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The Love of God in Religion

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Abstract: Every culture has a religious tradition which maybe different from that of others. Even in Christendom religious traditions are diverse. This differences gives to labels such fundamentalist or conservatism “or” liberal in the religion generally speaking, it is of special or general revelation, if the saying that is “All truth is God’s truth” is of great to then attention should be given not priest (it cultic on ritual practices the religion and its superiority to that of their; rather on the unity experienced the God’s love that pervades all religious. The common experience of God’s holiness, kindness, sovereignty, Almightyness, truth, salvation, protection, guidance, knowledge etc. that come in his guidance and love to all mankind, this paper is a library necessity work limited to that loving aspect of God that downs people to religion, implicitly or explicitly.

Keywords: Religion, God, Love, Common Experience.

INTRODUCTION

Religion has diverse forms of definitions from the perspectives of nature, pantheon of gods, intermediaries, ethical codes, liturgy, sacraments, creeds and absolute deity or supreme being, hence the many terms that are frequently applied to it, such as; national or universal, monotheistic or polytheistic, ethical, salvific or mediated, etc. Revealed religion according to Astley (1994) is “knowledge about God that only arises from a particular divine revelation and (usually cannot be attainable by unaided human reason” (p.295). While natural religion is “knowledge about God that may be attained by human reason alone, without divine revelation” (p.293). Early anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor regarded religious belief as the result of a rational search for an explanation from natural events. Others especially R.R. Marrett emphasized emotion explaining religion in terms of fear, awe, religious thrill and so on. (The New Universal, p.309). Whatever the religion, however, God or gods always seem to be centring point or focus. But this centre is often also lost in religious traditions and institutions. The institution itself, ecclesiastical organization and all its functions become the god or God. There should be a separation in identity between God and his earthly representatives and their institution. This lost vision of God can be found in the love for God, He should be foremost and not the human institution in religion. Many religious people have missed the whole point of religion and have completely lost their vision of God in their focus on human religious organizations, leaders and traditions. All these should be means to an end and not the end it self, even though they come from God they cannot replace Him.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Some definitions of religion will be useful at this point:-

James (1952) in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, defines it as “the feelings acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (pages 31-32).

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005) defines religion “as (1) peoples belief in the life of the spirit and usually in one or more gods; (2) A particular system of this belief and all the ways of expressing your god, ceremonies and duties that are connected with it” (p. 1195).

While Idowu (1973) wrote that

Religion results from man’s spontaneous awareness, and spontaneous reaction to his unmediated awareness of a great power, “wholly other” and infinitely greater than himself; a power mysterious because unseen, yet a present and urgent reality seeking to bring man into communion with himself (p. 75).

These definitions, so far are without doubt suggestive of a religious experience and a relationship with God and none other.

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

The German scholar Rudolf Otto (1923) in *The Idea of the Holy* defines the common factor in all regions as the NUMINOUS. This NUMINOUS is an

experience with two dimensions: The MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM, which is the tendency to invoke fear and trembling and MYSTERIUM FASCINAS, the tendency to attract, fascinate and compel. Otto sees the numinous as also having a personal quality in which the person is in communion with a wholly other. Richard Swinburne distinguished between two main categories of religious experience that are not mediated and experienced by sensations and that are mediated by sensations. The latter can be subdivided into

- 1) Religious experiences that are mediated by public objects/events (public perception which includes).
 - a) Experiences in which the supernatural object is perceived perceiving an ordinary non-religious objects, and
 - b) Those in which the religious experience is mediated through perceiving “very unusual public objects e.g. Jesus miraculous resurrection experiences” (Astley, p. 126).
- 2) Religious experiences that are mediated by private sensory perceptions which comprises
 - a) Those in which the experience may be described in normal sense experience language e.g. visual and auditory sensations in dreams of angels and
 - b) Those in which sensation are only analogous to sense experiences.

This classification of objective religious experience would thus include the so call NUMINOUS experiences in which God is known in an “outer” experience as a Holy presence: a transcendent, “wholly other reality over and against the experiences. It also embraces any mystical experiences. “Inner” experiences of the souls union or identity with the immanent God. The category of “experiences in which the supernatural object is perceived in perceiving an ordinary non-religious objects” may be said to encompass some at least examples of experiencing particular experiences or dispositions so to interpret ordinary sense experience, moral experience (p. 126).

Religious experience according to Swinburne is “an experience which seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God” (p. 126). The problem here is the absence of the criteria for testing objectivity or veridicality.

Here Swinburne argues for two fundamental principles which are essential to any defense of the objectivity of any religious experience. The first is the principle of credulity for which he claims as a basic principle of rationality. This means that “what he seems to perceive is probably so”, although with special conditions which must be followed. The second principle, the principle of testimony complements the first principle, that in the special considerations “the experience of others are probably as they report them. These special considerations would include evidences of lying, exaggerating or misremembering. In the absence

of these considerations, Swinburne claims other people’s religious experiences may rationally be trusted (p. 128).

Abraham is the father of the faithful in the world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Thus faith becomes a criteria for testifying to one’s religious experiences. Since faith demands love for God and one’s neighbour, the proper response the religious experiences of others is faith and love. Otto believes that the experience of the Holy applies to all religious hence the absence of objective proofs of one’s inner religious experience may be accommodated as so based on the principle of credulity.

Man’s Relationship with God

Closely related to religious experience in religion is the continuous relationship of the adherent who has these experiences with God. *In Honest to God*, Bishop A.T. Robinson speaks of the world coming of age, therefore, Christianity must be regarded not from the view of the “worldly” or “Religion” and “institution”. Christianity must detach itself from its traditional scheme of thought of DEUS EX MACHINA (A God hovering over the world) to belief in “a supreme person, a self existing subject of infinite goodness and power, who enters into a relationship with us comparable with that of one human personality with another” (Brown, p. 210). The Bishop went further to say that “reality at its very deepest level is personal.” that personality is of ultimate significance and in personal relationships one finds the meaning of existence (p. 210). Pierre Teilhard De Chardin (1964), in the *Future of man* write that “the belief that human individual cannot perfect himself or fully exist except through the organic unification of all men in God is essential and fundamental to Christian doctrine” (p. 233). He argues for harmony of the supernatural and the “natural” against those who see in the phenomenon of religion nothing more than purely conventional and abstract.

Love Commandment

De Chardin states that

Under these purely enforced conditions the centre of consciousness cannot achieve its natural growth rising out of the technical centre of social organization only union through love and in love, because it brings individuals together, not superficially and tangentially but centre to centre can physically possess the property of not merely differentiating but also personalizing the elements which comprises it (p. 235).

Love here, De Chardin emphasized, is used in its broadest and real sense to refer to a “mutual internal affinity” in which “mankind will only find and shape itself if men can learn to love one another in the very act of drawing closer” (p. 235).

It is not surprising that the Gospel of Mark 12:29-31 states categorically that

The most important one answered Jesus, is this: hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these (NIV).

This reply of Jesus to the teacher of the law was certainly having great significance in the ears of his hearers at that point in time since the Jews had missed the whole point of the religion of Judaism – its centre or focus, which is Jesus Christ Himself. They had replaced God with laws, the temple and sacerdotalism, these became their gods and God became secondary and his Son without honour before them. Stephen was stoned to death in Acts Chapter 7 for speaking against the temple and the Jewish traditions because they had taken the place of God in their lives and failed to see God working in their midst. This is also a truism today among the various religions in the world. They would stop at nothing but destroy those who speak against the wrongs of their leaders, laws, shrines or temples, or institutions, even the church of God.

God, Religion, Institution or State?

The replacement of God by religious institutions, functions, ecclesiastical organizations, priesthood and priestcraft have resulted in the very negative responses from critics like Arthur Schopenhauer, Karl Marx and others Schopenhauer did not hide his dislike for Christianity in which he said that he would even prefer the religions of Indian both Hinduism and Buddhism. He began the emphasis on Will which characterized much of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy (Russel, 1964, p. 753). “The world and all its phenomena” Schopenhauer says “are only the objectification of will” (p. 757). Karl Marx denounced religion as “the enemy of all progress” (Brown, p. 136). Man is the inventor of religion which is the result of his state and society. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (p. 136). Marx had built his materialistic philosophy on Hegel’s dialectical movement of history, in which states play the role that classes play in the former (p. 739). According to Hegel: the state is the actually realized moral life and all spiritual reality possessed by a human being he possesses only through the state. For truth is the unity of the universal and subjective Will and the universal is found in the state, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The state is the divine idea as it exists on earth. The state is the embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form. The state is the idea of Spirit in

the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom (Russel, 1964, p. 740).

The state seen to occupy the same place as the church for Hegel, since it is a body united by common creed, “believed by its members to be of supreme importance and it is thus in its very essence the embodiment of what Hegel calls the “Idea” Again Hegel’s Absolute idea or Spirit is God and each state in relation to its subject is made absolute by Hegel (p. 740 – 741).

Among other things the state are sets of coercive, fiscal, judicial and administrative organizations claiming sovereignty over territory and people. Its main tasks are thus to “maintain public order and to ensure a secure and sufficient revenue base for its own reproduction and sufficient provision for a certain level of collective goods” (McLennan, 1989, p. 229). The state of Hegel or all other human institutions and social organizations including religious institutions that are made absolute have very little or no room for God because they have become God themselves individually or collectively.

LOVE OF GOD

In all of these questions come to mind and one is: Can there be absolute states, religious institutions in juxtaposition and equal with God? The answer of course is no. In the words of a missionary, Carver (1982)

All religions are but common religion of the human heart interpreted and expressed in variant forms and varying with the growth of the religion and the development of thought and culture. Man finding God because God is showing himself to man. The study of religions should reveal the measure in which the religions have found God (p. 109).

One who sincerely seeks God will find God. In order to find God one must learn to appreciate Him and love Him for who He is. God is the centre of religion and it is dismantling due barriers of the idols set up by institutions and religious organizations, and responding in loving attention to His divine Will and Presence can be found. Then religion becomes truly religion, devoid of all due agonies, catastrophes and failures that accompany it today, Pual Tillich speaks about God in terms of one’s ULTIMATE CONCERN. God is the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being (Brown, 1985, p. 194). Tillich speaks of God as beyond, he is BEING HIMSELF, the POWER OF BEING and the GROUND OF BEING (p. 194). The problem of sin is that “man is estranged from the ground his being from the ground his being from other beings and from being himself” (p. 195), in the words of Benedict De Spinoza “The love of God must hold the chief place in the mind” (Russel, 1964, p. 576).

Recommendations

What remains after making the love of God topmost in one's heart is

1. Seek the SOMMUM BONUM (the general happiness), that is, common advantage or good for the individual and the society (Russel, 1964, p. 774).
2. Regard Emmanuel Kant's CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE That:
"Act only according to a maxim by which you can at the same time will that it shall become a general law or Act as if your action were to become through your will a general natural law" (p. 711).
3. Reflect on Martin Buber's arguments on the I – It and I – Thou relations. When one sees things and people as mere phenomena or "It", it is superficial. But I – Thou involves a relationship that is of a personal sort with other people and with things and this is the realm where one encounters God. Thus a meaningful relationship will be an I – Thou with other persons. Buber interprets the personality of Jesus Christ in terms of I – Thou concept (Brown, 1985, p. 234 – 235).
4. According to Tillich, Jesus Christ removes the problem of estrangement through whom those who confess Him are once more highly related to the GROUND OF THEIR BEING and accept JESUS AS THE CHRIST THE BEARER THE NEW BEING (p. 196).
5. Finally, believe the words of the Master Jesus Christ and Make the love of God and your neighbor a PASSION and a DUTY. (Mark 12:29-31).

CONCLUSION

Irrespective of one religion in multi-religious environment and must be ready to accommodate others and respond to another in love. Otto say that there is no

religious that does not personify the holy; which suffers one common ground for all religious "God is holy". Most religious will operate on what is truth or the truth. What is true is all religious will obviously God and person of such or deity as savior caring or loving and protector of religious adherents in their different religious needs no interpretation. This is present in all religious in the contents and practices of their faiths as the modus vivendi for living religiously.

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