

Unit 17 :Rudolf Otto: The Idea of the Hol

17.1 Learning Objectives

17.2 Introduction

17.3 Rudolf Otto: The Idea of the Holy

17.4 What is Numinous (Holy Experience)

17.5 Characteristics of Numinous

17.6 Let us Sum Up

17.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

17.8 Further Readings

17.9 Model Questions

17.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain what is Numinous
- Describe the etymological meaning of Numinous
- Discuss about Holy Experience
- Explain what is Mysterium Tremendum
- Describe what is Fascination
- Explain why Numinous is Non-rational
- Explain why numinous is subjective
- Explain characteristics of Numinous
- Explain what is Sui Generis
- Explain why Otto's Idea of Holy is not sound

17.2 Introduction

Otto was one of the most influential thinkers of religion in the first half of the twentieth century. He is best known for his analysis of the religious experience. He calls this experience “Numinous” i.e. religious experience.

A religious experience is a subjective experience which is interpreted within a religious framework. Many religious and mystical traditions see religious experiences as revelations caused by divine agency rather than ordinary natural processes. They are considered real encounters with God or gods, or real contact with higher-order realities of which humans are not ordinarily aware.

Otto very clearly discussed why numinous is not in a position to explain but everybody can experience it. People have the fear or we can say terror but in the same time people are attracted for God and religious places. According to Otto numinous is infinite and always far away to express or explain the Holy experiences.

LET US KNOW

Rudolf Otto: (25 September, 1869-6 March 1937): R. Otto was an eminent German Theologian, Philosopher and Comparative Religionist. He is regarded as one of the most influential scholars of

religion in the early twentieth century and is best known for his concept of the “Numinous” and his work “The Idea of the Holy”

17.3 Rudolf Otto: The Idea of the Holy

Since the English translation first appeared in 1923, Rudolf Otto’s volume has established itself as a classic in the field of religious philosophy. It offers an in-depth inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational.

Otto discussed about “Numinous” in his book “The Idea of the Holy”. In his book he introduced many new terms like, wholly other, *Mysterium Tremendum*, fascination, *Sui generis* and he discussed why religious experience can be equated with Holy experience and why Numinous is non-rational and subjective. The concept “numinous” got the vital importance in his book “The Idea of the holy”.

LET US KNOW

The Idea of the Holy: “The Idea of the Holy” is an enquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational was first published by Oxford University Press in 1923. A second edition appeared in 1950.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Who is the author of the book “The Idea of the Holy”?

17.4 What is Numinous (Holy Experience)

For Otto religious experience is a Holy experience and he used the term “Numinous” instead of religious experience. According to Otto this experience is a creature consciousness which is different from creature. Again according to him this type of experience have creative feelings also. Numinous can be two types. They are “Mysterium tremendum” and other is “Fascination”. According to Otto Numinous is non-rational and Subjective. Otto explained very beautifully some characteristics of Numinous also which will be discuss after it.

The word Numinous came from the Latin Word “Numen” which means God. So the meaning of “Numinous” is Holy experience and this type of experience is very pious. The etymological meaning of Numinous is Holy experience.

Otto’s view of religious experience is different from the entire philosopher. According to him this type of holy experience is very infinite type or we can say complete and mysterious. So we ordinary people can’t get this type of Holy experience as we are not complete and we are finite in nature. So it is not possible to get the infinite experience for us as we are finite human being. Beside of all this as it is mysterious so it is wholly other which means it is outside of this

ordinary experience. According to Otto, this type of experience is Creature Consciousness which is different from the creature. And again according to Otto this type of holy experience is different from all type of experience so he called it “Numinous”.

According to Otto, Numinous are two types. They are, “Mysterium Tremendum” and the other is “Fascination.” Religious experience can be come from the feelings of fear, wonder and the feelings of mysticism. According to him, Numinous is a mysterious experience which he wants to call “Mysterium Tremendum”. The Holy experience is in the same time attractive which is called by Otto “Fascination”. According to him, all people use to get such type of Holy experience but people are unable to explain this type of experience. It is impossible for human being to explain “Numinous” because this type of experience is totally different from all other experience so Otto called it “Sui Generis” which means man can get this Holy experience but never be able to explain it or we can say impossible to explain. “Numinous” is such type of experience where people feel very small in front of God.

According to Otto, numinous is Subjective and Non-rational. According to him, through reason we can't get the experience of Holy i.e. “Numinous” and there is no place of reason in Numinous. The Holy experience is also subjective which we can't explain in words. This

Holy experience is a feeling of satisfaction for us but we can't clearly explain this experience externally. It is almost impossible to express.

LET US KNOW

Numinous: Numinous is an English adjective derived from the Latin "numen", meaning "arousing spiritual or religious emotion; mysterious.

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Mysterium Tremendum: Mysterium means wholly other, experienced with blank wonder, stupor and Tremendum means awfulness, terror etc. So mysterium Tremendum means terror or we can say entirely different from which we experience in ordinary life.

LET US KNOW

Fascination: potent charm, attractiveness in spite of fear and terror which is merciful and gracious.

LET US KNOW

Sui generis: sui generis is a Latin phrase which means in a class or group of its own, their own kind and which is unique

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Non-rational: which is not reason based.

LET US KNOW

Subjective: Which is mind dependant or according to Otto it is individual feelings.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2. State whether the following statements are true or false.

- a) The Numinous experience is rational (T/F)
- b) According to Otto, the Numinous experience is wholly other. (T/F)

Q.3 From which word “Numinous” derived?

Q.4. What is the meaning of the term “Numen”?

Q.5. What is the etymological meaning of the term “Numinous”?

Q.6. Fill in the Blanks:

- a) Otto used the term Numinous instead of.....

b) Otto introduced the terminstead of holy experience.

c) Otto derived the term “Numinous” from the Latin word.....

17.4 Characteristics of Numinous

After reading Otto’s “The Idea of the Holy” some characteristics of Numinous we can draw. They are—

- 1) Numinous is *Mysterium Tremendum*: as *mysterium*, the numinous is “wholly other” i.e. entirely different from anything we experience in our ordinary life. *Tremendum* means awfulness, terror etc. So *mysterium Tremendum* means terror or we can say entirely different from which we experience in ordinary life. It evokes a reaction of silence. Otto called it “*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” which means a mystery before which man both trembles and is fascinated, is both repelled and attracted.
- 2) Numinous is Fascination: Numinous or Holy experience that makes us fearful yet fascinated, awed yet attracted. In numinous have the element of fascination which cause the subject of the experience of the numinous to be caught up in it.
- 3) Numinous is Non-rational: According to Otto religious experience as non-rational. There is no place of reason in the religious experience. We can’t get the pious experience like Numinous through reason. According to him Numinous is such a Holy experience which is

entirely outside of reason. Otto means that which cannot be exhaustively described by purely rational concepts.

4) Numinous is wholly other: according to Otto the holy experience or numinous is the experience which is far away from reason means non-rational, subjective, which can't be expressed in language and not known to us.

5) Numinous is Sui generis: According to Otto this type of Holy experience can't be compare with any other experience. So Otto named it Numinous which is mysterious but it is more than any mysticism. It is unique; one can feel by himself/herself, of its own kind.

Otto believed that religious experience is unique and fundamentally different from other kinds of experience. He maintained that if there be any single domain of human experience that presents us with something unmistakably specific and unique, peculiar to itself, assuredly it is that of the religious life.

LET US KNOW

Mysterious: difficult or impossible to understand, explain or identify, secret.

ACTIVITY:

Go to your religious place and after coming from that place try write “ What is your feelings after entering that place?”

.....

.....

....

.....

Why you worship your God? Is it because of fear
or love/respect for your God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7. What do you mean by “Tremendum
Mysterium”?

Q.8. What is “Sui generis according to Otto?

Q.9. fill in the Blanks:

a) Numinous or Holy experience that makes us
fearful yet

b) Numinous or that makes us fearful yet
fascinated, awed yet

17.5 Let Us Sum Up

We have discussed in this unit about Otto's idea of the Holy which is highlighted with the concept of Numinous.

The most important points are:

- Otto was one of the most influential thinkers of religion in the first half of the twentieth century. He is best known for his analysis of the religious experience. He calls this experience "Numinous" i.e. Religious Experience.
- A religious experience is a subjective experience which is interpreted within a religious framework. They are considered real encounters with God or gods, or real contact with higher-order realities of which humans are not ordinarily aware.
- Otto discussed about "Numinous" in his book "The Idea of the Holy". In his book he introduced many new terms like, wholly other, *Mysterium Tremendum*, fascination, *Sui generis* and he discussed why religious experience can be equated with Holy experience and why Numinous is non-rational and subjective.
- The concept "numinous" got the vital importance in his book "The Idea of the holy".
- Otto very clearly discussed why numinous is not in a position to explain but everybody can experience it. People have the fear or we can say terror but in the same time people are attracted for God and religious places. According to Otto numinous is infinite and always far away to express or explain the Holy experiences.
- The word Numinous came from the Latin Word "Numen" which means God. So the meaning of "Numinous" is Holy experience

and this type of experience is very pious. The etymological meaning of Numinous is Holy experience.

- According to Otto, Numinous are two types. They are, “Mysterium Tremendum” and the other is “Fascination.” Religious experience can be come from the feelings of fear, wonder and the feelings of mysticism. According to him, Numinous is a mysterious experience which he wants to call “Mysterium Tremendum”.
- The Holy experience is in the same time attractive which is called by Otto “Fascination”.
- According to him, all people use to get such type of Holy experience but people are unable to explain this type of experience. It is impossible for human being to explain “Numinous” because this type of experience is totally different from all other experience. So, Otto called it “Sui Generis”.
- According to Otto, numinous is Subjective and Non-rational. According to him, through reason we can’t get the experience of Holy i.e. “Numinous” and there is no place of reason in Numinous. The Holy experience is also subjective which we can’t explain in words.

17.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

Ans. to Q.No. 1: Rudolf Otto

Ans. to Q. No. 2:

a) F

b) T

Ans.to Q. No.3: Numen

Ans.to Q. No. 4 :God

Ans. to Q. No. 5: Holy Experience

Ans. to Q. No. 6:

a) Holy Experience

b) Numinous

Ans. to Q. No. 7: which means a mystery before which man both trembles and is fascinated, is both repelled and attracted.

Ans. to Q. No. 8: It is unique; one can feel by himself/herself, of its own kind. Otto believed that religious experience is unique and fundamentally different from other kinds of experience.

Ans. to Q. No. 9: a) Fascinated

b) Holy experience, attracted.

17.7 Further Readings:

- Hook, Sidney.(1961) religious Experience And Truth, New York University Press.
- Otto, Rudolf . (1950) The Idea of the Holy, Oxford University Press.
- John, W, Harvey.(Translated), The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the Idea of the

Devine and its Relation to the Rational, Oxford university Press

- Armstrong , Karen.(1996), In the Beging,p.44
- Cousins, Ewert.(1971), Process Theology, New York: Newman Publisher.
- Eliade, Mircea, (1957),The Sacred and the Profane.
- Costa, D.(1993), Whose Objectivity? Which neutrality? Religious Studies, Cambridge university Press.
- Roy, K, Hemanta.(2014), Dharmadarshan, Union Book Publication.

17.8 Model Questions

A) Very Short Question

- Q.1. What is Numinous?
- Q.2. What is Sui generis?
- Q.3. What do you mean by Non-rational?
- Q.4 What do you mean by subjective?

B) Short Questions

- Q.1. Define Numinous
- Q. 2. What is Holy experience?

C) Write Short Note on(Answer in about 150 words)

- Q.1. Numinous
- Q.2. Sui generis
- Q.3.Tremendum Mysterium
- Q.4.Rudolf Otto

D) Long Questions(Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

- Q.1.Explain and examine Otto's Idea of the Holy
- Q.2. What is Numinous? Discuss Otto's concept of the numinous?

Q.3. according to Otto, Numinous is “Tremendum mysterium”.
Explain this point.

Q.4. Explain whether numinous experience is rational or non-rational?

Q.5. Define Numinous. Explain the salient features of Numinous.