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## THE MEANING OF RELIGION

Some Remarks about the Semantic Constitution of Ultimate Realities.<sup>1</sup>

### I - Introduction

Since sociologists and other social scientists study religion as a social phenomenon, they tried to explain its universality and variety by relating its origin, function and changing aspects to social reality and its structural and evolutionary aspects. Two basic approaches to the problem of explaining the relation religion – society – individual can be distinguished:

- 1) Religion as a *system of human beliefs and practices* is defined by the *sacredness* of its elements<sup>2</sup>. Basic questions are: how is this sacredness maintained by a group of people and how does this established „sacred canopy“ (Peter L. Berger)<sup>3</sup> influence the profane world? Thus the transcendental quality of religion remains beyond the sociologists capacity for scientific explanation<sup>4</sup>, it has to be taken for granted, and the question *why* a group of people defines this sacred realm cannot – at least to my opinion – be discussed sufficiently.
- 2) Religion as a *system of meaningful symbols* is defined by the *relation between the sacred and the profane*. What problems of human existence are answered by religion?<sup>5</sup> Why do people believe and rely on religious symbols in mastering their individual as well as collective life? This approach can be considered as a „semantic approach“, which is concentrated on the social meaning of socially used symbols and symbol systems.<sup>6</sup>

The consequence of this second approach is to analyze the human life-world and its problematic structures and aspects as a *framework that makes religion possible*. What is the foundation for the acceptance of religious symbols as meaningful signs of orientation? How do religious symbols gain and lose such a specific meaning? These are the basic questions that need to be answered. Only then the manifold aspects of religion in a changing society can be explained adequately.

Religion as a system of meaningful symbols can be analyzed as „knowledge“ about the *contingent aspects of social reality*. This *contingency* leads to the question how this reality is constructed and maintained with respect to the problems of *human cognition, emotion and action*. This point of view is common to the sociology of knowledge since Peter L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's certainly epoch-making work about the „Social Construction of Reality“<sup>7</sup> And Berger and Luckmann stated themselves that studying the meaning of religious symbols is a central part of analyzing the growth and maintenance of human knowledge about the world and the problems of action in this world:<sup>8</sup>

„The sociology of religion is an integral and even central part of the sociology of knowledge. – Its most important task is to analyze the cognitive and normative apparatus by which a socially constructed universe (that is knowledge about it) is legitimated“.

The realisation that religious symbols are a central part of the constitution of the human life-world – here still restricted to the problems of its legitimation – carries on the attempts of the classical sociology of religion to explain the origin and persistence of religious symbols.

Karl Marx<sup>9</sup>, Max Weber<sup>10</sup>, and Émile Durkheim<sup>11</sup> are, I think, the most important classical theorists in this respect. Their analysis of religion leads to the consequence that religion is knowledge about human insufficiency and simultaneously the attempt to deal with this insufficiency, by giving the possibility for action where otherwise successful action and cognition would be impossible. The essential arguments of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, which inspired Berger/ Luck-

mann as well as our hereby presented „constitutional analysis“ of religious symbols are, I think, the following:

The deepest root of religion are the problems of individual interpretation of the world and individual action in this world. Thus religion is compensation with respect to phenomena not yet ripe for explanation and handling, and at the same time the first step to master these problems (religion as selfconsciousness and selfalienation of man (Feuerbach), as ideology and utopical thinking (Marx) and as first step to rationality (Weber)). At the same time religion symbolizes the fact that human life is only possible as part of collectivity, by sharing the social reality (Durkheim). Religious symbols lead to the conceiving of other possibilities of human existence (Marx) and give a strong motivation to set these possibilities into effect, hereby gaining dominance over the social world, even in the secularized form of a specific ethic (Weber). Thus religion is the reflection of the central problems of human existence, and just as these problems are specific to the social and historical context, the answers of religion are specific to this context, too (religion as superstructure, Marx).

Studying the different theories of religion, I now always missed a general and coherent analysis of religious symbols based on this starting point. P.L. Berger & Th. Luckmann for example look primarily at the problem of legitimation, Sigmund Freud<sup>12</sup> mostly at the problem of compensation, and Bronislaw Malinowski<sup>13</sup> basically at the problems of successful action, all of them trying to explain religion by these partial aspects alone, and thus reducing the complexity of the possible social meaning and social use of religious symbols.

Many authors, on the other hand, concentrate their analysis on the *special quality* of religious symbols – their transcendentality, their *sacred character*, distinguishing them from profane symbols and reality (Durkheim). This is an important question, but not the problem I want to deal with here, and not sufficient to explain religion. My problem is not the syntax of religious symbols, but their *semantic constitution* and their following *pragmatic significance*:

How is the paramount reality of religious symbols linked to everyday social reality – not of a specific culture at a given time, but: what possibilities of this semantic relation and its pragmatic use do exist? I think that only after discussing this problem and thus conceiving a theoretical frame, concrete religions and their symbols can be analyzed adequately: that is with view to their origin as well as to their present meaning (semantically and pragmatically).

## II - Semantic (and pragmatic) dimensions of religious symbols

After these preliminary remarks I can begin with my central reflections about the semantics – personal as well as social dimensions – of religious symbols. In this respect there can be distinguished three areas in which the *contingency of the human life-world* can be pointed out and discussed with reference to religious symbols, their semantic significance and pragmatic context:

- (1) Problems of *individual consciousness and experience*;
- (2) Problems of *human interaction and social integration* of the individual;
- (3) Problems of *constructing, maintaining, and changing social structures* and their interpretation.

*ad 1* (Problems of individual consciousness and experience):

Starting point is the relation of individual man and his world, which is a conscious one, that is: man must reflect his needs and urges as well as the possibilities of satisfying them within his environment (natural and social). Man does not fit instinctively into his environment, only by culture and individual learning of the culturally defined meaningful activities. The conscious and

rational (that is: reflection of aims and means) relation of man to his relevant environment now leads to the first consequence, that the possibility of *unsuccessful action* must be calculated. Culture has to explain this possibility and to give the chance for action dealing with this problem of uncertainty. The *magic elements of religion* deal with these problems: magic forces are responsible for the conditions of success and can be influenced by magic rituals. I here only can refer to the profound analysis of Bronislaw Malinowski<sup>14</sup> concerning the magic practices of the *Trobriand*<sup>15</sup> aborigines, where the most necessary and most uncertain activities, i.e. fishing on the sea, are heavily loaded with magic, whereas other, more calculable activities show no magic at all. By the way, astrology and its persistence in modern industrial civilisation can also be explained by its magic elements: the forces playing upon individual life are as uncertain as ever, the need for explanation as strong as ever.

The conscious relation of man to his (natural and social) environment also has the consequence, that this environment is full of surprises, which cannot be explained by personal or cultural experiences of everyday life. There must be the possibility to deal with these surprising qualities of the world. Herin the *explaining elements of religion* are rooted: invisible forces, demons for example, responsible for familiar as well as for unfamiliar, surprising aspects of reality, explain all possibilities of human experience.<sup>16</sup> The christian concept of miracle also has explaining quality.

Within the culturally defined horizon of human activity no individual can fully participate in reality. Its time, space and energy is limited. Individual consciousness has to deal with these limitations. Thus symbols giving personal compensation can be identified. These *elements of personal compensation* in religion are for example projections: no personal limitations after death; or by conceiving supernatural beings (God) without limitations: allmighty, allpresent, eternal; or cognitive compensations: the experience of limitations is due to some eternal or divine plan. An example is the Hindu concept of birth and rebirth on a stage with less limitations, due to the former personal life.<sup>17</sup>

We now have discussed the main cognitive problems of human consciousness dealt with by religious symbols. The sphere of emotion now is just as important. Religion dealing with human emotions was already discussed by S. Freud,<sup>18</sup> only restricted to the problem of how religious illusions make the principally repressive character of culture tolerable for the human psyche.

The principally open relation of man to his world is also an emotional openness. This emotionally open condition of human existence has its manifestation for example in the processes of developing and maintaining personal identity, which is only possible by emotional contact to others. Certain phenomena, like the hospitalism of children or the „Urvertrauen“ (R. Spitz, E.H. Erikson)<sup>19</sup> illustrate this aspect of individual need for emotional contact. Emotional acceptance now is as necessary for maintaining personal identity as it is for its development. But emotional contact to other people always is uncertain, any person may fail as emotional secure contact, at the latest by death. Therefore you can find *elements of emotional acceptance* in most religions. Christianity f.a. conceives of a never failing alter ego (God, Jesus) you can identify with and of whose love you can always feel sure. And the Christian concept of charity generalises the emotional relation to one's fellow-men: everybody is the (potential) next one, love for him is love for God, giving thus emotional security. The direct presence of the ancestors (often the physical presence of the corpse) in primitive societies and the lasting communication with them can also be interpreted as element of emotional security. The christian promise of incarnation carries on this tradition.

I shall quote Parsons, who writes about the threat to emotional security imposed by the death of a human being:<sup>20</sup>

„No ritual observances will bring the deceased back to life. But precisely for this reason, the problem of emotional adjustment is all the greater of importance. The significance both practically and emotionally

of a human individual is of such a magnitude that his death involves a process of readjustment for the survivors.“

Parsons interpretes the religious explanations and rituals of death only with respect to the „continued solidarity and functionality of the group“. But religious concepts and rituals of death must be analyzed also as elements of *emotional security*.

For living, acting and feeling individuals there often are situations and problems causing strong emotions. I do not agree with Arnold Gehlen<sup>21</sup> that strong stimuli reaching the emotional and instinctive depths of man are the cause for the development of rituals and thus the origin of religion in general, but dealing with emotions is an important part of the religious universe. An uncontrolled eruption of the „emotional energy“ of man would threaten the coherence and interaction of the group. The *ritual elements of religion* deal with these affective problems of human existence. Expressive rituals give the possibility to canalize these emotions. The relief for the individual psyche given by religious rituals was already noted by Freud and caused him to explain religion as „collective neurosis“<sup>22</sup>. In this respect the *Christian prayer* also deals with emotional stress and frustration and helps to „digest“ it inwardly.

#### *ad 2* (Problems of human interaction and social integration of the individual)

The attempt to give a brief outline of the semantic relation of religious Symbols and human life and its problems would be incomplete and misleading only analyzing the problems of individual consciousness and experience. Without discussing the social character of human reality and the foundation of individual consciousness in social interaction we would only understand partial aspects of religious symbols. The intentionality of individual consciousness depends on the existence of a socially constructed and maintained reality, of culture.

The individual needs und urges are transformed, as Parsons<sup>23</sup> explained, to *need dispositions*, formed by this culture. But the satisfaction of culturally shaped individual needs within this culture never is total. There remains a difference which has to be explained and worked up. Participation in society always means restriction, resignation (Freud), often compensated by religious symbols. These *elements of social compensation* can f.e. be found in the Christian concept of the heavenly kingdom, where justice, freedom and equality is promised. Such elements lie also in the legitimation of social order as divine design. The concept of sin also is an example: the seven mortal sins of the Catholic church are the socially most destructive patterns of behaviour, and the connection of sin and repentance compensates social restraint by heavenly reward, and imposes divine punishment on not accepting social limitations of individual actions; significantly in *hell*, where all social restrictions are raised to a higher power.

Individual identity and consciousness, on the other hand, only develop by processes of social learning, by relation to an alter ego and congruent role-taking and interpretation of behaviour (Mead).<sup>24</sup> Human existence thus depends on stable social relations. But so every newborn child, not yet a social being, and every personal biography, threatened by typical and accidental deep changes in its social relations, is precarious with respect to maintaining or developing social identity. This leads to *elements of personal integration* in religion. They glue the cracks in the social identity of the individual. The ‚rites de passage‘ (Durkheim) must be interpreted this way. Birth, death and typical discontinuities in social existence (child-grown up) are covered by cognitive concepts and ritual framework. Observations in concentration-camps with complete break-down of peoples identity without transcendental security for their identity may also be an example for this significance of religious concepts.<sup>25</sup>

In social interaction the alter ego can never be fully comprehended by the partner of interaction. Successfull personal interaction depends in spite of this on successfull ‚Fremdverstehen‘ (Schütz), on understanding of the others intentions, emotions, thoughts etc. But the other is principally unpredictable, doubtful, an „island“<sup>26</sup>, and not always it is sufficient to interpret the in-

teraction and the partner of interaction in terms of socially defined role-playing. The uncertainty of interpreting an alter ego in close interaction constitutes the *correlative elements of religion*. The „everyman-is-an-island–experience“ is compensated by religious acts and concepts. An example is the mystical union in God: the holy communion as symbolic act also deals with that problem; as well as rituals of dance and drug experience, which lead to a common expressive and ecstatic extinction or extension of the I and full congruence with the other participants in this ritual. Even the modern wave of group dynamics as remedy for disturbed interpersonal relations can be interpreted as an equivalent of religion in this respect.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless a great part of everyday interaction is based on congruent role-taking and role-playing of the actors. You have to rely on adequate action and reaction of the others, without the possibility to confirm this immediately, especially when planning an action.<sup>28</sup> This further uncertain quality of interaction is covered by *normative elements of religion*, which make the rules of role-playing evident and obligatory and give the chance of successful action depending on adequate reaction of others. *Hinduism* is the best example for normative symbolisation. The rules of the Indian caste system are defined as religious obligations, and following this rules brings reward at rebirth.

### *ad 3* (Problems of constructing, maintaining, & changing social structures & their interpretation)

Our fundamental analysis of the meaning of religious symbols was up to now based on the problems of individual man and his actions/interactions. One self-evident result was that without some institutionalized concepts, without the cultural complex including religious symbols human existence is impossible. But the super-individual character and the transpersonal continuance of the cultural complex of institutions and social structures have some special problems, which are also fundamental elements of a system of religious symbols.

The *construction of social reality is a very difficult process*. Certain perspectives on reality and the determination of certain possibilities for action and interaction are defined in a social process, whose results need an extra affirmation to become stable. The emergence of transpersonal concepts and structures of interaction is only possible, if they lose their *arbitrary and preliminary* character. This is done by *elements of religious foundation*, as Peter L. Berger has explicated thoroughly:<sup>29</sup> religion solves the problem of world-construction by giving these concepts such an aura of factuality that they seem to be the only possible ones, seem to be uniquely realistic. The objectivation and individual internalisation of the social reality is made possible by conceiving a holy cosmos, which is absolute, unquestionable and thus stabilizes the precarious human constructions by giving them a transcendental source.

But these constructions are themselves not absolute ones; they change with the prerequisites of their existence, especially the relation to nature & the economic structures (Marx). Therefore there must be the possibility to give an interpretation to the change of social reality, too. Religious symbols give foundation by giving ultimate reasons for the existence of social structures and cultural concepts. *Reasoning now opens the possibility of reflexion of the social reality at a given time. Therefore the arbitrariness and precariousness of social structures is only covered for the purposes of everyday action, not principally.*

More developed religions and symbols of religious foundation therefore give the relative chance to *negate* the founded structures. The long history of Christianity shows how this world-negating quality of Christian faith and values continuously caused revolutionary ideas and movements within the church (certain orders, Protestantism etc.) as well as in the secular world. Christianity as revolutionary ideology can be found – in the ideas of Thomas Müntzer as well as in the concepts of the Latin American priest of liberation, Camilo Torres.<sup>30</sup>

Religious symbols of foundation are therefore ambivalent, they have the capacity to negate as well as to legitimate. Of course, the problem of world-maintenance (Berger) is a predominant

and a very important part of most religions. The *legitimizing elements* can be found in the equation king = god in ancient religions as well as in the caste system of the Hindu religion. But the negating quality is a latent danger that lies within religious symbols.

Socially constructed and maintained reality consists of different institutions and structures, sometimes – especially in a institutionally very differentiated society like the industrial – with heavy problems of coordination. Especially for purposes of everyday action coordination becomes a problem, insofar the question of situational priority must be answered. This question is answered by *elements of social integration in religion*, giving a frame for an homogenous, integral interpretation of the heterogenous elements of the social universe.

Last not least social structures must be established in time, not only legitimated as being necessary this way and no other, but also as guaranteed beyond individual continuance, in spite of changing individuals participating in society. This *social continuity given by religion* is held up by conceiving a beginning of the world and society and a consistent development up to the present state. Myths of the worlds origin are abundant. Social continuity in the Christian and Jewish tradition is also held up by conceiving the end of history in the coming of the Messiah and the heavenly kingdom as aim of history.

### III - Conclusion

Hereby the semantic (& pragmatic) constitution of religious symbols is indicated. Of course this is only a first step to an adequate analysis of religious symbols. But the abstraction of contingent aspects of the human life showed, that this life-world and corresponding society is uncertain and precarious in many aspects. *Religious symbols deal with all of these aspects* by reference to a *transcendental horizon of meaning (which excludes these symbols from everyday reasoning and probing)*. This excluding reference is *pragmatically essential*, because thus the *symbols become irrefutable, inevitable and incontestable*.

There are other ways (than anchoring them in a transcendental (religious) realm of meaning) of making socially meaningful symbols irrefutable and incontestable. Any system of symbols dealing with the above discussed fundamental elements in a irrefutable and incontestable way (like ideologies, basic value systems etc.) is equivalent to religion.

On the other hand, any traditional religion not covering the changing manifestations of the fundamental contingencies of human life becomes obsolete, and new religious start developing.<sup>31</sup>

Towards the end of my remarks about the semantic (and pragmatic) constitution of religious knowledge in the *contingencies of the social reality* and its individual, interactional and structural aspects I have to clarify some possible misunderstandings:

- 1) This is not an attempt to define religious phenomena in a *negative* way. Connecting religious symbols with the contingencies of human existence and indicating how they deal with these basic problems does not mean that religion is only the product of a deficient social reality, ideology of an incomplete, imperfect world, unnecessary after some conscious improvement of society.<sup>32</sup> What I tried to point out is how religion is an integral part of social reality, a very fundamental one indeed; *knowledge* about human insufficiency and – last not least in many variations and equivalents to „supernatural“ religions – successful in dealing with these basic problems. Thus religion can be analyzed sociologically as an *essential* part of human knowledge. An analysis of the fundamental meaning of religion is then not a „pathology“ of society and social interaction, but the attempt to point out that *social reality itself* (for the participating individuals as well as for the maintenance of the general structure) would be impossible without some concepts that lie beyond its here and now.

- 2) A second misunderstanding is that pointing out the semantic constitution of the universe of religious knowledge implies that every given individual in a given society knows about this horizon of meaning.<sup>33</sup> Individuals participate in social reality at many levels of conscious reflection of their actions and the conditions for these actions. One important achievement by establishing meaningful religious symbols within social reality is that individuals do *not have to* reflect the ultimate aspects of their actions. This constant reflection of the basic relation between religious symbols and social reality is relevant only in extraordinary situations (experience of death, f.e.) or the task of ‚religious specialists‘ -f.e. priests and theologians in an established religion, or people having the intellectual and emotional capacity to experience personally the ultimate problems of existence that confront a group of people, and thus founding a new religious movement.<sup>34</sup>
- 3) A third misunderstanding would be to take this approach as a simple enlargement of the traditional functionalist approach, *defining religion by a variety of functions* instead of a basic one (like integration). This is *not* an attempt to define religion by its functions. The question: what elements in the condition of man make religion possible? has to be distinguished from the question: what makes religion a religion? This question cannot be answered in a preliminary way. You have to look at a given group of people at a given time in a given society and find out what symbols, beliefs, practices, rituals etc. they use to deal with the basic contingencies of their specific situation, and if they consider these symbols as *something apart* from everyday life and interaction. This difference to the everydaylife-world can be established in many ways. Defining religion by the belief in something supernatural or non-natural<sup>35</sup> and the sacred quality of its concepts would be too restrictive, excluding other possibilities of establishing this apartness of religious symbols.
- 4) The last and biggest misunderstanding would be to think that I present these remarks as a final analysis of all possibilities of meaning in religious symbols. This is meant to be a starting point, summarizing a broad tradition of social scientific approaches to explain religion.

The central concept used up to now was „*contingency*“<sup>36</sup>, and the basic feelings referred to were the *experience of uncertainty, fear, grief, awe, anxiety, limitations* etc. But the analysis of the semantic constitution has to be developed further, by adding the *dimension of fulfilment* to the horizon of religious meaning. How is religion possible in relation to basic human situations that can be described by the *experience of joy, love, happiness, completeness, success* etc.?

I have to leave this question open. But only by discussing both, contingency as well as fulfilment within social reality an adequate framework for the explanation of religion can be constructed.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> The basic considerations of this paper rely on my doctoral thesis „Religion in feldtheoretischer Perspektive“ (Johannes Kepler University Linz 1977, supervision by Friedrich Fürstenberg and Jakobus Wössner († 1975)), and (additional note to the original paper 1977) published in a revised and reworked version 1978 in the book: Ingo Mörth: „Die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit von Religion. Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Religionstheorie“, Stuttgart 1978, see here especially pp. 114-130.
- <sup>2</sup> See for that tradition Émile Durkheim: „De la définition des phénomènes religieux“, in: L'Année Sociologique, Paris 1898, or his „Elementary Forms of Religious Life“, London 1915, esp. pp. 245-251, or: Rudolf Otto: „The Idea of the Holy“, New York 1923; or Mircea Eliade: „The Sacred and the Profane“, New York 1959.
- <sup>3</sup> (additional note to the original paper 1977) Peter L. Berger: „The sacred canopy. Elements of a sociological theory of religion“, New York 1969.
- <sup>4</sup> See Max Weber's famous remark that he is not dealing with the essence of religion, but with the conditions and effects of a specific social interaction (M. Weber: „Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft“, Köln 1964, S.317; engl. translation of the part dealing with religion in: „The Sociology of Religion“, transl. E. Fischoff, Boston 1963, the cited remark is on p. 1).



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- <sup>5</sup> See f.e. John Milton Yinger's definition: „Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people deals with the ultimate problems of their existence“ (J. M. Yinger: „Religion, Society and the Individual“, New York 1957, p. 9).
- <sup>6</sup> (additional note to the original paper 1977) see for definition and discussion of semantic aspects within a semiotic approach to social phenomena: John Lyons: „Semantics“, Cambridge 1976. Semantics in general mean an analysis of the significant meaning of used symbols in the context of the symbolic universe of a given semiotic community, including the pragmatic aspects of the symbolized objects, agenda and experiences.
- <sup>7</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann: „The Social Construction of Reality“, New York 1966.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann: „The Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge“ (1963), repr. in: Norman Birnbaum/ Gertrud Lenzer (eds.): „Sociology and Religion“, Englewood Cliffs/N.J. 1969, cit. p. 416.
- <sup>9</sup> See here Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: „Gesammelte Werke“, Berlin (East) 1953-58, especially: „Einleitung zur Kritik der Hegel'schen Rechtsphilosophie“, „Thesen über Feuerbach“, „Die Deutsche Ideologie“, „Der deutsche Bauernkrieg“, „Einleitung zur Geschichte des Urchristentums“, „Die Heilige Familie“, „Vom Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates“, „Das Kapital, Bd.I“. Some essays are translated in: K. Marx/ F. Engels: „On Religion“, Moscow 1955.
- <sup>10</sup> Besides the already cited „Sociology of Religion“, Weber's „Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism“, transl. T. Parsons, New York 1958, and his „Essays in Sociology“, transl. Hermann Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York 1958, should be mentioned.
- <sup>11</sup> Émile Durkheim is somewhat ambivalent in his basic approach towards religion. In his cited „Elementary Forms of Religious Life“ he tries to explain why primitive people developed the idea of the sacred (the mass frenzy of excitement caused by the Corrobbori of the Australian aborigines created - acc. to Durkheim the feeling of being transported to another realm, the sacred). But once established the relations to the sacred lose the meaning they had in the process of their origin. Religion becomes „a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things ...which unite into one single moral community all those who adhere to them“ (op.cit., p. 62). So once established, for Durkheim religion can only be analyzed in its function within the structural framework of society, that *is the cohesiveness* and integration of the group. Besides the „Elementary Forms“ see also: „Durkheim on Religion“, ed. and intr. by William Pickering, London 1975, and Robert Nisbet: „The Sociology of Emile Durkheim“, London 1975.
- <sup>12</sup> For Sigmund Freud man is, in short, doomed to have some frustrations by the social control necessarily exerted by culture. Religion compensates for that frustration by offering ‚quasi-neurotic‘ rituals and concepts. See „Totem and Taboo“, transl. Abraham A. Brill, New York 1960, and „The Future of an Illusion“, transl. William Robson-Scott, Garden City/N.Y. 1964.
- <sup>13</sup> See his famous essay „Magic, Science and Religion“, in: Bronislaw Malinowski: „Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays“, Garden City/N.Y. 1955, and his „Eine wissenschaftliche Theorie der Kultur“, Zürich 1949. Malinowski's (and many other anthropologist's) distinction between magic and religion is, I think, a superficial one. The long discussion about this difference developed only out of the more descriptive approach and the „primitive materials tradition“ within anthropology. In analyzing religion as a universe of meaningful symbols „magic“ practices become part of this universe.
- <sup>14</sup> See Bronislaw Malinowski: „Magic, Science and Religion“, op.cit., pp. 29-37.
- <sup>15</sup> (additional note to the original paper 1977) The *Trobriand islands* in the Western Pacific, now part of Papua New Guinea, were part of an extensive ethnological/ anthropological research by Malinowski, ad basis of many of his anthropological contributions. See especially: Bronislaw Malinowski: „Coral gardens and their magic. A study of the methods of tilling the soil and of agricultural rites in the Trobriand Islands“, London 1935 (2 volumes).
- <sup>16</sup> An example would also be the concept of witchcraft as f.e. developed by the *Azande* and described by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard. Witchcraft („mangu“) explains any surprising aspect of individual as well as collective life. See Edward E. Evans-Pritchard: „Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande“, Oxford 1937. (additional note to the original paper 1977) The *Azande* (*Zande*, Population: ~1 million) are a black tribe, located from the upper Nile basin in the southernwestern Sudan to the borders of the semitropical rain forests in Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo); their religious beliefs revolve around ideas associated with „mangu“ (witchcraft).
- <sup>17</sup> Compare the following explanation of the relation between Hindu faith and society: „For the Hindu, fulfilling traditional roles with all ones ability and intelligence is the existential mode of asking and understanding the question ‚Who am I?‘ ... The autological syntax of the crucial Hindu question involves a complete, all-inclusive, absolute involvement of the Hindu ... There is, therefore, a fundamental sense in which Hinduism and Hindu so-

- ciety are inseparable: ... I cannot be a Hindu without a Hindu society to live in.“ (Shri A.K. Saran: „Religion and Society: The Hindu view“, in: International Yearbook for the Sociology of Religion, vol. 5, Köln 1969, pp. 48f). The Indian caste system thus is only the way to reach again the starting point: the *unity of Brahman*.
- 18 Sigmund Freud discussed the *relief* of religious rituals for the psyche of an individual, that has to deal with the social limitations of its drives (see footnote 12).
- 19 See René Spitz: „Hospitalism“, in: The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, vol. 1, New York 1945, and Eric H. Erikson: „Childhood and Society“, New York 1950.
- 20 Talcott Parsons: „A Perspective on Religion“, in: Alvin Gouldner (ed.): „Modern Sociology“, New York 1963, p.125.
- 21 See Arnold Gehlen: „Urmensch und Spätkultur“, Bonn 1956, and „Der Mensch. Seine Natur und Stellung in der Welt“, Bonn 1962. Gehlen argues that for man the relation stimulus/response is undifferentiated and not specific. Many stimuli have no immediate biological significance. Nevertheless there are powerful and impressive stimuli that can reach the level of biological drives (esp. perceptive stimuli accompanied by fear, awe or excitement). But there are no specific responses ‚programmed‘, only a general urge to do something in reaction. That is the situation where rituals are born. Gehlen thinks that rituals are originally a mimic repetition of the stimulating event within the group. These rituals are now the first elements of collective behaviour and thus the origin not only of religion, but of culture as well.
- 22 Sigmund Freud uses this term in his essay „Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen“ (1907, in: Gesammelte Werke, vol. VII, London 1940, p. 138).
- 23 See Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (eds.): Towards a General Theory of Action, Cambridge/Mass. 1962, pp.20f.
- 24 See here George Herbert Mead: „Mind, Self and Society“, Chicago 1934, and his „Philosophy of the Present“, Open Court/Ill. 1959. See also Anselm S. Strauss: „Mirrors and Masks“, New York 1959, and Edward F. Zigler/ Irvin L. Child (eds.): „Socialization and Personality Development“, Reading/Mass. 1973.
- 25 The results of Durkheim’s famous study about suicide can be interpreted the same way: Religious concepts have the capacity to stabilize personal identity *beyond* its „social mirror“ that normally ensures our identity, and which is always endangered to break. Suicide can therefore be considered here as result of a deep identity crisis. See Émile Durkheim: „Suicide“, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, London 1952.
- 26 See here Alfred Schütz: „Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt“, Wien 1960, pp. 115f. (engl. transl.: „The Phenomenology of the Social World“, trans. George Walsch, Chicago/Ill. 1967).
- 27 See Martin L. Cross: „The Psychological Society. The Impact and the Failure of Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis and the Psychological Revolution“, New York 1977. Cross discusses psychology and its different forms of therapy as a new, quasi-religious movement with priests and followers, rituals and credos. Even sectarian developments are observed by Cross.
- 28 See Alfred Schütz, op.cit., pp. 129.
- 29 See Peter L. Berger: „The Social Reality of Religion“, London 1967.
- 30 Friedrich Engels (in: „Der deutsche Bauernkrieg“, Marx/ Engels: „Gesammelte Werke“, op.cit.) demonstrated how the revolutionary movement of the German serfs, lead by *Thomas Müntzer*, used Christian concepts to justify their struggle. *Camilo Torres* only stands for many other Latin American catholic priests with revolutionary ideas inspired by radical Christian faith. (additional note to the original paper 1977) *Jorge Camilo Torres Restrepo* (born 1929) was a Colombian priest associated with *Liberation Theology*. He died 1966 during his first combat with the Colombian military as a member of the Colombian Liberation movement „*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*“ (ELN) and was made an official martyr of this political group. As part of the academic staff of the *National University Colombia* he was in 1960 co-founder (with Orlando Fals Borda) of the Sociology Faculty. His main writings were internationally first published in English as: Torres Restrepo, Camilo (edited by John Alvarez Garcia & Christian Restrepo Calle): „Camilo Torres: his life and his message, the text of his original platform and all his messages to the Colombian people“, Springfield/GB 1968; this collection also published in German: Torres Restrepo, Camilo: „Vom Apostolat zum Partisanenkampf. Artikel und Proklamationen“, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1969: Rowohlt (Rowohlt-Paperback 78).
- 31 See here for a description and explanation how new religious movements start developing in a situation of social disorientation and struggle, making the basic experience of a contingent world acute and painful, and traditional religious concepts obsolete: Vittorio Lanternari: „Religiöse Freiheits- und Heilsbewegungen unterdrückter Völker“, Neuwied 1966; Ernst Benz: „Neue Religionen“, Stuttgart 1971; Brian Wilson: „Magic and the Millennium:

A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples“, New York 1973; Peter Worsley: „The Trumpet Shall Sound. A Study of ‚Cargo‘ Cults in Melanesia“, London 1968.

- <sup>32</sup> Karl Marx f.e. thought that in the future & forthcoming communist and classless society religion would have no further „social background“ and would sooner or later become obsolete. See Karl Marx: „Das Kapital, vol. III“, in Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels: Werke, op.cit., vol. XXV.
- <sup>33</sup> Clifford Geertz notes the same; see C.. Geertz: „Religion as a Cultural System“, in: Michael Banton (ed.): „Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion“, London 1966 (footnote 1).
- <sup>34</sup> This would imply the discussion of prophetism and its psychological as well as its social significance; see Max Weber: „The Sociology of Religion“, op.cit., pp. 35ff.; Joachim Wach: „The Sociology of Religion“, Chicago 1944, pp. 341-370, and the references in my footnote 31.
- <sup>35</sup> See f.e. Glenn M. Vernon’s definition of religion by 1. A belief in the supernatural or nonnatural, and 2. A belief in the sacred ... (G.M. Vernon: „Sociology of Religion“, New York 1962, pp.46-50.
- <sup>36</sup> The way I use the term „contingency“ includes any human experience of limitation. Normally the use of the term contingency is more restrictive. See f.e. Thomas Francis O’Dea, who discusses religion with reference to three basic problems, i.e (1) uncertainty and contingency, (2) powerlessness and (3) insufficiency and scarcity (see T.F. O’Dea: „The Sociology of Religion“, Englewood Cliffs/N.J. 1966).