

A Tentative Model for Religion

MILTON JACOBS

Contents:

- Prologue
- 1. Death
- 2. Dreams, Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts
- 3. The Significance of Group Size and Insecurity
- 4. Group Size and Dreams
- 5. Conclusions

Prologue

"Since religion is a universal, it must have some value ... despite the immense variations in the outward observances, the inner glow and the function of religion in the group were identical from one form to the other. The Catholic priest, the Mormon missionary, the Eskimo shaman, the African witch-doctor, and the Protestant clergyman were all alike in their sense of inner conviction, in their intense desire to help others, and in their dependence upon some force outside themselves that gave them courage" (LOWIE 1963: 532).

"The Crow Indians and their neighbors continually amazed me by their ever-recurring face-to-face communication with the superhuman. It is such direct intercourse with the divine that is most distinctive of religion at its peak" (LOWIE 1963: 536).

"(As one informant put it:) All who had visions were well-to-do; I was to be poor, and that is why I had no vision" (LOWIE 1963: 537).

To present another flurry of words about religion, its origins, and its significance to the study of man, an author must be audacious or mad. No matter how generous I have tried to be about most scholarly works on religion, I must admit that the explanations, theories, and arguments leave me dissatisfied. Being an optimist, I hope that new analyses of religion – if done with some depth and imagination – may shed light on the phenomenon as well as adding some small insight into man's nature.

There are adequate recitals of previous scholarly treatments on religion. Reproducing another here would certainly be superfluous. Nor is it my intention to present endless citations from a vast literature to support my contentions.