

Letter to the Editor

Dear sir,

I have never before responded to a review of any of my books, but I must set the record straight regarding several misleading assertions in Jocelyn Murray's review of *Colonial Evangelism (Africa, 53(3), 89–90)*. Murray's review struck me as trying to be honest and fair, considering that it stems from a different perspective from my own, but that perspective is the source of difficulties.

Murray states that I 'dislike religion'. In my preface I indicate that although I was reared a Christian, I am an agnostic. Obviously, I cannot therefore share some of the assumptions of those of my reviewers who not only believe but in some cases have devoted much of their lives to promoting Christianity among non-believers. It is not true, however, that I 'dislike religion' any more than it is true that I dislike kinship, economics or politics. In this sense, I believe that Murray's observation that 'Beidelman's antipathy for most of what he saw really disqualifies him from making an adequate study' questions my integrity as a social anthropologist.

In a perceptive essay, 'Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?' (in J. Hick, ed., *Faith and the Philosophers*, London, 1964, 115–33), Alisdair MacIntyre forcefully argues that religious belief is a serious impediment to sociological analysis of religion. Evans-Pritchard argues the reverse, ('Religion and the Anthropologist', in *Essays in Social Anthropology*, London, 1962), but in any case the founding fathers of the sociology of religion, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Freud, were either agnostics or atheists. By the false logic employed by Murray, I should have to be an economic entrepreneur to write about capitalism, a communist to write about contemporary China, and a racist to write about the Klu Klux Klan. It is probably because I am not a believer that Murray has 'never read a more negative account than this one'. This, in turn, may relate to the fact that most studies of missionaries have been written by believers, often missionaries themselves.

It is not appropriate for me to rehash Murray's criticisms, but one particularly relates to her attack on me as a person. She chides me for using the term 'religiousity', implying that this reflects my supposed religious hostility, asking why I do not instead use the term 'religion'. I use 'religiousity' to describe the particular attributes and bearing of those who not only have a religion but who make a career both out of constantly presenting this to the rest of the world and out of denigrating religious beliefs contrary to their own. These features make missionaries rather different from persons who simply try to observe their beliefs as best they can but are not impelled to present them to others who do not believe as they do. That is what makes a missionary different from many others with religion; it is in this sense, too, that missionizing is sociologically related to colonialism.

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