CHAPTER ONE

Religion and the Spiritual Quest

From Closure to Openness

We shall not look far in search of the quest; it will meet us at every turn of the way. For this business of seeking, of setting off in determined pursuit of what we are lacking and may never attain, is no incidental theme of our literature and thought, no bypath of history, but a fundamental activity that contributes in no small measure toward defining existence *as* human. All life is continually going beyond its given condition, and the primal origin of the quest may very well lie in the biochemical composition that links the proud members of our sapient species with everything else that grows before decomposing.

But the quest is pre-eminently a *conscious* transcendence, a deliberate reaching toward a posited—if by no means an unalterable—goal; and in this purposeful overreaching of our given status we are perhaps entitled to regard humankind, among the inhabitants of our planet, as being alone. We distinguish ourselves from lowlier beasts as kindlers of fire, makers of tools, users of language, but whatever innate dispositions may have evolved to render these activities possible, each of them was and remains, like everything specifically human, not an instinctive inheritance but a cultural acquisition, a capacity that must be attained. As the animal most imperfectly programmed by nature for the period between birth and death, the animal that must seek to acquire what it characteristically lacks to begin with, and to actualize by directed effort what is potential in its being but never knowable in advance, the human species may be designated *animal quaerens* with at least as much right as *animal rationale.*

What human beings lack in genetically programmed endowments they normally make good, to be sure, by an acculturation process so routine as to seem automatic: to speak one's native language, or to

manufacture a basic artifact, requires no one to go questing afar. Here culture is very nearly a second nature, and the most ordinary effort is all but certain not to miscarry. But awareness of this process may set human beings self-consciously apart from a no longer "natural" world which they strive to regain or surpass; the concerted effort to overcome this apartness is a cardinal condition of the quest. The very term *spiritual* is an index of this separation; for distinction from the body places the unhoused spirit in a state of incompletion and need. Whether or not the process of self-transcendence has its inarticulate origin in the protoplasmic beginnings of life, so that evolution can be comprehended, as Bergson somewhat fancifully thought (213), "only if we view it as seeking for something beyond its reach," it achieves awareness, and hence can be fully a quest, first in man; and not until man posits a mobile dimension at least partly independent of biological need does the quest become spiritual and specifically human. It lies in the nature of spirit, which owes its existence to the separation that it continually strives to overcome, rather to seek than to find.

TWO ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS RITUAL

We naturally associate the spiritual quest with religions; we emphatically cannot identify them. Like technology and language, religion is a frequently cited differentia of humanity; insofar as it too is an institution of acculturation, it appears to be a self-contained system that leaves the spirit little to ask for. In this light, religion is less a manifestation of the individual quest than an alternative to it; it says not "Seek!" but "Seek no further!" This aspect of religion has been repeatedly emphasized by those who view religious beliefs as a reflection, and religious practices as a reaffirmation, of dominant social values.

For Marx it was axiomatic that the religious sentiment "is itself a *social product*" and that "the religious world is but the reflex of the real world" (Marx and Engels, 71, 135), "real" being equivalent to "socio-economic." Nor is this perspective exclusively Marxist: "In societies such as our own," Bergson remarked (13), "the first effect of religion is to sustain and reinforce the claims of society." For Peter L. Berger (1967, 33), "religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference." Within this frame religious and social institutions (which repeatedly overlap) are viewed as immutable, and religion, by its claim to permanent status, acts as the hypostatized inertia (or "repository of sacred tradition") by which society collectively denies the potentially disruptive reality of change. It would be hard to imagine an institution more alien to the tentative in-betweenness and perpetual

movement of the spiritual quest than this stolid objectification of willed social rigidity.

The study of "primitive" religion has found this model of particular value. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* of 1912 (115), Durkheim pronounced the totemism of aboriginal Australia, as recorded by Spencer and Gillen, Strehlow, and Howitt, "the most primitive and simple religion which it is possible to find," and therefore the one in which the essential features of all religions could best be studied. Many of Durkheim's assumptions now seem preposterous. Australian religions are neither single nor simple; and the hypothesis of universal religious evolution from a vague "totemism" unattested in much of the world was flimsy then and is untenable now. But by his single-minded insistence on the interdependence of the religious and social orders Durkheim exerted immense influence on the sociology of religion. His belief that society is "the highest reality in the intellectual and moral order that we can know by observation" (29) mounts to evangelical heights when he declares it "unquestionable" that to its members society "is what a god is to his worshippers" (236–37). And in this worship of society "the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be illusory" (464): their adoration has the force of indefeasible truth.[1] Durkheim's collectivism is thus totalitarian in the strictest sense. Society as the Absolute, unlike lesser deities, allows no exceptions and tempers the necessity of its order with no merely personal mercy. Such a monolithic religion clearly leaves no place at all for the restless spirit to quest in.

Anthropologists have by no means unanimously acquiesced in Durkheim's fervid credo—"It was Durkheim and not the savage," Evans-Pritchard tartly observed (1956, 313), "who made society into a god"—but the social perspective on religion has been central to many. Thus for Malinowski (66–67), though society is neither the author nor the self-revealed subject of religious truth, religion "standardizes the right way of thinking and acting and society takes up the verdict and repeats it in unison." And for Radcliffe-Brown (1952, 157), the principal function of religious rites is to "regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends." We need not subscribe to the unitary correlation between society and religion propounded by Marx or Durkheim to acknowledge their intimate connection. Religion is no luxuriant excrescence upon the trunk of

1. Bellah (1959, 458) must turn to early unpublished lectures for evidence that Durkheim "saw clearly that collective representations have a reciprocal influence on social structure." *The Elementary Forms,* Durkheim's last major work, whose very title has a Platonic resonance, offers little support. On the contrary, as Talcott Parsons writes (1937, 1:449), Durkheim was evidently "thinking of society as a system of eternal objects," timeless and unchanging.

society but a fundamental expression of underlying values that society can articulate in no more effective form. Insofar as such an articulation, unlike Durkheim's seamless weld, allows for variation and imperfection, however, and thus falls short of "unquestionable" authority in matters of ultimate truth, an otherwise inconceivable space for the quest may be imperceptibly but portentously opened.

Influential though orthodoxy, or "right opinion," has been in regulating social order, the orthopraxis, or "right practice," encoded in ritual has been more basic still; and ritual, which knits the social group together and validates its identity, is invariant almost by definition. The striking parallels between human and animal rituals have led to speculations concerning an instinctive disposition toward ritual behavior, even though ritual, like language, is culturally transmitted. Fundamental to its function of stabilizing social order is its repetitiousness. Every ritual must be performed over and over in essentially the same way, so that ritual has even been defined, by Kluckhohn (1942, 105), as "an obsessive repetitive activity." Since the rite re-presents a sacrosanct beginning, it must not be thought to change in any essential, however adaptable it may prove in practice (Firth 1967a, 41). Every performance is not only alike but *the same;* significant variation is excluded by the nature of ritual itself. What has worked before must not be altered lightly if it is reliably to work again, and again. . . .

In ritual the animal and the human indistinguishably meet and momentously diverge; ritual can no more be reduced to biology than restricted to spirit. Survival value appears fundamental to animal ritual (Lorenz 1966, 67). In addition to abating hostile tensions and cementing social bonds, human ritual often explicitly aims to assure the food supply on which survival depends; it is literally, in Hocart's phrase (37), "a cooperation for life." At the same time, while looking back toward primordial origins re-enacted ad infinitum and while sharing in the invariance of animal ceremonies, religious ritual decisively differentiates human from animal behavior by positing a goal no longer determined solely by chromosomal codes or physiological needs. By reaching *consciously* back toward consecrated prehuman beginnings whose distance from their ordinary condition they strive to overcome, the enactors of ritual thereby reach beyond them as well. They hypostatize ancestral animals not only as biological progenitors but as founders of the culture that distinguishes human from animal; their culturally acquired ritual effects, by its very existence, transcendence of the animal condition it celebrates. The very repetitiousness of ritual proclaims a distinctively human reality striving toward realization—a reality indeterminately in statu nascendi. Thus ritual is no mere inertial force but a potent agency of organic and social development. "Both instinctive and cultural rituals," according to Lo-

renz (1966, 77–78), "become independent motivations of behavior by creating new ends or goals toward which the organism strives for their own sake." Ritual "can have an adaptive and even creative function" (Firth 1967b, 23) in formation of the social order.

In this light, ritual seems an extension of the impulse to purposeful differentiation implicit in life; it is not stasis but regulated movement. Only after its adaptive rhythms have become mechanical does ritual assume the character of bureaucratic control assigned to it by Weber (1946, 267) and correspond only to religious "rules and regulations." Even so, the creative function recognized by Firth and others in no sense contradicts the maintenance of social equilibrium stressed by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The dynamic aspect of ritual may be no more perceptible to its participants than the evolution of life to a species in transition; ritual participants may be conscious only of perpetuating their group by scrupulous performance of practices prescribed since their foundation. Stability takes precedence of change (even though stability may be attainable only by nearly insensible change). "Ceremonies are the bond that holds the multitudes together," Radcliffe-Brown (1952, 159) quotes the Chinese *Book of Rites* as saying, "and if the bond be removed, those multitudes fall into confusion." A similar view underlies Kluckhohn's contention (1942, 101) that rituals (and associated myths) provide "the maximum of fixity" in a world where social order is continually threatened by spontaneity and change. In its coercive reduction of present and future to re-enactments of a domineering past, its insulation from time and denial of the change it may be unwittingly promoting, and its exclusion of all uncertainties arising from uncontrolled variation, ritual reinforces the equilibrium that every human society strives to maintain. In this it is the antithesis of the restlessly aspiring quest which is nevertheless, perhaps, latent within it.

The inseparable link between religion and social structure postulated by Marx and Durkheim thus appears to be abundantly established. Yet we should be wary, even apart from the dogmatisms of Marx and evangelical excesses of Durkheim, of assenting uncritically to the thesis of social priority and hence of seeing religion (by simple inversion, à la Feuerbach, of the religious viewpoint itself) as the reflection of a preexistent social reality. "Durkheim's theory," Cassirer cogently observes (2:193), "amounts to a *hysteron proteron,*" a placing of the cart before the horse. "For the form of society is not absolutely and immediately *given* any more than is the objective form of nature, the regularity of our world of perception. Just as nature comes into being through a theoretical interpretation and elaboration of sensory contents, so the structure of society is a mediated and ideally conditioned reality." To affirm the interdependence of the religious and social orders by no means justifies

us in viewing either as the simple emanation of the other; and inasmuch as ritual is a creative force we might no less plausibly view society as the offshoot of religion than religion as the outgrowth of society. The antecedence of one or the other of these coordinate constructs of human culture is a moot, if not a meaningless, question.

Such considerations caution us against viewing ritual as a wholly static reflex of the society whose stability it asserts. (If ritual is an instrument of imperceptible adaptation, its very denial of change may be its supreme defensive stratagem: plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change. . . .) Nor can religion be confined to the collective and invariant aspects that permit it to be understood as a ratification of existing social order—the aspects in which it is farthest from any true quest of the mobile spirit. Bergson, who acknowledged the effectiveness of religion in sustaining society's claims, associated this dimension with a "relatively unchangeable" instinct directed toward "a closed society" (32). In contrast, the self-sufficient motion of "the open soul," far from being instinctual, "is acquired; it calls for, has always called for, an effort" (38–39). To these qualitatively distinct sources of morality and religion he respectively assigned the functions of "pressure and aspiration: the former the more perfect as it becomes more impersonal, closer to those natural forces which we call habit or even instinct, the latter the more powerful according as it is more obviously aroused in us by definite persons, and the more it apparently triumphs over nature" (50). In this second aspect individuals are no longer wholly identified with the collectivity, and no longer find their beliefs and practices adequately prescribed by social fiat in accord with biological predisposition, but must acquire them and make them their own. Here the human being, even in ritual movements which partake of both dimensions, parts company with the instinctually determined animal within as socially programmed religious behavior gives way to individually varied religious action purposefully directed toward an indeterminate outcome—religious action in which the spiritual quest has both matrix and paradigm.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP: RITES OF PASSAGE

Far from being, in Whitehead's phrase, "what the individual does with his solitariness" (1926, 47), religion in most societies is a quintessentially social activity. Even so, the Durkheimian equation of religious reality with "Society divinized" led Malinowski to ask (56) if primitive religion could be "so entirely devoid of the inspiration of solitude," leading him to the contrary conclusion (58) that "the *collective* and the *religious*,

though impinging on each other, are by no means coextensive." In the solidarity of tribal society our accustomed antithesis of individual and group would no doubt be inconceivable. The very essence of the "participation" which Lévy-Bruhl associated with "primitive mentality" (and, he increasingly realized, with our own) is that "the subject is at the same time himself and the being in whom he participates" (1925, 345). Selfhood is achieved by identification with the group, not distinction from it. The religion of solitariness thought by Whitehead (1926, 35) to be the result of evolution toward more individualistic, less communal forms could have had no place (as he understood) in the unity of tribal society. Even so, the identity of individual and group has never perhaps been so complete as Lévy-Bruhl's much-disputed "mystical participation" suggests.

"Such facts as the seclusion of novices at initiation, their individual, personal struggles during the ordeal, the communion with spirits, divinities, and powers in lonely spots, all these," Malinowski reminds us (56), "show us primitive religion frequently lived through in solitude." And insofar as religion remains communal, the solidarity it ratifies is not an inheritance possessed ab initio as by the bees but a goal to be attained—often by strenuous effort—and periodically renewed. Far from affirming the undifferentiated cohesion of society, initiation ceremonies and other rites of passage suggest a relationship not of static invariance but of reciprocal transformation. Even in its tribal manifestations, then, religion presupposes (in Bergson's terms) not only instinctive "pressure" for the maintenance of a closed society but, at least in potential, the psychic "motion" of personal aspiration toward a community forever being achieved.

The importance of van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage,* published in 1908, four years before Durkheim's *Elementary Forms,* is evident from the title: ritual, the presumably immutable substratum of religious behavior, pertains not only to social stability but to transition, passage, and therefore change. The pattern underlying different rites of passage may indeed be remarkably stable—van Gennep (11) discriminated the three major phases of separation (*séparation*), transition (*marge*), and incorporation (*agrégation*), which he otherwise (21) called the preliminal, liminal (or threshold), and postliminal stages—but the rites affirm not structural fixity, in the first instance, but processual movement; not the apathetic self-sufficiency of a divine collectivity but the sometimes hazardous adaptation of its human components (whether individuals or groups) to a larger whole which, to that extent, is of their own making.

Van Gennep emphasizes (191–92) the importance of "transitional periods which sometimes acquire a certain autonomy" and of "*territorial*

passage, such as the entrance into a village or house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets"; the passage defining these rites "is actually a territorial passage." It is therefore not the beginning or end points, the separation or incorporation, which these rites have in common—rites of birth, marriage, initiation, or death begin and end in wholly different biological and social conditions—but passage itself, the critical crossing of a threshold that is not a line but a region, a temporal and spatial in-between, "autonomous" because not governed by conventions prevailing before and after the crossing. Each passage, to be sure, presupposes a goal—it is a passage *to* something—but no goal entirely subsumes the passage to it (autonomy cannot be subsumed under law, or movement under fixity) or finally terminates the process of crossing, since every end-point is potentially a point of departure and "there are always new thresholds to cross" (189). What the rite of passage celebrates above all is passage itself.

Victor Turner, developing van Gennep's insights, repeatedly emphasizes that society cannot be understood in terms of fixed structure alone but is always a process, in which van Gennep's transitional stage is of crucial importance. Concerning this fluid, "antistructural" condition of "liminality," and the revitalized human relationship of *communitas* to which it typically gives rise, he writes (1969, 95–96):

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. . . . We are presented, in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social structure. . . . It is as though there were here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions . . . The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

The "communitas" emerging from liminality, in contrast to the hierarchies enclosing it on either side of the threshold, is for Turner the quintessentially religious aspect of human existence. The totality in which the individual transcends himself is not society as an immemorial static entity but an inherently transitional community perpetually in the process of realization.

Moreover, communitas, though originating in the liminal phase of rites of passage, need not terminate with it; jesters, saints, and other outsiders who "fall in the interstices of social structure, are on its margins, or occupy its lowest rungs" (1969, 125) provide society with a

continuous (if not always welcome) reminder of communal values, and transition may even become a permanent condition when spontaneous communitas is normalized, as in the monastic orders of Christendom. Liminality is thus not simply a transient phase left behind once the ritual has accomplished its immediate object but a recurrent constituent of human culture, which it distinguishes (one might add) from the transitionless hierarchies of the ants and bees as an intrinsically unfinished process directed toward an incessantly redefined goal. The communitas fostered by this recurrent transitionality has an existential quality, as opposed to the cognitive, classificatory quality which Turner (with Lévi-Strauss) associates with structure; it has "an aspect of potentiality" and "is often in the subjunctive mood" (127).

Of the two complementary dimensions, communitas—the dynamic or potential—is therefore prior to the apparently stable configurations of the structural stasis which it is forever imperceptibly transforming. "Communitas . . . is not structure with its signs reversed, minuses instead of pluses, but rather the *fons et origo* of all structures and, at the same time, their critique. For its very existence puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities. Communitas strains toward universalism and openness" (1974, 202). This aspiration toward a more inclusive human community—all rites of passage, not excepting those of death, enlarge a corporate group—is one respect in which "communitas is to solidarity as Henri Bergson's 'open morality' is to his 'closed morality'" (1969, 132)—a force inherently expansive and incomplete. "Communitas is not merely instinctual," any more than Bergson's second source; rather, "it involves consciousness and volition" (188).

In major liminal situations a society "*takes cognizance of itself*" (1974, 239–40); for only in between obligatory fulfillment of structurally prescribed functions does the potential for purposeful change arise. The social order, for stability's sake, must therefore confine overt expressions of communitas to "interstitial" occasions and institutions. Clearly distinguished categories and relations are the essence of structure, and there is always danger in transitional states, as Douglas remarks (96), "simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable." The danger is one that the social order must strictly circumscribe, or it will soon be no order at all.

At the same time, anomaly which finds a recognized place in the social order—as in the Ndembu twinship ritual studied by Turner—may ratify that order by making it the guarantor of values seemingly antithetical to its immutable categories: by being assimilated, the anomaly is regularized and order is upheld. "Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as

extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior" (Turner 1969, 176). Rituals of status reversal, by making the low high and the high low, reaffirm the hierarchical principle without which high and low could not be distinguished even in reverse. But to reaffirm the principle is by no means to affirm any given hierarchy's perpetuity as actually constituted; on the contrary, continuous passage through a porous hierarchy whose only divisions are thresholds makes such an affirmation meaningless. Social life, as experienced by its participants, is "a process rather than a thing" (203)—not a fixed system but a dialectic "that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality" (97). A society in stasis is a contradiction in terms, for ritual can truly affirm the social order only by continually reshaping and creating it anew.

Turner's argument is open to criticism for its excessively pliable terminology (*communitas,* like Lévy-Bruhl's *mystical participation,* is a catch-all of nearly undefinable limits) and its impressionistic use of evidence drawn from a grab-bag extending from African tribal rites to William Blake, Martin Buber, and the hippie counterculture of the 1960s. Granted that symbol and metaphor are fitter vehicles (as Turner suggests) than analysis for conveying the existential qualities of communitas, in these departments the anthropologist can hardly better the originals toward which he somewhat redundantly points us. Yet by his emphasis on ritual liminality as a formative component of a society in continual transition Turner, like van Gennep before him, fundamentally modifies the widespread view of religion (above all in its putative origins) as a passively reflective, obsessively repetitive ratification of a preexistent social order which it thereby endeavors to immunize from the virus of change.

And by associating (even at the risk of prematurely equating) liminality and communitas, Turner discerns that far from merely dissolving the structural bonds among its members, leaving them isolated during their perilous crossing, the liminal phases essential to the rhythm of social life reconstitute those bonds by creating a deeper awareness of community as a shared human need than any static system of kinship roles alone can prescribe. It is in this sense, not by its coercive injunctions, that religion, to the extent that it is "liminal" and not wholly institutional, is most profoundly (as the etymology of our word suggests) a binding together. Through continually renewed assimilation of its members into a more comprehensive community in transitional rites that provide a fluidity integral to its existence if alien to its categories, a no longer static social structure achieves the capacity for self-renovation by which it becomes, in more than a manner of speaking, social life.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This understanding of the dynamic role of ritual sharply contrasts with that of Durkheim or Radcliffe-Brown, for whom religion was essentially an epiphenomenon reinforcing the primary social order which it reflected. Other major thinkers of the early twentieth century also assigned to religion a formative function within a society seen less as a finished structure than a work forever under construction. Max Weber's primary interest, as Talcott Parsons discerned (1963, xxx), "is in religion as a source of the dynamics of social change, not religion as a reinforcement of the stability of societies." For Weber (1946, 245), the tendency of society to congeal in bureaucratic institutions is periodically subverted by the "entirely heterogeneous" force of personal charisma. Throughout early history, "charismatic authority, which rests upon a belief in the sanctity or the value of the extraordinary, and traditionalist (patriarchal) domination, which rests upon a belief in the sanctity of everyday routines, divided the most important authoritative relations between them" (297).

Both tendencies are therefore (like Bergson's two sources or Turner's structure and communitas) fundamental to religion; nor is the traditionalist solely an inertial or the charismatic a progressive force. Both (through "revelation and the sword") can be innovative, and both are subject to institutional routinization. Yet charisma, as a force essentially extraordinary, personal, and unstable, is for Weber, in the absence of external intrusion, the primary agency working against rigidification of social structures. The charismatic attitude "is revolutionary and transvalues everything; it makes a sovereign break with all traditional or rational norms: 'It is written, but I say unto you'" (250). By its highly personal disruption of the collective, its injection of the unpredictable into the routine, and its crystallization around the charismatic individual of an intensely motivated community within the larger society, religious charisma, as Weber portrays it, is inherently a force for change—a force equally destructive and creative in potential and always, from the observer's perspective, uncertain in outcome.

For George Herbert Mead, as for Bergson and Weber, the transformative agency in religion is not the liminal rite of van Gennep's or Turner's tribal societies but the dissident individual who gives new voice to his society's deepest, if nearly forgotten, aspirations. What gives unique importance to religious geniuses, such as Jesus, Buddha, and Socrates, is their "attitude of living with reference to a larger society," a society larger than their institutional communities; though each diverges from the prejudices of his age, "in another sense he expresses the principles

of the community more completely than any other" (1934, 217). Only because society is a dialectical interchange between whole and part can any person achieve this unique importance by actuating the aspirations implicit in his social environment; he transforms his world by revealing to it, from his seemingly tangential perspective, the unsuspected novelty latent within it.

In Mead's social psychology, "the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole" (7). The individual comes into being only through social differentiation and is a product of society, not its pre-existent component. Not until he can adopt toward himself the attitude of the "generalized other" constituted by his environment does the human being become a conscious individual. Ritual contributes significantly to this developing consciousness, since the self is a process in which the conversation with others has been internalized (178); the religious cult contributes toward evolution of the self by giving expression to an ongoing conversation with the world.

In contrast to the conventional "me"—the generalized other internalized in each individual—the response of the subjective "I" is always uncertain. "It is there that novelty arises and it is there that our most important values are located. It is the realization in some sense of this self that we are continually seeking" (204). And this "I," the individual's changing response to the institutionalized attitude of the community, in turn changes the latter by introducing something not previously present (196): the unpredictably responsive "I" is thus the dynamic agency of society's transformation. A reciprocal adaptation is always taking place, not only of the self to the social environment but of that environment to the self by which it is continually being reshaped. Thinking itself is "the carrying-on of a conversation between . . . the 'I' and the 'me'" (335), and because this conversation is forever introducing new situations, it is incompatible for long with any fixed form of society. The religious genius accelerates this often-imperceptible process by acting as "I" to society's "me," thereby actualizing what was potential. Not only primitive cult but religion in general is thus the open-ended conversation of man with his world.

For Peter L. Berger, too, social reality is a construct of human consciousness in turn structured by it through internalization of its own objectified projections: "the social world . . . is not passively absorbed by the individual, but actively appropriated by him" (18). By means of this "protracted conversation" society furnishes its constituent individuals with a *nomos,* or meaningful order, that shields them against the blankness of its unassimilable margins—with the result, however, that "the world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining conversation begins to falter" (22). Religion protects man against the terror of

"anomy," or meaninglessness, by audaciously attempting to conceive of the entire cosmos as humanly significant. And although its projection of human meanings into an empty universe returns as a hauntingly alien reality, the religious enterprise "profoundly reveals the pressing urgency and intensity of man's quest for meaning" (100), which lies at the root of all his endeavors to impose order on what is beyond his control.

It follows that religion not only legitimates social institutions by bestowing ontological status on them, but relativizes these same institutions *sub specie aeternitatis* and hence may withdraw sanctity from them (97–98). Far from merely validating society's decrees, religion reveals the intrinsic incompleteness of all human attainments by holding out the possibility of an order transcending the approximative actual: the indispensable if unreachable goal of an all-encompassing nomos, an all-embracing communitas. For this reason, religion is a force not only, as Durkheim believed, of social inertia but no less intrinsically, as Weber understood, of radical change arising from the individual's aspiration toward a more meaningful order than the emptied legitimacies his given world can supply.

A similar conception of religion as continuous transcendence finds expression in Kierkegaard, who affirms through Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* "that it is not the truth but the way which is the truth, i.e. that the truth exists only in the process of becoming" (72). Existence "is precisely the opposite of finality" (107) and cannot be conceived without movement or reduced to any closed system, and reality is "an *inter-esse*" (273), "the dialectical moment in a trilogy, whose beginning and whose end cannot be for the existing individual" (279).

Since human life is by nature "steady striving and a continuous meanwhile" (469), then, the religious aspirant will renounce the mirage of absolute truth in this world for the road leading toward it and concur with Lessing's hard saying that "if God held all truth in his right hand, and in his left hand held the lifelong pursuit of it, he would choose the left hand" (97). The subjective thinker has no finite goal toward which he strives and which he could reach and be finished: "No, he strives infinitely, is constantly in process of becoming" (84). Religious aspiration requires a goal indeed, but requires that this goal be transcendent—attainable, if at all, only by a leap beyond the continuous meanwhile of human existence into another order of things whither neither Johannes Climacus nor we may follow. To the extent that religion pertains to the human it remains, for Kierkegaard's quixotically inward outsider no less than for the tribesmen of van Gennep or Turner, a never-completed transition.

Of the two conceptions of religion that we have examined, one is as-

sociated with passively habitual (if not "instinctive") affirmation of society as a closed structure immutably grounded in the past, the other with actively purposeful transformation of society as an open process perpetually in passage toward an unrealized future. In terms of the first, no quest is conceivable, since the answers are given in the fixed repetitions of ritual before the questions are asked. In terms of the second, the personal quest finds a collective paradigm in the liminal community's ritualized itinerary through society's margins toward an indeterminate outcome always leaving new thresholds to cross, and the individual's aspiration toward a more meaningful order may in turn become a potent instrument of social transformation.

Between the two, Bergson discerned (58), lies "the whole distance between repose and movement. The first is supposed to be immutable. . . . The shape it assumes at any given time claims to be the final shape. But the second is a forward thrust, a demand for movement; it is the very essence of mobility." The difference is not, however, as Bergson elsewhere implies,[2] a qualitative one that precludes interaction between them. On the contrary, the static and the kinetic, the closed and the open, the structured and the liminal dimensions of religion, neither of which can exist in isolation for long, are inseparable aspects of one another, through whose dialectical interplay the religious life of society comes into being and continues insensibly to evolve.

These aspects, though both essential, are nevertheless not equal; the primacy of the second derives, for Bergson, from the fact that "movement includes immobility" (58). Stasis is the temporary equilibrium that results from the variation in tempo intrinsic to motion; it is not an autonomous reality but a pulsation or pause in the movement that repeatedly creates and annuls it. The real is not only mobile but movement itself; and if we persist in regarding as real the momentary halts which are only the simultaneity of movements, and in fallaciously viewing rest as anterior to motion, this error reflects our deeply ingrained reluctance to accept the ineluctable mutability of a condition which suggests to our dissatisfied minds "a deficiency, a lack, a quest of the unchanging form" (244). To exist with irrepressible *consciousness* of impermanence, of the in-betweenness intrinsic to the transitional process of life, and to confront in perpetuity an openness offering no prospect of termination, is to be always aware of a lack—the lack of that very closure and fixity we so insistently affirm—fundamental to our existence.

Yet if the permanence we inherently lack and incessantly strive to

2. "But between the society in which we live and humanity in general there is, we repeat, the same contrast as between the closed and the open; the difference between the two objects is one of kind and not simply one of degree" (32). Bergson's "vitalism" rests, very shakily, on a similar dualism.

achieve should be a chimera incompatible with the mutability that defines and propels us as living and questing beings, it will be not only a will-o'-the-wisp forever beyond attainment but an object finally alien to our aspirations themselves—an ultimate goal of our quest, but a goal that can only provide fulfillment so long as we continue to lack and continue to seek it. For just as rest is a phase of the movement that includes it, finding can be no more than a momentary pause in the continuous process of seeking which has, by its nature, no end.