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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Philip H. Phenix was educated at Princeton University, Union Theological Seminary, and Columbia University. He was formerly Dean of Carleton College, and was professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Published by Harper & Brother, New York. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

This book is addressed to both believers and unbelievers and examines a number of areas of religions thought and practice including an approach to intelligible religion, the fundamentals of religious experience, the existence and nature of God, the problem of good and evil, the meaning of the supernatural and of future life, the significance of Christ, the Church, the Bible, miracles and prayer.

Part 1: An Approach to Intelligible Religion

Chapter 1: Religion and Reason

If religion is significant when it deals with the whole range of man's experience (which it is the business of reason to coordinate) and when it is concerned with the widest meanings, connections, and implications (all of which are the province of reason), and if religion is good when it promotes community (which is the function of reason in the life of the mind), it follows that reason must be a powerful ally of significant and good religion.

Chapter 2: How to Make Religion Intelligible

How do you obtain intelligible religious outlook in these times? The procedure is to begin by finding certain universal, ultimate experiences which can be intelligibly described, which shed light upon traditional religious ideas and which may contain valuable further implications.

Part 2: Five Fundamentals of Religious Experience

Chapter 3: Change

A world where change occurs must be a surprising world and one where both history and possibility are regarded as real and important. This means that the world will be seen as

possessing a *depth* and a *richness* beyond the mere appearance of successive states and configurations of things. The awareness of change provides the ground for one of the fundamental forms of religious experience. Some basic religious concepts grow out of an interpretation of this experience.

Chapter 4: Dependence

Religion grows out of a consciousness of dependence. This is expressed in thankfulness which begets generosity, confidence, and humility.

Chapter 5: Order

The world is ordered in many ways: by a temporal order, by causal connection, as located, in terms of quantity, with various qualities, the possibility of classification, by the relatedness of things. Order my also be described in terms of community, of law, and moral order. Still other aspects of order are in "The Word of God," including "The God of Love." Illumination, meaning, insight, and confidence are also instruments of order.

Chapter 6: Value

Value is the ground of loyalty. It also gives zest and interest to life. It destroys boredom. It leads to sensitivity rather than callousness, to responsibility rather than neglect, to decisiveness in place of faltering. It is the source of energy for creative living rather than static existence. Out of the experience of value spring not only the positive responses of faithfulness and love but also the sense of tragedy.

Chapter 7: Imperfection

The idea of progress comes out of the sense of imperfection, as does the idea of God as transcendent. Thus a sense of divine purpose along with a religious experience growing out of hope is generated.

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Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

Chapter 8: God

The world as it meets one in religious experience is a person-producing and person-enhancing

world. Any encounter of this kind is a personal encounter. Therefore God is personal. Impersonal encounters are experiences of the relatively static, the unrelated, the random, the irrelevant and the conservative. Other concepts are also discussed: The meaning of the Word "God, Monotheism, "God" defined, God's existence, Polytheism, Arguments for existence of God, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Immanence and Transcendence, Creation, and God as personal.

Chapter 9: Good and Evil

Community is the ultimate standard by which good is measured, Therefore the basic sin is destruction of community. Love is the fundamental law of life and hate and estrangement are the fundamentals of sin.

Chapter 10: The World Beyond

All experience necessarily takes place within the time sequence. It is not possible to speak meaningfully about anything which is outside time. Religion, if it is anything at all, to the average person is a set of beliefs about the "supernatural", "the eternal", "the future life", "heaven and hell", "immortality", "resurrection", or the "Day of Judgment". It is important to indicate an approach to the interpretation of these ideas in the light of an analysis of religious experience.

Chapter 11: The Christian Message

The Christian message may be briefly summarized in the single assertion "Jesus is the Messiah." It would seem right to regard as truly "saved" anyone who has been given the grace of a high and noble purpose which draws him out of preoccupation with self into a full creative life which serves the development of community. Without underestimating the relevance of the positive Christian message, it is still important to recognize and gratefully to benefit from the other saving influences at work in human life.

Chapter 12: Church, Bible, Prophecy, and Miracle

The church is an *organism* brought into being by the unique series of events associated with the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Divine inspiration can be intelligibly interpreted to mean that the Scriptures are very particularly transparent to and vehicles of the basic experiences called religious. The prophet is an interpreter because he is able to see the religious dimension in what appear to others as ordinary events. Miracle stories are faith-symbols, fundamentally ways of expressing the conviction that the nature of things is not just what it appears to be, but that there are resident in the world hidden depths and heights of possibility, for which from time to time there is at least some evidence.

Chapter 13: Prayer and Sacrament

Prayer is a process in which the one who prays is constantly related in a profound way to his

whole objective world (with both material and mental aspects) and is thereby creatively transformed into a mature person. In worship, the symbols too easily become ends in themselves. As such they are crystallized in the dogmatic finality of an Absolute Church. They are properly only means to an end -- the recognition of the whole world as a "sacramental universe".

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Part 1: An Approach to Intelligible Religion

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Chapter 1: Religion and Reason

It might seem that a book whose purpose is to present an intelligible view of religion ought to begin by stating what religion is. This is asking too much, because the chief task of the entire work is one of definition. The word "religion" in actual practice is applied to a great variety of human ideas, acts, and institutions. All attempts to sift out from these some common element which would represent the "essence" of religion have ended in failure. There is no such thing as religion in general. There are only particular religions. When, therefore, a person wishes to talk about religion, he should try to make clear what he refers to. Much of the confusion and controversy associated with religion has come from a failure (usually unrecognized) to agree on the meaning of this word.

Considering the wide range of concerns called religious, it is at least clear that altogether they have played a highly significant part in human history. Men have fought and died for their religion. Art and literature have flowered forth as expressions of faith. In religion many institutions and customs have found their formative principles. Countless individuals have acknowledged religion as the basis for strength, hope, and significance in their lives. On the other hand, there have been and still are particular forms of religion which are insignificant -- lacking in formative power for the life of individuals or societies and without depth of insight or effect.

To say that on the whole religion has been important in human history is not to say that its influence has been wholly good. Significant religion may be good or bad. There is a common fallacy that religion is good because it is religion and that the cure for evil in the world is more religion. Actually great evils often flow from it. Bigotry, prejudice, cruelty, and ignorance, for example, are natural results of a fanatical faith. But neither is it right to condemn all religion, as some critics have done, for it seems quite obvious that much which goes by that name has been

associated with the highest levels of human experience.

In setting forth a view of religion in these pages it will be our task to describe a faith which is (1) important rather than trivial and (2) good rather than bad. The general tests by which we shall measure significance and goodness in religion will be stated in this and the following chapter. The remainder of the book will be devoted to sketching a kind of religion which will meet these tests.

Generally speaking, we shall regard religion as significant in the degree to which it concerns the whole range of man's experience. By this test, a religion which is relevant only to a part of man's life would be relatively trivial. A second test of significance or importance is the extent to which the religion deals with "ultimate" rather than merely preliminary matters. The meaning of this statement will not be fully plain until well into the second part of this book. Suffice it to say now that a religion is trivial unless it continually leads one out from immediate and particular concerns to questions about ever wider meanings, more extensive connections, and deeper implications.

Our standard of goodness in religion can be summarized in one word, "community". Again, this will require much further elaboration before it is clearly understood. Broadly speaking, community is the harmonious inter-relation of individual entities. By this test, a religion is good when it ultimately promotes community and it is bad when it destroys community. The elements which enter into what we here call "community', are not necessarily human beings. Thus we do not mean by this term only the social group. Harmonious inter-relation may also apply to man *vis à vis* his non-human environment. Or it may concern the co-ordination of the diverse experiences in the consciousness of a single human being.

This leads directly to a consideration of "reason". What is reason? In the broadest sense it is that capacity by which man is able to co-ordinate his various experiences. By the power of reason man can create a "community" of consciousness through harmoniously inter-relating in various degrees the diverse elements which go into his experience. Reason thus broadly conceived includes a wide range of human mental activity. Clearly scientific inquiry is an enterprise of reason. But so is "common sense", the co-ordination of everyday experience for practical ends. And so is art, including poetry, painting, and even music. For every work of art is a community of color or sound or shapes, producing out of a variety of elements some unity of consciousness.

Reason is man's most distinctive and precious capacity. It is the power of reason which sets him apart from the lower animals. It is in the full exercise of the life of reason that human life finds its highest fulfillment. Human history is the history of reason. Human culture is the expression of the creative power of reason.

What, then, is the connection between religion and reason ? If religion is significant when it deals with the whole range of man's experience (which it is the business of reason to co-

ordinate) and when it is concerned with the widest meanings, connections, and implications (all of which are the province of reason), and if religion is good when it promotes community (which is the function of reason in the life of the mind), it follows that reason must be a powerful ally of significant and good religion. Religion which disregards or opposes reason is, by the same token, in this respect trivial or harmful or both. Regard for the demands of reason is therefore an essential of religion as we shall describe it.

Unfortunately there have traditionally been varying degrees of opposition between religion and reason. Religion has tended to be emotional, enthusiastic, impatient with the facts of this world in preference for the hopes of a world beyond. Reason, on the other hand, has often been opposed to feeling by insisting upon fidelity to the evidence of actual experience. Religion has generally been "supra-rational" if not frankly irrational. This opposition of reason and religion is not easy to overcome. Much so-called "reasonable religion" is so lacking in emotional warmth as to fail in real significance. On the other hand, the "supra-rational" faiths often do not commend themselves to people of liberal intelligence nor lend themselves to ready communication to unbelievers.

It is the fundamental thesis of this book that a union of reason with significant religion is both imperative and possible. To show one way in which this can be accomplished is our goal. It can be done only by taking a generous enough view of both religion and reason. Irrational religions have been too limited in scope to welcome the co-ordination of all experience which reason requires. Cold rationality, on the other hand, has involved too narrow a view of reason to admit the depth of meaning which is the essence of religious insight. It is possible, as will be shown in the following pages, to be both religious and reasonable. It is doubtful, in fact, whether it is possible to be religious in the highest sense without being true to reason. Nor is it possible to be truly reasonable without at the same time being religious. Reason and religion belong together.

The relation between religion and reason is especially important in the contemporary scene. The reason for this is largely the rise of modern science and technology. The magnificent successes of the natural sciences have greatly extended man’s knowledge and control of the natural world. This has led to the attempt to extend the scientific method to all areas of inquiry and to the tendency to pattern inquiry in every area on that used in the exact sciences. The striking progress of the physical scientists has also given them a degree of prestige which has invited admiration and emulation by workers in other fields. Nor has this influence been confined to professional scientific workers. The progress of science has produced a revolution in the outlook of the lay citizen as well. He may not really understand well either the intent or the method or the conclusions of the scientists, but he does have a view of the world which is largely influenced by certain of their assumptions and findings.

This modern scientific revolution -- together with its practical consequences in the marvels of the machine age -- has been a triumph of reason, probably the major one in all history measured by brilliance and by transforming power. It has given man greater confidence in his ability to

use his reason to discover the nature of the world, including himself and his societies, to solve his problems in every area, and to influence his destiny.

Parallel with this mounting prestige of science there has been a general decline in the prestige of religion. Much religion has centered around the attempt through various rites to gain security in a precarious world. When these securities have been more consistently provided by technology, the religious techniques have fallen into disuse. Again, religion has often been regarded as the source of ultimate truth. When particular elements in the traditional teaching about the nature of things have been challenged by demonstrable scientific findings, the whole structure of religious dogma has been called into question. Finally, preoccupation with the fascinations of progressive scientific discovery and with the material products of technology has turned man's attention away from the more uncertain and outwardly less rewarding results of the religious life.

The consequence of this two-fold development -- the advance of science and the decline of religion -- has been the often-discussed predicament of modern man in which knowledge and technical skill have outrun moral and spiritual competence. Human personality has been all but submerged by the machine and its demands. New and more terrifying evils have arisen to take the place of those eliminated by scientists and engineers. Large numbers of human beings are lonely, frustrated, confused, and threatened by ever more menacing forms of personal and social insecurity.

In the attempt to cope with this predicament many voices have recently been raised on behalf of religion. In colleges and universities interest in the study of religion has greatly increased. Theological schools are crowded. Vigorous discussion regarding the place of religion in public education has been generated. Many books on religion have been on the best-seller lists. Church attendance is reported as increasing at a faster rate than the population. These and other signs point to a marked return to an interest in religion.

Implied in much of the new religious emphasis is an attack upon reason. The movement called "existentialism" in its religious bearings has included an attack on the objective, rational understanding and control of human life and has encouraged reliance upon a freely chosen "faith" which is not rationally demonstrable. Leading thinkers have recently placed emphasis on the radical limitations of science and especially upon the inherent impossibility of applying scientific techniques to the true understanding and effective control of human beings both individually and socially.

The purpose of this brief summary of the modern situation in respect to religion and to reason as science is primarily to draw attention to the tension which exists in their relationship to one another. The rise of science is associated with the decline of religion. The resurgence of religion is linked with an attack upon reason. One might draw the conclusion -- as some people do --that religion and reason are incompatible. Others -- a larger number -- conclude that reason and

religion occupy different "spheres" of human activity and hence may never be in conflict. Still others assert that reason must be subordinate to religion, serving merely to clarify and express it or that religion should derive from and serve reason.

Actually religion and reason ought not to be related in any of these ways -- as enemies or as strangers, or by subordination. Religion and reason are two constituents in the total life of whole human beings. Religious experience has rational elements and must draw upon reason for expression and co-ordination. Likewise, the life of reason may draw upon religious experience for motivation or for part of its working materials. Thus reason and religion belong together. The historical fact remains that reason in the form of science and technology has tended to disregard or discourage religious development and that religious interests have tended to undermine reason. Thus the union of reason and religion is not so much a fact as a task and an ideal.

It is to that task that the present work is dedicated. There is a particularly urgent need in our time for an intelligible religion --for a religion which is adequate to the full measure of man’s life including all the insights of his rational understanding. Such a religion would make possible greater spiritual resources for modern man who cannot give up a scientific world view and it would also provide the means by which religious experiences could be continually enriched with every enlargement of rational understanding.

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Chapter 2: How to Make Religion Intelligible

Granting the need for an intelligible religious outlook, especially in our times, the next step is to ask how it may be attained. This chapter is therefore concerned with method. It will suggest some of the considerations which enter into the choice of a method, and will then outline the main steps in the method to be used in this book. Succeeding chapters will apply this procedure in detail to the construction of a religious view of life.

The obvious and time-honored way to begin describing a religion is to introduce its God or gods. The deity is regarded as the central object of worship and the source of religious inspiration. It would seem, then, that once he is defined the other aspects of the religion may be derived easily.

In practice this approach does not work well. The idea of the deity is not the proper starting-point. Understanding it is the end-process in a long series of more easily understood ideas and experiences. Since there are many different conceptions of God, in any discussion where this word is used there will be a tendency to confuse one meaning with another and thus lead to misunderstanding. Only as one begins with commonly-shared and understood experiences which go to make up a religious attitude can intelligible results be achieved.

The days of tribal religion are over. That is why we refer to commonly-shared and commonly-understood experiences. Formerly, in the particular religions of tribes or nations religion was the expression of special interests, needs, insights, and cultural peculiarities. The gods were the reputed defenders, authors, or even the critics of particular cultures. In order to discover the nature and source of any concept of deity it is necessary to analyze the culture in which it arose and whose needs it expressed.

If we are in search of a universal religion, then we must seek for experiences properly called religious which are in some sense universal. They must not be merely reflections of a special culture. If, then, the deity in such a universal religion is an expression of universal experiences, he must be one with whom all men must directly and inescapably have dealings. The deity of universal religion must be universally evident.

When we examine even casually the actual situation, it turns out that the gods of the so-called universal religions are by no means universally evident. If the average intelligent Christian, for example, is asked to make clear to an unbeliever who, what, or where his God is, it is most likely that no answer at all helpful to the unbeliever will come forth. Assertions to the effect that God is the Creator of the universe, the Father of mankind, or that he came in human form in Jesus Christ, probably do not relate helpfully at any point to the experience of the questioner and may well clash with well-grounded concepts derived from other areas of his experience. It appears that in effect the so-called universal religions are simply more ambitious versions of the tribal religions. The Christian, the Jew, and the Muslim, for example, each claims universality for his religion, but none of them in defining his faith points clearly and unambiguously to basic experiences which all human beings will acknowledge. Instead, each presents as his statement of faith a variety of more or less traditional statements which reflect the particular experience of the group with which he is historically identified. This is nothing except tribal religion with universal pretensions.

Religion ought to be the source of community -- a binding and unifying resource for mankind. Instead, the historical religions have in many respects divided people. One group is set against another -- all in the name of God. Natural divisions are accentuated and conserved when the gods are regarded as authorities for the special beliefs or practices of the groups devoted to them.

In theory the God of Christians (for example) is in some sense present in all events of the created world. The questions then naturally arise: Why is he so hard to find? Why are there so many who do not recognize his existence? Why is there so much confusion about his nature and activity ? Why is there such constant dispute about him ? Why is he not more evident? The standard answers take two main forms. One approach emphasizes man’s finiteness. It is said that the world, including man, is finite while God is infinite; that this is not merely a difference in degree; it is a difference in kind; that God is "wholly other" than the created world. The finite obviously cannot comprehend the infinite, it is claimed.

Such an answer at first sounds plausible. But it will not bear examination. If God is "wholly other" -- utterly different in kind from the creation and particularly from the creature man, then it must be impossible to say anything at all about God -- including the assertion that he is "wholly other"! It is fruitless to speak of anything which has not become evident through human experience. This leads us back to the basic assertion that God must always be designated in terms of specified human experiences. If no such experiences can be cited, it is impossible to

have an intelligible conception of the deity.

The second answer given to the questions mentioned above is that God is hidden from man by human sin. It is said that God is continually seeking to make himself known to man, but that man inevitably rejects God by seeking his own profit and satisfaction instead of God's.

It is true that human beings are selfish and willful. But it is difficult to see how this fact bears upon the acknowledgment of God. World peace is difficult to attain, and mankind seems constantly to defeat it, yet we are not for that reason any less clear about what world peace is. The ideal which it represents is fully evident. In fact it is the more evident precisely because it is so difficult to attain. In the same way, the fact of human perversity ought to be one of the factors making the recognition and understanding of God more attainable. Human sin ought to throw into sharper relief precisely what it is against which man is rebelling.

Our conclusion is that neither of the standard explanations for the difficulty of clearly specifying the deity will bear examination. Our conviction is rather that the difficulty arises simply from a failure resolutely and consistently to found religious ideas upon shareable human experiences. We believe that the trouble is not that religious questions are inescapably involved in obscurity but that adherence to traditional doctrines is regarded as more important than clarity and universal intelligibility.

Is it asking too much to be clear about religious matters ? The usual answer is in the affirmative. It is said that religion is primarily a matter not of reason but of faith. Faith is regarded as a way of grasping the truth quite beyond the power of reason. It is usually asserted that the demand for clarity is detrimental to faith.

In our view such an attitude must not be accepted. It represents the betrayal of reason -- man's highest and most characteristic power and the principal means by which his life may be safely guided. To deny the possibility of clarity in matters of religion is to open the doors wide to every superstition. Furthermore, it prevents the realization of the community which is the goal of any truly universal religion. For where there is no reliable means of communicating religious insights, there can be no real community.

This leads us to the point where we are ready to outline a method which will ensure clarity, communicability, and universality of religious outlook. There are six aspects of this method which will now be described.

First. A religious view must grow out of human experience. This follows from the fact that human experience is the only basis for ideas that have any meaning or allow intelligible communication. This means that at every stage of discussion about religion, concepts or assertions must be explained by reference to actual human experience. Ideas tend in time to declare their independence of experience. When this happens, they lose their meaning or their

significance becomes obscure and confused. This is the trouble with traditional religious doctrines: they are burdened with ideas which have lost their reference to actual human experience.

The method which retains constant reference to experience contrasts sharply with the method of authority, under which ideas are accepted on the basis of the prestige of a person or institution. For most people religious ideas are derived from and justified by appeal to such authorities. Even where there is a degree of reference to experience, there is generally a considerable residue of conscious or unconscious deference to authority for its own sake. It is legitimate, of course, to accept the experience of others as a valuable source of suggestions for ideas, but the ideas must be accepted as true only by the test of repeatable experience, and not on the ground that some powerful or eloquent or venerated person has stated them.

Our method therefore will consist first of all in the selection of certain specifiable human experiences as defining the concern of religion. It will also involve the constant return to experience at every stage of discussion for the clarification of the ideas developed.

Second. From amongst the varieties of human experience only those will be selected as religiously significant which are universal in nature. The reason for this has already been stated. We are seeking to define a religion which will be universal in character, which will have reference to the concerns of every human being. To do this it is necessary to discover experiences which are an inevitable part of being human.

Our approach rules out the commonly-held idea that religious insight or awareness is primarily the product of a special group of religious geniuses, or that it is the result of only occasional flashes of illumination. It is true, of course, that every experience is had in varying degrees of intensity or with a variety of consequences as between different occasions and persons. But experiences which are so rare as to be inaccessible to ordinary persons or unrelated to the life every day cannot be the basis for a universal religion. The insights of geniuses or of moments of high illumination may of course be valuable clues to the significance of the more generally enjoyed experiences which define the religious consciousness.

The method advocated here is also apparently at variance with the idea of "special revelation" in the Jewish and Christian tradition. "Special revelation" means that God does not make himself known primarily in the general experiences of mankind, but in particular critical historical happenings of unusually great significance. Examples are the exodus from Egypt, the Babylonian Exile and the Return, and the events associated with Jesus of Nazareth, culminating in his resurrection and the rise of the Church. It is true that every great discovery in human civilization is made in particular circumstances and because of a favorable combination of circumstances. All the historical events mentioned above were occasions for deepened insight into the meaning of life. But they were important precisely because they provided a clue to what may be universally true for man as a human being and not because they represented particular

events or situations.

It is the same as the matter of the religious genius. There are special times -- as well as people -- which are the occasions for new insights. But the truth and importance of the insights consists in their universal applicability and not in the special circumstances surrounding their origin. The same relation of the special to the general holds in scientific inquiry. Many scientific discoveries have been made under special circumstances, but the important thing is not those circumstances, but the scientific principles made evident through them. This is not to make us less grateful for the events which occasioned the discovery, but it does suggest that our major concerns should be for the general truths. Adherents of the great historic religions are usually too much concerned with the primary historical events rather than with the universal truth discovered through them.

The chief value of concern with the historical sources of religious insight is their power of stimulating a vivid awareness of the general insights and suggesting ways for their further concrete embodiment. For the universal truth can only become individually, personally, and socially important when it is embodied in new concrete situations. In spite of this, it is still true that universal religion must be based upon universal experiences which can be successively illustrated in actual life situations.

Third. Among the universal experiences in which man participates religion relates to those which are of central concern. By this is meant experiences which are involved in every area of man's life. Religious experience, as it will be defined in later chapters, is not some specialized department of human thought or activity. Rather it is an aspect which pervades every form of man's existence. Further, these experiences are of central concern by being in some sense ultimate. They do not refer to the immediate, obvious, superficial aspects of consciousness, but to the deepest and most pervasive factors which determine the long-term quality of existence.

An example may make this clear. Hunger for food, and its satisfaction, are universal human experiences. But they are not by that token religious in character. This is because hunger for food is not necessarily involved in other experiences, such as the enjoyment of a work of art. In contrast with this experience, which is universal and important but not of *central* or *ultimate* importance, the experiences described in the next part of this book as defining religious experiences are involved in and illustrated by every form of human activity including the seeking for food and the appreciation of art.

This third aspect of our method confirms what was said in the first chapter about significant religion. We are not interested in a religion which deals only with one segment of human life, nor with matters of preliminary concern. It is the discovery of the pervasive factors and fundamental bases of life in its whole scope that is the task of significant religious philosophy. That this is not self-evident is clear when one considers the large number of specialized practices and minor concerns that enter into most actual religions. In fact religion is commonly

understood as consisting precisely (from our viewpoint) in such relatively trivial and non-essential elements -- as for example, the precise acceptance of particular historic doctrines, the reverencing of sacred books, or the performance of specific ritual acts.

Fourth. It will be required that the ultimate universal experiences selected as defining religion be communicable to others. This probably follows naturally from the first three requirements. However, it deserves special attention because there is a difference between having an experience and communicating it. A religious view of life must be put into concepts which can be understood by others. It is not enough merely to distinguish the fundamental experiences called religious. It is also necessary to use them in defining a framework of concepts which can be used to clarify the meaning of religion in mutual discourse.

In terms of procedure in constructing a view of religion, the demand for communicability will probably be satisfied best by approaching the description of each basic religious concept from a variety of directions, all of which converge on a common center. This is necessary whenever matters of rich content are being dealt with and where great precision is neither possible nor desirable. In each of the five following chapters one basic concept will be defined in this way. Where communication is not achieved by one approach, another mode of description of the basic concept may be effective, and all the explanations together will, it is hoped, define a concept which all can understand.

As pointed out earlier, the requirement of communicability is one of the qualities of a good religion, judged by the standard of "community". It is also an essential for any religion which can be regarded as intelligible or reasonable.

A communicable religion cannot rest, as some religions claim to do, upon private disclosures to mystics or prophets. Nor can such a religion be the privilege of a favored circle of initiates. The exponents of mystical religion have emphasized the "ineffable" or indescribable and indefinable character of their mystic vision. All experiences are, in one sense, ineffable. None of us can know fully what anyone else experiences. But we are sufficiently alike to be able to assume for all practical purposes a community of experience. Religious experiences which cannot be communicated cannot be humanly important, except perhaps to the one who undergoes them. But they have no cultural significance. It is even unlikely that they can really be important in the long run to the person who has them until they become communicable, because without that they cannot really be understood even by himself. Hence we exclude the private vision as a method of reaching a religious view of life.

Fifth. To deserve the name "religious", the communicable, ultimate, universal experiences which are described should provide illuminating explanations of important features of the actual historic religions of mankind. It is reasonable to employ the word "religious" only if the experiences described do justice to at least large parts of what is traditionally associated with that term. Clearly no one is free to define a commonly used word in any way he pleases. The

necessity for new definitions arises from the fact of ambiguity. A word like "religion" has many meanings, but not just any meaning. New definitions, such as those attempted here, serve to distinguish certain meanings of a term in preference to others in the hope that these will be more consistent and more serviceable in creating a community of understanding than the term in its full ambiguity and vagueness was able to do.

Hence an important part of our method will be to show the ways in which the experiences defining religion relate to important traditional concepts, institutions, and practices commonly called "religious". This will be done in part in the discussion of each of the five basic concepts in Part Two and will be further and more directly carried out in Part Three.

Sixth. The final component of our method will be to develop the implications of the historically-related, communicable, ultimate, universal experiences which are taken as defining religion. The experiences do not simply occur with no further consequences. The human mind is inevitably driven to ask what they mean and how they are related to other experiences. One is also encouraged to develop further concepts to include the experiences so inter-related. This leads to theological speculation. The danger here is that such speculation will lose touch with actual experience and lead a life of its own, unchecked by reference to concrete reality. Nevertheless, the full richness of a religious view of life cannot be achieved without a thorough but cautious searching for implications.

The traditional belief in God represents an important illustration of the speculative leap. As we shall see, there is a variety of fundamental experiences which enter into the definition of religion. The question about God involves the question as to what connection these experiences have with each other. Is it possible to imply a unity underlying them all, or must they remain distinct at our present stage of understanding? Whatever the answer to this question, we shall certainly be able to develop certain less complete implications of each of the basic experiences by which religion will be defined.

This concludes our discussion of method. In summary, our procedure is to begin by finding certain universal, ultimate experiences which can be intelligibly described, which shed light upon traditional religious ideas and which may contain valuable further implications. The important point is that we do not begin with inherited doctrines or with speculations about God, or the soul, or the realm of the supernatural. All of these and similar matters must be considered only in the light of the fundamental religious experiences themselves. This would appear to be a solid basis upon which a religious view intelligible to all can be built. While it may seem to some to provide an unfinished and incomplete picture, the beginning is at least secure and the direction of further development clearly indicated.

In the following part of this book five fundamental experiences will be described as forming a basis for a religious understanding of human existence. These are not the only ones which might be mentioned. They are ones which do seem to the present writer particularly important

religiously. Other people might find somewhat different concepts more useful. These five will at least serve to accomplish one of the central aims of this book -- namely, to illustrate how an intelligible religious philosophy may be constructed. The particular results are not as important as the method. It seems to this writer that only such a method can deliver religious thought from many of the confusions which have perennially beset it.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 2: Five Fundamentals of Religious Experience

Philip H. Phenix was educated at Princeton University, Union Theological Seminary, and Columbia University. He was formerly Dean of Carleton College, and was professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Published by Harper & Brother, New York. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 3: Change

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the awareness of change provides the ground for one of the fundamental forms of religious experience and how some of the basic religious concepts grow out of an interpretation of this experience.

The skeptical writer of the book of Ecclesiastics said that there is nothing new under the sun, that all things are a stale and wearisome repetition of what has happened before. Though this expresses a not uncommon and often understandable feeling, it is not actually true. The most elementary fact of all human experience is that every moment brings to birth a new world. The state of things at one moment of time is never exactly the same as that which prevailed at the previous moment. This is only to say that we live in a world of ceaseless change. The fact of change is perhaps the most fundamental human experience. There is no form of existence where change does not rule. Even the "eternal hills" do not stand forever, as any geologist can testify.

The most solid and durable of substances is simply a relatively stable arrangement of changing electric fields and elementary particles. In living forms the dominance of change is even more obvious. In life there can be no standing still. Stagnation means death. Change is the essence of life. We do not know yet, and we may never know, the deepest secrets of the nature of living substances, but we do know this much: that growth and decay, assimilation and reproduction -- in short, a variety of processes of change -- are without exception their characteristic. All existence therefore has a dynamic character. Thus the consciousness of change must be a universal and a central human experience.

The omnipresence of change has become most striking in modern times. The picture of the world presented first by the physical scientists, then by the biologists, and finally by the social scientists has convincingly and increasingly confirmed this dynamic character. But the average

layman has been even more impressed by the revolutions which have taken place in his life and in the world about him because of inventions. And now the world-wide changes occasioned by the renewed rise of nationalism, the collapse of colonialism, and the spread of new ideologies -- all the results of conditions imposed by the machine age -- have increased the tempo of cultural transformation to an unprecedented degree.

The primacy of change is reflected in the dominant character of modern philosophy. One of the greatest of modern thinkers, Whitehead, built his view of the world upon this fundamental fact. The primary concept in his system he calls "creativity", by which he means simply the ceaseless change in which all existence is inevitably involved. On the same basis he finds the dynamic quality which is the essence characteristic of all things, even the so-called inanimate. According to this view there is no sharp distinction between dead matter on the one hand and life and mind on the other. Since all things are in process of change, they all partake of the same fundamental nature.

Another recent influential thinker, Bergson, also regarded change as fundamental. The truth about the nature of things, he said, is revealed in the intuition of "duration", or true time. This intuition is an awareness of the dynamic character of all existence. Implied in this is a renewed emphasis on the reality and the significance of time. Time and change are correlates. To be aware of time is to be conscious that all things change. This concern with the nature of time which pervades much of modern philosophy -- not only that of Bergson and other so-called "process" philosophers -- is therefore further witness of the recognition of change as a basic human experience.

At first thought there would seem to be no religious significance in the experience of change. Indeed, it might appear that religion would be concerned with change only as an unwelcome contrast to its interest in the "eternal". Actually this is a superficial view. To understand why we must now look more closely at the fact of change to see what it is and what questions it raises.

What is change? It is the appearance of something really new, and correspondingly the disappearance of something old. We are aware of change by virtue of two powers of the mind: memory and discrimination. Memory enables us to carry over the image of the past into the present. Discrimination enables us to compare this image with the present state of things. It is this discrimination of the difference between present observation and the image of the observed past which is the consciousness of change. This applies most obviously to the constant change, from moment to moment, which characterizes our ordinary existence.

But it applies equally well to the longer-range changes which occur in the structures of the world: in the transformations of inorganic substances, in the evolution of stellar systems, in the decay of radioactive matter, in the origin and disappearance of species, in the growth and decay of individual organisms, or in the rise and fall of civilizations. In long-term changes the individual memory which makes comparison and discrimination possible is replaced by a

natural or historical memory, provided by the marks left in nature or in human records of what once was but has now passed away. But whether in the constant flow of passing events, in the unperceived processes of growth, or in the long slow transformations of world history, the same basic pattern holds good: things genuinely new come into being and present things pass out of being. Each moment of time brings a whole new world to birth and presides over the dissolution of an old world. To be sure there are important relationships between the new and the old, but the fact remains that out of whatever materials from the past, new things constantly are being generated in place of the things that are.

We now come to the heart of the matter. What does the fact of universal change mean? We are so accustomed to this basic experience that it may hardly occur to us to reflect on it. But when we do it immediately becomes apparent how extraordinary it is. For questions like this insistently present themselves: How is it possible that things really new come into being? Where do they come from? If they are really new, they cannot come from the world of the present or the past. But what other world is there? There is not even a world of the past, but only a present world with remnants of a past. Is there in some sense a "world of the future" which is real but not apparent ? What and where would this world of the future be? Can there be now a world of the future, since the future is not yet? And when the world of the present disappears, where does it go? What receptacle is there for things that once were and no longer are? What is the status and condition of the "world of the past"? Is it real since the past no longer is ?

There are at least three ways in which questions like these may be dealt with. (1) The first way is to refuse the assumption underlying the questions, namely, that there is such a thing as change in the sense of really new things coming into being. Some would assert that the author of Ecclesiastics was right, that there actually is not anything new under the sun, that the present was wholly contained in the past, and that the future is wholly contained in the present. Such a view gains support mainly from the success with which scientists have been able to predict the course of nature. If one can accurately predict the future on the basis of present conditions and the known laws of nature, then it would seem that in a sense the future is already contained in the present.

The objection to this view is that it robs time of any real significance. Time becomes simply a quantity by means of which the various possible arrangements of the components of the world may be labeled. Is it true that everything that now exists is simply a rearrangement of something in the past ? This is a question that cannot be simply and decisively answered. Much can be done by way of analyzing the course of events in terms of such rearrangement -- especially in the physical sciences. But there is no assurance that such an analysis is complete or in some areas justified at all -- especially in the study of living things, including man and his works. Curiously enough, doubts concerning the adequacy of this method of analysis have been most persistently and pointedly raised in recent years in the field of atomic physics, in connection with the so-called "uncertainty principle", according to which definite limits are set to the

precise predictability of physical quantities. There is a strong trend among philosophers and scientists today towards the denial of the possibility of complete predictability in any realm of inquiry and therefore towards the re-establishment of the significance of time and the reality of change as the emergence of the genuinely new.

But even apart from these considerations, and assuming that the old theory of rearrangements were maintained, one might still admit the reality of change. For "rearrangement" is itself change. There is something significantly new in a new order of old things. In fact it is the order of things which really determines their essential nature. Even if it were true that the future could be fully predicted from the present state of things, there would still be a real difference between present and future. Otherwise, what would it mean to "predict"? Prediction means that something new, something not yet in being, is to come into being. And this suggests the same questions about change and the world of past and future which the denial of change was designed to dispel.

The conclusion is that the assumption underlying the questions about change cannot be denied. All experience confirms the reality of change. Hence the first way of dealing with these questions must be rejected.

(2) The second way is simply to dismiss the questions as idle speculations, and to rest content with the experience of change in itself. This involves a decision to be concerned with other things which appear to yield profitable results. The motive for disregarding the questions is that to some they do not seem to yield sufficiently clear and definite answers. Under these conditions the most that appears worth while is to acknowledge the fact of change and to describe the various changes which do actually occur. This is the position generally adopted by the scientist who considers that his business is to discover what in fact takes place in the course of natural processes and to discern the laws that pertain to them. For example, in dealing with the evolution of organic life, the scientist will speak of the "emergence" of new forms. This is what actually happens. New forms do come forth. And it does not usually seem to the scientists that there is anything more to say about the process. He does not see any scientific meaning in the question: Where do the new forms come from? For he conceives of his job as one of describing facts, and the only facts he discerns are the events as they succeed one another in the order of natural processes.

The difficulty with this position is that the questions suggested by the experience of change will not always be denied. They tend to return, sometimes with even greater insistence for having been banished. Whether he wish it or not, man is by nature a philosopher, latent if not actual. Though he may by choice limit himself to pure description of passing events, he cannot escape the haunting insistence of these still unacknowledged questions. The objection here is therefore different from that to the first response. The reaction is not really wrong. It is simply inadequate. It fails to do justice to the deeper meaning of the fact of change. It leaves too much unexamined. And this is unsatisfactory, because it is true, as Socrates said, that the unexamined

life is not worth living.

(3) Both of the first two kinds of response to the questions suggested by change fail to lead to anything that might be called a religious experience. The response becomes religious when the reality of change is acknowledged and when the questions are asked in all seriousness. We are justified in calling it religious because as a matter of historical fact a number of the major ideas of the great religions are attempts to supply answers to these questions.

First there is the whole range of ideas associated with belief in some sort of supernatural realm. Where do new things come from and where do old things go? Many have found an answer in postulating another world, an "unseen world" where both past and future have their lodging. Plato suggested an ideal realm where the pure forms of things reside. In eastern religions there is the infinite ocean of absolute being of which the world of changing things is only the flickering shadow. In Jewish and Christian thought there is a divine kingdom where possibilities unrealized in this world are fulfilled. Regardless of its exact form, such an unseen world provides a source from which new things derive and into which things present pass away.

But even more to the point are the ideas of a Creator-God who is the ground of all existent things. Plato thought of the Creator as a great artisan fashioning the world of matter after the image of the ideal forms. The earlier of the two stories of creation in the book of Genesis somewhat similarly portrays God as the craftsman lending shape to formless stuff. The later and more sophisticated account in Genesis suggests that the world was created "out of nothing" by divine command. But in traditional theology God has been thought of not only as the creator "in the beginning". He is said to create continually. This doctrine of "continuous creation" has been particularly favored in more recent theological discussions. It does more clearly reflect the concern with the problem of change as it continually occurs in the world process.

In Hinduism the god Siva is called both Creator and Destroyer. This two-fold function reflects the corresponding two-fold character of change as both coming into being and passing away. The god thus represents an answer to the question about this double process.

Some of the ideas are naïve and graphic, with God pictured as literally fashioning the world or commanding it to come into being. Others are the product of highly-trained philosophic imagination. For example, the Creator-God is conceived of in a variety of ways, sometimes as though he were a person, at other times more impersonally as a source of energy. The contemporary theologian, Paul Tillich, speaks of the "Ground of being" or "Being-itself", from which all particular beings proceed. He also refers to the "Abyss of being", by which he attempts to do justice to the dissolution aspect of the process of change. The philosopher Hartshorne presents a proof for God as the "subject of all change". He argues that if change occurs, then there must be something which itself undergoes change. This reality he calls God. Whitehead thinks of God in part as the residence of the "eternal objects"-- the manifold forms of things -- and as the resource from which these forms are made available from moment to

moment as new things appear. In this system God is also the vast receptacle into whose being all things pass as the present becomes past.

Our purpose here is not to discuss in any detail the various kinds of answers that have been proposed by religious thinkers to the problems raised by the fact of change. Our main task is simply to make clear that important religious ideas have arisen directly in answer to these problems, and that this is the justification for regarding the awareness of change as one of the fundamental sources of religious experience.

Most of the controversies in religion have arisen over differing details in answering such basic questions as those raised by the fact of change. One group will take their stand upon a doctrine of a man-like Creator-God dwelling in a supernatural realm. Another group will stand for an impersonal creative energy. Still another will attempt to define the answer in terms of symbols which point to the mystery involved in the emergence of the new.

There is, of course, every reason to seek for the most complete and satisfying answers possible. But the history of religious thought shows that agreement and mutual understanding in such matters are difficult to attain. Our contention is that the main issue lies not between those who give differing answers to the questions about change but between those who take these questions seriously and those who do not. It is this latter contrast that divides the non-religious from the religious. Those who either deny change or in their views of the world content themselves merely with description by that fact miss the religious significance of the experience of change. From this may it not follow that the awareness of change, together with its immediate implications, provides one basis for an approach to religious experience which is universally understood and of central importance to all persons ? Does it not provide one basis for the formulation of an intelligible religion ?

The extent to which any person will wish to speculate about the detailed answers to the questions suggested by change is partly a matter of his temper of mind. There are uncritical persons who find it easy to accept extensive metaphysical elaboration about a supernatural order. There are on the other extreme tough-minded persons who wish to remain squarely within the realm of repeatable and clearly describable human experience. Between these extremes there are those who wish to adhere to some of the great traditional symbols of the supernatural without taking them literally. The answers will differ, but in each case there is a clear recognition of the importance of the questions and a serious facing of what they may imply.

Let us attempt now to outline briefly the minimum implications of the fact of change. These should be intelligible to all who cannot rest content merely with a description of the changing order of things.

In the first place, there are two psychological components in the experience of change. One is

the mere fact of discriminating differences between present and remembered past. The other may be described as a kind of "shock" experienced at the appearance of the really new and the disappearance of the old. When this latter component is recognized the calm survey of successive events -- which only involves discrimination of difference -- is not possible. The new now is recognized as *really new*. There is an element of genuine surprise at its appearance. The really new is "shocking" because it cannot be recognized. It has never been seen before. It is a revelation of the unfamiliar. In a similar way there will be a shock when the old is seen as really gone. The once familiar is seen no more. It is this experience of shock which finds expression in the questions about change. If there were only the act of discriminating difference, there would be no questions. Hence the first and most apparent mark of a religious understanding of change is a sense of surprise or of wonder or even amazement, at its happening. It has been said that religion begins in wonder. The analysis of the implications of change provides an outstanding confirmation of this statement.

In the second place, the experiences of memory and of anticipation give us in some degree access to whatever world lies beyond the present world of things. The past and the future both have a reality in the present through these two kinds of experience. Or perhaps one could say that the longer view of what the world really is, in comparison with its immediate appearance in a momentary time cross-section, is shown by memories and anticipations. The full scope of reality -- with a minimum of speculation -- certainly must include in some way the possibilities of things yet to be -- whether anticipated or not -- and the completed but no longer present actuality of things that once were.

On a minimum view, then, a world where change occurs must be a surprising world and one where both history and possibility are regarded as real and important. This means that the world will be seen as possessing a *depth* and a *richness* beyond the mere appearance of successive states and configurations of things. Such a view is essentially religious in character. Whether more elaborate explanations of the status of the world beyond its present appearance are attempted is a relatively secondary matter. One thing is certain: that there will be differences and perhaps misunderstandings about the speculations. The primary fact is that the ground from which the religious experience grows may be discerned. Amidst the differences of theological formulation the only basis for common understanding is to return constantly to the fundamental experiences from which the doctrines originally arose. The consciousness of change is one such experience.

In concluding this discussion of change, a few more remarks need to be added concerning the attitudes of mind which a religious understanding of change involves. First, there is a sense of *mystery*. Mystery implies an intimation of something real and important but still hidden from full understanding. If new things are constantly coming to be, then such an intimation is inevitable. A sense of mystery is the preparation of the mind to receive the shock of the really new. Without such mystery the world would not actually be interesting. It is interesting in proportion as new surprises are constantly emerging from the mystery of what in the present is

only more or less dimly suspected.

A second attitude, really a part of the sense of mystery, is *expectancy*. There is no expectancy where change is no longer a problem. If there is indeed nothing new under the sun, then there is nothing to look forward to. Recognition of a world of possibility constantly unfolding into the world of actuality lends freshness and vigor in place of staleness and boredom. Perhaps the great success of the physical sciences in predicting the course of natural events and the remarkable control we possess over the forces of nature have led us to think the future in effect already ours and therefore to expect nothing really new. Some of the ennui which depresses many people today -- especially the more prosperous ones -- may find its source here. To understand change religiously is to regard existence as a venture, the inspiration for which is the expectation of things to come now hidden from sight.

A third attitude is *humility*, which goes hand-in-hand with expectancy and the sense of mystery. Humility is not, in the right sense of the word, self-negation. It is self-fulfillment through recognition of one's proper relationship in the large scheme of which one is a part. Pride, the opposite of humility, is making one's self central by ignoring the larger context. To see no problem in change is an act of pride because, in effect, one regards himself as beyond the power of surprise and superior to the mystery that enshrouds both future and past. The religious understanding of change encourages the recognition of the limitations within which we live and of our consciousness of the world as it appears to us now.

In the New Testament it is said that we cannot enter the heavenly kingdom without first becoming as little children. Perhaps this is because children have not yet learned to take change for granted. The world is for them still the opening of a new book, with surprises on each successive page and with enticing mysteries still to be disclosed at every turn. To regenerate the child-like mind -- the sense of wonder, expectancy, and continual surprise -- to experience the delight and the dismay of things coming and going: this is the function of a religious understanding of the fact of change.

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Chapter 4: Dependence

The second fundamental experience out of which religion grows is the *consciousness of dependence*. This means simply that we recognize our life and all the experiences which make it up as given to us and received by us. No one could ever have asked to be born, nor could he fix the time and occasion of his appearance. Our existence, from the earliest moment, was not for us to determine, but came as our inheritance from the acts or decisions of others. So also were the resources for our growth and development provided. We did not make them. We received them and used them to become what we are. We come, as it were, as guests into the house of this world. It was here before we were and we live by virtue of the powers and supplies which it affords.

What is the life which we experience but a *participation* -- a "taking part" ? Whatever we are or do is a reflection of what has entered into our making. Every person is in a sense a *channel* through whom the stream of life flows. These are, of course, vague metaphors. They express in various ways the awareness that all life -- indeed all existence whatever -- is *derived*. Everything that exists derives its being from prior sources. Nothing is insulated from its causes, but is their outcome. In fact, to say that existence is derived is in part to affirm that nothing happens without a cause and that for every effect there is a sufficient cause. It is its causes, in this general sense, upon which everything depends. To say that all existence is "given" then means in part that there is nothing which lacks an adequate cause, and the consciousness of dependence is the experience of being caused.

The experience of dependence, viewed in the light of this principle of causation, is necessary for an intelligible view of the world. For intelligibility implies the possibility of ordering experiences in terms of cause and effect. Anything for which no question about its causes could be asked would be inherently irrational and unintelligible. Reason demands of everything that

its causes be determined. The extent to which such determination has been effected is a measure of the rationality of existence.

Dependence implies that the things which make up the world are involved in a network of relationships. Nothing is independent of everything else. In fact, in the last analysis nothing is wholly independent of *anything* else in the entire world. This inter-relationship includes connections between things and their causes. It also refers to the contemporary connections. Thus dependence includes, but is more than, causal connection. It also involves the fact that everything is a part of a larger whole. Nothing stands alone. Everything belongs in various ways and through various links to everything else. The quality of experience at every moment is a function of the many relationships in which one is involved. Everything and everyone constantly depends in this way on its environment. It is impossible to describe any experience without specifying the various relationships and connections to surrounding beings. In fact, the description consists precisely in such specifications.

Obviously no simple and ready answer can be given to the questions: Upon what are we dependent, or What is the source or what are the sources of being? To answer such questions requires a detailed description of causes and of the complex networks of inter-connections which relate things to each other. A *complete* answer to any such question would require a full knowledge of everything in the whole world -- since in some way, however remote, everything is related to everything else. Such an answer is obviously not attainable. The most that can be done is to approximate to the major causes and contemporary connections of things. These are of the most varied sorts.

Consider, for example, the sources from which the life of a human being is derived. There are the material elements which through a long chain of chemical transformations have come to make up his flesh and bone. There is the stream of substances such as oxygen, water, protein and carbohydrates which continually nourish, repair, and empower the organism. There are the mental and emotional influences, beginning with the earliest experiences of mother and child and continuing with significant associations in home, neighborhood, school, and vocation which enter into the formation of habits of thought and patterns of feeling. Included also are the treasures of civilization -- the books, works of art, scientific creations, principles of wise conduct, social institutions -- which have influenced the developing personality. All of these -- material or mental, personal or impersonal, individual or institutional -- belong to the sources of being for any human being.

In a similar way it would be possible to analyze the causes and connections of entities other than persons or even of non-living beings. Each type of entity has its own important sources. For example, cultural values have only the most remote and indirect relevance to the production of a tree or a rock. They would be more significant sources for the life of a domesticated animal, and controlling in the life of a civilized human being.

Our assumption is that the sources of any being must be adequate to account for that being. Thus, material causes may be given as the sources for material entities. But material causes do not adequately account for beings like man, where mental characteristics are a dominant feature. The sources of human beings must include mental factors, as well as material ones. No personal factors are required in the causal analysis of plant forms, for example, but they are needed in the case of man. Thus when a human being asks whether that upon which his life depends is personal or impersonal, the answer is that he is dependent both upon personal and upon impersonal sources. Because he is a person, he has his derivations from personal sources -- that is from entities which adequately explain personality; but he also derives some of the aspects of his being from nonpersonal sources.

The fact of dependence is closely linked with the fact of change already discussed. In the experience of change the central element is the awareness of newness -- of appearance and disappearance of being. In the experience of dependence the central element is relatedness. The connection between the two consists in the fact that it is the sources of being, from moment to moment, which determine the changes that take place. This means that the question, "What are the sources of being ?" includes the question, "Where do the new things come from and the old things go?" But though the experiences of change and of dependence introduce essentially the same question, they are different experiences. The former involves surprise or shock at the fact of changing being, the latter involves awareness of other beings, past or present, with which links of influence and support exist. It is one thing to recognize that the face of things is never the same, another to know that all things are bound to one another by links of mutual dependence.

If the question about the sources of being includes the question about the basis for change, then the same variety of answers discussed in the previous chapter must apply here also. This means that no mere description of the apparent connections between things will complete the story. It is not enough, for example, to point out the many traceable factors which influenced the life of a person. There still remain those essentially astonishing factors which entered into the production of new elements in the developing person. Thus the sources of his being must include the hidden resources out of which new things proceed. It is for this reason that the problem of change really precedes the problem of dependence. The answer to the question about the sources of being must include the answer to the question about the ground of change.

The experience of dependence is both universal and central. There is no one who is not confronted at every moment of his existence with the fact of derivation. This is not an experience which relates to special circumstances, to particular moods, or to particular forms of activity. It applies necessarily to the character of existence itself. It is the nature of all that happens to be derived. There is no exceptional individual or special group exempt from this fact. There is no situation in which any being is more or less dependent than in others. Under every condition all beings are completely and entirely dependent, because everything has a source from which it proceeds.

The objection will certainly be made now that dependence is not complete because there is such a thing as independence. The concept of independence has a meaning and it does qualify what we have called the experience of dependence. In what sense, then, is there also an experience of independence? Take the case of the child in relation to the parent. The child begins life almost wholly dependent upon the parent, and then through the years he develops more and more independence. This means that powers which at first were exercised by the parent for the child more and more reside within the child himself and can be directly exercised by him.

Relatively speaking, then, independence may have clear and definite meaning. But when we speak of dependence being complete, we are concerned with the question that must still be asked about the mature and "independent" person, namely, what are the sources of those powers by which he demonstrates his independence? The "built-in" capacities which make him self-sufficient are all grounded in resources which were prior to him. The assertion of complete dependence is therefore based upon the assumption that for every being there is a sufficient cause. In this sense, independence has only a relative significance, referring to the more immediate relevance of one thing to others and not to the ultimate and perennial question of original derivation.

The next step is to justify the assertion that the experience of dependence is *religious* in character. This requires that we show that a number of important traditional religious concepts have their roots in this experience.

One of the most immediate religious ideas springing out of the experience of dependence is that of Divine Providence. Providence simply means that our life is provided for us, that it is a gift to us from the hand of God. It grows from the consciousness that we are part of and subject to a power or powers greater than ourselves upon which our destiny depends. In the history of religions Providence has been variously conceived. Sometimes, as in Stoicism, it is a rather impersonal order of things which governs their course. In other cases, as in the Jewish and Christian tradition, Providence is a personal yet usually orderly power, the giver and sustainer of life and upholder of the whole created order. In Islam he is thought of also as personal, but more in terms of arbitrary power and sovereign will. The very name "Muslim", meaning "one who submits", suggests the centrality in Islam of the experience of dependence.

Closely related to the idea of Providence is the concept of *fate* or of *predestination*. This results from the conviction that human life is directed by hidden powers towards definite and inescapable ends. It means that no one is ever really independent but is subject to higher powers. It needs no elaboration to see how such concepts stem from the experience of dependence.

The idea of God as Father is an interpretation of the same experience. In human families the father is the provider of the necessities of life. He has in most societies been regarded as the

"head" of the family, and the one upon whom the responsibility for initiating action falls. Thus the idea of fatherhood becomes appropriate to designate the more ultimate sources upon which all life depends for its support. It should be noted, in passing, that most religions also have mother-gods. The reason is that in the human family mothers are obviously important sources of being; in fact, the child's dependence within the family is generally much more upon the mother than upon the father.

In popular Roman Catholic piety the Virgin Mary, "Mother of God", supplies the need for a female supernatural resource. In Christian Science, founded by a woman, God is called Father-Mother God, thus combining the two forms of filial dependence. The experience of receiving life as a gift suggests the idea of the *love of God* or of God as love. This also expresses the feeling of *relatedness*, of belonging to a larger order of things which is one aspect of the experience of dependence. One of the difficulties which such a designation raises is the fact that all aspects of man's life -- the bad as well as the good -- are involved in dependence. From the evil aspects have arisen concepts of evil powers --devils, demons, and dark spirits -- by which one's life is in part determined and upon which one is dependent.

The religious concept which perhaps best expresses the experience of dependence is the idea of *grace*. Grace implies a free gift. A gracious person is one who is generous and outgoing towards others. Correspondingly, when the "grace of God" is spoken of, the meaning is that one has a sense that his life is freely given to him. One responds to whatever he regards as the sources of being as he would to a gracious person.

In Christian thought, stemming largely from the writings of St. Paul, the idea of grace is brought out in the contrast between faith and works. Faith in this sense does not mean, as it is often popularly interpreted, belief about something for which there is little clear evidence. It means rather a *confident dependence* upon one in whom he has faith. Thus the way of faith is the way of confident dependence upon a power deemed worthy of trust. The way of works, in contrast, involves self-reliance, confidence in one's own powers, and independence of any external supports. A sense of grace and a corresponding life of faith would emerge from the recognition of the ultimate sources for one's being.

The discussion of independence above shows that there is no necessary contradiction between faith and works For the works of the self are simply an expression of the life whose sources are other than the self, just as the independent person is independent by virtue of powers derived from beyond himself in the course of his life development. According to the religion of grace the most effective people, from the point of view of independence and the power of personal maturity, are those who most vividly recognize their dependence. The reason for this is that such recognition may strengthen and establish connection with the sources from which personal power derives. Faith is therefore not opposed to works but is their guarantee and support. There can be no works apart from some faith in the sources which make them possible, and there can be no faith which does not issue in works appropriate to the powers with which such faith

makes connection.

It is from this recognition of the significance of dependence that the various religious "gospels of relaxation" have sprung. The clearest instance of this is probably in Taoism, one of the basic principles of which is the importance of "letting go", abandoning the attempt to make the world over according to one's own plans and of letting nature take its course. One takes a passive attitude, expecting that life will best work out in the absence of striving and coercion. Such a philosophy can easily become an excuse for irresponsibility, but it contains important elements of wisdom. Above all it rests upon the firm recognition of universal dependence and upon the positive values, even in terms of work accomplished, which stem from such awareness.

The phenomenon of faith-healing well illustrates the practical effect of acknowledging dependence. That such cures really do take place seems well established. There are various interpretations as to *how* they occur. But this much seems clear: that at least part of the explanation is the release of the sufferer from fears and crippling self-concern by virtue of self-abandonment to some higher power to which he looks for strength and wholeness. He recognizes that health is a gift and not an achievement of his own, that it comes as he opens himself to receive it. This is of course true of *all* healing, not only the so-called faith-cures. Few doctors would presume to claim that *they* cure the sick. They recognize their function as preparing the conditions under which the healing process can take place. Their medical knowledge is a formulation of those laws and principles not made by human contrivance but discovered in the natural order, upon obedience to which the healing process depends.

The principle of dependence extends, in fact, clearly to every area of human achievement. Success in the arts, for example, depends upon sensitive responsiveness to the beautiful forms which are presented as free gifts of nature and life. Similarly in science and engineering the principle once again is dependence upon the natural laws that have been discovered. Man cannot really dominate nature. He can only express the powers implicit in it. And this requires before everything else the acknowledgment of dependence upon it.

It is in this matter of the consciousness of dependence that the contrast between the religious and the non-religious views of life becomes most clear. The assertion of absolute independence and self-sufficiency is the essence of irreligion. Independence may be claimed either by an individual or by a group. Thus, fanatical nationalism or partisanship are as irreligious as the most rugged individualism. It is the tragedy of the present age that the principle of dependency has so largely given way to the claims of self-sufficiency. The "self-made man" has been the ideal of success in capitalist societies. But collectivisms of various sorts, in which the individual acknowledges his dependence upon the group, substitute group self-sufficiency for individual independence and thereby merely magnify the threat and error of the self-made man. It has often been pointed out that modern man is without roots and that modern culture rests upon insecure foundations. This is a direct result of the irreligious rejection of the fact of dependence. Individuals and societies tend to wither and die when they cease to acknowledge and to

strengthen their connection with the sources of their being.

At this point a word is in order about humanism. There are many kinds of humanism, all of which share a concern for the recognition of the unique values in man and in his culture. The kind referred to here is scientific or naturalistic humanism. This school of thought has made important contributions in such areas as the criticism of irrational world-views, of authoritarian social systems, of arbitrary religious dogmatism, and of pious superstitions. One of its major tenets is the self-sufficiency of man. When carefully examined it is usually clear that this means that man is not dependent for the fulfillment of his life upon "supernatural" agencies, but upon the resources which scientific understanding reveals as part of the natural (including human) order.

There is unfortunately in some humanists the tendency so to emphasize this negative criticism that they fail to appreciate the importance and the human value in the awareness of ultimate dependence. One of the best ways for humanism to strengthen its appeal would be to emphasize the fact of man’s radical dependence upon the various resources in the physical world, in society, and in whatever are thought to be the grounds for moral, aesthetic, and intellectual insight, inspiration, and illumination. Some humanists are so busy asserting man’s self-sufficiency and attempting to demonstrate it in activity that they fail to discover the secret of appropriating the power available to them and thus both disprove their assertions and frustrate their activities. Humanism loses its religious quality -- and incidentally its practical effectiveness -- as soon as the sense of grace disappears. A thoughtful recognition of human dependence is a requirement both of theoretical adequacy and of constructive accomplishment.

Psychotherapists have often pointed out the evil consequences of an overdeveloped sense of dependence, and have regarded independence as one of the characteristics of mature personalities. Particularly destructive from a psychological viewpoint are the fear and conformity engendered by strongly authoritarian influences on the developing personality. With this outlook we are in full agreement. There are good and bad kinds of dependence. As pointed out already, there is a preliminary sense in which independence is necessary. Children must grow up from early reliance upon parents to the development of powers which reside within themselves. To be subservient to other persons or to group demands in such a way as to impair the full development of human potentialities is bad dependence. But when mature personality is attained and independence achieved there still remains the importance of acknowledging one’s "good" dependence -- his indebtedness to all the sources of being which made him what he is -- and his reliance upon the many surrounding beings with which he is constantly in active relationship. The insistence upon independence is an important safeguard against preliminary dependency -- that is, reliance upon particular persons or groups. The demand for independence drives one out from such immature reliances. But it must not remain there, as though independence were the last word. The purpose of independence is to force one from preliminary to ultimate dependency, that is, to acknowledgment of and reliance upon the ultimate sources of our being.

This discussion of independence brings us to the much debated problem of freedom and the relation between freedom and dependence. It might appear that the assertion of radical dependence would deny the reality of freedom. Such is not the case. To understand this, it is important to be clear on the point that freedom does not mean absence of determination. Freedom does not mean pure chance. Human freedom does mean *self-determination*, that is, the causing of activity by the self rather than by external agencies. Understood in this way, freedom is not in opposition to dependence. For, granted the reality of human freedom, it is still important to ask: What are the resources upon which the making of the self depends ? It is these resources upon which one is dependent. It seems safe to say that the most complete freedom can, in fact, be achieved only when ultimate dependence is acknowledged. For freedom means not only the absence of external control, but power for maximum self-realization. And such maximum development occurs only by virtue of one's connection with and full openness to the sources of his being.

Throughout our discussion of dependence it may have occurred to many to ask whether the main point is not being missed in failing to describe more precisely just what it is we are ultimately dependent upon. That such a description would be valuable and important is granted. A number of suggestions regarding the nature of the sources of our being have already been made. Some of the traditional religious answers, such as Divine Providence, Fate, Father God, and Love, have been indicated. These and numerous other answers have grown out of centuries of reflection upon the fact of universal dependence. Different degrees of speculative elaboration will satisfy different kinds of minds. Some will find satisfaction only in a man-like invisible Person-God, while others will accept only a tentative conception of the system of powers and structures in the natural order which reasonably account for the observed fact of the physical, biological, and social world.

The point to emphasize is that the particular form of speculative implication demanded is of less importance than the basic experience of dependence common to all interpreters, out of which the implications grow. The basic religious experience, whatever the interpretation, is the experience of dependence. It is only by reference to this universal foundation that the corresponding religious concepts can be understood, and it is only through a clear laying of this foundation in experience that a universally intelligible religious view may be assured.

In conclusion, we wish to summarize some of the attitudes of mind which stem from a vivid awareness of ultimate dependence. The most important of these is the spirit of thankfulness. There are few attitudes more productive of healthy and attractive personality than thankfulness. When a person feels grateful for the gift of life, his joy tends to infect others. He also becomes less subject to the threat of misfortune, because he regards life as a free gift and not as a possession to which he has permanent and inalienable rights.

Thankfulness then begets generosity. One who regards his life as not his own considers himself

a steward and a trustee, responsible for the wise and profitable use of what has been entrusted to him. Since he is heir to a gift, he does not feel the need to protect his smallholdings, but in turn becomes a giver, in the expectation of finding replenishment from the still generous sources of his being.

The sense of dependence also generates confidence. Fear comes from the threat of isolation, of being bereft of support, of being estranged from powers larger than one's self. Recognition of dependence links one to others and makes him aware of the many supports available to him.

Another result is humility. Pride is the assertion of ultimate self-sufficiency. In classical theology pride is the greatest sin. This agrees with the position outlined above that the denial of dependency is the essence of irreligion. Humility is the acknowledgment of dependence. It is the recognition that one is part of a larger order, and the seeking for a right relationship to others within the larger context.

Thankfulness, generosity, confidence, and humility -- these are some of the fruits of the experience of dependence. These are characteristics of the religious outlook. They have their roots in one of the universal experiences of human existence.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 2: Five Fundamentals of Religious Experience

Philip H. Phenix was educated at Princeton University, Union Theological Seminary, and Columbia University. He was formerly Dean of Carleton College, and was professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Published by Harper & Brother, New York. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 5: Order

A third fundamental of religious experience is the experience of *order*. We saw in the last chapter that the world of our experience appears to us as "given". As persons we are dependent upon the sources of being which determine the world process. But it is not enough to point out this pervasive fact. For the world of experience is not given just anyhow. It comes to us in *particular forms*. These forms confront us at each moment of our awareness. Existence has a determinate *structure*. It is not formless, arbitrary, and chaotic. The world as we know it possesses character. It exhibits regularities. It lives up to expectations to a certain extent, and it also provides new patterns as the creative process goes on.

Another way of saying this is to point out that the words "possible" and "impossible" make sense. To say that the world comes to us as ordered implies that not everything is possible. Of course we cannot with our limited knowledge state fully and finally what is possible and what is not. But to describe the structure of existence is to draw the line between the possible and the impossible. There are certain inescapable characteristics in the nature of things with which we are confronted. This is the world of things possible. Actually there is no world of things impossible, for the impossible is something which is not and never could be. The real world, then, is the world as it is and as it might possibly be. The form or order or structure of existence is the definition of possibility.

Order is of several kinds, most basic perhaps is the fact of *temporal* order. Everything which we experience is involved in temporal succession. All experience involves the passage of time. There is no experience which does not have this dimension of temporality. Everything is perceived as "then" or "now". There is no event which we cannot designate by some index of its place in the sequence of passing moments. This is to say that everything belongs to world history -- including the "history of the future". To be outside history is to be impossible. For

history is the story of whatever happens. And the primary dimension of history is time.

A kind of order depending upon temporal order is *causal connection*. Things are not only involved in succession, but some things are related to others as cause and effect. Not everything is cause or effect of everything else. Particular things are causes of specific effects. Furthermore, everything that is has causes and there is nothing which has not its effects. This is the fundamental character of time -- that the world that now is arises on the ground of the world that was. The reality of temporal process therefore assumes a principle of universal causation.

Another basic kind of order is spatial. Everything appears to us as *located*. It is possible to specify of every event its position in space. The world appears as spread out, and as arranged in various spatial structures. That two different things cannot be in the same place at the same time expresses a condition of possibility in the world of space and time.

Experience also presents the world in terms of *quantity*. To everything some predicate of size or number is applicable. Counting and measuring are activities which are used to describe the structure of the world. The detailed working out of this process is, of course, seen in the quantitative aspects of scientific inquiry. The principles of mathematics and logic determine the specific ways in which the quantitative structure of the world may be described. The special sciences then attempt as far as possible to apply these principles to the ordering of the data in their various provinces. The manner and extent to which such ordering is possible is, of course, not for the scientists to determine, but is a matter of *discovery*. This is another way of saying that the quantitative order of things is one of the "given" aspects of existence.

Two things need to be added about the quantitative order. The first is that there is a considerable variety of quantitative systems which may be exemplified in things. The proof of this is the development of new mathematical systems and their successful application to the description of the experienced world -- most strikingly in 20th-century physics. One of the most exciting developments in modern science is the recognition of the multiplicity of possible systems for the ordering of the materials of experience. The second point to be made is that the quantitative order is not the only kind of order, even in science. Much misunderstanding has been caused by the assumption of many people that the only function of science is to describe the quantitative aspects of things, and that the goal of all science is to reduce every description to mathematical equations. This is an unnecessary restriction of the task of science. To be sure, the task of quantitative ordering ought to be pushed as far as it will go, but it should not be assumed to be the sole task of scientific inquiry. There are other kinds of order the discovery of which belongs to the scientific enterprise in the broad sense.

The world also appears with various *qualities*. The quality of a thing is simply a description of it as it appears to the perceiving person. Color, taste, smell, or hardness are obvious qualities. Quality is actually a general term. Temporality and extension in space are really qualities. In this general sense quality is synonymous with the experienced character or structure of

existence. Duration and size are qualities of things in this sense. But so are much more vague qualities such as goodness or rightness or loveliness or awesomeness. Such qualities need further explanation, but the point here is simply that the world does present itself in a vast variety of forms, and we are not justified in arbitrarily restricting the scope of that variety. The world as we experience it is rich in qualities. It is these qualities which constitute the given order of things.

Another aspect of the fact of order is the possibility of *classification*. All knowledge of the world depends upon classification. This means that it is possible to distinguish similarities between different things. Certain identical qualities may be found in different entities. Groups of such similar things are said to constitute a *class*, and the process of grouping them together is *classification*. Classification, and therefore knowledge, is possible only because the world is ordered. The nature of its order is described by stating the possible classifications of things. Scientific inquiry is, in the last analysis, classification. We *know* only to the extent that we are able to discover the classes into which experienced entities may be grouped.

The possibility of classification provides the basis for language. Language and communication involve the process of abstraction, that is, the discovery of similarities between different things. An abstraction is simply the common element discerned in the different things. Such abstractions enter language as *concepts*. Concepts are the expression in language of the observed order of things. Thus the existence of language bears witness to the order of the world. Language is the verbal embodiment of the order of existence. For this reason the world is intelligible only because it is subject to order. A world where there was no order would be one without language and without intelligibility.

A still different way of speaking of order is to refer to the *relatedness* of things. Everything that is has some definite *relationship* with everything else. Every relationship is a kind of order. That one event is before or after another constitutes a temporal relationship. To be located to the right or left of another is a spatial relationship. To be the cause of another is a causal relationship. Relationships may indicate similarity or difference. Thus, membership in the same class is one form of relationship and membership in different classes is another form. But between all things there is *some* kind of definite relationship. That this is so is witness to the order involved in all experience.

Order may also be described in terms of the concept of "community". Community is simply the inter-related coexistence of distinct entities. It is the condition of unity-in-difference or difference-in-unity. Every kind of order is a kind of community. In the usual sense of the term, a human community is a group of people living together on the basis of some principles of order. But so is an atom, for example, a community, because its different electrical constituents are inter-related by certain definite structural principles. The order of cause and effect establishes a kind of community between past and present. The intelligible order expressed in language is also evidence of a community of discourse and of understanding. The same

observations hold for all other forms of order. Thus to say that the world is ordered is the same as to say that it exhibits various kinds of community.

The order of the world is sometimes spoken of in terms of the concept of "law". Thus, there are the laws of the physical world, the laws of living things, the laws of mental life, and the laws of social existence. Every science endeavors to discover the laws which pertain to its particular area of inquiry. In all these cases "law" means the specific ways in which things do actually behave. It does not refer to a *pre*scription regarding how things *should* behave. It is solely a *des*cription of what does occur. In human society there is another meaning of the word "law", referring to the forms of human behavior prescribed for members of the society, whether they are actually obeyed or not.

In the case of the descriptive laws, there is no question of "obedience" in the usual sense. To say that matter "obeys" the law of gravity is only a figurative way of speaking. There is no command to which the matter gives heed. "Heeding" requires mind, and dead matter does not have that. Matter "obeys" the law of gravity only in the sense that it always moves in accordance with that descriptive principle. The law of nature, then, means the regularity or constancy of the order of nature. Law in the sense of a command is applicable only where mental factors are present. For the command may or may not be obeyed. It is obeyed only when the actual order of things conforms to the commanded order. Whether or not this is the case depends on a variety of factors. Thus, for example, a commanded law of human equality may conflict with certain actual laws of human behavior based on self-interest and thus fail of full realization. As a matter of fact, no prescriptive law will be actualized until it becomes the descriptive law of the human beings to whom it applies.

This leads directly to the question of the so-called "moral order". It is common to draw a distinction between the world of things as they *are* and the world of things as they *ought to be*. The world of the ought-to-be is called the moral order. Now it is clear that human action -- with which morality is concerned -- does involve a definite structure. Thus, for example, it is not possible both to act selfishly and to enjoy the benefits of friendship. It is a descriptive law of things that selfishness and friendship are mutually exclusive. Here there is clearly a moral order in a descriptive sense. The question then arises: Ought we to act selfishly or seek friendship ? It is difficult to see how this could be answered apart from the discovery of some tension or tendency giving some kind of preference to one form of behavior rather than the other. We shall discuss this matter further in the next chapter. It is sufficient here merely to say that in the area of human conduct, as well as in the more obvious areas of natural phenomena, there is form or structure. Only certain kinds of human activities, relationships, and patterns of organization are possible, and the moral order is an expression of these various structures together with principles upon which certain preferences may be established among them.

Particular forms or laws in any realm are not necessarily fixed or permanent. Individual things, whose character is an expression of a certain structure, change into things with other forms. But

even the more general patterns, such as the so-called "laws of nature", *may* not be for ever fixed. There is no guarantee that the particular regularities which now pertain in the nature of things will always hold good. This means simply that order is not static, but dynamic. It is none the less order for being subject to change.

Disorder is a term which is always relative to a particular kind of order. There is no such thing as disorder in general. Entities are disordered in a given respect when they do not correspond to some particular sort of order which one seeks to apply to them. But nothing is without *any* order. Everything is what it is by virtue of its particular kinds of order. The most disordered array from one standpoint is from another point of view perfectly ordered. In fact, the nature of a thing is simply that order or set of orders which it exemplifies. It must be recognized, however, that no statement is ordinarily possible regarding *all* the orders which any given entity exemplifies. The process of stating the possible classes to which anything belongs and the many relationships into which it enters is one to which there is really no end, so vast is the world and so manifold its inter-connections. This is only to say that the full nature of anything is of limitless complexity.

It requires no discussion to see that order is a universal experience. The awareness of order is a necessary aspect of every person’s experience. There is no person who can perceive the world other than as an ordered world, in such ways as we have already illustrated. Furthermore, the centrality of order is borne out by the fact that there is no type of experience which does not come as a structured experience. An order-experience is not simply one among many other kinds of experience, but every possible experience is an order-experience. Order is the character, quality, or nature of *any* experience.

The experience of order is closely related to the other two fundamentals of religious experience already discussed, namely, change and dependence. For the new world which comes into being every moment is an *ordered* world. Not just *anything* new comes forth, but only entities of certain determinate structures. Order is therefore the law or structure of change. And change is in turn the dynamic component in the order of things. Similarly with dependence, the fact of order means that we are not *arbitrarily* dependent, but intelligibly so. The world of experience is not simply given, it is given in a determinate way, which is the order of things.

The experience of order has been an important element in all the great religions of the world. The basic theological concept stemming from it is the idea of *divine wisdom*. That the ultimate source of things, however otherwise conceived, is wise is evident from the marvelous structure with which the world is endowed. Wisdom implies a well-ordered mind. If the world is intelligible and well-ordered, then it follows that the sources of being are wise. However otherwise conceived, the ultimate ground must be as intelligible and as orderly as the world of experience. The God of religion is therefore never really arbitrary, but endowed with that wisdom which is the source of the world’s order.

The laws of the natural order have commonly therefore been regarded by religious people as expressions of the laws of God's own nature. God is not without a nature. He has a definite character. The only basis upon which knowledge of that divine nature may be founded is the order of the experienced world. Important in this regard are the laws of the moral order. The prophetic personalities in human history who have been gifted with dreams of a better society have usually regarded these visions as revelations of the righteousness of God. The destructive consequences of human wrong-doing have likewise been interpreted as the judgment or wrath of God. The divine judgment is thus a theological interpretation of the experienced reality of a moral order. Human acts have consequences. Not everything is possible. There is a structure in the possibilities of human conduct. The ways in which this structure becomes apparent in human experience are theologically understood as revelations of the divine justice.

Another religious concept based upon the experience of order is the idea of the "Word of God". This phrase is often misunderstood, especially by biblical literalists, as meaning the *words* of God, supposedly contained in the Holy Book. The correct meaning is that God reveals himself in determinate forms. Thus he becomes intelligible to man. The Word of God is therefore simply every disclosure of the ultimate intelligibility of things. Since such disclosure is made through the experienced order of the world, it follows that the divine Word is a theological interpretation of the experience of order. The Word is sometimes referred to as the *logos*. This is a Greek word referring to the intelligible structure of the world. In Christian theology Jesus Christ is called the Logos or the Word. This is to be understood as expressing the conviction of the early Christians that the fundamental order of things was best seen in the life and death of Jesus and in the subsequent events in the community of disciples. Christ is the Word to those for whom the most complete understanding of the essential and humanly significant order of things is found in him.

The identification of order with community suggests also the relation between the experience of order and the idea of God as Love. The divine love is an interpretation of dependence, but it also interprets order, for love is the basis for community. Love is the establishment of mutuality between different persons. It is the discovery of unity amidst differences. Therefore love is an ordering process. It follows that if the world is ordered, its source or ground must be love. Hence an ordered world implies theologically a God of love. To be sure, this is qualified by the fact that there are many kinds of order and thus many sorts of community. Thus love also has different levels. It is even true, paradoxical as it may seem, that hate depends on love. For there can be no hate without a link of understanding between the individuals, and that is a product of love. Hate is hate because it eventually results in a complete destruction of community, even the minimal community that made hate possible. Thus love underlies all order, and the idea of the God of love becomes an appropriate symbol for the universal order in which all things experienced are grounded.

The experience of order is thus intrinsic to religious experience as traditionally understood. In this regard the irreligious would be simply oblivious to or heedless of this pervasive fact. They

would either call order an illusion or else be so overwhelmed by the failure of the world to conform to their preferred patterns of order that they would fail to affirm the order that does exist. There are skeptics who claim that experience is a meaningless jumble. From some selected standpoint of what a meaningful order would be this may be the case. But that there is some kind of order pervasively experienced none can doubt. To recognize and acknowledge this is one of the fundamentals of all religious experience.

As in our discussions of change and of dependence, so with order it is important to note that from our point of view the significant thing religiously is the experience from which the various theological interpretations arise and not the various forms of interpretation themselves. Some will wish and be able to believe in some sort of Cosmic Mind "behind" the world -- in the sense discussed in Chapter III. Others will prefer to remain on less speculative ground in merely affirming the astounding fact of order and in recognizing this as a primary datum in the nature of things. Whatever the interpretation, the fundamental experience is the same.

Furthermore, amidst divergent theologies the basis for mutual understanding and intelligible discourse is provided in this universal experience of order. Actually religion like everything else can be intelligible and rational only because the world is orderly. Religious experience has a structure. It is the purpose of these chapters to describe some of the main lines of that structure. If this is possible, and if our thesis that religion need not be an unintelligible mystery can be sustained, it is because all our experience does involve order.

In concluding this chapter some of the attitudes which accompany the religious experience of order may be indicated. There is certainly in it a sense of *illumination* or *insight*. ("God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.") Life is no longer entirely obscure and baffling. Thus also it has *meaning*. The sense of order is the basis of meaning. Life is "meaningless" when existence is regarded as chaotic and arbitrary. The meaning of life is precisely the forms of order which it presents. Especially important for a sense of personal meaning is the moral order. Moral meaning arises when the reality of the moral order is understood and affirmed.

The experience of order also underlies the attitude of *confidence*, which stems from the recognition that the world is in some sense reliable. Order means that experience, while admitting new things, is not pure surprise. Without some determinate structure no existence would be possible. With order a sense of trust is engendered. This is the ground for feeling "at home" in the world rather than a lonely alien. Never completely at home, perhaps, because the present order is not the final order, but sufficiently aware of the pervasiveness of structure to make us rejoice in the magnificent existence in which we are privileged to participate.

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Chapter 6: Value

A fourth fundamental of religious experience is the consciousness of *value.* It is necessary, if one is to be clear, always to speak of value for a specified person. For value depends upon the relationship between a valuer and what he values. The value of something for someone is one of the aspects of his reaction to it. If he seeks to preserve or extend or confirm the relationship, a positive value is indicated; if he seeks to destroy or diminish or escape it, a negative value is indicated. Involved here are emotional components. Acceptance and a feeling of satisfaction characterize a positive value; rejection and a feeling of unrest or dissatisfaction characterize a negative value. Something has positive value for a person if he is attracted by it or to it; it has negative value if he is repelled by it or from it. This is to be understood, of course, as more than a purely physiological reaction, as including emotional and intellectual components. Positive values act as a kind of "lure", negative values as a threat.

The value-experience rests upon some principle of conformity or congruity between the valuer and what is valued. Particular values are acquired in the process of education. It is through education, working within the context of the regular laws of biological, psychological, and social growth, that the pattern of habitual human behavior is formed. Positive values result when the human personality is confronted with objects and enters into situations where there is some kind of correspondence between the person’s nature and the nature of the objects and situations. Negative values result from a clash between subject and object. A precise statement of what the correspondence or the clash might be is not easy to produce and is not necessary here, since our main purpose in these remarks is merely to emphasize the point that value experiences depend for their character upon the kinds of relationships that exist between subject and object.

Presumably there are *neutral* values also, that is, situations in which there is neither attraction

nor repulsion. In such cases the subject is simply *indifferent* to the object. This would seem to imply that there would be neither congruence of the type leading to positive value nor the clash producing negative value, but a relation of irrelevance of object to subject.

The complexity of the human personality is such that one cannot always speak of value without ambiguity. For a person may be at once attracted and repelled by the same thing. There may be conflicting emotions generated within the same situation. This is because no human being is completely "single-minded" or "integrated". He possesses a variety of impulses, needs, and habitual modes of response. This ambiguity does not impair the idea of value, however. It simply means that in every case the full complexity of the relationship and of the reactions involved must be stated. Value-experience is likely to be complex rather than simple. For full understanding the several components of it must be distinguished.

We sometimes speak of "valuing" something, "placing a value" on it, or "having a high regard" for it, as though the experience of value were a matter of our decision or choice. According to the view presented here, this is not correct. Value depends upon a relationship between given structures or orders. It is not made by us but we are confronted by it. Thus, for example, the value which a human being finds in food is a result jointly of the biological nature of man and of the chemical characteristics of the food which correspond to the nutrition needs of the organism. The value of food for man is a direct consequence of the natural order of which man and food are parts. This leads to the important conclusion that values are really one kind of fact. That there are certain correspondences or clashes between persons and objects or situations confronting them is a matter of fact. It is simply one aspect of the nature of things that human beings are of such a nature as to find some things attractive, some things repulsive, and some things neutral. Values reflect the human responses to the various structural interrelationships in which persons are involved.

It would be well in this connection to ask why it is so persistently asserted that facts and values are essentially different. It is said that facts refer to whatever is, while values refer to the worth of things which may or may not actually be. Thus, it is a fact that we live in a world with selfish and quarrelsome people. On the other hand, a universal peace, which has never actually existed and perhaps never will, is a value. How in this case can we say that the value is a kind of fact ? We can only do so by noting that there are really two kinds of values. One kind stems from relationship to something actual. The other reflects the human response to something not actual but only conceived in imagination. In the illustration just given, universal peace is not an actual fact, but is an imagined state of affairs. The response (usually an attraction) to the idea of universal peace is what determines its value. We can now see that in such a case the value is still a fact. It is a fact, for example, that a congruent relationship exists between a person and the idea of universal peace. In similar manner one’s own death may be a negative value, because there is a clash between the idea of it and the demand of the person for self-preservation.

Generally values based on imagined situations undergo change when the imagined becomes

actual. This is because the relation of the person to an idea will differ from his relationship to the actual embodiment of that idea. The idea and its embodiment are inevitably different, and so the response to each will differ. A man (or woman) may be in love with love, as the saying goes, but find that any actual woman (or man) fails to measure up to expectations. A person may dread the idea of suffering, but sometimes discovers positive values in the actual experience of it. This change in response as one passes from idea to actuality further illustrates the difference between the two kinds of value.

Therefore, instead of making the common distinction between fact and value it would be better simply to make a distinction between the two kinds of value -- actual value and ideal value -- while insisting that both of these kinds are still facts.

An even more important reason for the traditional separation between fact and value stems from the practice of speaking of values as though they had some meaning apart from valuing persons. For example, it may be said that honesty is a value -- not for anyone in particular but simply in general. From one point of view such a way of speaking does not really make sense since values depend on a relationship. To speak of honesty as a value in general would be similar to saying that a certain tree is taller. If one asked "Taller than what?" and the reply were, "just taller in general", we would rightly say that the statement made no sense. So, also, honesty is a value to actual persons. It is therefore a matter for factual inquiry to determine whether or not honesty is a value for any given person.

A similar reason for the traditional separation of fact from value is the attempt to apply the values of one person or group to other persons. For example, the accumulation of property may be a positive value to one person, while another may be indifferent to it. Yet one or the other may insist without qualification that his attitude is the right one and that everyone "ought" to feel as he does about property. The expression of obligation is merely an attempt by one to secure the conformity of another (and different) person to his own pattern of value-relationships. Such an effort can be aided by the assumption that values are not matters of fact, but are in some way "above" the realm of actuality and therefore have some kind of independent status.

The separation of fact and value is thus derived in part from the desire of one person to justify and support the persuasion of other persons to accept his particular values. It often happens that the relationship between the person involved in these cases is such that the value urged by one actually becomes a value for the other. For example, a child will tend to take on the values of the parent because of the strong attachment to the parent. Often such "grafting" of values has harmful effects on the child’s personality, because they may not correspond to other values more proper to him derived from his direct experience. From such considerations arises the criticism of authoritarian methods in the education of children.

Our main purpose in dwelling on the factual nature of value is to strengthen the foundations of

our discussion of religion, in so far as it depends on value, in actual human experience. When values are given some other status "beyond" the world of fact, the discussion of them tends to soar out of the area of shareable human experience and becomes unintelligible and confused. To recognize the factual nature of values as responses of actual human beings in actual or imagined situations is to remain on the solid ground of experience which all can understand.

This leads to a brief consideration of another commonly discussed question, namely, whether values are "objective" or "subjective". Are values real apart from human beings, or are they dependent on individual subjects? From our analysis above the answer is clear. Values are *both* "objective" and "subjective". They are neither purely one nor the other because they depend on the relation between subject and object. Values are objective in the sense that they describe the response of actual persons in actual or imagined situations. They have a subjective element in that it does not make sense to speak of values apart from valuing subjects. Values are not so objective as to be independent of persons. Nor are they so subjective as to be arbitrary whims of persons without reference to objective relationships. Note that here an imagined situation is assumed to be "objective" because the subject's reaction to it is not a matter of preference but of given fact. The ideal of loyalty, for example, either attracts or repels a particular person, and which it is a given discoverable *fact,* not a matter of the inquirer's preference.

A closely related question is the even more hotly-disputed one of the so-called "relativity of values". Are values purely relative -- that is, dependent upon persons and particular situations ? Values are based upon relationships. In that sense they are always and by definition relative. However, it may be that there are certain characteristics which are widely or universally shared by human beings, so that their responses in similar situations would be similar. Thus the universal value of food is based upon the common biological nature of men. Similarly perhaps with love, though here the case is not so easily established. Such common elements of human nature lead to whatever agreement on values exists among different persons. Values will inevitably differ in respect to those aspects in which persons are different. There is a good analogue from the field of modern physics which will clarify our answer about relativity of values. It is clear that velocity, like value, is always a relationship. Thus one cannot without qualification say that an automobile is moving with a speed of forty miles per hour. It may have this speed in relation to the roadbed, but a different speed in relation to another moving automobile. All speed measurements depend on a specified reference system. Speed is relative to the motion of the observer. However, it has been discovered that one speed, that of light, comes out the same for all observers, whatever their state of motion. Thus, it has been experimentally established that the speed of light is absolute, even though in general all speeds are relative. So in regard to values, while it is true that they are by definition relative because arising from relationships, there may in point of fact prove to be values which are the same or nearly the same from person to person or time to time. Such values would be called universal or perhaps absolute.

The problem of the ultimate relativity of values hinges on the question as to whether or not

there is any universal value by which all other values may be arranged in order of rank. This depends upon whether there is some sovereign principle by which certain values are actually confirmed or enhanced in comparison with others, leading to a condition of increasing stability, permanence, and comprehensiveness. Such a principle will be suggested in the next chapter.

Just as there are many different types of order, there are also different kinds of value. One kind may be called "truth-value". This is a value which arises from the relation between an idea and the total organized set of ideas already held. An affirmative response resulting from the congruence or coherence of a new idea with one's already existing ideas gives that idea positive truth-value. Another idea conflicting with the existing order of ideas may have negative truth-value, or appears as error. On the other hand a clash between new and old may result in a reconstruction of the old and assimilation of the new in such a way that the new idea has positive truth-value while some ideas formerly of positive value take on negative truth-value.

A second important kind of value is found in the experience of beauty. The sense of beauty is a positive response growing out of a relationship of the person to the aesthetic object. Beauty is felt when there is some congruence between the aesthetic object and the observer's pattern of sense perception and related responses. It represents a harmony, complex in nature but simply perceived, between subject and object. In the opposite case, negative value or the experience of the ugly represents a clash or incongruity between object and subject.

A third important kind of value arises in the sphere of conduct. These are moral values. An act has positive moral value when it is based upon the whole-hearted assent of the person to it, that is, when there is a congruent relation between the act and the total personality structure of the one who acts. This is sometimes taken to mean that a moral act is one done "in good conscience". But this is not always so because the "conscience" may not represent the actual nature of the person involved. In any case, positive value in the area of conduct occurs when there is an affirmative response to it by the person acting. Obviously judgments of moral value will differ greatly, depending upon the training and basic characteristics of different persons. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that changes in what are regarded as moral values may be brought about by education. The fact remains that actual value-judgments, in the realm of conduct as in other areas, will vary greatly according to the individual. The larger question of what this means for the problem of morality in general will be discussed in Chapter IX.

The division of values into kinds such as the three just mentioned is merely a matter of convenience and does not represent any radical separation. For value-experience is a single response with many aspects. For example, every contemplation of truth involves aesthetic and moral aspects. A mathematician may speak of a "beautiful" geometric demonstration, and he will feel a moral obligation to teach the truth. Similarly aesthetic experiences have truth-value and moral value and moral values involve truth and beauty. The distinction among the three kinds rests upon the nature of the objects valued -- ideas in the first case, sense data in the

second, and acts in the third.

One further distinction is that between intrinsic and instrumental values. Intrinsic values are those which represent a direct and immediate response to the object valued. Instrumental values derive their worth from their relationship to more remote values. Thus food to a hungry person would be an intrinsic value because immediately affirmed and enjoyed. On the other hand, in regard to the value of health and strength the same food would have instrumental value. This distinction is only a relative one, since every instrumental value also has (some other) intrinsic value, and every intrinsic value has (some other) value of an instrumental character.

The experience of value is obviously universal. There are not some persons who have it and others who do not. Valuing is part of being a feeling, thinking person. It is also a central experience, in that every experience, of whatever sort, involves it. There is no situation in which a value-response of some kind is not produced. All experience arises out of the relationship of persons to their world. Values are the attracting or repelling forces which inhere in these relationships. There is no relationship to which the question may not apply: Is it one which will tend to confirm itself or are there forces involved which will tend to destroy or impair it? The universality and centrality of value-experience give it a fundamental character just as with the experience of change, dependence and order, and fulfill two aspects as the requirements for a basis of religious experience.

Value is related to change as a kind of dynamic element or tension in human life. If positive values tend to confirm relationships and negative values to fracture them, then the particular ways in which changes take place in the human scene will depend upon the systems of value which pertain. For example, the "motives" of conduct are derived from the moral values which persons have. Value is also related to dependence. We have already seen that values simply are. They are "given". Persons are "grasped" by them. They are not made up by the valuer, but emerge directly out of relationships as their inevitable accompaniment. Thus the derived character of human existence is illustrated clearly in the experience of value. Finally, value is related to order, because it is itself one of the products of order. The special character of any relationship depends on the particular kind of order involved. Thus value is simply an expression of the tensions set up by the inter-relations of persons with various forms of existence.

The experience of value has been a fundamental element in the traditional religions. One theological expression for the experience of positive value is the idea of the goodness or righteousness of God. This belief grows out of a profound experience of the worth of existence, a deep-seated affirmation of life as worthwhile. A related religious idea is that of the goodness of the created order, expressed for example in the Genesis creation story in the recurring words "And God saw that it was good". Certain ascetic tendencies in the historic religions have involved a denial of the goodness of the creation, but many have affirmed it. On the other hand, negative value-experiences have generated ideas of devils or demons or of a "fallen" world.

Positive moral value is taken in most religions as an expression of the *will of God*. This is especially true when the feeling of rightness is strong. In such cases the value of the individual or group is made into an absolute and universal rule. It is easy to understand why powerful motivations should tend to produce this result, but the bitter conflicts generated by the existence of opposing strong convictions bear witness to the destructive possibilities in making partial moral insights into ultimate religious principles.

The experience of value is also the basis for the "visions" of prophets and seers. A vision is an imagined situation the contemplation of which appeals with great power of attraction and persuasion to the prophet. He is "grasped" by an imagined ideal with such force that it becomes an important motivating principle in his life, particularly in his relationships with other people in whom he seeks to produce a similar reaction, as he may or may not do in varying degrees depending upon their preparation for the message. In this connection, it is to be observed that the prophet's or the preacher's message either will or will not appeal as a positive value to his hearers, depending upon their natures. Mere insistence on his part will not convince them. Either the soil is prepared or it is not. The New Testament parable of the soils is relevant here. The message will grow only in those who are ready for it and to the degree that they are prepared to receive it fruitfully.

A similar religious interpretation of value-experience is the idea of *divine guidance*, usually through prayer. Such guidance depends upon the awareness of compelling values -- the discovery of strong motivations through the imaginative consideration of various possible directions of activity.

Value is also involved in the religious concept of *faith*. As indicated previously, religious faith does not primarily mean assent to some belief for which there is insufficient evidence. It rather means an attitude of loyal commitment. This obviously springs from an experience of value. Faith in this primary sense reflects the positive response to the object of loyalty. Our description of value shows that faith is given through the nature of the responses actually generated in the inter-relation of persons with the objects of their loyalty. The commitment is not an arbitrary decision to be loyal. It is the direct consequence of having been captivated by that which is valued. Faith in this respect is like love. One loves truly and completely when the beloved has taken captive the heart of the lover. There is a real sense in which love simply is; one cannot help himself, still less can he claim credit for generating the love. So with faith, which really depends on love, there is no taking credit for it nor denying it. It is *given* out of the relationship to its object. This recalls what was said in Chapter IV about grace. Faith is a gift for which one may be thankful. It is by grace -- by a free gift -- that our commitments and loyalties come to us and that we can remain steadfast in them.

A final religious interpretation of value-experience is the idea of *sacrament*. A sacrament is some object or act which has special power of generating profound faith. For example, for

Christians the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper may intensify loyalty to Jesus and his cause through the imaginative association of the elements with the body and blood of the crucified Jesus. The power of the sacrament is analogous to that of a catalyst in chemical reactions. It has the power of an intermediary agent. The sacrament stimulates a value response to an object other than itself -- in this sense being a kind of instrumental value -- by virtue of a three-way congruence of some sort involving person, sacrament, an ultimate faith-object. It is possible to extend the idea of sacrament beyond the traditional limits in church practice to include *any* object or act which evokes deep religious feeling. For example, the positive value felt in one particular object may evoke a sense of the general worthwhileness of life. Such an object has a sacramental character in the broad sense.

As pointed out, the experience of value is a universal one. Whether positive or negative, there is always some value-reaction to every relationship in which man is involved. It would appear, therefore, that everyone shares in this kind of religious experience. Irreligion would mean having no values. This condition is never actually reached. But it can be a tendency. Any increase in the feeling of irrelevance and of loss of interest in life is an irreligious tendency. The attitude that nothing matters very much and that one thing is the same as every other thing -- a feeling of "flatness" and of boredom -- is in the direction of the irreligious. Isolation or estrangement is also relatively irreligious because it reduces the number and closeness of relationships upon which any value depends. In the extreme case of the psychotic person living in a private world out of all relation to the real world value-experience is severely restricted, because it lacks the possibilities for growth and enrichment through the establishment of new external relationships. Complete irreligion would mean death, for man cannot live without some concern for the values of life. He cannot exist without some motivation for living. The difference between religion and irreligion is therefore measured by the depth and range of value experience.

As in the previous three chapters, no attempt has been made in this discussion to evaluate the various theological ideas associated with the experience of value. Those of speculative disposition may postulate a supernatural being, who, for example, issues moral commands. Others will prefer the interpretation of value experience simply in terms of a given structure of inter-relationships in which persons are involved. The point of our discussion is to show the roots in experience from which a whole range of religious concepts spring -- and to suggest once again that the intelligibility of religious ideas will depend upon returning constantly to these roots as the basis for mutual understanding.

Now a final brief remark about the personal attitudes developed through the experience of value. As pointed out above, it is the ground of loyalty. It also gives zest and interest to life. It destroys boredom. It leads to sensitivity rather than callousness, to responsibility rather than neglect, to decisiveness in place of faltering. It is the source of energy for creative living rather than static existence. Out of the experience of value spring not only the positive responses of faithfulness and love but also the sense of tragedy. Only thus can life be appreciated in its full

dimensions of height and depth.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 2: Five Fundamentals of Religious Experience

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Chapter 7: Imperfection

A fifth fundamental of religious experience is the sense of imperfection. This means simply that every situation in which a person finds himself suggests the possibility of a better one. As one considers the world or any aspect of it, he is aware of the fact that it is not as perfect, as complete, as beautiful, as good, or as just as it might be. There is always "something more" beyond what now exists. The world that *is* for ever suggests a world that is not yet but that could be or should be. The actualities of existence are seen as only partial fulfillment's of latent possibilities. This is to say that there is a richness of potentiality which the achievements of life in any realm up to now fail to exhaust.

We have already spoken in Chapter III of this fact of potentiality as one of the implications of the experience of change. In Chapter VI we then considered the experience of value. Imagined possibilities all have value to the persons who consider them. Here we add a new element to the discussion. It is not the mere fact of latent possibilities and their values. It is the sense that, whatever the situation considered, there are always *more valuable* possibilities beyond it. Clearly this involves some standard -- a scale of values -- by which the relative value of the possibilities may be evaluated. In actual practice there are many such standards employed. For the moment we shall remain content with the observation that on some basis or other the world and everything in it are always regarded as capable of improvement. Later in this chapter a suggested standard for evaluating improvement will be explained.

In everyday life, however, it is usual not to make the standard explicit. Few people if questioned could say just how they would measure better or worse. Or rather with regard to each condition discussed they would tend to apply some different measure. And usually the standard employed would be derived from common cultural prejudices. All this does not refute the basic fact that the world as experienced always appears to us as in some sense or other imperfect, incomplete,

unfinished, capable of improvement. The idea of imperfection is firmly planted in universal human experience. Everything that we encounter comes to us as less-than-perfect.

Another way of stating this is to say that human beings can idealize in every situation. The ideal is a possible situation standing in contrast with the actual situation and regarded as an improvement of it. The experience of imperfection means that corresponding to every actual condition and growing out of it is an imagined ideal. Ideal as here used does not mean perfection. It means simply a higher goal towards which one aims or by which one criticizes a given condition of things. In fact, the nature of ideals is such that each stage of achievement leads to the formulation of still higher goals. Thus ideals as meant here are not final and ultimate goals, but successive steps upon the pathway of betterment.

The experience of imperfection is the basis of the idea of *progress*. Progress means an advance from a lower to a higher value. There is progress only when a scale of values has been defined. Imperfection means that further progress is possible. It does not, of course, mean that it is inevitable or automatic as many easy optimists have assumed. The sense of imperfection implies that in every situation there is the demand for or invitation to progress.

The sense of imperfection and the process of idealization can be illustrated in the most diverse areas of human experience. Consider first the realm of knowledge. Man is constantly engaged in what is called "the search for truth". The significant thing for us now is that this appears to be a never-ending search. Whenever the advance of knowledge pushes back the boundary of ignorance, there always appear new depths of ignorance to explore. This is especially striking in the history of scientific discovery. We know a great many things about the nature of the world. Our libraries are filled with the records of the achievements of researchers in many areas. And yet these discoveries, far from reducing the number of problems to be solved, have actually served to create vast new problems that were never thought of before.

There are more questions seeking answers in our present age than ever before. In physics, for example, knowledge of atomic structure has opened up a whole new area of research possibilities, and we confidently expect that when the currently most pressing problems are solved there will be implicit in the solutions new problems at present beyond our power even to formulate. Again, in the life sciences and in the social sciences much knowledge has been accumulated, but the function of such knowledge is not to extinguish the demand for research but rather to provide the basis for vast new explorations into the questions suggested by such knowledge.

It is this amazing capacity of experience to suggest new questions at every stage of inquiry which makes the "search for truth" a permanent pursuit. Actual attained knowledge is never completely satisfying, because implicit in it is the ideal of more complete understanding. The world is such that within every body of knowledge there are tensions and contradictions which invite resolution. Every answer, which before it was given was an ideal, becomes a new actual

beyond which further ideals of understanding are envisaged. The scholar can never think that the last word has been spoken on any topic. The more he knows the more he sees how much there is still to learn. Implicit in the learning process is the sense of imperfection.

Closely related to the pursuit of knowledge is the realm of technical advance. Man has certain wants which he seeks to satisfy by means of machines which he invents. One might think that the satisfaction of these wants would put an end to the incentive for invention. The history of modern industrial development refutes this idea. Every invention has tended to confront man with new problems and new possibilities for the satisfaction of his wants. He does not remain content with one stage of technical development, but each stage drives him on to still further possibilities of the use of nature's resources. Each end seems always to suggest new beginnings.

Even the exhaustion of natural resources, which might be considered a denial of the limitlessness of nature, is sometimes the basis for some new approach to the problem of supply which yields more than if the former supplies had been maintained. However, it must be granted that this argument cannot be pressed too far. Natural resources are perhaps not without limit, and it would be foolish to imply that man can continue to drain supplies of power indefinitely. But this does not really contradict the fundamental thesis, which is only that *some kind* of more ideal situation can always be formulated, though it may not necessarily be along any particular preconceived line. Thus in the case of natural resources the ideal might well involve a reduction in the use of power for the sake of achieving a more adequate balance between man and nature.

As with knowledge, so in the realm of conduct a sense of imperfection is always possible. There is no instance of human conduct in which some improvement cannot be suggested. There is no human relationship which can be considered entirely without flaws. There is no form of social organization which represents the final possibilities of achievement. It is doubtful, for example, if any individual is ever completely honest in his dealings with others. There are always some reservations, perhaps unconscious, which qualify them. No one ever tells the *whole* truth, partly because he never fully knows it and partly because he is never fully free of personal bias and self-interest. Thus honesty is always an ideal rather than a complete actuality. Every achievement of relative honesty suggests ways in which a higher level of truthfulness might be attained.

Or take the relationship of love. Actual love is always imperfect. That is, in every loving relationship it is possible to discern taints of discord, of insincerity, of masked self-interest. The more perfect the love the more apparent become its limitless dimensions and the farther one is from claiming his fulfillment of them. Love involves above all a keen sensitivity to the needs of others. Human life is so complex that the full extent of such needs can never be fathomed. Furthermore, to become sensitive to one set of needs is to be in a position to see still further needs not being met. Thus the more one loves the greater is the demand which love places upon him and the more he realizes how impossible it is ever completely to fulfill it.

The same is true with respect to the organization of society. A society is really an attempt to embody on a larger scale the principles of co-operation and mutual support involved in individual relationships. Love between individuals has its social counterpart in the provisions for security and mutual assistance established by the community. The history of man is the long story of the attempts to actualize such ideals as justice, freedom, equality, and security. Where many individuals are involved there are necessarily many competing interests to be reconciled. The numerous ways in which such reconciliation may be effected are the various forms of social order. Our point is that none of these forms perfectly or completely satisfies the demands of all members of the group, and that upon every actual form of social organization stands the judgment of some higher ideal.

There is no society which in any aspect could not be improved upon. In any given case the particular ways in which the ideals would be envisaged would depend upon circumstances and in many instances would be obscure. But that some reform or improvement is always in order can hardly be doubted. This is certainly obvious in terms of widening the area of human co-operation -- in uniting families into peaceful communities with equitable distribution of responsibilities and privileges, and then creating from these the larger communities of states and nations, and finally developing from these a world society dedicated to the fullest realization of every member of the human family. This is evidently a never-ending task, in the accomplishment of which each stage of achievement provides the opportunity for the next higher stage. There could be no ideal for a nation until there were smaller social units ready to unite and there can be no ideal for a world society without a prior actualization of national communities.

What is thus true in the pursuit of knowledge or in the field of human conduct and social organization is also true in the realm of artistic creation or appreciation. Beauty is inexhaustible. The manifestations of beauty are never perfect or complete. No work of art ever expresses the full dimension of the experience of the beautiful. Thus beauty is always an ideal which can never be reached. The artist constantly endeavors to express what he feels, but his forms, whether in music, in painting, in marble or in concrete never fully succeed. So also there is no work of art which is not capable of ever new interpretations and insights. To be sure, art differs from science in that the individual work of art stands by itself in a way that scientific facts do not. The latter always drive one on to generalization and to new formulations of hypotheses, while the former is in one sense a completed whole. A work of art is *finished* in a sense that a fact, which is grist for the scientist’s mill, is not. Yet it is still true that a work of art possesses unfathomable depths and that no artist can feel satisfied either with having expressed his insights fully, much less with having exhausted the possibilities of artistic expression. In fact there is probably no area of human endeavor where the phenomenal richness of possibility is so apparent as in art, and where the sense of incompleteness is more evident.

The question may, of course, be raised as to whether the world is really inexhaustibly rich in

possibilities or whether its appearance as such may be due merely to the relatively minor place man has in the whole scheme of things and to the magnitude and complexity of the world in comparison with man and his works. Just as it might well be predicted that basic natural resources of the earth may be exhausted in the relatively near future, leaving the human race impoverished or even extinguishing it, so it might be argued that eventually scientific discovery could come to an end or that some utopian scheme of social organization might be achieved and that the perverseness of the human heart would be eradicated. At present such perfectionist hypotheses seem improbable. However this may be, we are in all areas of experience confronted with the *practical* inexhaustibility of existence and with the awareness of imperfection and incompleteness in all that we achieve.

This is all our argument requires. For we only intend to point to certain universal experiences out of which religion springs. And as we shall presently indicate, this sense of imperfection is one such experience which human beings do actually have. One could speculate as to what difference in religious ideas and practices would result should the possibilities turn out to be limited. In certain respects they would differ from those which depend upon the assumption of limitlessness. The form of the analysis of religion would remain the same, though the detailed conclusions would differ. Since our main interest in this book is to demonstrate an intelligible approach to religion, we need not dwell long on such alternative hypotheses which in the nature of the case cannot at present be tested.

The question just raised is made more interesting by the fact that in present-day mathematical physics the belief has grown that the world may be finite, both in spatial extent and in temporal duration. And there have been numerous gloomy predictions, stemming from the "law of entropy" or of increasing unavailability of energy, to the effect that the world is "running down" and will eventually be unable to support any living things. All these suggestions from physics weigh on the side of limitation. Some, such as the theory of finite space, suggest the idea of a sort of spatial completeness. Others, such as the running down of the world, suggest rather the limitation imposed on actual achievements in comparison with possibilities dependent upon unlimited availability of energy. According to this theory, there would be a peak in possible development, and then a decline as the conditions of life became unfavorable. Even in this case, though, it might be that new possibilities could open up in another cosmic era where some more favorable natural law would pertain.

Enough has been said to indicate why we assert that the sense of imperfection is both a universal and a central experience. Perfectibility is implicit in the conditions of every human life. It is a necessary aspect of the human situation. Furthermore, it is implicit in every realm of human experience. The sense of imperfection is not simply one kind of experience among others; it is an aspect or dimension of every possible human experience.

We can briefly indicate the relation of the experience of imperfection to the four previously discussed fundamentals of religious experience. The experience of imperfection presupposes

the experience of change, of dependence, of order, and of value. Change merely raises the question of the ground for the appearance of the new. Imperfection, on the other hand, implies something about the *extent* or *depth* of possibility. Dependence is related to imperfection in that the possibilities as they are actualized come as gifts rather than as our own creations. Order expresses the fact that both the actual and the ideal and their relationships are aspects of the structure in which all existence is necessarily involved. Imperfection implies the progressive fulfillment of ideal orders, but it also involves the corresponding destruction of lower forms in favor of higher ones. Imperfection presupposes value in that it arranges the values of existence into an order of preference. It involves a sense not only of value but of higher and lower values.

A considerable variety of standards for evaluating possibilities is actually employed, and in everyday life the standards assumed are usually not explicitly recognized. It will perhaps be useful to suggest now *one* standard by which the value of various possibilities may be assessed, and therefore to provide a basis upon which a rational understanding of the meaning of imperfection may be gained.

The basis for such evaluation has already been suggested in previous chapters in the concept of *community*. As pointed out earlier, community refers to the relating of different entities so as to achieve unity-in-difference and difference-in-unity. This means in the first place absence of uniformity. Mere uniformity lacks the contrast essential to community. Community is only possible where there are real differences between the constituent elements. But in the second place community requires also a binding principle. There is no community where the constituents exist in isolation or in pure opposition. Community is the harmonious inter-relation of distinct entities.

The degree of community, then, is determined by at least four factors: (1) the number of different elements involved, i.e. the *extent* of the community, (2) the strength of contrast between the various elements, (3) the unifying links between these elements, and (4) the balance between factors (2) and (3). If any of these factors is weak, there is a low degree of community. There is a high degree of community to the extent that each of them is strong.

With this principle of evaluation in mind, we may now make explicit the meaning of the experience of imperfection. This means that every situation in which a person finds himself suggests a situation where a higher degree of community would prevail. It means that every condition of things is seen as possessing less community than it might. It means that to every actual situation an ideal situation characterized by a higher degree of community will correspond.

From the experience of imperfection some of the most basic traditional religious ideas arise. Most important is the idea of an infinite standing over against the finite world. There have been different interpretations of the concept of the infinite. Often it is a vague concept meaning "very large" or "beyond imagination". It seems clear that a finite being like man could not

comprehend what the infinite is, for comprehension, as the word itself implies, means to "grasp fully". But if man is himself limited, how could he fully grasp the unlimited? The infinite cannot therefore mean any determinate thing, for then it would be limited, since determination and definition are forms of limitation. What then, does the infinite mean? It would seem reasonable to conclude that this is a way of designating the inexhaustible nature of the world. The infinite, from this point of view would not be a thing but a way of signifying the limitlessness of perfectibility in the nature of things.

The problem of the infinite has been and still is a difficult and important one not only in philosophy and theology but in mathematics. It is a disputed question as to whether or not there is an "actual infinite". The view suggested in the last paragraph is that there is not, and that "the infinite" is a way of speaking of the process of ceaseless envisaging of ideal possibilities beyond present actualities.

In theological language it is usually said that God is infinite or perfect. This is generally taken to mean that there is a supernatural being who is free from the imperfection that besets nature in all her forms. Within the conditions of actual existence from which all of our conceptions must necessarily be taken it is obviously impossible to imagine what such a being would be like. We can only know existence as perfectible. However we cannot know anything which is by nature perfect or complete. Traditional theology assumes that such a perfect being exists but that we cannot know him by our ordinary means of knowledge. Hence a new mode of apprehension called faith is invoked to make him available, or a new mode of communication called revelation is assumed to relate him to human life.

There is, of course, no way of testing such assumptions. What is clear, however, is that the only possible basis for them to arise on is the experience of imperfection. These doctrines are speculative ways of expressing the fact that life always comes to us with the stamp of incompleteness and with the suggestion of further ideal possibilities. The infinite God or the perfect God might with a minimum of speculation be taken simply as a symbol of the limitless wealth of possibilities inherent in existence.

Similar comments can be made regarding the idea of God as the Absolute or for that matter concerning the philosophic notion of the Absolute. Generally this term implies some sort of static perfection, some completed system of reality. It may alternatively be taken as an expression for the perennial perfectibility of the experienced world. In other words the statement "God is Absolute" may be taken as a way of saying, "There is no condition of the world which is not subject to improvement", or "The world as it is imperfect but limitlessly perfectible".

Sometimes reference is made to "The Truth" or "The Good", as though these were complete embodiments and fulfillment’s of all the partial truths and imperfect goods of the world. Again it is necessary to postulate some supernatural realm if such entities are to have residence. Or

they may be taken as symbols of the endlessness of the process of searching for truth or goodness and of the unlimited heights of achievement either in science or in the life of moral conduct.

The idea of God as *transcendent* also grows out of the experience of imperfection. Transcendence means beyondness, and the transcendence of God may mean either that there is a being wholly beyond the world or that the world may always be experienced as having the character of beyondness -- of an unattained ideal surpassing the attained actuality.

The sense of imperfection leads to a concept of *divine purpose*. If values can be arranged in a scale of relative excellence:, then there is some direction or tendency or ultimate standard in which all values are involved. This is thought of as "God's plan" for the world or the basis for asserting the ultimate righteousness of which all lesser values are a dim reflection or a pale imitation. The standard of community, for example, suggests a ground for describing the ultimate purpose of things. This means, if it is true to the facts, that all values tend to be confirmed and extended to the degree that they conform to the standard of community and that they tend to lose power to the extent that they contradict community. Such a standard, if it can be found, provides the answer to the question of the relativity of values raised in Chapter VI.

The experience of imperfection underlies the whole prophetic criticism of idolatry. An idol is any finite object to which is ascribed final meaning or ultimate worth. To have an idol is to deny with respect to it the principle of imperfection and to give up the criticism of it by a higher ideal. The message of the prophet is always a message of transcendence -- a pointing to possibilities higher than the present actualities and an assertion of the essential principle of perfectibility in things. Prophetic condemnation is never mere destructive criticism. It is always the pronouncing of judgment upon the actual in the light of a higher ideal.

The experience of imperfection implies what Tillich calls "the Protestant Principle". This principle is simply that no human idea or institution or condition can ever be made final, ultimate, or absolute, but that every such finite order must remain under the criticism of higher possibilities, at *every* level of achievement. That is to say, perfection is never an actual state of things but is a process of endless transformation in which each stage is judged by a higher possibility not yet attained.

An irreligious attitude in relation to the matter of imperfection would be to hold the assumption in some form or other that no further improvement is possible. By this criterion anyone who is committed to an idea as absolutely final, or to an institution or person as infallible would be irreligious. Historically this is not true in the customary employment of the word "religious". For many religious groups infallibility and finality are the very essence of religion. However, it is clear that such an idea conflicts fundamentally with the religious experience based upon the sense of imperfection as described in this chapter. This contradiction is one that has been a source of constant confusion and tension within and amongst the historic religions themselves.

Obviously irreligious, even from the standpoint of the absolutist religions, however, is the cynical attitude that rejects the validity of ideals and the reality of value distinctions. If the world is what it is and there is no better or worse then there is no sense in speaking of ideals or of the perfectibility of existence. Such cynicism is, unfortunately, fairly widespread in modern times. Its cause lies in large part in the attempt to interpret all experience in purely mechanical terms, ignoring or explaining away the value-experiences which are the most important aspect of human life. Such preoccupation with mechanics in realms where more appropriate concepts are required is fatal to any true understanding of the world, much more to a comprehension of the religious dimension. The remedy for such cynicism consists in the recognition of the necessity for more adequate conceptual schemes and in sufficient reflection upon the experience of imperfection.

Even if ideals are admitted, some may be so preoccupied with the world of present fact that they fail to see the significance of ideals. Scientific people may become so absorbed in describing the world as it is that they forget the meaning of that perfectibility which is the very ground for the scientific enterprise itself. Practical people may become so absorbed in the business of getting along in life as it is that they lose the sense of the higher possibilities for which every actual achievement is only a preparation. It is not a simple thing to avoid such practical irreligion. Perhaps one answer to it is the sustaining power of the religious community and the symbolic power of customary religious practices, serving to remind the worshipper that there is a better possibility beyond every present attainment.

It is not necessary to discuss in any detail -- as has been done in the previous three chapters -- the point that from the standpoint of intelligible religion the basis for understanding must be constant reference to the universal experience of imperfection. In the light of such a foundation the varieties of interpretations arising in the various religious systems may be fruitfully discussed.

Turning finally to the attitudes typically associated with the religious experience growing out of the sense of imperfection, perhaps the most obvious one is *hope*. Hope rests upon envisaged possibilities yet to be actualized. It is built upon the conviction that there is more still to be achieved. Yet curiously enough this experience may also lead to the opposite of hope, that is, to despair. For the tension between the ideal and the actual may be so great that the ideal seems impossible of actual fulfillment. Despair is one of the elements in religious experience, but its presence does indicate the need of other elements in order that it may be transmuted into hope. One of those elements is the sense of dependence, by which the burden of accomplishment is lifted and a free reception of power for realization is made possible. Another element comes from the element of persuasiveness in the experience of value.

Another resulting attitude is *humility*. The humble person never regards himself as having final answers. He is provisional and tentative in his judgments, recognizing that the world as he

knows it is only a very partial and fragmentary view. He also knows that the achievements of himself or of his group are very imperfect ones and that further improvements are possible without limit.

Being humble he is also *tolerant*. He understands that the partiality of his own view blinds him to the partial merits of other views. Hence he grants to others the right to their own sincerely held convictions and tries to supplement his own understanding through learning how others think and act.

Summary and Prospectus

We have now completed a brief analysis of five fundamental experiences in which religion is rooted. This has been done in each case by (1) identifying the experience in question, (2) suggesting some of its various forms and some of the more immediate problems connected with it, (3) pointing out its universality and centrality, (4) discussing some of the chief traditional religious ideas by which this experience is expressed and interpreted, (5) stating the contrasting meaning of irreligion, (6) emphasizing the necessity of reference to the root experience if religious discourse is to be intelligible, and (7) mentioning some of the attitudes of mind connected with the experience.

There is no claim that these five experiences are the only five which are basic to religion. There are other possible analyses and other ways of discriminating the fundamentals. Furthermore, there are intimate relationships between the experiences described above. Actually such distinctions as we have made are necessarily artificial, since experience is an indivisible whole, and such aspects as we have discussed are abstractions from the whole.

While a number of traditional religious ideas have been briefly interpreted in the above analysis, the organizing principle in each chapter has been the experience under discussion. In the third part of this book an attempt will be made to employ the basic experiences to interpret more systematically a series of traditional religious ideas and practices. That is, in the third part the organizing principle will be these concepts rather than the experiences. The latter will now be employed as needed as an interpretive basis.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

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Chapter 8: God

Traditionally the most important single religious concept has been that of God or of gods. It is necessary, therefore, in achieving an intelligible religious view to discuss the significance of this idea. This is not a simple task because of the almost endless variety of different god-ideas which have been and still are held.

Generally speaking, a god is a supreme object of religious devotion. It is from the god that the various inspirations and benefits of the religion are believed to derive and it is to him that various obligations are due. The character of the god is therefore best understood by reference to the whole complex of experiences which constitute the religion in question. This suggests that the idea of god is not really a primary religious concept, but is dependent on the particular nature of religious experiences. The experiences come first, and various ideas of gods or of a God emerge to summarize, symbolize, and interpret them.

The idea of god has had a long history. At least in the western world the general line of development has been from primitive animism (belief in many spirits inhabiting natural objects) through polytheism (belief in several gods) towards monotheism (belief in one God). Among primitive peoples the spirits are invoked to explain phenomena which are especially mysterious or exciting or momentous. Any unusual natural phenomenon may be regarded as evidence of the activity of a spirit. Storms, running water, unusual shapes in rocks or trees, fire -- these and many other phenomena signify to primitive men hidden spiritual powers.

In the polytheistic stage the gods are in general no longer so localized and so intimately tied to particular happenings in nature. Tribal life suggests tribal deities whose major functions are the

protection of the social group in battle and the securing of necessary food and water. The gods may also -- as in Greek mythology -- have a somewhat independent existence, often quite remote from concern with human beings. On the other hand, they may represent certain dominant human interests such as love, war, and agriculture.

Monotheism arises when out of the multiplicity of divine beings one is first selected as supreme among many and ultimately as the only God. Under monotheism all the powers and attributes of the many spirits or gods are taken up into the complete power and perfection of the one high God.

We need to answer the question: "What does the word ‘God’ mean?" But before doing so it should be noted that the objection is often raised that God cannot be defined. It is said that to define him would be not only impious but impossible, since definition implies limitation and God is without limitation. This is an inadequate argument, because without some sort of definition of what the word "God" signifies it becomes a meaningless and unintelligible sound. To say that God is without any limitation is to say that there is no God at all, for to have any nature or any character or any meaning there must be limitation to this rather than that. It is both an intellectual and a religious duty to frame the most precise possible definition of the word "God".

Let us then return to our question, "What does the word ‘God’ mean ?" To answer this we should first consider how the meaning of any concept is established. How, for example, could one explain the meaning of the word "love" ? It could only be done by describing the various kinds of circumstances in which the experience of love was felt and stating as many as possible of the feelings and attitudes accompanying the experience.

Or, in a different area, the meaning of the concept "electron" could only be established by describing the various experiments which must be performed if the observations resulting in the formulation of this concept are to be obtained. In general we may say that the meaning of any concept can be stated only by describing the experiences in which its use is appropriate. This means that we must identify the kinds of experience in which the word arises as a means of intelligible communication.

This remark suggests a special difficulty in specifying the meaning of the word "God". There has been such a wide variety of experiences to which various groups have applied the word throughout human history that a different meaning attaches to every use. The same is true of many other concepts. "Love", for example, is a word with many meanings. But it is doubtful whether many words, including "love" have had as long and varied a history of meaning as the word "God". So complex has been this history that some have suggested that the word should be dropped and some less confusing concept or concepts adopted instead. While such a suggestion may have theoretical value, it does not help much practically, since the word "god" continues to be widely used and to serve as more or less useful means of communicating

religious ideas. Our task, therefore, is to specify *what* the word communicates, and to show how to clarify the meaning and to reduce the confusion attending its use.

The discussion of meaning above shows that the meaning of the word "god" can only be specified by reference to those experiences in which the use of the word has been agreed to be appropriate by a particular group. Thus, for example, the concept "water-god" may be applicable in the language of primitive people in connection with the experience of astonishment at the appearance of a bubbling spring, full of life, inexhaustible, and without apparent origin. Or "god of justice" may arise within the experience of the impulse towards equity in the life of organized society. As one considers the more advanced stages of religious development, specification of the experiences to which the word "God" is relevant becomes more complex.

The analysis in Part Two suggests one way in which an approach may be made to an intelligible meaning for the word "God". Since meaning depends upon the assignment of relevant experiences, the five fundamentals of religious experience may be taken as providing basic meanings for the concept of deity in a universal religion. The religion is universal because the experiences are universal -- in contrast, for example, to the limited experiences involved in the definition of nature spirits or tribal deities. Let us proceed then to state the meaning of the word "God" in these terms.

First, with regard to the experience of change: When one considers the fact of change and seriously faces the question of the origin of the new and the destiny of the old, it is appropriate to use the word "God".

Second, with regard to the experience of dependence: When one becomes aware of the derived character of all existence and seriously asks the question concerning the sources of being, it is appropriate to use the word "God".

Third, with regard to the experience of order: When one recognizes that all existence is constructed with a "given" order and pattern, it is appropriate to use the word "God".

Fourth, with regard to the experience of value: When one is moved by attracting or repelling powers in different situations so as to become aware of the dynamic character of his existence, it is appropriate to use the word "God".

Fifth, with regard to the experience of imperfection: When one is conscious of the greater value possible in comparison with any actual situation, it is appropriate to use the word "God".

We come now to an important point. We have used the same word "God" as appropriate to five different fundamental experiences. Does this mean that the word as used here has five different

meanings? Surely there are by this definition five different *aspects* of the one word, since the experiences themselves are distinct. But is there some essential connection between these aspects? If there is not, then why should the same word apply in all five experiences?

The answer is that there is an essential connection, making the use of the one word appropriate. To understand the connection, it is only necessary to recall the discussion in Part Two of the relationships between the five fundamental experiences. All five were shown to be different aspects of every possible human experience. The sources of being upon which all existence depends ultimately involve the answer to the question generated by the awareness of change. Furthermore, the nature of these sources is disclosed in the various *orders* of existence, each of which appeals to man as a *value*, and yet beckons to still higher ranges of value yet unactualized. The connection between the five fundamentals is that they are necessary components of every human experience, each of which has its unity in the fact of conscious awareness.

This leads us at once to an understanding, through the analysis of experience, of the traditional doctrine of the *unity* of God. That God is one and not many means that the various experiences by which the meaning of the word "God" is defined are not separable but always accompany one another. By this is not meant that the conscious process of asking the questions about change, recognizing dependence, and the other three fundamentals are all simultaneously at the focus of attention. The processes of thought do not proceed like that. What is meant is that *implicit* in every human experience are all five of these types of experience, and that one cannot fully explore any one of the five without coming upon the other four also. For example, one cannot fully experience the fact of order without becoming aware of its newness, its derivation, its value, and its imperfection. Similarly with each of the other fundamentals.

In contrast with such a view of the divine unity, the more primitive beliefs in many spirits or gods were based upon multiple experiences which had no essential connection with one another. For example, there is no necessary connection between the experience of religious awe in the presence of a thunderstorm and the feeling of surprise at the rustling of leaves in a "sacred" tree or of respect for a person endowed with unusual powers of perception and thus regarded as "holy". Monotheism depends upon the discovery of certain ultimate experiences all of which have an inner relatedness that welds them into a unity. The five fundamentals selected in Part Two as a basis for interpreting religious experience were chosen without regard for their possible connections That they should thus prove to be integrally related so as to constitute an essential unity is a kind of empirical justification for a monotheistic religious view.

It is important to see what is implied in the definition of the word "God" which has been outlined just now. "God" does not refer to any determinate object, since such an object would involve certain special kinds of experience. It would never be disclosed in every human experience. Thus, God is, from our viewpoint, more like a disclosure of the underlying nature of everything experienced, and not just a thing experienced. God is not a special kind of being, but

something necessarily involved in all kinds and conditions of being. This does not mean that God is everything, for to say that would be equivalent to saying he is nothing. It does mean that God is the name applied to a set of definite and intelligible *aspects* of the world made apparent in the experience of everything in it. God is a kind of *dimension* or complex of dimensions made manifest in all our experience.

In most discussions of God the primary focus is on the question of his existence. It has commonly been assumed that to be religious or not depends upon whether or not one "believes in the existence of God". Actually the prior question concerns the meaning of the word "God". There is no use in discussing the problem of existence if the problem of the meaning of the word has not been settled. Many discussions of existence get nowhere because there is no prior clarity regarding meaning. Often the parties to the discussion have different meanings for the basic concept involved.

If the word "God" is defined in terms of experience, as suggested above, the problem of existence is already solved. For anything which is defined in actual human experience is thereby shown in some sense to exist. That is, the clear statement of the actual experiences in connection with which the word "God" is to be used is itself warrant for the reality of that to which the word refers. The real question is: In *what sense* does God exist? or *What kind* of reality does the experience reveal? In other words, the real question, after God is defined, is not his existence but his nature.

This matter will be clearer if we point out that the same considerations apply not only to God but to anything at all. Thus, for example, suppose one wishes to ask about the existence of a unicorn. We must first define what we mean by "unicorn". A definition of the basis of experience must start from the fact that the word "unicorn" is only appropriate in connection with certain experiences of *imaginative* understanding, *not* in connection with any actual sense experience. Then to the question, Does the unicorn exist? the answer should be, yes, the unicorn exists. Then the question comes, But in what sense does he exist? or What is his nature ? To which the answer is that he exists in imagination and serves such and such poetic functions. The unicorn has been chosen because he, like God, is usually accused of not existing. In point of fact, he has a real "spiritual" existence and through the power of imagination has exercised definite influence in the course of history. There is, of course, a great difference between the existence of God and the existence of the unicorn. The difference is as pervasive and profound as the difference between the experiences by which the two concepts are defined.

This same argument leads to the conclusion that in some sense even the nature spirits or the many gods of polytheism exist. It is possible in each case to discern definite experiences with which these divine beings were associated. It was right for the groups who shared these experiences to name deities to symbolize them. There were real powers at work on men as they contemplated the majesty of nature or felt the impulse towards tribal unity or responded to the demand for moral improvement. These powers received the names of gods.

That with the advance of civilization there has been a "twilight of the gods" does not mean that the powers that were the gods have disappeared, but only that their names have been changed Thus, today a thunderstorm is interpreted as a meteorological phenomenon and "explained" in the categories of science rather than as the voice of an angry god. While it would be foolish to give up the meteorological explanation for the theological one, it should be said that there may be important aspects of the storm, such as its relation to the powers of nature on which life is dependent and the sense of awe inspired by it, which are present in the latter interpretation but wholly lacking in the former. Hence there is a truth even in primitive theological interpretations which may be needed to complete the more "scientific" current explanations. In a religious view such as that outlined in this book, the aim would be to include the permanently valid insights of both the earlier and the later modes of interpretation.

Many readers will be familiar with some of the traditional "arguments for the existence of God", such as that everything has a prior cause, but that the causal chain cannot be continued back indefinitely, so that there must somewhere be a First Cause; or that since there are various degrees of perfection there must be a Perfect One by whom all lesser degrees are measured; or that all change in a thing is caused by something else which leads eventually to some Prime Mover. A classic statement of such arguments was made by Thomas Aquinas. It would not be difficult to show that these arguments contain hidden assumptions and logical lapses which invalidate them as demonstrative proofs. However, they are significant from our viewpoint because they may readily be transformed into experiential foundations for defining a universal God. For example, the causal argument is not really a demonstration of God’s existence, but a statement of the experience that everything which exists comes as a gift and thus suggests the question concerning the ultimate sources of being. That such an experience occurs is one of the roots of the idea of God.

The argument from degrees of perfection is not really a demonstration of God’s existence, but a statement of the experienced perfectibility of all things, which provides another God-defining experience. Similarly the argument from motion is the counterpart of our discussion of the religious meaning of the experience of change. Our criticism of the traditional "proofs" is partly that they do not prove what they claim, but even more that they usually proceed on the assumption that the God demonstrated by them will turn out to be the particular deity endorsed by a certain religious group. Thus, the God supposedly proved by Thomas Aquinas turns out to be the Perfect Being of traditional Christian theology, already well known and unquestioned on the basis of other sources of assumed religious knowledge. By remaining true to actual and universal experience in defining God, this prior identification of what is to be proved is avoided.

We are now ready to deal with some of the aspects of the nature of God. One of the most common characteristics attributed to him is *omnipotence*. This is sometimes taken to mean that God is a Being with absolute will, so that he can do anything he wishes, without qualification.

Such a view is not in harmony with the experienced order of the world. An unqualifiedly omnipotent God would be a God without character. Only if the divine powers are exercised according to some ordered plan can he be said to have any ‘’character". According to the experiential definition, the omnipotence of God simply means that the experience of change, dependence, order, value, and imperfection reflect the nature of *all possible existence*. That is to say, whatever can possibly come into being comes by virtue of the inexhaustibly rich, changing, valuable order of which we are dependent parts. To say that God is omnipotent means that whatever is possible in the nature of things may be seen as an illustration of that experience by which God is defined. God does not do the impossible, because one of the concepts in terms of which he is defined is the order of the possible out of which all new things proceed and to which they return. For God to do the impossible would be to contradict his nature.

Another attribute is *omnipresence*. This does not mean that God is like a rarefied gas which has become diffused throughout the universe. Experientially, it means that there is no situation in which the fundamentals of religious experience do not pertain. Thus the divine omnipresence is a theological interpretation of the *universality* and *centrality* of the fundamentals by which the religious attitude is defined. That is to say, there is no person and no aspect of his life in which the awareness of change, dependence, order, value, and imperfection, together with their implications, may not be experienced.

The attribute of *omniscience* is not as easily interpreted. In the pious imagination this refers to a Cosmic Mind who is consciously aware of all that has happened or ever will happen. Such a picture does not connect closely enough with a basis in experience. Experientially omniscience is related to the ordered process by which all things come into being. That is to say, things are experienced as happening *intelligibly* rather than haphazardly. Or more accurately, the world process shows itself as susceptible to what seem to be limitless possibilities of intelligible analysis. Whether at the moment we know it precisely or not, there is thus apparently a "truth to be known" about everything that is. To say that God is omniscient is therefore to say that the world is experienced as intelligible order, or to say that all that is appears as intelligible. It needs to be added, however, that the divine *omni*science is not a direct outgrowth of experience, because there is no guarantee that the world is *completely* intelligible. Omniscience can only be used to express the at present apparently limitless possibilities of intelligible ordering of experience. It is an outgrowth of the experience of imperfection in the realm of truth.

In the realm of moral values, the experience of imperfection gives rise to the idea of the divine *holiness*. Just as omniscience means that all existence is regarded as intelligible, so holiness means that all action is involved in some moral order and that every moral achievement, however worthy, stands under a higher judgment. Holiness is thus in the realm of the good what Truth is in the realm of knowledge. Just as "God the Omniscient" is not a particular Wise Being but a dimension within experience of limitless intelligibility, so "God All Holy" is not a particular Righteous Being but a dimension within experience of limitless moral perfectibility.

The attributes of God as Perfect, Provident, Absolute, and Infinite have already been sufficiently discussed. The attribute of "transcendence" was also mentioned, as referring to the awareness of beyondness, of possibility in contrast with actuality, involved in the fundamental religious experiences. But God is also said to be "immanent". This means that he is not "beyond the world" in such a way as to be outside human experience. If he were, there would be no sense in talking about him. God is beyond the world in the same sense that possibility is beyond actuality, or that the richness inherent in things is beyond present fulfillment. But God is also immanent in that he is defined in terms of specifiable human experience. He is an aspect of the one world of which we are a part and which we know in our varied experiences.

Religiously it is important to maintain both an immanent and a transcendent view of God. Immanence secures the relevance of the beyond to the actual conditions of existence. Transcendence secures a dynamic and tension towards a fulfillment beyond the actual conditions. Religions of pure immanence lead to complacency. Religions of pure transcendence lead to a feeling of irrelevance and despair. Emphasis on experiences of order and value suggests the immanence of God. Emphasis on change and incompleteness suggests transcendence. Dependence unites immanence with transcendence. For a full experience of both immanent and transcendent elements all five fundamentals of religious experience are necessary.

This discussion of God as immanent and transcendent leads to a mention of God as natural or as supernatural. The distinction between natural and supernatural will be discussed at some length in Chapter X. Suffice it to say here that God is "supernatural" in the same sense that he is transcendent and that he is "natural" in the same sense as he is immanent. In regard to the nature of God, the two sets of terms may be taken as synonymous.

In Chapter III there was some consideration of God as Creator. There it was pointed out that a doctrine of divine creation is a religious interpretation of the experience of change. Probably the favored doctrine in western religious thought has been the idea of "creation out of nothing". This doctrine denies that creation is simply the giving of form to otherwise formless stuff, but the production *de novo* of the beings which make up the world. Originally this was thought of as a series of original divine acts through which the world as it essentially is now was brought into being. The theory of evolution changed that, so that all except the most conservative now regard creation as a continuous process, but generally still as "out of nothing". The doctrine of creation "out of nothing" is a way of symbolizing the experienced fact of real newness. Change means that what was not has come to be, and it is not possible to deny it by tracing causal connections. The new is still new, no matter how good its connections. The "out of nothing" in the tradition simply means that what *is* cannot be wholly accounted for on the basis of what *was*. Something *new* has been added. The objection to the phrase "out of nothing" is that it denies reality to whatever was the ground of the new. If we take account of the possibilities inherent in the world, and recognize that the full understanding of the world requires not only a catalogue of the actual, but also the latent possibilities, past and future, then it is hardly right to

say that creation takes place "out of nothing". Rather, creation takes place out of the dynamic relation between the actual and the possible and the creativity of God is a symbol for the experienced reality of the appearance of the genuinely new.

Another aspect of God as creator was mentioned in Chapter VII and deserves fuller treatment here. According to modern physics, the energy of the physical world tends to become more and more random and unavailable (the Second Law of Thermodynamics). This means that if the present laws of nature hold good, there must have been a time when energy was at a maximum degree of orderly organization. The calculation of this time sets a limit to the past duration of the physical universe. It has been suggested by some scientists and theologians that this provides a confirmation of the religious doctrine of creation. From our point of view, this would be so only in the sense that the original state of things would represent a world-condition of maximum possibility, pregnant with future development, with a minimum of spent possibility in the form of transpired history. It would not mean that a God essentially "outside of" and "apart from" the world "made" it out of nothing and set it going on its downhill path. Such a view is meaningless from the point of view of experiential understanding. With regard to these physical speculations, however, it is important to remember that they are based on the assumed constancy of present natural laws through all time (which may not actually be the case) and on the analysis only of the limited range of phenomena now forming the province of physics, in accordance with the limited set of concepts at present used in this science. The ultimate correctness of such speculations is therefore open to considerable question. Added scientific discoveries may radically alter the picture -- as seems not unlikely, since the conclusions reached are scientifically unsatisfying to many. But, even more important, it should be recognized that a religious view of life, based as it is on universal and central experiences such as we have described, has only a remote connection with these speculations regarding the primordial history of the physical cosmos. Certainly the latter are not the basis for the understanding of the basic meaning of the religious doctrine of creation.

Our final discussion in this chapter will deal with the idea of God as a Person or as personal. In normal language "a person" means a human being. But no one would seriously assert that God is a human being. (Except in some statements of the doctrine of incarnation -- on which see the brief discussion in Chapter XIII). Therefore, it follows that within the normal use of language God is not a Person. To use that designation is only possible if one alters its meaning so as to exclude important features of human persons. The trouble with using such altered meanings is that the exclusions are seldom made explicit, with the result that God is regarded simply as an imaginary Great Man, and this leads to a religious view which is not only filled with incongruities and impossibilities, but also serves to alienate people with trained minds.

The case is different with the attribute "personal". "Personal" in common usage means relevant to persons, or involved in the most characteristic activities or concerns of persons. To say that God is personal, therefore, means simply that the experiences by which God is defined are ones in which there is direct involvement and relevance to persons. If now the five fundamentals of

religious experience are examined, it will be seen that in each case distinctively personal elements are involved. A person is said to be creative, and it is precisely in the experience of change that the meaning of creativity is understood. A person is essentially one who is aware of relationships -- who is conscious of self as over against not-self -- and it is the experience of dependence which provides this awareness. A person is a thinking animal, with power to perceive his world as an intelligible order A person is free, in the sense that he is determined by the relative *values* of alternatives. Finally, a personality has a transcendent dimension, a vision of ideals beyond every actual attainment. Creativity, sociality, intelligence, freedom, and transcendence -- these major characteristics of personality -- are exactly the five elements involved in the fundamental religious experiences by means of which God is defined. These experiences are ones in which personality is most fully realized. This means that the experience of God is the essence of experiencing what it means to be personal. Or, more briefly, it means that God is personal.

The world as it meets one in religious experience is a person-producing and person-enhancing world. Any encounter of this kind is a personal encounter. Therefore God is personal. Impersonal encounters are experiences of the relatively static, the unrelated, the random, the irrelevant and the conservative. Those experiences in which man’s highest powers are exercised are personal experiences, and it is these which we have designated as the fundamentals of religion.

One of the important aspects of what it means to be personal is the possibility of communication. This leads to a discussion of prayer and worship which will be taken up in Chapter XI. Suffice it to say now that an analysis of this subject leads to the further support of the idea of God as personal.

The identification of basic religious elements in universal experience thus provides a firm foundation for an intelligible view of God and for an interpretation of the traditional doctrines. It is important in such an analysis not to relapse into the childish pattern of thought by which God is conceived of as a great Being alongside other beings. Rather it must be constantly remembered that the word "God" stands for certain specified qualities present in every experience. It provides a symbol for certain dimensions in the ultimate nature of the world as we encounter it.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

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Chapter 9: Good and Evil

One of the persistent themes of religious thought has been the problem of good and evil. This problem has not, of course, been the exclusive concern of those who are called religious. In one form or another every person and every group has necessarily faced this question, for all human action involves some standard, whether implicit or explicit, of what is good. Similarly all judgments which are made on the conduct of persons, either ourselves or others, require some ethical measure. This universality of the problem suggests a connection with the universal experiences described in Part Two, upon which a basic definition of religion was constructed. Judgments of good and evil spring from the experience of value, which is one of the fundamentals of religious experience as we have described it.

We therefore have a two-fold reason for considering good and evil as religious problems: first, because historically virtually every religion has had a central concern for the problem, and second, because they are directly related to one of the elements of what we have chosen to call religious experience. Non-religious problems about the good would then arise either because of a context not customarily called religious or because the questions raised were not driven deeply enough to bring out the implications called religious in our sense of the word. Thus, for example, if one takes good to mean simply the customary, there is no real relation to value and the resulting ethic is of a non-religious character. The following discussion deals with the problem on a religious level.

From the standpoint of an intelligible religion, the problem of good and evil is crucial, for in no other area has there been more difficulty in establishing mutual understanding. There is little sign of any relaxation in the tension amongst the warring parties, either as to theory or as to

practical solutions. Any discussion aimed at universal intelligibility must therefore suggest some answer to the problem of the good or at least some constructive way of dealing with the conflicts which arise.

Appeal to experience is the basis for intelligible discourse. In discussing the good it is the experience of value to which appeal must be made. By experience of value we mean either the total attraction or the repulsion exercised on the subject by the object or within the situation experienced. Value, as explained in Chapter VI, is some function of the congruity or incongruity of subject and object, resulting in various positive or negative reactions between the two. There are many kinds of values, important among which are those usually called "good" and "evil". The "beautiful" and the "true" are other kinds.

What is a "good" ? In the simplest sense, a good is something which a person desires. Desire is here to be understood not merely as physical appetite, but as a total positive response involving "mental" and "spiritual" as well as physiological components. But this simple test for the good must clearly be modified, because there are things which people desire which are said not to be good. For example, a drug addict may desire the drug, but know and admit that it is not good. A different case would be that of a person desiring a piece of food which he did not know was poisoned. Clearly the food would not be good, but the person would desire it. How must the analysis then be modified to take care of such examples as these ?

As to the first example, we must observe that a thing may be good in some respects but not in others. Thus, the drug is good for the addict in respect to the feeling of exhilaration or whatever else he seeks from it, but it is not good with respect to many other factors such as cost, resulting sickness, and unfavorable social standing. This suggests that goodness is not an unqualified property of an object, but is an aspect of the relation of that object to a specified person in a given situation. Probably no thing has a simple and unqualified relation to any given person. Every human reaction is to some extent mixed and self-contradictory. There are both positive and negative components in every human response. In the psychologists' language, human beings are incurably "ambivalent". When, therefore, someone says he desires something but knows that it is not good, he is not really disproving the assertion that the good is what a person desires. He is merely saying that his response is a mixed one -- that in certain respects he desires the thing, while in other respects he does not, i.e., that in some ways it is good and in other ways it is not good. That which is good about any particular thing to a certain person is still that which he desires from it.

Consider the second example, of the poisoned food. The food is not good, even though it is desired. Here we are confronted with the problem of error. The food is not what it appears to be. Food eaten in the past, similar in appearance and proving satisfactory, is the basis for the judgment, "This food is good". If the poisoned food were eaten and its ill effects experienced, the judgment "This food is good" would no longer hold. Therefore every statement about the good must be based upon full experience of that appraised. The good is what a person desires

when he has complete knowledge of what is involved in experiencing it. This means that every actual judgment of a good must be to an extent tentative, for the *full* implications and consequences of experiencing it can never be known. For instance, the long range destructive effects of certain kinds of diet or of certain kinds of activity might not be observable except over several generations.

If good is a function of desire, in the broad sense, and assuming the qualifications indicated, it is clear that judgments of good will depend upon the detailed character of the persons and situations in which they arise. That is to say, goodness is relative to persons and situations. As pointed out in Chapter VI, this does not mean that the judgment of good is "purely arbitrary" or merely "subjective". It does represent a natural fact arising out of the inter-relation of valuing subject and valued object. It is the variety of such interrelations which gives rise to the *problem* of the good. Good is a problem only because there are disputes concerning it. One person's judgment of what is good may differ diametrically from another person's judgment. Or there may be within the same person two conflicting judgments about what is good in given situations. The basic question here for an intelligible religious view is how to resolve such disputes.

To answer this question, we must observe once again that two kinds of value may be distinguished: instrumental values and intrinsic values. Conflicts between judgments regarding these two kinds of value have different bases and must be resolved in different ways. In the case of an instrumental good, conflict arises because of different conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the good as a means to a specified end. For example, there are differences of judgment regarding the relative effectiveness of *laissez-faire* capitalism or of a specified kind of socialism as means of securing the economic well-being of a nation. Or there is an argument as to whether strict or relaxed sex standards contribute most to emotional stability within a given society. In such disputes the question concerns the efficiency of means to yield agreed-upon ends. The resolution of the conflict is therefore a matter of securing adequate empirical knowledge. The conflict arises because of insufficient knowledge of the facts. Either one or the other of the alleged goods is actually more efficient in yielding the agreed-upon ends. Thus the basis of disputes in such cases is lack of information and the solution of it is further empirical inquiry.

Disputes over intrinsic values have a different basis and resolution. Their basis is a difference in character of the disputants. The structure of the personality of the two judges is different. What is good for one person may not be good for another person, because they are different people. For example, for certain persons in certain situations solitude is an intrinsic good, while for other persons in the same situation social intercourse would be intrinsically good. When there are such differences, it is foolish to attempt to resolve them in a theoretical fashion. They can be resolved, if at all, only by a process of actual personality change. Education, growth, and new experience may bring about changes in one or both of the parties to the dispute, of such a nature that differences in ends are overcome. There may be a re-education of the pattern of desires, so

that there is essential agreement in matters formerly under dispute.

This is not to imply that it is necessary for disputes over the good always to be resolved. There is room for much diversity within even the same society and much more within a world of many different societies. One of the lessons derived from this view of the nature of value is that there is no universal catalogue of the good. Recognition that ultimately there are as many judgments of good as there are persons is essential. This does not mean that concurrences of judgment are lacking, but merely that the plurality of the world of persons and things may not be denied.

However, there arise occasions in which individuals and groups do seek for a basis of agreement and where interrelations are of such a nature that fundamental differences in judgments of the good become sources of dangerous social disorder. Examples from the contemporary world crisis could be multiplied indefinitely. The purpose of our analysis is to show what the nature of the disagreement is and what must be done if agreement is to be reached. Obviously where there are differences in intrinsic values, it is only through the process of sharing common experiences that the necessary growth on both sides may take place.

The problem of conflict in judgments concerning the good is important not only as between different individuals or groups but, as suggested above, even within the individual person. Where there is inner conflict, the situation is analogous to the conflict between persons. Here also the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic goods applies. How is the person inwardly torn, the person who cannot "make up his mind", to resolve the inner conflict? In the case of instrumental values, he must secure more information. He must examine the alternatives with respect to their demonstrated efficiency in achieving the end he desires. While this may not be easy in practice, at least it is clear in principle and gives direction to the search for a solution.

In the case of conflict over intrinsic values, the difficulty is more deeply rooted. The conflict means that there is division within the character-structure itself. In the language of popular psychology, the person is not "integrated". He is not a whole, but possesses a nature with multiple opposing factions. The person who experiences basic conflict of values must therefore seek for a reformation of his character structure. This can take place only through a process of growth, education, and new experiences which are of a unifying nature. Disintegrated persons are products of disintegrating experiences. Healthful experience is that which produces whole persons. The psychological hazards of living, as a child, in a broken home in contrast with the benefits in terms of stable personality through growing up in a happy home illustrate what is meant by unifying experiences. Education in the good is largely a patterning of desire in such a way that deep inner conflicts do not occur.

Disagreements over what is good do not usually take the form of direct antitheses, but generally center around discussions of "better" or "worse", i.e., are concerned with judgments of comparative worth. But comparison is possible only on the basis of some standard. From this it

follows that only instrumental values can be compared, because comparison implies the judgment of the values in relation to some one assumed value to which they are both relevant. Intrinsic values cannot, as such, be compared, because by definition an intrinsic good means something good-in-itself and not in relation to some other standard. Therefore intrinsic goods can be compared only when they are treated as instrumental to some other good. No resolution is possible unless some value agreed upon by both parties can be found to which the disputed intrinsic values are relevant. One such common value would be the good of shared experience itself. A common adoption of this good may lead to a re-orientation of character on both sides of such a nature that the new value situation will be better than the old -- "better" in terms of effectiveness in contributing to the assumed good of mutual understanding.

The introduction of the idea of "better" at once presents us with the problem as to whether there is some sovereign good in terms of which all other goods may be judged. Or is the nature of things such that we can only speak of the multiple goods for particular persons in distinct situations? Are there goods which are inevitably and permanently incommensurate so that no ultimate "better" or "worse" can be applied to them? Or is there some fundamental unity in the nature of things which supplies a common standard against which every good may be measured? Is there some ultimate intrinsic good to which all other goods are instrumental ?

In relation to these questions there occurs one distinction between a religious and a non-religious view of the world. The non-religious view emphasizes the particular and incommensurate nature of values. The religious view is based upon the universal applicability of comparative judgments, i.e., upon the existence of some intrinsic good by which all others may be measured. One such good has been suggested several times already -- namely, *community*. According to this every good may be judged by reference to the contribution it makes to community, in any of its many forms, such as rational, social, or aesthetic. Community then becomes the "absolute" good to which all other goods are relative. Whether or not community is actually such an ultimate standard depends upon whether or not there is in the world process a discipline of desire in the direction of community. Are the warrings of incompatible desires ultimately destined to be resolved by the more persistent desire for community?

A case can be made for the ultimacy of community by pointing out that desire itself, the ground for all judgments of good, is intrinsically in the nature of a tendency towards community. Desire is the expression of the binding force or attraction of compatibles. It is the motivation for establishing the unity of distinct entities. But this is also the basis for community.

Thus the urge towards community may be seen as the ground for desire which in turn determines the nature of the good. One good is "better" than another to the extent that it fulfills the goal of all desire -- the establishment of community. Every good may be judged as instrumental to its contribution to community.

Such an analysis shows the sense in which the goodness of God is to be understood. This does not mean that there is a being called God who is the supreme object of desire. It means that within the central and universal experience by which God is defined the direction of maximum fulfillment of desire is found. It means that the very experiences that determine awareness of the good and of the better towards which desire tends are the experience by which God is defined.

The same general analysis applies to the question of evil as to the good. Evil is what one does not desire. But, again, evil like good can be thus defined only within the context of a specified person or group of persons, under stated conditions, and in particular respects. Just as we cannot speak intelligibly of good-in-general, so there are particular evils. There may be evils which turn out with fuller knowledge to be good, and there may be persons who so change in fundamental nature that what was once evil becomes good, or vice versa.

Just as good involves fitness or congruence, evil involves incongruity or disharmony. This leads in turn to a feeling of repugnance for the evil thing. It follows from this that no one ever really desires evil. To speak of desiring evil would be a contradiction in terms, since evil is defined as what one does not desire. Of course one may desire what another person regards as evil -- or he may with one aspect of his nature desire what he repudiates with another part of his being. But he cannot directly and unambiguously himself desire evil. So-called "desired evil" is really apparent good.

The existence of evil has led to one of the persistent problems in religious philosophy, namely the so-called "problem of evil". The problem arises from an attempt to explain how with a God who is both all-powerful and all-good there can be evil in the world. Various approaches have been adopted in attempting to solve this problem. One is to deny the reality of evil -- as in Christian Science or in some eastern mysticism. A similar approach is to assert that good and evil are due to the partial human perspective, and that God is beyond such distinctions. Both these attitudes violate the universal witness of the human race to the reality and importance of the distinction between good and evil.

A third approach is to deny that God is wholly good, though all-powerful. The trouble with this is that it violates the fundamental religious demand for a deity with whom one may have a relationship of trust and confidence. A fourth, and perhaps the most common traditional approach, is to declare the problem an insoluble mystery, born of the incomprehensible greatness of God’s purposes. This is surrender to irrationalism and cannot but do violence to man’s basic rationality. A fifth approach is to deny the omnipotence of God. This is regarded as heresy by the orthodox because it limits the sovereignty and authority of God.

From the standpoint of empirical analysis it is difficult to see how any "problem of evil", strictly speaking, arises. There is no incompatibility between God defined in terms of our five basic experiences and the existence of evil. As a matter of fact, God cannot be defined according to our method without including the fact of evil -- for the experience of imperfection is based upon

an awareness of the better possible and therefore, comparatively speaking, of the worse actual. In comparison with the desired ideal possibility, one does not desire the present actuality. Nor is this at variance with a carefully interpreted idea of the divine omnipotence. This should mean only that the experience of God is by definition the experience of how everything possible comes into being. To require that the coming of anything into being be without evil would be to deny the universal perfectibility of all things. In conclusion, it appears that the historic "problem of evil" stems from an unwarranted interpretation of the idea of divine omnipotence.

It is sometimes said that evil is simply the absence of good. Usually this is accompanied by the view that existence is good and that non-existence is therefore the nature of evil. Against this theory is the view that evil is a real and destructive power. According to this view there are genuine "demonic" agencies at work in the world. One way of analyzing these alternative theories is to observe that all evil is dependent on good. Whatever it is that is regarded as evil, there are certain excellences and certain powers that give the "evil" thing its special character. And within its own proper sphere these are good. Thus, a robber gang is evil from the point of view of law-abiding citizens. But there is an excellence of organization, of skill, and even perhaps of purpose in the gang itself. There is a sense in which the worst criminals are the *best* criminals -- i.e., those who perform their nefarious tasks with the greatest skill. This insight shows that both of the theories mentioned above are true. Evil is a real destructive power. And it is such by virtue of the presence of one kind of being and the absence of another kind of being. Thus the gang has one kind of being which is evil because out of relation to the larger social unit within which it lives. It is the anti-social character which constitutes the evil of the gang.

Evil thus may be regarded as a perversion of the good. The greater the good the greater the evil which may result from it. Good, according to our belief, consists in community. When one degree or form of community is fixed upon in such a way as to prevent further realization of community, it becomes evil -- a "demonic structure". The higher the degree of community achieved, the more power it has to block further realization of community. Evil, therefore, is not only the absence of community. It is the frustration of more complete community by partial achievements of community.

It is sometimes assumed that evil is a result of man’s physical or material embodiment and conditions of existence, while good is due to his spiritual or mental nature. This view must be rejected. It arose primarily because of the obvious conflict between physical desires and rational demands. But it is equally true that there are mental or spiritual evils -- such as hate, jealousy, unrestrained ambition, and pride -- which have little to do with bodily desires. Actually the worst causes of human disorder are not physical, but mental or spiritual. Matter itself is neither good nor evil in itself. It becomes good or evil only in relation to human attitudes and uses. Therefore good and evil are not functions respectively of mind and matter, but of the relation between the whole valuing personality -- including mental and material factors -- and the whole configuration of mental and material factors in whatever is valued by him.

Evil is usually divided into two kinds -- natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is that lack of community caused by such factors as disease, accidents, and various catastrophes in the physical or biological world. Moral evil, on the other hand, is caused by wrong human choice. Of the first kind of evil all that needs to be said is that it exists and has to be accepted as part of the natural situation in which human life pursues its course. For the second kind some discussion is required. Moral evil is traditionally called sin. There is sin only in terms of some standard of obligation, i.e., some code of moral conduct. Usually the standard of conduct is socially determined, so that sin is infraction of what is socially approved. What constitutes sin therefore varies in accordance with the differing standards of right and wrong adopted by various societies.

But this is not the whole story, or even the most important part of it, because socially approved standards are constantly coming under the criticism of persons who have an idea of a "better" standard. What we have called the universal experience of imperfection, applied to the sphere of moral conduct, is evidence of this critical process. This means that there is some standard of the morally good which is not a matter of social approval. It involves an ideal which is beyond the actual achievements or even the corporate ideals of the social group. In such a case the prophetic personality may feel obliged to sin against the law of the group in order not to sin against the ideal law which has captured his imagination and loyalty.

Considerations such as these lead to the concept of "sin against God". To us this does not mean infraction of particular rules which are laid down by a sovereign God -- though this is the meaning usually assigned. It rather means that under the universal experience of imperfection there is no action which is not seen to be less than perfect or incapable of being improved upon. This implies that any conduct, however high in purpose, stands under some higher judgment. Just what that judgment is it is not always necessary to specify. But that there is in every situation a higher order, a better possible way of conduct, is the meaning of the statement that human action involves sin against God.

It is further apparent that there is no act which does not involve sin against God in this sense. It is possible either to obey or not to obey the laws set down by human societies. But by definition it is not possible to avoid sin against God -- because by this we refer to the inevitable imperfection from which every actual act suffers. Thus there is an essential difference between sin against society and sin against God. This difference does not result from the difference in two sets of laws, one of which can be obeyed and the other of which cannot, but from the essential difference in the way in which "society" and "God" are defined.

If we take community as the ultimate standard by which good is measured, it follows that the basic sin is destruction of community. Another way of putting this is to say that love is the fundamental law of life and that hate and estrangement are the fundamentals of sin. In traditional Christian thought pride has been regarded as the basic sin. Pride means acting as

though the self and its concerns were the ultimate good. This means the setting up of a partial good as though it were the final good. This is precisely the definition of a demonic structure as discussed above. And it is this because it is destructive of community. The sinfulness of pride therefore consists in its frustration of community.

Another traditional doctrine is that of "original sin". This is commonly thought to refer to a taint inherited from the original human pair, Adam and Eve, who "fell" through disobedience to the divine command. We do not today accept the story of the Fall as an historical account but as an explanatory story in a pre-scientific age. The purpose of this story is to point out that human beings are by nature prone to self-centeredness. They are from the beginning of life governed by impulses to self-preservation, self-justification, and self-gratification, with more or less disregard of the needs of others. There are inherent within human nature tendencies towards the demonic destruction of community. Pride, as the summation of self-centeredness, is therefore a fundamental or "original" aspect of human nature. This is the meaning of the doctrines of Original Sin and the Fall. They provide a statement of the chief reasons for the failure of the impulses towards community to be more effective than they are. They also help to explain why in every situation the consciousness of imperfection is present, for there is no actual situation in which tendencies destructive of community are not seen to operate.

Sin was defined as wrong moral choice. This means that there must be both freedom and responsibility. There has been a tendency in recent decades to "explain" sin in terms of purely external environmental factors, such as an unfavorable childhood situation. There is much to be said for such conditioning and predisposing factors, but they do not fully cover the case. For every human personality is what it is not only because of its environment but also by virtue of its own nature at each stage of growth. The human person is free because it is not determined wholly by external factors but also by its own self. Freedom is self-determination. Two persons in an identical environmental situation may react differently because they are different persons. It is this determination of conduct by what one is that constitutes free choice. Freedom is the peculiar use of what one is confronted with, on the basis of what he *is*. And this means that one is responsible for what he does. Sin, then, is free, responsible acting against the law.

The effect of sin is to produce a feeling of guilt. Guilt is an inner division resulting from the contrast between the consciousness on the one hand of the law and on the other of what has actually been done. There may be an unhealthy kind of guilt if the law disobeyed represents an unreasonable demand upon the human personality. On the other hand, there are guilt feelings which are healthy in that they provide inducement to return to modes of life which accord with the best interest of the individual and society. The name given to the consciousness of the moral law is "conscience" or the "super-ego". Conscience is in part a product of education, by which the socially approved patterns of behavior are, as it were, written into consciousness. Conscience is therefore no more infallible than those who engendered it in the growing personality. Thus there is no certain "inner voice" by which one may be surely guided in moral choices. On the other hand, there is also an element in conscience which goes beyond social

conditioning. This arises from that sense of prophetic judgment on everything actual, in what we have called the experience of imperfection. Corresponding to this somewhat indefinite and higher conscience there is inevitably a more profound sense of guilt, stemming from the recognition of sin not against society but against God.

Real sin, or moral evil, always leads to frustration, disappointment, and destruction of the values of life. This is because evil is, by definition, that which persons do not desire. Of course what is called sin may not really be so, and this will not lead to frustration. It is a common notion that sin is really pleasant and good unpleasant. This idea stems in part from the identification of sin with the breaking of certain quite inadequate customary laws of morality, and in part from failure to be fully aware of the consequences and implications of acts which are "pleasant" in the short run but may not be so in the long run. Real sin is eventually frustrating and therefore tends towards its own undoing. It leads to an attempt to restore a constructive mode of activity. Therefore, in spite of the selfish impulses in human nature, a certain optimism is in order regarding the human situation. For sin is self-defeating in the long run. It is a major function of the cultural heritage to transmit from generation to generation a knowledge of the perils of sin and the good fruits of righteousness as learned through the experience of the race.

The restoration from sin involves several steps. First, there must be *contrition*, the recognition of sin *as* sin, an actual awareness of evil as not desired, through a full understanding of its consequences and implications. This contrition requires an act of the whole self, which depends upon the unification of the personality in a total renunciation of the evil thing. Next follows *repentance*, a looking forward to new activity to replace the old. A third step is *confession*. Since sin involves broken relationships and the destruction of community, it is necessary by confession to share the sin with others and thus re-establish the connection. A fourth step is *restitution*, or the reparation of damage done in the act of sin. Next comes the response of those sinned against, as *forgiveness*, opening the way to the re-establishment of community, which is consummated in *reconciliation* and *atonement* (the establishment of unity between those formerly estranged).

All of these steps may be interpreted either in respect to relationships between persons or, somewhat differently, in respect to God. What does it mean to be restored from sin against God? It is summed up in the meaning of divine forgiveness. To understand this we must return to the fundamentals of religious experience by which God was defined. One who is unforgiven has an awareness of imperfection without a corresponding awareness of grace (in the experience of dependence). To know God’s forgiveness means to respond thankfully to the continued outpouring of the gifts of life from the sources of our being, even while we live in ways which constantly bear the mark of imperfection. Thus while in relation to God we are constantly guilty (experience of imperfection) we are simultaneously eligible for divine forgiveness (experience of dependence).

Furthermore every response to goodness is an act of atonement (at-one-ment) by which breaches are healed. Some of the breaches are within man himself (the divided personality), some are between persons, and others are between man and the non-human world. These breaches are all results of sin (destruction of community). To be at one with God is to experience divine forgiveness, and this is possible when one is dedicated to the progressive realization (through the grace of the sources of our being) of the ideal of community.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

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Chapter 10: The World Beyond

Most forms of religion have included some reference to another world beyond or above the world of everyday experience. To many people, in fact, ideas and expectations concerning this other world are the essence of religious belief. They cannot conceive of a religion worth the name which ignores or excludes such ideas. Religion, if it is anything at all, to the average person is a set of beliefs about the "supernatural", "the eternal", "the future life", "heaven and hell", "immortality", "resurrection", or the "Day of Judgment". It is therefore important to indicate an approach to the interpretation of these ideas in the light of such an analysis of religious experience as we are here attempting.

Let us first consider the question of the "supernatural". In its crude form the idea of the supernatural is essentially a geographical conception. The "other world" is another *place*, "above" or "below" the world in which we live. Such a view presupposes the ancient two- or three-story concept of the universe -- with the flat earth in the center, the "heavens" above and usually various forms of nether regions either in the depths of the earth or below the earth. It is difficult to see how such a view could be maintained after the Ptolemaic view of things was overcome by the Copernican revolution of thought which displaced the earth from the center of the universe. Strangely enough, however, the popular mind still clings to such a geographical notion of the other world. Of course our best-attested scientific world-view shows that there is only one "space-time continuum" within which everything occurs. There is no evidence for any other world in the geographic sense.

Recent speculations in physics resulting in theories of a finite world of space-time have however been taken by some philosophers as warrant for belief in some infinite reality

"beyond" the finite world, upon which that world is dependent. There is no space to go into this question here. Suffice it to say that a clear understanding of what the physicists mean by the finitude of the world precludes any deduction from it of anything "beyond" the world. There is therefore no possibility of reviving a quasi-geographical idea of a world beyond from modern physics.

Another meaning associated with the supernatural is that it refers to certain extraordinary, astonishing, or fear-inspiring things. Because primitive men fear thunder and lightning, certain kinds of animals, and dead things, they may ascribe supernatural powers to them. The tribesman's idea of *mana* or of inherent "wonderful power" in things and the various taboos which apply to their use are an expression of such a belief in the supernatural. Rudolph Otto analyzed the basic element in religion in his book *The Idea of the Holy* as a compound of fear and of fascination in the presence of overwhelming mystery.

Regarding such a view of the supernatural two things should be said. First, it does accord with one of the basic elements in religion as discussed in Chapter 3 in the analysis of change. The serious consciousness of change implies the "shock" of the appearance of the really new, and this raises the question, What is the source of the new? The full awareness of what the fact of change implies is precisely what has often been meant by encounter with the supernatural. "The supernatural" is the answer given to the question concerning the source of the new and the destiny of the old. The supernatural is the name given to that from which the new comes and to which the old goes. This does not, of course, require us to think of a "place" of origin and destiny. But it does, so to speak, suggest a "dimension" in the nature of things.

The world in its full reality, including possibilities yet unfulfilled and actualities now lost to the past, is more than the momentary view of it yielded to present vision. The world is more than it appears to be in any single-time cross-section. It has a depth and a richness even beyond the, power of imagination to conceive. It is out of this depth that the surprising things occur. It is this mysterious and sometimes frightening source that may be called the supernatural.

The second thing that should be said regarding this meaning of the supernatural is that the surprising and frightening phenomena are really no different in essence from what is generally called "natural". When understood in their full significance, even so-called natural happenings are surprising and awe-inspiring. And conversely, even the initially most surprising phenomena can by repetition and investigation be "naturalized" so as to excite no wonder. It would therefore seem that while there may be an important religious element in the experience of surprise, wonder, and fear of the extraordinary, the events themselves may not be permanently classified "supernatural" as opposed to "natural".

A third meaning sometimes attached to the concept "supernatural" is the realm of "mind" or "spirit" as opposed to the material order. It is true that some distinction between the mental and the material needs to be made. Attempts to reduce mind to matter or matter to mind lead to

equally unsatisfactory results. Yet mind and matter are not really separate realms. There is no "spiritual world" over against the physical world. Mind and matter are constituent aspects of the same world. The two aspects are inextricably interrelated. Mind has a material basis, just as life does. And material things have some mental aspects, even if they be only their intelligible structures. Even what is called "psychic research", involving the attempt to communicate with the "spiritworld" requires physical media including sense impressions. Mental phenomena are the subject of natural inquiry just as much as physical occurrences. Of course the methods of psychology may differ from the methods of physics, but both deal with the same world -- the one "natural" world. The element of truth in this view of the supernatural is the obvious fact that religious experience is only possible to beings with mental or spiritual capacities, i.e., to human beings. But it does not follow that all mental experience is religious, nor is religious experience without a material basis.

A similar analysis would invalidate the distinction between the natural and supernatural based on the difference between the "seen" and the "unseen" world. On this basis electrons would be supernatural, since they cannot be seen. But if it is replied that the effects of electrons can be seen, it must be pointed out that the effects of love and of the impulse to goodness are also visible. It is clear from such an analysis that this distinction will not stand up under examination.

Nor can we accept the idea that the natural is the realm of scientific inquiry, while the supernatural is what lies beyond possible scientific knowledge. From our empirical viewpoint everything which can be intelligibly spoken about must be subject to scientific inquiry, understood in the broadest sense. This does not mean only physics or even physics and biology. It includes also the sciences of mind and of society. By scientific method we mean all ways in which reliable, communicable knowledge based on experience in every area may be gained.

There is no possible area of human experience which lies beyond scientific inquiry in this sense. It must be acknowledged, however, that questions such as those raised by the awareness of change are not usually included among the inquiries considered appropriate to science. Surprise at the new and the lure of the unknown are certainly part of the scientist’s experience, but they are not generally regarded as suggesting questions for his science. In thus sense religion deals with something "supernatural" (as opposed to the scientist’s concern with the "natural").

Sometimes the supernatural is taken as the realm of values as opposed to the realm of natural fact. The experience of value is one of the bases of religion, as shown in Chapter VI. It is therefore easy to understand the traditional linkage between value and the supernatural. We have been at pains to show that value is actually one kind of fact, so that the usual distinction between fact and value does not hold good. Values are powers of confirmation or negation arising in the inter-relations of persons with various aspects of their world. These values and the structural inter-actions upon which they are based are natural facts and should not be relegated to a different "realm" from other natural facts.

A somewhat better case can be made for the supernatural as the realm of ideal possibilities as opposed to the realm of the actual. This meaning of the supernatural is involved in the experience of imperfection (See Chapter VII). Because the world as it is always appears capable of improvement, it is feasible to distinguish between the actual world (as natural) and the ideal world (as supernatural). Or more accurately, the supernatural is that dimension of the real world by which it is seen as limitlessly perfectible. By virtue of this supernatural dimension there is always an imagined better world serving both as judgment on the present and invitation for the future. The objection to calling this "supernatural" is that ideals are not really separate from the actual world, but are firmly rooted in it. The actual world is shaped by the ideal, so that the ideal is quite natural, essential, and integral to the actual world.

This is, of course, in large part a question of coming to agreement about the use of language. Generally the concept of the supernatural has been poorly defined. It may be used, if meaningfully defined, to refer to particular *aspects* of the world as experienced. It cannot within the context of experience apply to "another world" in any clear sense. It usually carries the connotation of opposition to the natural or transcendence of the natural, and this implies various forms of limitation on the natural, including the suggestion that certain aspects of the one real world are not "natural". Probably the confusions resulting from this are such as to make the use of some other set of distinctions preferable. We can then speak of the one world which we experience in various of its aspects and we avoid the temptation of unintelligible discourse about other worlds of which, if they are really "other", we can obviously have no experience or knowledge of any kind.

By far the most important source of religious concern for a "world beyond" has been the contemplation of death. Human beings naturally cling to life, and the witnessing of the death of others, especially those near and dear, and the anticipation of one’s own passing away compel reflection upon the meaning of these events. That life itself is generally a value is evident from the way in which living beings seek to sustain and preserve it. The belief in a world beyond, where life may continue past its earthly span, unthreatened by the hazards of this world, is one of the ways in which this demand for preservation finds expression. In western religious thought, this belief has usually taken the form of a doctrine of immortality of the soul. According to this view, a person is thought to consist of a union of body with soul. At death the body disintegrates and the liberated soul takes up its abode in the world beyond -- in a realm of spirits free from the prison-house of matter.

The first problem which such a view as this raises concerns the idea of the soul. The naïve concept of the soul is that it is something like an invisible organ connected with the body during life but having a more or less distinct and separate existence within the body and, after life, capable of leading a completely independent existence. Sometimes the soul has even been regarded as having a particular location, such as the heart or the brain. The scientific account of man does not agree with such an idea of soul. According to this account, the human being is a

single total organism with many specialized functions, amongst which are thinking and feeling (generally regarded as operations of the soul in the traditional view). Thus the soul is not an organ with a semi-independent status, but (assuming the term is used in a scientific description at all) at most the term applied to certain aspects of the functional or structural nature of the total organism. This is essentially the view advanced by Aristotle, for whom the soul was simply the principle of organization of the living body. If this is the case, it follows that there can be no soul apart from a body, and that in particular the death of a human being involves the disintegration of the whole organism, including its organizing principle, the soul.

As far as our actual experience goes, there are no disembodied souls or spirits. At least that is the most widely accepted scientific view. The exponents of psychic research think they have some evidence far the presence of such spirits, but most careful students of the matter are skeptical of this conclusion.(I do not wish to underestimate the significance or validity of some of the carefully done experiments in para-psychology, involving such phenomena as precognition and thought transfer. The findings in these new fields of inquiry may possibly require important modifications in the scientific account of human thought, but not, as far as now appears, in the direction of re-establishing a simple body-soul duality.) If the spirits were really without bodies, it would seem impossible anyway for them to communicate with us, since normally physical media are required for communication. If we accept the conclusion that there is no actual evidence for disembodied spirits, then either they do not exist or they occupy a realm of being -- a world beyond -- which is inaccessible to us and about which we can know nothing. If we really can know nothing about such a realm, there is no basis upon which to talk or think about it. Everything we may say must be fancy and ungrounded speculation.

If we are to rest on the solid ground of communicable experience, we must return in our discussion of immortality to the basic experiences which give rise to the belief. It is the experience of change which is relevant here. The belief in a world beyond, where the souls of the dead go, is an attempt to answer the question about the status of what has been but no longer is. Even if the soul is regarded as the organizing principle of the body, the question still applies: What becomes of that formative principle ? It should be apparent, however, that the question about the destiny of the soul is merely one special case of the general question: Where does *anything* that passes away go ? Passing away is not something which occurs at the moment of what we call death. Every instant, the world by the very fact of change is in process of ceaseless passing away.

In the case of a human being, what we call death is only the culmination of many earlier deaths. It occurs when unfavorable balance between organizing and disorganizing factors occurs, in favor of the latter. But in older people this final collapse of organization has been preceded by numerous failures of function, which are deaths of a kind. And even in a young person, where the integrative factors are in the ascendancy, it is still only a relative preponderance of creative over destructive factors. At every age there are ceaseless passings away.

Furthermore, "the soul" is a principle which is never the same at any moment in a person's life. For the organizing principle of the person is conditioned by the many factors which enter into his day-by-day experience. The whole person, including the soul, grows, matures, and passes away. It follows from this that for each person there is no single, unchanging entity called the soul, of whose destiny within and beyond the body we may speak. We can refer intelligibly only to the history of a total complex organism called a human being -- of the incessant coming into being and passing away of its powers, functions, and structures.

The problem of immortality is only one example of the fundamental problem of change. There would appear to be no reason for singling out the instance of passing away for special treatment. Indeed, if there is to be a world beyond, peopled only with the spirits of those who have died, then we shall have to charge the nature of things with flagrant favoritism. For what is the destiny of the other souls -- of animals and plants, which are also living beings with principles of organization? And what of the principles of organization of inanimate things which crumble to dust? They also may have been worthy of enduring and they had their own kind of formative principles.

In short, if we seriously face the fundamental problem of change, any world beyond which is postulated in answer to the questions raised by it must include not only the souls of the deceased but the whole vast company of the forms of things that were but no longer exist. Furthermore, why should only the soul be immortal ? Bodies, too, are valuable and worth preserving. When we think more closely on the problem, it becomes difficult to distinguish between bodies and souls. For we cannot speak of a formless material substance. Everything -- non-living or living, conscious or unconscious -- is what it is by virtue of its form; yet it is the form of something involving a material aspect.

If we do not wish to speculate about this other world of which we can have no experience here, it is still important to recognize the religious dimension of the problem to which the doctrine of immortality is an attempted answer. We are impelled again, at the least, to recognize that the complete reality of things is richer and more profound than their immediate, contemporary aspect makes them appear to be. Which is to say that the past is more than a mere memory, just as the future is more than a mere anticipation. What that more is we cannot say in detail. But it is from this reality richer than it appears to be that there come unexpected and ever-fresh creations.

Immortality is not really a religious idea when it stands apart from the idea of grace, that is, when the destiny of the souls is not seen as ultimately one with their origin. Without grace, belief in immortality is irreligious because it reflects central concern with the selfish preservation of the self. Much popular belief in immortality is almost wholly self-centered. It represents the final attempt of concern to save one's own life. A *religious* belief in immortality reflects not a concern for self-preservation but a love of God. Such immortality is not so much one's own continued existence as life-in-God. The center of attention is no longer self, but God.

In terms of fundamental experiences, this means a vivid sense both of the implications of change and of dependence.

Dependence involves recognition of the sources of one's being as the answer to the problem of change. This unites destiny with origin in the one awareness of the deeply significant reality in which our lives participate. Added to this are the experiences of form, by which we are reminded of the manifold yet definite character of this reality; the experience of value, by which our personal involvement in it is determined; and the experience of imperfection, by which the unbounded heights of possibility may be imagined. In this many-faceted religious experience the selfish concern for individual preservation is overcome and replaced by a self-forgetful yet self-fulfilling participation in the extraordinary resources out of which all existence proceeds. It is this kind of experience which perhaps best explains the meaning of the traditional term "eternal life" -- which is now not conceived as an extension in time of our personal existence but as a new dimension of existence into which one can enter during his natural life. That new dimension is revealed through such experiences as we have described as the fundamentals of religious reality.

Traditional western doctrines of the world beyond have generally included a distinction between a "heaven" for the righteous souls, and a "hell" for the wicked, sometimes with a "purgatory" for those who must undergo purifying punishment before entering heaven. As we have pointed out, these ideas do not hold in any geographical sense. What they do is to add a moral dimension to the problem of the destiny of the soul. The character of individual destiny now becomes conditioned by the character of the life lived in the body. In the light of such fundamental experiences, these doctrines refer to the relationship between the quality of life and the degree to which one participates in the new dimension already spoken of. The good life is one which maximizes community and this kind of life opens up most widely the world of value, of myriad forms, of limitless possibilities. The evil life is one which frustrates community and thus blinds one to this richness. The life of community links one with the creative sources of being. The self-centered life leads to isolation and stagnation. By this interpretation, "heaven" is participation in community and hell is isolation and frustration of community.

Heaven means the expansion, fulfillment, and realization of the potentialities of existence. Hell means the walling off of the self which results in impoverishment and death. Heaven is the condition of harmonious co-existence. Hell is the condition of contradiction and estrangement. Heaven is the source of being. Hell is the ground of annihilation.

Two other closely related answers to the question raised by death should be briefly discussed. One is resurrection and the other reincarnation, sometimes called metempsychosis. Immortality is essentially a Greek idea. Resurrection is a concept Hebraic in origin, and reincarnation is characteristic of the belief of most oriental religions. The doctrine of resurrection is that man's destiny is to die but one day to be raised again to life, not as a disembodied spirit, but with a body -- usually the original one possessed during life.

Hebrew thought developed this idea rather than immortality, first, because the Hebrews had a vivid sense of the goodness of material bodily existence; and second, because they understood the necessary unity of the person not as a soul-in-body but as a whole living, feeling, thinking personality. This is far more congenial, for both reasons, to modern thought than is the Greek idea. While it is impossible in a scientific age to consider any literal acceptance of the doctrine of resurrection, it does point even better than the doctrine of immortality to some of the fundamentals of religious experience mentioned above. It means that the significance of an individual life is not measured simply by its coming and going in the passing panorama of existence. Rather it is determined by its participation in and exemplification of the rich resources from which all being springs. Furthermore, this significance is not simply a matter of the mental life but includes the whole life of man, bodily as well as spiritual. The resurrection is a symbol, as it now can be seen in retrospect, for the showing forth of the full significance which within the partial experiences and understandings of man's finite life could never become clear. The idea of a "Day of Judgment" is the symbolic expression for the now hidden meaning of every life within the whole context of world history -- the whole context, since the full implications of any life will never be known apart from its working out in the whole of the historical and existential process.

The doctrine of reincarnation is interesting because it attempts to provide an answer not only to the question of human destiny but also of human origin. If death poses the problem of "whither", birth poses the problem of "whence". Both are real and baffling questions to which the reincarnation teaching claims to supply a simple answer: New souls are simply old souls in new bodies. The character and the limitations of each soul are however determined by the earlier life-histories of the soul (law of karma). This is a much neater and more logical system of explanation of origin, destiny, and differences of character than are either immortality or resurrection. Religiously and ethically it has not appealed generally to the west because it undermines the moral earnestness of the only-one-chance view of the soul's destiny, and because it does away with the idea of a God who continually creates new things, including souls. The main trouble with the doctrine of reincarnation is that it does not seem to be true to the facts. We have no evidence at all for it and every reason to deny it on the basis of what we do know about the mechanisms of reproduction and inheritance. The interest for us in this doctrine is primarily that it illustrates further the importance and persistence of the questions raised by the human experiences of change and of dependence.

It is often claimed that a literal belief in conscious personal survival beyond death is necessary for either a meaningful or a moral earthly life. It is said that if this life is all one can look forward to, nothing at all is worthwhile and that the amoral law of the jungle will be the inevitable rule of behavior. It is difficult to see by what logic such conclusions follow. The "meaning" of life depends primarily upon the immediate forms and values in existence, including the relationships in terms of which life is established in community. Values are experienced realistically as valuable regardless of their final and unknown destiny as well as

that of the valuer. Temporal stability may indeed be a positive value to certain persons in certain situations, but it is by no means the only value, nor is it necessarily always a positive value. Change itself has values. It is also a matter of historical record that countless generations of people in many vigorous cultures have lived meaningful and ethically robust lives without any belief in continued personal existence after death. It may also be added that the analysis of religion based on the five fundamentals discussed in Part Two holds good whether or not such a belief is maintained.

We have been largely concerned thus far with the doctrines of a world beyond as they relate to the destiny of the individual. A final word may now be added regarding the destiny of the race as a whole. The traditional concept of the "next world" is not only that of a place where individual souls go after death. It includes also such an idea as the "Kingdom of God" as a condition of things in which God's complete reign will be set up and evil and death will be permanently overcome. According to this idea, there is a world lying beyond this one as its fulfillment and culmination. A non-theological version of this idea is the belief in automatic or inevitable progress, resulting in the final establishment of some sort of utopian order. The most obvious contemporary example of this is Marxian utopianism, with its accompanying doctrine of the dialectic.

In terms of the fundamentals of religious experience, these doctrines must be interpreted chiefly in the light of the experience of imperfection. That the world always presents itself as limitlessly perfectible leads to the idea of a "perfect world" towards which the actual world may be tending. Perfectibility implies an ideal state of things standing in contrast to the actual state of things. It is the whole set of such imagined ideals which enters into the formulation of the ideas of a state of consummate perfection.

There are two important problems which now arise. The first stems from the fact that the consciousness of inevitable imperfection is easily converted into a belief in some actual state of perfection lying beyond the present actual imperfect world. Of such a state we have no knowledge. All ideals of a better world are merely improvements of the actual world and are themselves subject to improvement, if the world should prove to be limitlessly perfectible. Under this assumption, there is no final state of things either as a determinate present ideal or as a culmination within time. The experience of imperfection, truly understood, is therefore both a source for idealism and a denial of utopianism.

The second problem concerns the relationship between good and evil in the historical process. Progress means the enlarging triumph of good over evil. We have defined good and evil in terms of desire and have then suggested that various goods may be arranged in order with reference to an assumed sovereign good called community. The question of the final triumph of good is the question regarding the extent to which community is sovereign in fact and also as an hypothesis or basis of inter-action. To what extent is the desire for community actually and ultimately dominant over the desire for values which may deny or frustrate community? The

facts of human perversity are only too plain, and it is by no means clear that by any processes within our control or within reasonable forecast human nature may be fundamentally improved.

On the other hand, community is self-consistent in a way that no lesser goods are. In fact, community is by its very definition the state of self-consistency, mutuality, harmonious inter-relation of individual personalities. Therefore there is some reasonable presumption that the world process may proceed in such a way as to maximize community -- i.e., to establish conditions of maximum self-consistency, as between person and person and person and his communal relations.

Part of the process by which this will take place will be the conflicts as between those whose interests are interests to limit community. Such conflicts are partly destructive but also partly educative and preparatory for more comprehensive community. Ideas such as the Kingdom of God are expressions of confidence in the ultimate triumph of community, i.e., in the long-run victory of good over evil, or the final establishment of progress. This means that the experience of imperfection will not be seen merely as a vision of what might be but as an invitation and motivation to participate in the transformations which will tend to bring the ideal closer towards actuality.

Regarding the long-range balance between good and evil, however, it is important to remain open to the empirical evidence. It is not possible now to say whether or not the value of community will exert a more powerful persuasion in human life than other seemingly opposed values. There is the possibility that the world process may have epochs of decline as well as of advance. According to our present knowledge of physics, as already pointed out, the Second Law of Thermodynamics presents us in the material realm with the picture of a running-down universe which will ultimately be impossible for human life. What the final word will be on such matters as well as on the problem of resolving conflicts in nature and society we do not now know enough to say.

Because of the problematic character of the idea of progress within world-history, there has arisen the idea of a world of consummation lying "beyond history". Being outside the time sequence, it is usually called an "eternal kingdom".

Since all experience necessarily takes place within the time sequence, it is not possible to speak meaningfully about anything which is outside time. Such ideas, therefore, of a kingdom beyond history must be either nonsense or metaphorical ways of speaking of certain aspects of temporal experience. For example, the statement ‘`There is a perfect kingdom beyond history", which is *literally* nonsense and incomprehensible, may be understood to express symbolically the inevitable human experience of imperfection. The phrase "There is a perfect kingdom" expresses the reality and the power of the ideal. The phrase "beyond history" expresses the recognition that no ideal within history is the final one.

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Chapter 11: The Christian Message

Thus far our discussion of some of the traditional religious ideas in the light of an analysis of religion in terms of actual human experience has not been concerned exclusively with any one religious or sectarian movement. The fact is, however, that for the most part the doctrines here discussed have stood within the main Jewish and Christian tradition of the west. It is the purpose of this chapter, and largely also that of the next two, to focus attention on the central beliefs of the Christian community. It will also help to show better how the method of analysis applies, through its use in connection with certain central tenets of the dominant historical faith of western civilization.

When we propose to deal with "the Christian message", it is first necessary to state what that message is. But this leads to the difficulty that there is a wide variety of opinions about the nature of that message. What is an essential aspect of Christian teaching to one group of Christians is considered by another group as a minor matter or even as a heresy. Some would say that the Sermon on the Mount is the sum and substance of Christianity. Others would say that the essential Christian message is that Christ died to save sinners or that only by believing in Jesus Christ as personal Savior can one inherit eternal life. The sorely divided condition of Christendom is largely a reflection of the many divergent ideas about what constitutes essential Christianity --about what is fundamental and what is of secondary importance in the Christian message.

In spite of this terrifying diversity of beliefs, it is the present writer’s conviction -- and this is shared by many students of the history of Christian thought -- that there is a fairly clear central core of belief which forms both the original Christian message and the continuing main source of inspiration and doctrine throughout Christian history. This basic Christian message is to be

discovered through a careful and critical study of the Christian Bible -- the Old and the New Testaments. It is in the biblical record that the earliest statements of the essential message are to be found. And it is to this record that Christians have continually made reference in re-examining the content of their faith from generation to generation. The next chapter will contain an analysis of the nature and authority of the Bible. Our purpose is here to indicate what this book says about the central message of the Christian faith.

It is impossible to understand Christianity apart from its Jewish background. This is why the Jewish Scriptures or "writings" (the Old Testament) are part of the Christian Bible. The connecting link between Judaism and Christianity is the idea of the Messiah. The word Messiah means "anointed one" and refers to an expected God-appointed agent who would come one day to implement in one way or another the rule of God on earth, ushering in a new age in which the powers of evil would no longer hold sway. The Messiah is the one in whom the Jews centered their hopes for the coming of a new age of righteousness, in which particularly the injustices done to the people of Israel would be punished and loyalty to the one true God appropriately rewarded.

Throughout all Jewish history the coming of the Messiah has remained a hope not yet fulfilled. In the time of Jesus the coming of the anointed one was fervently longed for by many, in the face of the enforced subservience of the Jewish people to the Romans. And even today the unfulfilled and expectant hope for the Messiah is a part of the Jewish faith.

The Christian message may be briefly summarized in the single assertion: "Jesus is the Messiah." The word *Christos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Thus an alternative way of stating the Christian message is to say: "Jesus is the Christ." It will take some explanation to make clear what this means -- to show in what sense Christians believe Jesus to be the Messiah. Indeed, the various forms of Christianity are, in part, different ways of interpreting the meaning of this basic assertion. But the central fact remains that the Christian movement was the expression of this fundamental conviction about Jesus. The major difference between Judaism and Christianity is that in the former the Messiah is still to come, while in the latter he has already come.

The New Testament contains the record of how a belief in Jesus as Messiah arose. As we have already implied, the belief would never have arisen had there not been within Judaism a vivid expectation of the anointed one. But this of itself was of course not enough. The direct cause, within this context, was the whole series of events associated with the career of Jesus of Nazareth. In most respects his life was not unlike that of some of the other great spiritual leaders of Israel. Most of his teaching has parallels in the prophetic or rabbinic literature. He exercised over his followers a remarkable power which often resulted in transformations of character and even in physical healing. He pronounced decisive prophetic judgments on the organized religion of his day, reminiscent of an Amos or a Jeremiah. He interpreted his teaching and actions in terms of the current messianic expectation, and he regarded himself in some sense as the bearer

of the messianic commission. It seems unlikely that Jesus' followers would ever have regarded him as the Christ if he had not made this claim for himself during his brief ministry.

From the biblical record it is clear, however, that the decisive influence in establishing the messianic claim of Jesus was not his life and teaching but the events associated with his death.

It is easy to mark the point at which the Christian message came into being, and that is the moment at which certain of Jesus' followers claimed to have seen him alive again after his death by crucifixion. It was primarily by virtue of the claim that Jesus had risen from the dead that the Christians established his messiahship. For the early Christians the resurrection of Jesus was the foundation upon which their message rested. Jesus is the Christ, they said, because he has risen from the dead. By historical right, then, the heart of the Christian message is that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified as a criminal, rose from the dead and by that evidence was shown to be God's anointed one.

From this it follows that the key to the interpretation of the Christian message is the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament itself is by no means unambiguous regarding this meaning, though it is clear that there was unambiguously a belief in the resurrection. Some of the accounts depict post-mortem appearances in a physical body. Some accounts tell of the empty tomb. But a careful study of the earliest accounts, in Paul's letters, indicates that these physical resurrection stories were probably later than the descriptions of the risen Jesus as an exalted heavenly being. A strong case can be made for the view that the original resurrection appearances were in the nature of visions, and that the physical resuscitation accounts were developed for the purpose of convincing the doubtful, who thought the disciples had only seen a ghost.

In terms of our modern scientific world-view it is difficult to believe that anyone has ever risen bodily from the dead. We must remember, however, that the people of Bible times knew nothing of modern science and that in the Judaism of that day belief in the possibility of resurrection was common; there are several other instances in the Bible where resurrection is claimed. We can therefore understand the way in which the New Testament account of Jesus' resurrection developed, but we are not likely to be able to accept any belief in a physical resurrection. What meaning, then, can the resurrection of Jesus -- the central Christian message -- have for moderns with an intelligible religious outlook ? The important fact is that the early Christians were convinced that Jesus had been delivered from the bonds of death, and that in a real sense he continued alive with them and for them. It is important to add that they did not regard his aliveness as only a matter of vivid memory, but as a present fact. They did not find his power diminished, but rather multiplied after his death. The meaning of the resurrection therefore has to do with the problem of death. Ordinarily death is the end of things. What was, no longer is. But in connection with Jesus the early Christians experienced a reversal of this customary experience. Instead of death being the end, it turned out to be the beginning.

Actually, if we consider the matter, deaths are often beginnings. Sometimes the existence of some real value is a bar to the achievement of a greater value. Often people or institutions have to die before certain creative developments can take place. But more to the present point, it is by sacrifice -- by the voluntary loss of some good out of devotion to a greater good, that the highest possibilities in human life are realized. Heroes in every area of attainment are those who have given themselves without reservation for a cause they love more than life itself.

In Jesus' case it was a combination of factors -- such as the fervent longing of oppressed people, their religious preparation and ethical sensitivity, the remarkable personal power of Jesus, and the particular circumstances of his death -- which produced among his followers a mental and emotional situation favorable to the attainment of a remarkable new intensity of life, marked by love, loyalty, courage and joy, all for the sake of the Master, who had sacrificed his life for them and for the larger good he saw through them.

In terms of the fundamentals of religious experience, the resurrection first provides an answer to the problem of *change*. There was the shock of disappearance (Jesus died), giving rise to the question: Where does that which perishes go? The answer was not a theoretical, but a practical one, and came in the form of a new resurgence of life within the disciples as individuals and within the Christian fellowship. This was the old Jesus appearing in a new form. Where did Jesus go ? He went "to God" (the source of the new and the destiny of the old). The resurrection experience means the realization, through the rising within one of powers related to him who has died, that there is a depth of surprising creative possibility in existence in which we may participate, and that the realization of this possibility is often contingent upon the loss of existing structures. The resurrection experience shows the unity of the depth into which existing actuality sinks and that out of which new possibility arises into actuality.

The resurrection also answers to the experience of *dependence*. One of the striking things about the New Testament account is the complete reversal of the disciples' outlook between the day of crucifixion and the day of resurrection. And the impression is strong that this change was not something expected but which "came upon" them, as it were overpowering them. There is no suggestion of any *effort* to believe something that one hopes is so. The atmosphere is wholly one of wonder and excitement at the remarkable things that have happened to them and of thankfulness for having been granted the gift of the new life they sense within themselves and the Christian community. The resurrection experience was essentially an affair of grace, not of human effortful achievement. It was through it that the early Christians gained a vivid consciousness of the sources from which their life derived.

In the third place, the resurrection experience was one of *form*. The new life experienced in connection with Jesus had a clear and definite structure. That structure was expressed in terms of obedience to Jesus' commands, imitation of his life, and the development of forms of organization and patterns of behavior and belief consonant with the emerging life of the new fellowship.

The new life was also of supreme *value* to the Christians. They were irresistibly drawn not only to the Jesus who had lived among them but even more to the form of dedicated life which had come into being after his death. Furthermore, this value was such as to inspire in them a sense of the limitless possibilities lying beyond their actual attainments. The new life filled them with intense hope for better things, together with an acutual awareness of how far they fell short of the full potentialities inherent in the new community. Everything they did fell under the judgment of the highest good -- Christian love -- which was their version of what we call "community".

Thus the resurrection experience for the early Christians involved an intense exemplification of the five fundamentals of religious experience. We may suppose that this is the primary reason for the centrality of the resurrection in the Christian faith. In the above we have spoken of what the experience of Jesus' resurrection meant to the early Christians. The same remarks hold good for all those who since that first age have shared in the transforming power which the first believers unquestionably received. The central Christian message is therefore really the proclamation that within the Christian fellowship it is possible to realize the power of new life which was first known by the disciples after Jesus' death and expressed by them as evidence of his resurrection from the dead and continued living presence among them. Adherence to an organized Christian group does not of itself guarantee the conferring of this new life. All that has been said is that the resurrection of Jesus may be understood in terms of a transforming power within the group of believers, first operating amongst the immediate followers of the crucified Master and then continuing in varying degrees from generation to generation in the Christian fellowships springing from them.

Belief in a dying and rising being is found in many religions. Nowhere else does it have the concrete historical reference found in Christianity. Usually the one who dies and rises is a mythological figure, such as Osiris in the Isis cult. The historical reference probably has the effect of greatly intensifying the power and the vividness of the resurrection belief. Apart from this, the widespread belief in the resurrection of a representative being is a further confirmation of the way in which this belief expressed the universal experiences underlying religion.

The belief in Jesus' resurrection is not the same as to believe in his immortality. According to the Christian message, Jesus was not immortal. He really died, and then rose again. This is certainly borne out by the disciples' experience. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was dead, until resurrection day, when (as they believed) God created him anew amongst them. This distinction is important in regard to the doctrine of immortality. One cannot argue from Jesus' resurrection to the immortality of people in general for two reasons: first, because people in general are not Jesus or even much like him -- and there is strong presumption that Jesus' nature had everything to do with his resurrection -- and second, because Jesus was not immortal, according to the Christian message. What one can infer from Jesus' resurrection is that the fountain of life and being is not necessarily frustrated by death, and therefore that we may take courage and hope regarding the deaths of others and of ourselves that we may in like manner be

the occasion for some of the creative-death-defeating power which was so magnificently poured out in the case of Jesus. And Christians consider it likely that the best way to ensure that participation is by partaking now of the new life in the Christian community, under the inspiration of the Jesus who founded it and still lives within it.

There is a doctrine closely connected with the resurrection of Jesus which will be briefly mentioned. This is the belief in the ascension of Jesus. According to this teaching Jesus after his resurrection was taken up into heaven. It is clear that this is a logical consequence of the idea of a physical resurrection, for if Jesus returned bodily to life, then some explanation of his ultimate disappearance from earthly residence is required. Careful analysis of the New Testament shows that the ascension story (like the physical resurrection accounts) was relatively late and was not part of the earliest message. Thus it is unlikely even on the grounds of the New Testament itself that the ascension is an integral part of the Christian story. Furthermore, from the modern view it is incredible as a physical phenomenon and belongs to the pre-Copernican cosmology The symbolic meaning of the ascension is that the continuing life of the risen Jesus is a "heavenly" life, i.e., one not dependent upon his physical body, and manifesting itself in the spiritual life of the Christian fellowship.

The essence of the Christian message is that Jesus is the Christ, demonstrated as such by his victory over death in his resurrection. Starting from this basic affirmation a number of other conclusions regarding the nature and function of Jesus in the faith were developed. Probably the most important of these is the assertion that Jesus is divine or that Jesus is God. Orthodox Christians have usually taken this as the basic test of doctrinal soundness. A believing Christian, they say, must affirm the "divinity of Christ", or the "deity of Christ". This is consistent with the attitude of the earliest Christians and must be understood as an expression of their experience of the risen Christ. These people found in that experience the kind of personal renewal, inspiration, and life-direction which they had by their religious training always attributed to God -- the giver of life and the Lord of individuals and nations. Therefore they identified the risen Jesus -- the spirit of life amongst them -- as a manifestation of God himself. From this it was easy to derive such formulas as "Jesus is divine" or "Christ is God".

Another way of putting it is to say that for the first Christians the best in everything they had ever known about religion was fulfilled for them in their encounter with Jesus -- in his life, in his death, and particularly in his new life after death. Thus there was no better representation for them of what God meant to them than Jesus the Christ. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ was nothing more nor nothing less than this. It was a way of expressing a genuine experience of the meaning of Jesus for them. And whenever there has been a re-creation of that original life and experience in Christian history, the meaning of the doctrine has been illuminated afresh. It is not a theoretical or abstract principle. It is an expression of a powerful experience within the Christian circle. It is nothing which can be argued about in such a way as to show it to be true or false in general. It is a symbolic way of talking about attitudes and values of actual persons who have been caught up in devotion to one in relation to whom they have found a new and

ultimately satisfying kind of life.

The divinity of Christ so understood is by no means incongruous with his humanity. Indeed, it was precisely through the fact that he lived a fully human life that the powerful experiences which linked him with God in the faith of the Christians were possible.

It is easy to interpret the doctrine of the divinity of Christ in terms of our analysis of religious experience. We showed above that the resurrection experience contained all the elements of the universal experiences of change, dependence, form, value, and imperfection. We have also shown in Chapter VIII how the word "God" may intelligibly be defined by reference to these five fundamentals. If "God" is defined in this fashion, then it would follow that the resurrection experience was (and, whenever it is repeated, is) an experience of God.

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is only a brief way of affirming this. In our terms, to say that Christ is divine is to say that in the participation in a new life, associated with and resulting from the death of Jesus, the Christian finds an answer to the mystery of change, gratefully receives from the fountain of life upon which he is dependent new access of power, becomes aware of a new form of truth and of life, is grasped by a new enthusiasm (value), and sees as never before the boundless higher possibilities which existence affords (imperfection).

A Christian affirmation closely related to the one just discussed is the Incarnation. The Incarnation means that the earthly Jesus was the embodiment of God in human form. On the face of it, as an abstract proposition, this looks absurd. If one thinks of the universal creative powers (or however he customarily considers God) as becoming concentrated within the limits of a human body, the assertion is pure nonsense. Many times such irrational views have been defended, to the detriment of the cause of intelligible religion. The Incarnation is actually another way of expressing what the significance of Jesus is within the vital Christian community. It is a way of pointing out the rather extraordinary fact that the primary and really convincing evidence which Christians claim to discover for the reality and power of God for them is in their relation to Jesus. It is in him that a center of illumination for all life appears. It is in him that a source of power for the fulfillment of life is provided. Not from any *general* "sources of being", but from this one particular source. The Incarnation expresses this remarkable *focusing* of the religious experience in terms of this one person. It is a turning away from religion in general to a special religion, and then finding, incidentally, that the general is freshly illuminated as it never was before. In terms of our analysis, for example, the Christian faith in the Incarnate God would imply that the fullest implications of change, dependence, form, value, and imperfection are apparent when understood in the light of the experience of the resurrected Christ.

Another traditional Christian doctrine is that God is a Trinity -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. Again, it is useless to try to analyze this as a general theoretical proposition. It can only be understood as a "symbol of the faith". By the Holy Spirit is meant the life of God in the

community of believers. The Spirit was regarded as the source of that tremendous outpouring of enthusiasm, courage, hope, and love which accompanied the rise of the resurrection faith. Experientially there is no difference between what is called the Holy Spirit and what is regarded as the manifestation amongst Christians of the living, risen Christ. Thus the identification of Jesus with God leads also to the identification of the Spirit with God (and with Jesus). The doctrine of the Trinity is simply the statement that, for Christians, Jesus (the Son) and the Spirit to which he gave rise in the Christian community were both none other than the manifestations of that source of spiritual energy which they called "God". It is only to say that God manifests himself in different ways in the general facts of existence (Father), in the particular man Jesus (Son), and in the life of the Christian community (Holy Spirit). In terms of our analysis, this would mean that the five fundamentals could be regarded at the same time as universal experiences (Father), as especially illuminated in the life of Jesus (Son), and as continually re-established in the life of the Church (Holy Spirit).

These considerations lead to the problem of the relation of Jesus to the rest of the human race, that is, to the question of the uniqueness of Jesus. Was Jesus "just another man", though admittedly a great one, or is he in some special way set apart from all the rest of the race? The traditional Christian answer has been to affirm his uniqueness. Usually this affirmation is founded on an abstract and nonexperiential inference from such doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. If Jesus is divine, it is said, he cannot possibly be just another man. To argue in this way leads only to confusion and absurdity. The question about the uniqueness of Jesus can only be answered in terms of experience. To say that Jesus is unique is only to assert that the kind of new life which vital Christians discover they regard as available only through Jesus. They think it is a fact that what they experience in him they have never experienced through any other man. And thus they set him apart as unique.

While it may be true that individual Christians have actually not found the new life they prize other than in relation to Jesus, it is quite something else to assert that there is no other comparable source. It is often this latter which is meant by the uniqueness of Jesus. It is at this point that a perfectly intelligible individual or group experience is arbitrarily extended as a principle to which all possible experience must conform. It may be true that certain persons find only in Jesus the unfolding of the deepest meaning of life -- and we have seen how the experience of the resurrected Jesus makes this possible -- but it does not follow from this that there is no other particular channel through which new life may flow. In fact, the whole history of the race is against it. There are countless particularly creative situations having nothing to do with Christianity historically in which life-fulfillments quite comparable to those of the best of Christians are experienced. In *this* sense Jesus is not unique. Of course strictly speaking every person is unique; no one is just like anyone else. And in a sense every man has a "divine spark" -- in that he may serve as the occasion for the experience of God. Jesus is different from the rest of mankind only in the degree that the consequences of his life are of special significance in comparison with the rest of the race. That these consequences have been momentous historically and a profound creative power none can deny. But that he stands totally and absolutely beyond and above all other men seems to be an assertion of arbitrary and unwarranted dogmatism which

does nothing to enhance the faith of the Christian and much to alienate those who cannot share that faith.

In a number of different connections in the present discussion we have spoken of the new life which constitutes the evidence of the living risen Christ in the community of Christians. It is now important to state more precisely what the nature and source of that new life are. As already suggested, the manifestation of it consisted in such things as heightened courage, confidence, hope, fidelity, enthusiasm, and love. Doubtless nobody ever became perfect, but it does seem clear that Christians at their best have given evidence of truly remarkable achievements, in what have been generally regarded as major virtues -- in such things as the power to endure hardships, to be patient in the face of opposition and disappointment, to forgive others for wrongs inflicted on them, and to show concern for the needs of others. The important fact in this connection is that these achievements are not the result of resolves to be virtuous or of comprehensive programs in self-improvement. They are rather by-products of a transformed personality. What is the nature of the transformation that has taken place? One way of describing it is to say that, to a certain extent at least, the dominion of self-centeredness has been overcome. When we then ask by what means self-centeredness has been destroyed, the answer seems to be related to the death and resurrection of Jesus. How can this be interpreted? It happens, says the Christian, because self-centeredness is caused by the ever-present fear of death: every man sees the life which he desires threatened in all its forms by dissolution, and he strives at all costs and by every means to grasp and hold this insecure treasure. Self-centeredness is the attempt by man to hold fast to that which he knows and fears will pass away. Note that the "death" of which one is afraid does not refer only to the cessation of earthly existence -- to mortality in the usual sense -- but also to the whole parade of smaller deaths -- the endless disappointments, failures, declines, agings -- which render all human life insecure.

The meaning of the resurrection is that the death of Jesus, whose life was certainly worth preserving, was not the end but the beginning of a larger, richer, more powerful, and more widely significant life. By the process of identifying himself with Jesus, the Christian seeks to participate in and appropriate the benefits of the resurrection. Thus he is freed from the fear of death and hence from self-centeredness.

It has been usual to speak of this process of life-transformation by faith in or identification with Jesus as "salvation by faith in Jesus Christ". Salvation here means being rescued from the destructive power of self-concern induced by the sense of personal insecurity. This self-concern is usually called "sin". (In Chapter IX we showed that sin is primarily self-centeredness.) Thus the Christian Gospel or good news is that by faith in Jesus Christ one can be saved from sin. This is not to be understood as a guarantee of perfection, but only as a promise of a new personal orientation in which the self is no longer dominated by the ceaseless but ultimately hopeless struggle to secure his own position in the scheme of things. Nor do we think this is to be interpreted (as is often done) as a particular way of gaining assurance of a favorable position in the life hereafter. It seems like sheer superstition to expect that by affirming belief in Christ one

can gain a happy eternity, while those who do not affirm it must suffer everlasting torment in hell. Salvation, according to our interpretation, does not consist primarily in the destiny of the soul after death, but in present participation in the kind of life over which the fear of death has no dominion because it has been shown not to be permanently frustrated by death.

From the standpoint of our interpretation of religion the central Christian experience just described is important because it provides an answer to the question regarding the relative power of community-creating and community-destroying factors in human history, i.e., to the question concerning the outcome of the battle between good and evil. What the Christian message asserts is that the events associated with Jesus precipitated a situation in which a decisive blow was dealt to the community-destroying powers (symbolized in the form of devils or dark spirits) and in which a hitherto unavailable key was provided for opening up the treasure-house of community-creating powers. This can be understood best in relation to the fundamental experience of imperfection. When a person or group is dominated by a sense of impending loss, the resulting fear demands a kind of absolutizing of what already exists, and it dispels any courage for looking to ideals beyond the present imperfect situation. The grasping caused by fear of death therefore results in a constricted and restricted view of things which obscures the heights and depths of possibility inherent in existence. But the measure of these values is community. Hence a sense of profound insecurity results in the frustration of community and the fixation of life on lower levels of achievement. The active awareness of imperfection -- the vital consciousness of the limitless perfectibility in things, which is one of the essentials of religious experience -- thus depends on release from this fear. For this reason the kind of new life which Christians claim through faith in the risen Christ is essential to the actual advancement of community and to the creation of the religious outlook which underlies it.

As a footnote to this discussion it is interesting to observe that a vivid sense of imperfection (including a sense of sin) is a necessary component in religious experience, and that those who are the worst sinners (i.e., who most frustrate community) are the least aware of their sin. Fear of death entails a protective blinding to the fact of imperfection. This points to the fact that for religious fulfillment ("salvation") it is not enough merely to be preached to about sin for that tends to set up defenses against the awareness of imperfection; "grace" is also necessary -- the confidence born of the conviction that the sources of life upon which we are dependent are not extinguished by our death. It is because this conviction has been one of the fruits of the good news about the victorious Jesus that Christians have been so conscious both of the seriousness of sin and of the joyful certainty of freely-given salvation.

What has just been said confirms what was pointed out in Chapter IV and earlier in this chapter about the relation between faith and works. The fruits of the Christian life do not stem from a gigantic effort of the will, but from a transformed personality. The Christian message is not primarily a statement about what man must do but good news about what has been done for man, namely, about his release from the power of sin through identification with the risen Christ, and from this springs the thankful response of a life devoted to good deeds. This is the meaning

of the New Testament discussion concerning the relation of the Law (moral requirements) and the Gospel. The Christian answer is that because of sin (self-centeredness) man cannot by nature obey the Law. His only hope is for a transformation of nature which destroys the rule of self-concern by means of the Gospel.

Three critical problems about the Christian message must still be faced. First, we must ask whether the Christian claim regarding the transformations effected by identification with Jesus is actually true. In answer it seems to this writer that there is clear evidence both in past history and in present experience that many persons and groups of people have validated this claim. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that a great many more persons and groups calling themselves by the name of Christ and seeking in every possible way to benefit from faith in him have failed to validate it. It therefore seems on the basis of actual performance that the Christian faith provides an uncertain means of effecting the desired transformations of human nature.

The second problem grows out of the first. May it not be that the particular form of the Christian message, based as it is upon a record of events long ago, recorded in terms largely alien to modern thinking, partly explains the comparative ineffectiveness of the Gospel ? Can modern man consistently, permanently, and whole-heartedly believe that the fulfillment of his life depends upon the events associated with the life of the one man, Jesus of Nazareth?

This leads to the third problem, which was touched on in discussing the uniqueness of Jesus. Is the Christian way of identification with the risen Jesus in the experience of the historic Christian community the *only* way in which the new life referred to above may be attained? Is it only through Christ that the fear of death and the resulting self-centeredness may be overcome? Is it true that "there is no other name given under heaven by which men may be saved"? The answer seems clearly to be No. It is right to recognize the genuine power and illumination in the Christian message without asserting its exclusiveness of all other messages of salvation. This refers not only to other historic religions, which also produce high fruits of human achievement -- whether or not in as great numbers or with as much efficiency as Christianity we are not concerned to say at this point but to movements and influences not ordinarily called religious. For example, many of the deepest insights of Christianity are implied in some of the current work in psychotherapy. May it not be that a careful scientific attack on the problem of insecurity and fear will enable us more consistently to achieve what has been only sporadically effected by the proclamation of the traditional Christian message?

There are many ways in which to some degree self-centeredness is overcome. In times of national emergency, in warfare, and in the struggle for great causes there are countless illustrations of the sacrifice of personal gain in the interest of the large good. The willingness of devoted parents or of husbands and wives to give up their own immediate comfort or safety in exchange for the privilege of serving those whom they love is further evidence of the larger loyalties that may cause people to abandon concern for personal security. The heroes of culture -- the dedicated scientists, artists, and statesmen of every age -- have also achieved greatness and

usefulness in part by the same process.

In summary, it would seem right to regard as truly "saved" anyone who has been given the grace of a high and noble purpose which draws him out of preoccupation with self into a full creative life which serves the development of community. Without underestimating the relevance of the positive Christian message as described above, it is still important to recognize and gratefully to benefit from the other saving influences at work in human life.

An intelligible and a truly universal religion would require this broader basis for faith. The deep insights of historical Christianity -- as well as of other historical religions -- are of great value in understanding the human situation and the resources available in it. But to be of full value for all people in all ages these insights must be understood as illustrations and particular embodiments of general aspects of universal human experience. A durable universal religion cannot be built upon historical particularities and claims of uniqueness and finality. The Christian message must, from this point of view, be regarded as one important source of suggestion and of exemplification for such a religion.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

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Chapter 12: Church, Bible, Prophecy, and Miracle

In the last chapter the major features of the characteristic message of Christianity were described. In this and the next chapter certain related matters, also largely within the context of the Christian tradition, will be considered.

First, there is the question of the Church. Superficially regarded, the Church is merely one of the many social institutions existing within civilization. It represents the association of persons with common religious or social interests and participation in various customary practices characteristic of their particular group. The real problem is: What underlies these organizations and what determines the particular form of their practices ?

One of the essential elements in the historical development of the Christian Church was the Jewish idea of the "Chosen People". The Hebrews, taught by their religious leaders, regarded themselves as in some sense God’s special people. They considered that he had chosen them as the only recipients and custodians of the one final divine law. Sometimes they regarded themselves as selected for special divine favor, through the guarantee of victory over enemies, or social stability or economic prosperity. Sometimes their special position was seen to entail not only privilege but responsibility. In some of the prophets, notably the Second Isaiah, this responsibility was interpreted in terms of a religious mission to all peoples of the earth.

The idea of a Chosen People has usually seemed repugnant to the liberal spirit, particularly in a democratic society where the ideal of equality runs strong. There is nevertheless a deep truth in it which can scarcely be denied. In the case of the Hebrews it is simply a matter of historical record that this people, in some respects alone amongst all of the peoples of the ancient world,

possessed religious insights which were destined to endure and to become formative principles of the mighty stream of western civilization. The moral and spiritual contributions of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Canaanites, or even Egyptians -- at their height so preponderant in power and influence as compared with little Israel -- have been negligible in the long run. In comparison with these other contemporary powers, in the sphere of moral and religious insight, the Hebrews were a special people. All history argues that nations, like individual persons, are in important respects not created equal.

The consciousness of being chosen by God is fundamentally a powerful experience of *value*. It comes as a result of "being laid hold on" by a dominating ideal whose far-reaching and enduring quality is vividly recognized. All great ideas have this characteristic. They are great precisely because they are immensely persuasive, because they are seen to be applicable to very wide and varying circumstances and peoples, and because they suggest further possibilities lying beyond the more immediately apparent ones (experience of imperfection).

Being chosen also involves a deep consciousness of *dependence*. The values to which one is dedicated are regarded not as human creations, but as *gifts*. The Jews never thought of the laws of their society as created by that society or by its leaders for purposes of order and convenience. Moral principles were never regarded by them merely as satisfying rules of behavior. They believed the Law was *given* to them, and they dramatized this conviction through the biblical narrative about Moses receiving the tablets from the very hand of God on Mount Sinai.

It is for scientific inquiry to answer the question: Why were the Jews the Chosen People ? It is a fact that in the religious sense they were unique, just as in an intellectual sense the Greeks were a Chosen People. The reasons for these facts are many and complex, but in principle there is no barrier to discovering them. Psychological, sociological, anthropological, geographical, and other factors combined in such a way as to generate these remarkable peoples. Certain peoples -- like certain individuals -- are so constituted as to possess in extraordinary degree special gifts for cultural creativity. In like manner, on the simpler level, certain animals or plants are so formed as to exhibit remarkable and unique properties. Just so, on the inorganic level, every element in the periodic scale has its special characteristics, and some, like the radioactive substances, have qualities of far-reaching significance in certain respects. All of these unusual and noteworthy powers are in principle explicable in terms of internal structure, antecedents, and character of inter-actions with other entities.

It follows that there is nothing inherently either unnatural or illiberal about the idea of the Chosen People. Rightly understood, it is the expression in social terms, first, of the fundamental plurality of existence, and second, of the awareness of dominant values, and third, of the sense of dependence which such awareness inspires. This idea becomes destructive when it degenerates into an exclusivistic dogma where the emphasis is not upon one’s own being chosen but upon others’ *not* being chosen. At this point the idea loses its religious character (in the

sense of Part Two). For there is no longer a true experience of dependence, since the special privilege is regarded not as a gift but as an inalienable and exclusive right and possession. The value-experience that underlay the sense of being chosen is itself diminished, as every value which is not shared must be. But most important of all, with an exclusivist dogma the sense of imperfection is gone. Belief in the fixity and finality of the choice (of one's own group) inevitably shuts out the limitless horizon of the idealizing process which is an integral part of religious experience.

It is clear from what has been said that the idea of "being chosen" is in reality a general religious principle, applicable to individuals as well as to groups, and in an analogous sense has relevance to all levels in the order of nature. To know that one is chosen is to be gratefully conscious of the special gifts with which he has been endowed. So understood, being chosen is not in opposition to community but is its very condition. Community requires the harmonious inter-relation of *distinct* entities -- all with special gifts and capacities. There is no community with absolute equality. True community involves the enhancing of the life of the whole and of all parts through the mutual recognition and appreciation of those unique contributions which each constituent can make.

The idea of chosen people is otherwise expressed through the so-called doctrine of "election". Election means that human destiny is determined by God rather than by man himself. It may apply either to groups or to individuals. Like the concept of the Chosen People, election has often been regarded as an objectionable idea because it makes the deity seem arbitrary and unjust to many. It is very difficult, however, to avoid the plain evidence of inequality in many ways, and these inequalities must be traced ultimately to whatever are the sources of being upon which life depends. That some are "elected" to fulfillment and some to frustration is, then, to be understood as a consequence of the plurality of being and of the fact of dependence. As pointed out in Chapter IV, this does not deny freedom, which means self-determination, since the self is what it is by virtue of the sources of its being.

The Christian Church is largely an outgrowth of the Jewish idea of the Chosen People. The people of Israel regarded themselves as custodians of the holy oracles of God contained in the Law. The early Christians regarded themselves as the recipients and transmitters of a new holy treasure -- the Gospel of the risen Christ. Just as the Hebrews in their consciousness of historical destiny felt themselves laid hold on by the great principles of the Torah, the Christians were overwhelmed and captured by the consciousness of victory over death and the promise of inexhaustible fountains of life to which they had secured access through identification with Jesus in the resurrection community. Just as the Jews had sometimes felt called to the task of preserving the Law for the salvation of all nations, the early Christians, with tremendous missionary zeal, were inwardly impelled to "proclaim the Gospel to every living creature". Christians regard themselves as a Chosen People in the sense that to them has been entrusted the message of God's grace to sinful (selfish) man in Jesus, who was shown to be the Christ by his coming alive in the Christian community where, because the fear of death is gone, the rule of

love replaces that grasping for security which is the cause of sin.

The Church is therefore the resurrection community. It is not a mere collection of individuals who agree to associate together. Rather, it is an *organism* brought into being by the unique series of events associated with the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. The Church is no organization which certain people decided to set up. It is a living whole, brought into being by the overpowering corporate experiences of the early Christians, and continued in being through the successive regeneration of these same experiences of new life from age to age. In Christian language, the Church was created by God when he sent the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and continues as the Church through the perennial renewal of this gift of the Spirit. Its organic character was referred to by St. Paul in the phrase "the body of Christ". The body has many "members", each differing in function, but each also contributing to the good of the whole. This organic conception is another way of expressing, in the sphere of human relationships, what we have consistently designated by the word "community".

The claim of Christians is therefore validated only in so far as it is really true that they possess a unique and powerful treasure-house (the Gospel) from which new life (the Holy Spirit) is available for the healing, restoring, and recreating of sick, delinquent, and perishing men. To a certain extent this claim can be validated, but there are also serious limitations to which it is subject. We may now add, in the light of the above discussion of the Chosen People, that the Christian claim becomes invalid at the point where it becomes exclusive. The assertion that "outside the Church there is no salvation" must be rejected on religious grounds as well as on the clear evidence of history and of everyday life. That the historic Christian community has made mighty contributions to the life of our society cannot be doubted. (Some of these contributions have been evil.) But that this community is the sole means by which man can be renewed on the deepest levels of his life is hardly a credible position. The traditional reply to this has been to make a distinction between the visible Church (the Church as a social institution) and the invisible Church (the community of those who have been restored to new life by faith in Jesus as Christ, whether they belong to the visible institution or not). Such a distinction has real merit, but it does not answer the question as to whether there may not be other channels of "salvation" (in almost any sense that can be intelligibly specified) than that which stems from the historic events connected with Jesus of Nazareth.

There can be no claim of a Church universal until the principle of exclusion is overcome in favor of an all-embracing principle of community. This would imply the grateful recognition of the powerful sources of moral insight available through the experience of the Jewish people and the revitalizing power resident within the Christian Gospel, but also the rightful and needful contributions of other peoples and historic religions to the fulfillment of the highest potentialities in existence.

Closely related to the Church is the Bible. The Bible is the Holy Book of the religious community. There is a reciprocal relationship between Bible and Church. In the book are

recorded the key events, central teaching, and ritual regulations governing the life of the community. Thus the Bible is a product of the Church. On the other hand, the book is in turn the source of the tradition which ensures the continuity of the religious community through the generations. In this sense the Church is a product of the Bible. Historically, the religious community of Israel preceded the production of a collection of sacred writings and the earliest Christian community came before the New Testament writings. In both cases the Scriptures were written expressions of the basic experiences characteristic of the respective religious groups. This does not invalidate the assertion that once the Scriptures were produced (step by step in a long process of literary and social evolution), they were powerful factors in guiding the course of the religious community.

A body of sacred writings gains authority through its demonstrated power of bringing to expression the dominant and enduring attitudes characteristic of the religious group. Out of a vast body of oral or written material, through long testing, a certain few selections are made, generally not by an official body so much as by the decision of the community itself as evidenced by degree of use or disuse, and these become the sacred canon. This observation is important because it emphasizes the fact that the authority of Scripture is generally not (as often maintained by the opponents of traditional religion) arbitrarily imposed but is by common consent out of the long experience of the group. From this we conclude that the familiar idea of the special character and sacred quality of the Scriptures in comparison with other writings is a way of expressing in doctrinal form the well-tested superiority of the holy writings in respect to the religious life of the group. Amongst traditional religious ideas, that of the sacredness of Scripture is one of the most empirical in character.

The sacred writings of all the great religions have the power, in unusual degree, of stimulating the kinds of universal experiences which we described in Part Two. For example, the Old Testament is dominated by the conviction of Israel’s dependence upon God and by specific illustrations from history of the consequences of that dependence. In its pages the reality of change is recognized and the deepest questions of beginnings and endings -- of creation and destruction -- are constantly confronted. It is pervaded by the sense of the order of the creation, with a definite physical, living, and moral structure which set the conditions of man’s life. It is the record of values passionately espoused, and of visions of better things not yet achieved. Similarly with the New Testament, which carries out most of the themes of the Old Testament within the context of a new historical situation introduced by the coming of Jesus. An examination of other sacred writings would show their peculiar fitness for expressing and inspiring the fundamental experiences by which we defined universal religion.

This leads to an interpretation of the doctrine of the divine *inspiration* of the Scriptures. The obvious meaning of this is that the Scriptures were not human creations, but were specially given by God. The extreme form of the doctrine asserts *verbal inspiration*, i.e., that the words were themselves given by God (as in Muslim or in some Fundamentalist Jewish or Christian circles). The usual form is that God in all essential features guided the production of the Bible,

through human instrumentality. A literal understanding of inspiration, according to which a god delivers messages to special persons, cannot be intelligible in terms of universal experience. It can appeal only to those willing to accept the claim on the authority of others. But the doctrine can be understood rather as a way of symbolizing the peculiar power the Scriptures have of generating religious experience, as described above. "Divine inspiration" means "produced by God", and this means, in terms of our discussion of God in Chapter VIII, "arising from those aspects of the nature of things which are experienced in the five fundamentals of change, dependence, etc." Thus divine inspiration can be intelligibly interpreted to mean that the Scriptures are very particularly transparent to and vehicles of the basic experiences called religious.

According to such an interpretation there is no sharp line which divides sacred writings from all other literature. Many other works have great power of mediating the divine in essentially the same way as the Scriptures. The only claim the Scriptures have must rest upon the long experience of the group whose religious life is nourished by them.

Closely akin to the idea of inspiration is the concept of *revelation*. This means that the sacred writings, in contrast with other literature, are regarded as disclosures of the divine nature and will. Matters ordinarily hidden from man are made plain through the Scriptures. The revelatory character of sacred writings results essentially from their powerful exemplification of the first two fundamentals of religious experience: In the first place, there is the marked element of surprise, of wonder and amazement at the new and wholly unexpected things that have come to pass (e.g., deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt or from Babylon, the sense of a living presence among the disciples who had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion). In this respect something hidden has come to light. In the second place, there is a strong sense of dependence, in the conviction that these surprising things have been done to them and were not of their own will or making. Coupled with these two primary elements in the experience of revelation there is the opening of new and hitherto undisclosed horizons for the fulfillment of life (order, value, and especially the experience of imperfection). Thus revelation combines all the fundamentals of religious experience. Again it must be said, however, that Scripture is not the only source of revelation, in our sense of the word. While the events of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures certainly have remarkable revelatory power, we cannot deny such power to other events or to other writings. The extent of such power depends upon the particular nature of the writings, of those who use them, and of the situations in which they are produced and read.

Two problems now present themselves. The first is that when certain writings are officially accepted as the sacred canon, they tend to assume a position of finality which resists any further critical testing by corporate experience. They now become the norm for experience rather than a canon judged by experience. When this happens, it may no longer be true that the Scriptures possess intrinsic authority based on contemporary experience. Their authority may then need to be bolstered by extrinsic and arbitrary means. This has taken place with respect to most if not all of the sacred writings of the historic religions. Conditions of life have radically changed since

ancient times. It is therefore extremely difficult for the average person so to translate the biblical view into his own idiom that the ancient experiences become relevant to him. For this reason the ancient writings often tend to obscure rather than to illuminate the religious dimensions of experience. To the normal difficulty of penetrating to a more profound level of understanding is added the burden of thinking in terms of both an ancient and a modern world-view. This is not to deny that the sacred writings contain insights of permanent significance. But it is in order to ask whether there is not an imperative in every age for the production of "sacred" literature which will express -- possibly better than the ancient writings -- the deepest religious insights and experiences of civilization. Our analysis of religion and of the meaning of inspiration would suggest an affirmative answer to this question.

The second problem is that of the plurality of sacred books. Each religious group tends to exalt its sacred canon to a leading or to an exclusive position. Obviously everyone cannot make his claim good. Orthodox western religions have accorded a unique status to their particular Bibles. For each of them there is only one holy book, provided by God for the ultimate religious guidance of man. Such exclusive claims are in the same class as claims of exclusive Churches. The two claims generally go together. The only intelligible solution to this problem would seem to be to admit the relative religious value, based on experience, of each group's scriptures for its own corporate life, but to recognize that no book has final authority. To claim finality is to deny the basic religious principle implied by the experience of imperfection, and (as was shown above in connection with Church exclusiveness) to destroy the other basic elements in religious experience as well.

Among the important components of the sacred writings are the oracles of the prophets. It is often thought that the function of the prophet is to forecast the future. While there is some truth in this, it does not do justice to the real meaning of prophecy in the Old Testament. The true significance of the prophets of Israel was that they were able to discern the deeper meaning of historical events. They were "seers", i.e., those who *see* deeply into the meanings of events. They were interpreters, who understood what lay beneath the superficial and usually deceptive appearances. Their interpretation was not only a matter of predicting consequences. They were as much concerned with pointing out the meaning of past events and of present situations as with the future.

The Christians, in their zeal to find confirmation for their claim that Jesus was the Messiah, unfortunately obscured the original and really authentic meaning of Old Testament prophecy by seeking to show that the prophets had foretold the coming of Jesus. While there are in the Old Testament prophetic proclamations of a Messianic Age to come, only by the most narrow and literalistic special pleading can the specific foretelling of Jesus be defended.

Prophecy in its true sense is important because it furnishes an excellent illustration of some of the fundamentals of religious experience. The most striking thing about the prophet is his sense of divine commission. He does not regard himself as his own agent but as a spokesman for God,

who instructs him to deliver messages to his people. This sense of commission is simply a well-developed consciousness of dependence. It is also a powerful experience of value. The prophet is one who feels that he is grasped or impelled by a demand placed upon him. He has a total commitment, which comes from being wholly and unequivocally caught up by an ideal. It is also as though a key has slipped into place and a door has been unlocked towards future possibilities. The prophet has a keen sense of present imperfection and a vivid apprehension of a better order beyond. Thus he is able to pronounce judgment on the existing order, threatening destruction of every order which resists the pressure of a higher level of community, and holding out the promise of a glorious new age to all who are faithful to this demand.

The prophet is an interpreter because he is able to see the religious dimension in what appear to others as ordinary events. He actually carries out in a particularly complete and faithful way the pursuit of the implications which are present in all experience if profoundly examined. The prophet is in this sense a "religious genius". But this does not mean that he is actually a specially designated agent of God with a relation to him that others cannot have. His genius lies in his ability to discern more clearly what is open to all to see and understand in the universal experience of the race. To be sure, some events are more provocative of religious insight than others, and it is these upon which the prophet chiefly draws. But it remains true that the prophet’s experience is not different in kind from the experience of any other man, and that his greatness and relevance lies not so much in his unique capacities as in the fact that he does represent the universal religious perspective implicit in the experience of every man.

Prophecy is one of the characteristic components of Scripture. Another is accounts of miracles. Miracle stories are also, found outside the sacred canon. In the popular mind the miraculous element is chiefly what makes a religion sacred. To many people religion without miracles would not be religion, and the Scriptures without miracle stories would not be a holy book. The word "miracle" is usually understood to mean any astonishing, extraordinary, inexplicable event which is regarded as signifying the activity of divine agencies.

There are miracles of many kinds. "Nature miracles" are events which appear to contradict the established order of nature, such as the stilling of a storm at sea. Another kind -- healing miracles -- are especially common in the reports. There are miraculous restorations of the dead to life (resurrection stories) which in the case of Jesus is the central Christian miracle. There are communication miracles, in the form of supernatural visions and revelations (usually to prophets or seers). Some miracles are regular in occurrence (e.g., the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament, according to the Roman Catholic view), while some are unique (as in Christ’s resurrection). Some have a moral purpose (as the parting of the sea for the deliverance of the Israelites), while others have none (the withering of the fig tree cursed by Jesus). Some miracles are worked directly by God, while others are performed by holy men -- prophets, apostles, or saints.

The conditions favorable for belief in miracle reports are several: a strong religious conviction, a

vivid imagination, a pre-scientific or non-scientific view of the world, and discontent with the conditions of everyday life as a result of boredom, oppression, or want.

There are several ways in which miracle reports may be interpreted. The orthodox view is that they are direct evidence of supernatural intervention and must be believed without question. A second view is that miracles are due to the operation of natural laws not yet discovered or perhaps of laws now known but not understood by those who reported the miracles. A third view is that miracles are faith-symbols, that they are dramatic representations of the inner meaning of events to those who witnessed them with the eye of faith.

It is actually necessary to deal with each kind of miracle on its own merits. No doubt many of the phenomena of nature, once regarded as miraculous interventions, are now understood as regular parts of the cosmic order. Probably many of the reported miraculous healings did occur. We are only beginning now to understand some of the mechanisms by which emotional and physical factors are inter-related, and therefore to possess a rudimentary explanation of faith healing. Some miracle reports -- especially the most exaggerated ones -- must surely be taken as nothing more than products of the pious imagination. It is also important to remember that most miracle stories come from a pre-scientific age, in which there was no conception of a uniform order of nature. The world was regarded as directly governed by spiritual powers, as a man controls his body. It was therefore taken for granted that "signs and wonders" would occur.

How shall we interpret miracles in the light of our analysis of religious experience? First let it be said that a blind acceptance of such stories simply because they are in the Bible or attested by Church authority has no place in an intelligent religious outlook. In the second place, we cannot and should not, even or especially in our religious outlook, abandon the search for the intelligible structure of the natural order through orderly scientific means. Miracle stories which conflict with well-tested scientific evidence are to be regarded as extremely improbable. Miracles which can be explained by natural means should be analyzed in that way. Miracles which are neither in conflict with scientific evidence nor explicable by known natural laws should be regarded as stimuli for further inquiry. But in the third place we should not be so intent on the orderly structures of nature that we lose sight of the essential religious meaning of miracles. This leads to their interpretation as faith-symbols, as mentioned above. Miracle stories are fundamentally ways of expressing the conviction that the nature of things is not just what it appears to be, but that there are resident in the world hidden depths and heights of possibility, for which from time to time there is at least some evidence. They point to the fact that life is full of surprises and that for those who have eyes to see there is untold treasure of latent richness which may come into being.

This leads us back to the fundamentals of religious experience. The implications of change are especially relevant to the understanding of miracle. In fact, one does not really understand the religious meaning of change until he sees it as miracle. Change is the perennial source of miracle. The supreme wonder is that the wholly new emerges -- apparently from nowhere. The

questions raised by the fact of change are expressed in the recognition that a miracle has occurred. In this sense the pre-scientific interpretation of surprising natural phenomena as miracles is really more perceptive than the routine acceptance of every occurrence as part of an invariable law-abiding order of things. What is required in intelligible religion is to preserve an appreciation both for the principle of order and for the acknowledgment of wonder in the presence of the new.

Miracles also need to be understood in the light of dependence. For the miraculous is always regarded as something that *happe*ns *to* one. It is a gift, wholly unexpected and unprepared for, not a human achievement but a contribution from the endlessly rich sources of being. Furthermore, by its novelty miracle impels a recognition of order, not in the sense of a regular occurrence, but as a given structure or condition which is *this* rather than *that*. Miracles represent the perception of unexpected orders in existence. Again, miracles always arise in situations of intense value-experience. In fact, the overwhelming surge of new life which comes when one enters -- usually quite unexpectedly -- into a profound value-relationship has all the quality of a miracle. There is truth in such a familiar phrase as "the miracle of love". The surprising gift of a vivifying new human relationship is a miracle. Finally, miracle implies the opening of new horizons. It is not the immediate event in itself which is miraculous. It is the power some occurrences have of raising the curtain upon endless vistas of higher possibilities which makes them miracles, i.e., which makes it possible to appear miraculous. Thus the experience of imperfection also contributes to the understanding of the miraculous.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that miracle, so defined, is the essence of religion. There is no deeply religious experience, according to our interpretation, which is not miraculous. Intelligible religion need not (as some would recommend) deny miracle. Rather it would appear that miracle freed from literalistic and unscientific connotations and re-interpreted in the light of fundamental experience is an essential to significant religion.

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Intelligible Religion by Philip H. Phenix

Part 3: Application To Some Traditional Religious Problems

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Chapter 13: Prayer and Sacrament

The most characteristic religious activity is prayer. If we discover what a man's prayer is, we know the most important part of his religion. Prayer is religion in operation. In prayer religion is not theory but act. Therefore if we are concerned with outlining an intelligible religion, it is important to understand what prayer is.

Generally speaking, prayer is the process of communication between man and God. More usually it refers only to the communication from man to God. The reverse process, from God to man, is called by such names as inspiration, revelation, or divine guidance. But it is clear that the two processes ought to be considered together. There are many different kinds of prayer. In terms of content, a distinction is often made between prayers of confession, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, and adoration. Prayers may be either informal or liturgical, silent or spoken, corporate or individual. Each type merits its own special analysis and presents its own peculiar problems, yet all these kinds of prayers still possess the generic character of communication of man with God. Our basic task in understanding prayer is therefore to analyze what such communication means.

This brings us back to the problem of the nature of God, which was discussed in Chapter VIII. Communication means the transfer of information from one being to another. The nature of the process depends upon the nature of the beings who communicate and the means of transmission employed. Prayer may therefore be understood only in the light of the nature of God and of the relation of the Deity to man. Now it has been the constant theme of this book that the intelligible basis for dealing with all such problems is to make explicit the fundamental experiences out of which the religious ideas arise. We are invited thus to ask: What does prayer mean in the light of the "fundamentals" of religion described in Part Two ?

We have seen that the meaning of the word "God" can be designated by reference to certain aspects of universal experience. We said that it is appropriate, for example, to use the word in connection with the "shock" of the new or with the recognition of limitless ideal possibilities in every situation. If we have included all of the aspects of experience in which the use of the word "God" is appropriate, we have automatically included those which define prayer, since prayer is one important God-experience. That is to say, the meaning of God and the meaning of prayer are comprehended in the same analysis.

Let us consider, for example, the prayer of confession. A man pours out his admission of guilt, perhaps in a room by himself, where no person can hear him. He speaks as to an unseen Person and believes that he is heard. It makes no difference whether the words are spoken or silent. It does not even matter if the prayer is formulated in words at all. The deeply felt attitude of contrition and repentance is enough. What actually happens in such an act of prayer? In what sense is there any communication involved ? The traditional answer would be that there actually is present a spiritual Being in the room with the pray-er (as well as everywhere else) and that this Being "hears" the words, thoughts, and deepest feelings of the confessor. The trouble with such an answer is that it would be impossible for the believer to convince the skeptic of the existence of any such Being, any more than he could persuade the unbeliever of the existence of a ghost in the house. The simple assertion of the existence of such a Presence is therefore not satisfactory for an intelligible religious view. The problem is solved if an entirely different approach is used --namely, to show that one aspect of the definition of "God" and the understanding of the prayer of confession are simultaneously given in the analysis of the experience of imperfection. It is obvious that confession by itself does not imply prayer. One can admit guilt in a thousand ways without engaging in prayer. Confession becomes prayer when it is made with a consciousness of the limitlessness of the possibilities of goodness against which every human achievement must appear as a relative failure. Confession is prayer when guilt is seen in the light of the consciousness of imperfection. But we have shown that this experience is one of the ways in which God is defined. Therefore the experience of imperfection contains within itself both an aspect of the *definition* of God and the basis for interpreting the prayer of confession. If "God" is the name applied to that dimension of existence in which its boundless perfectibility is seen, the prayer of confession is man’s response to this recognition, in the face of his own actual performance.

Such a mode of analysis avoids the skeptic’s perplexities. There is no need to cast about for ways in which to exhibit some unseen Presence. For the act of heartfelt repentance in the light of limitless perfectibility is itself the experience in which both the unseen Presence and the process of communicating with that Presence are defined. The trouble with the traditional picture is that it encourages the idea of God on the one hand as a kind of pervasive substance and on the other as a particular Being with whom transfer of thought takes place as with other human beings. Such ideas are crude and confusing pictorial representations which do justice neither to the fundamental religious experiences nor to the realities of the life of prayer.

One of the best ways of clarifying what we mean here is to deal with the question about the objectivity of prayer. It is usually maintained that there are only two possibilities: Either God is an objective Being separate from us, to whom we pray, or else prayer is "purely subjective"-- a talking to oneself. This antithesis -- on the surface so obvious -- in point of fact cannot be defended. It is quite analogous -- for the same reasons -- to the familiar antithesis of the individual and society. Some maintain that society is the sum total of the individuals who constitute it. Others reply that the individual is the product of society. The first makes the individual basic and society derivative, while the second reverses the order of precedence. Actually individual and society are both abstractions from the concrete reality of "community" or persons-in-relationship. There is no such thing as a person apart from his relationships, and there can be no human relationships without persons. So it is with prayer. It is neither a purely objective nor a purely subjective process. Prayer is objective in the sense that it involves the participation of the pray-er in the manifold inter-relations which the world in which he lives imposes. For instance, in the prayer of confession the confessor is directly confronted with the objective and unalterable fact of actual existence and the heights of possibility which it contains. The awareness of imperfection is nothing which he generates, as it were, by an act of will, but is borne in upon him as one of the given structures of his experience of life in the world as it is and as it might be. (The relevance for the prayer of confession of the awareness of dependence upon the given structures of existence, as well as of the awareness of imperfection, is evident from these comments). On the other hand, prayer is also subjective in that it is in the act of prayer that the person most fully becomes a subject or a self. Just as it is only in relationship to other persons that one’s selfhood can be achieved, so it is true that full selfhood requires ever wider and deeper relationships -- for example to the possibilities of what might be, and not only to persons who now are. To return to prayer of confession, the act of recognizing guilt in the light of limitless possibilities is a person-creating act. One becomes a self in a deeper sense through such an act. In this sense prayer is the matrix out of which selfhood grows. This brief discussion should make it clear that prayer is neither purely objective nor purely subjective. It is a process in which the one who prays is constantly related in a profound way to his whole objective world (with both material and mental aspects) and is thereby creatively transformed into a mature person.

This means that in the case of prayer a broader concept of "communication" must be employed than is usually the case. In prayer there is no communication in the ordinary sense between two separate beings -- man and God. Nor is man simply "talking to himself" in prayer, as though a genuine transaction involving the objective world were not taking place. Communication in the usual sense requires the use of objective signs or symbols and a medium through which the transfer of information proceeds. Prayer needs no outward signs and requires no medium. Ordinary communication is a transfer in space and time between creatures with specific space-time locations. Prayer, though it takes place in space and time in creatures who are of space and time, is not a matter of transfer through space in time. Transfer is not involved because the act of prayer takes place solely within human experiences in which the person is confronted immediately (i.e., without mediation) with the reality of his own existence and of his world on

the deepest levels of awareness (change, dependence, etc.). There is no need to "project", a prayer to a God who is "out there". Prayer is an inward and intimate act. In all these ways it is not communication in the ordinary sense. It is communication only in the sense that in the act of prayer one does "break through" the bounds of preliminary concern and reach an awareness of the ultimate dimensions of life. This implies the establishment of a new relationship of one's self with his total world, the creation of a new depth of community, or in fact a form of "communication". This broader sense of the word communication thus really follows from the broader meaning of the word community in not being restricted to the harmonious spatial and temporal interrelation of persons. For example, just as there can be "community" of ideas in a well-integrated philosophy, so communication may be taken (as in the analysis of confessory prayer) to mean the establishment of an appreciation of one's relatedness to the world as endlessly perfectible.

The analysis of prayer provides the best understanding of what it means to say that God is personal. It is possible to speak meaningfully of communication between animals or between man and animals, but in neither of these cases is there the richness of content as in communication between persons. There is a sense, perhaps, in which even plants or rocks communicate with human beings. But this is not to be compared with what takes place between persons. We commonly describe as "impersonal" those situations in which communication in the full sense does not take place. The difference between personal and impersonal encounters is that the former are relevant to the growth and development of persons on the highest levels of achievement and require the exercise of the distinctively human powers of thought, imagination, and concept formation, while the latter do not. From what we have already said about prayer, it is clear that the prayer-situation is one which is supremely relevant to the fulfillment of the highest human potentiality (e.g., envisaging of ideal possibilities) and which calls for the exercise of the distinctively human capacities (e.g., imagination, reflection, deep feeling). Man's encounter with his life situation in prayer, as described above, is therefore a supremely personal encounter. It is the personal nature of the prayer response that one makes in the religious dimensions of experience which is the ground for saying that God is personal. As already pointed out in Chapter VIII, to affirm this is not to say that God is a person. In usual speech "a person" is a human being. God is not a human being. Nor is it helpful to regard God as a *Being* who is personal. The statement "God is personal" is rather a way of speaking of the intensely personal character of the "communication" which takes place in the act of prayer. In fact, nowhere else does the self so truly "come to itself" or "find itself" as in the experiences we have called religious. That is what is meant by the statement "God is personal".

So far we have illustrated our discussion only with the prayer of confession, which was shown to be especially related to the experiences of imperfection and of dependence. Let us now consider briefly some of the other types of prayer. The prayer of thanksgiving is directly involved in the experience of value and of dependence. Thankfulness stems from a vivid sense of the goodness of life combined with an awareness of its given or derived nature. The prayer of thanksgiving is the human response to this combined experience. Does God hear this thankful expression and is he pleased with it? Obviously there is no "hearing" in the ordinary sense, and God's "pleasure"

must be equally metaphorical. "God hears" in the sense that the giving of thanks is not a dead-end process, but is a creative act which "registers" in terms of consequences which confirm or strengthen community. It is this enhancement of community which also constitutes the divine "pleasure".

The case of prayers of petition is more ambiguous. In common thought prayer usually means simply petition -- asking God for things. Of such prayer probably the first thing to say is that it is in large part an unworthy and superstitious practice. It is fundamentally a self-centered act and therefore an enemy of community. Much petitionary prayer is sanctified magic -- an attempt to employ divine powers to serve human purposes. There is no convincing evidence to show that petitionary prayers are "answered", i.e., that imploring the Deity for things that we wish will of itself hasten their coming. For every case of fulfillment (which is long remembered and often spoken of) there are probably dozens of forgotten disappointments.

There is actually nothing religious except in a conventional and formal sense about prayers of petition as just described. However, petitionary prayer may be genuinely religious in character when instead of asking for what he selfishly wants the petitioner earnestly prays for "the will of God" to be done. In such a prayer all the fundamentals of religious experience are involved: passionate yearning (value), awareness of given forms and structures (order), humility in the face of higher possibilities not yet realized (imperfection), faithful recognition of sources of being (dependence), and expectancy of new shapes of things to come (change). In contrast with selfish petition, the religious petitioner is always open to wider possibilities, is tentative in judgment, and is capable of wonder and surprise. Such prayers are indeed answered, in that such receptive attitudes do lead to maximum fulfillment. Religious petition does not need to be general, in the form of seeking "the will of God" or "the kingdom of heaven" or "the truth". Generally it should not be of this form, but should involve requests for specific goods. What makes such prayer religious is the way in which the goods are asked for. The request should be, in effect, a device for seeking community. It is virtually a hypothesis to be tested. It is as though the asker were to say, "Let us see whether the giving of this for which I have a deeply-felt desire may not serve to extend the cause of community." Desire itself, by which (as we have seen) value is indicated, is an invitation to community. The only question is whether the community so established is restrictive of larger community or is conducive to its fuller realization. What makes a desire into a real prayer of petition is the entertainment of that desire chiefly within the consciousness of the tentativeness and inevitable imperfection of the object of desire.

One form of religious petition is the "prayer for guidance". This does not mean that in prayer one has a source of information not available through the normal channels of desire disciplined by intelligence, experience and imaginative insight. It does mean that through religious awareness new material is provided for the direction of conduct by these normal means. Desires are criticized and transmuted by the vision of higher possibilities, wider dependences and inter-relationships are taken into account, expectation of new forms replaces fixation on determined goals. The prayer for guidance is thus the search for direction within the context of the

awareness of change, the acknowledgment of the sources of being, the acceptance of the discipline of form, the response to value, and the vision of limitless perfectibility.

Of all the classic forms of prayer, intercession is perhaps the most difficult to interpret affirmatively along the lines of our general analysis. It seems very doubtful, in our present state of knowledge, that much help can be given to others without any direct communication with them, solely by the act of praying for them. Often such intercession is unselfish, and so cannot be criticized as irreligious on that ground. Whatever value there may be in intercession springs from the fact of inter-dependence. It is the pervasive network of inter-relationships spoken of in Chapter IV which is the ground for any efficacy that intercession may have. There is at least a possibility that forms of influence may be exerted by one person on another without any of the modes of mediation now known. Until such possibilities are better understood, intercession literally interpreted will seem to have little meaning. As a symbolic means of enhancing the other forms of prayer through the imaginative consideration of other persons, it will continue to have considerable value.

The prayer of adoration is the highest form of all because in it self-concern is lost in the joyous contemplation of the supremely good. The consciousness of guilt is overshadowed by the freshness and beauty of a new awareness of the boundless goodness constantly poured out into the world. The remembrance of particular past benefits received is lost in the sense of profound gratitude to the source of all being. Requests for particular goods desired become irrelevant in the moment when one feels as though he were drinking from the fountain from which all blessings flow. It is like the lover who adores the beloved and is not concerned with this or that advantage or benefit to be conferred. Adoration is the whole-hearted response to the lure of community. As such it is the fulfillment of all the fundamentals of religious experience.

Of the various *forms* which prayer assumes -- vocal or silent, public or private, liturgical or free -- little needs to be said here. It should only be observed that *some* forms there must be. There are particular structures of thought and feeling which constitute prayer as a characteristic mode of activity. There are prayer forms which are appropriate in some situations but not in others. The structure of prayer must be determined in each case in such a way as to maximize the fundamental consciousness of change, dependence, etc., and their implications. Any response within such a basically religious awareness is prayer, whether called by that name or not. Doubtless much that passes for prayer is a routine and meaningless exercise dictated by custom. And much that is not called prayer actually has the reality of prayer, in the way we have described it. On the other hand, the purpose of the classical disciplines of the life of prayer -- such as postures, directing of thoughts, or devotional objects -- is to provide what have proved in actual experience to be the most favorable conditions for real prayer. While these may contain valuable suggestions, it remains as a task for every generation to discover new ways in which to deepen and to enrich the basic experiences which make up the creative life of prayer.

This consideration of the forms of worship leads naturally to the topic of sacred acts and sacred

objects. In Christianity the most important of these are the sacraments. Roman Catholics name seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, ordination, marriage, penance, and extreme unction. Most Protestants recognize only two: baptism and the Eucharist. The traditional definition of a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace". The word "grace" here signifies a gift or an endowment. A sacrament is thus an outward, visible vehicle for the imparting of a spiritual gift.

We can understand the nature of the sacraments by the use of the fundamentals of religious experience. Three of these fundamentals are particularly relevant in this connection. The most important one is *order*. A sacramental act is a very special and particular kind of act. Not just any act will serve as the stimulator of religious experience. There are only certain forms which will serve as powerful reminders of the divine. For example, in the sacrament of baptism there is apparently a special virtue or power in the symbolic washing of a penitent with water. There is a peculiar quality about water -- perhaps its essential purity and its fundamental place in the economy of all life -- which especially fits it for use as a symbol of the forgiveness of sin. Also for this purpose the act of washing or sprinkling is peculiarly appropriate rather than some other use of the water, such as drinking it. The special form of the sacrament of baptism is therefore especially powerful in representing symbolically the inward sense of the obliteration of guilt. In the sacrament of the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper there is also a characteristically appropriate form. The inward and spiritual grace to be conferred by it is identification with the risen Christ. For this purpose the appropriate act is the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. The act of eating and drinking implies the closest possible identity -- so that Christ (as represented in the elements) becomes embodied in us in flesh and blood. The wine also stands for enhanced vitality ("spirit") and the bread for the enduring sustenance of life. Furthermore, the form of the sacrament relates the Christian to the historical roots in Judaism in which similar rites in recollection of the deliverance from bondage in Egypt are celebrated. In all these ways the sacramental acts in the Lord’s Supper serve in a unique way to stimulate a sense of the new life in Christ, the conquest of death, and the triumphant fulfillment of the ages-long expectations of God’s people for redemption. The same kind of analysis would apply in the case of other sacraments. For each one it would become apparent that the special form of the symbolic acts and objects has a particular power of generating the type of religious awareness appropriate to it.

The second fundamental which is especially relevant to the understanding of sacrament is the awareness of imperfection. It is of the nature of symbols to point beyond themselves to that which they represent. This means that the symbol is effective when it stimulates a sense of the more perfect, of which it is only a feeble representation. Thus, in baptism there would be no sacrament were the penitent to rest content merely with the purification by water. The act is symbolic because such purification is vividly seen as the very partial reflection of what real purification might be. That is, the limitless possibilities of forgiveness and inner purity are glimpsed in the moment of receiving the partial and imperfect outward purification by water. In a similar way, the Eucharist is sacramental only because the worshipper does not rest content with the mere eating of bread and the drinking of wine. He experiences the vivid awareness of the fragmentary and partial character of the life which these elements impart and in that

awareness becomes conscious of the endless possibilities for the fulfillment of life which lie beyond every actual achievement. Thus the awareness of imperfection is also a necessary aspect of the sacramental act. It is this which makes the particular form expressive of a religious dimension rather than merely of its own intrinsic value.

Sacraments also well illustrate a third of the fundamentals -- the consciousness of dependence. The sacrament is the outward sign of an inward *grace*. Without the recognition of a gift there is no sacrament. The sacramental act is not a way of doing something, but a means by which something is done in the worshipper. In baptism the penitent does not wash himself but is washed outwardly and receives the gift of forgiveness. In the Eucharist the worshipper does not unite himself with Christ, but he receives the gifts of bread and wine by which he expects inner nourishment from the sources of spiritual life upon which he depends.

In Protestant Christianity, although there are generally only two recognized sacraments, "the Word of God" as recorded in the Bible is often regarded as having a sacred character and the reading of the Bible as in effect a sacramental act. The Bible is called a Holy Book and it is usually accorded special veneration. The biblical Word has a sacred character when it succeeds in evoking religious awareness with unique power and clarity. The sacredness of the Bible rests upon the demonstration, through generation after generation within the religious community, that it is able to do this. This is the basis for the uniqueness claimed for the Bible, as pointed out in the previous chapter. Through its visible pages the believer claims he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit opening his inward eyes to the hitherto hidden truth about himself and the perplexing and wonderful world in which he lives. It is this essentially sacramental character of the Scriptures -- the special forms of the words and sentences which give them unique power to point beyond themselves to the sources of being from which untold possibilities spring -- that explains what is meant by the statement that for the believer the Bible is the Word of God.

The essential character of sacrament will be misunderstood unless two points are constantly kept in mind: First, the sacredness of the objects or acts does not lie in themselves. If it did, they would no longer be symbols, the essential nature of which is to point beyond themselves. Sacraments are not fetishes. They are not of themselves filled with sacred power. There is always a danger that sacraments will come to be regarded in this mistaken way. The Roman Catholic view of the sacraments (e.g., the doctrine of transubstantiation, that the consecrated elements in the Eucharist are actually the body and blood of Christ) tends especially to degenerate in this way. The common view of the magical efficacy of baptism is the outstanding example of a degraded view of the sacrament. The other point to be clear about is that sacraments are not merely arbitrary rites agreed upon by social convention, but possessing no inherent symbolic power. This is the opposite error to the magical view just mentioned. It is characteristic of the liberal and rationalistic wing of the Church. Against this view, the special power of sacramental symbols must be affirmed. There is a peculiar fitness of certain forms for the production of religious awareness. These forms may not arbitrarily be created or destroyed. They can only be *discovered* in the long course of religious development, and while their special

power can in some measure be understood it must primarily be accepted as a given fact in the nature of things.

This discussion leads to some concluding remarks about the relation of religious symbols to universal religion. The existence of special religious symbols -- sacraments, rites, holy books, sacred institutions -- is the basic argument by which the particular historic faiths support their universal claim. They argue that, given the nature of things, there are only certain pathways to God and that the forms approved by their special group are the appropriate symbols for representing him and for providing the "means of grace" by which the divine life is mediated to man. In apparent opposition, we have claimed throughout this book that religious awareness is possible in every human experience -- that the fundamentals described in Part Two are universal and central, in the sense that there is no experience to which they are not relevant. There is no necessary opposition between this view and the recognition of the function of religious symbols. It is true that while the fundamentals of religious experience are relevant in every possible situation the nature of things is such that particular kinds of situations may be more conducive than others to the awakening of these fundamental awarenesses. These situations are religiously symbolic. They are the justification for all the special forms, practices, and institutions of organized religion.

Nevertheless, there is a variety of such special forms; no single symbol or set of symbols will suffice to express the ultimate in religious meaning, and any and all of them should serve only to stimulate an awareness of the religious dimension in all experience. The symbols too easily become ends in themselves. As such they are crystallized in the dogmatic finality of an Absolute Church. They are properly only means to an end -- the recognition of the whole world as a "sacramental universe". Particular symbols serve their true purpose only when they lead out beyond themselves, not to the momentary vision of the divine, but to the habitual realization of the religious dimension in every human experience.

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