

people who practice it. A faith is not merely a concept to be studied and compared. A faith is lived, not merely studied. It is a basic part of a culture's means of coping with life, a pattern of beliefs and rituals which have been widely accepted as right methods of dealing with human problems. This acceptance is not to be seen by us as ignorant or unfounded. It is based on that culture's perception of what is most valued and true. Our criticism of the acceptance of a faith is often one which fails to consider the differing needs and problems of the people of that faith.¹

Paul Tillich has written, "...religion is being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern."² Faith, he continues, is "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, and God is the name for the content of the concern."³ I quote Tillich to establish a connection between faith and values. This is a sort of restatement of the contention that religion and human need are related. We attribute value to whatever tool, action, belief, or ritual which successfully meets a human need. I do not mean to absolutize this point as Tillich seems to, but I seek to stress the need to understand the relationship of

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¹ I shall use the terms religion and faith interchangeably to stress the personalness of religion, a personalness which the word religion alone fails to communicate.

² Tillich, Paul. Theology of Culture N.Y. Oxford Univ. Press, 1959, pg. 40.

³ Ibid.

Religion

religion and human needs, values, and concerns. A religion which deals head on with concerns which are ultimate can more readily offer ultimate meaning to a people. Tillich views religion (as ultimate concern) as "the meaning-giving substance of culture".⁴ So, religion is closely tied to human needs, problems, and values which are themselves closely connected to a peoples' cultural context.

"Religion is found in every known human society", writes Annemarie De Waal Malefijt, "It is man's attempt to cope with the uncontrolable, and the un-understandable."⁵

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Religion survives in the villages in Burma, the slums of New York and in the cathedrals of Rome. It survives where humans struggle. J. Milton Yinger defines religion as "a sytem of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with...ultimate problems of human life."⁶ According to a great image of the Buddha, the world is "...a burning house and man's urgent need is to escape from it."⁷

5 Malefijt, Annemarie De Waal. Religion and Culture. (The Macmillan Co.), 1968. pg.1.
6 J.M. Yinger, The Scientific Study of Religion (the Macmillan Co.) London. 1970. pg, 7.
7 Bellah, Robert N. Religious Evolution. (article in Reader in Comparative Religion. edited by William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt.) Harper and Row, Publishers. 1972. pg. 38.

II. Comparing the Religions and Cultures of Man (Practical Treatment)

Has humankind been left alone with a haunting realization of ultimate powerlessness in an inscrutable world? Alone to face the dangers and fears of life? Alone to grope for answers to the problems of pain and loneliness? As a Christian, my answer is no. True, we experience all the above trials but not alone. This is my faith. I believe in a God who has come to us with the offer of a solution to the problems of mankind, an offer to meet our greatest needs. The offer is universal. God's promises are given to all and valid everywhere. It is an offer of forgiveness and salvation. This, I believe, is how God dealt with me. However, throughout the world, humans with problems and questions like mine have found different answers, which they also regard as ways to salvation (redefined). Is it productive for us to simply confront them as if they were really ways of damnation? No. In our encounter we must seek understanding of what the religion is to them (a way of salvation) rather than criticize its forms because they meet none of our needs and seems irrational. Without accepting the religion we can accept the people, and trust that my God is dealing with them with the same love he gave to me, in a different way perhaps but a way that is somehow best. Perhaps God is using me to offer his love to them. Thus my message is not one of damnation or rejection but of salvation and love.

Practical solutions for the many-sided problems in the

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Wayne Dye"

Letter Home: "When we first got back we faced an interesting (and devastating) case for animism class. Our village Christian friends had been gradually using more and more magic (without our knowledge) and suddenly rebuilt the men's cult house. This is the heart of the old pagan religion.

We had been teaching like mad from the Old Testament, I Corint. 8, etc, as opportunity has come. The people are happy for Bible studies or rather a significant minority are.

But we also found that God has been fighting this battle - on their terms!

1) Our chief informant was one person who knew very well that he shouldn't join the cult revival. He did anyway and died a week later.

2) A week after we got here, an important man in another village died - sorcery in revenge was charged against close relatives of our village. Suddenly it occurred to them that nothing in the old religion or magic could protect them from such sorcery. Only God could (There was a most earnest prayer meeting - that night).

3) Usually they kill about 2 wild pigs a week. They depend on pigs for food (protein). Until they built the cult house they had been getting 2 to three a week. Since then one pig every three weeks. The few they have gotten have been when they have put aside magic and prayed earnestly.

Thought you'd be interested. In His Power, Wayne.