THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

JAMES BISSETT PRATT, Ph.D.

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN WILLIAMS COLLEGE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF.

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INDIA AND ITS FAITHS.

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TO
MY DEAR SISTER
HARRIET PRATT CLARKE

PREFACE

THE chief function of a preface is, I suppose, to provide information for the hurried reviewer who has not time to read further. In a sense the preface might be called the author's own book-review; or it is the book's *Apologia pro vita sua*. No apology, to be sure, need be made for a new book on the psychology of religion. The science, if such we may call it, is still young, and good books upon it are scarce. Perhaps, however, it is incumbent upon one who lays before the public so formidable-looking a volume as the present one, even within so new a field, to state at least his purpose and his point of view in writing it.

My purpose is easily stated. It is, namely, to *describe the religious consciousness,* and to do so without having any point of view. Without, that is, having any point of view save that of the unprejudiced observer who has no thesis to prove. My aim, in short, has been purely descriptive, and my method purely empirical. Like other men I have my own theories about the philosophy of religion, but I have made unremitting efforts (and I trust with some success) to describe the religious consciousness without undue influence from my philosophical theories, but merely by going to experience and writing down what I find.

I have also sought to cover the field with a fair degree of adequacy; to do justice by both religion and science; to hold the scales even between the individual and society (no easy matter in these days); and to make my book of value and (if possible) of interest to both the general reader and the technical student. I am, of course, painfully aware of the fact that in many ways I have fallen short of my aims. It is now over twelve years ago that I began writing the book; and in that length of time so many changes come over one's evaluations and one's style that in looking through the completed volume I can plainly see (though I hope the reader will not) several distinct strata of thought and language superimposed upon each other,

as through successive geologic ages. These diverse elements I think are not really inconsistent with each other, though in this I may be mistaken.

In whatever else I have failed I hope at least that I have avoided provincialism, both of the geographical and of the intellectual variety. In order not to be confined to the American Protestant point of view I have seen what I could of Roman Catholicism in Europe, and of Hinduism and Buddhism in India, Burma, and Ceylon. As to the more dangerous provincialism of the spirit, none of us knows how far he succeeds in escaping it. To what extent my training in psychology has provincialized my judgment and my power of evaluation, the reader alone will be able to decide.

My thanks are due to the editors of the *American Journal of Religious Psychology* and the *Harvard Theological Review* for permission to reprint (in revised form) some of the content of this volume which first appeared in their pages; and to the following friends, former students of mine, who by the circulation of questionnaires aided me in the collection of some of my material — namely Mr. J. L. Cole, Mr. H. S. Dodd, Mr. P. W. Hammond, Mr. E. B. Hart, Mr. E. L. Hazelton, Mr. H. M. Ives, Mr. L. E. McCuen, Mr. C. B. Rogers, Mr. S. T. Stanley, and Mr. Y. Suzuki. Particularly to my wife am I indebted for increased insight into the inner nature of Roman Catholicism, for considerable assistance in the preparation of my manuscript and index, and for unfailing encouragement and keen though kindly criticism.

Williamstown, Massachusetts.
April, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

RELIGION

It is a rather odd fact that a word so repeatedly on the lips of men and connoting, apparently, one of the most obvious phenomena of human life should be so notoriously difficult of definition as is the word Religion. None of us seem able to get along without using the word; and yet when asked just what we mean by it very few of us can tell. Nor is this unsteadiness in the employment of the term confined to those who have done but little systematic thinking on the subject. Not that the great thinkers who have written books have neglected to tell us what religion is,— Professor Leuba enumerates forty-eight definitions of religion from as many great men [1] (and, elsewhere, adds two of his own, apparently to fill out the even half-hundred). But the striking thing about these definitions is that, persuasive as many of them are, each learned doctor seems quite unpersuaded by any but his own. And when doctors disagree what are the rest of us going to do? Can we be justified in talking about religion at all?

The truth is, I suppose, that "religion" is one of those general and popular terms which have been used for centuries to cover so vague and indefinite a collection of phenomena that no definition can be framed which will include all its uses and coincide with every one's meaning for it. Hence all definitions of religion are more or less arbitrary and should be taken rather as postulates than as axioms. In this sense I shall myself propose a tentative definition of religion, not at all as a

1 "A Psychological Study of Religion." (New York, Macmillan: 1912.) Appendix.

final or complete statement, nor because I think it of any great importance, but because I intend to write a book about religion and it therefore seems only fair that I should tell the reader in advance not what the word means, but what I am going to mean by the word.

The definition which I propose is the following: Religion is the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies.[2] This definition I propose for what it is worth, and if it is found in several ways defective, I shall not be surprised, nor shall I greatly care. It has, however, one or two characteristics which seem to me of some merit, and to which I wish to call the reader's attention. And its first, and perhaps its only merit, is that it defines religion as an "attitude." This word as a psychological term has received its greatest emphasis and its clearest exposition from Professor Judd,[3] and it is from him, in a general way, that I borrow it. And without accepting all of Professor Judd's views on the subject[4] I shall say briefly that the word "attitude" shall here be used to cover that *responsive* side of consciousness which is found in such things as attention, interest, expectancy, feeling, tendencies to reaction, etc. Thus it is contrasted with what Professor Judd calls "content," the relatively passive element in sensation, the accepted and recognized. It presupposes always an object of some sort, and involves some sort of content; but it is itself a relatively active state of consciousness which is not to be described in terms of the given but it is a subjective

[2] For views somewhat similar to this compare A. C. Watson, "The Logic of Religion" (*Am. Jour. of Theol.*, XX, 98), Irving King's "The Development of Religion" (New York, Macmillan: 1910), esp. p. 17, Perry's "Approach to Philosophy" (New York, Scribner: 1905), pp. 65–66, and his "The Moral Economy" (New York, Scribner: 1909), p. 218. See also Lowes Dickinson's brilliant defense of a similar view of religion in his little book, "Religion, a Criticism and a Forecast" (London, Brimley: 1906), p. 56ff, and Everett's "Moral Values" (New York, Holt: 1918), p. 382.

[3] See his "Psychology" (New York, Scribner: 1907), *passim*, esp. pp. 68–69. Also his article, "The Doctrine of Attitudes," *Jour. of Phil.*, V., 676f.

[4] His hypothesis as to the concomitant physiological processes seems particularly questionable.

response to the given. Thus it is not to be confined to any one of the three traditional departments of the mind —"knowing, feeling, and willing"— but involves factors that belong to each of them.

The advantages of defining religion as an attitude are now, I think, sufficiently manifest. It shows that religion is not a matter of any one "department" of psychic life but involves the whole man. It includes what there was of truth in the historical attempts to identify religion with feeling, belief, or will. And it draws attention to the fact that religion is immediately subjective, thus differing from science (which emphasizes "content" rather than "attitude"); and yet it points to the other fact also that religion involves and presupposes the acceptance of the objective. Religion is the attitude of a self toward an object in which the self genuinely believes.

I have qualified the word "attitude" in my definition by the adjective "social" with considerable misgiving, for I do not wish to suggest that religion must have a *personal* object. I have used the word to indicate that the religious attitude toward the Determiner of Destiny must not be "mechanical" (as, according to Mr. Watson, the scientific attitude is) nor coldly intellectual. It must have some faint touch of that social quality which we feel in our relations toward anything that can make response to us. It is only in this incipient way that the religious attitude need be social.

Again let me admit, or rather insist, that this, like all other definitions of religion, is more or less arbitrary. Whoever wishes to do so has certainly a perfectly logical right to give a much narrower or a much broader definition of the term, provided he is willing to take the consequences. He may, if he chooses, even confine religion to belief in Jehovah, on condition that he will stick to his definition and consistently call irreligious all men who do not so believe. A narrow definition based upon a particular theological belief, however, has two patent disadvantages. In the first place, it necessarily leaves out a great number of people and a great number of phenomena which are by general consent recognized as religious. Thus if we hold that belief in a personal God is the criterion of re-

ligion we not only run counter to the general view which classes Buddhism in its original form (that great stumbling block to most definitions) among the religions, but we are forced to call irreligious many deeply spiritual souls nearer home, who certainly have something more within them than can be included under philosophy or morality.[5] If religion is merely this purely intellectual and rather superficial thing it is hardly worth very much discussion. And, in the second place, however much it may be worth, at any rate it is not a subject that *can* be discussed by psychology. One purely intellectual position does not differ psychologically from another. Hence the very admission that there is such a thing as the psychology of religion presupposes that we mean by religion something else than a theological affirmation.

For a somewhat similar reason the student of the psychology of religion will hesitate to accept Durkheim's (much more satisfactory) view which seeks for the essential characteristic of religion in the distinction between the sacred and the profane. A definition of religion based on this distinction makes a very practical working hypothesis for the sociologist, as is shown in Durkheim's long and admirable work, "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," [6] in which this position is maintained and illustrated. But the book shows no less clearly that Durkheim's identification of religion with the idea of the sacred has notable limitations, particularly from the psychologist's point of view. It describes fairly enough the religion of the tribes of central Australia; but it leaves out of account much that is of importance in the religion of the modern civilized man. Many religious beliefs and religious rites upon which groups or communities agree, and which may be studied objectively, come well enough under Durkheim's formula; but the mental attitude of the modern religious individual contains a good deal which we should have to leave out were we to confine our study to the limits set by Durkheim's method of stating the problem. His definition is devised for the use of sociology; but it is the function of the psychology of religion to describe a large number

[5] Cf. Hebert, "Le Divin" (Paris, Alcan: 1907), pp. 186–195, and the cases there cited from Arreat's and Flournoy's and Leuba's collections.

[6] London, Macmillan: 1915.

of facts and to face a variety of problems which cannot be stated in terms of group consciousness and which have no significant relation to the distinction between the sacred and the profane.

Both the theological and the sociological definitions of religion are, therefore, too narrow to be entirely satisfactory as bases for a psychological study of religion. On the other hand it is possible to make the definition of religion so broad and inclusive as to empty it of all particular meaning. If religion is everything it will cease to be anything. If, as we are sometimes enthusiastically told, all thoughts, all feelings, all volitions of all men are always religious, then religion becomes synonymous with consciousness, and we have simply lost one good old word out of our language.

The definition I have suggested above aims to avoid both the extremes of narrowness and of excessive breadth. It does not necessarily presuppose that all men are religious — they are so only if they believe in a Power that has ultimate control over their destinies, and only if this Power is sufficiently real in their minds for them to have a conscious attitude toward it which in some faint way might be called social. I do not know that all men have this attitude. It may be that there are moments in the lives of all when they do — if so all men have religious moments. If not, then there are some completely irreligious persons. There certainly are millions who are irreligious nearly all the time and in whose lives religion plays a very negligible part. On the other hand, our proposed definition would recognize many an atheist as religious — and I do not see how we can avoid doing so if we are to regard religion as a psychological object.[7] Certainly our definition would find a great deal more religion in some agnostics than in many church-goers. A man may go to Church all his life as the conventional "thing-to-do," he may repeat the Creed every Sunday and never doubt one of its assertions, and yet the problems of Nature and Destiny may be so far removed from all his thought, and the God of whom the Creed speaks may be so unreal to him that he can-

[7] Whether under the proposed definition one could speak of such a position as that of Mr. Bertrand Russell as religious is indeed a question; but certainly his attitude toward the logical and æsthetic aspects of reality is closely related to religion. See his essay on "A Free Man's Worship," reprinted in "Mysticism and Logic" (London, Longmans: 1918).

not justly be said to have any conscious attitude toward Him or any other *cosmic* reality. The cosmic realities and possibilities may be completely barred from his thought by Steel Common and the price of eggs. To such a man God is not sufficiently real even to be doubted. It was something like this that Tennyson had in mind when he wrote,

> "There is more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

The reference to "faith" and to "cosmic realities" which seems to have crept in inevitably, brings up the question of the relation of religion to theological belief, and it may as well be dealt with at once. And first of all it must be said most emphatically that religion is not theology. It differs from theology and philosophy and science in that it consciously cares for the ultimate cosmic problems not on their own account but from practical and personal considerations. It is not a doctrine nor a law nor an hypothesis but an attitude, and essentially an attitude of *expectancy*. Its real and basal question is not, What is the Cause or the Ultimate Nature of the World? but What is going to become of me — or of us — and what is the attitude of the Determiner of Destiny toward us and our interests?

This subjective nature of religion seems to be almost a discovery of our own times. The Eighteenth Century practically identified religion with theology, and it was not till after the psychology of Schleiermacher, on the one hand, and the evolutionary point of view on the other got well ingrained in the minds of writers on religion that the relatively subordinate position of any particular belief within the life of religion was appreciated. The origin of religion is now sought for not in any external revelation but within the subjective needs of human nature, and its development is to be traced through purely human influences, as is the case with language, morality, and art. Thus we have come to see that religion is essentially a human thing, a biological product and instrument, that it is to be understood better by observing its functions than by analyzing any of its particular doctrines, and that it is to be judged by the way it works rather than to be tested by logical canons

as an intellectual system.[8] Religion is not so much theology as life; it is to be *lived* rather than reasoned about.

In short, religion is not a theory about reality; it *is* a reality. And yet we must not forget that it is a reality which includes a theory. The fact that it has had a subjective origin and growth of much the same nature as language, morality, and art, must not hide from us the other fact that it involves an outer reference of a sort that these do not. It is an attitude toward the powers in ultimate control of one's destiny, and hence involves a belief in such powers. This belief need not be explicit — often, especially in early times, it is not so. But if it is not explicit it is at any rate implicit; and inevitably for most of us moderns it is to a considerable extent actually explicit.[9] In one way or another, then, religion always and necessarily involves some sort of theology, some sort of belief about the ultimate Determiner of Destiny. Religion is not merely a feeling; it is, as Professor James says, "a postulator of new facts as well." It takes itself seriously, and is not satisfied with being simply comforting and "useful"; it means to be also *true*. The religious consciousness inevitably considers its religion objective as well as subjective. And if it be said that the *value* of religion at any rate is subjective only, then at least religion must not know that this is the case; for if it learned the secret both its value and it would cease to be even subjective.

This fact that religion is an attitude that involves a belief differentiates it from morality. No one indeed can deny that the two are very closely related, that in origin they were hardly distinguishable and in development have gone side by side, nor that the two may and should command the same things. This almost inextricable relation of morality and religion has been influential in determining much that is loftiest and best in the messages of all the prophets and great religious leaders of every religion, and it was this upon which Jesus laid peculiar em-

[8] Cf. Prof. Foster's admirable little book, "The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence" (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1909).

[9] This is true of all religions that have reached the stage which Bousset calls "Religions of the Law." See his "What is Religion" (London, Fisher Unwin: 1907), Chap. V.

phasis. The different "historical religions," in fact, are differentiated from each other largely by the moral ideals they uphold, and hence may be said to be characterized chiefly by their ethical teachings. In fact these "historical religions" regularly contain two quite distinguishable, though also quite inseparable, moments: an attitude toward the Controller of Destiny and a system of teachings about the conduct of life. In every well formed religion, indeed, each of these is the natural or inevitable correlate of the other, but they are still theoretically distinguishable. Hence each of these religions may be said to be both a religion and a system of ethics. With this explanation I trust it will not seem paradoxical if I say that while every "religion" is in part morality, religion and morality as such are not identical.

The fact that both religious and moral elements are to be found in every great religion and are always closely associated will explain why so many writers have almost completely identified the two. From the time of St. James to the appearance of the latest book on the subject we have been told that pure religion consists in visiting the orphan and widow in their affliction and in keeping oneself unspotted from the world—in other words, in personal and social morality. This identification of religion with morality — especially with social morality — is defended at length in Professor Ames's admirable "Psychology of Religious Experience." Religion is there defined as "the consciousness of the highest social values" [10], and throughout the book this view that religion is simply social righteousness is continually restated and freshly illustrated. Thus "non-religious persons," to whom Ames devotes a chapter, are those who, for lack of some mental endowment, are not interested in the welfare of society, whereas the typically religious people are those who work for social improvement. More explicitly his position is expressed thus: "The term moral has been used to designate those ideals which pertain particularly to human social welfare, in distinction from the claims of religion which seeks authority for conduct in the will of a Deity. The contrast between moral and religious conduct belongs to that con-

[10] "The Psychology of Religious Experience." (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin: 1910) pp. VII, 168, 169, and in fact throughout.

ception of the world which makes a rigid distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between the human and the divine. But if religion is identified with the most intimate and vital phases of the social consciousness, then the distinction between morality and religion is not real. . . . All moral ideals are religious in the degree to which they are expressions of great vital interests of society. . . . The attempt to delimit the field of natural morality from religion presupposes in the older writers a dualism between human and divine, natural and 'regenerate' natures. Without the definite assumption of this dualism the line between morality and religion becomes obscure and tends to vanish completely." [11]

As was said some time ago, every one, in a sense, has a right to make his own definitions for his own terms, provided he will take the consequences. But while this is true abstractly, it would seem that something is due to the traditional uses of the language in which one happens to be writing. No one can be logically restrained from defining religion as morality. But it should at least be pointed out that to do so is to depart from the usages of the English tongue. And it would seem that before appropriating a common and useful though somewhat indefinite, old word such as religion, and making it exactly synonymous and interchangeable with another common word, morality, Professor Ames and the numerous writers who agree with him should at least coin for us a new word which we might use in place of the old one. For, call it what you will, there is in most human lives an attitude toward the Determiner of Destiny which simply is not to be identified with social righteousness or any other kind of morality. And this attitude certainly approaches much more closely to the common meaning of the English word *religion* than does the very admirable thing which Professor Ames has suggested as the equivalent of the term. It is this attitude — not morality — that one expects to read about in a book on religion. And if religion be the sort of attitude I have suggested, then it is perfectly possible that a religious man may be immoral and that a moral man may be irreligious. A deeply religious man indeed is not likely to sin greatly against his own code of morality, and his religion will,

[11] Pp. 285–87.