

THEOLOGY

The second attribute of most religions is theology, and a great deal of effort has commonly been expended in trying to get it right although aesthetes of many faiths may in the end largely dispense with it.

The wide range of theologies that modern communications now reveal to be sincerely accepted by thoughtful men might lead one to suspect the statistical likelihood of any particular version being the literal truth. However without exception theologies are either based on tradition or on statements by revered leaders who demand, and receive the respect necessary to ensure credence of their particular approach without the indignity of having to submit factual proof of a convincing nature.

The motivation of religion is to provide an understandable and acceptable explanation of the rather painful situation in which mankind finds itself. Many of the factors of this situation are anyway beyond the limit of comprehension permitted by the human brain, and others were beyond comprehension in pre-technological times. The religious fathers found it necessary to adopt some sort of anthropomorphic explanation of an optimistic nature to suit the public demand, and to link it to a middle ground morality suitable to the needs of the group. It was religions that came nearest to meeting public demand that were accepted. Christianity for example replaced Mithraism.

It is embarrassing for all concerned when sects fail to keep up with accepted technological advance and attempt to tie themselves to ideas that are demonstrably fallacious. Embarrassing but not necessarily disastrous, because many factual matters like the shape of the earth for example are not really central to theological thought.

It is necessary to remember that man is living in a sort of 'species dream ' because in common with all animals he has to concentrate a great deal of attention on the physical facts of the particular world with which he has to cope. The world that he

sees is highly conditioned to his biological make up. To start with, he sees it only with eyes that receive particular electromagnetic waves, and ears that can receive only a specific range of pressure wave frequencies. Time moves with a specified speed related to his metabolism and rotation of the earth. During most of this time he is unconscious of what lies outside the fragile shell of the familiar nine-to-five world with which he surrounds himself. What lies outside the fragile shell of the dream is for most of mankind largely unknown territory - fearsome, uncertain, misty, unreal. The reality is the dream and the dream the reality; it is normal for all living organisms from greenfly to man. As far as we know man alone has the potential to burst out of his shell into the real world.

Theology though, has to relate mainly to man trapped inside the shell of his dream world. It therefore has to speak in anthropomorphic language, creating its all-powerful points of reference in human form and with human relationships and emotions. This procedure seems pathetic until one accepts all theologies as allegorical, and the variety of god-forms as reflections of local conditions.

The message that needs to be learnt is that the ludicrous formats of a thousand theologies, and the ludicrous devotion with which each is accepted, are not to be regarded as part only of the dream status of man's existence.

To come slightly nearer to home one might add that they are a reminder of the readership figures of the Daily Mirror, and that the nature of the Mirror's headlines about world events does not necessarily mean that the events did not occur. On the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose that something is motivating the headlines.

ECSTASY

Ecstasy is the dynamo of religion, but it spreads far beyond religion into delight in all sorts of aspects of life and surroundings for their own sakes. It arises from the individual submerging himself in something outside, to the extent of joyously identifying with it.

Ecstasy latches onto biologically necessary instincts such as love associated with reproduction, group loyalty and hatred of group enemies; and in all these instances it strengthens the species survival potential and could therefore constitute a pattern of feeling evolved by natural selection.

The strong mainstream of ecstasy however, confers no discernable evolutionary advantage to the species. It includes religious ecstasy and appreciation of natural things and human arts. These can be very, very strong feelings. Whence do they come? Science can at present produce no answer, nor can the feelings be precisely quantified. One thing is that they cannot be dismissed as simple biological functions arising from well-understood physiochemical processes. It is as though there is a factor within the biological organism that seeks outwards to identify with aspects of things outside, and finding this identification reacts with a joyous sense of unification achieved.

It must be concluded that this factor can only relate to physiochemical aspects of the organism, or the matter of the organism, which are not yet understood. It might be called the 'oneness factor' and looking deeper, it must arise from the interrelation of the fundamental particles of matter. It could even one day be measurable; in the meantime it spawns religions. The theology of these religions may be dismissed as nonsense, but their proliferation is not nonsense - it is a fact of the real world for which the only possible explanation is the physical existence of causative force. The building bricks of the world, which are building bricks of ourselves, are linked. All things are one thing. Trailing around us are invisible links to the matter from which we sprung.

Ecstasy equates with unification. Unification with what? With that outside the individual of course. But that outside the individual includes positive and negative in all their senses, including the scale of compassion. It is possible to ecstatically equate with compassionate forces and also with disruptive forces. A fox probably feels ecstasy as he kills more chickens than he needs, and the blood-stained victor after a good massacre has probably got much pleasure out of exceeding the biological requirements of the situation. The examples that could be quoted are

legion. Whatever one calls it, it is the old story of good and evil.

The individual biological organism thus carries within itself potential links of fellow feeling with all aspects of that with which it is surrounded. Considering that it is made out of the materials of its surroundings and eventually goes back to them is not surprising.

One might even be tempted to consider it surprising if these links with mother earth and grandmother universe were not perceived, and yet there is little evidence that they play anything like such a large role in the lives of organisms other than man. Is it perhaps a function of distillation of sensory ability into man's complex brain? There is admittedly the cat sunning itself and the dolphin racing the ship's bow, and the response of some animals to music. Only in the windy ways of man though, does the ecstasy of sympathy, the ecstasy of destruction and the ecstasy of oneness with all things appear to play so dominant a role.

Perhaps we simply have no means to perceive it in other life forms. Perhaps plants spend most of their time in worship; presumably to the sun.

As far as man is concerned, once a religion has been spawned it is apt to become a vested interest. It develops its shadow of hypocrisy, amalgamates with vital biological instincts, creates its necessary anthropomorphisms, dilutes and redistills its sense of ecstasy. For most humans it is not possible to be ecstatic except in short stints, although these can be prolonged with practice. It is well known that the springtime cloys with tasting and in any case one is liable to be eaten by some other organism if one stands too long before sunset. Institutionalised religion has to cater for all this and keep going, so no wonder it tends to be a shambles. As in the case of the Daily Mirror headline, the shambolic appearance in no way invalidates the sense of ecstasy on which it is based.