THE RELIGION OF A STABLE SOCIETY

by Edward Goldsmith

We all think we know what is meant by religion; yet if we were asked to define it we would probably all do so differently. In the irreligious age in which we live, many would agree with Salomon Reinach that religion is but "a sum of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties," or even with Marx, who, as is well known, described it as "the opiate of the masses." To both these critics religion is some sort of aberration, one which may characterize backward, barbarous, and ignorant people but which, it is intimated, has no place in advanced, civilized, and enlightened society. In this article I shall show that the opposite is in fact the case.

Let us consider a few more definitions offered by those who have examined most carefully the philosophy of religion. Robert Thouless considers it as "a felt, practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings," while James George Frazer regards it as "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life." They thus see religion as something which is concerned intimately with the supernatural. Julian Huxley describes it as "the reaction of the personality as a whole to its experience of the universe as a whole." This is clearly a much wider definition which includes, among other things, the notion of culture.

I regard the last three definitions as containing some of the essential elements of religion without providing, however, a functional definition that is of use in developing a cross-cultural model of human social behavior. I shall try to provide such a definition. Religion I shall take as constituting the control mechanism of a stable society.

WHAT IS CONTROL?

Let us begin by examining the nature of control. To control the behavior pattern of a natural system (by which I mean a unit of behavior within the biosphere such as cells, biological organisms, ecosystems,

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[Zygon, vol. 12, no. 3 (September 1977).] © 1978 by The University of Chicago. 0044-5614/77/1203-0003\$02.14 societies, etc.) simply means keeping it on its right course, just like controlling a motorcar or a guided missile. This must assume, of course, that it has a right course; that is, it is goal directed, which it must be, the alternative being that it is purely random (quite clearly not the case). (If it were, it in any case would be impossible to study.)⁵

What is this goal? The answer is the maintenance of "stability." A system is regarded as stable if it is capable of maintaining its basic structure in the face of imposed change. This means, among other things, taking those measures required to reduce the extent of possible changes, for a system can function only in an environment which approximates that to which it has been adapted by its evolution. It would cease to be able to do so if changes were to get out of hand. In fact, it would be no longer under control. This notion clearly conflicts with the dogma of man's infinite adaptability—one that is necessary to justify the systematic efforts of industrial society to cause our environment to divert even more from that in which we have evolved. The dogma is maintained by the very loose way in which the term "adaptation" is used. No distinction is made between achieving stability, which implies long-term equilibrium in which free energy will be minimized over a long period, and a position of short-term equilibrium achieved at the cost of creating a situation in which there will be more frequent and more serious discontinuities. It is in this latter category that must fall the so-called adaptive behavior of man in an industrial environment which fails increasingly to satisfy his basic biological and social needs.

The implication of this principle is that stable systems tend toward the avoidance of change. Those who have studied anthropology will realize that it is to this end that stable societies are geared. Few, however, have examined the nature of the mechanism which enables them to achieve this end.

Enlightenment on this is provided by the relatively new discipline of cybernetics, which is, in fact, the study of control. Cybernetics probably has contributed more to the study of behavior in general than any other discipline by demonstrating that there is only one way to control the behavior of a system, regardless of its level of organization. It requires the presence of a control mechanism which operates by detecting data relevant to the maintenance of the system's stable relationship with its environment, transducing them into the appropriate medium and interpreting them in terms of the model which the system has built up of its relationship with its specific environment.⁶

Let us see how this principle operates at different levels of organization. Consider the process of protein synthesis. It is highly controlled since it is a process, both complicated and orderly, in which

little is left to chance. What are the conditions required for its occurrence? Norman H. Horowitz writes: "It seems evident that the synthesis of an enzyme—a giant protein molecule consisting of hundreds of amino acid units arranged end-to-end in a specific and unique order—requires a model or set of instructions of some kind. These instructions must be characteristic of the species; they must be automatically transmitted from generation to generation, and they must be constant yet capable of evolutionary change. The only known entity that could perform such a function is the gene. There are many reasons for believing that it transmits information by acting as a model, or template."⁷

The mechanism ensuring the normal day-to-day behavior of a biological organism, such as a dog or a man, must function in very much the same way. K. J. W. Craik was probably the first person to point this out. He viewed the brain as the basic feature of thought and of explanation.⁸

It can be shown also that such a mechanism is required to explain the behavior of a human society. The model or template involved in this case is the society's world view. It is in terms of this world view that the society's behavior pattern can be understood, and the two together are referred to as its culture. The principle in question implicitly underlies the approach to the study of traditional societies provided by cultural anthropology—a relatively new approach mainly associated with the names of Andrew Vayda and Roy Rappoport.

It may be objected that there are other means of controlling human societies. For instance, we tend to regard a society as controlled through its institutionalized government by means of scientific and technological information. But this is not quite the case. Both institutionalized government and scientific-technological information are relatively new principles which have played but a negligible part in the total human experience of social control. What is more, they have proved to be a failure, inevitably so since they do not satisfy any of the basic cybernetic requirements and since, by their very nature, they must lead society on a course—that which we are embarked on today—diametrically opposed to the one which would ensure social stability and hence survival.

Indeed, the human experience during the historical period in which institutionalized government and objective knowledge were first made use of for the purpose of social control has been one of wars, massacres, intrigues, famines—in other words, of precisely those discontinuities which it is the function of social and ecological control to eliminate. This era is in stark contrast with the preceding Paleolithic era when man's life appeared to have been as stable and as

satisfying as that of the other forms of life—left in an undisturbed state—inhabiting this planet.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CONTROL OF A HUMAN SOCIETY

If a society is to be controlled by means of its religioculture, what are certain requirements? Such a religion must be able to ensure the maintenance of the society's basic structure. It must prevent the environment from undergoing changes to which the society is incapable of adapting without compromising its basic structure, and it must ensure the continuity of the society in its relationship with its environment

If we glance at our religion today, it is apparent that it does not in any way satisfy these requirements. It has little effect on guiding our personal behavior or that of our society. We tend to pay lip service to the code of ethics which it teaches, observing instead a totally different one, that implicit in the culture of industrial man.

What is clear is that religious matters have largely broken away from social ones, although this has been true only for a very short time and during a period which is aberrant on many other counts. If the phenomenon of religion is to be understood, it must be in terms of the total human experience and not just of a very small and unrepresentative fraction of the whole. What few people seem to realize today is that the religion of traditional societies, that is, the religion of man in normal conditions, admirably satisfies these cybernetic requirements and that, if we take religion as the basic social control mechanism, the behavior of a traditional society can be described in terms of the basic cybernetic model which, it can be shown, ensures the control of all other natural systems.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

An indication of the close relationship between religion and society in historical terms is seen in the fact that the motive for the adoption of a particular religious faith by a group has been primarily social. The group's motive usually has been to reestablish its identity, which may have been compromised by foreign influences, or to distinguish it from other possibly antagonistic social groups.

Thus, in the kingdom of Ruanda, Catholicism was adopted for the purpose of providing a doctrine to hold together the Hutu revolutionaries against abusive Tutsi rule. In Burma the Karen and Shan minorities were converted to Protestantism to affirm their national existence against the Burman Buddhist majority. Messianic or millenarist movements, of which there are about seven thousand in Africa alone today (in Lagos there actually is said to be a trade union of

Messiahs), are adopted by an oppressed, socially and culturally deprived proletariat in an effort to reestablish a new system of values and an orderly society that will provide them with the social satisfactions they require and an identity to distinguish them from the mainstream society in which they have no place.

Also, in many small American towns, the members of different denominations are distinguished from one another not so much by a different set of theological considerations as by their social class. Thus the Episcopalians often make up the upper class, the Methodists the middle class, the Baptists the lower class, while Pentecostalists, Holy Rollers, and others are likely to belong to a subculture antagonistic to the society as a whole. In this way each of these classes seeks to constitute, albeit imperfectly, separate cultural patterns, all living in some sort of symbiotic relationship with one another.

In traditional society the social aspect of religion is very much more pronounced. All social life, in fact, is so permeated with it that it tends to merge almost completely with the society's cultural pattern. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges wrote of Rome, Sparta, and Athens that "the state and religion were so completely confounded, that it was impossible even to distinguish the one from the other, to say nothing of forming an idea of a conflict between the two." The same can be said of traditional societies in Africa and Asia even today. If, in such societies, it is possible to serve both gods and men, it is because there is no real distinction, as there is with us, between the two, any more than there is between the natural and the supernatural or the sacred and the profane. More precisely, the difference is one of degree rather than kind. I shall quote in full W. Robertson Smith's description of the relationship between religion and traditional society:

The circle into which a man was born was not simply a group of kinsfolk and fellow-citizens, but embraced also certain divine beings, the gods of the family and of the state, which to the ancient mind were as much a part of the particular community with which they stood connected as the human members of the social circle. The relation between the gods of antiquity and their worshippers was expressed in the language of human relationship, and this language was not taken in a figurative sense but with strict literality. If a god was spoken of as father and his worshippers as his offspring, the meaning was that the worshippers were literally of his stock, that he and they made up one natural family with reciprocal family duties to one another. Or, again, if the god was addressed as king, and the worshippers called themselves his servants, they meant that the supreme guidance of the state was actually in his hands, and accordingly the organisation of the state included provision for consulting his will and obtaining his direction in all weighty matters, and also provision for approaching him as king with due homage and tribute.

Thus a man was born into a fixed relation to certain gods as surely as he was born into relation to his fellow-men; and his religion, that is, the part of

conduct which was determined by his relation to the gods, was simply one side of the general scheme of conduct prescribed for him by his position as a member of society. There was no separation between the spheres of religion and of ordinary life. Every social act had a reference to the gods as well as to men, for the social body was not made up of men only, but of gods and men.

This account of the position of religion in the social system holds good, I believe, for all parts and races of the ancient world in the earlier stages of their history. The causes of so remarkable a uniformity lie hidden in the mists of prehistoric time, but must plainly have been of a general kind, operating on all parts of mankind without distinction of race and local environment; for in every region of the world, as soon as we find a nation or tribe emerging from prehistoric darkness into the light of authentic history, we find also that its religion conforms to the general type which has just been indicated.¹⁰

It is not surprising that in such conditions there was no word for religion. "Religion," for instance, significantly meant "matters of state," while in Japan the closest approximation, *Matsori Goro*, also meant government. Let us examine more closely the model or world view in terms of which traditional man sees himself as related in this way to the men and the gods that make up his social environment.

RELIGIOCULTURE AS A MEANS OF CLASSIFYING MEMBERS OF MAN'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

We live in a mass society in which the bonds, which in a traditional society hold people together so that they are capable of forming a self-controlling system, have been largely eroded. A traditional society is a highly differentiated system. It is this differentiation which gives rise to these bonds. Differentiation implies cooperation, lack of it competition which may lead to downright aggression. The world view of a traditional society provides its members with a means of classifying other people in a very elaborate manner, each classification reflecting a set of asymmetric kinship relationships among different members of the group. In some societies as many as 150 different terms are in use. As A. R. Radcliffe-Brown points out, the general rule is that the inclusion of two relatives in the same terminological category implies that there is some similarity in the customary behavior due to both of them or in the social relation in which one stands to each of them, while, inversely, the placing of two relatives in different categories implies some significant difference in customary behavior or social relations.11

A religioculture also enables one to classify the members of other social groups, whether they be enemies or merely living in cultural symbiosis with one's own group. J. S. Furnivall describes India as the most remarkable example of a country that has maintained a stable

plural society in the face of overwhelming odds.¹² This he attributes to the fact that the caste system has provided a religious basis for the principle of inequality. The religioculture of a man's caste provides him with a complete model of the environment and a corresponding, strictly laid down behavior pattern, determining every detail of his relationship with other members of his caste and with men outside it in such a way that a member has no aspiration beyond his caste, no desire to advance himself other than by the strict adherence to the prescribed caste pattern of behavior. Inequality does not constitute a frustration, a situation which to us seems inconceivable.

This provides a clue to what is one of the basic functions of the supernatural in the religioculture of a traditional society—that of consecrating or sanctifying the generalities of a society's behavior pattern, thereby ensuring its stability. To understand the importance of this most fundamental principle one must enter, once more, into certain theoretical considerations.

THE NONPLASTICITY OF GENERALITIES

The model used by the control mechanism of a natural system, regardless of its level of complexity, constitutes a hierarchical organization of information. Information is organized in it in accordance with its degree of generality. The more general the information, the more important it is since it colors all the other information in terms of which it is differentiated. Also, the more general it is, the longer the experience of the species or of the social group (in the case of cultural information) which it reflects. The more circumstances to which it mediates adaptive behavior, the less modifiable is this information.

Traditional man could predict with confidence that the circumstances which had been present for thousands of years were likely to continue being present. The whole cultural pattern of a traditional society depends on the continued presence of these circumstances, and little or no provision is made for their possible absence. Thus a fishing society living on the end of a lake assumes that the lake does not go dry and that its fish population is not depleted. An Eskimo society living in the arctic wastes assumes the permanence of the particular climatic conditions in which it lives. Neither society can tolerate drastic changes in its basic relationship with its environment. If such changes were to occur, traditional cultural patterns would collapse. But in terms of their very long experience such societies have no reason to suppose that they would occur.

The same is true of genetic information. Let us not forget that the basic generalities of our behavior pattern are formulated in terms of our genetic information. This reflects the experience of a far longer

period than does our cultural information. The main feature of our genetic information is that it is nonplastic, that is, it is not subject to change except over a very long period. If, for instance, it were modifiable on the basis of the experience of a single generation, the species would cease to display any continuity; it would cease, in fact, to be stable.

When scientific information is built up, this essential fact often is not taken into account. The generalities of a scientific model are erroneously presumed to be as modifiable as are its particularities, enabling it to help us adapt to the most radical environmental changes. Needless to say, it does not work out that way for us any more than for a traditional culture.

A normal organization of information will contain the optimum, not the maximum, amount of information. A system will not develop the capacity to detect signals and interpret them if it does not have the capacity to adapt to the situations involved or can do so only at the cost of disrupting its basic structure, which is precisely what its entire behavior pattern is designed to avoid. To change the generalities of a pattern of information and hence to seek to adapt to very radical changes would lead to precisely this result.

For this reason the human brain is not designed to contain an objective pattern of information. It cannot handle its generalities. For the same reason scientists are incapable of applying scientific method to the analysis of social questions on which their views are uncritically those of their particular subculture. The objective particularities of their "scientific" world view tend simply to be grafted onto the subjective generalities of that provided by their specific subculture.

Let us not forget that all behavioral processes, including "learning," proceed from the general to the particular, and once the generalities have been determined during infancy they are very difficult to modify, however impressive the scientific arguments for this purpose may be. When a conflict occurs, it is the subjective generalities which inevitably prevail, and the subjective interpretation of any situation which they provide simply tends to be rationalized in the most convincing "scientific" jargon. That is why only ingenuity, not wisdom, seems to grow with access to scientific knowledge; and if the ingenuity is in the service of the wrong ideals, entertained on the basis of faulty assumptions, it is a liability rather than an asset.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE GODS

If traditional man makes no distinction between his society and its pantheon, it is because both are organized in exactly the same way. What is more, the classificatory system employed is four-dimensional, so that both are regarded as forming part of a continuous series. The tremendous significance of this principle is that a society is thereby capable of sanctifying its past and hence the social structure it has inherited from it. This ensures that the principles that previously have governed the society are adhered to strictly. It is the supreme strategy for ensuring social continuity. In this way the cultural information that is transmitted from one generation to the next represents not merely the experience of the previous generation but the total experience of the society, stretching back into the mists of time. In this way the principles governing the transmission of cultural information are precisely those governing the transmission of genetic information, which ensures the stability of natural systems at a biological level of organization. A traditional society is thereby not a "gerontocracy," or government by the old, as often it has been described, but a "necrocracy," or government by the dead. On this subject Lafcadio Hearn writes, " . . . we shall find that not only government, but almost everything in Japanese society, derives directly or indirectly from this ancestor-cult; and that in all matters the dead, rather than the living, have been the rulers of the nation and the shapers of its destinies."13 This essential principle is worth examining in some detail.

What is normally called ancestor worship or manes worship appears common to all traditional societies, though the term "worship" is not in fact correct, the relationship being a more informal one than this term would suggest. Furthermore, it is not a cult by itself, but it forms an integral part of the total relationship between man and the supernatural. If the cult of man's direct ancestors plays a greater part in his life than that of any other cult, it is because of the importance of the family unit, around which centers the vast proportion of his daily concerns. Edward Tyler writes, "The dead ancestor, now passed into a deity, simply goes on protecting his own family and receiving suit service from them as of old; the dead chief still watches over his own tribe, still holds his authority by helping friends and harming enemies, still rewards the right and sharply punishes the wrong." 14

Hearn considers the following beliefs to "underlie all forms of persistent ancestor-worship in all climes and countries": (1) "The dead remain in this world, . . . haunting their tombs, and also their former homes, and sharing invisibly in the life of their living descendants." (2) "All the dead become gods, in the sense of acquiring supernatural power; but they retain the characters which distinguished them during life." (3) "The happiness of the dead depends upon the respectful service rendered them by the living; and the happiness of the living depends upon the fulfilment of pious duty to the dead." ¹⁵

FEAR OF DEATH

In a traditional society a man views his own life as but a link in an infinite chain of being. When he dies, he will live on as an ancestral spirit (which means no more than graduating to a superior and more prestigious age grade), and in this form he will remain a member of his family and community. Even when dead he will continue to be in touch with his loved ones, whom he will continue to serve and who will continue to serve him. He does not entertain our pathological fear of death. Indeed, he would find it difficult to understand the point of heart transplants, for instance, or of subjecting the moribund in our factory-like hospitals to appalling tortures so as technically to prolong their lives for a few more agonizing days. At the same time the notion of paradise is, and must be, totally foreign to him. To be consigned to such a place could mean breaking away from his family and his community—a thought which, rather than provide him with succor, would fill him with the deepest despair.

It is for this reason that there is little mention of a future life in the Old Testament. The notion appears only in later Judaism, after the triumph of the priests of Jahweh over the practitioners of the old tribal religion with its ancestral cult and associated beliefs and practices. Thus Adolphe Lods writes: "It was not till very much later, about the second century B.C., that Jahwism, having destroyed the old animistic belief in survival as a false and dangerous superstition, actually replaced the consolations, gloomy at best, which it offered, by a new hope, namely, that of a resurrection or immortality accompanied by judgment after death. Hence Jahwism presents the phenomenon, somewhat disconcerting to our modern ideas, of a religion in which the belief in a future life for the individual was long an alien and unwelcome element." ¹⁶

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE GODS

As already mentioned, the cult of the ancestors not only is a family affair but also is practiced on all the other levels of social organization. Thus Hearn writes of Japan: "The three forms of the Shinto worship of ancestors are the Domestic Cult, the Communal Cult and the State Cult;—or, in other words, the worship of family ancestors, the worship of clan or tribal ancestors, and the worship of imperial ancestors. The first is the religion of the home; the second is the religion of the local divinity, or tutelar god; the third is the national religion." This appears to be the case in all traditional societies. Francis Hsu writes that among the Chinese "the world of spirits is approximately a copy of, and strictly a supplement to, the world of the living."

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Harold E. Driver shows how the difference in the organization of the gods among North American Indian societies can be explained in terms of their differing social structures:

There was a strong tendency to arrange gods in a ranked hierarchy in areas where people were ranked in similar manner, and to ignore such ranking where egalitarianism dominated human societies. Thus the peoples of Meso-America carefully ranked their gods, while those in the Sub-Arctic, Plateau, and Great Basin believed in large numbers of spirits of about equal rank. Other areas tended to be intermediate in this respect. Among the Pueblos, where many spiritual personalities were widely recognized to be designated as gods, there was little tendency toward ranking, just as there was near equality among human beings.¹⁹

If we consider the people of Alor as described by Cora Du Bois and analyzed by Abram Kardiner, we find that they have a very loosely organized society. Few constraints are applied on a level higher than that of the family, and even this unit is very weak, the average Alorese being undisciplined, self-indulgent, and having little regard for any authority of any kind. Their pantheon appears to reflect this social organization very closely:

They do have a supreme being who has some general attributes as the originator of life. There is also a cultural hero, who makes men from food with the breath of the supreme being. However these figures are of no great practical significance. . . . The universal form of sacrifice, with which they are well acquainted, is the sacrifice of food, and . . . it is to be noted that the sacrificial feeding of the ancestors takes place reluctantly and under great pressure of some actual emergency. So slight is the tendency to idealize the parental imago that the effigies by which the Alorese represent the ancestral spirits are made in the most careless and slipshod manner and are used in the most perfunctory way and then forthwith discarded. There is no tendency to give the deity permanent housing or idealized forms. The dead are merely pressing and insistent creditors who can enforce their demands through supernatural powers. This is precisely the experience of the child with his parents. Hence he obeys reluctantly and grudgingly. ²⁰

William J. Goode shows how the religious system of the Manus, a small nation of traders and fishermen who also have a loose social organization, regards their gods as organized in the same way. Their religious system, according to Goode, "is highly individualistic, in that the sacred entity worshipped is the spirit of one person, usually the father, though sometimes it may be the son, or brother, or one who stood in the mother's brother-sister's relationship."²¹

The Swazi have developed a cohesive and hierarchically organized

society, and according to Hilda Kuper they regard their gods as organized in exactly the same way:

In the ancestral cult, the world of the living is projected into a world of spirits (emadloti). Men and women, old and young, aristocrats and commoners, continue the patterns of superiority and inferiority established by earthly experiences. Paternal and maternal spirits exercise complementary roles similar to those operating in daily life on earth; the paternal role reinforces legal and economic obligations; the maternal exercises a less formalized protective influence. Although the cult is set in a kinship framework, it is extended to the nation through the king, who is regarded as the father of all Swazi; his ancestors are the most powerful of the spirits.²²

In Dahomey a centralized kingdom was developed at an early stage in its history. Goode, citing Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, says "the organization of the Dahomean gods is a reflection of the organization of the society, though in a somewhat rough fashion. This includes the idea of reigning over a kingdom, and of a hierarchy of organization influencing all aspects of the social and economic life."²³

THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE GODS

It is interesting to trace changes in the organization of the gods following important social changes. Smith shows how, with the breakdown of tribal society during the beginning of the historical period, social structures underwent considerable change. The course of change, however, was very different in Greece and Rome from that in the East. In the West the aristocracy managed to gain power at the expense of the kings, whereas in Asia the kings held their own until their states eventually were destroyed by larger and more powerful ones. Smith points out: "This diversity of political fortune is reflected in the diversity of religious development. For as the national god did not at first supersede tribal and family deities any more than the king superseded tribal and family institutions, the tendency of the West, where the kingship succumbed, was towards a divine aristocracy of many gods, only modified by a weak reminiscence of the old kingship in the not very effective sovereignty of Zeus, while in the East the national god tended to acquire a really monarchic sway."24

What is particularly significant is that it is from the East that we have inherited our concept of monotheism. The idea of a universal god is an old one, but in tribal society it played only a very small part in people's preoccupations. There was no cult connected with his worship, and he was addressed only on rare occasions by the tribe as a whole rather than the individual.

T. Cullen Young, who was a missionary in Africa for twenty-seven years, remembers only four situations "in which direct, spontaneous reference to god was made in circumstances which gave a feeling of certainty that I was in the presence of genuine, uninfluenced primitive belief." The reason for this, of course, is that tribal man has no need for a universal god. There is no universal society for him to sanctify and protect, and he is too distant and too remote to take an interest in a man's day-to-day problems. This is the function of the ancestral spirits.

The idea of the universal brotherhood of man could not be farther from the thought of traditional man. Young writes: "The non-African intruder within this strange thought-world is not culpably guilty, however, of error when he concludes that the idea of God seems absent. He is, for the time being, moving within a sphere where reference to God is simply not required. He will find it not easy to discover any point or moment in African communal living at which the belief in the continuing presence and active power of those whom we describe as 'dead' is not sufficient in itself for confidence and trust."²⁶

However, it is easy to see how a national god can evolve slowly into a universal one. This is undoubtedly what happened with Jahweh; he probably started off as the god of the Kennites, a Bedouin tribe of the Sinai peninsula, with whom the Jews came into contact during their sojourn in the desert. He then became the national god of the southern Jews and only briefly the national god of the precarious Jewish kingdom resulting from the temporary fusion of Judah and Israel under David and Solomon. It is only with Saint Paul that he became a universal god. As Smith writes, "What is often described as the natural tendency of Semitic religion towards ethical monotheism, is in the main nothing more than a consequence of the alliance of religion with monarchy."²⁷

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss found among the Zuni, a branch of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, "a veritable arrangement of the universe. All beings and facts in nature, 'the sun, moon, and stars, the sky, earth and sea, in all their phenomena and elements; and all inanimate objects, as well as plants, animals, and men,' are classed, labelled, and assigned to fixed places in a unique and integrated 'system' in which all the parts are co-ordinated and subordinated one to another by 'degrees of resemblance.' "They go on to say that "this division of the world is exactly the same as that of the clans within the pueblo." What is more, the same system of classification of the natural environment appears to have characterized the world view of all the

other traditional societies examined, including Australian aboriginal tribes, the Sioux Indians, and the Chinese.²⁸

Also, the natural environment is classified in terms of the same system used for the gods and ancestors. The classificatory system of tribal man provides him with a means of formalizing his relationship with his natural environment such that the environment is treated not simply, as it is by us, as a resource to be exploited for the satisfaction of his petty, short-term requirements. The different forms of life which are a part of man's natural environment are classified in terms of his society's social structure. Different animals are associated with each different clan, and they are invested with some sort of mana or vital force, rendering them sacred in it. Others are sacred to the tribe as a whole. However, the degree of sacredness may vary from one form of life to another.

Since the natural world is classified in terms of the same system used for society and for the gods and ancestors, it is not surprising that its components—through the social unit in terms of which they are classified—are associated with the society's ancestors and hence with its gods. In this way they too are sanctified, and a complete set of ritualized relationships is established between the traditional society and the forms of life with which it is in contact. In terms of this relationship, as Radcliffe-Brown points out, "each group is responsible for the ritual care of a certain number of species by which the maintenance of that species is believed to be assured. For the tribe all these species are of importance, and the ceremonies are thus a sort of co-operative effort, involving a division of (ritual) labour, by which the normal processes of nature and the supply of food are provided for."²⁹ By contrast, it is by desanctifying the environment that modern man has been able systematically to destroy it.

THE DYNAMIC PRINCIPLE

I have shown that traditional man has at his disposal a complete, four-dimensional model of his relationship to his family, society, and his natural environment in which he sees the whole thing as one vast continuum. Such a world view is capable of giving rise to a single, coordinated pattern of responses. The pattern of behavior of a modern industrial state is, on the other hand, nothing more than a patchwork of expedients since the information on the basis of which it is mediated displays practically no organization at all. A coordinated pattern is precluded by the reductionist method of modern science and by the fact that science is divided into a host of watertight compartments called disciplines, each with its own methodology and its own terminology, largely unintelligible to the nonspecialist.

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A religioculture, however, must do more than provide a model of the society's relationship with its environment. It also must provide it with a dynamic principle in the form of a goal structure and a set of rules for achieving it so that the society's overriding goal of maintaining its stable relationship with its environment is satisfied. This means channeling man's natural, instinctive motivations in the direction which will satisfy the requirements of society.

On the family level this presents no problem. As B. Malinowski was possibly the first to point out, man is genetically at least a family animal. Unless the family is interfered with seriously, as in our industrial society, there is normally no difficulty in causing the various members of a family unit to fulfill their appropriate functions within it. Thus a man obtains the greatest satisfaction by behaving in a husbandly manner toward his wife and in a fatherly manner toward his children. A woman probably obtains the greatest satisfaction by fulfilling her functions as a wife and mother and later as a grandmother. As it happens, by behaving in this way she also can contribute best toward the stability of the family unit.³⁰ This is precisely the relationship obtaining between the parts and the whole of any natural system and it provides the dynamic principle that is required to ensure this stability.

A society, however, is a more precarious system. The bonds that hold it together are culturally determined and, as Malinowski showed, are basically extensions of those that hold the family together—hence the elaborate kinship terminology used for classifying the members of social groups, most of whom are outside the basic family unit. In this case the motivation that is exploited is the quest for prestige, undoubtedly originally associated with man's desire to shine in the eyes of the woman of his choice and compete with other men for her favors.

PRESTIGE

It is one of the tenets of our industrial society that man's overriding goal is to maximize his material benefits. This notion is based on a superficial examination of the behavior of man during a minute fraction of his total experience. If one looks at the behavior of traditional societies, however, one finds that this is simply not true. Man, in normal conditions, is culturally a social rather than an economic animal, though this point has been explained only recently to our very misguided economists. Karl Polanyi writes:

The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social re-

lationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only insofar as they serve this end. Neither the process of production nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods; but every single step in that process is geared to a number of social interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken. These interests will be very different in a small hunting or fishing community from those in a vast despotic society, but in either case the economic system will be run on non-economic motives.³¹

The desire for prestige, as Ralph Linton points out, is used in traditional societies as an instrument of control: "The human desire for prestige is probably the most useful of all the innate qualities of man. The hope of gaining prestige, or the fear of losing it, does more than anything else to hold the average individual to the proper performance of his role." ³²

How is the desire for prestige exploited in this way by society? Prestige in accordance with a society's world view is achieved by the fulfillment of precisely those functions which will enable the society to survive. Thus in a fishing society prestige is obtained by those who are proficient in catching fish; among hunters prestige is associated with success in the hunt; in a society geared to warlike pursuits it is the successful warrior who will be the most admired. One becomes a successful fisherman, hunter, or warrior by accumulating mana, as it is known among the Polynesians. I already have referred to this force, whose possession by individuals, animals, and even objects confers upon them an aura of sacredness. This notion is in fact so closely associated with that of god that, according to Lods, it may well be that "the very ancient term which is found in all Semitic languages to express the idea of 'god' under the various forms of 'el (Hebrew), ilu (Babylonian), ilah (Arab), originally denoted the vague force which is the source of all strength and life, the divine rather than a god or a divine personality: it would have had a meaning similar to that of the term mana among the Polynesians, the Indian brahman, and the Latin numen."33

The notion that power can be acquired or lost, increased or decreased, in accordance with a carefully formulated set of rules appears to be common to most traditional societies. The principle is referred to as "dynamism." In Africa this vital force is referred to as muntu among the Baluba, nyama among the Dogon, and megbe among the Congo pygmies. J. H. Driberg regards this notion as underlying the religious beliefs and philosophy of traditional societies throughout Africa: "This spiritual force consists of an abstract power or natu-

ral potency, all-pervasive and definitely never regarded anthropomorphically."³⁴ In his study of Bantu philosophy Placide Tempels writes: "Vital force is the central theme of Bantu philosophy. The goal of all efforts among the Bantu can only be to intensify this vital force. One can only understand their customs if one interprets them as a means of preserving or increasing one's stock of vital force. It is the only ideal he is willing to suffer or sacrifice himself for."³⁵

All illnesses, depressions, failures in any field of activity are taken as a reduction in this vital force. The only way to avoid them is to increase one's stock of it. When a Baluba prays, it is to obtain from the ancestral spirits or other deities an increase in *muntu*. The rituals he performs are designed to increase this vital force. Those performed at birth, circumcision, marriage, etc., involve such important increases that on each occasion new names—corresponding to the type of *muntu* thereby obtained—are acquired. Each time the old name no longer must be pronounced for fear of reducing his *muntu*.

For the same reason taboos are observed. Their transgression always involves a reduction of *muntu*, whose extent depends on their importance. Everyday interpersonal relations also provide an opportunity for increasing or decreasing *muntu*. A powerful man is referred to as a *muntu mukulumpe*, a man with a great deal of *muntu*, whereas a man of no social significance is referred to as a *muntu mutupu*, or one who has but a small amount of *muntu*. A complex vocabulary is used to describe all the changes that can overcome one's stock of *muntu*. The verbs *kufwa* and *kufwididila* indicate degrees of the loss of this vital force. A man with none left at all is referred to as a *mufu*. He is as good as dead.

Paul Schebesta points to the same notion among pygmies of the Ituri forests: "The pygmies believe in that impersonal force which the specialists call mana but which they refer to as megbe. Megbe is spread out everywhere, but its power does not manifest itself everywhere with the same force or in the same way. Certain animals are richly endowed with it. Humans possess a lot more of some types of megbe but less of other types. Able men are precisely those who have accumulated a lot of *megbe*; this is also true of witch doctors."³⁶ Kardiner explains the behavior pattern of the Comanche Indians in the same way. They appear to have "the most ingenious concept of power, which can be borrowed, lent, pooled, and freely dispersed among the entire group."37 Their behavior provides an idea of how vital force is used to achieve the stable relationship of a society with its environment. According to Kardiner, they regard all the constituents of the environment as possessing some sort of power. The greatest is personified by the eagle, the earth, the sky, and the sun. The highest force is god. After him come the first fathers who founded various clans, and next comes the head of the tribe; the living also form a hierarchy in accordance with their vital power. Animals, plants, and minerals are organized in the same way. However, since their role is to satisfy the need of the humans, they have less vital power. Sorcerers and witches are considered to be capable of manipulating vital power in people and objects to the detriment and death of their fellows.

In accordance with tribal custom, certain things can be done, certain words spoken, certain thoughts harbored, and to break these taboos involves releasing hidden forces, with the consequent destruction of vital force for the transgressor.³⁸ It is through the intermediary of this power that the breaking of taboos is punished. A complicated set of rules governs the transfer from one person or object to another. The sky power cannot be transferred to men. Earth power can be transferred only to those who miraculously recover from wounds. Next come the power of the eagle and the various lesser powers, each of which provides its possessor with certain specific benefits. Thus bear power confers invulnerability; the burrowing owl gives the power of being hard to hit; beavers and buffaloes give the power of the rapid healing of wounds; the mountain lion gives tremendous strength, the snake the ability to recover from the bite of snakes, the meadowlark the power to "go directly home." Minnow power acts as a love charm. The horse, dog, and coyote are associated with no specific powers. Success in hunting is attributed to the power conferred by "tiny black men with invisible arrows." The possession of power is double edged in the sense that its possession subjects one to corresponding taboos, whose violation automatically reduces the power involved. It appears that all Comanche ritual can be explained in terms of obtaining, getting rid of, increasing, or reducing all those different powers. Thus a specific ritual permits middle-aged men to get rid of warrior powers in order to free themselves from corresponding taboos, which grow increasingly irksome. Other rituals, such as the sun ceremony, have the object of obtaining specific powers from the medicine man in charge.³⁹

CENTRALIZATION OF VITAL FORCE

The amount of vital force inherent in the different levels of social organization reflects, as one would expect, the society's social structure. In a very loose society, such as that of the people of Alor, one would expect individuals and families to be endowed with a considerable proportion of the society's vital force. On the other hand, in a highly centralized society—a traditional kingdom such as ancient Egypt, Dahomey, or Benin in West Africa—the vital force becomes

concentrated in the person of the divine king, who is in fact divine precisely for this reason. In such a society the welfare of all the inhabitants is regarded as totally dependent on the fulfillment of certain rituals designed to preserve and increase the king's stock of vital force and on the observance of the many taboos surrounding his person. That this was true of the ancient Hellenic kingdoms was recorded by Homer, who writes in the *Odyssey*, "When a blameless and god-fearing king maintains impartial justice, the brown earth is rich in corn and in barley, and the trees are laden with fruit; the ewes constantly bring forth young, the seas abound in fishes, there is nothing that does not prosper when there is good government and the people are happy."

The principle of killing the king at periodic intervals makes much sense if he eventually ceases to be a fit repository for the society's vital force, if in terms of the world view of the society concerned the society's stock of vital force can be renewed only by transferring it to someone else, who thereby must be crowned in his stead. As is generally known, in some kingdoms the king would be murdered ritually at the end of each year—a custom incomprehensible to those unaware of the specific law governing the transfer of vital force in such societies. Equally incomprehensible would be the custom of putting to death commoners who might have trodden in the king's shadow or committed some other ritual offense if it were not realized that in terms of the society's world view this misdemeanor could lead to the most terrible social calamities.

Universalism

Mason Hammond traces the development of universalism in the Greek city-state and shows how it is reflected in its philosophers' withdrawal from social affairs. Plato withdrew with his pupils to the grove of the hero Academos in the Attic countryside, and thereafter his academy became cut off from real life and devoted to the pursuit of pure mathematics and other intellectual pursuits. Similarly, Epicurus established his school in a garden outside Athens. The garden became a symbol of retirement from the world into a pleasant existence such as the gods led in their remote heaven. Epicurus took as the ideal of life the Greek word *apraxia* or inactivity, almost *dolce far niente*.

The Stoics made a gallant attempt to resist this trend. The city-state, however, had disintegrated. The Stoics instead regarded the larger inhabited world, *oecumene*, as the social reality. For them, the concept of citizenship had to be enlarged correspondingly. It was to this illusory entity that Zeno and his disciples preached that man owed a duty.

Rather than retreat from society, the Stoics taught all who would listen (in a public colonnade in the center of Athens, the painted stoa) world citizenship, the universal brotherhood of man—the same fiction which we are taught today. Needless to say, it failed. Hammond writes: ". . . Stoicism offered a solution at once practical and noble to the problem of the relation of the individual to the state in the new monarchies. Yet this solution was not wholly satisfactory because it was one-sided. It placed on the individual a duty toward his fellow men, but it offered him no corresponding privilege, such as citizenship had constituted in the city-state." The same forces which make man entertain the notion of the universal brotherhood of man made him direct his thought toward a universal god.

The development of universalism is traced by Smith. Among the pre-Islamic Arabs, as the tribes disintegrated and the old tribal gods lost their function, no permanent kingdom established itself to whose god they could transfer their permanent allegiance. Thus developed the custom of visiting gods in some distant holy place, to whom special powers were attributed and who could provide the psychological satisfactions and the solace previously provided by the tribal gods. Smith describes this disintegrative process:

... the prevalence of religion based on clientship and voluntary homage is seen in the growth of the practice of pilgrimage to distant shrines, which is so prominent a feature in later Semitic heathenism. Almost all Arabia met at Mecca, and the shrine at Hierapolis drew visitors from the whole Semitic world. These pilgrims were the guests of the god, and were received as such by the inhabitants of the holy places. They approached the god as strangers, not with the old joyous confidence of national worship, but with atoning ceremonies and rites of self-mortification, and their acts of worship were carefully prescribed for them by qualified instructors, the prototypes of the modern Meccan Motawwif. The progress of heathenism towards universalism, as it is displayed in these usages, seemed only to widen the gulf between the deity and man, to destroy the naïve trustfulness of the old religion without substituting a better way for man to be at one with his god, to weaken the moral ideas of nationality without bringing in a higher morality of universal obligation, ... 43

It is also interesting to trace changes in the organization of the gods of ancient Egypt in terms of the changes in their social organization. According to E. A. Wallis Budge, the original religion of the ancient Egyptians was ancestor worship.⁴⁴ They had a vague belief in a universal god, who was regarded—and is regarded by surviving tribal societies today—as the creator or molder. This god, Pautti, was regarded as too remote and too far removed from the world to concern

himself with the affairs of men. Significantly, it was not he who was destined to become the god of the later Egyptian empires. The original tribal societies of ancient Egypt disappeared during the historical period, and we find emerging the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt, which always remained distinct and tended to preserve their independence in times of trouble. These were divided into Nomes linked together in a sort of federal system whose degree of centralization varied with the strength of their central government. As this increased, so was their power correspondingly reduced. Social structures were eroded further during the long period of foreign domination by the Assyrians, Persians, and Greeks, until eventually the Egyptian people were turned into something approaching the structureless mass society which we, in the aberrant period in which we live, have been taught to dignify with the title "nation." These changes were accompanied by a corresponding change in the organization of the gods. During the Middle Empire the fusion of the two national gods Amon and Ra occurred. During the time of troubles preceding the Saite renaissance the tendency toward the fusion of the gods was even greater, and this went on until the Ptolemaic period, when all the male gods fused into the person of Osiris and all the female gods into that of Isis.45

When there is no longer any social structure, there is no longer any basis for structuring the pantheon. It disintegrates, and only the supreme god remains at the top of a defunct hierarchy. However, he now has acquired a wife and child. This is an interesting development, which never previously characterized a supreme god. Jomo Kenyatta says of the supreme god, known as Ngai, of the Wakamba and Masai: "He has no father, mother, or companion of any kind. His work is done in solitude." Let us not forget that the supreme god of a tribal society is not part of the social scheme of things, whereas all the other gods are. They are part of one's family, one's clan or tribe, and one's ethnic group. In such conditions there is no need for separate father, mother, or child figures.

One might consider the difference pointed out by Erich Fromm between the psychological need for a father, mother, child, and even a grandmother figure and the tendency to worship father, mother, child, and grandmother gods and goddesses.⁴⁷ The psychological need for a mother figure is derived from the fact that she dispenses mother love, which is different from what is dispensed by the father because it is unconditional. A child can behave in the most atrocious way without impairing the love its mother will bestow upon it. The father's love, on the other hand, is conditional. If it is to obtain father love, the child must behave in accordance with the father's ethical code,

which in a stable society will reflect that of his particular society. For this reason, a child seeks it only after it is several years old, when it is sufficiently strong psychologically to put up with the implications. Grandmother love is possibly even more unconditional than that of the mother. She does not have the mother's responsibility for disciplining the child and can dote on it from a distant vantage point.

As can be expected, self-indulgent societies, like those which inhabit the areas verging on the Mediterranean Sea, will tend to single out for worship a mother figure. Puritanical societies, for whom virtue is associated with the observance of a rigorous code of ethics, will single out a god to whom an extended family, a clan, or a tribe is not attributed, since these social structures are now defunct. Significantly, it is but of a nuclear family that he has been made a member. The reason for this is very simple. The nuclear family in such conditions is the only social unit to survive. The autocrat who rules the state and the massive, all-pervading bureaucracy which implements his edict are the only other realities. They do not require sanctification, for they are not controlled by the society's religioculture. On the contrary, they provide a rival, though, as we have seen, very imperfect, principle of control.

VITAL FORCE IN A DISINTEGRATING SOCIETY

With the disintegration of a society and the destruction of its cultural pattern the functioning of the dynamic principle is affected equally. In the case of our aberrant industrial society, however, the notion of vital force is not altogether lost. We still live in an age of faith—not in god or gods but in science, technology, and industry to solve all human problems and create for us a material paradise here on earth. Undoubtedly we attribute some sort of vital force or salvatory power to the scientific knowledge required for this purpose. Its possession is regarded as the key to success, a passport to status and riches. Money or economic power is also imbued with vital force, since it is the key to setting into motion the technological development and the industrial enterprises to exploit this scientific knowledge. A faith in "technological fixes" for deliverance from man's problems of food, health, power, happiness, and general needs has become a dominant religion.

Unfortunately, this view of religious vital force turns out to be false for the continued viability of human society. It fails to deal adequately either with the limits and conditions imposed by the external system or with the internal psychosocial requirements of the life of a human society. As we have seen, traditional religious rituals and beliefs in the past have adapted men to thrive in their ecological niche. Religions have adapted man to the internal psychosocial requirements of his

niche by providing him with meaning and hope for his personal, sacred role in his society and in the scheme of things. They have also adapted him to the external ecosystem's requirements for his society's continuing viability in its context.

In the recent, rapid growth of consciously devised, scientifically informed technological fixes to bring salvation to men, these transpersonal, ecosystemic requirements have begun to penetrate a significant degree of conscious attention. Moreover, men have largely lost their fear and respect for the unseen reality that created and sustains them, the reality which the religions symbolize as God.

People in the burgeoning technological-industrial societies, in the flush of their short-term miracles in satisfying human wants, naively began to presume that the superhuman realities and requirements for men were superstitions and that man was master of his destiny in fighting a "nature" which he could overcome. He did not stop to think that his aircraft rose against gravity because he was utilizing other laws of nature, rather than because he was defeating the law of gravity. Moreover, the religious images of the ultimate creator and determiner of human destiny had lost most of their connection with what now had become recognized as the true nature of things. Hence the religious beliefs tended to become irrelevant or perhaps merely nostalgic "myths." They went so far that even theologians, the custodians of religious symbols, admitted that their "God is dead."

Theologians had failed completely to see their creator and determiner of destiny in terms of the new scientific pictures of the reality of nature. They could not imagine their god, in Darwin's language, as the "natural selection" that "is daily and hourly scrutinizing throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life."⁴⁸

Turning from the external or prehuman processes of natural selection to the internal or psychosocial aspects of human governance or control of its own stability, we again find that neither the theologians nor the scientifically informed technologists of Western civilization understood the realities. Theologians had lost their convictions about souls and eternal life, and so also had most of the men in the street. At first, at least, the developers of industrial technology and industry presumed that they did not need to concern themselves with ultimate human values, since these were safely in the hands of religious institutions.

But with the increase of psychosocial tensions there were attempts

at scientifically informed technological fixes to replace the waning and not yet scientifically understood virtues of traditional religion for psychosocial adaptation. But such attempts at scientifically informed remedies as those of Marx and Freud and their followers for the most part failed to appreciate the delicate and complex solutions the traditional religions had worked out to provide viable links and dynamics among the psychological, social, biological, and ecosystemic requirements for human life. Hence they failed to provide fully adequate reforms of this long and carefully evolved system for psychosocial control and adaptation to the ultimate realities of nature.

In particular, the Marxist and Freudian redeemers failed to appreciate the reality and necessity of religion's adaptation of man to a transcendent system of power symbolized as God. In fact, these proposers of new, more scientific programs for deliverance from evil overlooked, as did the theologians, the fact that the larger, everpresent, and inescapable system of nature placed inherent limits upon the massiveness of scientific technology's consumption.

Also, they failed to see that the total ecosystem, internal to human psyches and societies as well as external, was full of intrinsic taboos which require a more complex and delicate self-control in the human system than ever before.

With the failure of the institutions that internalize such self-controls, whether the traditional religions or the new redeemers, the industrial powers of a scientifically informed technology became harnessed to the runaway insatiability of human lusts for power and pleasure unadapted to sociocultural and ecosystemic realities which had been symbolized in the religious God.

In less than a thousandth of the time during which *Homo* slowly and surely has been adapting his sociocultural religious control systems within the bounds imposed by his habitat and his internal nature, he suddenly has become uncontrolled and headed for sheer disaster unless he repents himself in time and walks more humbly under the requirements of the ultimate reality system.

Urgent for our salvation is the revitalization and renovation of the sociocultural institutions that carry on the traditional religious functions of showing man what is required of him if he is to continue to have life, to be saved from destruction and death.

THE REDEVELOPMENT OF A SAVING RELIGION

The religions of the world have not always been impotent to motivate men in their sacred or essential duties to their society and its viability in the land which God gave them. Today, as industrial society disintegrates under its false faith and hubris in the power of man, one can expect to see emerge from the accompanying chaos an increasing number of new messianic movements which will attempt to reestablish a revitalized social order based upon an ancient religious hypothesis of man's dependence upon a system of dynamic and evolving reality with which he must come to terms.

The objection that the religious cultures did not provide objective, credible, or true information about what God requires of man simply is not valid. The test of validity is viability—the cybernetic control of material and energy flows that constitutes the stability or homeostasis that is life. Failure of such control leads to death and nonentity. Both traditional religions and modern scientific pictures of man's dependence upon the hidden reality system which molds and determines his destiny provide a common truth that man did not make himself and that he continues to have life only insofar as he adapts to or bows down before the requirements placed upon life by the larger reality system of which he is a part.

Unfortunately, it is not sufficiently realized that the new sciences join traditional religion to say that information is organized in living systems for one purpose only: to provide a model of a system that is stable in relation to its environment, that is, a model for adapting the life system to such behavior as will provide its future continuation under the reality conditions in which it finds itself.

Not only has the information enculturated or interiorized in man by traditional religions achieved this end, but on both empirical and theoretical grounds it would seem that some such process is the only effective means of doing so. As our scientific understanding of the complex wisdom of the religious cultures increases, we are just beginning to be able to say how this subtle heritage of wisdom does provide us in fact with valid information on how we must live.

Our new models of the cybernetics of living systems give us new respect for the ancient wisdom of traditional religious sociocultural systems as the necessary control mechanisms to provide human societies with stability—continued life.⁴⁹

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