RELIGION:
An Ambiguous And Questionable Concept

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الملخص

كاد يتفق أكثر علماء الأديان – إن لم نقل جميعهم- على أن الدين عبارة عن العلاقة القائمة بين الناس وما اعتبروه مقدسا. إن الدين بهذا المعنى كان وما يزال موجودا طوال التاريخ البشري، إلا أنهم يختلفون عندما يعرّفون ويبينون الدين باعتباره مفهوما من المفهومات . إن الدين – كمفهوم– له تعريفات متباينة. فللدين إذن مفهوم متعدد المعاني كما يرى الكاتب في هذه المقالة. هذا الاختلاف حول مفهوم الدين قد سبب ازدياد التعقيد والإشكال في فهم معنى الدين ولكن يمكننا تمييز جميع الأديان الموجودة في التاريخ – على الأقل- على سبعة معايير وهي: المعيارية والجغرافية والإثنوغرافيةواللغوية والفلسفية والمورفولوجيةوالظاهراتية. من هنا يمكننا أن نقول إن مفهوم الدين – من المنظور الأكاديمي– يشمل ظاهرة اعتقادية وسلوكا إنسانيا بمعناهما الواسع ولا يقتصر على ما يسمى بأديان العالم الكبيرة. إن الأديان لها أوجه شبه وفرق، كما شرحه الكاتب في نهاية هذه المقالة.

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Abstract

Hampir sebagian besar ahli ilmu agama, jika bukan seluruhnya, tentu akan sepakat dengan definisi agama sebagai sebuah hubungan manusia dengan sesuatu yang dianggapnya suci. Dalam sepanjang sejarah, agama dalam pengertian seperti itu memang selalu dapat ditemukan dalam kehidupan masyarakat manusia. Tetapi, mereka akan berbeda-beda pendapat ketika berusaha mendefinisikan dan menjelaskan agama sebagai sebuah konsep. Sungguh, agama sebagai sebuah konsep memiliki pengertian yang berbeda-beda. Agama adalah sebuah konsep yang ambigu, sebuah konsep yang mempunyai banyak pengertian, seperti diperlihatkan oleh tulisan ini. Perbedaan pengertian seputar konsep agama itu telah menyebabkan pemahaman tentang agama menjadi semakin kompleks dan rumit. Semua agama yang ditemukan dalam sejarah diklasifikasikan berdasarkan sekurang-kurangnya tujuh kriteria, mulai dari kriteria yang bersifat paling subjektif hingga kriteria yang dianggap paling objektif. Ketujuh kriteria tersebut adalah normatif, geografis, etnografis-linguistik, filosofis, morfologis, dan fenomenologis. Berdasarkan klasifikasi ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa secara akademik konsep agama mencakup sebuah fenomena keyakinan dan perilaku manusia yang sangat luas yang tidak terbatas pada apa yang disebut "agama-agama besar dunia". Agama-agama mempunyai persamaan dan perbedaan seperti secara singkat diperlihatkan pada akhir tulisan ini.

Keywords: tradition, theology, monotheism, psychology, manifestation of God.

I

The subject of religion has been studied by many disciplines, especially by the study of religion which attempts to systematize and bring order to a vast range of knowledge about religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. However, scholars of religious studies have encountered many difficulties in defining religions which are accounted for by the immensity of religious diversity that history exhibits. The scholar who embarks upon the arduous task of trying to understand religion as a whole confronts an almost inconceivably huge and bewilderingly variegated host of phenomena from every locale and every era.

This present essay attempts to give a brief account on the concepts of religions and the diversity of religions. After a general review on the

theories of the origin and essence of religion, it will discuss the classifications of religions that have been found by religious studies. The diversity of religions or religious diversity is a matter of fact within the universal belief in the One God and the same ultimate goal of all religions, i.e. salvation.

II

As far as scholars have discovered, there has never existed any people, anywhere, at any time, who were not in some sense religious. Since the dawn of human history, as stated by Ayyoub, men and women everywhere have turned to religion in their search for the meaning and purpose of human existence. This quest has been undertaken both by individuals and societies. It has been expressed in myth and ritual, poetry and music, architecture and the visual arts. But above all, it has manifested itself in outpourings of human emotions of fear and hope, love and despair, and inner communion of the human heart with the Divine. Religion has in fact been the fountainhead and framework of human civilization.[1] Numerous definitions and classifications and expositions have been offered by many scholars from many disciplines.

The endeavour to grasp religions and to describe them in scientific manner belongs to be one of the four main questions which have to be answered by religious study.[2] Linguistically, the term religion comes from Latin world *relig(are)* which means to tie, fasten. The word would originally have meant being tied back, or connected to God. What is generally understood by religion is usually religion in the sense human beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual, or divine. Religion is commonly regarded as consisting of a person's relation to God or gods or spirits. There are two non English words that have

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[1]Mahmoud Ayyoub, "Quest for Meaning: the Role of Religion in Human History", Paper originally submitted to the International Conference on Muslim-Christian Relations: Past, Present, and Future Dialogue and Cooperation, Jakarta, August 7-9, 1997

[2]Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. xvii. The four formative basic questions in the study of religions are: (1) What is religion? (2) How did religion come into being? (3) How shall religion be described? and (4) What is the function or purpose of religion?

relation to the meaning of religion: *dharma*, from Hinduism, and *din*, from Arabic. Both mean more than what the religion in English word has. Hindus prefer to use the Sanskrit term "sanatana dharma" for their religious tradition. This term is often translated into English as "eternal religion" or "eternal tradition" that according to Hindus the translation of *dharma* as "religion" or "tradition" gives an extremely limited, even mistaken, sense of the world. In Sanskrit, *dharma* has many meanings, including "moral order", "duty", and "right action".[3] The same is the meaning of the word *din* found in Arabic language and therefore in Islamic teaching. In its literal usage, *'din'* means obedience, being in debt, restoring one's rights, adopting as a habit, forcing, calling to account, managing, rewarding or punishing, serving, lending and so on.[4]

It is clear that the word religion has many different meanings depend on what the original used term is. Terminologically, religion has been defined as a set of belief concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a super human agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often having a moral code for the conduct of human affairs. It also means a specific and institutionalized set of belief and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects; the body of persons and institutions adhering to a set of religious beliefs and practices; a deep conviction of the validity of religious beliefs and practices; the life or state of a monk, nun, etc.; the practice of religious beliefs; ritual observance of faith; or a point or matter of ethics or conscience.[5] Muslim theologians have terminologically described *'din'* as the set of principles revealed by God through Prophets so that mankind should follow by free will in order to acquire happiness in both worlds.

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[3]Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism", in *Encarta Encyclopedia 2004*, Microsoft Corporation.

[4]See the complex meanings of this word in, for example, Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971), pp. 305-306.

[5]Jess Stein, *The Random House College Dictionary*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1984), p. 1114.

The concept of religion may be viewed from two perspectives: the human or the divine perspective. The followers of the great world religions tend to conceive religion form divine perspective and define religion as God-revealed principles, values and commandments. By contrast, most modern Western scholars of religious studies link the origin of religion to man and then seek to explain it away according to the different sciences of man — anthropology or sociology or psychology or others. Modern thinking assumes humanity as a continuous irresistible and irreversible flow or movement toward what is better. Humanity has gone through certain stages of intellectual development. Based upon the theory of evolution, Western scholars studies and treats religions as an organism like physical world. In fact, the contribution of evolutionism for the study of religions is too great so that it is said that "Darwinism make it possible".[6]

Among others who have studied religions, anthropologists have concentrated on the question of "How did religion come into being" and reached different conclusions. J. G. Frazer (1854-1941),[7] for example, stated the origin was magic, while for E.B. Tylor (1832-1917)[8] it was animism, for Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954)[9] it was original monotheism, and for others it was pre-animism, totemism, fetishism, or polytheism. Later anthropologists concentrated on rather the role of the religion in society than its origin. While social anthropologists saw religion as part of society and concentrated on field studies of particular tribes, or the analysis of myth, ritual and symbol, the cultural anthropologists saw it as a set of beliefs, rites and institutions.

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[6]It is a title of one of thirteen chapters of Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd., 1986), pp. 47-71, dealing with the great influence of Darwinism on anthropology in one side, and study of religions in other side.

[7]He is British anthropologist, folklorist, and classical scholar, best remembered as the author of *The Golden Bough*.

[8]Tylor is an English anthropologist regarded as the founder of cultural anthropology. His most important work, *Primitive Culture* (1871), influenced by Darwin's theory of biological evolution, developed the theory of an evolutionary, progressive relationship between primitive and modern cultures.

[9]He is a German anthropologist and Roman Catholic priest who led the influential cultural-historical European school of ethnology. He was a member of the Society of the Divine Word missionary order.

Just as the evolutionists drew different conclusions, those who want to capture the essence of religions also come to different opinions. Some of this opinions are positive and some negative. Among the positive opinions, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who is widely regarded as the founder of Liberal Protestant Theology, defined religion as "the feeling of ultimate dependence". His definition has been among the most influential definitions of religion in modern religious thought. In his view, religion — while includes both knowledge and action — is actually based in an "immediate self-consciousness" in which the self feels itself totally dependent on something infinitely beyond itself.[10] Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) said religion is a response to the holy and more than a feeling of dependence or a mode of self-consciousness. According to him, it is the depth of religious emotion, a paradoxical mix of love and fear, attraction to and repulsion from that to which all religions point, the "wholly other".[11] Paul Tillich (1886-1965), one of the major Protestant theologians of the first half of the twentieth century, defined religion as "ultimate concern". In his view, all people have an ultimate concern and hence a "religion" or "faith", but not all religions are equally valid or true. The true faith focuses on the true ultimate; any lesser concern is "idolatrous" and hence inadequate as a faith.[12]

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895) — both are always associated with the beginnings of communism — described religion in extremely contradicted ways. They criticized religion as an illusory hope for a better life which arises out of the experience of social inequality in this world. Man makes religion, and not *vice versa*. They declared religion as the "opium of the people", a kind of drug that gives people false happiness. The abolition of religion as people's illusory happiness is the demand for their real happiness. For Marx, the practice of religion is the sign that emancipation has not yet been achieved. Thus, if human beings are fully to enjoy a real and lasting happiness, they must be emancipated from the ineffective treatment of fundamental alienation that religion stands for.[13] Sigmund Freud (1859-1939), creator

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[10]John Lyden (ed.), *Enduring Issues in Religion* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1995), pp. 18-19.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 33; also, Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

of the modern discipline of psychology, viewed religion as a neurosis, or psychological illness, which develops when people refuse to give up the need for a father figure who watches over and protects them. Religion is both irrational and unhealthy, therefore, and people would be better off if they could accept a "scientific" view of the world which rejects religion and its unrealistic notions.[14] One of the major atheistic existentialist thinkers of the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), rejects any transcendent standard for morality to which one can refer. In his view, the fact that there is no God requires us to take responsibility for our own moral decisions; those who cling to the idea of God are simply refusing to accept this responsibility. Even if God did exist, he admits, it would change nothing because we are still left to make our own choices. The idea of God cannot be used to escape the fact that we are "condemned to be free".[15]

III

Let me now turn our attention to the classification of religions. Actually, there are too numerous classifications of religions to catalogue completely. Thus, only some of the more important principles of classification will be talked over.[16]

1) Normative Classification

Perhaps it is the most common division of religions and in many ways the most unsatisfactory because distinguishes religions into two classifications: true religion and false or untrue religion. Such classifications appear in the theological speculation of most major world's religion and are the natural result of the need to defend own faith against others. Normative classifications, however, have no scientific value, because they are arbitrary and subjective. But because living religions always feel the need of apologetics (systematic intellectual defences), normative classifications continue to exist.

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[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
[13]Walter H. Capps, *op.cit.*, p. 40; cf. John Lyden, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
[14]*Ibid.*, p. 39.
[15]*Ibid.*, p. 45.
[16]For detail exposition of these classification, see *Encyclopædia Britannica Deluxe Edition CD Rom.*

Many examples of normative classification might be given. Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274), the greatest medieval philosopher and theologian, distinguished natural religion, or that kind of religious truth discoverable by unaided reason, from revealed religion, or religion resting upon divine truth, which he identified exclusively with Christianity. In the 16th century Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, forthrightly labelled the religious views of Muslims, Jews, and Roman Catholic Christians to be false and held the view that the gospel of Christianity understood from the viewpoint of justification by grace through faith was the true standard. In Islam, religions are classified into three groups: the wholly true, the partially true, and the wholly false, corresponding with Islam, the Peoples of the Book (Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians), and polytheism. The classification is of particular interest because it is an integral part of Islamic teaching, and also because it has legal implications for Muslim treatment of followers of other religions.

A normative element is also indicated in classification schemes that preserve theological distinctions, such as that between natural and revealed religion. We could found division of religions into heaven religion and earth religion, missionary religion and non missionary religion, or ethnic religion and universal religion. The normative factor still has an important place in the classification of religions and will doubtless always have, since it is extraordinarily difficult to draw precise lines between disciplines primarily devoted to the normative exposition of religion, such as theology and philosophy of religion, and disciplines devoted to its description or scientific study.

2) Geographical Classification

A common and relatively simple type of classification is based upon the geographical distribution of religious communities. Those religions found in a single region of the earth are grouped together. Such classifications are found in many textbooks on comparative religion, and they offer a convenient framework for presenting man's religious history. The categories most often used are:

- Middle Eastern religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and a variety of ancient cults;

- Far Eastern religions, comprising the religious communities of China, Japan, and Korea, and consisting of Confucianism, Taoism, Mahayana ("Greater Vehicle") Buddhism, and Shinto;
- Indian religions, including early Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and sometimes also Theravada Buddhism and the Hindu- and Buddhist-inspired religions of South and Southeast Asia;
- African religions, or the cults of the tribal peoples of black Africa, but excluding ancient Egyptian religion, which is considered to belong to the ancient Middle East;
- American religions, consisting of the beliefs and practices of the Indian peoples indigenous to the two American continents;
- Oceanic religions—i.e., the religious systems of the peoples of the Pacific islands, Australia, and New Zealand;
- Classical religions of ancient Greece and Rome and their Hellenistic descendants.

The extent and complexity of a geographical classification is limited only by the classifier's knowledge of geography and his desire to seek detail and comprehensiveness in his classification scheme. Relatively crude geographical schemes that distinguish Western religions from Eastern religions are quite common.[17]

The geographical classifications present obvious inadequacies. Many religions, including some of the greatest historical importance, are not confined to a single region (e.g., Islam), or do not have their greatest strength in the region of their origins (e.g., Christianity, Buddhism). Further, a single region or continent may be the dwelling place of many different religious communities and viewpoints that range from the most archaic to the most sophisticated. At a more profound level, geographical classifications are unacceptable because they have nothing to do with the essential constitutive elements or inner spirit of religion. The physical location of a religious community reveals little of

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[17]See, for example, Willard G. Oxtoby (ed.), *World Religions Western Traditions* and World *Religions Eastern Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Western tradition consists of the Jewish, Zoroastrian, Christian, and Islamic traditions, while eastern traditions consists of the Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, East Asian religions, and Asian and Pacific horizons.

the specific religious life of the group. Though useful for some purposes, geographical classifications contribute minimally to the task of providing a systematic understanding of man's religions and religiousness.

3) Ethnographic-linguistic Classification

The insight of Max Müller (1823-1900), the "Father of the history of religions", that there is a most intimate relationship between language, religion, and nationality, supplies the basis for a genetic classification of religions. According to this theory, in Asia and Europe dwell three great races, the Turanians (including the Ural-Altaic peoples), the Semites, and the Aryans, to which correspond three great families of languages. Originally, in some remote prehistory, each of these races formed a unity, but with the passage of time they split up into a myriad of peoples with a great number of distinct languages. Through careful investigation, however, the original unity may be discerned, including the unity of religion in each case.

Other scholars, Duren J.H. Ward, for example, accepted the premise of the connection between race and religion but appealed to a much more detailed scheme of ethnological relationship. He says that religion gets its character from the people or race who develop or adopt it and that the same influences, forces, and isolated circumstances which developed a special race developed at the same time a special religion, which is a necessary constituent element or part of a race. He divided the human races in five divisions: (1) the Oceanic races, (2) the African races, (3) the American races, (4) the Mongolian races, and (5) the Mediterranean races, each of which has its own peculiar religion. The largest branch, the Mediterranean races, he subdivided into primeval Semites and primeval Aryans, in order to demonstrate in turn how the various Semitic, Indo-Aryan, and European races descended from these original stocks.

4) Philosophical Classification

The past 150 years have also produced several classifications of religion based upon speculative and abstract concepts that serve the purposes of philosophy. The principal example of these is the notion of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), a seminal German philosopher. In general,

Hegel's understanding of religion coincided with his philosophical thought; he viewed the whole of human history as a vast dialectical movement toward the realization of freedom. The reality of history, he held, is Spirit, and the story of religion is the process by which Spirit comes to full consciousness of itself. Individual religions thus represent stages in a process of evolution (i.e., progressive steps in the unfolding of Spirit) directed toward the great goal at which all history aims. Hegel classified religions according to the role that they have played in the self-realization of Spirit. The historical religions fall into three great divisions, corresponding with the three stages of the dialectical progression:

- At the lowest level of development are the religions of nature, or religions based principally upon the immediate consciousness deriving from sense experience. They include: immediate religion or magic at the lowest level; religions, such as those of China and India plus Buddhism, that represent a division of consciousness within itself; and others, such as the religions of ancient Persia, Syria, and Egypt, that form a transition to the next type.

- At an intermediate level are the religions of spiritual individuality, among which are Judaism (the religion of sublimity), ancient Greek religion (the religion of beauty), and ancient Roman religion (the religion of utility).

- At the highest level is absolute religion, or the religion of complete spirituality, which Hegel identified with Christianity. The progression thus proceeds from man immersed in nature and functioning only at the level of sensual consciousness, to man becoming conscious of himself in his individuality as distinct from nature, and beyond that to a grand awareness in which the opposition of individuality and nature is overcome in the realization of Absolute Spirit.

Many criticisms have been offered to Hegel's classification. It failed to make a place for Islam, one of the major historical religious communities. The classification is also questionable for its assumption of continuous development in history. The notion of perpetual progress is not only doubtful in itself but is also compromised as a principle of classification because of its value implications. Nevertheless, Hegel's scheme was influential and was adapted and modified by a generation

of philosophers of religion in the Idealist tradition.

Otto Pfleiderer, a German theologian of the 19th century, gives another example of the philosophical classification of religion. Pfleiderer held that the essence of religious consciousness exhibits two elements, or moments, perpetually in tension with one another: one of freedom and one of dependence, with a number of different kinds of relationships between these two. One or the other may predominate, or they may be mixed in varying degrees. His classification of religions derived from the relationships between these basic elements. He distinguished religions into three groups:

- One great group of religions exhibits extreme partiality for one over against the other. The religions in which the sense of dependence is virtually exclusive are those of the ancient Semites, the Egyptians, and the Chinese. Opposite these are the early Indian, Germanic, and Greek and Roman religions, in which the sense of freedom prevails. The religion of this group may also be seen in a different way, as nature religions in the less-developed cultures or as culture or humanitarian religions in the more advanced.

- A second group of religions exhibits a recognition of both elements of religion, but gives them unequal value. These religions are called supernatural religions. Among them Zoroastrianism gives more weight to freedom as a factor in its piety, and Brahmanism and Buddhism are judged to have a stronger sense of dependence.

- The last group of religions is the monotheistic religions: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, which are divided again into two sub-groups, i.e., those that achieve an exact balance of the elements of religion and those that achieve a blending and merging of the elements. Both Judaism and Islam grant the importance of the two poles of piety, though there is a slight tendency in Islam toward the element of dependence and in Judaism toward freedom. It is Christianity alone, he claimed, that accomplishes the blending of the two, realizing both together in their fullness, the one through the other.

5) Morphological classification

Considerable progress toward more scientific classifications of religions was marked by the emergence of morphological schemes, which assume that religion in its history has passed through a series of discernible stages of development, each having readily identifiable characteristics and each constituting an advance beyond the former stage. So essential is the notion of progressive development to morphological schemes that they might also be called evolutionary classifications. The pioneer of morphological classifications was E. B. Tylor, mentioned above Tylor developed the thesis of animism, a view that the essential element in all religion is belief in spiritual beings. Of immediate interest is the classification of religions drawn from Tylor's animistic thesis. Ancestor worship, prevalent in preliterate societies, is obeisance to the spirits of the dead. Fetishism, the veneration of objects believed to have magical or supernatural potency, springs from the association of spirits with particular places or things and leads to idolatry, in which the image is viewed as the symbol of a spiritual being or deity. Totemism, the belief in an association between particular groups of people and certain spirits that serve as guardians of those people, arises when the entire world is conceived as peopled by spiritual beings. At a still higher stage, polytheism, the interest in particular deities or spirits disappears and is replaced by concern for a "species" deity who represents an entire class of similar spiritual realities. By a variety of means, polytheism may evolve into monotheism, a belief in a supreme and unique deity. Tylor's theory of the nature of religions and the resultant classification were so logical, convincing, and comprehensive that for a number of years they remained virtually unchallenged.

The morphological classification of religions received more sophisticated expression from C.P. Tiele (1830-1902), a 19th-century Dutch scholar and an important pioneer in the scientific study of religion. Tiele agreed strongly with the distinction between nature and ethical religions. According to him, ethical religion develops out of nature religion, but the substitution of ethical religions for nature-religions is, as a rule, the result of a revolution; or at least of an intentional reform. Each of these categories (i.e., nature or spiritualistic-ethical) may be further subdivided. After the earliest and lowest stage, polyzoic religion,

there are what is called polydaemonistics (many spirits) magical religion, therianthropic polytheism, anthropomorphic polytheism, and ethical religions. This last category falls into two subcategories. First are the national nomistic (legal) religions that are particularistic, limited to the horizon of one people only and based upon a sacred law drawn from sacred book. Above them are the universalistic religions, qualitatively different in kind, aspiring to be accepted by all men, and based upon abstract principles and maxims. In both subtypes, doctrines and teachings are associated with the careers of distinct personalities who play important roles in their origin and formation. Tiele found only three examples of this highest type of religion: Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism.

Tiele's classification influenced many who came after him. Nathan Söderblom (1886-1931), a Swedish archbishop and a distinguished historian of religion, spoke of culture religions and prophetic religions, of culture religions and founded religions, and of nature religions and historical religions. The highest expression of the first category is the "mysticism of infinity" that is characteristic of the higher aspects of Hindu and Buddhist religious experience. The apex of genuine prophetic religion is reached in the "mysticism of personality." All these distinctions mean the same thing, and all are indebted to Tiele's thought.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), a Romanian-American scholar and one of the most prolific contemporary students of religion, was also influenced by Tiele. Eliade made division between traditional religions—including primitive religions and the archaic cults of the ancient civilizations of Asia, Europe, and America—and historical religions. In his estimation, all of traditional religion shares a common outlook upon the world—chiefly, the deprecation of history and the rejection of profane, mundane time. Religiously, traditional man is not interested in the unique and specific but rather exclusively in those things and actions that repeat and restore transcendental models. Only those things that participate in and reflect the eternal archetypes or the great pattern of original creation by which cosmos came out of chaos are real in the traditional outlook. The religious activities of traditional man are the recurring attempts to return to the beginning, to the Great Time, to trace again and renew the process by which the structure and order of

the cosmos were established. Also, their understanding of history, as far as they are concerned with it at all, is cyclical. The world and what happens in it are devalued, except as they show forth the eternal pattern of the original creation.

Modern or historical religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) show markedly other features. They tend to see a discontinuity between God and the world and to locate the sacred not in the cosmos but somewhere beyond it. Moreover, they hold to linear views of history, believing it to have a beginning and an end, with a definite goal as its climax, and to be by nature unrepeatable. Thus, the historical religions are world affirming in the double sense of believing in the reality of the world and of believing that meaning for man is worked out in the historical process. By reason of these views, the historical religions alone have been monotheistic and exclusivist in their theologies.

6) Phenomenological Classification

In recent times a new emerging interest in the phenomenology of religion appear, which claims its origin in the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German Jewish-Lutheran scholar, and has found its greatest exponents in The Netherlands. One of the earliest Dutch phenomenologists, W. Brede Kristensen (1867-1953), divided his presentation of religious material into discussions of (1) cosmology, which includes worship of nature in the form of sky and earth deities, animal worship, totemism, and animism, (2) anthropology, made up of a variety of considerations on the nature of man, his life, and his associations in society, (3) cultus, which involves consideration of sacred places, sacred times, and sacred images, and (4) cultic acts, such as prayer, oaths and curses, and ordeals. Kristensen was not concerned with the historical development or the description of a particular religion or even a series of religions but rather with grouping the typical elements of the entire religious life, irrespective of the community in which they might occur.

Van der Leeuw, another Dutch scholar, categorized the material of religious life under the following headings: (1) the object of religion, or that which evokes the religious response, (2) the subject of religion, in which there are three divisions: the sacred man, the sacred community,

and the sacred within man, or the soul, (3) object and subject in their reciprocal operation as outward reaction and inward action, (4) the world, ways to the world, and the goals of the world, and (5) forms, which must take into account religions and the founders of religions. Van der Leeuw was not interested in grouping religious communities as such but rather in laying out the types of religious expression. He discussed distinct religions only because religion in the abstract has no existence. He classified religions according to 12 forms: (1) religion of remoteness and flight (ancient China and 18th-century deism), (2) religion of struggle (Zoroastrianism), (3) religion of repose, which has no specific historical form but is found in every religion in the form of mysticism, (4) religion of unrest or theism, which again has no specific form but is found in many religions, (5) dynamic of religions in relation to other religions (syncretism and missions), (6) dynamic of religions in terms of internal developments (revivals and reformations), (7) religion of strain and form, the first that van der Leeuw characterizes as one of the "great" forms of religion (Greece), (8) religion of infinity and of asceticism (Indian religions but excluding Buddhism), (9) religion of nothingness and compassion (Buddhism), (10) religion of will and of obedience (Israel), (11) the religion of majesty and humility (Islam), and (12) the religion of love (Christianity). The above is not a classification of religions as organized systems. Categories 3, 4, 5, and 6 relate to elements found in many if not all historical religious communities, and the categories from 7 onward are not classifications but attempts to characterize particular communities by short phrases that express what van der Leeuw considered to be their essential spirit. The "primitive" religions of less-developed peoples are not classified.

Actually, there are many other principles of religious classification. In addition to the classifications stated above, William James (1842-1910), the American philosopher and psychologist, differentiated two types of religion according to the attitude toward life: the religion of healthy-mindedness, which minimizes or ignores the evil of existence, and that of morbid-mindedness, which considers evil as the very essence of life. Max Weber (1864-1920), a German sociologist, distinguished between religions that express themselves primarily in mythopoeic ways and those that express themselves in rational forms. Nathan Söderblom

divided religions into dynamistic, animistic, and theistic types according to the way primitive peoples apprehend the divine. He contended that Christianity is the central point of the entire history of religions and, therefore, classified religions according to the historical order in which they came into contact with Christianity. Similarly, Albert Schweitzer, the French theologian, grouped religions as rivals or non rivals of Christianity. Still another division is the classification of religions according to their doctrines of the relation between human and divine activity in the achievement of salvation. Thus, among higher religions there are those in which man alone is responsible for salvation, God alone is responsible, or God and man cooperate.

In short, one may find additional classifications based upon the content of religious ideas, the forms of religious teaching, the nature of cults, the character of piety, the nature of the emotional involvement in religion, the character of the good toward which religions strive, and the relations of religions to the state, to art, to science, and to morality.

IV

Numerous definitions and classifications have been given to the enduring questions of religion as indicated before. In order to illustrate the differences of opinion that arise among those who offer their definition of a matter, we can take an analogy of some blind persons defined an elephant and, on touching different parts of the animal's body, offer their partial, inept and contradictory definitions of an elephant: one finds it to be a heavy, thick column, another a hard, flexible pipe, and so on.[18] This is what those who try to explain the origin of religion have achieved in the West. Each definition and classification has been attacked for its inadequacies or distortions, yet each is useful in bringing to light certain aspects of religion. Though each may have its shortcomings, each offers a positive contribution to the store of knowledge and its systematization. Definition and classification should be viewed as a method and a tool only.

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[18]See this analogy in Dale Cannon, *Six Ways of Being Religious A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), p. 5.

Although a perfect classification lies at present beyond scholars' grasp, certain criteria, both positive and negative in nature, may be suggested for building and judging classifications:

- First, classifications should not be arbitrary, subjective, or provincial. A first principle of the scientific method is that objectivity should be pursued to the extent possible and that findings should be capable of confirmation by other observers.

- Second, an acceptable classification should deal with the essential and typical in the religious life, not with the accidental and the unimportant. The contribution to understanding that a classification may make is in direct proportion to the penetration of the bases of religious life exhibited in its principles of division. A good classification must concern itself with the fundamentals of religion and with the most typical elements of the units it is seeking to order.

- Third, a proper classification should be capable of presenting both that which is common to religious forms of a given type and that which is peculiar or unique to each member of the type. Thus, no classification should ignore the concrete historical individuality of religious manifestations in favour of that which is common to them all, nor should it neglect to demonstrate the common factors that are the bases for the very distinction of types of religious experience, manifestations, and forms. Classification of religions involves both the systematic and the historical tasks of the general science of religion.

- Fourth, it is desirable in a classification that it demonstrate the dynamics of religious life both in the recognition that religions as living systems are constai.tly changing and in the effort to show, through the categories chosen, how it is possible for one religious form or manifestation to develop into another. Few errors have been more damaging to the understanding of religion than that of viewing religious systems as static and fixed, as, in effect, unhistorical. Adequate classifications should possess the flexibility to come to terms with the flexibility of religion itself.

- Fifth, a classification must define what exactly is to be classified. If the purpose is to develop types of religions as a whole, the questions of what constitutes a religion and what constitutes various individual

religions must be asked. Since no historical manifestation of religion is known that has not exhibited an unvarying process of change, evolution, and development, these questions are far from easily solved. With such criteria in mind it should be possible continuously to construct classification schemes that illuminate man's religious history.

V

The question of "What is religion?" still need much more answers in order to come to proper understanding of religions. From human side, religion can be illustrated as an subjective encounter between man with that he believes as Ultimate Reality.[19] This subjective encounter results in what is called "religious experience" which manifests in three expressions: theoretical, practical, and sociological. Religion has come to be reified belief-system[20] and, as stated by Mahmoud Ayyoub, connote primarily a system of institutionalized beliefs, rites and customs that bind society together in a common pledge to uphold and defend the truth or validity of these beliefs. A divinely-revealed law may be one of the major components of such an institutionalized religious system, as is the case with Judaism and Islam. Alternatively, it may have as its central focus a corpus of sacraments and sacred symbols, as is the case especially with Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. A religion may also be centered around a complex devotional system of meditation, as is generally the case with Hinduism and Buddhism. These general characteristics, however, in no way exhaust the great variety of religions, or even the diverse schools, sects and denominations within any of the major religious traditions.

Some institutionalized religious systems, notably the monotheistic traditions, arose out of deep religious experiences often typified by a personal encounter with God, a holy spiritual being such as an angel, or some other sacred apparition. These encounters sometimes took the

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[19]Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

[20]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 19ff.

form of a divine appearance or theophany.[21] The appearance of Yhwh to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3), to Isaiah in the Jerusalem Temple (Isaiah 6) and to Job in the whirlwind (Job 38-41) are typical examples of this transformative religious experience.[22] The appearance of the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in the cave of Mount Hira' is yet another instance of such an encounter with the Holy.[23] Krishna's appearance to the warrior Arjuna in his true and awesome form is also the tale of a dramatic encounter with the divine.[24] In contrast to morally and historically significant encounters with the Holy such as these, there are religious experiences which may be characterized as mystical states or feelings, triggered by an unusual, or even common sight or sound. A mystical experience of this sort may be only a memorable but passing experience — or it may permanently alter the life and consciousness of the person involved.[25]

Common to most, if not all, religious experiences is a liberating or salvific apprehension of the Truth or ultimate reality. It may therefore be argued that salvation, broadly speaking, is the ultimate goal of all religious. Salvation is, however, closely related to two important religious concepts or doctrines, namely creation and revelation. Myths and doctrinal accounts of creation are meant to explain the origin, meaning and purpose of history. Such explanations are usually believed to have been revealed by God or the gods to ancient prophets, sages or venerable elders who lived in primordial time.[26] Creation, revelation and salvation are central concepts in all religious traditions. However, religions differ

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[21]See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (new York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959).

[22]Such encounters with the sacred are termed by Rudolf Otto "numinous experiences." See his classic work on this subject, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2d ed. (Oxford University Press, 1950), especially chapters 1-9.

[23]For Muhammad's encounters with the Holy, see *al-Najm* 53:1-18, and for his encounter with the angel Gabriel on Mount Hira', see A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (translation of Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah") (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1955), 106.

[24]See *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter 10.

[25]These are admirably discusses by William James in his classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The New American Library, 1958).

[26]Mircea Eliade calls this metahistorical time *in illo tempore*, or 'time before time.' See his *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1965), 395.

also in many ways. The diversity of religions might be found in external expressions of religion either doctrinal, practical, or sociological aspects of religion. Taking an example, we can compare the doctrine of the self reality between Hinduism and Buddhism. The two religions shared much: monastic asceticism, for instance, and the notion of cyclical rebirth. However, Hindus assert the reality of self, while Buddhist doctrine totally repudiated the human self as a persisting reality.

Another comparably central difference exists between Christianity and Islam on the doctrine of divine incarnation or the Trinity. According to Guillaume, we cannot refrain from saying that the Muslim doctrine of God is not so far removed from the Christian system until the crucial question of the Trinity.[27] As stated in Apostles' Creed or Apostolicum, a statement of faith used in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and many Protestant churches, for Christians God is the Father, and Jesus Christ is his only son who was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell, and in the third day he rose again from the dead and sit on the right hand of God the Father. All these are bitterly rejected by Islam. For Christians, Jesus is a manifestation of God's very nature in a human life, while for Muslims the absolute otherness of God forbids the association of any other being with God at God's level.[28]

However, in the face of such diversities, we still maintain the unity of religions. We agree with Hindu saying that the truth is one, but the sages call it by many names. The Qur'an states that God have sent apostle (rasul) to every community[29] so that in the Islamic teaching the sum of all prophets are uncountable and not limited to the well-known twenty five prophets of the Qur'an. Now we have a pluralistic religious legacy of the past so we are living in a pluralistic world. The diversity of religions is an undeniable fact that urges us to live in harmonious relationship with others. All, religions are essentially noble ways to bring human becomes near and nearer to the same One God whatever the

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[27]Alfred Guillaumem, *Islam* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 195.

[28]The Qur'an explicitly states that God does not beget and begotten (Q.S. 112:3). Even in a charming passage (Q.S. 5:116) stated that God is to ask Jesus at the day of judgment, 'Did you tell them you were to be worshiped as divine?' and Jesus is to reply, 'No, why would I ever tell them such a thing?'

[29]Q.S. 16:36.

term to be used to comprehend Him and however the ways are. Indeed, the religious plurality is one of God's mercies. It is impossible and unreasonable to think religious plurality as human misfortune. In contrary, all religions are people ways that they regard as the best path to be followed in order to realize the ideal condition of life. We are not the "committee of heaven" who has the rights to judge people who will go to paradise and who will go to hell.

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