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RELIGION A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT IN THE SOCIETAL ANALYSIS OF KARL MARX AND MAX WEBER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Introduction

It is a truism to say that the present western society – its institutions and ideas—is based on concepts coming basically from the previous century;¹ it could be no less true of social sciences. Giddens, who “conceived the project of examining the residue of nineteenth century European social theory for contemporary problems in the social sciences” (Giddens 1979 : 294),* observes: “It . . . still seems to me now, that social science in the contemporary world bears the strong imprint of ideas worked out in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe” (Giddens 1979 : 1).

Among the thinkers of the foregone century, Karl Marx and, after him, Max Weber, rank as seminal thinkers and the theories, interpretations and illustrations built after their own concepts and methods are a living proof of their vitality. Both, one after the other, made religion one of the categories of their social analysis,² in critically understanding and proposing projects of change in their own society and milieu. Even when both of them saw an end of religion, Marx as an end of the false consciousness and projection of genuine human being into the other world, and Weber as the end of the rational behaviour, in their analysis of society it was acknowledged to have played an important and irreversibly decisive role.

Religion, besides, plays an important and ambivalent role in contemporary European Society, “an important part in the over-all ideological posture vis-à-vis the communist world” (Berger-Luckmann, 1963 : 417). In analysis,

* In this article the system of reference adopted by the author is preserved. For the title of the book and other details of publication of a reference, see the bibliography at the end of this article arranged in the alphabetical order of the authors' name with the year of publication of each book.

- 1 Madge (1914) extends this origin into the 18th century, whereas Giddens (1979) furthers it into the early 20th century.
2. Cfr. Godelier (1978 : 176): “Marx’s insistence on using religious metaphors... seems to indicate that for him, religious form of ideology plays a dominant role in history”.

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the functional typology of church-sect-denomination and secularisation has played a greater role (Luckmann, 1967: 28-39). In the analysis of non-European societies, ethnological works have found in religion the key to society and its understanding.³ It is, however, in the so-called modernisation and development planning of non-European societies that the role of religion is being re-assessed together with the role of tradition and culture, of which religion is an element. To begin with the Weberian model of such an analysis has been used to assess the role of religion in development, or modernisation. The category of religion, together with tradition, has emerged from its residual and retarding character to be an active and catalytic agent of change.⁴ As Eisenstadt (1971: 25) observes with regard to Weber's thesis on 'The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism': "In the last fifteen years or so, with the upsurge of the great interest in development and modernisation beyond Europe, interest in this thesis has arisen once more. Many seek in the existence or non-existence of some equivalent to the Protestant Ethic the key to the understanding of the successful or unsuccessful modernisation of non-European countries" (Bellah 1965). It has happened in the wake of post-war political independence of a number of non-European countries and a corresponding upsurge in non-Christian religions and their relevance for political organisation (Smith, 1966; Miller, 1974; Oddie, 1977).

In recent neo-Marxist studies of the industrially developed countries and the non-capitalist or industrially less developed countries, inspired on the one hand by the neo-Marxist school of Althusser (1969: 34-5) and his group, and on the other, the response to the challenge of Third World development

3. Cf the works of Franz, Boas, B. Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Mayer Fortes, Mary Douglas, Clifford Geertz, Louis Dumont.
4. On Tradition and Modernisation cf. Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States. The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, Amerind, New Delhi, 1971; L.I. Rudolph S.H. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition. Political Development in India*, Orient Longman, 1967; S.N. Eisenstadt, *Some Reflections on the Significance of Marx Weber's Sociology of Religions for the Analysis of non-European Modernity*, in Arch. Socio. des Religio. 32 (1971) 29-52; *Ibid.*, ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernisation*, Basic Books, New York, 1968; *Millon Singer, The Religion of India* (Review of Marx Weber), in *American Anthropologist*, LXIII (1961) No. 1, p. 150; Arun Sahay, *Hindu Reformer Ethic and the Weber theses: An Application of Max Weber's Methodology*, 2 vols, University Ph. D. theses, London, 1969 (unpublished); Kahane, *Religious Diffusion and Modernisation*. A Preliminary Reflection on the Spread of Islam in Indonesia and its Impact on Social Change, in Arch. europ. sociol. XXI (1980), pp. 116-138

models (Mouzelis 1979), a new series of studies of religion have been forthcoming. These have the character of culture and religion in these countries (Houtart 1974:1976). The contributions of Gramsci are also very significant (Nesti 1970; Portelli 1974). They have opened new vistas of historical and contemporary studies of societies with religion as a social category of analysis.

The *locus classicus* of a sociological analysis of religion and its relevance for a revolutionary praxis has been South America.⁶ All these movements, studies and reflections claim their starting point, if not their legitimacy, from Marx or Weber, which means a general presupposition of the social analysis undertaken by them. It could be worthwhile to review the contributions of Marx and Weber to the question of religion in societal analysis in the context of its formulation, the irrationality of religion. Methodologically, to keep this task under manageable control, we could concentrate on the symbolic aspect of religion, its mediation of meaning-production and social legitimation within a given, historically specific society. What is important, in the spirit of both the seminal thinkers, is to abstract the formal meaning of religion as a general category of analysis and resituate it within historically specific societies (Kersevan 1975). Weber, for example, as Buhler (1976:317-44) explains, claims that ethics and religious belief are not reducible to any class interest. However, he emphasises the function of social legitimation by all types of religious doctrine. This could be properly understood when we hypothesize that men have two distinct but indissoluble needs, viz. the need to give meaning to one's existence bound up with existential anxiety, a sense of finitude, biological misery, and the uncertainty of one's origin and future. Religion meets the needs adequately mediating the problems symbolically and enriching them with meaning. But, at the same time, it justifies the social situation of the social agents in which they find themselves: as it is where it is, or by expressing the need of dignity. Thereby religion appears to be intimately bound up with social order, which also goes

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5. By treating religion as a social category one makes a methodological option to foreclose on religion-in-itself, the phenomenology and the history and the psychology of religion schools. Here, "...la religion est un phénomène complexe qu'il s'agit d'analyser au moyen d'un appareil conceptuel adéquat... une représentation symbolique permettant de créer un sens en référence avec une réalité surnaturelle, cette dernière étant définie comme telle par la groupe produisant la représentation": F. Houtart, *Religion et Modes de Production Précapitalistes*, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 1980, p. 263. Cfr also *Worsely* (1978 : 221-36).
6. There is a vast amount of literature on this subject. (Cfr. Segundo 1975).

to explain why the legitimating function of religion could go disguised: by being totally absorbed in the function of producing meaning, the consciousness of the agent could let the other function of legitimating function of religion (Buehler 1976: 317-44). This is one of the crucial problems in the sociology of religion, and a review of Marx and Weber could shed further light on this point as much as clarify their own contribution to an understanding of religion.

Marx on Religion

Since religion did not become the be-all and end-all of Marx's criticism or praxis,⁸ it could only rightly be understood within the totality of his discourse and praxis. In the situation of Europe between the Enlightenment and 1848,⁹ the blow dealt to religion (to Christian religious discourse of Catholic and Reformation origin) was to some extent, of Catholic and philosophical idealism of Hegel producing an idealistic meaning system and Prussian legitimacy. What was to become a matter of bitter concern to young Hegelians, Hegel's radical disciples, was: "Hegel had claimed that philosophy and religion had different forms but the same content (McLellan, 1980: 7). This honeymoon was contested by the Hegelian left, being bitter at the Prussian praxis of political censure, and ended in the total religious critique of Feuerbach and the uneasy stance of others represented by Bauer, who "considered religion as essentially irrational and saw the loosening of the Church's grip on the Prussian state as a precondition of any progress" (McLellan 1980: 7). Marx belonged to this group and summarised this situation, the first step in his long march in search of an adequate praxis and discourse thus: "I left behind the idealism which, by the way, I had nourished with that of Kant and Fichte, and came to seek the idea in the real itself. If the Gods had before dwelt above the earth they had now

7. There is a return to religious functionalism in Niklas Luhmann after the school of Sociology of Knowledge (Luckmann, Berger).
8. Commenting of Marx's criticism and viewpoint of religion Segundo accuses him of not completing the hermeneutic circle of discourse-praxis, a theological standpoint of Christian meaning-production and legitimization which Marx critically set aside in search of a communist utopia and alternative and, to that extent, was a 'full circle' viewpoint arrived at, but not in the form, essentially religious form, expected by Segundo (1975: 13-9).
9. There is a vast literature on Marx and Marxism. The German situation is summarised in McLellan (1980: 1-23).

become its centre" (McLellan, 1980 : 6). Marx wished to defend Epicurus' view of the radical opposition between philosophy and religion.¹⁰

Marx entered the scene of German thought,¹¹ to begin with, at the juncture where critique of religion had become the supreme critique and had been, so to say, brought to completion. Marx observed: "For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism" (Marx 1977 : 243). In fact, Marx entered this scene with expectations among his friends to achieve precisely that: "... Dr. Marx will give medieval religion and politics their *coup de grâce*", wrote Moses Hess, commenting on Marx who had become a regular contributor to the *Rheinische Zeitung* (McLellan, 1980 : 4).

In the development of Marx's discourse and praxis, we could notice not so much a discontinuity into young and old Marx but a period of formation of the mind,¹² a phase of self-clarification and the writing of the so-called 'scientific socialism'; as Engels would later characterise it, in opposition to 'utopian socialism'. There was a double central aspect of praxis.¹³ There was a double adventure of Marx, intellectual and geographical, one bound with the other in the level of social evolution and toleration of criticism, in more or less progressive and deepening phases. From the philosophical he baled out; ideologically walked out of the ideal into the real.¹⁴ At this stage his journalistic undertakings give an aesthetic shape to what he wrote – a metaphoric and illustrative use of language graphically describing his discourse and being able to be sharp and biting in words. Basis and superstructure, the reflective image or mirror image belong to this heritage (Williams 1977 : 75-82). At each stage, so to say, he rescued certain

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10. The Young Hegelians considered religion as an essentially irrational force and wanted its grip on Prussia loosened so that it made room for genuine progress.
 11. It is important to note that Marx was a German thinker because this fact brings much of the historical clarification required in Marx's analysis and the simplification of his picture; Germany-France-England : Philosophy-Politics-Economy is overcome. Cfr *Kolakowsky* (1978 : 1.1). In the same way to say that Weber comes after Marx and represents a criticism of 'vulgar Marxism' sobers down any attempt at a true comparison. Cfr also Dumont (1980 : 116-118).
 12. It is a point of departure for Althusser in neo-Marxist theory-building.
 13. Lefebvre (1968) makes it the main thrust of Marx's life. In this he was influenced by the Polish Count August Cieszkowski (1838) and his philosophy of action. Cfr McLellan (1980 : 64) and *Kolakowsky* (1978 : 1.75).
 14. Dumont (1980 : 111-85) characterises the early period of Marx as that of individual-society dichotomy, corresponding to his 'Homo equalis' thesis,

elements, tools of analysis concepts and issues and further, at every level, made their application historically specific, thus transforming and overcoming them.

One could briefly reconstruct this undertaking of Marx in order to situate his religious critique as transformed and overcome in political economy, or better, in his criticism of political economy.

A general survey of Marx would reveal that he set himself the task to analyse the capitalist society and its demise in the birth of a socialist society. At his death in 1883 this programme, with the exception of Capital I (1867), remained inchoate and incomplete. Corresponding activity, both on the European continent especially in Germany and in England, was dissolute. It gave him a revisionist blow in the Goth Programme (1875).¹⁵ But it crowned his journey from Germany to France and finally, in the 1850's to England whose political economy he made the case study of the application of all the conceptual instruments he had criticised and adopted: his acquaintance with Saint-Simon already in Germany¹⁶ had sown the seeds of a theory of classes, the Paris Manuscripts (1844) had anticipated a flavour of economic analysis, there was a 'revolutionary vow' of his early youth, (Dumont 1977: 116) his inheritance of the concept of the dialectic, now made to stand on its feet, and alienation, the laws of historical evolution of societies in historical materialism, labour power, surplus value, party, state, revolution and future society (Marx 1977: 425-6). Weaning these concepts from their universal and general application, or false application, Marx pressed them into systematic analysis, by the help of the abstract method, of the phenomenon of capitalistic production in its historical specificity, in their most typical form and most free from disturbing influence.

The evidence to this transition is the much quoted paragraph 'preface to *A Contribution of the Critique of Political Economy*' (1859) where he re-traces his own growth in thought. In this text he accepted for himself the fact that the general development of the mind is to be overcome in situating it in the material conditions of its origin; so were the legal, political relations (their totality, civil society) to be sought for in political economy.

15. Gotha programme outlines the broad stages of the communist society in which alienation, class-differentiation will be eliminated in first, the dictatorship of the proletariat and second, the abolition of the conditions of alienation in eliminating private property.

16. Gurwitsch speaks on the significance of Saint-Simon in the evolution of Marx's ideas; (cf also Giddens (1973: 13).

This 'conscientious research' he made his guiding principle and summarised into what has become the *locus classicus* for neo-Marxism (Marx 1977:425).

In this text there is mention of religion within the framework of basis superstructure: 'In its origin and transformation is religion clarified'. All important references to religion, however, appear in earlier texts, from 1843-1848, from 'The Jewish Question' to 'The Communist Manifesto'.

Religion, therefore, is seen together with the specific organisation of man's relations to nature and between men, with corresponding political, legal systems and consciousness. It belongs to the context of ideology,¹⁷ sharing all its characteristics: unconscious representation of the material basis, claim for universality, the inverse representation of the basis-superstructure relations, relative autonomy, socially dominant in some form or other, and a possible ally of class struggle.¹⁸ It also admits of hierarchic ordering in its various forms: philosophical, political juridical, economic, artistic, moral, philosophical and religious. As Lefebvre (1968: 49) says: "Le concept d'ideologie est un des plus originaux et des plus amples que Marx ait introduits. C'est aussi l'un des plus difficiles et des plus obscures..."

As already remarked, since the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism, Marx has overcome it by the time of his self-clarification arrived at terminally in 'The German Ideology' (1846) and 'The Poverty of Philosophy' (1847). We could also summarise this phase as follows:

1. Religion is essentially a product of social alienation, a necessary but inverted reflection of perverted social relations and man-to-nature but uncontrolled relations.
2. Religion, and in his analysis in particular, Christianity, is a negative force legitimising the power of the dominant classes and educating the masses to submission.

The mechanism of projection is evidenced in his criticism of Hegel's doctrine of the state appearing as such in the state formalism of the bureaucracy — net-network of political illusions. Philosophy and religion

17. For a comprehensive analysis of ideology and religion in Marx and Engels see *Nguyen-Ngoc-Vu*, *Ideologie et Religion d'apres K. Marx-F. Engels*, Strasbourg, 1973.

18. *Ngoc-Vu* (1973:180): "Dansle Manifeste Communiste, la religion est considérée comme une idéologie parmi d' autres idéologies telles que la morale, la, philosophie le droit etc., et c'est ensemble avec ces idéologies qu'elle est soumise à l'examen critique". Here religion shares the same status with other ideologies.

share the same platform, the former comprehending the latter in its illusory reality (Marx 1977: 156). As a mechanism of projection, however, it does not possess a consistency of its own but is the domain of appearances, of illusion, the imaginative realisation of men which appears to be basic reality. By that token, religion represents the theoretical issues of the struggle of mankind, and together with its political form it must be analysed as for its mystical form, and thus human conscience reformed (Marx 1977: 20).

In 'On the Jewish Question' (1843) this analysis is further detailed. In criticising the idealism of Bauer, who demanded the state cease to be Christian in order to stop discriminating against the Jew, Marx demands that the state itself be criticised. It is not political emancipation but human emancipation that is to be demanded. Citing the example of the United States where religion is banished from political life but is notoriously religious, it is abolition of religion altogether that he highlights, because the state could free itself from religion without freeing the citizen, the goal of this striving, and it would also presuppose the continued existence of religion. He demands, therefore, a total emancipation, which is total also for religion because "man makes religion, religion does not make man... Man is the world of man, the state, society. This... produces religion's inverted attitude to the world, because they are themselves inverted world. Thus the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed people... It is the opium of the people" (Marx 1977: 63-4). Once it is overcome one should discover self-alienation in the secular, for criticism of religion changes into the criticism of law, of politics etc. because they are intimately related.

In 'German Ideology' (1846) he went into some details of the religion of nature in which the forces of production were not adequately developed to ensure control of nature. From these definite relations of production, definite mode of life and the objectification of natural forces outside of man were reproduced. With further division of labour, there appears the corresponding division of material and intellectual labour and at this juncture appear priests as the first ideologues. Then conscience develops representing some things as they are and others not as they are and gradually becomes autonomous in pure theory such as theology, philosophy, moral etc. The manner of looking at social forces outside objectively reproduces itself and peters out into playing a role between private and

collective interests sharpening into class relations: "Out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter takes an independent form as the state, separated from the real interests of the individual and the community, and at the same time, as an illusory communal life, but always based on the real bonds..."¹⁹ "This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world". Marx had already said in his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction' (Marx 1977 : 244, 326-7).

This summary leads one to the point of religious legitimation. Here Marx is specific to Germany and to Christian religion. He observes the relationship of religion to social praxis in a specific manner. In what concerns Christianity, he is negative. He highlights its role of legitimising the power of dominant classes and educating the masses to submission (Buehler 1976 : 321). He criticises religion which "has become an integral part of landed property" (Marx 1979 : 171); in the Christian German state "religion is an economic matter just as economic matters are religion... the dominance of religion is the religion of dominance" (Marx 1977 : 224). He is able to see the secret of the religion of the Jew : self-interest, haggling and money, which characterise his age. The Jewish monotheism is in the polytheism of many needs. To him, the Christian remains from the very beginning a theorising Jew (Marx 1977 : 238-9, 40).

He further sees religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc. as only particular modes of production (Marx 1977 : 349). In polemics against the consistory council of Prussia, he identifies the eighteen centuries of Christianity as justifying slavery in ancient society, glorifying servitude in medieval society, legitimising the oppression of the poor; Christian social principles pleading for the existence of dominant-dominated classes, compensating all atrocities in heaven and assuring their continued practice on earth, preaching humiliation, submission, humility with servile principles (Buehler 1976 : 321-2).

Marx knew how deep-rooted religion and its historical forms were. He acknowledged this fact, negatively again, by comparing the mystifying

19. K. Marx (1977 : 169) In the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) he describes the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie in carving out the capitalist system out of the ruins of the feudal system. In this context all that is sacred and religious is mercilessly mauled, religion is debased—the bourgeoisie use everything to their advantage (Marx, 1978-6)

character of religion with the political and economic ideologies of the time : democracy is related to other political forms as Christianity is to other religions (Marx 1977: 87). The supporters of money and a mercantile system make a fetish of private property like Catholic worshippers ; man is brought into the realm of private property as Luther brought him into the realm of religion ; the mysterious character of commodity hiding the definite social relations between men is explained by analogy of the misty realm of religion (Marx 1979 : 165). Christianity with its cult of men in the abstract is the most fitting form of religion for a society of commodity producers (Marx 1979 : 172). Finally, the legitimising search of the bourgeois calling their institutions natural and those of feudalism artificial, he compares to the theological position of considering their religion as coming from God (natural) while what is not there as their own being an invention of men (artificial). In this way, they cancel history and establish universality, the foundation of their legitimacy (Marx 1979 : 175).

Before concluding, a question or two could be asked. First, did Marx find no positive element in religion? And second, how did he propose to supersede religion as a *false consciousness*? There is in Marx a positive appreciation regarding the theoretical from Luther's religious criticism. He perceives that theory could be a material force when grasped by the masses. He sees that for Germany concretely the Reformation had a theoretical thrust ; Luther conquered the servitude based on devotion, faith based on authority, suppressed by priestly mediation ; but he introduced servitude of conviction, authority of faith and priestly mediation within men themselves. He was asking the right questions, but was not radical enough, since to be radical means to grasp by the root ; and for man the root is man himself. Luther had capitulated before princes and the emerging bourgeoisie. He had not put the dominant social and political relations of his time into question while proposing an utopia of liberation. For Marx, religion and all ideology being inverted reality, the only true, radical solution is to put them on their true basis, to re-invert them. Since they are specific phenomena, determined phases of history, a) by

20. Marx established a link between alienated labour and gods and its standing over against man with a certain spontaneity ; he points out Hegel's inconsistency and asserts that religion is an alienated consciousness and in its supersession the self is confirmed in itself. In his criticism of Feuerbach he commends his criticism of religion, which is projection of the self outside itself, but demands that the secular be understood in its contradiction and revolutionised in practice.

domination of nature, and b) by the liberation of the oppressed who suffer a double illusion viz. a false reality and its legitimacy, the true emancipation could be achieved. It is done in the revolutionary praxis of the proletariat, or the oppressed. He does not study religion in itself, nor does he produce his general statement on religion from the right questions asked by the Reformers. He sees its specific social condition and legitimising function. Concerning the meaning of religion and religious phenomena he concentrates on false-consciousness (false reality), but refuses to see an objective outside of man and society. All reality is to be brought to its real base for solution because "all social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice (Marx 1977 : 423). The *epistemological value* of this point has not been worked out by Marx himself and hence the spate of Marxist works to arrive at a true sociology of religion,²¹ which in Marx was seminal (Buehler 1976 : 324).

Weber on Religion

In contrast to Marx, Weber, makes the analysis of religion one of his central tasks; the meaning-production and social legitimacy constitute the perspective of his specific analysis of sociology of religion while his basic search is found in the meaning of social action. But Weber has produced such a volume of literature on religion that it is difficult to delve into its riches and complexity. There are, however, guidelines to direct oneself with the right perspective because Weber himself saw a guiding unity in his diverse analyses : rationalisation of Western society.²² Religion-in-itself was never Weber's first love. The general structure of 'Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft' (Weber 1976) is ample proof that religion belongs within the totality of his theoretical discourse and Weber's project of producing a theoretical discourse remained incomplete.

As an introduction, we could see Weber working at different levels and in different areas. He entered the field as a lawyer and did an economic analysis of early middle age commerce, as also studied the history

21. For a bibliography of neo-Marxists see Maduro (1975).

22. "The word rationalism is used by Weber as a term of art to describe an economic system based not on custom or tradition, but on the deliberate and systematic adjustment of economic means to the attainment of the objective of pecuniary profit" (R.H. Tawney, *Two Concepts of Capitalism*, 1956, p 1).

of Roman legal institutions (Bendix 1960 : 37-70). His was a criticism of 'vulgar Marxism' as he met it in the extant literature and political praxis of his time. He took the German nation-state seriously enough to arrive, theoretically, at more subtle views on class, class-differentiation and the autonomy of the political, personified in Bismarckian and Junker affinity (Giddens 1972 : 29-39), and the weak subordination of the liberal bourgeoisie to the traditional elite groups (Giddens 1972 : 41-52), even in the wake of rapid industrialisation of Germany.

At the same time he refined the methodological repertoire of his theoretical work, taking the inheritance from German cultural sciences and contrasting it with the natural sciences then on the rise. A synthesis of the two led to further experiments. The 'irrational' behaviour of the German nation-state, in contrast to the rationalism of England, France etc., made him ask a few questions on rationalisation itself as a phenomenon of the so-called modern Europe. The ideal type method stood him good company in handling the origin of European rationalisation, which he summarily identified with a few rational methods and institutions (Weber 1978 : 1, 1-16). The impact of 'Verstehen' the meaning of the individual behaviour, gave Weber certain presuppositions to inquire how Europe arrived at rationalisation; the investigating its origin he studied the Reformation and Reformation Sects; and in comparative contrast he asked why the civilisations like that of China and India did not develop it, and then as a special case he studied Ancient Judaism for its particularism as also for its general features that served as a basis for eventual European rationality.

It was Weber's conviction that the economic rationality had taken over the role of religion in modern Europe. But in explaining its origin he found the importance of religion (Weber 1978 : 1, 17-30). He also introduced a host of concepts and refinements such that, if one is not careful, one would come away having lost the main threads of his reasoning as has happened with his Protestant Ethic.²⁴ The study itself and the controversy it raised in his life-time led further to search to observe the

23. His projected study of Islam and early Christianity were unfulfilled wishes. Giddens says : "The prominence which has been given to the Protestant Ethic has tended to obscure some of the main pre-suppositions of Weber's analysis, and also has helped to direct attention away from certain of the most significant divergences between this analysis and that of Marx, moving the emphasis instead to a sterile debate over the 'role of ideas' in history" (1972 : 45).

rationality of sects and the spirit of capitalism. In studying the sects, as he later specified, he concentrated on their behaviour, thus studying the ethical conduct inspired by religious principles. It was but a consequence of cultural-methodological inheritance from Dilthey and Rickert (Outhwaite 1975 : 25-55). The social strata—as a class and status group—also played an important role in his analysis so that he was able to analyse religious behaviour and attitudes typical of each group. Weber's interest in psychological behaviour was no less marked; meaningful behaviour implied certain amount of psychological probing. His interest in typification of establishing its means-ends polarity and its orientation to a definite praxis, made him pursue the total picture of a religion and, since religion belonged to the birth of rationality, i.e. in its genesis, an evolutionary scheme was not outside his ambitious programme. The evolutionary scheme, however, was flexible; he studied the different forms of manifestation or articulation of behaviour: ritual, magic, prayer, divine cult, ecstasy, orgy, contemplation, polytheism, monotheism and its different variations and permutations — all producing meaningful or rational behaviour.

There is no historical chronology that Weber held for important; no form of religious behaviour was to appear on a strictly historical perspective; to that extent he was not interested in causality; he overcame it by the use of a concept 'elective affinity' (*Wahlverwandtschaft*). His study of the rise of religion is itself cast into the mould of the rise of rationalisation of behaviour. In the process of legitimisation of power, he considered economic relations, to some extent, as also other aspects of religion such as religious ethics, salvation and theodicy. He did not emphasize the economic relations these types legitimised and, therefore, as Bourdieu says, refused to make religion the direct reflection of economic and social conditions, nor did he reduce it to wonder phenomena inspired suddenly and from outside (Bourdieu 1976 : 346).

We could, therefore, divide the understanding of religion in Weber at different levels, without respect to the manner of their origin, but arranging them in the order best suited to study them in the process of rationalisation of society: the historical perspective of evolution of religion, the religions of China and India, Ancient Judaism and Western rationality and the Protestant Sects. The conclusion could be an evaluation of the contemporary period.

i. *The Historical Perspective*: Since Weber's interest is in this-world behaviour and rationalisation he studies all forms of religious behaviour under that aspect. Since, as in modern times, an economic, political, rational behaviour independent of religion had not developed he sees political and economic aspects within religious rationality, giving rise to secular or general rationality.

The most elementary forms of religion are oriented to this world, i.e. towards well-being in the world and to make it sure the acts of religion or magic are more or less rational and are the means to achieve definite ends. In the next stage appears the belief in the spirits, spirits residing behind the visible objects. The come the gods and demons, i.e. the rise of the supernatural, which constitutes a further stage of religious activity, and even magic enters into a new phase of symbolic activity. Then one notices the rites and rituals of offerings occasioned by the rites of the dying or dead. The forms of totemism and tabu have their interaction with animism and sacral magic, but a number of economic and social interests are also invested into it. Tabu leads to organised norms - the dos and don'ts, and the rise of special groups is also bound with these rites of the totemic fraternising or otherwise.

Weber further sees the complexification and reciprocation of relations between gods and social evolution and political consequences which lead him to analyse the special relationships between specific political units and local gods. The good and the bad is a division that leads to moralisation in religion.

A real break comes with the arrival of the tendency to monotheistic cults which demand specific ethical forms of behaviour, either between gods of the pantheon or between the presiding god and his people and among people themselves. The most universal ethic corresponds to monotheism.

ii. *The Chinese and Indian Developments*: The formation of an empire in China and the penetration of Brahman caste into all specific political formations demand the birth of universalism and monotheism, at least in some vague form.

In studying India and China, to a large extent, he ignored chronology. He moved from the past economic-social analysis and the analysis of religion to the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The

growth of cities as fortresses and princely residences, the imperial centralisations and corresponding paternalism, a religious organisation that lacked the prophet and a powerful priesthood, the role of the literati who were the government officials and the ruling strata, the Confucian priests, the state cult and popular religiosity, systematic rationalisation of magic under Taoism — all these aspects of the Chinese Society were compared with their corresponding organisations of economic life. But in the comparison of Confucian and Puritan religiosity and ethic: whereas in Confucianism prophecy was repudiated and economic transactions subordinated to filial piety, the West subordinated familial ties to impersonal conditions and shattered the fetters of kinship. The difference came from “superior community of faith and a common ethical way of life in opposition to the community-confidence upon the ethical qualities of the individual proven in his impersonal, vocational work.

With regard to India, castes gave examples of a special case of status group. In caste ostracism resulting from violation of exclusiveness, Weber saw a similarity to ascetic groups. After an analysis of its variegated history, in its important aspects Weber saw that in Hindu thought the immutable world order and deprecation of world was non-ascetic in the occidental sense: “It could not have occurred to the Hindu to see the economic success he had attained through devotion to his calling as a sign of his salvation. And what is more important, it could not have occurred to a Hindu to prize rational transformation of the world in accordance with matter-of-fact considerations and to undertake such a transformation as an act of obedience to a Divine will” (Weber 1951: 237). Weber concluded that in Asia “the element was lacking which was decisive for the economy of . . . this emotional drive which is endemic in the pursuit of gain” (Weber 1951: 337).

iii. *The Western Rationality*: Having briefly summarised the historical and the comparative²⁵ perspective, Weber could now be seen polishing his argument on Ancient Judaism and its religious types especially those of inner-worldly asceticism and prophecy. The contrast with the oriental world would be that of mystical contemplation. Weber noticed a common trait between Judaism and Christianity i.e. of an active religious asceticism by the idea of positive ethical action under divine guidance. He did not interest himself in Christian asceticism that rejected all worldly concerns, but in that which

25. From Weber's analysis many countries of the Middle East have been left out, for reasons of being within manageable limits?

sought to transform the world. He goes on to analyse the history and social organisations of ancient Palestine, but interest is once again concentrated on the social orientation of the prophets after the political decline of Israel, the future orientation in promise and Israelitic dominance, the consciousness of the prophets of being the tools of Yahweh's will. He isolated their charisma - whose origin and continuity he had outlined with great care throughout his sociological analyses of religion - in a special manner and emphasized their ethics and theodicy-the political events remaining central in their message. The Jewish scriptures represent a rationalism, moralistic as well as pragmatic-cosmological, and through them the ancient Judaism helped create the moral rationalism of Western civilisation.

In the West to insure its authority, the clergy was forced to systematise its doctrine in defense against new prophecies and define the religious group in relation to competing doctrines while the emotional community was developing. Practical pastoral care kept casuistic systematisation of ethical commandments alive and took a stand with regard to the habits and conventions of the lay world. Greek thought, social position as middle estate and community organisation gave rise to systematic rationalisation with dogmatic theories, cosmological explanations and salvation myths which justified clerical power. But the laity was variously rationalised, which led Weber to determine the corresponding types of religiosity. In 'Economy and Society' he analyses the demands of different groups in different strata of society: in the lower strata the transformation of religion into savour religion compensating their deprivation; in the higher strata their intellectual conception of reality and social life demanding an impersonal and supra-divine order; whereas among the negatively privileged there was no demand for religion at all.

The privileged strata of society assign to religion the primary role of legitimising their own social status and way of life. But in some circumstances of deprivation, they might even have recourse to salvation religion. That was Weber's conclusion because in this manner the function of religion is essentially bound with each social group. Its development and causality demand such an affinity. This is rooted in a cultural differentiation which is the result of economic rationality, the fruit of the performed occupation. Weber "establishes a relation of covariance between the level of rationality borne by a social stratum and the religious form it produces" (Houtart 1976: 349).

The rise of Protestant Sects in the Reformation movement and their this-worldly asceticism characterised by the idea of calling (Martin Luther) by the glory of God, his providence and search for signs of his predestination (John Calvin) led to the conduct that created a spirit that characterised in turn the rationality of Capitalism. This thesis is too well known and much written about to merit lengthy treatment here.

iv. *The Modern Crises* : The progressive rationalisation, ethico-religious concepts and elimination of magic gave rise to inner crises of injustice, evil etc. so that the teleological development and means-ends rationality made its entry into irrational behaviour – a cold-blooded diagnosis of the modern society by Weber. There came rationalisation of a bureaucracy and the disenchantment of the world, but it routinized itself. The grand prophetic charisma came also to an end. Religion declined as a condition of rational behaviour at its height, but the exact sciences could not go beyond the point of arrival. Weber saw a gloomy future yawn a chasm of irrationality. Any revival of religion, considered Weber, would be artificial and sterile, but he was short of breath to wish for a charismatic saviour to redeem the thankless situation ?

Unlike Marx, Weber, approached religion from the side of its daily praxis taking into account its complex interest ; the religious field deals with irreducible continuities. He does not reduce them to class interests or class inferiority complex. He attributes to them a unique causality, positively appreciating the meaning-producing and legitimising role of religion leading to a life of ethics, rationality and order.

Marx And Weber : Some Conclusions.

Marx and Weber were shaped by two different phases of German social formation. They responded differently to the challenge and arrived into their respective analysis by different roads. Weber encountered the 'vulgar' Marx of 'economic determinism' (?) but both embarked on a task of analysing the bourgeois society of the 19th century whose origins they saw in the seventeenth century. The most fateful force of the modern life they saw in capitalism and among the many elements of this society to be analysed, both acknowledged the role of religion. Both undertook to analyse its impact and bearing on society, not merely in general terms but also in its genesis, historically and in specific societies.

Secondly, in choosing a method of ideal types and the search for the intended meaning of the agent (finality), Weber blocks himself from establishing an explanation of causes. The elective affinity is a special 'causality', no more than a covariance. The totality approach explains more than covariance. It brings out the logic of relationships which unite the elements into a whole and bring out their meaning. Of course, the fear of uncausal trap, far which he reproached Marxism, left him without an ultimate intended meaning of the agents in a rationalised, bureaucratic society; it could not have exhaustively explained even the beginning of a society, the logic of the relationship of various elements within themselves and within the whole. Besides, the agents don't often possess an analytic preception of their social position, which leaves one to postulate a second level reflection, excluding sometimes the intended meaning.

For Weber, however, religion represented the privileged locus of meaning-production and the reason of society: rationalisation. Since class differentiation was a complex of class and status differentiation and relations, he could arrive at a cultural differentiation of the class status-groups and their corresponding demand on religion for legitimisation corresponding to their level of rationalisation. With this one arrives in the valley of no return, the alternative is the irrational. Religion exhausts itself, without its alternative. Weber too remains without an alternative.

For Marx, religion was one of the elements of the superstructure whose real foundation, the economic forces and relations (totality) he set out to analyse, and made the criticism of religion, the *fantasmic form of the real*, the type of all criticism. It represented the inverted reality par excellence and shared it in common with other ideological elements of the superstructure. The task of re-inverting was a task of praxis, situated in the dialectics of the class-differentiation of society, and to be overcome or superseded in the revolutionary praxis of the class to whom it was an exploitative relationship i. e. of the proletariat. Hence for Marx there is a real alternative to the capitalist society.

But in their methodological approach, they parted company. Both diverged in their historical perspective of the origin of capitalist society. Marx analysed it, in origin and in its structure, by abstracting the most typical and the most free form in comparison: the commodity. Weber looked at its characteristic formal aspect: rationalisation.

Weber admits that different status groups demand different types of religious legitimations and meanings of their position, status etc. The question is: how do they belong together? If they are not to be atomised and closed in on themselves as single elements, the question of social cohesion remains open. If different types of religious functions hold together the different but interacting groups (within a given totality), so that the dominant (more rationalised) demands legitimacy, by the same token the dominated demand compensation which means the same religion offers itself for cohesion, presenting itself differently. Here we arrive in the court of Marx: religion for one and illusion for the other. The function of social placement of the groups was socio-economically asymmetric. The religious legitimisation of the privileged and the compensation of the underprivileged would not be beyond legitimacy if it was not made natural i.e., beyond questioning which means the social order is symbolically transposed into the 'supernatural', or 'metasocial' order. This produces the need to hold the different groups together. Here religion explains, justifies and regulates the order, which means it totally functions as an ideology.

Religion may not always function as an ideology and legitimise the social order and regulate it. It could play a specialised role. This introduces us to the fact that ideology and ideological function of religion is not a constant and needs to be determined by searching for conditions of its placement and function. Empirical research is one of the tasks that could clarify this point. But it cannot be arrived at adequately without a totality approach, where one considers society as a whole and its elements (group etc.) as interrelated. A synchronic viewpoint, as in Weber, may have its value, to explain why some groups have access to rationality than others, but it does not go beyond.

Further, in the Protestant Ethic, in choosing the ideal types Weber did not rule out the importance of the economic factor. Rather he stressed it on a number of occasions, which again goes to bring the point of the totality of society into analysis, which also means religion must be viewed within its totality of relationships.

A less rigid view of understanding basis-superstructure as *process* (Raymond Williams), as *function* (Maurice Godelier), or even some elements of the superstructure as *dominant relations of production or of the basis* (Godelier, Hindess, Hirst), means the unicausal or mechanistic aspect of

the problem is overcome. More empirical research especially non- and pre-capitalist societies would clarify these theoretical issues and yield rich dividend.

One could adopt Marx's vision of viewing religion, its role and function in society, on condition that one does not fall into the blindness of mechanism, and accepts the relative autonomy of religious phenomena as admirably brought out by Weber.