

The Place of Religion in Social Control.

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Philosophers and scientists recognize the importance of "control" as a crucial issue in all the departments of life. Natural science works to know the secret of control within the physical universe, sociology and social psychology within the realm of human environment and conscious mind.

We owe to Prof. Edward A. Ross the broad term "social control." It was his important essay on the subject published around 1901 that popularized the term.

What is the meaning of this term? It is used by sociologists with at least three meanings. First, to stress the *source* of control and limit it to that which emanates from the group and to exercise constraint in the individual members; second, to stress the *purpose* with the limitation of the intention to exercise constraint; third, and including both, it is broad enough to include all the forms, means and methods in which *constraint* is exercised and the *solidarity* of the group is manifested. Different sociologists give different lists of the means and methods of "social control," each of whom without attempting to give an all-inclusive list, gives those which in his own judgment are the most important. Professor Eubanks summarizes from ten of the leading sociologists a catalog that includes fifty-eight different forms of control. These forms are familiar under various names, from the most elementary forms of social control, the spontaneous forms in the crowd, in ceremony, prestige and taboo; the more explicit expression, in gossip, rumor, news, public opinion, to the formal organization in law, dogma, and in religious and political institutions. Our discussion, then, of Religion is limited to only one of its many aspects in the field of sociology, and within this field only as a means of societal control.

Again and again formal means of social control such as government and law with all their machinery and technique fail to realize their purpose because they cannot deal with the spring of human action itself. Religion proves to be the force in that realm for social order.

Religion conceived as a social force, through all of its history has been an instrument of social adaptation and control over social life. From its earliest stages, it has supported the "mores" of the social group in which it has been found. Dr. Marett in his book "Anthropology" says: "The religion of a savage is his whole custom so far as it appears sacred." Everywhere in primitive society, after certain practices have developed into institutions, we find that religion comes in and gives its sanctions, working in that way, for permanence and stability.

What has been proved to work for the safety and welfare of the group in more advanced societies, has been made sacred through the agency of religion. Patterns of conduct and life of the group have been strengthened (reinforced) with the aid of a supernatural sanction. So marriage, for example, was made sacred, the authority of the head of the house over the members and the right of each of them with reference to the others was made sacred. The authority of the magistrate and his different functions, also were made sacred. Fustel de Coulange in his work "La Cité Antique" quotes Plutarch as saying: "For it is this (religion) that contains and holds together all human society and is its main prop and stay."

The "mores" were inbedded in religious feelings and beliefs, that is to say, they became absolute social values, with a supernatural sanction added to them. It is easy to see what would have been the validity of patterns of conduct and life for the coming generations without the sanction of religion, the breakdown of all their patterns, social discontinuity, and chaos. Civilization is possible only by the handing down of certain social ideas and ideals, and religion has given to those ideas and ideals a particular value, making them worthy of being preserved by the following generation; not only that, but also the sanction to enforce them upon the individual. It has been in that way that the individual member of society has been constrained to conform his habits to society and to control his conduct according to the social demands. The sociologist cannot ignore the social effects of religion as a harmonizing and order preserving element in the support which

it has given in all stages of human culture, to custom, moral standards and moral ideals. It is, as Prof. Ward says, "the power of social gravitation which holds the social world in its orbit."

For the very reason that religion supports social values and attaches its sanctions to them, it can as easily attach its sanctions to values, moral and social ideals, beyond the existing order of things. The values that support are not only those which are customary in the life of a given society, but also those which have not been realized. Therefore, it is not only a conservative element in society but also a chief stimulus to social progress.

Giving its approval to a "pattern idea," an ideal social life not yet realized, it imparts a force and dynamic impossible of securing from any other agency. Further, it sets up a goal which gives direction and meaning for the whole social life. It is undeniable that the religion which fertilizes the altruistic feelings and emotions of the individual lays also the foundation for social progress, because sympathetic understanding makes for harmonious relations and for opening the doors to a higher type of social order.

"In proportion," says Prof. Ellwood, "as religion sanctions altruistic conduct on the part of the individual, in that degree it helps not only to harmonize the relations among the group, but also to secure the establishment of a just social order. It thus aids progress."

Then we may conclude, religion as a means of social control, enforces the claim to dominance in the life of man of the highest ideas and values of society. That is to say, it exalts the life in which the individual merges his interests, desires and aspirations with his society—a society which to the Christian is co-incidental with the whole world. It is this very process that works for social stability. Also religion, in setting goals that call for realization, itself impels progress, which progress can be wrought out only through co-operation and solidarity.

An anonymous Christian writer in the first half of the second century apprehended the social value of his religion.

In happy words he says: "What the soul is in the body, that (Christianity) is in the world . . . it holds the world together."

There have been raised the questions, "Can religion as a means of control be supplanted by other means?" and "What is the future of religion in an overly complex society?" One leading sociologist of this country in his book, "The Psychology of Human Society," answers the first, "So far as Social Psychology can discover, there is no substitute for religion as an instrument of social control." As to the second—the real question is not "What is the future of religion?" but what would be the future of society without the sustaining, stabilizing, inspiring force of Religion? Religion "holds the world together!"