BRILL

THE TRANSPLANTATION OF RELIGIONS

BY

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This article offers some ideas about the transplantation of religions which are thought to be sufficiently widely illuminating to be considered as a phenomenological theory.

What Van Der Leeuw called "the dynamic of religions"[1] has always been the most neglected aspect of the phenomenology of religion. This neglect may have been at least partly due in recent times to the necessity of distinguishing clearly between the history of religions and the phenomenology of religion, which naturally led to the focussing of the latter on static structures rather than on anything which smacked of chronological development. R. Pettazzoni's "*Aperçu Introductif*" in the first volume of *Numen*[2] illustrates this clearly. He explains the purpose of phenomenology as being to explain "le sens" of religion[3] and quotes Van Der Leeuw's dicta: "Die Religionsphänomenologie is nicht Religionsgeschichte" and "von einer historischen Entwicklung der Religion weiß die Phänomenologie nichts".[4] The distinction between the two disciplines could not be more emphatically stated, and it is significant that it is the notion of development which betrays itself as an important distinguishing factor.

Conversely, Pettazzoni himself attempted to draw the two together precisely by emphasising "la fenomenologia dinamica". In the phenomenology of the dynamics of religion he saw the point of identification between phenomenology and history.[5] He was, it seems to me, partly right. On the one hand it is important to hold history and phenomen-

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1) G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (2nd. Eng. ed. 1964) p. 609. (The first edition was in 1933.)
2) *Numen* I, 1 (Jan. 1954), *Aperçu Introductif*.
3) *Op. cit.*, p. 3.
4) *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
5) *Numen* I. 2 *Manuali di Storia delle Religioni* p. 140. Cf. also Numen VI, 1 (Jan. 1959) *Il Metodo Comparativo* pp. 9ff. and p. 14.

ology firmly apart, as their relationship is one of interplay. A "dualism" of mental categories such as Pettazzoni feared does not necessarily affect the unity and coherence of that which is studied. However on the other hand Pettazzoni's instinctive demand for a phenomenology of the dynamics of religion was completely justified. Such a phenomenology is just as important as a phenomenology of the static structure of religion, though it may be more difficult to develop.

Perhaps the main difficulty in elaborating a theory of the "dynamic" aspects of religion is indeed that it can easily be mistaken for history. A phenomenological theory draws on histories of religions and relates again to further historical research as a heuristic principle, but it is itself an abstraction (or set of abstractions) and as such quite different from those wide generalised sweeps of history which are sometimes illuminating but which more often simply obscure the actual complexities of things. The integrity of the historical method as such, which must be defended from the idolatry, so to speak, of specific phenomenological theories, may be safeguarded if one assumes, at any rate for a few centuries or so, that no phenomenological theory can claim to be *exhaustively* illuminating, especially if the field of religion is defined, for operative purposes, at its widest. Nevertheless a theory is valuable if it illuminates some similarities between some religions which are dissimilar in other respects, or if it sets up a framework in terms of which varying degrees of some characteristics may be considered in the case of a series of religions. It is in this spirit that the following ideas about the transplantation of religion, in expressly formal and non-historical terms, are offered.

Van Der Leeuw himself devoted only nine pages [6]) out of several hundred to "the dynamics of religion", in the course of which he dealt with syncretism, transposition, mission, revival and reformation. Of the five terms mentioned "mission" stands out as carrying with it heavy associations of one specific religion, Christianity, and I therefore suggest that it should be dropped for phenomenological purposes in favour of *transplantation*. Similarly I prefer the word *ambiguity* (for which see later) to *accomodation* as the latter has specifically Buddhist overtones for those who are aware of them.

In the above cases the preferred terms also have the advantage over

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6) Van Der Leeuw, *op. cit.,* pp. 609ff.

the rejected ones that they do not necessarily imply conscious activity. Van Der Leeuw admitted that "mission" may be completely unconscious [7]) but it must be said that it can scarcely be so in the specifically Christian context from which the word was drawn. *Transplantation* allows us to include conscious and unconscious activity without strain. I admit that even *transplantation,* if taken too literally, suggests some kind of gardener rearranging his flowers and vegetables, but *propagation,* which is unconscious enough in botany, has already been snapped up by the Vatican. So we shall have to make do with *transplantation,* forgetting the gardener and allowing that seeds are sometimes blown about by the wind or carried unwittingly by animals and birds. The use of the word *transplantation* will also allow us to detail a rather more comprehensive theoretical pattern which will link "mission" not only with "syncretism" as in Van Der Leeuw's chapter 93 but also with "revival" and "reform" as in his chapter 94.

The transplantation of a religion involves a complex relationship between tradition and interpretation, or in other words, an interplay between what is taken to be the content of the religion and the key factors in the situation which it is entering. This relationship may be considered in terms of three principal aspects (designated below as 1.1; 1.2; 1.3) and five sets of differentia (designated 2.1; 2.2; etc.). In order to explain the theory in consecutive prose it will be convenient to detail briefly two pairs of differentia as an introduction, then the three principal aspects as the hinge of the theory, then the three further sets of differentia by way of elucidation.

2.1. Transplantation may be geographical or chronological. It may be geographical as in the case of the spread of oriental cults in the Roman Empire, or the spread of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Manichaeism, etc. into the areas concerned (c.f. "syncretism" and "mission", Van Der Leeuw, *op. cit.,* pp. 609ff.). It may also be chronological, not in the trivial sense that geographical transplantation takes time, but in the sense that a religion may find itself running on the spot to reassert itself in changing cultural circumstances (cf. "revivals" and "reformations", Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.,* pp. 613ff. with which should also be considered "transpositions", *op. cit.,* p. 610f., and also restatements and "aggiornamento").

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7) *Op. cit.,* p. 611.

2.2. The factors in the situation into which a religion is transplanted may be themselves specifically religious or not, or both. If a religion already present in the situation under consideration is itself undergoing a chronological transplantation, then religious struggle may ensue. Sometimes however political or economic or other non-religious factors may be more important than the claims of rival religions.

1.1. Contact (the first principal of transplantation). This is a very simple matter involving the setting up or presentation of means of communication, styles of activity, etc. e.g. writings, ideas, buildings, rituals. These means bear some relation to the factors of the situation into which the religion is being transplanted, i.e. writings are translated or re-translated etc.

1.2. Ambiguity (the seond principal aspect of transplantation). This involves a degree of acceptance of factors prevailing in the situation into which the religion is entering, such that the question of heresy and orthodoxy, rightness or wrongness, is thereby raised, i.e. the question as to the identity or otherwise of that which is expressed in the new situation and that which gave the initial impulse to the transplantation, or in other words the question as to the persistenec or dissipation of the tradition. Ambiguity may appear as one symbol with two sets of associations (e.g. Māra [8])) or simply in the unresolved coexistence of elements belonging to the transplanting tradition and to the situation which is being entered (e.g. Christian and pagan elements in Beowulf).

1.3. Recoupment [9]) (the third principal aspect of transplantation). This involves the reassertion or reclarification of that which was being transplanted in some adequate way. On the one hand the new expression of the religion will have a reasonable claim to identity with that which

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8) See T. O. Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil,* 1962.

9) Since working out the above ideas I have come across the use of the word "recoupment" by I. R. Faruqi in his *History of Religions: its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim-Christian Dialogue* (continuation, in *Numen* XII, 2. p. 83) where he says. "Therefore, there can be no doubt that Semitic Christianity had itself developed into Islam, and that the latter's contention with Orthodox Christianity is only a backward look within the same stream from a point further down its course — in short a domestic recoupment within the one and same Semitic consciousness itself." Clearly the usage is not yet technical in the sense in which I am trying to establish it, but at the same time it is a clear attempt to delineate a chronological transplantation (for more details of which see *op cit.,* pp. 81ff.) which coincides with Islam's account of itself, and to claim the Quranic revelation as an adequate reassertion of the essential meaning

gave the impulse to the transplantation; but on the other hand it will
not be simply identical with older forms since it has expressed itself
in terms of the factors of the situation which it has entered. The recoup-
ment aspect is the most difficult to evaluate because it involves some
sorting out of heresy and orthodoxy (or similar), that is, some attempt
to elucidate the essential characteristics or content of the religion
concerned, which is frequently a theological problem (or similar) for
the adherents of the religion themselves.

2.3. The three aspects may appear chronologically in the order given
and are perhaps thus most easy to recognise, as e.g. in the case of the
hellenisation of Christianity. However they may also be relevant in some
other order. For example, the work of Nichiren, considered as a case
of chronological transplantation ("reform"), began with the extremely
fluid and ambiguous state of Buddhism in Japan at the time, developed
into a conscious attempt at recoupment by the seeking out and setting
forth of what he took to be orthodox essence of Buddhism, and finally
flowered into new symbols (new *gohonzon, daimoku,* and new *kaidan*)
which in turn made contact with that and subsequent generations. Indeed
the three aspects may be relevant in a quite unchronological way. For
example, the *gohonzon* in Nichirenite Buddhism might be considered
simultaneously under all three aspects.

2.4. The three aspects may be more or less tightly linked one with
another. E.g. in the case of Christianity the prevailing instinct seems
to be to insist on recoupment following closely on the ambiguities
caused by contact, although this judgement depends partly on how one
delineates Christianity as a historical phenomenon. Buddhism allows for
a greater degree of ambiguity, as does Shinto (so that relationships
between the two are very difficult to chart), while Manichaeism allowed
so much ambiguity that it was never able to recoup properly and died
out altogether.

2.5. The adherents of religions may be themselves conscious in varying
degrees of the transplantation process. They may react quite uncon-
sciously to situations which arise and thereby ensure the automatic
chronological transplantation of their religion (c.f. Van Der Leeuw's

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of the tradition. Faruqi insists that the historical truth involved must be discovered
and established. But the extreme complexity of analysis should be recognised,
especially in the case of the aspect of recoupment, complicated as it is by problems
of religious self-interpretation on the part of the religions involved.

comments on "syncretism" and "transposition" *op cit.,* pp. 609ff). Conscious furtherance of a transplantation process may be variously motivated, e.g. politically, economically (Diana of the Ephesians!) or religiously (mission or apostolate, etc.) or by some subtle combination of these. The lowest degree of sophistication in the conscious further- ance of transplantation is reliance on contact; second in order of so- phistication comes the recognition that in a resultant ambiguous situation orthodoxy is at risk and that recoupment is demanded; and thirdly comes the conscious acceptance of a tolerable amount of ambiguity as the price of successful transplantation.

The theory I have outlined, I should insist, is not an invitation to vast frescoes of the history of religion. In practice, under the umbrellas of the big names, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, many trans- plantation processes are taking place at once, just as the situations in which a religion is potentially influential are innumerable and various. When a particular case is under consideration the eight points which have been detailed might be thought of as questions to be raised. Some of the questions may not prove easy to answer, especially those con- cerning ambiguity and recoupment, and especially if those two aspects are almost simultaneous and very tightly linked. However, it is essential, in my view, to raise such questions in the study of religions, since transplantation is an everpresent aspect of that which is under study.