

Religions

by D. W. GUNDRY



*A preliminary
historical and theological
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A PRELIMINARY HISTORICAL
AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

D. W. GUNDRY

WARDEN OF NEUADD REICHEL AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
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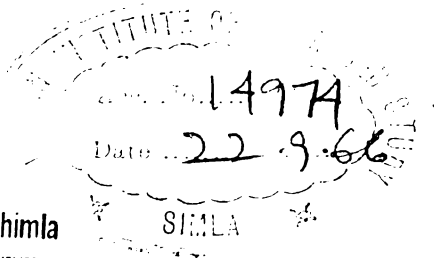
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PREFACE

It is nowadays almost more than commonplace to remark that we live in a smaller world than did our forefathers. Yet the implications of new and faster means of communication are not always realized; and certainly this is so in respect of religion. Just as a global outlook has arisen in so many spheres of human activity, so a global — which is not the same thing as an oecumenical — outlook is bound to grow more and more in religion. Already there is a widespread desire to learn about the creeds and customs of other peoples, past and present. The reasons for this spirit of enquiry are numerous: sometimes it is just curiosity; sometimes it derives from a dissatisfaction with traditional beliefs and institutions at home. It would be futile for Christian theologians to disregard this growing interest; and it is to be hoped that comparative theology will take a more prominent place in the curricula of theological faculties and colleges than it has done in the past. The term ‘comparative theology’ is preferable to the cumbersome ‘comparative study of religions’ or the inaccurate ‘comparative religion’. We are well aware that many people are comparatively religious; but the study of their spiritual condition is the concern of the sociologist or the pastoral theologian. The study in outline of the leading personalities and ideas of the great religions might also be profitable in the sixth forms of schools, where the level of divinity should match that aimed at in the arts and sciences; but it is doubtful whether there is much point in introducing the subject at an earlier stage, since young people will only just have entered into thoughtful membership of their own church.

This book is intended to interest and inform several different kinds of readers: theological and other students, the clergy, teachers and their advanced pupils, as well as the educated layman. An attempt has been made to avoid unnecessary tech-

nicalities; and, even where unfamiliar matters have been dealt with, I have tried to make them as clear as possible to the non-specialist without undue generalization. The reader new to the subject should note two things which will help to avoid confusion. One is that I have simplified many technical terms by omitting diacritical and similar marks: thus *Quran* is preferred to *Qur'ān*. The other is that, as there is in practice no uniform system of transliteration from oriental and other languages into those using roman characters, different books often use different transliterations: thus *brahmin* and *brahman*; *Lao Tzu*, *Lao Tze* and *Lao Tse*. A short bibliography has been appended, which will enable further reading. The map and chronological table, so often lacking in books of this kind, seem to me essential in order to place religious pioneers and movements geographically and historically.

Mere curiosity and the mere acquisition of information about the religions of mankind are unlikely to prove much more than an academic luxury, unless they are followed by an effort to relate one's study to one's own religious allegiance and experience. It is here that the main difficulty lies, and that theology proper can help. So many people wrongly assume at the outset that all religions are basically the same, or that, even if they differ, some new sort of all-embracing religion can be manufactured from them; and that, even then, we can do justice to religion by remaining detached observers. The fact of the matter is that no religion yields up its treasures until one gives oneself to it. Yet it is impossible to become a member of each religion in turn. Life is too short and religion too long. We shall do far better by throwing ourselves wholeheartedly into the religious tradition of our own society, but at the same time acknowledging and, where possible, assimilating anything of value which we find in other religions as we study them. In this way our own institutions will be enriched and enlarged.

The thoughtful Christian is, however, bound to be exercised by the problem of revelation. Contemporary society tends to equate the claims made by all religions; but acceptance of this valuation without question is a pitfall to beware of. It has been

my purpose, therefore, to provide the reader with something more than a factual outline of religions, and to lead him at least to an awareness of some of the important issues from such a survey. The point of view of this book is openly Christian; but that should not cause the reader to suppose that an agnostic or eclectic approach is a more satisfactory one. Most books on the religions of the world claiming to be scientific accounts are intellectually and spiritually sterile, and in fact represent a point of view quite as dogmatic as those by authors with definite religious convictions — sometimes even more so. There can be no such thing as absolute impartiality where vital matters are concerned; but sympathy with the sincere beliefs of others there must be.

I am indebted to those who have helped me in the writing of this book; and I wish particularly to thank the Revd Dr H. H. Farmer, fellow of Peterhouse and Norris-Hulse professor of divinity in the University of Cambridge, who first suggested it; the Revd Canon H. K. Luce, lately head-master of Durham School, for several useful suggestions; Mr Thomas McPherson, lecturer in philosophy in the University College of North Wales, for sparing the time to read the manuscript and proofs; Miss G. Ll. Thomas for making the typescript; and the publishers and printers, usually forgotten in such acknowledgments, whose part has been indispensable.

D. W. G.

Easter 1957



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHAT IS RELIGION?	I
II. THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION	11
III. THE RELIGIOUS QUEST OF THE ANCIENT WORLD	
The Problem of the Past	28
Egypt	33
Mesopotamia	42
The Indus Civilization	48
Greece	49
Rome	58
IV. THE UNDEVELOPED RELIGIONS	
Primitives	65
Shinto	70
V. THE MONISTIC RELIGIONS	
The Unknown One	74
Taoism	75
Confucianism	78
Hinduism	84
Buddhism	101
VI. THE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS	
The Known God	112
Hebrew Religion	114
Zoroastrianism	130
Islam	135
Christianity	144
VII. RELIGION AS DECISION	156
NOTES	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY	178
INDEX	183

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS RELIGION?

If you asked each member of a group of educated people to write down on a piece of paper what 'H₂O' meant the probability is that they would all give the same answer — 'water'. Some of them might even add the information that these symbols indicated that one molecule of water was made up of a chemical combination of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. At any rate, they would — if they remembered their elementary science lessons at school — all give the same answer. The reason for this is that over a long period chemists have, as a result of a patient process of observing, weighing, measuring and imagining, constructed a uniform picture of the elements of which the world around us is composed. Now, although it is conceivable that one day some other kind of chemistry might be invented, all chemists today accept this particular way of talking about water.

In many other spheres of human life and thought, however, such simplicity of definition is impossible, simply because there is no generally agreed picture. As soon as we begin to deal with less tangible and more complex matters, such as art, democracy, love, we are no longer concerned with things that can be fitted into a neat pigeon-holed framework of knowledge; and we should be very suspicious of any attempt so to fit them. This certainly applies to religion. Ask each one of a group of people to write down in a sentence — or even a paragraph — what they mean by 'religion', and you are bound to get a variety of answers.¹ One might say 'Religion is believing in God', another 'Religion is leading a good life', another 'Religion is some kind of profound inner experience', and so on. This would not be surprising, since very many learned writers throughout history have put forward varying definitions of religion; and, although

they are usually phrased more elegantly than those of ordinary people, they are often not so very different in content. When, for example, the great eighteenth-century German philosopher Kant said that religion is 'the recognition of all our duties as divine commands', and Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century English poet, that religion is 'morality touched with emotion', they were only elaborating the naïve statement 'Religion is being good'.

But not all definitions of religion are of this kind. These are attempts to say what religion ideally is, what religion, according to a particular person's standpoint, ought to be. They are normative definitions: they attempt to express the norm, or ideal, of religion. On the other hand, we can try to forget our own religious convictions and attempt simply to describe religion as it is. We recognize that there is such a thing as religion existing in the world, and we try to point out what in fact religion is, whatever may be our view as to whether or not it is true.

Both these methods of defining religion — the normative and the descriptive — are necessary, if we are to make anything like an adequate and thorough study of religions; but we should be clear at the outset that they are distinct.² The description of religion will lead us to a detached study — the scientific study — of religions. Just as the botanist studies plants in a detached — or, as we say, objective — manner, without any reference to their beauty or purpose, and just as the anthropologist studies man in a detached manner, as if he himself were quite apart from society, so can we study religion simply as a phenomenon existing among human beings. This kind of detached study, although interesting, can be unfruitful, if it does not lead us on to consider the place of religion in modern life as we live it.

The normative study of religions proceeds not from detachment but from our own ideas and ideals. Here we are concerned not only with religion as it is, but with the truth or falsehood of religions and whether we ought to put ourselves under their allegiance. This is not so much a scientific as a theological enquiry. In a small enclosed society having little or no contact with other peoples a purely theological approach to religion

may suffice; but today we know that the world is a much more varied place than ever our forefathers realized, and for the sake of intellectual honesty must consider religions other than our own fairly and sympathetically. In all kinds of respects men are learning that no one country, no one political party, no one school of thought has full possession of the truth; and the same is true of religion, if we understand by religion the quest of man for his spiritual enlightenment.

Yet having surveyed the great religions of the world, as we shall do in the ensuing chapters, we shall make a great mistake if we suppose that we can in some way lump them all together and, as it were, make a new world religion superior to any that has existed before. The likelihood is that we should never arrive at such a solution, even if we spent a whole lifetime in searching for it. Furthermore, we can in the meantime hardly live a full life without a religion of our own. We should be very foolish to throw overboard the faith and ideals of our forefathers and hope that we could arrive by ourselves at a satisfying religion. We should be rather like a man, who, in seeking for a life free of illness and pain, disregarded all doctors and ignored the many centuries of medical research in the hope that he would ultimately find the elixir of life on his own. And we must also remember that even a scholarly survey of the great religions will not automatically reveal to us the truth. At the end, just as all along, we shall be faced with the necessity of making up our own minds — of making a decision for ourselves.

Our first task, however, is to find out as much as we can in a descriptive way about the religions of the world. This is not so easy a task as might be imagined; for we shall have to weigh up a good deal of conflicting evidence, though we shall always find our enquiry full of interest.

The first difficulty we must face is the word 'religion' itself.³ The derivation of the word does not help us very much. Cicero thought that it originated from the Latin verb *relegere*, to re-read, or to ponder: whereas Lactantius, a Latin writer of the third century A.D., often called 'the Christian Cicero', held that *religio* came from *religare*, to bind back, so indicating some bond

between man and the divine. But it is doubtful whether anyone has these meanings in mind when he speaks of religion today. Perhaps we shall arrive at a better understanding of how to describe religion if we *imagine that* a visitor from another planet *has arrived in our neighbourhood*, that in some miraculous way he speaks our language, and that we find ourselves his guide during his visit to the Earth. We can picture how interested he would be in everything we had to tell him; and we can anticipate what difficulty we should have in explaining so many *things to him*.

It would not be long before we mentioned religion; and at that stage he would ask us what this thing, religion, was. We *must* admit that we should find an explanation very difficult. We should only confuse him still further by using a good deal of religious language — words like ‘God’, ‘soul’, ‘prayer’, ‘worship’ — which he would, let us suppose, not understand. Eventually we should give up the attempt to describe or define religion, and decide that the best thing would be for him to see religion for himself. We should then take him on a visit to our local church or to our nearest cathedral. He would attend a service. He would go to a school and join in the daily act of worship. He would be given a copy of the Bible to read. He might get a glimpse of someone saying his prayers. He might go to a baptism, a confirmation, a wedding or a burial. But even then it would have to be explained to him that these were the outward and obvious manifestations of religion. We should have to make it clear that behind all this was a common attitude of mind, a way of thinking about the world and our place in it, and certain rules of conduct. And, in order to give him a completer picture of religion, we should have to show him religion in other lands. We might borrow his space-ship and fly off to Arabia for a visit to a Muhammadan mosque, where he would find that, whereas he had to take his hat off before entering a Christian church, he now had to take off his shoes. Or he might visit India and see amongst many other bewildering sights a Hindu holy man sitting cross-legged, wrapt in meditation; or in Ceylon or Burma he might visit a Buddhist monas-

tery and talk with the priests in their yellow robes, and would learn that their beliefs were in many respects quite different from ours. Or he might venture among the primitive tribes of Africa and witness their strange dances, which, they think, will bring rain, or in the remote Australian bush chance across ceremonies, which seem to us brutal, whereby boys are initiated into manhood.

All this shows that religion is not only universal but tremendously varied. Nevertheless, certain common features, not so much of inner content but of outward form, can be detected; and these we must attempt to classify, if we are to build up a picture of religion. It must always be remembered, however, that such classification is not irrevocable. One of the failings of the nineteenth-century historians of the world religions, which we should avoid today, was the forcing of data to fit into a neat text-book structure of religions. We cannot, of course, avoid generalizations in any intellectual enquiry, if we are to speak clearly; but that must not blind us to the fact that there are usually plenty of exceptions to any rule. The more one learns the more this becomes evident. For example, when we first study history we read or are told that Columbus was the first European to discover America; but afterwards, when we have learnt even a little more, we find that this needs a good deal of qualification. Similarly, in our first introduction to science we may be told that the atom is the smallest indivisible particle of matter; but within a short while we hear of electrons and neutrons and of splitting the atom. In our study of religion, too, we may at first get too simplified a picture. We may have the idea, for example, that the Parsis in Bombay are fire-worshippers, whereas in fact they are no more so than Christians are cross-worshippers: in each case fire and the cross are sacred symbols, revered but not worshipped, except by a few adherents who have never fully appreciated the inner meaning of their religion. We all have to start with a simplified version of most studies, and grow into a fuller knowledge as we read and think more about them.

This is certainly true even of our own religion. It is unfortunate, however, that many people hardly grow spiritually

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This is certainly true even of our own religion. It is unfortunate, however, that many people hardly grow spiritually

beyond their childhood. There is a story of a very clever old man who was once overheard by two people as he was saying his prayers before going to bed. They were both astonished because they had the impression that no grown-up people said their prayers nowadays. But their astonishment went further, though for different reasons. One of them, who was rather sentimental, thought it beautiful that this eminent man should still say each night the prayer which he had learnt as a little child at his mother's knee. But the other was highly indignant. He thought saying one's prayers was a noble thing, but that this man should still be saying the same simple prayer he considered pathetic. It was pathetic indeed; for, however clever and wise the old man was in other respects, it was clear that he had never grown up in his religion. There is always more to learn in anything; and the more we learn the less shall we be bewitched by generalizations. The systematization of knowledge is only a help towards the truth: it is not the truth itself.

It is important at this stage that we should not assume that we can find any common inner content in all religions which will make a simple normative definition of religion possible. Indeed, there has been much muddled thinking on the subject, because it has been glibly assumed that there is such a thing as religion in the abstract, a kind of doctrinal common denominator underlying all religions. This is something we must not accept too readily. We shall, therefore, at the present be content to recognize that religions do in fact exist, and attempt to obtain a tentative general picture of religion by looking for any common features in the several religions — common features of outward form rather than of inner content. A religion, objectively considered, is (1) a way of thinking about the world, including man himself; (2) a way of behaving; (3) a way of feeling. If we wanted to use technical language, which is useful because it is really a kind of shorthand, we might say that there is an intellectual, a moral and an experiential element in religions. Or, even more technically, each religion has a creed, a code of ethics and a cult.

The first of these elements of religion covers beliefs about how

the world came into existence and where it is going, what man's place in it is, and what will happen to him after death. The second provides the rules for conduct and speech, without which there would be no order or stability in society. And the third has to do with worship and prayer, whereby man tries to come into close touch with whatever he believes to be behind the universe. Some religions stress one of these three at the expense of the others, and, consequently, some of those who have attempted to define religion in a sentence or two have fallen into the same error. A religion is much more than a view of the world — a philosophy, as we say; it is much more than a code of conduct — ethics or morals; and it is much more than going to church or saying one's prayers — a cult. It is all these things together and embraces life as a whole. One of the dangers of studying religion from a detached point of view is that we tend to imagine it is just one of many departments of human interest, like music or art or a hobby. It is true that sometimes people act as if this were so, as when one member of a family goes to church on Sunday morning, while another plays tennis or digs the garden or mends his cycle. But this is simply to equate religion with the third of the three constituents mentioned above. Even those who do not go to church have their religion, although they may deny it or be unaware of it.

It is almost impossible not to have a religion; for even a denial of the commonly accepted teachings of the great religious systems by an individual leaves him still with a way of looking at things, a way of behaving and a way of feeling. Atheism itself is a kind of religion, though a negative one. For the atheist the truth about the world is that there is no God; and he must, if he is intellectually honest, live accordingly. Even when societies, instead of individuals, adopt an atheistic philosophy, as Russia has done since the Revolution of 1917, they still cannot escape religion. Official Communism has its view of the world, its code of conduct, and its cult; and in Russia we see how forcibly this new kind of religion is propagated. Indeed, the remarkable thing is that if you suppress religion in one form it soon rises up in another.

During the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century there was a violent reaction against the Church in France, which was generally looked upon as having supported the *ancien régime*. In 1793, therefore, the revolutionaries, many of the leaders of whom had ceased to believe in Christianity, brought Christian worship in the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris and over two thousand other French churches to an end. One might have supposed that they would have demolished them or turned them to secular use or preserved them as relics of bygone days; but in fact they were re-opened as temples of Reason. Contemporary Russia has in a few cases turned churches into museums; but on the whole it has not forbidden public worship. The Soviet authorities seem at least to have appreciated the truth of Tertullian's remark in the early days of Christianity that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, and has, therefore, avoided open persecution. Yet the ironical thing is that, although every effort has been made to exclude religion from official national life, a kind of substitute religion has come in its place unawares. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* has become the Bible of Communism, the veneration accorded to Lenin's tomb in Moscow approximates to ancestor-worship or the adoration of saints elsewhere, while the State has taken the place of God.

We should not adopt an attitude of false superiority towards this almost unconscious replacement of one religion by another. Many people in our own country who contend that religion is out-of-date either adopt some kind of substitute creed, code and cult, usually a kind of humanitarianism, or, as perhaps in the majority of cases, just drift along aimlessly through life. The latter are worse off even than the French Revolutionaries who worshipped Reason or the Russian Communist who submits to the will of the State. Religion, in some form, is bound to take hold of any man who considers life seriously.

Now we have seen that almost all religions are made up of a way of thinking, behaving and feeling — in other words, of a way of living; but this thinking, behaving and feeling is of a special kind. It has a relationship to something or somebody

outside man himself, and usually outside even the world around us. We must be careful at the present stage not to say that this is God, because generally the name 'God' has a particular meaning for some people which it has not for others. Christians, Jews and Muslims think that God is Someone, whereas Hindus and Buddhists generally regard that which is greater than the universe as Something. This will become evident, and even then need qualification, when we come to survey the great living faiths of the world today. We shall try to find out something about the world-picture, the moral ideals and the religious organizations of each; and then, having described, we shall have to consider the whole field normatively, that is, we shall have to weigh up for ourselves how these religions stand in relation to one another and how far we can recognize them as genuine expressions of the truth about the world and himself, for which man is seeking.

But before we embark on this adventure, another important question needs to be answered. Beside 'What is religion?' we must ask 'How did religion begin?' or better still, 'What is the beginning of religion?'. The latter form of the question is preferable, because it is more likely to lead us to a complete answer; for we not only want to know what the origin of religion was long ago at the dawn of human history, but also what the origin of religion is in each one of us as we are. To put the matter more technically, we must attempt to discover the psychological as well as the historical origin of religion. And even then we shall not have gone far enough. There is yet another way of considering the origin of religion. Not only is there its beginning in history and its source within ourselves, but also its origin outside both history and ourselves. Where do religious ideas, and all other ideas, come from? Is there a transcendent origin of religion? Here we have entered into another kind of enquiry, a department of philosophy, known as 'metaphysics', which discusses the total meaning of things. This is not a fashionable part of philosophy nowadays, because some philosophers think that the scientific method of observing, weighing and measuring is the only way of reaching the truth that we can be sure about.

But it is doubtful whether this fashion will last for long; for human beings cannot help trying to discover some kind of meaning in the universe. Metaphysics is the link between ordinary, every-day thinking and religious thinking. Or, as the older philosophers used to say, it is natural theology. Theology is the knowledge we have of God; and it is traditionally divided into revealed, or supernatural, theology, the knowledge of God brought to man through a special divine revelation, and natural theology, the knowledge of God which we have through thinking about the natural world, the universe, around us and of which we are part.

Having in our next chapter attempted to answer the question 'What is the origin of religion?' we shall then be in a better position to study first the dead religions, those of the ancient world which no longer survive, and after that the great living religions of the present time, in order to get a fuller picture of this wonderful quest of human beings for the truth about the world and about themselves.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION

Because of the way in which most of us have been educated, we tend to think of the origin of things historically. We imagine a long string of events reaching backward from ourselves into the past and forward into the future; and, further, we often imagine that the people of the past were less enlightened than we are and that those of the future will be more enlightened. The reason for our thinking in this way is that the theory of biological evolution, which was put forward in the middle of the nineteenth century, particularly after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, has been applied to almost everything. It came to be assumed that you have only to trace the evolution of anything and you would understand it.

This great enthusiasm for the idea of evolution was understandable enough at the time. We all know how easily people are smitten with the latest words and try to work them into their everyday conversation. The current fashion of using the words 'relative' and 'relatively' derives no doubt from Einstein's theory of relativity; while the overworked epithet 'psychological' and the Freudian term 'complex' reflect the widespread, if not always well-informed, interest in psychology in our time. 'Evolution' is a similar word; and we must guard against supposing it is a kind of Open Sesame to the truth.

When the evolutionary theory became fashionable in the latter part of last century and well on into the present century, people imagined that the evolution of almost everything — of man himself and his culture, as well as of the natural world around him — was an automatic upward progress, and that the golden age would come inevitably and perhaps not be far ahead. But the trend of events in our twentieth century has shown what a glib account this was. The evolution of man and

his institutions is far from an inevitable upward trend. Progress in the sense of going on from one time to another there undoubtedly is; but sometimes it is a step downward, at others a step upward, then downward again, and so on. Human history is punctuated by great periods all the way through; and we should beware of thinking that, just because our technical knowledge today is considerable, our quality of life is better than that of many of our forefathers, even of long ago.

We are becoming a little less historically-minded than the Victorians and Edwardians. This is certainly true as far as religion is concerned, and perhaps will become even more so. Interesting and important as the historical origins of religion are, it must be remembered that there are other kinds of origins. Today people are equally interested in the origins of religion within our own beings — or, as we say, in the psychological beginnings of religion. And, even when we have tried to consider the origins of religion both far back at the dawn of history and in the innermost depths of human personality today, there is still yet another kind of origin of religion.⁴ We must also ask whether religion is something man has produced himself or whether it comes to him from a source outside himself, even outside the world of the senses; and, if we decide that there must be some such source, we shall then be talking of the metaphysical origin of religion, of which we shall have more to say later. But first we must discuss in more detail some of the historical and psychological theories of the origin of religion.

For the first eighteen hundred years of the Christian era most Europeans relied on the Bible as the main source of knowledge about the earliest kind of religion. The *Genesis* myth of the creation of man and the story suggesting that all the human races were descended from Shem, Ham and Japhet were accepted more or less literally; and it was assumed that as Adam was apparently a monotheist, men were — or ought to have been — monotheists from the beginning, and that any other forms of religion were departures from man's pristine faith. Even until the end of the last century many Bibles were printed with the chronology worked out by Archbishop Ussher (d.

1656) in the margin; and at the head of the margin of the first chapter of *Genesis* stood the date 4004 B.C.

But even in the eighteenth century a new view of history was being formed, which took definite shape in the nineteenth. Some of the philosophers of the period, particularly the German Hegel (d. 1831), pointed to a long process of development. But it was the impact of the scientific idea of evolution, notably after the time of Darwin, which most of all brought about this change. The new science of geology, for example, made men realize that the earth was not a little under six thousand years old, but had been millions of years in forming. And, likewise, the new biology of the period showed that man himself had evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. It seemed clear, therefore, that man could not have been a monotheist from the start; and this became even clearer from the study of modern primitive tribes who were still at a Stone Age level of culture. Human history, it was realized, covers a much bigger period than six thousand years. Today, largely through the exciting new science of archaeology, we know that four to six thousand years B.C. there were flourishing civilizations in the Near East; and before them were the tens and even hundreds of thousands of years of prehistory.

One of the earliest attempts to suggest what the first form of religion must have been was that made by certain French scholars, de Brosses, Bergier and Comte, in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. They suggested that man first became religious when he invented fetiches, or lucky charms, to guard himself against misfortune. But this theory does not explain very much, and was based on insufficient evidence. Even if it is true that prehistoric man's religion was mainly concerned with magical objects, we should want to know what it was that made him assign magical significance to such objects.

A much more systematic attempt to discover the historical origin of religion⁵ was made in the latter half of the nineteenth century by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (d. 1903). He argued, on the basis that earliest man must have thought the

dead whom he saw in dreams were in fact their spirits who had visited him in the night, that all the gods of primitive peoples were deified human heroes of the past. Because the gods were thought to be the ghosts of such heroes, some people called this view the Ghost Theory of religion. This was not really a new idea, but was a revival of one put forward in ancient Greece by the philosopher Euhemerus (c. 300 B.C.). Hence it is also sometimes known as Euhemerism. Euhemerus had claimed that originally the gods of the Greek pantheon were famous mortals. But here, too, there are serious objections. Spencer fitted his facts to his theory, which was not a scientific thing to do. As in the case of fetichism, we must ask what prior factor it was that moved men unconsciously to transform the memory of heroes into a belief in gods. Moreover, it is clear that the veneration of ancestors is, among most primitive peoples, by no means a substitute for the worship of deities. Indeed, it is impossible to see what human beings the gods of most *primaeval* and primitive peoples could have been, since most of them are more closely connected with natural phenomena than with men.

Of far more importance is the animistic theory of the origin of religion, still widely held today. This was first put forward by the pioneer British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor in 1866, and later elaborated in his famous book *Primitive Culture*.⁶ He claimed that man first became religious when he imagined that there were spirits at work in the natural world. Another name for this view would be 'spiritism', which is also a more appropriate name for that kind of religion nowadays misnamed 'spiritualism'. Tylor's own definition of animism is that it is 'the theory which endows the phenomena of nature with personal life'. It must be admitted that there is a deep-rooted tendency in us all to personify inanimate things. Not only poets but people in everyday life talk of a mountain or river as 'she'. Small children, in particular, tend to be animists. There is certainly a good deal of evidence that spiritism crops up constantly throughout the history of religion from the earliest known times. But even so there is one very serious objection to believing that animism was the original form of religion. It is that

it demands too advanced an intellectual development. To attribute personality to natural objects, to picture spirits dwelling in the sun and stars, trees, rivers and hills, requires a certain power of imagination which the skull formation of prehistoric man suggests his brain could not have been capable of. Thus, there may well have been a pre-animistic stage at the dawn of religion.

Another interesting theory of the origin of religion was that suggested to the Old Testament scholar W. Robertson Smith (d. 1894)⁷ as a result of his study of the early religion of the Semites, the racial group of which the ancient Babylonians, the Hebrews and the ancient Egyptians formed part. Sir James Frazer, the famous author of *The Golden Bough*, was also impressed at one stage with this view, though he modified it later. This was the theory of totemism, the contention that the first form of religion was a kind of mystical compact between a tribe and its totem, *i.e.*, a sacred object, often an animal. Robertson Smith pointed out how the names of the Hebrew tribes were also the names of animals, *e.g.*, 'Simeon' means 'hyaena', 'Caleb', 'dog', and so on. Egyptologists, too, have long been aware that very many of the hundreds of ancient Egyptian deities were depicted as animals. So sacred was the totem that it was tabu, *i.e.*, it could not be killed except ceremonially, when it was usually eaten by the tribe in order to assimilate its sacred qualities. Totemism, however, though a widespread feature of human society, is not now generally regarded as the original form of religion. There are far too many non-totemistic peoples; and, in any case, on closer scrutiny, it would seem that it is not necessarily a religious phenomenon, but rather a kind of non-rational social movement to consolidate the tribe.

At the very end of the nineteenth century quite a different view of the beginning of religion was put forward by the Scottish writer Andrew Lang.⁸ He had grown tired of so much speculation about animism and totemism that he put forward the hypothesis that man had always been a monotheist, though not in the advanced sense. It is not surprising that, at that stage when evolution was so much in the air, few people took any notice of

Lang. But later on a celebrated Roman Catholic professor at Vienna, Father Wilhelm Schmidt (d. 1954), published a massive work championing the theory that religion began with a primitive monotheism, a belief in one supreme Being. Needless to say, most anthropologists have not accepted Schmidt's thesis, but there is more sympathy for it now than there was a generation ago. Yet the same defect is evident here as in the view that animism was the original form of religion, *viz.*, that it ascribes too highly developed a mentality to the earliest human beings. One is also suspicious of the theory of primitive monotheism because almost all the alleged evidence is produced from modern savages, the Australian aborigines and the African pygmies, who, while revering a High God, also worship other deities and spirits. There is, in fact, no known instance in antiquity or today of pure primitive monotheism. Had the propounders of this theory been content to argue that from the beginning there always appears to have been a feeling after one all-embracing reality they might have gained more agreement.

It is for this reason that the less intellectualized pre-animistic theory put forward by R. R. Marett (d. 1943), the Oxford anthropologist of a generation ago, has seemed to many to be nearer the truth. In 1891 Dr R. H. Codrington, a Church of England missionary in the Norfolk Islands, had drawn the attention of scholars to the word *mana*, used by the Melane- sians, the black inhabitants of the south-western islands of the Pacific Ocean, east of New Guinea.⁹ He defines *mana* as 'a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which it is the greatest advantage to possess or control'. It is impersonal, and may arise not only from awe-inspiring, natural phenomena, but even from such a thing as a weirdly-shaped root. It is something felt rather than something thought out. Soon scholars found there were similar words in other religions, such as *orenda*, used by the American Indian tribe, the Iraquois; while the Japanese term *kami*, like the Latin *numen*, although it came to mean a god, in origin signified simply what was supernatural and uncanny. The German theologian Rudolf Otto maintained that the

sensus numinis, or feeling of the holy, was the basic ingredient of all religion, advanced as well as primitive.¹⁰

Marett's particular contribution to the search for the historical origin of religion is to be found in his book *The Threshold of Religion*, where the title of one of the chapters, 'The Birth of Humility', aptly summarizes his thesis.¹¹ Religion dawned when primæval man first felt humble before the mysterious impersonal power or powers present in the world around him. This theory has the advantage of recognizing that the earliest human beings must have been creatures of instinct rather than thought; but even Marett himself had to admit that while the *mana* stage of religion, or, as it is sometimes called, pre-animism or animatism, is logically earlier than animism, there is in fact scanty chronological evidence. The difficulty is that whether we detect pre-animism as deep-rooted in the earliest known religion or in that of the most primitive savages of today, it never exists alone, but is always mixed up with belief in spirits or gods and other features of religion; and in consequence it is impossible to say for certain whether it really was the original element in religion. The fact of the matter is that it is impossible to know what the mind and behaviour of the earliest human beings were like. We can only make reasonable guesses, and leave it at that.

In searching for the historical origin of religion we try to go back in time; whereas in trying to discover the psychological origin of religion we look into human beings themselves as they are. Here, of course, there is a complication: are all human beings the same? And, even if they are much the same today, do they differ from those of bygone ages? Or again, does the mentality of a civilized twentieth-century European or American differ fundamentally from that of a twentieth-century African bushman or some other living savage? Apart from noting the questions, we have no space to devote to them here, although we shall note shortly that a school of French scholars at the beginning of this century argued strongly that the mind of primitive man works quite differently from that of his civilized brother.

As soon as one mentions the psychological origin of religion the question is raised whether man is naturally religious. In day to day speech we sometimes use the term 'religious instinct'; but most psychologists would contend that there is strictly speaking no such thing. An instinct is an unlearned activity, such as, the urge to satisfy hunger, mother love, self-preservation, the tendency to seek company, and so on. Clearly religion hardly falls into this category. But instincts are of two main kinds, preservative and destructive, those of love and hate; and it is when these are organized so that the love instincts are directed towards, say, God, and the hate instincts against whatever the believer holds to be godless, that religion occurs. If, then, a particular way of directing our instincts is called a sentiment, then religion is a sentiment rather than an instinct. Nevertheless, it is likely that people will still go on speaking of religion as an instinct; and there is no reason why they should not. It is, after all, the majority of everyday speakers, rather than a small group of specialists, who determine how words should be used.

The psychological study of religion is, of course, younger than the historical. Psychology, as an independent experimental science, is nearly a hundred years old; and only recently in this century has it become widely popular. It must be remembered that, just because it is so much in vogue at the present time, many people are easily bewitched by it. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the widespread and often uninformed use of the term 'complex', as in 'inferiority complex', is a clear instance. One can easily think of others, *e.g.*, 'psychological moment', 'maladjustment' and the like, which are often nothing more than conversational claptrap. Psychology, properly studied, does help us to understand a great deal about ourselves; but it does not explain all about us, let alone about the universe as a whole. It is always a danger to be guarded against to suppose that any one branch of human knowledge says all that can be said about anything; and this danger is specially great when a new science makes its début.

Over the past half-a-century and a little more many attempts

have been made to explain psychologically how religion begins. Some of these have been made by people who are not professional psychologists. Thus, the French scholar, Salomon Reinach (d. 1932) claimed, 'religion is a sum of scruples which impede the free use of our faculties';¹² and in so saying he was echoing the view of many nineteenth and twentieth-century so-called free-thinkers. He and others like him were alleging that religion is a groundless form of fear. They were not really very original in this respect, though no doubt their view was intended to shock their contemporaries, many of whom had, no doubt, become absurdly conventional in their ways of thinking. The theory that religion begins with fear is a very old one: perhaps its most famous statement was that of the Latin poet Statius (d. A.D. 96), who said *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*.¹³

The trouble with this view of religion is that, while it is on the surface somewhat arresting, it leaves fear undefined. Is the fear considered to be the basis of religion like that of a rabbit confronted by a hungry boa constrictor? If so, we should expect such physical fear to have a paralysing effect on human beings. Religion, however, while imposing certain sanctions, usually in the form of moral rules, does not in fact have any such effect. On the contrary, it is religion which has given men confidence to go forward. Long ago the Hebrew poet sang, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear?' Again, when we look into the fear alleged to characterize so many primitive religions, we find that such fear as that of witch-doctors among the African Bantu or of caste among the Hindus is social rather than religious. And the fear of hell which was at one time so widespread in Christendom was not so much something basic to Christianity as an exaggerated disciplinary device invented by the Church. In any case, the anti-religious polemicist is here hoisted by his own petard; for the atheist belief in extinction after death may well breed a far worse fear than that bred by any religious doctrine of hell. The fear basic to religion is, however, not a crude physical reaction of terror. It is rather a sense of awe. As we saw earlier, Marett's *mana* theory and Otto's *sensus numinis* have given a clearer picture of

this kind of fear, which is plainly spoken of in the great classics of religious devotion, such as the Bible and the Prayer Book.

A different approach to the problem of the psychological origin of religion was that of a group of French scholars, often known as the French Sociologists, of the first quarter of the present century. First among these was Emile Durkheim (d. 1917),¹⁴ then his two pupils Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, and latterly Lévy-Bruhl (d. 1939). They were primarily interested in modern primitive tribes, and contended that the mentality of the savage is quite different from that of civilized man. The savage rarely thinks individually but does so tribally. Hence the thesis of a group mind, a mystical collective consciousness, which expresses itself in the totemism of the tribe. The phrase 'pre-logical mentality', which was applied to this group mind, even argues that the way in which the savage thinks is entirely different from the way in which we think: it is a kind of emotional tribal expression rather than rational thinking.

Now there is no doubt that even in our own society human beings are capable of being influenced by what is popularly called 'mass psychology'. That tense crowds of people can believe and do things which as individuals engaging in cool reflexion they would not countenance is frequently instanced in our newspapers. But this is not to say that religion begins with a group mind. It is inconceivable that, though primitives may think and act more readily as a tribe than civilized people, they never think and act as individuals. There is, indeed, evidence to the contrary, as among the Crow Indians of North America. It is common among them for each young man on arriving at adolescence to leave his tribe and go out into the desert alone, where after fasting and meditation he comes to know his own personal guardian spirit. This is a striking reminder of the practice of most of the great advanced religions, where such a spiritual adventure is normally only undertaken by a few.

Whatever may be the rôle of the group mind among some modern primitives or whatever may have been its rôle among the peoples of antiquity or of our prehistoric ancestors, and

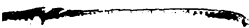
although corporate religious activities, such as worship and hearing sermons, are potent factors in religion, there is little doubt that in our own experience religion is an intensely personal matter. Whitehead's dictum, 'Religion is what a man does with his solitariness,' goes too far in the opposite direction, but it does remind us that, even if we owe our initial religious, like our other, ideas and experiences to the society in which we were born and brought up, there is a region of personal thought and experience which is ours alone as individuals. Moreover, this fact is clear, no matter what level of culture we are discussing, from the fact that the group mind must have been inspired at some stage, albeit unconsciously, by one or more creative religious geniuses.

The most important psychological theories of the origin of religion put forward in recent years, however, are those which have pointed out that religion begins, at any stage of human history, with imagination. There are many versions of this general thesis. For the sake of clarity and brevity, we shall mention only two here. One is the Oedipus Complex theory put forward by the famous founder of psycho-analysis, the Austrian physician Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the other which we shall designate the Projection theory of religion has numerous exponents, scientific and otherwise.

Freud, unlike his younger contemporary, Jung, was unsympathetic towards religion. The title of one of his shorter, less technical books makes this evident, *The Future of an Illusion*.¹⁵ In times past, Freud argues, man needed an illusion, that of a Heavenly Father, to protect him, but now that, through science, he understands himself and the world more rationally, he no longer needs this illusion to give him courage to meet the unfriendly universe. By using all his scientific and technical knowledge man can combat it, and when he dies there is, of course, no survival. Freud, however, adds considerably to this relatively simple point of view. In some of his other writings he recognizes that religion is much more than belief in a Heavenly Father, and that it covers certain rules of conduct and certain rites and ceremonies. Recalling the story in Greek mythology

in which King Oedipus unknowingly married his mother, thus committing incest, and was afterwards so stricken with remorse that he blinded himself, Freud suggests that religion is a morbid collective mental and emotional state persisting ever since a primaeval dislocation of society. He contends that at some stage — whether in prehistory or in the history of modern primitives is never quite clear — the sons of the tribe grew resentful of their father, banded together, killed him, and appropriated the females which had been hitherto regarded as belonging to the father. But they were overcome by regrets, particularly after having eaten the father in order to acquire his powerful qualities. Their repentance was expressed by forbidding the killing of the tribal totem, which had in some way become identified with the father, and by denying themselves endogamous marriage for the future. This is meant to explain in part how the horror of incest in human society began. Subsequently young men did not dare to repeat the original crime; but Freud believed that the original desire to kill the father and possess the mother persists in what has come to be called the Oedipus Complex. And he further maintained that the continuance of totemic sacrifices was a kind of sublimation of this desire, the father having become a deity and the cannibalistic meal a religious feast.

Now it must be remembered that however creative a thinker Freud was in respect of pathological states of human personality, he was not an expert on anthropology or prehistory; and one is bound to realize at once that he tended to strain the facts to fit his novel theory. There is no evidence at all for any such dislocation of primaeval or modern savage society. It is strange indeed that, although he knew that so many primitive societies are in fact matrilineal, he persisted in writing as if they were universally patrilineal. Freud's theory is only a myth of his own invention; and we suggest that as such it is far less illuminating about human nature than the age-old myth of the Fall in the *Book of Genesis*, which has a poetic insight which Freud never reaches. When, too, we find Freud trying to interpret the Christian sacrament of the Holy Communion as a



totemic meal arising from the Oedipus Complex our confidence is even more shaken; for it is evident that, however shrewd he may have been in his study of certain aspects of human behaviour, he had a very imperfect understanding of religious symbolism and its use in worship.

Furthermore, although he did great service to mankind in his highly original psychological researches, like so many other pioneers he was not a little obsessed by his own theory that sexual drives are fundamental. We are now able to see that while sex is a much more important factor in human life than was once realized, and one that ought not to be treated sheepishly, it is itself only an expression of even more basic, if less physical, desires on the part of human beings. It is not our purpose to pursue this matter here; but it must be pointed out that, although a good deal of sexual symbolism occurs in religion as in other human activities, sex *qua* sex in savage society is not primarily used to satisfy suppressed erotic desires.¹⁶

Far more common than Freud's particular psychological theory of the origin of religion is the view that God is simply a projection by man's imagination of the idea of human fatherhood into a cosmic fatherhood. Many writers, some professional psychologists but most of them not, have put forward some such thesis in a number of different ways. Bertrand Russell's contention that religion is 'the result of seeking comfort in a world which, dispassionately considered, is a terrifying wilderness' sums up this standpoint. In brief the projectionist theory of religion argues that just as a child looks to his father for protection and sustenance so the unenlightened adult persists in his infantile trust and imagines that there is a Heavenly Father who will protect him and give him his daily bread. The fact of the matter is that there is no such Being: God is only the figment of our wishful thinking. Such self-deception may have even served a useful purpose in making life tolerable in the unfriendly universe which our forefathers had to contend with; but, so it is held, by now modern educated man should rely on his scientific knowledge, which alone can bend the forces of nature to human advantage. There is no need to pray any

more: society must master the world through science and technology.¹⁷ And usually one hears at some stage of such a discussion of religion the well-worn words, 'Religion is the opium of the people.'

Now the first thing to note here is that, even if religion is the projection of the idea of a father on a grand scale into the universe around us, this in no way invalidates religion as a reasonable activity. Many other ways of thinking are equally projections of the human imagination. Science itself is an imposition of mental pictures upon the objective world. Thus, when we speak of scientific laws we are only projecting the idea of law in human society into the universe at large; but this in no way means that the idea is untrue. Reason and experience suggest that the world works in a way analogous to human ideas of law and order. And similarly reason and experience suggest that certain analogies from human life give us a clearer picture of God than we should have without them.

Indeed, theologians have always been much more aware of the limitations of human language than many other kinds of scholars. Hence the importance attached to analogical thinking in theology. Another clear instance of the theologians' realization of the inadequacy of language is seen in what the schoolmen used to call the *via negativa*, the method of talking about God in negative rather than positive terms. We can only say with logical accuracy what God is not; for as soon as we speak of him in positive terms we bring in all kinds of limitations. Yet paradoxically we must use this positive language if we are to make any useful statement about religion. Just as the chemist or physicist constructs models, pictures and tables to represent the physical nature of the universe, so in religion we use rich symbolic language, art, architecture and music to convey pictures of the spiritual nature of the universe.

Again, let us suppose that human beings' idea of God as Heavenly Father is simply a projection of their imagination, all that this tells us is something about the manner in which we think. We then need to go further and ask whether this is a valid way of thinking; and here psychology cannot help us.

Psychology can attempt to explain how we think, but it cannot tell us whether what we think is true. It may well be that our picture of God is drawn from human imagery. Not only do we invoke the notion of a father who protects, or the judge who maintains law and order, or the architect who plans, or the artificer who makes, but also a host of other imagery. The really important question we need to ask is not so much the obvious one whether this projection is derived from human experience, but whether this projection 'hits anything'. In other words, we need to know whether our own ideas and the language used to convey those ideas correspond with reality, the nature of things as they in fact are. This the sciences as such can neither aver nor deny. Philosophy itself has alternated between 'yes' and 'no', according to the school in vogue at the moment. Theology claims that there is such a reality, and is the systematic study of it.

It is clear, then, that while history, psychology and kindred sciences may be able to attempt to explain the mechanics of religious origins, they are unable to tell us much about the origin in any ultimate sense. We must further remember that science is itself constantly changing. The fast-held theories of one age become out-of-date and yield place to others. Does this mean that we must be sceptics as far as religion is concerned?

Far from it. There are certain things on which there is almost universal agreement. However much individual religions differ, they all have a common substrate, namely, that their followers through a set of beliefs, a code of conduct and a specific kind of behaviour variously known as devotion, prayer or worship, seek something that is abiding. The great monotheistic religions Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam, go further, and claim that God exists, that we exist, that the world is a real world, that we have wills, and that there is a life after death, and that our experience and our reason give us valid clues to the meaning of the universe. This is often summed up by saying that the sciences tell us how the world is made, while philosophy and theology tell us why. There is too much overlapping of these artificial departments of knowledge

for this to be entirely accurate, but as a rough statement it is satisfactory enough.

History, assisted by archaeology and the anatomical study of primæval man, can give us some idea of how religion probably began far back in time. Likewise, psychology and anthropology can help us to understand in some measure how religion begins in people today as in the past. But the most important kind of origin of religion is the metaphysical. This is the transcendent source, which is God himself. Knowledge of God is not obtained primarily as a result of inductive reasoning, *i.e.*, by a scientific gathering of data and then a drawing of conclusions from it; but is a given fact. No-one comes to believe in God because they have weighed up certain evidence which convinces them of his existence. People believe first. They may then corroborate their belief afterwards by submitting it to reasonable tests, if it needs such corroboration; and this process is known as natural theology.

Belief in God is not the only given belief. In practice we believe without question that it is better to do good than evil, that the universe makes sense and not nonsense, that the world around us exists and is not a figment of our imagination. We can, if we wish, justify these beliefs rationally, but we do so only after accepting them in the first place. And so it is with our belief in God.¹⁸ Theology is, in the words of St Anselm, *fides quaerens intellectum*, belief seeking rational reassurance. Intellect alone will not get us very far, since it is only one organ of knowledge and must usually be content with only the obvious things, those that are evident to the five senses and can be neatly pigeon-holed into a system. Human beings, however, if they are to live a full life, need to know much more; and that is why the arts, music, poetry, the humanities and religion are so important. Unfortunately, at the present time we are so impressed by the material achievements made possible through science and technology that we have tended to overlook these far more exciting and fruitful areas of human thought and experience.

In this chapter our main purpose has been to review some of

the theories of the origin of religion. The probability is that in future historical theories about the beginnings of religion will count for less, since we really can never expect to have sufficient data to enable us to speak with any certainty about the earliest human beings. At present, because psychology is still a young science, there is a great deal of interest in the springs of religion in human personality; but this has its limitations, since psychology can say nothing when we begin to ask about the truth of religion, unless, of course, psychology tries to play the philosopher: in which case she is doing more than she is entitled to do. Already there is much renewed interest in religious language and symbolism; and this suggests that, although it has been out of fashion, there will be a revival of interest in metaphysics or natural theology in the future. At least, one must hope for this: otherwise we shall be left simply with descriptions of religion and no indication of whether we ought to take it seriously or not as something of vital importance to ourselves. Our study of the religions of mankind must, therefore, include not only a description of them but also some indication of how far they assist us to find the truth.

CHAPTER III

THE RELIGIOUS QUEST OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE PROBLEM OF THE PAST

Our object in this chapter is to survey the greater civilizations of the ancient world; and in so doing we must bear in mind that we can easily be the victims of a textbook mentality. It must be remembered that every book which attempts to give in brief an account of anything is bound to be a caricature, a distorted rough sketch. One of the baffling problems which every scholar has to face up to is that the more he learns about a subject the less surely can he speak about it in general terms. Yet, if ever we are to learn anything, we must start with an outline, even if we have to modify that outline considerably as we go on.

We must first recognize that there are certain dangers inherent in the study of the dead religions of antiquity. First, it is wise to recall that, in a sense, none of them is dead. Parts of them live on in the religions of today. For example, the winter festival of the pre-Christian peoples of Europe survives in Christmas. Christian leaders in Western Europe early recognized how deep-rooted was the pagan feast on 25 December: so they transferred the feast of the nativity of Christ from 6 January¹ to that day in the hope of Christianizing it. Another instance is the borrowing of pre-Christian Greek philosophical language by the theologians of the early Church. Yet another consists of some animal cults found today in the primitive Hinduism of South India. Although there is no absolute certainty, it would seem likely that they are survivals of rites which existed long ago in the religion of the whole of the Near East of the third and fourth millennia B.C. This latter example shows



how some crude rites which were once general have disappeared save in one relatively small area: whereas the intellectual refinements of Greek thought were carried over into the Christian world and used by the Fathers of the Church to formulate religious doctrines.

Another danger to be guarded against in speaking of the ancient world is the artificial separation of its religion from the rest of its life. Terms like 'the religion of Egypt', 'the religion of Babylonia', 'the religion of Israel', are misleading, since they suggest that for the ancients, as for us, religion was but one of many human activities. This was far from the case. The probability is that, were it possible to ask an ancient Egyptian or an ancient Israelite about his religion as such, he would not understand you. The distinction between the sacred and the secular is an unfortunate post-Renaissance feature of our Western society. For the ancient all life was religious: indeed the life of his nation was his religion. To speak of the religion of this or that nation is simply a convenient device for limiting our field of enquiry; but we must always remember that it is an academic fiction.

Another caveat in studying the religions of antiquity is that their horizons are much more extensive than was once imagined. Archaeology has so extensively supplemented what we know of them from surviving literature that it has shown the ancient East to have consisted not of isolated peoples each with its own distinctive religion but of a highly complex culture pattern spreading over almost the entire Near East, at least from India to the Mediterranean. Once it was assumed that Greek religion consisted of the worship of the Greek pantheon much as we read about it in Homer and other classical authors; but excavations in Crete and on the mainland of Greece, as well as further afield, have brought to light evidence of a much earlier religion that survived well into classical times. The same is true of India. A few generations ago it was assumed that there was no civilization and no religion worth talking about in India prior to that of the Indo-European invaders of the second millennium B.C. who gave India its first religious literature, the

hymns known as the *Veda*. Latterly, however, excavations in the Indus valley have revealed an extensive pre-Vedic culture, the religion of which may well have resembled that of pre-Hellenic Greece. So here, too, it is important to remember that, while a geographical grouping of religions may be convenient, a religion was rarely limited to one area but had connexions with the religions of other areas.

Lastly, there is always the difficulty of trying to enter into the minds of bygone ages. This is one of the baffling things of all historical study; and, since we cannot directly communicate with people from the ancient world but have what is, after all, partial evidence to go by, we should face up to the fact that any picture we construct of the religion of the ancient world is only an approximation. We cannot help interpreting the ancient religions by means of our ways of thinking; but we may be sure that the ancients did not think quite as we do.² This means that today we should be less cocksure that we completely understand the mind of the ancient world than were some of the nineteenth-century writers on the subject. We are still a little bedevilled by the assumption that we are so much superior to our ancestors, simply because we are at the latest point on the long line of evolution. We shall, therefore, before surveying the chief religions of the ancient world say something about the development of religion in antiquity and, since it is often suggested that religion is fundamentally a matter of superstition, something about religion and magic.

Nineteenth-century writers on the history of religion tended to assume that just as other phenomena had evolved from elementary beginnings and, after thousands, if not millions, of years, had progressed to an advanced stage, so religion had begun with a belief in spirits and then developed stage by stage to a belief in one God. It was thought that almost everywhere polytheism, belief in a number of gods, had grown out of animism, as in Greece and Rome. Then this polytheism had risen to monolatry, that is, the belief in one deity for a particular tribe without the denial of the existence of other gods for other tribes; and here Israel was the usual example. And out of

monolatry emerged the full flower of monotheism: the idea of one holy God in the great writing prophets of the Old Testament was the final advance on the idea of Jehovah, or Yahweh, the tribal god of Israel, as he appears in the earlier historical books.

Now this is far too simple a pattern to suit the facts. It is true that some kind of development on these lines can be detected in ancient Israel, if we care to find it. There do seem to be traces of animism and totemism in the earlier books of the Old Testament; but we must not forget that it is possible to find them in later books too. Again, we must remember that the great writing prophets of the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries B.C., such as Amos, Hosea, the writers of *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, were religious geniuses whose doctrines were proclaimed in a larger, more complicated world than that of the days of the Judges and the early Hebrew Kingdom. They had a fuller opportunity to teach monotheism; but that is not to say that the earlier patriarchs were not monotheistic at heart.

While there is no need for us to agree with such writers as Andrew Lang and Father Schmidt in their contention that man has always been a monotheist, there certainly is a great deal of evidence to suggest that an embryonic monotheism is always present at every stage of human history. Animism, polytheism, monolatry and monotheism are not so much successive stages in the evolution of religion, as phenomena which crop up at different levels of enlightenment in any one period. The long line of human evolution is not a constant upward advance but an undulating curve. There is perhaps an upward advance at certain points; but the advance is never inevitable. It is wise to maintain a certain agnostic reserve about the idea of human progress. The whole subject is far too complex to admit of facile generalization.

A particularly important instance of this temptation to suppose that later stages of religion, like later stages of culture, must be nobler than earlier stages is seen in the theory of magic and religion put forward by some nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers. One of the most notable of these was

Sir J. G. Frazer, who, like the earlier pioneer British anthropologist Sir E. B. Tylor, was very much influenced by the extreme evolutionist sociology and anthropology that followed the popularization of Darwinianism. Frazer agreed with the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel that an age of magic preceded an age of religion. Magic, he says, is an attempt to control nature 'by the sheer force of spells and enchantments', whereas religion is the attempt to appease 'a coy, capricious or irascible deity by the soft insinuation of prayer and sacrifice'. Subsequently the two intermingled; but in the beginning magic came first. Magic he described as 'primitive science', which later gave place to a religious explanation of the universe; and the implication is, as Hegel would have contended, that after religion comes philosophy — Hegel's philosophy, of course. When it was found after thousands of years that magic did not really work, man invented religion. Later, also after thousands of years, they found religion did not work. We have now arrived at a sufficiently enlightened stage to realize that only an evolutionist philosophy will satisfy. Such, in brief, was the view of the typical nineteenth-century Western intellectual.

Far better is the view of Marett, who maintained that there is no question of magic being earlier than religion, or *vice versa*. Magic and religion are two different responses by man to the universe around him. Man may sink to magic or rise to religion at any period of history. He can do so today quite as much as he did in the distant past. Magic shows an arrogant attitude towards nature, whereas religion shows a humble attitude.³ Today, in this and in other respects, anthropologists are less keen to dogmatize on the historical evolution of religion: probably they will never be able to do so with certainty. Rather are they concerned with the structure of society at given periods. Our own twentieth-century world is complex enough. It ranges from primitives at a Stone Age level of culture to highly industrialized cultures; and even within these there are tremendous intellectual and spiritual varieties. If, then, it is so difficult to fit the religions of the present-day world into neat

academic pigeon-holes, we may be sure the same difficulty confronts us in the study of the dead religions of antiquity. The best we can do is to make a rough sketch, which we should be prepared to modify as we go along.

The civilizations we shall now consider are Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Greece and Rome before 300 B.C., and the Hellenistic World. All have vanished, but, in varying degrees, all have left a legacy to their successors.

EGYPT

Egyptian History

Of all the great ancient civilizations that of Egypt is perhaps the most fascinating. It had a continuous existence of over three thousand years, and was relatively untouched by the devastating racial movements of Asia. The term 'ecology' is used by scientists for the study of the influence of environment on things in nature, such as plants and animals. There is certainly an ecology of religions; for environment considerably influences the stability or otherwise of civilizations. Egypt, the land of the Nile, surrounded by desert, was seriously vulnerable only on its narrow Sinaitic frontier.

The Egyptians in race and language were proto-Semitic. Their history, extending over thirty-three dynasties, is conventionally divided into two main periods. The first, consisting of Dynasties I–XVII, lasted from *c.* 3300 to 1550 B.C.⁴ The country was not unified at this time, but was split up into a number of city states, often called 'nomes', such as Memphis, near the modern Cairo, in Lower Egypt, and Thebes, near the modern Luxor, in Upper Egypt. The several dynasties represent the irregular rise and fall in power of these various nomes. During this long, relatively uneventful period the great temple-tombs of Dynasty IX, the Pyramids, were built. From Dynasty VI we have the first version of the funerary texts which have come to be known as *The Book of the Dead*. And towards the end, during Dynasties XV and XVI a Canaanitish tribe, the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, seized power. They have been identified with the Israelites, and their expulsion *c.* 1550 B.C.

with the Exodus. As we shall note later, this theory, though conveniently fitting in here, conflicts with the traditional dating of the Hebrew Exodus from Egypt over three hundred years later in the time of Merenptah (Dynasty XIX).

The outstanding dynasty was the eighteenth, the first of the New Kingdom: it lasted from *c.* 1550 to 1320 B.C., and was not only the great age of Egyptian imperialism but the most adventurous era in religion. Its three greatest kings were Tuthmosis III (*c.* 1501-1447 B.C.), Amenhetep III (*c.* 1412-1376 B.C.) and Amenhetep IV (*c.* 1376-1362 B.C.). By means of successful campaigns Tuthmosis III⁵ extended Egyptian power into Asia as far as the Euphrates valley. Amenhetep III continued to enjoy the fruits of his predecessor's empire, though we can detect unrest by reading between the lines of the famous Tell-el-Amarna letters, so called from the place where they were discovered in 1887. They were reports in Babylonian cuneiform sent by the governors of the vassal states in Western Asia. But Amenhetep III was more interested in religion than his empire. Possibly because he had married an Indo-European wife and so come into contact with Indo-European religious ideas, he moved away from polytheism towards the worship of Amon, one of the chief deities of the Egyptian pantheon, as if he were the only god. His successor, Amenhetep IV went even further, and tried to make the worship of the Aten, the Sun-Disc, the only religion of Egypt; but he failed miserably. It is interesting to note that his next successor but one was Tutankhamen, the discovery of whose intact tomb in 1922 was one of the most thrilling of all Egyptian archaeological finds.

During the nineteenth dynasty, which held power throughout the thirteenth century B.C., Rameses II, the last of the great Egyptian empire-builders, built and endowed many temples,⁶ and was succeeded by Merenptah, who was once thought to be the pharaoh of the Exodus. There are, however, serious objections to retaining this view, notably that Palestine was under his yoke and that he was not drowned in the Red Sea.

Later, during Dynasty XXVI, Egypt, after several centuries of stagnation, revived, and was again engaged in wars against

Mesopotamia, in particular Neo-Babylonia. Israel was the convenient battle ground between these two great powers. Josiah king of Judah was killed by an Egyptian arrow at the battle of Megiddo in 608 B.C.⁷ But in fact neither Egypt, Babylon nor Assyria were destined to be the dominant power of the future. The new empire of Persia swept over the Near East, and invaded Egypt: Darius I and Xerxes were among the pharaohs of the Persian twenty-seventh dynasty.

The next eventful epoch was that of Macedonian Dynasty XXXII, inaugurated by Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt in 332 B.C. After his death his empire was divided into three parts, one of which was the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt; and Egypt remained in the hands of the sixteen successive Ptolemies of the Greek dynasty. The third century B.C. was an era of hellenization in Egypt as elsewhere in the Levant. Ptolemy I was the founder of the great library at Alexandria, where his successor Ptolemy II also built the famous pharos; and it was during their reigns that the hellenistic Jewish settlement, which was later to produce the philosopher Philo, was established at Alexandria.

From the reign of Ptolemy V came the Rosetta Stone, discovered during Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in 1799 and now in the British Museum. Commemorating the first anniversary of the Pharaoh's coronation in 196 B.C., its trilingual inscription helped nineteenth-century Egyptologists to transliterate and translate Egyptian hieroglyphics. The last of the dynasty was Ptolemy XVI, the son of Cleopatra by Julius Caesar. In 30 B.C. Antony, her second paramour, who had alienated Rome, was defeated by Octavianus, later to become the Emperor Augustus: so Egypt became a Roman province, and the Roman emperors took Egyptian titles. Greek superseded Egyptian as the official language, the remnant of which survived in Coptic, which is a hellenized form of late Egyptian written in the Greek alphabet aided by seven additional letters derived from Demotic, a script developed from the earlier hieroglyphic and hieratic. Later, Coptic became the language of Egyptian Christianity.

The Egyptian Pantheon

Apart from some of its hymns, ancient Egyptian religious literature never rises to sublime heights. There are books of moral precepts reminiscent of the Hebrew *Proverbs*; but the collections of funerary inscriptions known as *The Book of the Dead* show no profound religious genius. The Egyptians were not a mystical or speculative people. They thought in concrete images, and their genius was practical, as is shown by their art, their buildings and their almost scientific study of the Nile floods upon which their economy depended. This mentality is reflected in their religion.

Perhaps no people has had so many gods, unless it is the Japanese. Over two thousand deities have been identified, nearly five hundred of whom are mentioned in the Theban recension of *The Book of the Dead*. Many of these deities are pictured as animals or as animal-headed human beings, *e.g.*, Re, the falcon-headed sun-god of the city of On, later identified with Amon and Horus; Set, the pig-headed evil one, the opponent of Osiris; Anubis, the jackal-god; Hathor, the cow-goddess of the sky, whose back was fantastically imagined to be the daily path of the Sun-god; and Bubastis, the cat-headed goddess. These many theriomorphic deities have led many to suppose that the Egyptian pantheon was totemistic in origin; but this is at the best a guess, and the real origins of Egyptian religion must remain hidden. It must, however, be remembered that many of the gods had no animal form, but were thought of anthropomorphically. Such was Amon, though even he is sometimes associated with a ram. Osiris, Isis and Horus, the father, mother and son who formed the later Egyptian trinity, were regarded as human headed.

At first each nome, or city, had its tutelary deity; but as one part of Egypt gained ascendancy over another many gods were identified as local manifestations of one great deity. Thus Amon and Re were identified, and in due course associated with Osiris and Horus. One thing we must not expect to find is consistency in Egyptian mythology; but underlying it all there



does appear to be a feeling after one supreme god. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to Egyptian religion. Nearly a hundred years ago the orientalist Max Müller noticed a similar sub-conscious identification in Vedic religion; and he invented for it the term *kathenotheism*, or more briefly *henotheism*, meaning the worship of one god at a time, each god being a manifestation of the supreme god behind the gods.⁸ Had the Egyptians possessed a keener spiritual insight they might have progressed from this henotheism to something approaching monotheism; but their crude imagination prevented this from happening.

There were, however, two features of ancient Egyptian religion which were exceptional. One was the short-lived theological revolution of Amenhetep IV during the eighteenth dynasty; and the other was the cult of Osiris and Isis, which was particularly influential in the later phases of Egyptian history. Amenhetep III was a devotee of Amon-Re, who was already becoming *primus inter pares* in the Egyptian pantheon; but his successor Amenhetep IV attempted to banish even the worship of Amon as chief of the many gods, and to replace it by a new religion different from any hitherto known in Egypt or to be known thereafter. The other feature of Egyptian religion which transcended in quality the crudities of theriomorphism was the prominence of Osiris, later to be identified with Isis and Horus. We shall briefly refer to each of these.

Akhenaten's Experiment

As we have seen, the henotheistic trend in Egyptian religion had already suggested a latent monotheism. But Amenhetep IV attempted to sweep away even the cult of Amon and establish the religion of Aten, the god symbolized by the sun-disc, as the sole religion of Egypt. It is possible that he had been influenced in his religious ideas by his Asiatic mother. We must, however, not overlook his own genius. Disgusted by the powerful priestly hierarchy of Thebes, he moved his capital to a new city on the other side of the Nile, which he named Akhet-Aten (Horizon of the Sun-Disc). Here he set up a temple to Aten, abolished sacrifices, forbade images, took the new name of Akhenaten

(Blessed of the Sun-Disc), and had the people taught that Aten was the one true God, the Creator. Akhenaten would tolerate no other religion, and in consequence alienated both nobles and priests.⁹

That he was a strange personality seems clear from surviving portraits of him. The *Hymn to the Aten*, attributed to Akhenaten, is reminiscent of the Hebrew Psalms, and rises to a nobler level than the already noble *Hymn to Amon*. Yet it is difficult to believe that the driving conviction of a religious genius was the sole cause of the appearance of this quasi-monotheism. Egypt had, particularly under Amenhetep III, become a world-empire; and the imposition of its religion upon its vassals would no doubt have seemed a consolidating factor to Akhenaten. We must also remember that in Egypt the king himself was regarded as divine, even as the son of the Sun-god: hence Akhenaten's religious experiment had added weight.

But, like so many creative minds, he was a man of little practical ability. His fanaticism was unmatched by his statesmanship. He alienated the traditional priesthood and nobility, failed to maintain the powerful Egyptian unity built up by his predecessors, made the serious mistake of proceeding too quickly in his reform. On his death, the Aten-cult vanished: Amon and the multitudinous pantheon had prevailed. Egyptian religion reverted to type; and the only approximation to monotheism in later times is seen in the mystery cult of Isis during the Greek period.

The Egyptian Trinity

One of the most remarkable deities of Egypt was Osiris. Originally from Busiris in Lower Egypt, he came to be regarded throughout Egypt as the deity who presided over the world of the after-life. Unfortunately we can only guess at the meaning of the story of his death and resurrection. Osiris was the brother and husband of Isis; and Horus was their son. The myth suggests that Osiris had been the ruler of the world, but was murdered and cast into the Nile. By means of magic he was revived, and ruled thereafter in the land of the dead, his son

Horus reigning in his stead in this world. This is clearly a ritual story; and it lies behind the belief that the pharaohs were divine and related to Osiris and Horus.

Isis, the consort of Osiris, became much more important in the Greek period. She may well have been of foreign origin; for her similarity to Ishtar in Babylon, Astarte in Syria and the Mother-goddess of pre-hellenic Greek religion suggests she was the Egyptian version of the great Mother-goddess of nature, whose cult was widespread from India to the Mediterranean during the third and second millennia B.C. Under the Ptolemies she became the central figure of the Isis cult, which was to become fashionable throughout the Roman Empire. Hellenistic cosmopolitanism so influenced even Egypt that 'Isis of the myriad names' was by some consciously identified with the great female deities of other parts of the then known world. A further indication of this fusion of religions, often known as *syncretism* or *theocrasia*, is seen in the invention by Ptolemy I of a new god, Sarapis, who combined in himself the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Hades, as god of the nether-world.

It is interesting to note that so strong was the trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus in the Egyptian imagination that early in the Christian era there was an heretical Egyptian Church which held that the Christian Trinity was composed of God the Father, Mary the Mother and Jesus the Son; and it appears to have been from this source, as late as the seventh century of our era, that Muhammad derived his inaccurate notions about Christian doctrine.

Egyptian Cosmology

There is no systematic statement in ancient Egyptian literature about the origin and constitution of the world. A number of conflicting myths occur: no doubt they started in different religious centres and none of them ever became officially held doctrine. To us these inconsistencies seem strange; but it must be borne in mind that the ancients did not have our passion for a synthesis of knowledge. Most Egyptians, however, believed that in the beginning there existed simply the god Nu, with

Thoth, his ape-headed scribe, dwelling in a watery chaos. Men were all born of Re, but only the Egyptians, who had sprung from his tears, were his important progeny.

There is nothing in Egyptian literature comparable with the Babylonian and Hebrew myths of the Deluge, but a faint parallel exists in the story of the destruction of mankind told in the walls of the tombs of Seti I and Rameses III. According to this Re had grown old, and men were ignoring him. He took counsel, therefore, with the other gods, and sent forth his eye in the form of Hathor, who destroyed most of the human race. He then repented of his slaughter and decided to retire to a newly-created part of heaven. Another myth, contained in a papyrus from Dynasty XX, suggests that his power passed to Isis.

At first the Egyptians appear to have regarded the heavens as a flat expanse above the sky, supported by four pillars upheld by the four sons of Horus, representing the four points of the compass. The stars were suspended in the sky, and the righteous, including Osiris himself, had to mount to heaven by means of a ladder. Another cosmology saw the other world as deep within the earth, running parallel with Egypt to the West, known as Sekhet-hetep or Duat. This region was traversed by the Sun-god at night. According to yet another view the sky was the belly of Hathor, the cow-goddess, whose four legs were the four compass-points. Re, the Sun-god, travelled across her belly by day and across her back by night.

The Egyptians did not speculate about the end of the present world; but they were greatly exercised about death and the fate of the dead hereafter. Indeed, their tombs and their elaborate burial rites are among the most impressive features of Egyptian religion.

The After-life

As we have seen, *The Book of the Dead* is not so much a book as a collection of funerary texts. The Egyptian regarded life in the hereafter as almost identical with life here and now. It was, therefore, most important that the tomb of the deceased should

contain all his needs, weapons, furniture, boats, food, and even servants. In early times, when only kings, nobles and high-priests were thought of as surviving, servants were often killed and buried with their masters; but later images of servants, *ushabtiu*, were put in the tomb instead. Moreover, as time went on even people lower down in the social scale were embalmed.

The word 'mummy', an embalmed corpse, is derived from the Arabic for 'bitumen'. Pitch was used extensively in preserving bodies; and the remarkable thing is that the earlier mummies are much better than the later. In the Old and Middle Kingdoms great care was taken in the extraction of viscera and the preservation of the corpse: whereas by the Greek period mass production had become the rule, and today most later mummies are little more than masses of bitumen. After mummification it was considered essential that certain rites should be performed, the most important of which was the 'Opening of the Mouth', whereby the ankh, or charm of immortality, was placed on the mouth of the deceased and an appropriate formula recited. This was thought to guarantee consciousness in the other world.

The other world was Sekhet-hetep, the Field of Peace, but entry into it was not automatic. The dead had to pass through the judgment hall of Osiris. First, the deceased person was required to make the Negative Confession that he had not broken this religious ordinance; and this is of interest, because it shows that the Egyptian did not have an idea of sin like that of the Hebrews. Sin was not disobedience of God's moral law, but rather a breach of ritual rules or of the king's law or national custom. There was no notion of repentance either here or hereafter.

After the Negative Confession, the deceased went before Osiris for judgment, which consisted of the weighing of his heart against a feather, the symbol of truth. This is perhaps the only subtle idea in the whole ritual. If the heart was too light, it was cast to the Eater of the Dead: if the heart and feather balanced, the dead man was then led by Horus to Osiris to hear his reward. Yet it was probably not until Dynasty XIX, and

then through eastern Semitic influence, that any clear picture of rewards and punishments came into Egyptian religion. Nevertheless, despite the crudity of their imagery, the Egyptians certainly believed in an after-life long before the Hebrews did so; for among the latter it is only after the Exile that the suggestion that the dead sleep in a dusty underworld gives place to something more positive.

It can hardly be claimed that ancient Egypt made any notable contribution to the religious quest of the ancient world. Its inability to grapple with metaphysical problems, its concrete imagination, its idea of morality as a matter of avoiding certain negative ritual or national laws, its theriomorphic — or, at best, anthropomorphic — concept of deity, its belief in an after-life exactly parallel to this life, its relatively self-contained history, all militated against any full-flowering of the human spirit. Even Akhenaten's quasi-monotheistic reform was abortive; and the Egyptian interest in the Osirian other-world, fascinating as it has been to the archaeologist, vanished with the spread of hellenistic philosophy and the profounder religious yearnings of the Graeco-Roman world.

MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamian Civilizations

Like Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia was dependent upon a river — or, rather, rivers — for its life. But, unlike the Nile valley, the Tigris-Euphrates basin was a vast expanse open to attack from almost every direction. Consequently, we find a succession of different empires, and not a long historical continuity as in Egypt. Older books speak only of Babylonia, the chief city of the Euphrates valley, and Assyria, with its capital Nineveh, in the upper Tigris valley; but these are only two of the cultural centres of this area. Recent archaeological discoveries have unearthed civilizations dating from the fourth and third millennia B.C.

The ancient name for Babylonia was 'the Land of Sumer and Akkad'. The Sumerians were a non-Semitic people who held sway *c.* 3000 B.C., and were later subdued by the Semitic

Akkadians. Thereafter, as in Egypt, first one city, then another, such as Lagash, Ur and Sin, gained ascendancy, but never with quite the same unifying effect as in the Nile valley. At the beginning of the second millennium Babylon was gaining strength, and one king in particular, Hammurabi (*c.* 1800 B.C.),¹⁰ subdued his neighbours and established the first Babylonian Empire. His famous code of laws is of interest not only for its humanitarian temper, but also for its similarity to the Hebrew law set forth in the Pentateuch. But after Hammurabi Babylon declined, and became victim to a succession of invading hordes, first Hittites, then Kassites, then Hittites again. The Kassite hold was, however, weak; for it was during this time that the Egyptian kings of the eighteenth dynasty extended their empire into Asia. The Tell-el-Amarna tablets, referred to when we were surveying Egyptian religion, were reports sent by the governors in Mesopotamia to the Egyptian government.

During the thirteenth century B.C. came the first signs of a new power, the Assyrians; but, before they finally gained supremacy, the Babylonian empire had a short revival under Nebuchadnezzar I.¹¹ After him, however, Babylon declined; and, owing to the influence of the Aramaeans of North-eastern Mesopotamia and of the Chaldaeans from the lower reaches of the Euphrates, the city state gave place as a political unit to tribal districts. The new kingdom of Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh, was, however, growing in power. In 729 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III annexed Babylonia, and compelled the kings of Samaria and Judah to pay him tribute. In 721 Samaria, also sometimes known as Israel, fell before his successor, Sargon II. Frequent revolts in Babylon and elsewhere led to punitive raids by the Assyrians, one of which was that by Sennacherib in 689 B.C., who had also raided Palestine earlier, though presumably plague among his troops and trouble in Babylon caused him to turn back.¹²

A new people, the Medes from the mountainous country to the north-east of Mesopotamia, now began to threaten Assyria; and in 606 B.C. Nineveh itself fell before a Medean invasion. This gave Babylon the opportunity of re-asserting her

independence under Nabopolassar, founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Yet more famous was his son Nebuchadnezzar II, who destroyed Egyptian power in Palestine, captured Jerusalem in 596 B.C. and carried away its leading citizens to Babylon. So began the 'Babylonian Captivity' of the Jews,¹³ which lasted until their release by Cyrus of Persia in 538 B.C.¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar's successors were weak, and in due course Babylon fell to the Persians, largely through the quisling-like attitude of the priesthood. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus, whose heir, the unhappy Belshazzar, is classically commemorated in the story of the writing on the wall in *The Book of Daniel*.

From the collapse of the short-lived new empire in 538 B.C. until 331 B.C., Babylon remained a vassal state to Persia. It then passed into the hands of the world conqueror, Alexander the Great, and after his death became part of the Seleucid Empire. In 248 B.C. it passed to the Parthians, who were frequently but unsuccessfully challenged by the Romans. In A.D. 226 a new Persian kingdom, that of the Sassanids, gained possession of Babylonia, which they retained until A.D. 635, when it was overrun by the Arabs and became part of the Muslim world.

The Epics and the Gods

As the Rosetta Stone gave the clue to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, so just before the middle of the last century the trilingual inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistun enabled Sir Henry Rawlinson to begin the work of transliterating and translating cuneiform, the script of the ancient Mesopotamian languages. Moreover, during the past one hundred years earlier tablets than those of Babylonia and Assyria, those of the Sumerians and Akkadians, have come to light and show a remarkable continuity in the ancient mythology and cosmology of the area. This is the more noteworthy when we recall that the Sumerian language was non-Semitic, whereas Babylonian was Semitic, although written in non-Semitic cuneiform taken over from the early civilization.

The vast quantity of religious literature from these successive

civilizations consists mainly of hymns and rituals, incantations and omens, astrological texts, and, most important of all, the myths and epics. The hymns and rituals were used by the priests on special occasions, particularly the New Year Festival. The magical texts consist of spells used to ward off evil spirits and omens used by the priests to prognosticate the fortune of individuals or of the community. The astrological texts show that the Babylonians believed that future events could be known through consulting the sun, moon and stars; but they had a much more far-reaching significance, because a by-product of Mesopotamian astrology was the astronomy which laid the foundation for later scientific progress.

The epics and myths yield far fuller information about ancient beliefs. First, there is *The Epic of Creation*, which gives us the Mesopotamian cosmogony.¹⁵ This myth probably dates back to the third millennium B.C., but it is best known to us through a seventh-century version on clay tablets in the library of Assurbanipal discovered in the middle of the last century on the site of Nineveh. All things, according to this story, began with a primordial watery chaos, represented by the divine couple Apsu and Tiamat. From them sprang gods symbolizing the upper and lower regions; and later they gave birth to other deities, Anu, Ea and Marduk, otherwise Bel. A conflict arises between the primary gods and the later: Tiamat creates a host of monsters to assist her. Marduk now comes forward as the champion of the gods, on the condition that after victory supremacy shall be his. All the older gods are destroyed, but Tiamat stands firm. Marduk, however, entangles her in a net, which, caught by the winds, strangles her to death.¹⁶ He cuts her body in half, like a flat fish, making with one half the earth and the other the heavens. The gods praise Marduk, who then gives them their several provinces, and decides to create man.

The contrast between this and the cosmogony of *Genesis* is obvious. The Mesopotamian epic contains no detailed account of the creation of the world or of man, and is lacking both in poetic and religious nobility. Presumably man was made simply to fill the earth and worship the gods. In its present form

the epic is clearly composite, and has been 'edited' so as to present Marduk's claim to primacy. Here, as in most of the ancient religions, there is an incipient monotheism, which never develops, because of the lack of ethical and religious grandeur. The supremacy of Marduk is mostly suggested in Tablet VII, where his fifty names are recited.

The other important story is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, told on some twelve tablets.¹⁷ Here as in *The Babylonian Genesis* there are lacunae in the text, but the story can be reconstructed in general outline. Gilgamesh, ruler of Erech, was a despot. His people, assisted by the goddess Aruru, raise up an adversary in Enkidu, a vagrant warrior. Enkidu and Gilgamesh, however, become friends and embark on an expedition into the sacred forest, where they kill the guardian monster. Ishtar, goddess of Erech, then offers herself to Gilgamesh in admiration of his strength; but he spurns her love, taunting her with the unhappy fate of all those who have been her lovers, one of whom was Tammuz. Thus insulted, Ishtar persuades her father, Anu, to create a mighty bull to attack Gilgamesh; but the two friends slay it. In revenge Ishtar curses Enkidu, who dies. Gilgamesh, filled with grief, wanders far and wide, entering at length an underworld which leads him to a land where the trees bear gems as fruit. An excursion follows in Tablet XI, where we read that he has as his companion an old sailor, Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, who tells the story of the Deluge, which bears a close resemblance to that of Noah in *Genesis*. The last tablet reverts to the main theme. Gilgamesh is unable to get into closer touch with the underworld: so he returns to Erech, where the gods allow the ghost of Enkidu to rise 'like a vapour from the earth' and commune with Gilgamesh. Here the story breaks off; but the end is interesting for the insight it gives into Mesopotamian beliefs about the dead. This sleepy underworld is not unlike the Sheol of the Old Testament; and the appearance of Enkidu's spirit is reminiscent of the calling up of Samuel's ghost by the Witch of Endor.¹⁸

In other stories and religious writings many hundreds of other deities are mentioned besides those who occur in the main

epics. There was a kind of Babylonian trinity, consisting of Anu, the god of heaven, Enlil, the god of earth, often regarded as the creator of man, and Enki, or Ea, the god of the waters, who was looked upon as the source of human knowledge and more favourably disposed towards men than Anu and Enlil. Anu was a Sumerian deity who was later identified with, or rather replaced by, Marduk, the great semitic god of Babylon. Throughout the history of Mesopotamia, even more than in Egypt, there was a syncretistic process at work whereby many gods were regarded as manifestations of one supreme deity. Outstanding among the remaining deities are two we should particularly note. One is Ishtar, the great Mother-goddess, representing the permanent elements in nature; and the other is Tammuz, a legendary king, who came to be thought of as the consort of Ishtar and the god of the seasons and vegetation, so symbolizing the changing elements in nature.

The Myth and Ritual of the New Year Festival

An important feature of Mesopotamian religion was its concern for the guarantee of the continuity of nature. This is seen perhaps most clearly in the New Year Festival, held in the month of Nisan, our spring time, when a sacred marriage between the great Mother-goddess, usually Ishtar, and her consort Tammuz, was dramatized in procession upon a tower-like building called a *ziggurat*. The Tower of Babel in the Old Testament has been identified as one of such temples or high places, symbolizing the meeting place of heaven and earth.¹⁹ To the Babylonian mind the Mother-goddess embodied the permanent element in nature, whereas Tammuz represented the impermanent succession of the seasons, particularly the coming of spring and the reproductive power of nature. The New Year liturgy set out in cuneiform on baked clay tablets has been of great interest to archaeologists and historians of religion for two or three generations. Unfortunately early translators were often, unwittingly, too ready to read their preconceived theory of what the fertility ceremonies were like into their translations; and now many scholars are more inclined to

doubt whether we can reconstruct quite so certainly the eleven days of the New Year Festival. Nevertheless, the importance of it in Mesopotamian religion remains; and there is little doubt that the mythology of the Festival included a mime of the dying and rising again of the consort god, who was probably identified with the king as the representative of his people.

The existence of this fertility religion is also reinforced by the fact that archaeological discoveries elsewhere, such as the Ras Shamra Tablets dating from the fifteenth and following centuries B.C., discovered in Syria, show a similar cult; while the little we know of the religion of the Indus civilizations points in the same direction. Certainly the pre-Hellenic religion of Greece and the Isis-Osiris cult of Egypt have a similar pattern. It would seem, therefore, that all over the Near East of the second millennium B.C. there was a widespread religious complex concerned with a Mother-goddess and her consort deity, in which we can clearly discern a reaching after one supreme divine being, a deity behind all the gods.

THE INDUS CIVILIZATION

There were, in fact, several Indus civilizations during the fourth, third and second millennia B.C.; but as yet, because of the lack of documentary evidence, little is known of their religion. Such knowledge as we have is inferred mainly from the seal-amulets, figurines and other objects unearthed, mainly at Mohenjo Daro and Harappa during the last thirty-five years. These finds, however, do suggest that the Mother-goddess cult of the Mediterranean and Near East extended much further afield. One of the problems that now awaits orientalists is to discover whether this cult was indigenous or introduced from outside. At present the evidence suggests that it had long existed in India; and it may well be that it spread westward to the Levant, just as later the original Indo-Europeans of Central Asia spread westward to Europe, as well as southward to India, taking with them their pantheon of nature-gods, in which the chief deity — Dyaus Pitar in India, Zeus in Greece, Jupiter in Rome — was male rather than female. It is perhaps natural

that an agricultural people should think of the power behind nature as female, whereas a tougher, fiercer nomad race should envisage such a power as male. The significant thing is, however, that in all these ancient religions there was a feeling after what later was to become either monism or monotheism.

GREECE

Old and New Ideas of Greek Religion

Until the latter half of the last century the only source of information about ancient Greek religion was that derived from the surviving ancient Greek literature, particularly the Homeric epics, which gave a much too simplified picture of a pantheon of nature deities headed by Zeus. Archaeological excavations in the Mediterranean, beginning with those of Schliemann and Sir Arthur Evans in Asia Minor and Crete from 1870 onwards, have revolutionized Hellenic studies, as is to be seen in the work of such scholars as Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray. Hitherto it had been supposed that there was no Greek religion worth talking about prior to the coming of the Greeks proper; but today we see clearly that Greek religion was a complex phenomenon, made up of at least four main phases, each living on in its successor.

Minoan-Mycenaean Religion

Of the earliest inhabitants of Greece, the Pelasgoi, or Sea-people, we know very little. They were probably animists worshipping spirits identified with certain sacred objects. It is likely that the veneration of certain unhewn stones, or herms, which persisted in Greece dates back to this Stone Age people of the third millennium B.C. The Greek historian Herodotus remarks that they 'prayed to gods, but had no distinct names for them'.²⁰

Much more is known of the religion of the Bronze Age people who occupied Greece and the Aegean islands, including Crete, between 2000 and 1500 B.C. Their level of culture and their religion was similar to that of Mesopotamia and the Indus valley. Formerly known as the Cretan, or Minoan, civilization, because our first knowledge of it came from the excavations at

Knossos in Crete, it is now better known as the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization, because subsequent discoveries, particularly at Mycenae on the Greek mainland, have revealed its presence further afield.

At the centre of Minoan-Mycenaean religion was a nature-goddess, Mother Earth, Magna Mater, who survived in the background of Mediterranean religion right up to the days of the Roman Empire. Like the Mother-goddess of Babylonia, she was the source of eternal life, whereas her consort, the youth god, who lived on as Adonis in classical Greece, was the symbol of vegetational and animal life. Some writers have gone so far as to describe this religion as 'a Dual Monotheism'.²¹ This is a contradictory term; but at least it indicates how prepossessed the Minoan-Mycenaean people were with the supreme divine power behind the universe.

Classical Greek Religion

The Minoan-Mycenaean civilization itself disappeared during the latter half of the second millennium when the less materially civilized but physically and morally stronger Hellenes, or Achaeans, invaded Greece from the north. They were, in fact, one of the waves of Indo-European hordes who were sweeping westward from Asia bringing with them their Aryan language, which was to develop by way of a succession of dialects into classical Greek, and their religion, the worship of numerous nature gods headed by Zeus. The Celts and Teutons were yet other waves of Indo-Europeans who travelled further westward. The Minoan-Mycenaeans either capitulated to these new-comers or fled. Among those who escaped were probably the Philistines who settled on the sea-coast of Palestine and proved so troublesome to the Israelites after their conquest of Canaan.

The Hellenes, or Greeks proper, in due course imposed the worship of their pantheon as the established religion; but it would be idle to suppose that the older religion was exterminated altogether. It survived in out-of-the-way places, and contributed to the emergence later on of the mystery religions. Certain features of it also were fused with the worship of the

Zeus, and his fellow-deities. There were various Zeuses, who were in reality Zeus superimposed upon the older Mother-goddess or her consort. In time, however, he became supreme; for the Hellenes, like their predecessors, could not help feeling their way towards some kind of quasi-monotheism. But a full monotheism never flowered either in Greece or in Rome, because of the state systematization of the cult which prevented further development.

Another factor which hindered the official cult from ever fully satisfying the spiritual needs of the Greeks was the anthropomorphic way in which the gods were envisaged and represented in art. They were depicted as human beings, albeit super-human, and in consequence were thought of as behaving like human beings. Indeed, the conduct of the gods in Greek mythology was often such as would have earned strong disapproval in any mortal folk, even among the Greeks.²² It is true that Zeus was regarded as the father of the state, that Zeus and his wife Hera were looked upon as the guardians of marriage, and that the deified heroes inspired Greek manhood to noble feats. It is likewise true that the games at the four centres at Olympia, Delphi, the Corinthian isthmus and the Nemean valley helped to bring about not only the unification of the Greek state but also that of the state religion; and that the arts, as well as the actual *gymnasia*, were enlisted in the service of religion. But not one of these things could atone for the inner spiritual weakness of the cult.

By the fifth century B.C. signs of dissatisfaction were already evident. One of these was the rise of Greek drama. Possibly it originated in the ceremonies of the earlier pre-Hellenic religion of Dionysus, who was a Thracian vegetation deity unpopular with the Greek warriors in the Homeric epics. The great comedian Aristophanes satirizes the stories of the gods; while the tragedians, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, turned men's serious consideration in a less personal direction. They did not deny the existence of the gods, but implied they had little concern for men. As far as man is concerned, the dramatists point to a more abstract reality, 'the godhead' or 'the divine'

as of supreme importance. The Greek is beginning to look within himself for enlightenment. The mood of the age was well summed up in the famous words of Aristophanes: 'Whirl is king, having deposed Zeus!' Speculation on the problems of life and the decreasing regard for the gods of the traditional mythology led men to seek for their satisfaction in pastures new; and the starting point in that search was man himself, rather than the gods. This dissatisfaction was to become critical in the four centuries immediately before Christ.

Greek Philosophical Religion

The enquiries of the earliest Greek philosophers about the origin and nature of the world did not conflict with traditional cosmology: science and mythology were mixed up in their speculations. But in time they could not help discussing the gods as well. These early thinkers of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. are often called 'physicists', because of their concern to find the underlying principle of nature (Greek *phusis*), including the gods and men. It was not until the time of Socrates and after that speculation extended to psychological and ethical matters.

While Heracleitus protested against the futility of many traditional religious practices, Anaxagoras advanced the positive view that the supreme power was *nous*, or mind, which gives life to all things; and this idea was long to remain an outstanding feature of Greek philosophy. Western philosophical idealism, *i.e.*, the doctrine that mind is the only reality, is probably built up on this revolutionary Greek postulate, which, in turn, may owe something to influence from India. It is not unlikely that this belief, like that in the transmigration of the soul, which figures in most of the Greek philosophers, was not indigenous, but came to Greece from the East. Having, however, suggested that a cosmic mind controls all things, the Greek philosophers were not slow to pass on to consider man himself as a thinking being and his significance in the world.

This advance was made by Socrates (469-399 B.C.), who, as none of his writings have survived, is known to us mainly

through Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and the writings of Plato. Despite the fact that his uncouth appearance excited the ridicule of Aristophanes, that he was henpecked, and that he claimed to have a kind of clairvoyance, Socrates is one of the great creative minds of philosophy. He said, 'This one thing I know, that I know nothing'; and on this basis is often regarded as the founder of what has come to be called the inductive method of reasoning — from the particular to the general. But his chief contribution to philosophy lay in his ethical theory. He claimed that wickedness is the result of ignorance, and that virtue is knowledge. The motto of each man should be 'Know thyself', so that he might seek wisdom and avoid error. Further, like the earlier philosophers Socrates believed that there is a cosmic mind which permeates man as well as the world at large. He also regarded the gods as personifications of this cosmic mind, with which the human mind necessarily had a kinship. The story of the accusation that he had corrupted the youth of Athens by his teaching, and of his suicide through self-administered poison after his condemnation, is well known, and is beautifully told by Plato in the *Apology* and *Phaedo*.

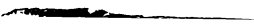
But Socrates left behind no systematic teaching: he claimed that his task was simply that of a midwife — to bring to birth new ideas. It was his disciple Plato, and Plato's disciple, Aristotle, who were the two greatest figures of Greek philosophy, and whose writings have had such a tremendous influence right up to our own time: so much so that some have even claimed that every school of philosophy since has been either Platonic or Aristotelean at heart.

First, however, we should note that several other schools developed in Greece after the time of Socrates. Two are particularly important, the Stoics and the Epicureans. Stoicism, so called after the *stoa*, or porch, in Athens where its founder Zeno taught, pictured unchangeable natural laws working on the four elements of fire, water, air and earth to produce the world, which would eventually end in a conflagration, after which the process would start over again. Amid this relentless cosmic evolution man alone has a limited independence: he can choose

virtue, which is the sole good. But he must not suppose that he can resist the buffets of the world: he must eventually capitulate to nature. Yet the stoic ideal, which has become proverbial and which later characterized so many of the nobler Romans, among them the slave philosopher Epictetus and the emperor Marcus Aurelius, was to endure one's fate with calm, unflinching courage. The other school was that of the Epicureans, founded by the Athenian Epicurus. Agnostic about the gods and the hereafter, he was not, as is often popularly supposed, an advocate of high living; but he did teach that pleasure is the sole good and pain the sole evil. For him chance rather than destiny ruled the world; and he advocated that in order to gain pleasure and avoid pain men should lead a simple, harmonious life.

Plato (427–348 B.C.) is doubtless the greatest of the Greek, if not of all, philosophers. He developed the dialectic method inaugurated by Socrates, that of seeking the truth by question and answer. In his famous *Republic*, the first Utopia — and perhaps the first blueprint of a socialist dictatorship, he tells his cave myth, which illustrates the basic doctrine of Platonism, that ideas, or abiding forms, alone are real and that the material world is a transitory pale copy of the eternal reality known only to the mind, particularly to the mind of the philosopher. Those who rely solely on sense experience are like cave dwellers who can see only the shadows on the walls of the cave: whereas the philosopher is like the man who, having been out into the sunlit world, can on his return interpret the shadows to the unenlightened.

This eternal ideal world is the only true Being: all else is becoming and passing away. And at the head of the scale of Being is the Good. This is for Plato supreme: it is God, but not in our monotheistic sense. Deity he regards as a kind of intermediary between the Good and man. While, therefore, Plato advances Greek religion from polytheism and materialism to belief in one abiding spiritual reality, he does not regard that reality as personal. He is a monist rather than a monotheist, though it must be admitted that sometimes Plato speaks as if he regarded



the Good as personal. Nevertheless, so impressed were they by his teaching that many of the early Fathers of the Church looked upon him as in the company of the prophets who prepared the way for Christ. It is perhaps unfortunate that his teaching has been regarded as a system of philosophy: it was much more a sublime confession of faith.

Plato's chief pupil was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who after being the tutor of Alexander the Great founded his own school, known as the Lyceum. It was also called the Peripatetics, after its members' habit of walking about while thinking and discussing.²³ Aristotle had a different temperament from that of Plato: he was a less poetic and a more matter-of-fact thinker. His encyclopaedic mind covered almost every branch of learning, which he arranged into a system of knowledge, with logic as the underlying technique for all subjects. Aristotle's theory of causation played a significant part in the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages. Aristotle also followed Plato in teaching that wisdom, courage, justice and self-control are the four cardinal virtues; but unlike Socrates and Plato he tends to see virtue as a distinct quality of character — an ability to keep to the middle way — rather than as a matter of intellect. He also accepted Plato's doctrine of the ideal, but contended that this was not laid up in a spiritual realm. Rather did he regard the ideal as always inherent in the actual material world — as the substance or inner being, contained within the accident, or outward material appearance. Few people realize that the doctrine of transubstantiation, which has aroused so much controversy in Christendom, stands or falls not on material appearances but upon whether or not Aristotle's theory of substance is true.

For our purpose we need only remark here that Aristotle's main contribution to the religious thought of the ancient world was his postulate that behind the universe there must be a First Mover, himself unmoved, God. Whether Aristotle thought of this Mover as personal or not is far from clear; but his metaphysics had a profound influence on Christian thinkers, particularly on Aquinas the greatest of the Christian Aristoteleans.

It is clear, however, that like his master, Plato, Aristotle led the Greeks and those whom they influenced away from the deadening formalism of the state religion to a realization that one Supreme Being rules the universe.

But the philosophers spake only to the few. Philosophy is at best emasculated religion. Full religion contains so much more than intellectual speculation. The majority of the Greeks looked elsewhere in their quest for spiritual nourishment — to the more exotic, more emotional, more other-worldly mystery religions. Yet we should bear in mind that after the time of Alexander the Great the Mediterranean world became almost entirely Greek in spirit. The Hellenistic age had dawned, when Greek philosophy and mystery religions were both thrown into the seething cauldron of the Graeco-Roman world and were, in due course, to play their part in the shaping of the future history of religion.

The Indigenous Greek Mysteries

We are not here concerned with the two great mystery religions — those of Isis and Mithras, which became so fashionable and widespread in the early days of the Roman Empire. Greece had its own mysteries of considerable antiquity. Originally these were agricultural cults, but by classical times their association with the fertility of the crops and herds had receded and they expressed the more specifically religious yearnings of the ordinary people. They are sometimes known as chthonic religions because they did not worship the Olympian gods of the heavens but the *chthonoi*, the gods of the underworld, the surviving deities of the older agricultural religion. There were two main mystery cults native to Greece, the Eleusinian and the Orphic; but we should note that the Delphic Oracle may also have had its origin in the pre-Hellenic religion, since the myths associated with it suggest that its patron deity Apollos had supplanted an early nature goddess worshipped in the form of a snake, whose priestess was called Pythia.

The Eleusinian Mysteries in honour of Demeter, who, as her name indicates was a form of Mother Earth, was the only



mystery cult recognized as a branch of the national religion. Initiates, among whom were often slaves, underwent a purification ceremony and were admitted to the 'Lesser Mysteries' in Athens. Later they joined the procession of white-robed *mystae* which went to the 'Greater Mysteries' at Eleusis. The latter took the form of a *tableau vivant* re-enacting the myth of Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone, who had been carried off and raped in the underworld by Hades. In time the agrarian significance of the ceremonies was forgotten, and they were supposed to reveal the secrets of communion with the divine and of the future life. The Greeks believed that Demeter manifested her divinity to men at Eleusis.

Far less civilized were the Orphic Mysteries whose patron was the wild Thracian deity Dionysus, whose Roman counterpart later was Bacchus.²⁴ The cult was so named after Orpheus who in mythology sought his beloved in the underworld but was torn in pieces by women driven mad by his lyre-playing. Orphic brotherhoods were widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean; and in the sixth century there was a good deal of missionary activity. There was even a temporary revival of Orphism under the Roman Empire. This weird, other-worldly cult ministered to the individual as conventional Greek religion did not. Its ceremonies included purifications, torch-light mountain processions, the frenzied tearing asunder and eating of an animal sacrifice, and the enjoyment of an ecstatic state enabling the initiates to catch a glimpse of Elysium. Undoubtedly a nature-goddess had originally figured in the religion, but she was forgotten as Dionysus, her consort, symbolizing death and rebirth hereafter, became all-important.

The reasons for the popularity of these cults are not far to seek. They satisfied personal longings for immortality, they gave scope to the emotions in worship, they brought men into touch with the supernatural, they offered a disciplined, often ascetic, membership of a society, they were non-political, and they transcended national and caste boundaries. Although crude, they had a sacramental approach to the divine; for mysterious symbolism always has an irresistible attraction. But they were

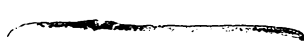
often weak morally; and doubtless many of the initiates cared little for their inner religious significance. 'Many carry the sacred wand but few are the Bacchoi' was but the Greek equivalent of 'The cowl does not make the monk'. Yet these cults show that the official religion of the Greek pantheon was little more than a kind of religious cement holding the Greek state together; and by the fourth century B.C. that cement was already fast crumbling. By taking Greek culture far and wide Alexander the Great initiated a new era, the Hellenistic Age, which was to be as cosmopolitan in religion as in other respects.

ROME

The Higher Animism

The origin of the Romans is still something of a mystery, but it is reasonably clear that, like the Greeks, they and the Etruscans and Gauls to the north were yet another wave of Indo-European invaders of Italy. Whether the early religion of Italy was of the same pattern as that of the other Mediterranean peoples is by no means clear. In religion the Romans certainly displayed little or no creative genius. One thing, however, is clear — that they were originally farmers and that, even when they became a great urbanized political power, they still clung to many of their simple agricultural beliefs and practices, which do not appear to have involved a Mother-goddess and a consort god.

One of the difficulties in studying the origins of Roman religion is that our main sources of information are the Augustan poets, who can be quite misleading, since they had artificially identified their own deities with those of the Greeks. Indeed, one wonders whether there would ever have been a Roman pantheon had it not been for this hellenization. Yet in the religion of the Republic and Empire linger traces of long forgotten cults, as is shown more by the Roman antiquaries than by the poets. Early Roman religion has been described as 'probably the most perfect instance known of an animistic religion'.²⁵ The veneration of the sacred stone in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol



with its spirit which guarded treaties made upon it, belief in Vesta and Janus the spirits of the hearth and door, the ceremonies at birth and death to drive away malicious spirits, the magical practices to ward off evil and guarantee prosperity, the taboos connected with certain people, places, and times all point to a vague kind of spiritism. None of these supernatural beings was thought of as having a distinct kind of personality: they were rather manifestations of the supernatural, which man felt he had to try to control.

The Religion of Numa

Numa, a successor to Romulus, was king of Rome at the end of the eighth century B.C.; and his name has been given to the systematization of this 'higher animism'. Romans of the Republic and Empire used to look back to it as the golden age of their religion. From the time of Numa onwards a refinement takes place: the orderly Roman mind, so effective in government and commerce, gets to work here too, but with less success. Religion is not at its best when pigeon-holed.

Many of the spirits, such as Janus and Vesta, the Penates — guardians of the larder, the Pales — guardians of the flocks, almost became gods to whom special functions are assigned. Three deities proper, however, soon emerge, who become the Roman 'trinity', Jupiter, Mars and Juno. Jupiter seems to have been an importation, for he is none other than the ubiquitous Sky Father of the Indo-Europeans. Yet Mars was an indigenous god of the crops, who is later transformed into the god of war. The origin of Juno is even more obscure: she had no temple of her own until the fourth century B.C. The likelihood is that, since she was a favourite with the Etruscans, the Romans must have borrowed her from that quarter. Her ultimate establishment came with her identification with Hera, the consort of Zeus, so that she became the wife of Jupiter.

Refinement and systematization also took place in worship and divination. One particularly noteworthy change is that the subjunctive of prayer is substituted for the imperative of magical formulae in addressing divine powers. This was inevitable with

the transition from an impersonal, magical religion to one believing in personal deities. Instead of the old exorcism 'Ghosts of my fathers, depart' we find 'Father Janus, I pray good prayers that thou mayest . . .'. In the formation of the *jus divinum* of the state religion the sacrificial system was stereotyped into four kinds of ceremonies for securing the *pax deorum*: the *sacrificium*, consisting of gifts and petitions at sacred times and places, including the home; the *lustratio*, a ceremony of purification from sin, usually ritual impurity; the *piaculum*, an act of reparation for wrongs, including mistakes in the proper performance of the ceremonies; and the *votum*, a promise made by a worshipper in return for some favour from a god.

Divination likewise became a 'science' under the state religion. Hardly any important national, family or personal venture was undertaken without recourse to it. The course of future events was thought to be revealed either by *impetrativa*, signs given by deity in response to man's request, or *ostenta*, signs given without such human seeking. The most celebrated instance of the former was the art of the *haruspices*, originally Etruscan soothsayers, who foretold the future by inspecting the quivering entrails of sacrificial animals or by observing the occurrence of lightning in different sectors of the sky.²⁶ So important did these diviners become that a special college of *haruspices* was formed under the Empire. Almost as much attention was paid to any unusual natural phenomenon, such as the screeching of birds or a snake crossing one's path. This kind of superstition is, of course, far from unknown today. Intelligent Romans, like Horace and Cicero, however, ridiculed the excesses to which this looking for signs and portents went.²⁷

Even a cursory glance shows that Roman religion was a stunted thing compared with that of Greece. The main reason why it never produced any great visionary was because it was from the third century onwards overshadowed by the superior Hellenistic religious spirit. The state cult became just a set of unreal conventions, outwardly religious but at heart mainly social and political.

Roman State Religion

After the end of the kingdom in 509 B.C., throughout the republic and after the establishment of the empire by Octavianus shortly after 30 B.C., Roman religion consisted of two intertwined strands. One was the 'higher animism', which was fundamentally the domestic cult of the Roman farmer continued even when the majority of Romans ceased to live off the land and became citizens of the great capital of the Mediterranean. The other was the still more formalized state cult with its hierarchy of priests and its unconscious imitation of the Greek pantheon. During the kingdom the king acted as high priest. Later, under the Republic, a patrician was *Rex Sacrorum*; and, under the Empire, Augustus and his successors took the office upon themselves. The priesthood gradually assumed a professional status, and was divided into three main classes. First, there were the *flamines*,²⁸ the priests assigned to separate deities, the chief of whom was the *Flamen Dialis*, the priest of Jupiter, who was always a member of the Senate. Secondly, there were groups of priests concerned with special ceremonies, among whom were the *Fetiales*, who supervised the making of treaties, the *Luperci*, who performed magic to ensure fertility, and the *Vestal Virgins* who tended the sacred flame in the temple of *Vesta*.²⁹

Thirdly, there were the two priestly colleges. We have already noted one, that of the augurs or diviners, who often assisted the magistrates in dealing with difficult cases. Today we have our psychiatrists. To each age its experts, in whom they believe. The other college was the greatest priestly institution of all, consisting of the *pontifices*.³⁰ Their task was to conduct the sacrificial system and so maintain the *pax deorum*; and they generally supervised the *jus divinum*, the law governing Roman religion. At first only patricians were eligible for office, but from c. 400 B.C. onwards plebeians were sometimes appointed. The president of the pontifical college was the *Pontifex Maximus*, the highest of Roman religious dignitaries; and Augustus, like Julius Caesar before him, assumed this title.

The mythology of the state religion organized by the priests was adapted more and more to follow that of the Greek pantheon. Its formalism, which prevented it from ever becoming a vigorous force in the religious quest of the ancient world, also fixed it as a moribund polytheism. The ascendancy of Jupiter in the pantheon indicated a leaning towards monotheism; but there was even less movement in that direction than in classical Greek religion, because it was far more stereotyped. The true instinct of the Romans is detected more clearly in the primitive survivals of the farmer's faith shown in the domestic religious observances; for behind its 'higher animism' lay an indefinite but overwhelming sense of the numinous. Indeed, the very Latin word *numen*, originally signifying impersonal sacred power, suggests that the Romans felt the presence of the divine;³¹ but their lack of philosophical and theological speculation prevented them from describing it in other than polytheistic images. Early Roman religion, that of the spirits of house and fields, was superior in its insight than was the sophisticated official religion of the later Republic and of the Empire.

The common man had little active part in the lifeless state cult; and many of the intelligentsia saw through its shallowness. The old domestic religion had by the dawn of the Christian era likewise faded far into the background. The old religious institutions were dying fast. Into the restless cosmopolitan Roman Empire flooded new religions, international in character, exciting fresh interest and loyalty. Two, in particular, won widespread allegiance. One was the worship of Isis, officially discouraged at Rome but highly popular elsewhere; and the other, Mithraism, the 'free-masonry' of the Roman legions from Asia Minor to the Anglo-Scottish frontier.

The Cult of Isis

Isis was originally the great Mother-goddess of Egypt, whose worship was but parallel to that of Demeter in Greece, Astarte in Syria and Ishtar in Babylon. During the first century B.C. and the first two centuries of the Christian era her cult spread far beyond Egypt, because it was open to all, including women,

with whom the cult was particularly popular, and presented the goddess as the one universal deity. Plutarch, the Greek biographer and antiquary, tells us a good deal about this religion;³² and it was he who invented the term 'syncretism' to describe the identification of Isis and the other great maternal deities of the Hellenistic World as manifestations of one god. Isis is called the deity 'of a myriad names'. 'Isis the one who art all' was a typical invocation.

A fascinating account of how an initiate's adoption of the Isis religion brought him spiritual satisfaction can be read in the latter part of *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, a 'novel' of the second century A.D.³³ Because the mystery religions were secret it is difficult for us to reconstruct the ceremonies of Isis; but it appears that the initiate was allowed to see some kind of dramatic performance in the temple symbolizing the mysteries of death and immortality. Doubtless the mental and emotional state of the worshipper was more important than the actual things seen and heard, and led him to experience some kind of union between himself and the deity. Probably in a mystical way he was identified with Osiris and Horus, the husband and son of Isis.

Mithraism

Even more fascinating, because it was still more secret, was the cult of the Persian deity Mithras, which became popular in the second and subsequent centuries. Membership was limited to men, and was largely confined to the Roman army. Wherever the legions went they built Mithraic temples; and remains of these are still being unearthed.³⁴ It has often been regarded by historians as the most serious rival of early Christianity, though possibly this claim is a little exaggerated. It is doubtful whether so exclusive a religion could ever have become universal.

As in the case of the other mysteries, there is no clear picture of how the cult worked. Attempts, notably those of the Belgian scholar Cumont, have been made at a reconstruction. It has even been held that the initiation included a *taurobolium* whereby the novice was baptized in the blood of a bull, so sym-

bolizing his acquisition of supernatural life; but some authorities question whether this was in fact so. It is evident, however, that the religion offered immortality to its adherents, and required of them a life of virtue and fortitude. The probability is that the mythology of Mithraism was complex and inconsistent, since it borrowed indiscriminately and uncritically from oriental sources.

The Fulness of Time

In his Epistle to the Galatians St Paul says, 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son.'³⁵ The scientific historian may remain sceptical about a divine intervention at this stage in history; but that conditions were highly favourable for the advent of a new, satisfying religion is undeniable. Roman administration ensured a peaceful world in which men could travel unmolested to and fro as they had never done before. There was an international language, Hellenistic Greek. Cosmopolitanism had broken down national prejudices and had suggested that there is a basic divine Reality behind all religions. The old faiths had lost their vitality, and, in any case, were inadequate to meet the yearnings of the human soul. And when, a few centuries later, the power of Rome began to totter, the Christian Church proved to be the only stable institution which men could cling on to, if they were not to recede into barbarism. Moreover, the intellectual lead of the Greek philosophers caused thoughtful men to seek for one Supreme Being; but the religious genius of the Jews taught them that the relationship between God and man was both moral and personal. Had Greek speculation alone shaped the future, the West might have become monist. Instead, Judaeo-Christian vision and experience transformed that monism into monotheism.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNDEVELOPED RELIGIONS

PRIMITIVES

The systematization of knowledge is the business of the scholar; but it has its dangers. And there are dangers in attempting to divide religions into primitive and advanced. While on the whole we expect peoples with a primitive material culture to have a primitive religion, and civilized peoples to have a higher religion, this is no more than a general principle. Religion and culture do not always coincide. Culturally backward folk can have a nobler religion than culturally advanced, and *vice versa*. What really determines the quality of religion is a people's degree of moral and spiritual vision. It is, therefore, a mistake to group all culturally primitive peoples of the present day together in speaking of their religions. Similarly, it is misleading to equate primitive religions of the past with those of today. There were variations in the quality of religions then just as much as now. Further, in comparing religions of the past and present we must remember that the passing of time has considerably varied the opportunities of contacts between different peoples. It makes things clearer to distinguish between *primaeval* religions, those of prehistoric savages, and the primitive religions of modern savages. Yet we need to remember all the time that primitive religion can be, and is, thrown up even among civilized peoples. This is certainly evident in our own society. Our concern at the moment, however, is to point out some of the features of the religions of the less civilized peoples of the present day.

Almost all the religions of modern primitive peoples are in some way connected with unseen powers. Sometimes this power is simply the impersonal supernatural, felt rather than thought

about, as among the Melanesians who call it *mana*. At other times it is the belief in good and evil spirits to be found among so many savage peoples all over the world, but this belief, like the cult connected with it, takes a variety of forms. Among the Ural-Altaic peoples of Siberia and the Eskimos of North America it is controlled by sorcerers known as *shamans*, who go into ecstatic states in order to communicate with unseen powers. Probably the neurotic tendency of these people to what has come to be called 'Arctic hysteria' naturally predisposes them to the development of this kind of religion. In Africa where belief in good and evil spirits is equally rife, the cult is in the hands of the witch-doctors, whose power and prestige is so great that the very knowledge of a witch-doctor's disapproval can often bring about so morbid a psychological condition in a native that he dies without any apparent physical cause. Fear is a powerful feature of indigenous African religion, as administrators and missionaries know only too well.

But it is a mistake to suppose that the religion of primitives is an undifferentiated spiritism. There are numerous strata in primitive as well as advanced religion. And it is not surprising, therefore, that there is often a parallel, though less powerful, belief in a Supreme Spirit. This is particularly the case with most African tribes, *e.g.*, Nyame of the Ashanti, Akongo of the Ngombe, a Congo tribe, Murungu of the Kikuyu in Kenya. Indeed, the name *Mulungu* or a variant of it is found among over twenty East African tribes as the name for God. Among the Australian aborigines, who are one of the most primitive of all races, there is also a belief in a Supreme Being, an All-Father. To us it may seem strange, however, that this belief is not paramount. The reason is not far to seek; for the vested interest of the shamans and witch-doctors is so powerful in day-to-day life that the Supreme Being seems very remote from the lot of men. Nevertheless, while it would be a mistake to go so far as to exaggerate this quasi-monotheism, it must be admitted that it is there.

Another reason why it is overshadowed by spiritism is that the deeply ingrained spiritism and the magic connected with it



has tended to produce a masterful, almost mechanical, approach to unseen powers. Sir J. G. Frazer called magic 'primitive science'. This was hardly an accurate description, because the primitives' making and use of tools and weapons, his building and crafts, are much more his science. Yet the belief that certain spells and ceremonies can force nature to conform to man's will does suggest a savage notion of some kind of natural law.

Perhaps the main distinction between primitive and advanced religion is to be found in the use of magic. It would, of course, be foolish to suppose, as was once the case, that an age of magic preceded that of religion. This was the view of Frazer, who also contended, with typical Victorian facile optimism, that the age of religion is followed by that of science.¹ F. B. Jevons was much nearer the truth when he pointed out that magic is 'a degradation or relapse in the evolution of religion'.² Magic, science and religion have always existed, and are distinct activities: or, if they have any affinity, magic and science are quite as interrelated as magic and religion.

Frazer's analysis of magic is, however, useful.³ The basic type he calls 'sympathetic magic', because magic assumes there is some secret sympathy which causes one thing to act upon another without any visible contact. Thus, if a witch-doctor casts a spell on a person, it is assumed that in some occult way the spell will influence the natural order so as to harm the victim. He also identifies two branches of sympathetic magic, homoeopathic and contagious. Homoeopathic magic makes use of similarity or imitation. The world-wide practice of sticking pins into an image of a victim is supposed to produce pain and death in the victim himself: a like action in the one is believed to cause nature to produce a like action in the other. Likewise, in contagious magic the destruction of something belonging to the intended victim, say, some of his hair or nail-parings, is supposed to effect an occult destructive contact with the victim himself.

Gods or spirits, though they may be thought to play some part in upholding an order of the world in which this is possible, play little or no part in the magical practice. Magic works *ex opere*

operato: the correct performance is thought automatically to produce the desired result. It is, therefore, coercitive behaviour: the magician has a masterful attitude towards impersonal nature. In Frazer's own words, magic is the attempt to control nature 'by the sheer force of spells and enchantments'. Religion, he argued, arose when man realized that magic did not work, and that he had to placate 'a coy, capricious and irascible deity'. Frazer's diagnosis of magic as the product of an impersonal view of nature, and of religion as that of a belief in a personal deity is probably correct; but he quite overlooked the fact that both magic and religion exist side by side in modern society — often in civilized as well as savage society.

Much more satisfactory was Marett's view that these two phenomena are inseparably connected, and that what differentiates the two is the attitude of the devotee. Both are forms of supernaturalism, but magic is a bad, antisocial kind, whereas religion is good for society. Magic reflects an arrogant attitude towards the supernatural, religion a humble. As we noted in our second chapter, the title of the chapter 'The Birth of Humility' in Marett's book *The Threshold of Religion*⁴ sums up his view of the dawn of religion; and he contends that this sense of humility does not depend on a personal deity, since the power before which he is humble may be no more than the impersonal supernatural, felt rather than thought of. It is clear, then, that magic is a recurrent feature of religion; and this is certainly confirmed when one considers some of the decadent practices of the higher religions, Christianity included.

Another feature of primitive as well as higher religion is sacrifice. Nineteenth-century anthropologists, such as Tylor and Spencer, explained sacrifice simply as an offering made to a god; but this seems an insufficient account. There must be some elementary *rationale* of sacrifice, even if the worshipper is not always conscious of it. Sacrifices to the dead are probably easily accounted for as expressions of fellow-feeling; but this can hardly be so in the case of offerings to supernatural beings. The most obvious reason would seem to be that of a kind of bribe, a gift to flatter a god and so buy his favour. Probably this is a very



common motive, since human beings are only too prone to indulge in this procedure among themselves.

Other theories of sacrifice have also been advanced.⁵ The French sociologists, Hubert and Mauss, thought that sacrifice is a system attempting to establish a real contact between the visible and invisible worlds. Since the unseen is *tabu*, entry to it could only be made by a priest with a dying victim and other occult accompaniments. A great deal of stress has been laid on the totemic sacrifice. The totem, often an animal regarded as a tribal god, is killed and then eaten by the tribe in order to assimilate its supernatural qualities. Cannibalism has a like justification; and so too has the practice formerly found among some North American Indians of eating their aged parents lest the tribal powers should be lost. This may well be the case among totemic peoples; but this is a distinct practice from sacrifice as generally understood.

Dr E. O. James argues that the essential feature of sacrifice is the shedding of blood in order to guarantee fertility and prosperity. The ritual killing of the king or his substitute in the religions of the ancient Near East can be explained on this basis. It is also an explanation given for the origin of the practice of circumcision. The gruesome human sacrifices performed on the gigantic tower-like buildings, or *teocalli*, of the Aztecs in Mexico, may also have had a similar purpose. Dr James believes that this idea of the preservation and propagation of life underlies all sacrifice, crude and refined. He sees a thread connecting these primitive acts with the spiritualized sacrifices of the higher religions, such as the Christian Eucharist.

Probably it is unwise to regard any one theory as explaining all sacrifice. The motive must invariably be a mixed one, and must vary according to place and period. The attempt to have communion with the supernatural and gain its favour is as comprehensive a view as one can accept. Sacrifice is but one of many instances of how the primitive mind reaches out towards a power greater than himself and the physical world around him. Sometimes this is little more than a feeling of awe in the presence of a vague impersonal power, sometimes it is the fear of

spirits, at others it is the veneration of gods. But, as we have seen, in all these cases there seems to be a dim underlying awareness of the supernatural. The germ of monism or monotheism is always there.

SHINTO

Of all the great living religions the most primitive is Shinto,⁶ the indigenous religion of Japan. It is a polytheism of nature-gods many of whom are barely more than spirits. It is very much the religion of a people who, apart from its Chinese contacts long ago, was cut off from the rest of the world until the latter half of the last century. It is little wonder, therefore, that Shinto is not only naturalistic but also nationalistic. It is the highest of the undeveloped religions of the world.

The main reason for this arrested growth is to be found in the fact that extraneous religions have come into Japan over the past thirteen hundred years, and have prevented Shinto from ever attaining mature stature. Long ago not only cultural refinements, such as writing, but also ancestor-worship were introduced from China. In the sixth century of our era Buddhism also came to Japan, was consolidated during the flowering of Japanese culture in the Nara period during the eighth century, and for more than a thousand years was in fact the religion of the country. It was a peculiar form of Buddhism grafted on to Shinto, and is known by the name *Ryobu*. Since 1868, when the Shogunate, the oligarchy of the nobles, was overthrown, the power of the Emperor reasserted, and more regular contact made with the outside world, Japan has also been influenced by Christianity and Western secular ideas.

Shinto is the most polytheistic of the living religions.⁷ Its official records number over three thousand deities, which even exceeds the pantheon of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Japanese often call their land 'the land of the Gods'. Most of these deities are personifications of natural objects or qualities, such as the sun, trees and natural growth. There are also man-gods — deifications of heroes and families or human qualities, mainly physical. The latter, for example, includes a god known

as 'the Strength of Hand Male'. But the greatest deity is Amaterasu, the Sun-goddess, symbolized on the Japanese flag, whose meeting place with men is the volcano Fujiyama. Her pre-eminence in the Japanese pantheon suggests that there are the glimmerings of a monotheism in Shinto, but it never becomes explicit.

Japanese mythology is highly fanciful, and is contained in two eighth-century books, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. There is also another sacred book the *Tengishiki*, which includes the *norito*, or ancient ritual, of Japan. The cosmology in these books shows that, in the Japanese imagination, there is no essential difference between gods and men: they are all part of nature, which is divine. All are descended from a primary male and female, whose chief descendant was the Sun-goddess, who in turn was the great ancestress of the emperor. The exalted position of the *mikado*, calling forth fanatical devotion, has become well known. A pre-war Japanese school reader illustrates this deification of the living dynasty.

Great Japan! Great Japan!
Our seventy million citizens
Look up to the Emperor even as to God,
And love and serve him as a parent.⁸

A commentary on the Japanese constitution describes the emperor as 'Heaven-descended, divine and sacred'. So profound was the veneration of the subject for his ruler, that it led to the grim Japanese practice of ceremonial suicide, *seppuku* or *harakiri*, in cases of failure to serve one's country. The Chinese veneration of ancestors undoubtedly reinforced this extreme form of patriotism. During the twelfth century a strict code of military chivalry, known as *Bushido*, took shape and dominated Japanese life until comparatively recently. In the naïve Shinto view of the world only Japan was regarded as divine. Other lands and peoples were thought of as evil.

It is often said that Shinto possesses 'neither creed, code nor canon'. By this it is meant that there is no official body of doctrine, no strict body of moral ideals and no authoritative scriptures. An unsophisticated naturalism pervades Japanese

religion. In consequence, its view is largely limited to this world: there is only the vaguest idea of an after-life. There is also hardly any idea of sin in the monotheistic sense, since man, like the gods, is part of nature and so himself divine. Sin is largely physical or ceremonial impurity, which is removed by magical means. The sprinkling of holy salt water, special ablutions, the scattering of salt on the threshold, the rubbing of paper charms on the person and the throwing of them into the sea, often accompanied by the recitation of a formula, are thought to remove defilement. The classic expression of these cleansing rites is the *Oho-Harahi*, or Ceremony of Great Purification, performed twice annually on behalf of the whole nation.⁹

Such a primitive religion could not satisfy the deeper religious needs of the people. Buddhism, therefore, made rapid progress in Japan, which is today one of its strongholds. But it was a foreign religion, so that as Japan gradually came more and more into contact with the outside world from the seventeenth century onwards a reaction set in. During the eighteenth century, notably in the work of Motoöri (d. 1801) and Hirata (d. 1813), revivalists taught that the golden age of Japan was that before the introduction of Chinese and Buddhist ideas. They argued that the reason why there is little ethical teaching in the Japanese scriptures is that the Japanese are naturally virtuous, unlike the Chinese who have to resort to a system of morals!

After the overthrow of the Shogunate in 1868 Shinto became the state religion, and fanned the fire of Japanese national ambition right up until the Second World War of this century, after which, largely through foreign demand, it was abolished. Such vestiges of state Shinto as remain are controlled by the Department of Home Affairs. There is, however, a good deal of sectarian Shinto, which, like Buddhism and Christianity, is supervised by the official Department of Religions. There are thirteen Shinto sects, whose members belong mainly to the lower classes; but, on the whole, they have little in common with the old nationalistic Shinto. The influence of Christianity and western humanism on them is only too evident. Today Buddhism and Christianity are still the two most progressive re-



ligions in Japan, the former having the most adherents. But in Japan, as in the rest of the world, industrialization is producing a materialist philosophy which bodes disquietingly for the future. One wonders whether the old polytheism, with its glimpse of one supreme deity in Amaterasu, was not more enlightened than the contemporary view that man's only needs are economic.

CHAPTER V

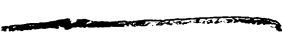
THE MONISTIC RELIGIONS

THE UNKNOWN ONE

The belief in one personal God is called 'monotheism', that in an impersonal Reality underlying and pervading all things is called 'monism'. Monism is also frequently equated with pantheism, the belief that God is everything and everything is God; but strictly monism is the belief that matter is of little consequence and that the only eternal thing is the immaterial, impersonal, indefinable One. Sometimes this is referred to as the 'Universal Soul', or the 'Spirit of the Universe' or by the philosophical term the 'Absolute'.

Monism has often attracted Western thinkers as a satisfying kind of religion. It was much in vogue among the idealist philosophers of the last century, notably Hegel and his followers. The English philosophers, T. H. Green and Bradley at Oxford, the brothers John and Edward Caird in Scotland, Royce in the United States, and Croce and Gentile in Italy were among the leading idealists who had a tremendous influence on the thinking of intelligent people in the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the present century.¹ Today, however, idealism is out of fashion among the professional philosophers, though there is a revived interest in it in some quarters, particularly among writers like Mr Aldous Huxley, who find so much satisfaction in Eastern thought.

As a basic religious belief monism is far more typical of the East than of the West. The great religions which have mostly influenced Europe, America and Africa are Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which are monotheistic. The great non-monotheistic living religions are Taoism and Confucianism in China, Hinduism in India, and Buddhism, which has adherents



in most of the lands of the Far East. These religions are on the whole monistic: that is, they teach not that there is one personal God but that the only eternal thing is an impersonal Reality. Sometimes this Reality, or Absolute, is thought of as pervading all material things; sometimes all material things are thought of as parts of the One; and at others the One is regarded as existing in splendid isolation and all material things as impermanent, almost illusory, departures from it.

On the surface this abstract kind of religion frequently appeals to those who want to be thought highly intellectual; but to mistake the abstract for the profound is foolish. Monism can be a very woolly religion, and lead people to despair. But, highly intellectual as monism may appear to be, the monistic religions have in practice become debased. The reason for this is that philosophical abstractions do not really satisfy most people. They long for a more tangible religion; and so gods and other supernatural beings, heavens and hells, and most of the imagery common to all the great religions occur in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism quite as much as they do elsewhere. The Chinese religion known as Taoism is a particularly good example of how unsatisfying a highly intellectual religion proved to be in the long run.

TAOISM

The Chinese Religious Complex

It is often said that China has not one religion but three: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. This is roughly true, but it needs certain qualifications. One might equally well speak of the six religions of China; for behind the three already mentioned lies the earlier spiritism, with its worship of good and evil beings and of ancestors, while in more recent times both Christianity and Islam have contributed to the religious life of that great country. And, as far as the present political élite are concerned, there is no doubt that a seventh religious — or rather anti-religious — creed, derived from Russian Marxist sources, can be detected. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism are, however, the classical religions of China. But it must not be supposed that

they exist separately. Chinese religion is rather one phenomenon, an amalgam, made up of these three. A devout Chinaman is not a Taoist or a Confucian or a Buddhist: he is all three at one and the same time, and an ancestor-worshipper as well.

Taoism derives its name from the important Chinese religious and philosophical term *Tao*, which is usually translated 'Way', meaning the 'Way of the Universe'. It might equally well be rendered 'Law' or 'Reason', or as the Chinese equivalent of the Greek word 'Logos', which has played a big part in Christian as well as Greek thought.

Lao Tse and His Book

The traditional founder of this school of Chinese religion was Lao Tse, who is said to have lived in the sixth century B.C. and was thus an older contemporary of Confucius. His name is sometimes transliterated as *Lao Tzu*, and often known by the latinized version, *Laocius*. Many Chinese proper names were latinized by Christian missionaries in the seventeenth century, who were the first to tell Europeans about China. *Confucius* is a latinization of *Kung Fu Tse*, *Mencius* of *Meng Tse*. Of recent years some sinologists have suggested that in fact Lao Tse lived later, while there have been those who have said of him, as has been said of many of the great religious geniuses of the world, that he never lived at all. For our purpose there is little point in doubting his historicity and customary dating. Lao Tse was a high-ranking civil servant, who in his old age decided to retire in order to engage in meditation. Legend has it that he travelled westward, far beyond the frontiers of China and was never seen again; but legend also tells how, before he crossed the border, he agreed to the request of the guard that he should write down his teaching in a book.

This book is the *Tao-Teh-Ching*, 'the Book of the Way and of Virtue', the Taoist classic.² Its opening words declare: 'The Power which can be defined is not the Eternal Power; the name by which it can be named is not its eternal name.' This is reminiscent of what many great religious teachers have taught, that Reality, whether we regard it as personal or impersonal, is

beyond the grasp of our finite human intelligence. A Hindu sage of long ago said of Reality that it is 'not this, not that'. And Christian theologians, as we have already noted, have always recognized that, as far as unaided human reason is concerned, we can only speak accurately of God by saying what he is not; for as soon as we say anything positive we are ascribing to him some kind of limitation. Yet Lao Tse cannot remain entirely silent, and he goes on to say of the Tao: 'Therefore only he who is ever passionless may behold its mystery. He who is ever subject to his passions may only see its external manifestations.'

He also ascribes certain attributes to the Tao, as when he says it is 'invisible, inaudible and intangible; as without substance, yet containing within itself all substance; as all-producing, all-pervading, all-nourishing and all-perfecting'. The aim of human life should be to return to harmony, even identity, with the Tao. The unthinking universe is always moving to this end: man must consciously move towards it. What enables man to do this is *teh*, virtue; but he must bring about this harmony without striving. Taoism is thus a form of quietism. Lao Tse opposed force and strife, advocating instead passivity. In this respect he was nearer Christ's teaching of the Golden Rule to do good to our enemies than was Confucius, whose Silver Rule advocated doing good only to those who are good.

After the time of Lao Tse other philosophers perpetuated his teaching, notably Chuang Tse, who lived in the fourth century B.C. Chuang Tse, however, seems to move away from the impersonal idea of Reality and pictures Tao as God. He also seems to believe in the survival of individual souls after death. This development is important; for it clearly indicates that absolutism — belief in an impersonal power pervading the universe — is an unsatisfying substitute for religion. Men have frequently been tempted to think that a pantheistic philosophy is superior to religion, but in fact it falls far short. The conviction that the power controlling the universe cannot be less than what human beings are and must be more invariably asserts itself.

The Decline of Taoism

The later history of Taoism is, however, less noble. The mass of people were incapable of grasping the mysticism of Lao Tse and Chuang Tse; and the religion soon degenerated into a system of magic. Popular Taoism has taken a literalist interpretation of its founder's teaching. Lao Tse indeed taught men to seek for the Tao and become one with it; but this was to be achieved on a spiritual level. In fact, Taoists have attempted to attain harmony with the Tao by means of magic and the worship of innumerable godlings and saints, among them the many Taoist popes.

Yet Taoism has contributed something positive to Chinese religion. Buddhism was too pessimistic and other-worldly to prove the only satisfying religion; while Confucianism was simply a formal moral code with little popular appeal. Taoism supplied the colourful, happy, optimistic strand in the religion of China.

CONFUCIANISM

Kung Fu Tse

Confucianism is a system of moral and political philosophy rather than a religion, though, as we have seen, it has become part of the Chinese religious complex. Its founder, Kung Fu Tse, usually known to the West by the latinized form of his name *Confucius*, was born c. 550 B.C., and was, like Lao Tse, a high-ranking civil servant. Eventually disgusted by the pleasure-seeking of the ruler of his native province of Lu, he became a wandering teacher of philosophy. He died in 479 B.C. a disillusioned man, whose memory and teaching were, however, kept alive by his disciples. At his tomb at Peking, which bears the simple legend 'Confucius the Primal Sage', annual sacrifices were still offered until the Revolution of 1911.

If Laocius was a romanticist, Confucius was a classicist. His life and teaching were characterized by a stoic-like formalism, which were the typical feature of the cultured Chinaman.³ Although he held no unduly optimistic view about human society, he regarded man as fundamentally good, and was him-

self one of simple, methodical life. We are told that if his mat were not straight he would not sit on it; and he always insisted that his meat should be properly cut and served with its appropriate sauce. He believed that in the far distant past there had been a golden age when men lived perfectly; and he set out to restore it in his own day, only to find the task impossible. Shortly before his death he declared: 'No intelligent monarch arises; there is not one in the empire that will make me his master. My time has come to die.' There is something priggish about Confucius, although he is one of the greatest of Chinese thinkers. Whether he can be regarded as a religious, as distinct from an ethical, teacher is open to doubt, since he was curiously reticent on specifically religious matters. But he devoutly observed Chinese religious practices, particularly in regard to sacrifice and the veneration of ancestors. While he accepted the doctrines of the Chinese sacred books, many of which he edited, his own sayings are mainly preserved in his *Analects*.

Later Exponents

After Confucius himself the two great Confucian scholars are Meng Tse (Mencius) and Chu Tse. If Confucius is compared with Plato, then Mencius may be compared with Aristotle and Chu Tse with Aquinas — at least chronologically; but Mencius is often regarded as the Aquinas of Confucianism, the great Chinese Scholastic.

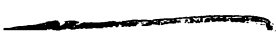
Mencius lived in the fourth century B.C., and so was the Chinese contemporary of the great Greek philosophers. Legge, the nineteenth-century pioneer sinologist, maintained: 'When we place Mencius among them he can look them in the face.' Like Confucius he was disappointed with men's response to his message, and lived his latter years in retirement, writing and teaching. In his great work *The Book of Mencius* he continues to expound the doctrine of the Master, specially developing the theme that human nature is fundamentally good.⁴ Yet for a long time Mencius was less popular than many other scholars, notably Hsun Tse, who did not accept Mencius's doctrine of original goodness in human nature.

Chu Tse, sometimes known as Chu Hsi, who flourished in the twelfth century A.D., was an encyclopaedic scholar well-versed in Buddhist and Taoist as well as Confucian learning. He may even have been acquainted with Islam and Nestorian Christianity, which by that time had become known to the Far East. His commentaries and treatises have long been standard works of Confucian orthodoxy, in which he continues to teach the optimistic estimate of human nature and is even more silent than his predecessors on distinctly theological matters.

By no means all the great teachers contemporary with Confucius and Mencius were in the Confucian tradition. Yang Tse taught that personal pleasure was the paramount aim of life. Hsun Tse played the Chinese Calvin by teaching his very un-Confucian doctrine of the depravity of man. But perhaps the most arresting teacher, little known hitherto to the West, was Mo Tse (or Mo Ti), who maintained that universal love was the supreme virtue.⁵ Yet in the long run it was the cold humanism of Confucius and Mencius that prevailed as the distinctive Chinese view of life.

The Chinese Sacred Books

There is no doctrine of divine inspiration in the Chinese view of the Confucian books. They are sacred simply because they record the good examples of past ages and set forth the character of the good man. For Confucius ethics predominated over theology. As we have already noted, he was comparatively silent on religious matters. He preferred to call deity by the impersonal name *Tien* (Heaven) rather than the personal name *Shang Ti* (Supreme Ruler). Again, he would say little about the after life: 'Not understanding what life is, how can you understand death?'.⁶ The supreme office of religion is to point out the truth contained in the *Book of Odes*: 'Heaven, having given life to man, raised up princes to rule them and teachers to instruct them.' Religion is, then, for Confucius not concerned with any divine revelation or with an eternal world or with salvation from sin, but with the promotion of the virtuous life, in which the veneration of ancestors plays an important part.



The Chinese canon consists of two main parts, *Five Classics* and *Four Books*,⁷ the former being held in higher esteem because of their greater antiquity. The *Five Classics* consist of: *The Book of Records*, the oldest of all, which purports to record speeches of early emperors and statesmen; *The Book of Odes*, made up of poems and folk-songs; *The Book of Rites*, containing the regulations for the proper conduct of public and private religious ceremonies; *The Book of Changes*, a strange speculative treatise on certain diagrams used in divination; and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, often spoken of as 'a mirror for princes', a prosaic account of the state of Lu by Confucius himself.

The Four Books are: *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, both ethical works, the one a treatise on education, the other advocating, as its title suggests, the importance of a balanced frame of mind devoid of extremism; *The Analects of Confucius*, sayings of the Master probably compiled by a second generation of his disciples, a kind of summary of the Confucian gospel; and *The Book of Mencius*, an anthology of the work of the great Chinese Scholastic. The four books were formerly the basic literature of Chinese education, and had to be learnt by heart by any student who wished to get on. They and *The Five Classics* were held to teach 'the revered and honoured path prescribed by Heaven'. But in practice the will of Heaven was sought in other ways, notably by means of divination.

Confucian Theology

It is because of its association with the ancient state sacrificial cult that Confucianism is commonly regarded as a religion. As we have seen, Confucius himself would say little about deity; but even in his time the Chinese, while believing in many good and evil spirits, recognized a Supreme Being, Tien (Heaven) or Shang Ti (Supreme Ruler). There has been a great deal of argument amongst writers on Chinese religions whether this suggests that the Chinese have always had a latent monotheism or whether this Supreme deity developed out of an earlier animism. As an historical problem this is impossible to settle, as we know so little of the earliest form of any religion and, in any

case, are still inclined to be bewitched by the dubious thesis that higher forms of religion must have evolved from earlier lower forms. The probability is that monotheism and animism, belief in one God and belief in good and evil spirits, have existed side by side from time immemorial.

Shang Ti himself is not anthropomorphically represented in Chinese religion; but he is regarded as supreme over all other gods, spirits and men. He can depose gods and emperors for moral unworthiness, and is the fount of the moral sense of mankind. The fact that Confucius preferred the more impersonal name of Tien, however, and would say little about God suggests that he was a monist. He was probably chary of upsetting established official beliefs and practices lest it should also upset the political and moral condition of society. In any case, popular Chinese religion is so much concerned with spirits, ancestors and magic that Shang Ti figures only in the background. Further, the impact of Taoism and Buddhism have both discouraged the growth of monotheism. For these reasons Confucianism may be regarded as at heart monistic.

This becomes even clearer when we consider Chinese cosmology. Here God is not the creator: at most the literature suggests that he gave birth to mankind. The universe came into being rather as a result of the interaction of two fundamental cosmic principles, *yang* and *yin*, which are symbolized by the male and female, right and left, good and evil, light and dark, summer and winter in nature. *Yang* and *yin* underlie the whole of the Chinese magical system. Chu Tse goes even further than Confucius in suggesting that this impersonal dualism is the primary fact about the universe. Where magic prevails there is rarely a strong monotheistic faith in God; for a magical system necessarily implies an amoral impersonal Reality. There is, therefore, little thought of a Creator, nor is there any trace of a divine purpose. The universe is a ceaseless emanation rather than a creation.

The Confucian Ethic

According to Confucius, man is good by nature, and needs



only to be educated aright. According to *The Book of Records*, 'The great God has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense, compliance with which would show their nature invariably right.' Evil is simply a departure from man's natural goodness. It does not seem to have occurred to Confucius and his school, any more than to many other humanist philosophers, to ask why this departure should ever have become so universal.

The attainment of goodness is, in the Confucian view, dependent upon the five cardinal virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity. The most important of these is the first, benevolence (*jen*), upon which is built up the five-fold relationship so characteristic of the Confucian ethic: father-son, ruler-people, husband-wife, brother-sister, friend-friend. The father-son relationship is basic; for if a father sets a good example to his son and a son acts in filial obedience to his father their society will be built on a sure moral foundation. The man who acts in accordance with this ideal is the Confucian 'superior man', who also always maintains a middle course in all things, not unlike that advocated in the Aristotelean ethic.

Confucian benevolence, however, falls short of Taoist teaching and further still of the Christian virtue of love (*agape*). Whereas Lao Tse taught that man should do good to those who did not do good to him, Confucius regarded goodness as only reciprocal. Rather does he teach in *The Analects* that enmity should not be met by kindness but by justice. Kindness should be reserved only for the kind.⁸

There is little sense of sin in Chinese religion; and moral evil is thought of simply as the result of deterioration. Neither Confucius nor Mencius seems to have been aware that this admitted deterioration reflected badly on man's nature; for if he were naturally good how could he deteriorate? Men are saved by a good example and good government: Confucius was an oriental Pelagian.⁹

But needless to say this teaching did not satisfy the rank and file. Indeed, it was never found in isolation, but superimposed upon the State Cult with its sacrificial system. Even so, the

indigenous religion and the doctrine of Confucius together proved inadequate, even with an admixture of Taoism. Buddhism has largely supplied China with its more specifically religious features. Buddhism came to China in the first century A.D. from India; and it is now to India that we must turn for the more profound religious quest of the East.

HINDUISM

Pre-Aryan India

Until a generation ago it was widely believed that before the invasion of India by people of Indo-European stock from Central Asia at the end of the second millennium B.C. there was no significant civilization in India. We have already noted that recent archaeological discoveries over the past thirty years in the Indus valley, notably at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, have revealed several civilizations going back to the third millennium B.C. and perhaps even earlier. As yet any picture of the ancient Indus valley religion is bound to be speculative, as it has to be reconstructed from material remains without literary documents.

Nevertheless, it is clear that this early Indian religion was by no means an isolated phenomenon, and was in many ways similar to the religion of Sumeria in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and that of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization in Greece and Crete. Indeed, it is probable that there was more contact between the East and the Mediterranean at that time than was once imagined. The excavations in the Indus valley have shown that the religion of its ancient civilizations was, like that of the ancient Levant, an agricultural cult with a great Mother-goddess at its centre. This Mother-goddess represented the permanent elements in nature, while her consort gods symbolized the transient features. Unfortunately so far tablets documenting the rituals of the Indus religion do not exist; but it is likely that the ceremonies were concerned with perpetuating the favourable recurrence of the seasons and fertility in nature. Doubtless many features of this religion survived the Indo-European invasion, and still figure in the popular village religion of



India, against which the brahmans have constantly had to contend.

The Vedic Age

Towards the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium B.C. the wandering shepherds living in Central Asia began to migrate southward and eastward in search of new and better lands. Their name, their language, their art, even their religion is largely a matter of inference, for at that stage they had no writing and little material culture. They are known to us as Indo-Europeans, because the Indian and the western European peoples are all sprung from them. At one time they were also known as Aryans, but it has now become a convention to use the term 'Aryan' to designate language rather than race. It must be remembered that, although at first race and language coincided, after many migrations, interminglings and conquests race and language did not always do so; and today they coincide even less.¹⁰ The Celts, the Greeks, the Italic peoples, the Norsemen and the Goths were all waves of Indo-European invaders who probably came from Central Asia, though it should be noted that there is also a theory that Central Europe was the original home of these peoples. We are, however, more certain about the invasion of some of these Aryan peoples through the mountainous passes of the north-west frontier into the fertile plains of India. Gradually they spread further south, subduing the indigenous Dravidian population.

With them they brought their religion, the worship of nature gods not unlike that of the Hellenic invaders of Greece and the Celtic, Italic and Teutonic invaders of Europe. This religion is known to us through the *Vedas*, hymns in Sanskrit, the classical language of India cognate with Greek and Latin; and these hymns, though doubtless at first passed on only by oral tradition, were committed to writing. The word '*Veda*' means 'knowledge';¹¹ and to this day the Hindu believes that the doctrines of his religion are enshrined in these hymns. On the surface, however, these hymns are in honour of three kinds of nature deities: gods of the heaven, like the sky god Varuna and Vishnu

the sun god; gods of the air, such as Rudra the storm god and Indra the god of war; and gods of the earth, among them the fire god Agni and the sacred intoxicant Soma.

The *Vedas*, which were used by the four different classes of priests in connexion with the sacrifices, consist of four books, of which the *Rigveda*, the earliest, is the most important. Among these hymns in praise of the gods are three which are particularly significant in the subsequent development of Indian religion. One of them asserts a divine origin of the Hindu caste system, which is still powerful in India despite the recognition of its absurdity by enlightened Hindus. Although there are many sub-divisions, the four main castes are the *brahmans*¹² or priests, the *rajanyas* or warriors, the *vaisyas* or traders, and the *sudras* or slaves. Doubtless the first three castes were in origin the invaders, while the *sudras* were the conquered people. A verse in one of the Rigvedic hymns imagines the four castes as being born of Purusha, the original man.

The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was
the Rajanya made.
His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the
Sudra was produced.¹³

Two other hymns hint at the peculiar future trend of Hinduism away from polytheism to monism rather than monotheism. One of these declares that the several gods are only manifestations of one basic deity.

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni,
And he is heavenly, noble-winged Garutman.
To what is one sages give many titles.
They call him Agni, Varuna, Matarisvan.¹⁴

For this view of the gods the celebrated nineteenth-century orientalist Max Müller invented the term *kathenotheism*, or more briefly *henotheism*, the worship of one god at a time. Such a conception of the Hindu pantheon might have led to monotheism; but in fact it did not lead to the belief in one supreme personal god, of whom the many gods were popular versions. Instead, under the guidance of the brahmans, the Indian people were taught to envisage an impersonal cosmic soul, or

Absolute, as underlying the Hindu pantheon. There is a hint of this even in the *Rigveda* itself; for one of the hymns in the tenth *mandala*, or section, almost deifies the interrogative pronoun 'who?' and so suggest that some indefinable Reality is more fundamental than any of the personal gods of the Vedic pantheon.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as we shall see, there was also a popular tendency to accord greater honour to certain gods than to others: as Zeus became *primus inter pares* in the Greek pantheon, so Varuna became one of the greatest of the Indian deities.

During the early Vedic period the warrior chiefs may well have been more important than the priests; but after the settlement of these hitherto war-like nomads as an agricultural people in the fertile but enervating plains of India the priests eventually became more powerful. Under them the religion took its distinctive turn in the direction of monism.

The Brahmanic Age

During the first half of the first millennium B.C. the brahmans succeeded in dominating the whole country. Economically the land flourished, largely as a result of trade with countries to the north-west; but socially there were movements towards depression, particularly in the fixation of the caste system and in the low position accorded to women. The sacrifices became a 'closed shop', the exclusive possession of the priests, who were regarded as divine. Says one of the priestly books of the period, 'Verily, there are two kinds of gods; for, indeed, the gods are the gods; and the brahmans who have studied and teach the sacred lore are the human gods.'¹⁶ It was the same book which laid it down that no Hindu could lawfully eat in his wife's presence.

No doubt many of the aboriginal cults continued with their nature worship, but only in a clandestine way; for an educational system grew up whereby the boys of the first three castes received their instruction only from the priests. Hence the priestly, warrior and merchant castes are often known as the 'twice born', since their sons' education by the brahmans is regarded as a second birth. Each school of priests had its own oral

tradition which in time was recorded in books now known as the *Brahmanas*. Unlike the *Vedas* they have little literary merit or profound spiritual content: they consist mainly of magical formulae and regulations for the conduct of sacrifices.

It must have been about this time that the asceticism so characteristic of Hinduism began to be practised. It became the fashion for many to leave their homes and live as hermits in the forests. Self-mortification was expected of such ascetics; and one of their rigid rules was *ahimsa*, harmlessness, which to this day is one of the great virtues of Hinduism and its derivative religion, Buddhism. These ascetics were, of course, the predecessors of the Indian holy men of today, who wander about begging their food, having no homes and doing no work. They are greatly venerated by the mass of the people, and regarded as passing straight to *nirvana*, or eternal peace, when they die.

The Upanishads

By the middle of the first millennium, say, between 600 and 450 B.C., Hinduism had begun to take its classic shape. The power of the brahmans increased yet more; and out of their speculation grew up the monistic religio-philosophy enshrined in the books known as the *Upanishads*. The name comes from a Sanskrit root meaning 'to sit near', and so indicates the secret knowledge learned by the pupils of each of the thirteen priestly schools.¹⁷ Although mythology plays a part in these books, they all teach that the ultimate reality is the impersonal One or Absolute, known as Brahman. The *Brahmanas* have been described as 'the most absurd and uninteresting prose literature in the world'; but no one could say this of the *Upanishads*. They are often noble and profound, as can be seen from the famous Upanishadic prayer:

From the unreal lead me to the real.
From darkness lead me to light.
From death lead me to immortality.¹⁸

It is little wonder that it has been said, 'To every Indian brahman today the *Upanishads* are what the New Testament is to the Christian.'¹⁹

The philosophy of the *Upanishads* has come to be called *Vedanta*, literally 'Veda-end', because it was believed, almost certainly erroneously, that the pantheism of the *Upanishads* was implicit in the *Veda*. As we saw earlier, however, the *Vedas* are in fact hymns in praise of nature gods, and there are only a few hints here and there of teaching that was to grow later into pantheism. Some modern writers, keen to commend *Vedanta* to the West, such as the Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan, argue that the *Upanishads* are not pantheistic; but it is difficult to avoid the view that they are. The material world and human personality are regarded as unreal, and the only abiding reality is *Brahman*.

The Soul (*Atman*) which pervades all things . . .
This is Brahman, the highest mystic doctrine.²⁰

The aim of the human soul, or *atman*, is to be absorbed into and lose its identity for ever in *Brahman*: hence the cosmic purpose is often expressed in what is known as the *Brahman-atman* equation. In one of the *Upanishads* there is the famous analogy of salt dissolved in water illustrating the absorption of the human soul into the World Soul.²¹

Bound up with *Vedanta* also is the doctrine of rebirth, which many think Plato and other Greek philosophers must have learnt indirectly from India. It is today still one of the characteristic Hindu beliefs. Just as one universe lasting countless ages is, according to Hindu cosmology, succeeded by another, so there is in human life a constant process of birth and rebirth whereby the human soul, which is a fragment of the World Soul, is born time and time again according to its deserts. Thus, if an ordinary Hindu lives an evil life he may on the death of his body be reborn as an animal or even into some lower form of life; but if he is virtuous he may be reborn as a holy man. And the good ascetic, on his death, is not reborn, but is liberated for ever from *karma*,²² the cycle of reincarnation, and is absorbed into *Brahman*. Such union with the impersonal Reality brings with it the final peace, known as *nirvana*.

Such a religion counts the everyday world of the senses for

very little. It is unreal, impermanent, and a hindrance to salvation. There is, too, no suggestion that this world is God's creation and that man is made in the image of God. Human personality, far from giving an insight into the nature of God, is itself transitory and a departure from the Universal One. This creed is not without its nobler aspects. It helps men to realize that the physical world is, after all, a fleeting thing in which we should not put our sole trust. There is nothing materialistic about Hinduism at its best. It also teaches the rule of *ahimsa*, harmlessness; for every form of life, even the meanest insect, should be allowed to travel on its road upward through life after life to release from rebirth and to *nirvana*. On the other hand, there is an enervating atmosphere about Hinduism, which encourages little concern for the misery of the world and little effort to put it right. God is not a loving Creator but a relentless impersonal Somewhat; and human minds, far from enabling us to understand in part the mind of God, are themselves unreal. Inevitably there is an ethical weakness in Hinduism; for mystical enlightenment is rated higher than moral goodness. In short, this world is, for the Hindu, not a vale of soul-making but a stumbling-block to self-salvation. Hinduism is indeed a religion of salvation, but that salvation is effected by man himself and not by God. An impersonal Reality can hardly have any concern for human beings.

Jainism

This classical form of Hinduism emerged out of the philosophical speculation of the brahmans; but we should note here that during the sixth century B.C. there were two important unorthodox movements in Hinduism which led to the formation of two separate religions, the one Jainism,²³ the other Buddhism, which was to become not only a world faith but a greater religion than its parent. Of Buddhism more will be said later. Both of these excursions from orthodox Hinduism, however, were the result of a lay revolt against sacerdotal control and of an accompanying intensification of the fashion for asceticism.

Jainism was traditionally founded by Mahavira, the Great



Hero, who emphasized yet more the duty of harmlessness to every creature; for he taught that every particle of matter has its *atman*, which must seek for a better re-birth next time, and so ascend to *nirvana*. Many of the Jain monks lived as nudists and undertook the severest self-mortification.²⁴ Jainism repudiated the divine inspiration of the Vedas and the authority of the brahmans, but later compromised with Hinduism by worshipping the Hindu deities, whose existence it had at first denied.

The Sutras and the Epics

The five hundred years immediately B.C. were a period of rich cultural life in India. Despite the short-lived invasion of Darius the Persian c. 500 B.C. and that of Alexander the Great in 326 B.C., architecture and sculpture flourished; and shortly after Alexander's death the first Indian empire, with its capital at Patna, was established by Chandragupta. His grandson Asoka, who was eventually to become a Buddhist monk, extended its influence even further.

Brahmanic learning was becoming stereotyped, and with it grew the need for text books for its students. Knowledge was by now divided into six divisions: ceremonial, pronunciation, grammar, etymology, metre and astrology; and the books on each of these were called *sutras*.²⁵ The most important were those on ceremonial, out of one of which later on grew the *Dharmaśāstras*, or Law Books.

More important are the two great Indian epics which took shape about this time. They are neither of them religious works, but, like the Homeric epics of ancient Greece, they reveal between the lines a good deal of information about Hinduism at this stage. Doubtless these stories are much older: they may have been handed on orally from the beginning of the first millennium. One of these long poems is the *Ramayana*, which tells how a prince, *Rama*, was deprived of his throne, how he fought with demons while in exile in the forest, how he rescued his wife from them, and how he was at last happily reconciled with his usurping brother. The gods appear much as in the *Veda*, but,

perhaps as a result of later editing at the beginning and end, Rama is represented as a partial manifestation on earth of the god Vishnu. The other great poem is the *Mahabharata*, which tells of the unsuccessful struggle of the prince of the Kurus against the prince of the Pandus, who have enlisted the aid of another chieftain, Krishna. Here, too, originally the religious beliefs seem to have been polytheistic, with an inclination to regard Brahman as personal and the greatest of the gods. But as the story develops the Pandavas become the heroes of the tale, while Krishna appears as an incarnation of Vishnu, who is now the equal of Brahman. About the beginning of the Christian era a remarkable addition was made to this epic, the *Bhagavad-gita*, which, though not regarded as one of the ancient sacred texts, is to this day one of the most well-loved religious books in India.

Before discussing the *Gita*, as it is often called for short, we should note that it was during this period that other languages grew out of Sanskrit, notably Prakrit, from which the modern Aryan languages of India are descended, and Pali, a vernacular used to write the canonical books of Buddhism. But the careful study of Sanskrit remained an integral part of a brahman's education, because it is the language of the *Veda* and the *Upanishads*, the great original literature of Hinduism.²⁶

The Six Schools

In order to understand the *Gita* better we must also know that shortly before its composition Hinduism divided up into six orthodox schools of philosophy. They are:

1. *Karma Mimamsa* ('Work Enquiry'), the earliest but now obsolete teaching of a literal inspiration kind on the *Veda*.
2. *Uttara Mimamsa* ('Later Enquiry'), the monistic philosophy of the *Upanishads*.
3. *Samkhya*, an atheistic theory attributed to Kapila that the cosmos originated out of the intermingling of *purusha* (pure spirit) and *prakriti* (raw matter).

4. *Yoga*, much the same as Samkhya but not atheistic, founded by Patanjali, who advocated meditation and control of the physical body as a means of attaining a state of bliss.
5. *Vaiseshika*, whose founder was nicknamed 'the Atom-eater', because he attributes the origin of the universe to atoms.
6. *Nyaya*, the Vaiseshika atomism with a highly developed logic added.

The first, fifth and sixth of these schools need not detain us: but the other three play an important rôle in subsequent Hinduism. As we have already seen, *Vedanta* is the classical Indian monism. *Samkhya* adds to this the dualistic theory that the universe emanates from the collision of two primary principles and has no supreme mind behind it.²⁷ To many people in the West *Yoga* is a method of physical culture; but unfortunately many of the popular books and articles on the subject omit to stress that the object of *Yoga* is not the development of a fine physique or the maintenance of sound health but the subjection of the body to the mind in order to meditate and even fall into a trance. The *yogin* thus accepts the dualism of Samkhya, but seeks in himself to separate mind from matter, so that his mind can attain union with God. The true *yogin* is perhaps the nearest Indian approach to the Christian and other monotheistic mystics.

The Bhagavadgita

The Song of the Adorable One was incorporated into the *Mahabharata* early in the Christian era, when Hindus were coming more and more to believe in the appearance of certain gods, particularly Vishnu, in the spatial, temporal world. Doubtless most men were growing weary of an abstract religion, and longed for a warmer and more vivid idea of the power that controlled man and the universe. In Buddhism, too, a similar trend led to schism: the Southern School clung to cold philosophy, whereas the Northern School began to regard the

Buddha as more than a great teacher of long ago, as a divine Being who still compassionately helps men towards *nirvana*.

In the eighth book of the *Mahabharata* the Pandu and Kuru chiefs are unable to bring about a peaceful settlement of their differences; and it is here that the eighteen chapters making up the *Gita* are interpolated.²⁸ Arjuna, the prince of the Pandus, sure as he is of victory, hesitates to fight; for he is repelled by the thought of unnecessary bloodshed, and feels even more for his foe than for his own troops. Thus perplexed he appeals to his charioteer, Krishna, who now reveals himself as an *avatar*, or descent to earth, of the god Vishnu. The *Bhagavadgita* is mainly a sermon resolving Arjuna's difficulties. The answer embodies an eclectic theology combining, often with some inconsistency, the monism of *Vedanta* and the *Samkhya* dualism of spirit and matter with *Yoga* discipline and meditation. But overriding these is a new doctrine teaching *bhakti*, loving devotion, to a personal God. Nevertheless there is no mitigation of caste duty. Arjuna must do his duty without thought of reward and fight out of adoring obedience to Vishnu. The amoral influence of *Vedanta* and *Samkhya* is also seen in the disregard for physical suffering. The cutting short of human lives and the sorrow of the bereaved matter little, since this world and this life are of little abiding value.

Nevertheless, in the *Gita* with its personal theism and the accompanying teaching of the love of God for man and of man's duty to love God, the ordinary Hindu, debarred from the priestly books, finds his inspiration. It has been aptly described as 'the layman's *Upanishad*':²⁹ it is little wonder that some have called it the St John's Gospel of Hinduism. The book ends with the prince's confession:

My bewilderment has vanished away; I have gotten remembrance by thy grace, O Never-Falling. I stand freed from doubt; I will do thy word.³⁰

The *Gita* is also interesting because it clearly marks the re-assertion of theism, which *Vedanta* has always tried to suppress. Hinduism makes no serious claim that God has ever become incarnate in the historical sense, as in Christianity. But

from the time of the *Gita* onwards *avatars*, or theophanies, figure prominently in the Hindu imagination.³¹ Thus Vishnu appears at first to Arjuna as his charioteer, and in the course of his teaching declares:

To guard the righteous, to destroy evil-doers, to establish the Law, I come to birth age after age.³²

Then the god takes on his more regal form, as usually represented in Hindu art, four-armed, 'with diadem, with mace, with disc in hand'; but in the eleventh chapter he reveals himself in all his terrible glory. Says Arjuna:

I behold in Thy body, O God, all the gods and hosts of the orders of born beings, Lord Brahman sitting on the lotus-throne, and all the saints and heavenly serpents.

I behold Thee of many arms, bellies, faces, and eyes, on all sides endless; I behold in Thee no end nor midst nor beginning, O All-Sovran of all forms. . . .

Looking upon Thy mighty form of many mouths and eyes, of many arms and thighs and feet, of many bellies, and grim with many teeth, O might-armed one, the worlds and I quake. . . .

As moths with exceeding speed pass into a lighted fire to perish, so pass the worlds with exceeding speed into Thy mouths to perish.³³

Although Vishnu is regarded by the Hindu as the Preserver, this terrifying theophany reveals the Hindu belief that there is a destructive aspect of deity. Pantheism must logically deny that there is any real conflict between good and evil.

Sectarianism

The period A.D. 300 to 1200 was marked first by a decline and then by a revival in Hinduism. Hitherto Buddhism had also made progress in India, but now it was gradually ousted by its parent religion and eventually flourished only outside the land of its birth. Doubtless the Mongolian invasion of India in the fifth century, which brought fifty years of massacre and oppression, helped to bring Hinduism to a low ebb. The simple moral grandeur of the *Vedas* and even the noble mysticism of the *Upanishads* give place to sectarian controversy and the

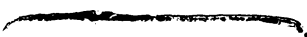
composition of sectarian books, known as *Puranas*, telling absurd myths about the gods.

Three gods in particular had their special sects, and formed a kind of Hindu trinity, manifesting the impersonal *Brahman*. These were Brahma the Creator, with his consort the goddess of wisdom, Vishnu the Preserver, married to the goddess of wealth, and Siva the Destroyer, whose consort is sometimes known as Kali. Each deity had its own sect; and the two most important were the Vishnuites, who worshipped the image of Vishnu, and the Sivites, who venerated images of the male and female sexual organs as their symbol of deity. The cult of Kali was divided into a right hand and a left hand school, the latter advocating robbery and murder as religious practices.

This sectarianism was accompanied by a great amount of temple building, much of it very fine work; but artistic achievement is not necessarily a sign of moral greatness. Temple prostitution was another feature of some of the sects. Inevitably pantheism leads to this kind of religion; for if God embraces all things room must be found in deity for evil as well as good.³⁴ Doubtless many of the vicious practices of popular Hinduism were really revivals of the latent pre-Aryan fertility religion. Nevertheless, later on there was a nobler side to Hinduism. All the sects taught that their devotees should worship the sect god out of loving devotion, *bhakti*, and were feeling after one supreme god, despite the underlying doctrine of the impersonality of *Brahman*.

During the eighth century a great teacher, Sankara, who has been dubbed 'the Aquinas of Hinduism', systematized the absolute monism of *Vedanta*, known as *advaita*, or 'non-duality'.³⁵ He reinforced the teaching that *Brahman* is alone Reality, that man's soul must be fused with it, and that all else is *maya* (illusion). Sankara accepted, however, the worship of the gods, but regarded them solely as temporal manifestations of the Absolute. He also effected reforms in Hindu religious institutions, notably by founding monasteries to foster learning.

If Sankara is the great advocate of Hindu Absolutism, Ramanuja, who lived four hundred years later, emphasized the



theistic side of Hinduism. A Vishnuite high priest from the South, he taught that Vishnu is the supreme manifestation of *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* is personal. He also believed that *nirvana* did not mean the obliteration of human personality, but that some kind of individual consciousness remains even when release from *karma* is attained. But he spoke only to the twice-born, the first three main castes. Like all other Hindu leaders he had scant good news for the *sudras* and less still for the outcastes, who to this day are socially ostracized. Yet the semi-monotheism of Ramanuja continued, and, perhaps influenced later by Islam, produced many poets who sang of the gods as if they loved human beings. One of the most famous of these was Tulsi Das, whose epic about the hero Rama, an avatar of Vishnu, dates from the end of the sixteenth century.

Muslim Domination

The Muhammadan invasion of India from the north-west began in the twelfth century, and by the sixteenth century, particularly under Akbar, the Mogul Empire reached its highest power. At first there was a determined effort to impose Islam on India, but the contact of the two religions inevitably led to an interest by Muslims in Hinduism and by Hindus in Islam. Akbar himself, almost an exact contemporary of Elizabeth I of England, attempted to establish an eclectic religion combining all the faiths of his empire. During the first half of the sixteenth century the poet Kabir had attacked Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy, and advocated a religion combining both. The religion of the Sikhs, founded by a *guru*, or teacher, named Nanak, who wanted to abolish caste and idol-worship, was one of the most important instances of a combination of Hinduism and Islam; but it ended by being anti-Muslim and readopted the caste-system.

During the seventeenth century there was a marked Muslim reaction. Orthodox Islam consolidated itself; and Hinduism went into a state of passive resistance. The results are with India still. Until the cessation of British rule and protection in 1947 the Indian Sub-continent was divided into a number of states,

some Muslim, some Hindu; and in some cases Hindu peoples were still ruled by Muslim princes. Since 1947 the country has been divided into the two independent states of India and Pakistan; but even now the mixed population of Kashmir in the far north and the isolation of East Bengal from Pakistan leave important political and religious problems unsettled. Nevertheless, the British withdrawal from India has intensified Muslim and Hindu propaganda, since Islam and Hinduism are regarded as the foundations of the two national ways of life.

Modern Hinduism

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European powers, notably the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British, entered India to trade, with the inevitable result of a race for power. In 1600 the British East India Company was founded; and by 1757, the year of Clive's defeat of the ruler of Bengal, Britain had gained control of India. But it was not until 1858, following the Mutiny, that 'John Company' was dissolved and direct British rule through a viceroy and the Indian Civil Service established. In 1877 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. Direct British rule lasted until 1947, when, as we have already noted, the two states of India and Pakistan replaced the British *raj*.

It is easy enough now to see the faults of British rule in India; but the good it brought to India must not be underestimated. The *pax Britannica* and its stable government helped the country to recover from centuries of internal warfare. The practice of *sati*, the burning of widows on their husband's funeral pyre was made illegal by British rule over a hundred years ago. Less successful have been efforts to get rid of child marriage, caste, and a host of other social evils; but today the intelligent Hindu generally recognizes that such blemishes in Indian life must eventually be removed. In the wake of the British administration came institutions and ideas from the West; and many of these goaded Hinduism into reform and Islam into renewed zeal.

We should note here that there has been a more considerable

Christian influence on India than is often realized. Tradition has it that the indigenous Syrian Church on the Malabar Coast was founded by Thomas the Apostle; but it has never exerted a strong influence. It was during the sixteenth century that Christian missions first began in earnest, particularly under the Jesuits, of whom St Francis Xavier was the most eminent. Protestant missions began in the eighteenth century. One of their leading figures was the Baptist William Carey, a pioneer orientalist; and another, two generations later, was the Scottish Presbyterian educationalist, Alexander Duff. During the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries Protestant Christianity began to make headway under the organization of the great societies, such as the C.M.S. and other denominational groups; but since the advent of Indian independence Christian missions have been curbed by nationalist legislation. Mission hospitals and schools are still welcomed, but direct religious teaching is discouraged, if not forbidden.

Today Christianity is, after Hinduism and Islam, the third religion of India; but most of its influence has been among the lower and non-caste people, who often did not understand the world-wide nature of their new religion. So damaging was Protestant sectarianism that in 1947 Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians in the south relinquished their denominationalism to become the United Church of South India. Similar developments elsewhere in the East are on the way, and may in due time make the denominationalism of European and American Christianity look out-of-date.

Reform Movements

While Christian missionaries were at work in India, Hinduism itself was reviving. In the middle of the nineteenth century the *Brahma-Samaj*, or Theistic Society, was founded. It taught an ethical monotheism not unlike that of Unitarian Christianity, modelled its worship on Protestant lines, condemned the caste system and rejected the cult of the gods and idols of popular Hinduism. One of its most famous members was the poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. But perhaps because of its

indebtedness to English thought and because so many of the evils it opposed have disappeared, the *Brahma-Samaj* has declined of recent years.

The *Arya Samaj*, or Aryan Society, which began about 1875, was another monotheistic movement; but in it we can already detect the re-awakening of Indian religion. It taught that the *Vedas* contain 'the finest record of the highest form of monotheism that can be conceived'. The movement is nationalist, anti-Muslim and anti-Christian; and its aim is the conversion of all India, including outcastes, to its brand of Hinduism. It has had considerable success, despite the fact that its interpretation of the *Vedas* cannot really be substantiated. Rather is its popularity derived from the rebirth of Indian national consciousness.

Over the last one hundred years there have been several Hindu movements which have attempted to show that *Vedanta* is the only satisfactory world-philosophy embracing the essential truth of all religions.³⁶ One of the first was the Ramakrishna Mission founded in 1871, and propagated during the latter half of the nineteenth century by Ramakrishna's western-educated disciple Vivekananda. Books by Hindus are still produced every year attempting to convince the non-Hindu reader that Hinduism is superior to all other religions; and there are now several well-known European and American writers, such as Mr Aldous Huxley and Mr Christopher Isherwood, who are keen to commend *Vedanta* to the West. But it must be remembered that this neo-Hinduism is a carefully sifted version of the religion which bears little relation to Hinduism as it is in fact practised in India. The same thing is true of another movement known by the name 'Theosophy', founded in New York in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott and later moved to India, where it came under the leadership of a Mrs Besant. Anti-Christian in temper, this sect still has its adherents; and meetings of the Theosophical Society are often advertized in Britain and America. Its chequered history makes fascinating reading, showing how easily are human beings attracted by the occult, even when the trickery of some of its leaders is exposed.

Needless to say, the profundity and sincerity of the leaders of

these movements has varied considerably; but the general tenor of their eclectic monism is well summed up in the words of the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission:³⁷

As some people come to this House of Kali by boat, some by carriage, and some on foot — various people by various means at last reaching the same spot; so, though men are various and their creeds various, yet the God whom they find by them is in all cases the same.

This is only an elaborate version of the hackneyed saying that all religions lead to the same thing in the end. All religions do not lead to the same thing, unless, of course, we acknowledge that Hindu monism is the underlying truth of all religions. Against such a belief the great monotheisms strongly set their face; for they proclaim that God is not less personal than human beings are, and that God, far from being amoral, is the fount of all moral values.

BUDDHISM

The Buddha

Buddhism was in origin a Hindu heresy inspired by a lay revolt against Brahmanism in the sixth century B.C. It soon became an independent religion; and today, like Christianity, it flourishes most outside the land of its birth. There are other specious similarities between Buddhism and Christianity — such as the seeming parallels between certain stories of the Buddha and of Christ, the monastic organization, the hierarchy, and the use of rosaries — which have tempted some to suppose that Christianity borrowed from Buddhism; but a closer investigation leaves one far less certain.

Gotama, for such was his family name,³⁸ was a minor prince of the Sakya tribe who inhabited the area in the north-east of India just south of the Nepal frontier. He was born c. 563 B.C. at Kapilavastu, and brought up to succeed to his tribal inheritance. He married when a young man, but the birth of his son only impressed upon him the fact which had troubled him ever since his childhood, that human life is a ceaseless round of suffering. Determined to seek peace for his soul, the future

Buddha left his home and family to become a wandering mendicant. He consulted well-known brahmins, he underwent self-mortification to the point of exhaustion, he meditated; but this still did not bring him the answer to the riddle of the meaning of life.

At length when he was thirty-five years of age the answer came as he sat meditating under the legendary bo-tree, the tree of enlightenment. Thus Gotama became the Buddha, the Enlightened One. His deliverance is epitomized in the Four Noble Truths, recorded in his so-called first sermon. He then gathered disciples around him, and spent his life in preaching the way of deliverance from suffering which he had found. At eighty years of age, having a premonition of his end, he returned to the North to die within sight of the Himalayas. There is a pathetic but human enough incongruity in the tradition that his death was brought about by his eating too freely of pork!

The Four Noble Truths

The truth which dawned upon Gotama was fourfold: (1) that life is suffering, (2) that the cause of suffering is the craving for life, (3) that the way of release from suffering is the cessation of craving for life, and (4) that the method of making that craving cease is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path — right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

The Eightfold Path is clearly a middle way, neither that of asceticism on the one hand, or that of sensuality on the other. It is noticeable that Gotama says nothing about God or about a future life. His sole concern is that each person should deliver himself from the painful round of earthly existence. Because of this it has popularly been supposed that he was an atheist and that his idea of *nibbana*³⁹ was simply extinction. Certainly Buddhism as expounded by one half of the Buddhist Church seems to bear out this analysis; but several modern writers, notably the English buddhologist the late Mrs C. F. Rhys Davids, claimed that this was a monkish distortion of the Buddha's original teaching. Whether this is so or not, it is clear that

an intuitive personal knowledge is essential for the Buddhist's salvation. The record of Gotama's own experience beneath the bo-tree runs thus:

I had attained the highest complete enlightenment. This I recognized. Knowledge arose in me, insight that the release of my mind is unshakable: this is my last existence; now there is no rebirth.⁴⁰

This quotation shows that Gotama's background was Hindu. He still accepted the doctrine of reincarnation; but his psychology is less positive than that of the *Vedanta*. For the Hindu the soul is born time and time again until after its holiest life it is released from the cycle of rebirth and absorbed into Brahman. For Gotama, or at any rate for his later followers, there is in fact no real soul to be reborn or to attain *nibbana*. There is nothing permanent about human personality, since it is only a collection of 'aggregates' which are re-assembled at each reincarnation until *nibbana* is reached, when they are disintegrated for ever.

The Buddha, it appears, was not concerned to discuss God, the purpose of the universe and man's eternal destiny. Hence the uncertainty as to what he meant by *nibbana*. He may not have intended to convey only a negative meaning; but, whether that is so or not, it is evident that Buddhism, in its simple original form, was basically a means whereby each man might find his own escape from suffering. Hinduism is essentially a doctrine of self-salvation: Buddhism more so. The Buddha's final words to his disciples were: 'Subject to decay are all compound things: work out your own salvation with earnestness.'⁴¹ None can help a man but himself.

Hinayana and Mahayana

About the year 270 B.C. King Asoka, the Constantine of Buddhism, became ruler of a large part of India; and it was during his time that a schism within Buddhism came to a head. Already there had been two general councils to deliberate on the rules of the Buddhist Order; but under Asoka a third led to its cleavage into two main schools. One of these is *Hinayana*,⁴²

the Lesser Vehicle, which is sometimes known as the Southern School, because it flourishes most in Ceylon, Burma and Thailand; while the other, *Mahayana*, or the Greater Vehicle, or the Northern School, is the Buddhism of China and Japan. A debased form of Mahayana Buddhism, which has for long attracted the attention of travel books, is the Lamaism of Tibet; but this, it should be understood, is Buddhism with a very strong admixture of spiritism.

The Hinayanists claim that theirs is the original Buddhism. They regard Gotama simply as the founder of their faith. They tend to be atheist, to deny the immortality of the soul, and to regard *nibbana* as annihilation. Such a religion, which Mrs Rhys Davids and others claim is not the original version of the Buddha's teaching, was unlikely to satisfy the deep spiritual yearnings of the majority; and the Mahayana Buddhism which grew up to meet this need is more definitely a religion than is Hinayana, which might well be described as a philosophy of life. The Mahayanists do not regard the Buddha of history as the only Buddha. They believe also in innumerable Buddhas, divine beings, often known as *bodhisattvas*, who guide men on the plane of the imagination. Even more important is the abstract impersonal Buddha nature, known to the enlightened intellect through meditation, which the true Buddhist is thought to attain at his final release from this world. In its cosmology Mahayana also has a host of supernatural beings, gods and devils, who, as it were, hover between this world and the final Reality. There are also Buddhist heavens and hells to which the dead go on their way to nirvana. Needless to say, many of these beliefs are not Buddhist as such, but have been adopted from the indigenous religions of the countries to which Buddhism spread.

But, like Hinayana, Mahayana has its organization of monks and abbots, and even of popes. The colourful but inferior Buddhism of Tibet is known everywhere for its belief that its head, the Dalai Lama, is a reincarnation of the first Grand Lama. Perhaps nowhere is the ecclesiastical organization of Buddhism shown more obviously than in Lhasa. Yet doubtless

it is the monks of Ceylon and Burma, in their saffron-coloured robes and with their simpler type of Buddhism, which will impress the occidental with the intellectualism of the religion.

The Pali Canon and Other Scriptures

The history of Buddhist classical literature is a complicated one, details of which need not detain us here. For a century and more there were no official written records: beliefs and rules were handed on by word of mouth. At the third general council, however, held at Patna, Asoka's capital, three hundred years after the time of the Buddha, the canon, or official list, of Pali Scriptures was approved; but already Buddhism had split into its two main schools so that the formation of the Pali Canon was almost entirely Hinayanist. Even so it was probably not until the beginning of the first century of the Christian era that the canon of sacred books was finally settled in Ceylon, the centre of Hinayana. Pali is a language developed from the earlier Sanskrit: indeed the very word *Pali* signifies 'canon'.

The Pali Canon is known as the *Tipitaka*,⁴³ which means literally 'Three Baskets'. These three sections are:

1. The *Vinaya Pitaka* (Discipline Basket), which contains the monastic rules, among them the *Patimokkha*, a form of confession, and the regulations for ordination.
2. The *Sutta Pitaka* (Sermon Basket), which, as the word *sutta* (literally 'a thread') shows, strings together the teaching of the Buddha. Among its more notable contents are his first and last sermons; the *Dhammapada* (Way of Virtue), perhaps the best-known Buddhist treatise; and the *Jatakas*, fanciful tales of Gotama's previous incarnations.
3. The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (Additional Doctrine Basket), a later more detailed psychological study of the teaching of the *Suttas*.

These books are recognized not so much as sacred but as authoritative by all Buddhists. At the present time Hinayanist scholars in Burma and Ceylon are engaged on compiling a new edition — a task that will take them many years. It is interesting

to note that they have not invited the co-operation of the Northern School; and this is because the Mahayanists have many beliefs which the Southern School consider to be accretions to the pure gospel of the Buddha.

There are many other important Buddhist books. Among them are the Siamese *Questions of King Milinda* and the *Path of Purity* from Ceylon. There is also the long work in another language, derivative from Sanskrit, *Prakrit*, called *The Mahavastu*, which dates from the time of the beginnings of Mahayana and recounts many myths about the Buddha, some of them similar to those in the *Jatakas*. Mahayana Buddhism has not formulated its own books in quite the rigid way of Hinayana; but there is a Chinese and Tibetan version of the Tipitaka. None of the Mahayanist writings are in Pali, but are mainly in Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan.

The Expansion of Buddhism

It is one of the ironies of history that while Buddhism spread to other lands and eventually became a world religion it had by the early days of the Christian era declined in India and at length disappeared. This was in no small measure the result of a revival within Hinduism itself and later of the Muslim domination of Northern India.

Buddhist missionaries from Asoka's empire first entered Ceylon in the third century B.C., which has been the stronghold of Hinayana ever since. It is at Kandy that Buddhists claim to preserve what is perhaps their most famous relic, one of the Buddha's teeth. There is also a temple claiming to enshrine one of Gotama's collar bones. But these are not the most important features of Ceylonese Buddhism. Of far greater significance was the life and work of Buddhagosa, the first Buddhist commentator, whose writings are the classics of the Hinayana interpretation of the religion.

Burma also received Buddhism from India or perhaps from missionaries sent from Ceylon in the time of Buddhagosa. It is clear, however, that until c. 1000 Burmese Buddhism had a Mahayanist element in it, as well as a strong survival of the

indigenous animism. In the eleventh century came a Hinayanist revival; and, apart from a regression in the thirteenth century, when Kubla Khan invaded the country, Burma has been Hinayanist ever since, though the Burmese interest in the psychology of Buddhism confirms its closer affinity to Mahayana than the Buddhism of Ceylon.

Thailand, otherwise Siam, is the third Hinayanist country, but probably had its first contact with Buddhism by way of China. It was not until the fourteenth century that a Buddhist mission came there from Ceylon. To the present day a notable feature of Thai Buddhism is the devotion of the monarchy to the Buddhist Order: it is customary for the Siamese king to spend at least a short period of his life as a Buddhist monk.

Buddhism was introduced to China at the beginning of the Christian era from India, where today it exists side by side with Taoism and Confucianism. Chinese Buddhism is Mahayanist; and its link throughout its history has been with India rather than Ceylon or Burma. It spread northward to Korea in the fourth century, and from there in the sixth century to Japan. This spread of Buddhism from China took not only religious ideas but also Chinese culture to Japan; for until that time Japan was without any developed indigenous art and had no system of writing. Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, never rose — and was perhaps incapable of rising — to a noble status. During the Nara period, the golden age of Japanese history during the eighth century, and for a thousand years afterwards, until the revival of pure Shinto in the last century, Japanese religion was a mixture of Shinto and Buddhism, known as Ryobu Shinto.

Although Tibet adjoins India it was not until the seventh century that Buddhism began to make headway there. But Tibetan Buddhism is only partially Buddhist. The earlier Bon religion, which is not unlike the shamanism of Central Asia, a cult of ecstatic wizards, survives; there is clearly the influence of Chinese magic; tantrism, an aboriginal nature worship, from India, much concerned with the idea of sexual symbolism, is now found most in Tibet; Hindu Yoga has also made its mark;

and beneath all this lies the indigenous cult of spirits and god-lings. The heads of the many monasteries are called *lamas*, literally 'superiors'; and some of them exercise considerable power. The Dalai Lama, so well known to the West through travel books, is not only a religious but also a political potentate. Tibet, where there are more monks than laymen, has been the melting-pot of religious ideas and practices from its surrounding countries; but from it has emerged only a colourful but chaotic Buddhism, superficially Mahayanist, about which many more orthodox Buddhists are not too happy.⁴⁴ Lamaism is the Buddhist parallel to the debased Roman Catholicism of some parts of Central and South America.

The use of the Tibetan incantation uttered by Buddhists, written on their prayer wheels, *Om mane padme hum*, illustrates both the highest and lowest in the religion. *Om*, a word first found in the *Vedas*, is indefinable: it signifies the Absolute, the ineffable One; while the rest of the saying means 'the Jewel of the Lotus', figuratively indicating that *Om* is the most precious truth in the universe. So regarded it is a highly metaphysical statement; but in fact those who say it are unaware of its inner meaning, and use it as a magical formula to gain divine favour or avert disaster.

The Mahayanist Sects

During the second century A.D. a great academy of Buddhist learning was established at Nalanda in Bihar, the province where Gotama received his enlightenment. The philosophy taught here, for a thousand years until the Muslim invasion of India, was a highly speculative system founded by the Buddhist scholastic Nagarjuna. For centuries men came from China and elsewhere to study at Nalanda; and they returned to their home countries to be propagators of Mahayana Buddhism.

As the Northern School spread so a number of sects grew up, the most important of which are to be found in China and Japan. Mahayana Buddhism generally, unlike Hinayana with its view that the Buddha was simply the historical founder of the religion, taught that it is the Buddha nature, transcending

time and place, which is pre-eminently important. But there were naturally divergences of opinion as to the relationship of the believer to the Buddha; and these divergences led to the formation of the divisions within Mahayana. One of the most interesting features of this kind of Buddhism is its doctrine of *trikaya*, three bodies.⁴⁵ This teaches that the Buddha is revealed to men on three levels, that of history, that of imagination, and that of pure reason. There was clearly the historic Gotama who taught in this world; but higher is the Buddha — or rather the many Buddhas — of mythology, who mean much more to devout Buddhists here and now. But higher still is the abstract *Tathata*, or Suchness, devoid of personality, which is known only by the truly enlightened mind. We see here the typical Buddhist fear of imagery and personality, and the pathos of its belief that this world contains no key to the understanding of the Ultimate.

We need not enumerate here the several Mahayanist sects of China and Japan. The four most influential Japanese sects today illustrate the variation of beliefs in modern Buddhism.⁴⁶ Two of them we need mention only briefly. The Shingon sect, founded in the ninth century A.D., is an esoteric religion, Buddhist in basis but containing beliefs and practices from many sources — Taoism and Confucianism, Indian Tantrism, and perhaps even Nestorian Christianity. Its worst feature is its reliance on magic and superstition. A great deal of importance is attached to sounds, words and signs, the underlying theory being that the truth can only be known through symbols. On its nobler side Shingon teaches that there are ten grades suiting people of different levels of enlightenment. The Nichiren sect, dating from the thirteenth century A.D., is founded on a sutra called *The Lotus of the True Law*, and claims to recall men to the historic Buddha. In fact, its picture of the Buddha is highly fanciful, and demands a mystical interpretation. Careful attention is paid to the saying of prayers and the recitation of the scriptures, as well as to other pious devotions, all of which are thought to produce material prosperity.

The two most illuminating sects today are, however, the Jodo-Shin and the Zen. These stand at the two extremes of

Mahayana Buddhism. Jodo-Shin dates back to a reform of the Pure Land Sect in the twelfth century of our era, and has been the religion of the common people. Intellectual Buddhists tend to look down upon it; but it is what Buddhism on the whole is not, a religion rather than a philosophy. It has departed from the classical exhortation of Gotama that each man must work out his own salvation, and teaches a kind of doctrine of justification by faith in Amida, the compassionate Buddha, who lives with other divine beings in the Pure Land, a heaven envisaged in concrete pictures, like the Paradise of Islam. Shin Buddhism maintains a priesthood in which marriage is permitted, and has given up monasticism, since faith alone and no works of man can save him.

On the other hand Zen, which a western Buddhist has described as the 'unique flower of Buddhism', stresses contemplation as the only way to enlightenment. Also founded in the twelfth century, it has been the religion of many of the more cultured people: it was popular among the Japanese *samurai*, or nobles, because it helped them to cultivate a stoic-like attitude towards life. The Zen adept aims at passing beyond mere intellect and at knowing the truth intuitively. At one time the use of all books was discouraged; but this objection was modified later. The *Diamond Cutter Sutra*, with its teaching reminiscent of Hindu *yoga*, was much esteemed. The means to this indescribable intuitive knowledge is meditation; and a prominent feature of Zen monasteries is their meditation hall.

The Appeal of Buddhism

Of all the classical religions of the world only two are serious rivals for world allegiance, though a third — a pseudo-religion — could be added in the prevalent economic humanism which has grown up in modern industrial society. Buddhism has many adherents and admirers today in Europe and America. Its simple creed at first suggests a religion not unlike Christianity:

I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dhamma.
I take refuge in the Sangha.

But the Buddha is not the revealer of God. The doctrine, or *dhamma*, is the teaching that man and not God saves himself. And the *sangha* is the order of monks seeking enlightenment for themselves. At first sight it seems strange that so negative a creed should win widespread sympathy; but it is the very negativeness of Buddhism which is its attraction. In its export form, 'Buddhism for the West', it appeals even more than the export form of Hinduism, 'Vedanta for the West', because of its apparent intellectualism. It seems to many to answer to the contemporary mood. There are four features of Buddhism which are worth noting. It is first a religion without God, and therefore attracts the atheist or agnostic. It also denies the permanence of human personality, which commends it to those who find an after-life incredible. Thirdly, it tends to count the material world a hindrance rather than a help to enlightenment; and this, too, invites the interest of so many who are bewildered by pain and disease, not to speak of man's own destructiveness. And, not least, Buddhism declares plainly that each man alone, following an upright life, can find his own peace. Despite its many noble and beautiful features, it is a religion of abstraction. Indeed, it is hardly a religion at all: it is a practical psychology, whereby each man hopes to save himself. From what he hopes to save himself is clear — suffering: to what he hopes to save himself is less clear.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS

THE KNOWN GOD

The great living religions fall into two classes: those that teach that God is an impersonal Something, the One, the Absolute, embracing all things, and those that teach that God is the personal Creator of the universe. Of the former Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese religion in some of its aspects, and some types of Western philosophical idealism are the foremost examples; while Judaism, the religion of the Parsis, Islam and Christianity are representative of the latter. The one type of religion regards personality as impermanent and yielding no clue to the nature of deity: the other envisages personality as one of the most wonderful things in the universe and contends that God is not less but more than personal. The former kind of religion we have called monism, the latter monotheism.

But we must bear in mind that there are also different kinds of monotheism. Most primitive tribes today, like most of the peoples of antiquity, seem to show some sort of belief in one supreme deity, though there is a great deal of disagreement among scholars as to how far this elementary monotheism was there from the start. Certainly during the last half-a-century, while the evolutionary theory has dominated our way of thinking about history, the theory put forward by the Scottish folk-lore scholar Andrew Lang, the encyclopaedic Austrian Wilhelm Schmidt, the pioneer missionary sinologist James Legge and others, that man has always been a monotheist in his heart of hearts, has been unfashionable; but today it has more sympathizers. We cannot expect to find a developed monotheism among our prehistoric ancestors or among modern primitives; but there is no escaping the fact that a latent undeveloped monotheism is almost universal at all periods of history.

Thus, henotheism — the belief that there is one supreme god behind all the gods of the pantheon — can be detected in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religion from the earliest times; and it is a gross distortion of fact to suppose that such henotheism appears only late in the historical period as a result of the evolution of religious ideas. Similarly, in pre-Confucian China there was along with the characteristic spiritism belief in the Supreme Lord. This monarchianism — the tendency to regard one divine being as superior to all others — exists in ancient Greek and Roman religion; while in the prehistoric religious complex of the Near East stretching from India to the Mediterranean there is the prominence of the Mother Goddess, a supreme being envisaged as female. Nor is a kind of monotheism lacking in the religion of modern primitives. The Australian aborigines are among the simplest of living savages: yet they acknowledge the existence of an All-Father. And, likewise, the native peoples of Africa, fear-ridden as they are by spirits and witch-doctors, believe in the existence of a supreme Creator.

In recognizing this latent monotheism we are not equating it with the full-flowered monotheism of the Hebrew prophets. All we are doing is to note that our far-off ancestors were not without an inkling that there is one divine being in control of the universe. It has, however, taken a long time to purify and clarify this belief. As today, so in the past there were always forces at work which hindered the emergency of a refined monotheism. The tendency to personify separate objects or powers, man's anthropomorphic imagination, the belief in fate or chance, the placing of tabus on certain animate or inanimate things — all these factors are still at work, even in self-styled enlightened societies. Spiritualism, superstitions, horoscopes (as in some newspapers), the occult, all have their fascination for many of our European and American contemporaries, and show clearly how monotheism has still to contend with modern prophets of Baal.

In the history of monotheism the Semitic and Aryan races have had a particularly important part to play, the former as

the creative geniuses, the latter as the propagators and systematic thinkers. Judaism and Islam are the two Semitic religions that survive today. Zoroastrianism, the religion of the small Parsi community mainly found in the Bombay area, came from Aryan Persia. Christianity, Jewish and so Semitic in origin, has more than the other monotheisms become a world-wide religion, though its spread from the first century to the present day has been largely the work of Europeans and more recently of Americans of European descent.

HEBREW RELIGION

Israel in the Ancient World

The Old Testament, the classical literature of the Hebrew people, consisting of books written over a period of several hundred years — and those mostly post-Exilic, incorporating earlier oral traditions, and advocating almost always a nationalist point of view, naturally gives us an exaggerated picture of the part played by Israel in the ancient Near East. This is not to say that its history is untrue: it is simply to say that it is written with a Hebrew bias. A reading of the historical books of the Old Testament alone suggests that Israel was a political equal of Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria; and until the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Mesopotamian cuneiform in the last century this was generally believed to have been the case. Over the last one hundred years, however, the translation of Near Eastern texts unearthed by archaeologists has shown up the position of the Hebrews in the ancient world in a truer perspective. Israel was in fact little more than a small buffer state between the empires of the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates valleys.

The significance of Israel was neither political nor economic, but religious. Both Egypt and Babylon were pioneers in the growth of science, India and Greece gave birth to philosophical speculation, and later on Rome proved to be the administrative genius of the ancient world. They have all contributed their share to our Western civilization. But it was Israel which rose above her greater neighbours in religious achievement: the very fact that she was of no great political, economic or cultural

significance may have been of positive help rather than hindrance in her spiritual progress. Certainly subjugation of Judah by Neo-Babylon and the ensuing Exile in the sixth century B.C. forced the Jews to refine their cultus and think in less worldly terms than if they had been a materially successful power in the ancient world. Their vicissitudes in no small measure prepared Judaism to be the cradle of Christianity.

The beginnings of the Hebrew people and their earliest religious ideas must still — and probably always will — be matters for some speculation. It must be remembered that none of the books of the Old Testament as we now have them were written before the ninth century, although they purport to tell of events which happened in the second millennium B.C. Behind these books lie, of course, earlier documents and a mass of tradition handed on by word of mouth, which were naturally adapted by successive generations. When the composite nature of the Pentateuch,¹ the first five books of the Old Testament, was first recognized by the nineteenth-century Higher Critics hasty conclusions were often also made about the nature of early Hebrew religion. Much influenced by the contemporary fashion of viewing history as a process of upward evolution, they were inclined to imagine that the Old Testament itself showed that Hebrew religion had clearly emerged from animism and totemism through monolatry to monotheism.

We cannot dismiss the signs of these forms of religion in the Old Testament. Animism may well lie behind the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel by the river and that of his dream as he lay on the sacred stone. Totemism possibly underlies the coincidence of certain patriarchal names with those of animals: Caleb is a dog, Deborah is a bee, and the like. The books I and II *Samuel* certainly suggest that the Israelites believed that Yahweh was their god but that the gods of their enemies were real gods none-the-less. But it is rash to assume that these were the only forms of religion then extant. The history of religion is never so simple as that. The probability is that there was always some inkling of monotheism in the religion of Israel, but that it was only after the teaching of a long succession of

religious geniuses in the patriarchs and prophets and after the hard spiritual trials of eighth and following centuries that a pure monotheism emerged.

From Abraham to the Exile

During the first half of the second millennium B.C. a small migration of Semitic people, probably led by Abraham of Ur, left Mesopotamia for Palestine. Some of them went on to Egypt, and were possibly related to the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings who ruled Egypt about this time.² By comparing the stories in *Genesis* and *Exodus* with the history revealed by Egyptian records, we can roughly reconstruct the general trend of events. At some stage in the second half of the second millennium the accession of a new dynasty led to the victimization of the Hebrews in Egypt and to their exodus, though precisely when it is difficult to discover with certainty. Several theories have been put forward, but the two most likely are that the Exodus, under Moses, whose name is in fact Egyptian, took place either with the expulsion of the Hyksos c. 1550 B.C. or in the time of King Merenptah nearly three hundred years later.³

After a period of nomadic existence in the Sinaitic peninsula which may have been anything from forty to four hundred years, the twelve tribes, now led by Joshua, entered upon their 'conquest' of Palestine c. 1200 B.C. But we must not assume that this was a straightforward campaign; for the books *Joshua* and *Judges* on close examination reveal a considerably 'written up' account, later historical propaganda, the aim of which was to impress upon Israel that their national way of life and their religion were quite distinct from and superior to that of the Canaanites. The fact that Canaanitish religion persisted so long after the conquest and was a constant source of worry to the prophets indicates how superficial the conquest was. The Hebrews had also to contend with the more materially advanced non-Semitic Philistines who had settled on the sea-coast, probably after coming from the Greek islands in order to escape the Hellenic invaders.

Once established in Canaan, however, the Israelites settled

down first under the rule of the judges, or dictators, and then of a monarchy. Saul was chosen, much against the wishes of the last of the judges, Samuel, *c.* 1000 B.C.; and his somewhat unsuccessful reign was followed by two which later generations were to look back upon as the glorious days of the Hebrew monarchy. David and Solomon were both strong rulers, who, on the whole, maintained a high national moral and spiritual level. But after Solomon's death the country divided into two, the northern kingdom, variously known as Israel, Ephraim or Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem. For over two hundred years both kingdoms suffered an alternation of good and bad kings, the latter calling forth the warnings of the early prophets, Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, in Israel, and a little later of Isaiah and Micah in Judah. During this period Palestine was becoming more and more a pawn in the fierce game for supremacy between the two empires at either extremity of the Fertile Crescent, Egypt on the one hand and Assyria and Neo-Babylonia on the other. Eventually Israel was entirely liquidated by Sargon II of Assyria in 721. Judah survived a while longer, but Jerusalem was at length sacked in 587 by Nebuchadrezzar of Neo-Babylon, which had supplanted Assyria in the contest for supremacy in the Near East.

Now in this chequered history a number of important influences were undoubtedly at work in the formation of a distinct Hebrew religion. Mesopotamia, Egypt and the tribes of Sinai and Canaan must all have made their mark. There are similarities between the mythology of Israel and that of Mesopotamia; there are similarities between the laws of Hammurabi of Babylon and the Mosaic law; and embedded in the literature of the Old Testament are numerous instances of borrowings, conscious or unconscious, from the religion of the Canaanites, as, for example, in the festivals and the rôle of the king as shown in the historical books and in the *Psalms*. Yet the remarkable thing is that, despite their political insignificance, the Hebrew people pioneered in the sphere of religion as did none of their overlords. For a long time it has been customary to offer some purely

naturalistic explanation for this remarkable phenomenon by postulating a process of evolution in religious ideas. Evolution there undoubtedly was, but this was inevitable as the nation assumed its individual identity — an identity which was not distinct at first but took centuries to form. It must be remembered that the Hebrews and their neighbours were almost all Semites, and that the struggle to attain national and religious independence was long and arduous. Yet this struggle could not have taken place without guiding genius from the start. The monotheism of Israel has its beginnings in the genius of Abraham and Moses; but both they and their successors had always to contend against great odds, because as yet there was no national religious tradition long enough and extensive enough to compete with the fertility religion which held sway in the Near East from Northern India to the Mediterranean.⁴ The wonder is not that a monotheism evolved in this kind of environment, but that it persisted from the beginning through the lofty vision of patriarchs, priests and prophets. Without their genius, without their devotion to the truth that they had long known, Hebrew monotheism would never have had its full flowering in the later prophets, and Judah would not have survived the test of the Exile.

Prophets, Priests and Kings

Among the Semitic peoples the king was regarded as the representative of the nation and as having a specially close relation to God; and this was the case with the comparatively short-lived Hebrew monarchy which began with Saul a little before 1000 B.C. and ended with the fall of Jerusalem under its puppet king Zedekiah in 586. Yet, despite the evil of many of the kings, the Hebrew monarch was looked upon as sacred. In a sense he was both priest and prophet; for at certain times he offered sacrifices and was also believed to be filled with the divine spirit. But in fact the monarchy never became an integral part of Hebrew religion. Doubtless the Exile dealt a blow from which the institution of kingship never recovered. The later kings of Judah were not looked upon with the same

reverence as those of classical times. Prophets and priests were both essential constituents of the Hebrew cultus. Unfortunately, many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestant biblical scholars made it fashionable to speak of them as if they were in direct opposition. What such scholars were often doing was projecting their own Protestantism into their interpretation of the Old Testament. Prophets and priests probably had a common origin as the professional guardians of the tribal religion; and in process of time their task as sacrificers or sooth-sayers became separated. The prophets, or seers, were certainly part of the Hebrew cultus: they were the mouthpiece of Jehovah, and in the early days of the monarchy were often king-makers.

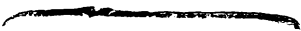
The great writing prophets, however, because their gift of communication from God was an individual one, were able to lead the people to a more personal and a nobler insight into their religion. They aimed at purifying the religion of its abuses. When Isaiah inveighed against sacrifice and festival he was not condemning the cultus as such: rather did he want to get rid of its corrupt and mercenary features.⁵ Had he opposed priestly religion altogether he would hardly have gone into the temple in the year that king Uzziah died to receive his vision of the Lord high and lifted up.⁶ Again, it must be remembered that Ezekiel was both prophet and priest.

Prophecy itself was not without its seamy side. There were false prophets as well as false priests. Moreover, both in their own day, and throughout history, prophets have sometimes been looked upon as little more than fortune-tellers. Rather were they at their best, as, for example, Isaiah and Jeremiah, men of clear spiritual insight who discerned the signs of their own times. They warned in general terms of the disasters that would result from apostasy and the blessings that would attend faithfulness. But, even then they were not always right. It is difficult to see how the political fortunes of the Hebrew people could ever have been happy, however godly they were, while Palestine was the cock-pit of the Near East. The prophets felt moved by God to speak, 'Thus saith the Lord'; and in so doing they were adding to, rather than displacing, the best in the priestly religion.

Societies today, like Israel of old, need prophecy, the religion of verbal communication; but they also need cultus, the religion of dramatic and emotional communication, to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. Prophetic and priestly religion were and are complementary, not antithetic. In actual fact, the prophetic protest helped to purge the Hebrew cultus; and we can only regard the prophets as pathetic failures if what they intended was to abolish the priestly cultus altogether. The obscene ceremonies of Canaanitish religion which had threatened Hebrew religion, divination, a mechanical view of sacrifice and a magical view of religious practices in general were in part driven out by the reform of Josiah; and further reforms followed as a result of the later rebukes of the prophets. But there was always the danger of mistaking the letter for the spirit in religious observances; and the classic warning of the prophets remains true for us today. Prophetic religion as distinct from priestly religion in the Old Testament is an academic abstraction; prophecy is a highly individual gift, which can only be born in the setting of a cultus and may often need the restraining influence of the cultus at its best to prevent it from becoming an eccentric utterance. God's inspiration is not limited solely to the words of individual men but is also expressed through social tradition. The famous words of Micah are often quoted as summing up the prophetic protest.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? . . . shall I come before him with burnt offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with rams? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?⁷

It has been held that the prophets meant that the cultus was superfluous. This could hardly have been the case; for without the cultus Micah would never have been able to utter his ideal. It was the cultus at its noblest which enabled the prophets to come to know the one God, whose purifying word they proclaimed.⁸ The fact that after the Exile prophecy declined showed that it had to a large extent fulfilled its purpose.



Monolatry and Monotheism

The great achievement of the writing prophets was to lead the Hebrew people from a belief in one god who was the guardian of their tribe to belief in the one God of all the nations of the earth. Belief in one tribal deity is technically known as monolatry, a stunted monotheism because of the restricted racial view of the Hebrews from the time of Abraham until just before the Exile. The Pentateuch and the Historical Books clearly show a belief in Yahweh as the one true deity; but he is envisaged only as the guardian of Israel. The reality of other gods for other peoples is not denied, as we see from the stories of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha; and it was believed that when Israel went to war against other tribes Yahweh contended with the enemies' gods. It was only with fuller experience that the genius of the Hebrews, as shown in the canonical prophets, particularly the writer of the last eleven chapters of *Isaiah*, that the universalism of God becomes clear. Doubtless contact with the religious ideas of other nations, notably Persia, made the Jews realize that, however superior their religion was, they were not the sole possessors of the truth.

After the Exile, however, there was a resurgence of religious nationalism. A note of exclusiveness is evident in *Nehemiah* and *Ezra*; and from then onwards the Jews tended to make their religion commensurate with their race. There were lonely voices, like the authors of *Ruth* and *Jonah*, who proclaimed that the Gentiles should hear the word of God, and in Hellenistic times proselytes were allowed to enter Judaism; but on the whole Judaism remained nationalistic. And to this day Judaism is among the least missionary-minded of religions.

The Exile and After

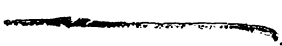
'Sweet are the uses of adversity.' This is particularly true of the Exile. The sufferings of Jewry in Neo-Babylon and their subsequent vassalage to Medea, Persia, Macedonia, the Seleucids and Rome forced the Jews⁹ to give up visions of worldly empire and even the chance of retaining the material magnificence of the temple at Jerusalem, which had been the

centre of their sacrificial cultus. They had even before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. heard the sublime prophecies of Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, that there is one holy, righteous loving God, who expects love and righteousness of his people; but as yet they had been lonely voices sounding on ears lacking in understanding. During and after the Exile they were to learn the full meaning of this message, and hear its amplification in the later prophets, notably II *Isaiah*, with its mystical picture of the suffering Servant, and Ezekiel with his strange imagery pointing to a spiritually renewed people.

Later still, after Cyrus of Persia allowed them to return and rebuild Jerusalem in 538 B.C., despite attempts to re-establish national exclusiveness, they were to learn, particularly from III *Isaiah*, *Malachi*, the idyllic story of *Ruth* and yet later from *Jonah*, the universality of the religious truths which they had preserved in their national history from time immemorial. Even so they could not relinquish their nationalism; and it is important to see that they could hardly have done so without jeopardizing their faith. The time for the proclamation of a universal religion was not yet.

The Exile was also not without at first undetected advantages to the Jews. No longer able to perform the temple sacrifices, they had to worship otherwise; and so grew up the practice of synagogue worship consisting of the reading of the law and its exposition, the singing of hymns and the saying of prayers. This has persisted as the norm of Jewish corporate devotion to the present day; and, because Christianity later grew up in a Jewish environment, it is not surprising to find that the sacraments of the Church were supplemented by services on the synagogue pattern.¹⁰

This spiritualization of the Jewish cultus was accompanied by the assimilation of many of the religious ideas of the peoples with whom they came into contact during and after the Exile. There is little doubt that until then the Hebrews had had only a hazy view of a life after death. The disappearance of the hopes of worldly empire forced them to look into the future not only for their nation but also for themselves as individuals. Here they



were undoubtedly influenced by the religious ideas of Zoroastrianism, the religion of Persia, with its doctrine of a Saviour who would appear at the end of the present age, its teaching on a future judgment, on heaven and hell, and on good and evil spiritual beings, the Devil and angels. Hence the writing, notably in the second and first centuries B.C., of apocalyptic books, as *Daniel* in the Old Testament, II *Esdras* in the Apocrypha, and pseudepigraphical writings such as the *Book of Enoch*, all pointing to a state of future blessedness at the end of present world-order.

Hellenization

There was, however, to come a yet more potent influence upon Judaism after the subjugation of Palestine by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. His meteoric conquest of the world from Greece to India spread not only Greek material culture but, even more important, Greek ideas and ideals far and wide. The great philosopher Aristotle, the disciple of Plato, was Alexander's tutor. The Jews were particularly opposed to adopting anything from either the Greek way of life or Greek thought; and this opposition brought them considerable bloodshed and bitterness. After Alexander's death, his empire split into three, the Macedonian, the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic. At first Palestine came under the control of the Ptolemies; but in 198 the Seleucid king Antiochus III wrested it from Egypt, and his successor Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) began his programme of attempting to hellenize the Jewish people. Antiochus unsuccessfully attempted to introduce the worship of an image of Zeus, 'the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not,' into the temple of Jerusalem.¹¹ The story of the revolt organized by Judas Maccabaeus, which led to the survival of the Jewish nation despite the later occupation by the Romans, is told in I *Maccabees*.

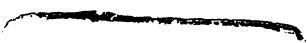
Yet there were nobler and more intellectually subtle Greek ideas which the Jews could not resist; and the first two centuries before Christ and the first of the Christian era were to witness their adoption by many Jews, particularly those who lived in

Alexandria or Palestinian Jews who had travelled beyond Judaea. The philosophy of Plato at length made an open appearance in Jewish thought in the writings of Philo during the first half of the first century A.D. Yet much earlier we can see the indirect bearing of Greek ideas, as possibly in *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*, and more certainly in the Wisdom literature of the *Apocrypha*.

Jewish Sectarianism

The assimilation of exotic religious ideas into Judaism naturally led to controversy; and controversy led to sectarianism. Many of these sects figure in the New Testament. Foremost among them were the Sadducees and the Pharisees; but their importance in the wider history of Judaism derives from the differences between them rather than from their opposition to Christ, though it must be remembered that they opposed him because they saw in him the leader of yet another school of thought. The Sadducees were the conservatives in religion, though they were by no means opposed to Hellenistic culture. Their dispute with Christ on the matter of life-after-death,¹² far from showing them up as the modernists of their time, clearly indicates how tenaciously they held the old, pre-Exilic Hebrew view that there is no hereafter, apart perhaps from a shadowy existence in a dust-laden underworld known as *Sheol*. They were the Jewish aristocrats, whose attitude towards the Mosaic law was in many ways a liberal one.

The Pharisees, whose undoubted hypocrisy called forth Christ's castigation, were the Jewish moderate left wing of their day. They were prepared to co-operate with Rome, though less so than the Sadducees; and they had for some generations readily taken Hellenistic ideas into Judaism. They acknowledged a debt to Persia and Greece by believing in the immortality of the soul. They were also prepared to receive Gentile proselytes into the Jewish faith, and, in holding that the Law of Moses was supplemented by oral tradition, they clearly opened up the way to incorporating foreign, notably Greek, ideas into Judaism. They were lawyers rather than priests, and as such contributed



to the decay of the priestly system. They and the Sadducees were on the whole cultured, progressive Jews, and stand in sharp contrast to the Samaritans, a stunted remnant of the old Northern kingdom, who built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim.¹³ Even among the Pharisees there were divergent schools, as, for instance, that of the tolerant Hillel and that of the legalistic Shammai, both leading lawyers of the first century B.C.

Another important Jewish sect which existed in the time of Christ were the puritanical Essenes, who hoped for the coming of an ideal Jewry separated from this world. The antiquary Josephus describes their asceticism and how they lived in exclusive communities. Although they adhered strictly to the Jewish law, they contributed to the refinement of Jewish worship by refusing to participate in the sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem because of the slaughter of animals involved.

Recently biblical scholars have paid more attention to the Essenes, since the Dead Sea Scrolls, the first batch of which were discovered in 1947 in a cave to the north-west of the Dead Sea, reveal a strict Jewish community with like beliefs and practices. The dating of these documents is still a matter of some uncertainty; but it now seems almost certain that they date from between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. It is interesting to note that the use of a scientific test, known as the Carbon 14 method, measuring the radio-activity of the carbon in the scrolls, suggests that they are just under two thousand years old. They are of special interest not only for the light they shed on Jewish sectarianism of the period, but also for the Hebrew version of parts of the Jewish scriptures, notably *Isaiah* and *Habbakuk*, as well as parts of the non-canonical books. At first a great deal of journalistic fuss was made about the Dead Sea Scrolls; but the bulk of scholarly opinion now suggests that they simply confirm what has always been known, *viz.*, that there were several such millenarian sects in Judaism at this time.¹⁴ Yet another group, known to us through Josephus and *Acts*, were the Zealots, with their cry 'No King but the Lord', who tried to throw off the Roman yoke by means of revolution.

Their fanaticism eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the consequent final dispersion of the Jewish nation.

Although Jewish opinion generally discouraged the admission of Gentiles to Judaism, the Hellenistic period saw the gradual admission of more and more non-Jewish proselytes. We read of these in the New Testament; and it appears that they were divided into two categories, 'devout proselytes', who had submitted to the Jewish initiation of circumcision, and 'God-fearers', who followed the Law in spirit only.¹⁵ In the spiritual ferment of the Graeco-Roman world many Gentiles saw in Jewish monotheism the noble religion they were seeking, but at the same time were unable to replace their cultural cosmopolitanism by a narrow Jewish racialism.

The Jewish Scriptures

The composition of the many strands of the Old Testament took over a thousand years, from the writing of the earliest sections of the Pentateuch to that of the latest book, *Daniel*, during the second century B.C. to encourage the Jews during the Antiochean persecution. They were all written in Hebrew; and at the beginning of the first century B.C. a council of Jewish scholars finally decided upon an authoritative list, or canon, of scriptures.¹⁶ In the Hebrew version these are grouped in three parts: the Law, or *Torah*, consisting of the Pentateuch; the Prophets, or *Nebi'im*, which were twofold — the former prophets, meaning *Joshua*, *Judges*, I and II *Samuel* and I and II *Kings*, and the latter made up of *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and the twelve minor prophets; and the writings, or *Kethubim*, the rest of the Old Testament.¹⁷ As time went on Aramaic displaced classical Hebrew as the Jewish vernacular; and this led to a great deal of uncertainty among Jewish scholars as to the accuracy and interpretation of the Hebrew words which were written without vowels. By the eighth century A.D. a school of Jewish exegetes known as the Massoretes had established the Hebrew text we now have, with its pointing (or vowel signs). The Latin version, known as the Vulgate, used by the Church

in the Middle Ages and today by Roman Catholics, was a fourth-century translation from the Hebrew and other versions by St Jerome.

During the first three centuries B.C. the Jews of the Dispersion, particularly those in Egypt, ceased to have an expert knowledge of Hebrew and made Greek their main language. This led to a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in a version known as the Septuagint (often designated by the abbreviation LXX), after the seventy translators who are supposed to have done the translation. In addition to the canonical books of the Hebrew version, the LXX contains a number of other books, considered to be less authoritative, the *Apocrypha*, among them *Wisdom*, *Ecclesiasticus* and I and II *Maccabees*. The LXX is still the version of the Old Testament used by the Eastern Church; and we have much older manuscripts of it than we have of the Hebrew, apart from a few fragments, which now include the passages of Hebrew scriptures in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Biblical scholars thus have the always interesting choice when faced with variant readings between the LXX and Massoretic texts; for the latter is in the original language, but survives in manuscripts at least four or five hundred years later than those of the Greek version. Later on, in the early days of the Church, of course, Christian scholars added the New Testament to the Greek version of the Scriptures.

Religio Licita

As we have already noted, many Gentiles were attracted to Judaism as a religion; and most of the Roman emperors tolerated its existence. There was little persecution, probably because the Jews, then as ever since, were useful and influential in the financial and economic life of the Roman Empire. To the thoughtful Hellenist Jewish monotheism was far nobler than the absurdly crude state polytheism of Greece and Rome, and had a devotional warmth and moral challenge lacking in the teaching of the Greek philosophers. Moreover, the Judaism of the first century B.C., while essentially the monotheism of the patriarchs and prophets, was beginning to assimilate some of the

metaphysical ideas of Plato and Aristotle. It is little wonder then that it proved fertile soil for the growth of Christianity. But the exclusive nationalism of the Jews was at length their undoing, and prevented Judaism itself from ever becoming a world religion. Judaism is found all over the world today simply because the Jews themselves were scattered.

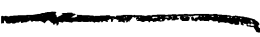
The Fall of Jerusalem

The end of any national hopes for Jewry came in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman emperor Titus. For generations numerous Jewish sects had attempted to throw off Roman domination. Each was suppressed with typical Roman efficiency, including the last Jewish War largely engineered by the Zealots. The capital was razed to the ground, and for nineteen hundred years — until the formation of Israel on Arab territory in Palestine in 1948 — the Jews had no national home. The story of their wanderings, their material success and their persecutions is well known. They are either by grace or nature or by both a gifted people; and the number of Jews who figure among the geniuses of mankind is considerable. It is remarkable that perhaps the three most significant figures in modern Western thought, Marx, Freud and Einstein, were all Jews by race.

The final dispersion of Jewry by Rome and, later, the contemptuous regard in which they were held by the Christian Church because they were the descendants of those who had had Christ put to death drove the Jews still further into racial exclusiveness. For four centuries, however, Palestine remained the chief Jewish centre, but in the fourth century leadership passed to the Jews in Babylonia.

The Talmud

Over several hundred years — certainly from the formation of the Hebrew canon onwards — a great deal of systematization and elaboration of the Law took place. This was codified during the first five hundred years A.D. in two main parts, the *Mishnah* in classical Hebrew, containing the civil and religious laws of



Jewry, and the *Gemara*, in Aramaic, which is a commentary on the *Mishnah*. The *Gemara* has two versions, a Palestinian and a Babylonian. The oral traditions behind these rabbinical commentaries are divided into *Halachah*, the actual laws and customs, and *Haggadah*, homiletic legends and stories illustrating the law, often known as *Midrash*. The great Spanish Jew Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), theologian and physician, who learnt the philosophy of Aristotle from the Arabs, wrote an Arabic commentary on the *Mishnah*, which in its Hebrew translation now forms part of the official text of the Talmud.

Mediaeval Judaism

Mediaeval Jewish scholars who had come into contact with the Arabs in Palestine, North Africa and Spain were considerably influenced by Neo-Platonism, a monistic development of Greek philosophy, which, despite its name, was quite as much Aristotelean as Platonic, and which, largely because of its origin in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, also included many oriental religious ideas. Out of this contact grew up a mystical kind of Jewish pantheism known as *Kabbalah*, a word which literally indicates traditionally received doctrines, but which has come to suggest secret, esoteric teaching. Classical Hebrew monotheism, however, was too deep-rooted to be ousted by this particular variety of theosophy, and by the end of the eighteenth century it has ceased to be of anything more than academic interest.

Mediaeval Judaism has more important aspects. We have already mentioned Maimonides, the leading Jewish Scholastic. About 1180 he drew up his Thirteen Articles, which are still the doctrinal basis of Jewish orthodoxy. In addition to stressing the principle of ethical monotheism, they assert that Moses is the greatest prophet and that God dictated the Law to him, that the Law is unchangeable and must not be altered by man, that God rewards and punishes on the basis of the Law, that a Messiah will come, and that one day God will raise the dead. Indirectly mediaeval Judaism is also important in the history of Christian thought; for it was from Jewish scholars, who in

turn had learnt it from the Arabs, that St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) learnt his Aristotelean philosophy, which he used as a basis for his own philosophy of religion.

Modern Judaism

Today Judaism is divided into two main branches. The Orthodox adhere rigidly to the traditional interpretation of the Law and to the traditional synagogue and household worship, as well as to the rules concerning clean and unclean meats. Their chief holy days are, of course, the Sabbath, Saturday, the several feasts ordained in the Jewish Bible, and certain days of mourning recalling the destruction of the Temple and the Dispersion. There are, however, Liberal Jews, who think that many of the old ideas and practices should no longer be binding, and that the spirit rather than the letter of Jewish institutions is all that really matters. Some Liberal Jewish synagogues have even instituted services on Sundays as well as the Sabbath, on the ground that they must recognize that they are living in a Christian social environment. But neither Orthodox nor Liberal Jewry is missionary minded. In the case of the former this is bound to be the case on account of their strong racial consciousness; while the latter are often barely distinguishable in their fundamental beliefs from Unitarian Christians. It is, of course, important to recognize that for several centuries many Jews have been Jews only by race, and have adopted Christianity as their religion.

ZOROASTRIANISM

The Parsis

We shall not devote a great deal of space to Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Parsis, a small community of less than 120,000 souls who live mainly in and near Bombay, and the still smaller one in Persia, the Gabars. But it should be mentioned, for its founder has been described as 'one of the noblest of the goodly fellowship of the prophets'; and, despite a degeneration in the religion after his death, it is still one of the monotheistic religions of the world. Indeed, the Parsis are a people of high moral and cultural standards, who are widely respected in

India by Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike. As we shall see, it is inaccurate to dub them 'fire-worshippers', which some early writers were inclined to do.

Zarathushtra

There is no reason to doubt the historicity of the founder of Zoroastrianism, although it is difficult to say with any certainty just when he lived. The consensus of scholarly opinion, however, which on the whole agrees with mediaeval Persian tradition, places him between 800 and 600 B.C. For long the only source of information about him and his religion were classical writers, such as Herodotus and the Elder Pliny. For this reason he was for long known only by the Greek form of his name, Zoroaster. The original form, however, Zarathushtra, came to the knowledge of the West when during the eighteenth century European scholars learnt at first hand about the history of Persia and of the Parsis and about their scriptures, the *Avesta*, written in Avestan, the Aryan language of ancient Persia, cognate with the Sanskrit of India.

Zarathushtra was a priest who reformed the polytheistic religion of the agricultural, cattle-rearing folk of Seistan, just as over a thousand years later Muhammad reformed the polytheism of Arabia. He condemned the deities of the neighbouring cattle-stealing brigands calling them demons, and taught a simple type of ethical monotheism — or, at any rate, something approximating to it. His message is contained in his hymns, or *Gathas*, which are the foundation of the Avesta. He believed that God had called him, and declared:

I conceived of thee, Mazdah, in my thought that Thou, the First, art also the Last — that Thou art the Father of Good Thought, for thus I apprehended Thee with mine eye — that Thou didst truly create Right, and art the Lord to judge the actions of life.¹⁸

At first, like most of the great reformers, unsuccessful, he at length won the support of King Vishtaspa. The prophet was killed in a war of religion, but thereafter Zoroastrianism flourished.

He was not an ascetic, but constantly insisted that men should side with Ahura Mazdah, later known as Ormuzd, the Wise Lord, in the cosmic warfare against Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman, the Evil One. This antithesis of good and evil has left us in some doubt as to whether Zarathushtra really was a monotheist: scholars have often argued that he was in fact a dualist. But it is important to remember that he was not a subtle speculative thinker, and that the knotty problem of the origin of good and evil probably never bothered him. Yet it is clear that he believed that after four periods, each of three thousand years, had passed, God would send the *Saoshyant*, or Saviour, who would defeat the Evil One and begin an Age of Renovation, when men would be judged and a perfect order of things established.

The Magi

The successors of Zarathushtra were the priestly caste, the Magi, with whom tradition associates the Wise Men of the East who came to worship the infant Christ.¹⁹ Although the Magi preserved the essence of the prophet's evangel, they also unconsciously debased the religion. The spirit of his teaching was forgotten, and in its place came a host of rules and regulations, many of them absurd. They also transformed the Amesha Spentas, the six divine attributes of God taught by Zarathushtra, into separate lesser deities, the Immortal Holy Ones, and, as in the case of Zervanists who speculated that good and evil evolved from an original principle called 'Boundless Time', tended to believe in an amoral Absolute from whom the Wise Lord and the Evil One both emanated. They forgot the true meaning of the actual recorded words of Zarathushtra, regarding them rather as having a property of a spell; and it is little wonder that our word 'magician' can be traced back to the Magi.

The Avesta

When the Zoroastrian scriptures first came to the knowledge of the West they were erroneously called the *Zend-Avesta*. Their



proper title is simply the *Avesta*. They have suffered considerable destruction in the course of their history, notably during the invasion of Persia by Alexander the Great and later during the Muslim conquest. The Avestan canon was fixed during the fourth century A.D., but unfortunately the earliest manuscripts that have survived date from as late as the thirteenth century. The *Avesta* itself is made up of the *Gathas* consisting of Zaratrusthra's hymns, the later prose *Gatha* of the Seven Chapters, certain other hymns, and the *Visparad* in honour of heavenly beings, as well as the *Vendidad*, a priestly code of laws for purification from ritual impurity.

There are also other sacred books in a later language, Pahlavi, dating from the eighth to the eleventh centuries A.D. Their two chief parts are the *Dinkart*, a summary of the *Avesta* proper, and the *Bundahish*, a kind of *vade-mecum* of mediaeval Zoroastrianism. It is these books, which are not accorded quite such high esteem as the others, which are the *Zend*, or Commentary, on the *Avesta*.

The Parsi scriptures contain a great deal of eschatology, which must have influenced not only Exilic and post-Exilic Judaism but also the whole religious outlook of the Near East, particularly during the cosmopolitan Hellenistic period from the time of Alexander the Great onwards. There seems little doubt that the mystery religions of the Roman Empire, particularly Mithraism, borrowed much of their symbolism from Persia. The Zoroastrian belief in the *fravashi*, a man's genius or guardian spirit, probably contributed to the angelology of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The idea of a Last Judgment and the vivid picture of rewards and punishments which figure in Judaeo-Christian and Islamic religion are likewise indebted to Persia. The *Avesta* teaches that at the end of the present age will come a resurrection followed by judgment. Severe trials will await mankind. One of these is the traversing of the Cinvat Bridge, which will be broad and firm to the righteous but narrow as a razor's edge to the wicked so that they fall off into the abyss below. Another is the lake of fire, burning to the evil, but lukewarm as milk to

the good. Yet the picture of heaven is not a sensuous one: at the most it is described as 'the House of Song' or 'the Home of Best Thought'. And it is interesting to note that a doctrine of purgatory was anticipated in the belief that there was a separate state for those whose good and evil thoughts, words, and deeds balanced. Modern Parsi theologians do not regard divine punishment as final but as remedial, so helping to overthrow the power of Ahriman, the Evil One.

Modern Zoroastrianism: the Parsis

The Muslim invasion of Persia drove the majority of Zoroastrians to India; but it is likely that they were not strangers there, for they were successful traders. The Parsis no longer proselytize, and their numbers have thus declined of recent years. Like the Quakers in Christendom, they consider that their example is sufficient to attract men to their religion.

The central material feature of their religious cult is the fire temple. Fire is for them the symbol of God; but it would be no more true to call them fire-worshippers than to call Christians cross-worshippers or Muslims Quran-worshippers. Most elaborate rules and precautions have to be taken to make a sacred fire; and even the domestic fire at home is treated with veneration. Worshippers, besides making confessions of their faith and saying their prayers when visiting a temple, make an offering of sandalwood. The priest who feeds the fire wears a mask of cloth lest his breath should pollute it: yet it is an amusing inconsistency that Parsis are not forbidden to smoke.

Another — and a gruesome — feature of this religion is its method of disposal of the dead. To bury a corpse is regarded as desecration of the soil. Dead bodies are, therefore, put on the top of 'towers of silence', where vultures soon descend to devour the flesh and the bones fall through a grating into a central chamber. As the early Zoroastrians buried their dead, this is a Magian practice evolved out of excessive concern to prevent pollution of the earth.

The Parsi priests learn the whole of the *Avesta* by heart; but

until recently this knowledge was little more than a parrot-like ability to recite. The result was often a quasi-magical view of the scriptures. Over the last two or three generations, however, there has been a reform movement, which has in some measure helped to produce a more learned ministry and with it a more enlightened view and use of the *Avesta*. Yet obscurantist traditionalism among the Parsis, as among the adepts of other religions, dies hard. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how, despite the measure in which it has departed from the original simple doctrine of the prophet, Zoroastrianism holds fast to the belief in one personal holy God who demands moral integrity of his followers; and it is also remarkable that, simple as he was, Zarathushtra's insight led him beyond a cold unitarianism when he called upon his followers to venerate the six divine attributes of Ahura Mazdah. As J. H. Moulton, the Christian biblical scholar who greatly admired Zoroaster, wrote: 'We see that this profound thinker's instinct not only grasped the supreme truth of the oneness of God, but realized the vital corollary — blindness to which has vitiated the monotheism of Islam — that there must be diversity within the Godhead if the unity is to be a fruitful doctrine.'²⁰

ISLAM

Muhammad

'There is no God but Allah: Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.' This short creed, the *kalima*, sums up two important Muslim beliefs. Islam is uncompromising in its monotheism, and Muhammad is the last and greatest of the prophets. Like so many creative religious geniuses, Muhammad was not a clever man: he was no scholar and no philosopher. Probably learning and speculation are to some extent inhibitive where profound vision is concerned. And it was not until he was in early middle age, the manager of a caravan business belonging to a widow named Khadijah, whom he married, that he became aware of a divine call to proclaim a message from God.

The religion of Arabia in the seventh century A.D. was polytheistic. True, there was some notion of a Supreme Being in

Allah, but there was also belief in his goddess-daughters and a host of other lesser deities. This ignoble religion with its sacrificial rites and the veneration of the Kaaba, or Black Stone, at Mecca the prophet reformed, at first by persuasion, later by force. Like most great leaders Muhammad was the product of a crisis — in this case a spiritual crisis.

Little is known of his conversion, save that it probably happened as a result of his habit of meditating on Mount Hira. About A.D. 610 he became convinced of a divine call from Allah through the archangel Gabriel. After a period of preparation he began his preaching, which probably consisted of stern ejaculations, which later formed the earlier *suras* of the *Quran*. At first he had scant success, and meetings of his followers had to be held in secret. His message was a simple one, an uncompromising ethical monotheism. Tradition has it that among his first utterances was:

O thou, Enwrapped in thy mantle!
 Arise and warn!
 Thy Lord — magnify Him!
 Thy raiment — purify it!
 The abomination — flee it!²¹

Here already his severe condemnation of idolatry is made plain. After a fight with opponents, in which one of his stepsons — the first Muslim martyr — was killed, Muhammad openly denounced the polytheism of Arabia. Many of his sayings are reminiscent of those of the Old Testament prophets.

The Quraish, the Meccan clan in control of the Kaaba, naturally sought to silence the prophet, and for a while he had to seek refuge in the Christian land of Ethiopia. But later he was allowed to return to Mecca, provided he limited his proselytizing to outsiders. But the opposition of the Quraish grew; and most of Muhammad's supporters fled to the city of Yathrib. Eventually he himself had to flee thither; and thereafter Yathrib became Medina, the City of the Prophet. This flight took place in A.D. 622, and from it the Muslim calendar is calculated.²² At Medina he built a mosque with living quarters for his family, which included ten wives and two concubines, with

whom he lived in turn, as has been the custom with rich Muslims until comparatively recent times.²³

The inhabitants of Medina did not prove enthusiastic converts; and the prophet had to rely on the support of refugees from Mecca, even condoning their highway robbery as a means of livelihood. This eventually led to a battle over a rich caravan from Mecca, which was won by Muhammad's fanatical supporters. The *Quran* refers to it as 'the Day of Deliverance',²⁴ and thereby set a precedent for later religious warfare, conversion at the point of the sword. Although supported by the Jews, whom the prophet had hitherto regarded in a friendly way but now with strong disfavour, the Meccans were unsuccessful in their retaliation. In 630 the prophet took the city. A massacre, particularly of the Jews, was followed by the destruction of the polytheistic idols and the conversion of the Kaaba into a place of summoning to prayer. A general amnesty was granted to the Meccans on the condition that they obeyed Muhammad; and thereafter Mecca became the capital of the new faith. Soon the whole of Arabia was subdued. Non-Muslims were prohibited from entering Mecca; and to this day this rule largely holds good. Jews and Christians were tolerated, if they became tributary peoples; but Muhammad regarded their religions as perversions of the true faith of Abraham, which he claimed he was restoring. Muhammad died at Medina in A.D. 632, having ruthlessly exterminated the debased religion of Arabia and established Islam.²⁵

The Spread of Islam

Today Islam covers the world from West Africa across the Sahara to Egypt, through the whole of the Near East, to Pakistan, on to Malaya and the East Indies. There are also small Muslim pockets in the Balkans and in China. Although during the Middle Ages the extent of Islam was yet wider in the West, its present survival in Africa and Asia is aided considerably by political, economic and racial factors.

Muhammad appointed no successor, but on his death leadership fell to two of his earliest converts Abu Bakr and Umar, who

became the first and second Caliphs;²⁶ and under the latter, in particular, the Arab Empire was founded by the conquest of Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Persia. We need not note for the purpose of this book the successive caliphates, save that by the eighth century Islam had entered Spain, where it lingered until the expulsion of the Moors in the fifteenth. Indeed, when in 720 the Muslims crossed the Pyrenees Christian Europe for a short spell was in dire peril, until the defeat of the Arabs by Charles Martel in 732. Islam had also spread to India by the eighth century, but it was not until the sixteenth century that the zenith of Muslim domination was reached in the Mogul Empire, some of the rulers of which were hardly orthodox Muslims. During the Middle Ages, partly through the conquests of Muslim invaders and partly through commercial infiltration, Islam reached as far as China and Indonesia on the one hand and West Africa on the other. But perhaps the most long-lived Muslim empire was the Ottoman which began with the reign of the Turk Uthman at the end of the thirteenth century and spread from Asia Minor into Europe, though it was not until 1453²⁷ that Constantinople fell to the Muslims, who then pressed forward and finally reached the outskirts of Vienna on the Danube in 1683, when they were repulsed by John Sobieski, King of Poland. The Ottoman Empire lingered on, becoming less and less powerful, until, as the 'Sick Man of Europe', it died during the First World War. In 1928 Islam ceased to be the state religion of the Turkish republic, but most Turks are still Muslims.

The Quran

Muslims regard Jews, Christians and themselves as peoples of the Book. They acknowledge the sanctity of the Judaeo-Christian Bible; but they regard the *Quran*, the Muslim bible, as superior and God's final word to man.²⁸ On the whole they are fundamentalists, believing that the very words in Arabic were dictated by the archangel Gabriel to the Prophet. The *Quran* itself proclaims its own authority:

Thus then, as a code in the Arabic tongue have we sent down the Koran. . . . To each age its Book.²⁹

The orthodox Muslims, the Sunnis, even believe that the Arabic words are eternal and were communicated to the Prophet by an audible voice. A rationalist group, the Mutazilites, however, arose in the eighth century, who maintain instead that its inner content is eternal but that the language is that of the prophet and his age.

The word *Quran* means 'Recitation', and is derived from the opening of *Sura xcvi*, which tradition holds to be the first chapter revealed to Muhammad:

Recite thou, in the name of thy Lord who created; —
Created man from Clots of Blood: —
Recite thou! for thy Lord is the most Beneficent,
Who hath taught the use of the pen.

The sections or chapters of the *Quran* are called *suras* (literally, rows of bricks), the earlier of which are the shorter and more poetic, since they contain Muhammad's staccato prophetic utterances. The later *suras*, because of their legalistic style, belong to a more developed stage of the religion when it had acquired a more definite organization. The traditional order of the *suras* is certainly not their chronological order of composition. This can hardly be the case, since it is said that the fragments on which they were written were kept in a container, and drawn out indiscriminately to be copied down in one volume. Attempts have been made to arrange them historically; and the most easily accessible of these in English translation is that of J. M. Rodwell.

The Old Testament and the Christian *Injil*, or Evangel, are mentioned in the *Quran*; but Muslims, while believing that they are inspired, also believe that they are superseded by it. What the New Testament, for example, says about the divine nature of Christ is strongly denied. But it is clear that Muhammad's knowledge of Christianity was not very expert. This is shown by his belief that the Christian Trinity consisted of God the Father, God the Mother and God the Son,³⁰ which he must have learnt from heretical Egyptian Christians who had simply christianized the Osiris, Isis and Horus trinity of ancient Egypt.

In order to solve the contradictions of the *Quran* Muslims

resort to a convenient doctrine of abrogation, whereby it is held that God gave later *suras* to cancel earlier. This doctrine has sanction in the *Quran* itself:

Whatever verses we cancel, or cause thee to forget, we bring a better or its like. Knowest thou not that God hath power of all things?³¹

Muslims acknowledge that there are over two hundred such cancelled verses. A striking instance of this is to be seen in the *suras* referring to Jews and Christians. The earlier say that God will reward their virtue, and were obviously written when Muhammad was friendly disposed towards them. The later, however, dating from and after the time of his victory over his opponents, the Quraish and Jews of Mecca, proclaim that they will be punished along with the infidels. Similarly, the *sura* allowing prayer to be made in the direction of Jerusalem is cancelled by the enforcing prayer towards Mecca. Again, there was a later *sura* granting to the prophet extra wives after the death of Khadijah.

Jews and Christians

At first Muhammad was kindly in his regard towards Jews and Christians. The prophet had good reason to be grateful to them; for he was granted asylum by the Christian king of Ethiopia, and owed not a little to the strict monotheism of the Jews, who, he admitted, had preserved the faith of Abraham and the patriarchs and prophets. But partly because of the Jewish support given to the Quraish when he fought against Mecca and partly because at length success gave him an intolerant upper hand, he began to condemn both: the *Quran* itself reflects this change of attitude. As we have already noted, the prophet was neither scholar nor philosopher: his views, therefore, of other religions, particularly of Christianity, were based on hearsay and were often inaccurate.

The Sects

The orthodox majority of Muslims are known as *Sunnis*, because they follow the *sunna*, or custom, of the Prophet. There are,

however, a number of sects. One of the chief of these are the *Shiahs*, found mainly in Persia, who believe that the twelve leaders, or *imams*, successors of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, ought to have been caliphs. The twelfth *imam* disappeared mysteriously in the ninth century; and the Shiahs look forward to his reappearance as the *Mahdi*, a Muslim messiah, before the Day of Judgment. There is also a similar sect, with the Aga Khan at its head, who believe there were only six historical imams, and that since his time there has always existed a hidden imam. They are also known as Ismailis.³²

Quite different was the mystical movement which grew up in Persia in the early Middle Ages. This was Sufism, the chief teacher of which was the great Al Ghazali (d. 1111). It shows the influence of Neo-platonism and Hinduism in that it is a thoroughgoing pantheism; and it is remarkable that it was tolerated at all in Islam. A similar movement occurred in the Kabbalah of mediaeval Judaism. The Sufis believe that in this life the soul is temporarily separated from God, but that hereafter it will be merged into God. One of the most famous expressions of Sufism is that of the tenth-century Persian martyr poet Hallaj, who declared: 'I am He whom I love; and He whom I love is I.'

Among the several other notable sects in the history of Islam have been the Qadarites and Mutazilites, modernists in their day, who objected to the literalism of the orthodox in their interpretation of the *Quran*, and who wanted to allow some room for human freewill in Muslim theology. On the other hand were the Kharijites who maintained an extreme literalism with respect to the *Quran*, and the Jabarites who held a thoroughgoing doctrine of divine predestination. During the eighteenth century the Wahhabis led a violent puritanical protest against the luxury of the day. They even engaged in iconoclastic violence in Mecca, but were eventually crushed by the Turks.

During the nineteenth century three influential movements took shape, which influence Islam to this day. One was Babism, which originated with a Persian, Mirza Ali Muhammad, who in 1844 claimed to be the *Bab*, or Door, who was preparing for the

appearance of the Imam, long expected by the Shiah. In 1850 the Bab was shot by order of the Shah, and the sect slowly died out. But another grew from it, through the teaching of one Mirza Husain Ali (d. 1892), who took the title 'Glory of God' and wrote several books which came to be the scriptures of this Bahai sect. Bahaism, however, has departed so far from orthodox Islam that it is no longer recognized as Muslim. It has adopted so much from other religions that it has become a kind of theosophy.³³

The most militant Muslim sect today is the Ahmadiyya movement, which engages in missionary work overseas. This began with the teaching of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908) in the Punjab. He claimed to be the Mahdi, or Messiah, not only for Muslims but also for Christians, and an *avatar* of Vishnu for Hindus. The Ahmadiyyists are strongly anti-Christian, claiming that Christ did not die on the cross but only became unconscious. He later recovered, and went to India, where they claim that his tomb is that at Srinagar in Kashmir bearing the inscription *Yus Asaf*. They assert that this means 'Jesus the Gatherer' of the lost tribes, but philologically the translation is absurd: the tomb can be none other than that of some Muslim holy man. Their outlook is a reactionary one; but their methods show Islam trying to extend its boundaries to other lands.³⁴

The Five Pillars

The five fundamental duties of every Muslim enjoined by Muhammad are as follows. First there is confession of faith, at least in the *kalima*, the well-known words 'There is no God but Allah: Muhammad is the apostle of Allah'. This the *muezzin* calls from the minaret of the mosque at the appointed hours of prayer. Prayer is the second foundation. It must be preceded by purification, the worshipper using water or sand, and must be performed in the proper posture and with the proper gesture in the direction of Mecca. On Fridays, the Muslim holy-day, Muslims are expected to assemble at a mosque for corporate prayers and to hear the *Quran* read and expounded. There is no priesthood, and in the absence of the *imam* any responsible

Muslim may lead worship. The stern monotheism of Islam is reflected in the bareness of the mosque, where there must be no music and no images, even of a decorative kind.

The third obligatory duty is fasting during Ramadhan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. None save children, pregnant mothers, the sick and aged are excused. There must be abstinence from all food and drink, from the use of tobacco and perfumes, as well as from sexual intercourse, from sunrise to sunset throughout the month. Only when the colour of a thread is no longer distinguishable may food be taken. The fourth pillar is almsgiving, which covers both legal and voluntary taxes for the support of the religion and for charitable purposes. And the fifth duty is the pilgrimage to Mecca, the desire of every devout Muslim. It should be carried out with the proper attire during the twelfth month of the Muslim year, but the lesser pilgrimage made at any time is also regarded as meritorious. Formerly a sixth duty of religious warfare was sometimes added.

Muslim Monotheism

Of all religions Islam is outwardly the most monotheistic in that it stresses that the unity of God is an arithmetical oneness, as distinct from Christianity which, as in its doctrine of the Trinity, envisages a diversity within the oneness of God. In the *Quran* Muhammad attacks the Christian doctrine of God, but also shows he did not understand it.

Although there is just one hint at an hypostasis within the Godhead, when the *Quran* says that the 'Divine Command' makes known the power of God,³⁵ Islam always stresses that nothing finite must be associated with Allah; for to attribute anything finite to God is to commit one of the greatest sins. Yet a critical examination of Muslim theology shows certain inconsistencies. For example, Allah is thought of as having seven attributes — life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight and speech — the last three of which, if not all seven, are certainly anthropomorphic.

Again there is a strange contrast between the frequent description of Allah as 'the Compassionate, the Merciful' and the

constant threats of punishment which occur in the *Quran*. Poetic as it is, one cannot help noting the tedious repetition of the basic message of the Prophet — that men should listen to him, and believe in one God, and so enjoy the bliss of a sensuous heaven and avoid the terrible doom of sinners. And all this is overshadowed by the perennial dilemma of Islam, the belief that everything is the will of Allah, even the infidelity and destruction of the infidel. In practice, of course, Muslims, like those Christians who believe in predestination, do not — indeed, cannot — live their daily lives as if it were true. To believe that all that happens is God's will and at the same time to fulminate against sinners who are such because God wills them to be so is nonsensical.

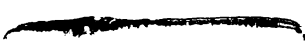
Needless to say, Muslim theologians have long been aware of the intellectual problems of their religion, and have disputed over them in order to arrive at satisfactory solutions. In practice, Islam has produced two extreme policies — inertia or fanatical devotion going to the limits of bloodshed. Yet the nobler side of the religion remains — its simplicity, its moral integrity, and its utter devotion to God rather than to man. Muhammad's genius was his grasp of the truth that religion is primarily not a theory about man or the universe but a living relationship between the creature and his Creator.

CHRISTIANITY

Jewish Origins

Because most of the readers of this book will be — or should be — more familiar with Christianity than with the other religions, our survey will not be an exhaustive one. We shall not go into details of its history: we shall be content to consider some of its leading men and movements, bearing in mind the basic religious ideas which they stood for.

As we have seen, Christianity, the religion founded by Jesus Christ, was in origin one of several Jewish sects. Consequently, its religious ideas are fundamentally Hebrew. Belief in one personal God, the creator of the universe, the director of history, who at once loves men and expects moral obedience of them, is



implicit in the teaching of Christ. Indeed, there was little in his ethical teaching that was highly original. The Sermon on the Mount can be paralleled by much in the Old Testament and in the Jewish rabbis. The uniqueness of Christianity derives from the person of Christ rather than from his moral discourses. He claimed to be — and his followers claimed him to be — God's revelation in human personality. This is sublimely expressed in the prologue of *St John*, where, even towards the end of the first century, we see Greek philosophical language being used to enshrine the great truth of the Gospel.³⁶

But the first Christians were naturally Jews, for whom it was difficult to separate the new religion from the old. The controversy as to whether Christianity should be bound down by Jewish law and custom is recorded in St Luke's second volume, *The Acts of the Apostles*. St Paul and his sympathizers, who saw that the Church must include all men, won the day,³⁷ and in so doing obeyed Christ's teaching, classically presented in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, that all men should love one another.

The Spread of the Church

Doubtless the apostles all contributed to the missionary activity of the Church; but it was Paul, a Pharisee of more learning than they, who, converted to Christianity after the death of Christ, did most in planting churches in the great cities of Asia Minor and Greece. He and Peter, according to tradition, ended their lives as martyrs in Rome itself, where Christianity had also been established despite the persecution of Nero. Persecution was to come time and time again; but it proved an encouragement rather than a deterrent. The organization of the infant Church was probably not a rigid one, but clearly certain practices started by Christ and his first disciples were continued. The Church grew and became yet more organized during the second century, and soon emerged with its ministry, its sacraments and its scriptures. But its progress was by no means smooth, for even after persecution had ceased in 313, when the Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity, internal dissensions

over doctrine caused almost endless trouble. Inevitably varying views of the nature of Christ had to be sorted out: hence the Christological heresies which successive councils of the Church had to deal with, particularly during the third to the fifth centuries. Moreover, the collapse of the Roman Empire, the significance of which was so keenly realized by one of the greatest of the Fathers, St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) in his *The City of God*,³⁸ and the threats to civilization by invaders — first the Goths and later the Muslims — brought about a temporary set-back, which banished Christianity from Asia and North Africa, so limiting it to Europe. Nevertheless, even during the so-called Dark Ages, missionaries made up for losses in the South by carrying Christianity further northwards. In 597 another Augustine, at the bidding of Pope Gregory the Great, began to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons of England and soon made contact with the earlier but by now weakened Celtic Church which had been driven to the west of Britain. By the beginning of the Middle Ages a Christian state had been established in Western Europe, with Rome as its ecclesiastical centre.

Latin, Greek and Hebrew

The inscription on Christ's Cross in three languages was almost prophetic. Christ himself and his immediate followers thought and spoke in Aramaic, the late Hebrew vernacular. But, as Hebrew forms of thought meant little to the Greeks, the early Church translated Christian teaching into Greek ways of thinking; and this is specially evident in the writings of the Fathers and the doctrinal formulae drawn up by the Church at its councils. With the dawn of the Middle Ages a further re-interpretation was necessary. The full-flowering of this interpretation is seen in the *Summa Theologica* of the greatest of the Schoolmen, St Thomas Aquinas (1226–1274).³⁹ Each age has to find a new means of communication: otherwise the truths of religion cease to have any meaning for them. One of the reasons why Islam, Hinduism and the religion of the Parsis have been so lethargic is that their followers often did not know the meaning

of the scriptures which they learnt by heart in a parrot-like fashion. In Christendom itself towards the end of the Middle Ages, the essence of Christianity had largely been obscured because the Bible and the Liturgy were in a language which the people did not understand.

The Bible

The Christian Bible consists of the Hebrew scriptures, comprising the Old Testament, the Jewish Apocrypha,⁴⁰ and the specifically Christian books, the New Testament. The latter consists of the Four Gospels, outlining the life and teaching of Jesus, the *Acts of the Apostles* telling of the spread of the Apostolic Church, the letters of St Paul to the churches in the chief cities of the Mediterranean world, other letters, mostly attributed to St Peter and St James, and the *Revelation of St John the Divine*, otherwise known as the *Apocalypse*, a tract written in strange imagery to encourage Christians suffering persecution. All these books were written in the second half of the first century, with possibly one or two small exceptions; and it is well to remember that the earliest of them all were Paul's epistles, composed within the twenty years A.D. 45 to 65.

These were only some of many early Christian writings composed in the first century; and a process of sifting took place, which ended with the establishment of the New Testament canon as we know it by the end of the fourth century, though most of the books had been acknowledged as authoritative by the end of the second. Many papyrus fragments of the Gospel dating back as far as the second century have come to light; but the oldest complete manuscript of the Greek Bible is the fine *Codex Sinaiticus* of the fourth century, now in the British Museum.

The Bible has always been accorded a special place in the Christian religion, because it contains the Word of God. Often this has led to an extreme veneration leading almost to bibliolatriy. Today millions of devout Christians are fundamentalists, believing that the Bible was specially inspired by God and is inerrant on all religious — and some would say all other — matters. Roman Christianity is fundamentalist in this respect,

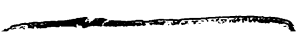
but it adds that the Church alone can rightly interpret the Scriptures. The Roman Catholic Church is, therefore, doubly fundamentalist, for it requires its adherents to believe in an infallible Bible and an infallible Church.

With the Reformation the Bible was translated into the vernacular in Protestant countries; and one of these translations is the Authorized Version of 1611, which, quite apart from the fact that it is a translation of ancient literature, is a classic of the English language. Since then, particularly during the last century, more ancient manuscripts have come to light and a new, more scientific approach to the Bible has been worked out. This historical-critical method, which has examined the Bible as it would examine any ancient literature, has been of untold benefit in helping us to understand it better. But unfortunately the critics forgot that religion, including Christianity, is not a museum piece to be understood only in its historical context. The Bible is part of a living tradition; and the meaning it has had for people throughout the ages as well as for people today must be taken into consideration if we are to avoid limiting our notion of Christianity to some unalterable set form which we imagine to have been laid down two thousand years ago.

The Bible itself is not the Word of God, but the Word of God is in the Bible, including the Bible as it is used today. Perhaps the early Fathers had grasped the truth of the matter when they taught that there is more than one level of truth in the Scriptures. Now that the destructive phase of Biblical criticism is over we may expect a new approach, which will seek to combine a critical with a religious understanding of the Bible. The Bible is the greatest of all sacred books: it is a library that took a thousand years to write; and a comparison of it with other sacred literatures shows its surpassing worth.

The Sacraments

An important feature of the Christian Church, except among some Protestants, is its sacramentalism. A sacrament is 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'.⁴¹ The two sacraments instituted by Christ, which have been



observed ever since, are Baptism, the Christian form of initiation, and the Lord's Supper, variously known as the Eucharist, the Mass and the Holy Communion. Ordination, marriage, penance, confirmation and the unction of the sick are also regarded by some branches of the Church as lesser sacraments. The virtue of the sacramental system is that it bridges the gulf between the material and spiritual worlds: most people, without such means of grace, would find their religion far too abstract. Sacramentalism also reminds the Christian that the material world is God's creation. Unlike the Hindu who regards matter as a hindrance to his attaining spiritual perfection, the Christian regards the material world as the means whereby he can express through his actions Christian values.

The actual verbal form of the Eucharist, as now found in the Greek *Liturgy*, the Roman *Missal* or in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, has been altered in the course of history; but its basic shape remains.⁴² For most of Christendom it is the supreme act of Christian worship, re-enacting the Last Supper and the Death of Christ and so symbolically offering to men the life-power of God which will enable them to offer the service of their lives to him. The liturgy is moreover a Christian treasure of great literary beauty.

The Church: Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Ideally the Church is one, but it is in fact divided. There was a Catholic⁴³ Church in the strict sense for the first thousand years, when East and West divided. Throughout the Middle Ages there was political and religious unity in Europe; but by the end of the fifteenth century the Church was so much in need of reformation that a break-up was inevitable. This break-up was further encouraged by the political division of Europe into nation-states. Today Christendom consists of three main sections: the Holy Orthodox Church, covering Eastern Europe, the Roman Catholic Church, and Protestant Christianity. The Roman Church now claims that it is the only legitimate Church, a claim which many find unjustified. Protestants, most of whom originate from the reform movements of Luther,

Calvin and others during the sixteenth century, have no unifying authority.

This division of Christendom is derived in no small measure from the opposition of corporate tradition and individual freedom. The Roman Church rigidly maintains the supremacy of the former, and has reaped no mean material benefits from its almost military, dictatorial authority. Since 1870 it has even claimed that the *ex-cathedra* statements of the Pope are infallible. One wonders why with such divine favour the Pope has so rarely spoken thus in order to enlighten mankind. The truth is that ever since the Counter-Reformation inaugurated by the Council of Trent in 1545 the Roman Church has been trying to define its boundaries more and more rigidly for fear of liberalization. Its efficient organization, its system of discipline, its wonderful works of devotion, and its understanding of different cultures, combined with its conservative spirit of usually backing old, established orders, have paid handsomely so far; but one wonders whether the tremendous political and economic changes in this century have not already undermined it.

What Dean Inge described as 'the fissiparous tendency' of Protestantism has been only too evident. The Reformation was inescapable. The mediaeval Church, with a decadent Papacy, an outworn philosophical system, an inefficient economy, corrupt religious practices, and a disinclination to face new discoveries and ideas, was bound to undergo a drastic purgation. The Renaissance had liberated the human mind by bringing to light the old civilizations of Greece and Rome and by stimulating adventure in science and exploration. Both men and nations became individuals and began to assert their individuality. Unbridled individualism was bound to lead to a multitude of sects and sub-sects. Not only do most Christians now see their absurdity, but they also realize how weak they make the Christian cause in a world threatened by vigorous, organized materialism. It is likely that Christian bodies elsewhere will soon follow the example of those which merged into the Church of South India in 1947. One of the heartening

features of Protestant Christendom over the last thirty years has been the Oecumenical Movement, which is seeking Christian unity, but not necessarily uniformity. The Anglican Communion, consisting of the Church of England and its sister churches, possesses an ethos which combines both freedom and authority, and in consequence may well have a specially valuable contribution to make in the healing of the breaches of Christendom. The Anglo-Catholic or High Church, the Liberal or Broad Church, the Evangelical or Low Church schools of thought are all part and parcel of the Church of England, which shows how tolerance and order can be maintained in one society.

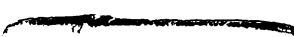
The Anglican ethos has, however, not been maintained without its price; for there is always the tension between individual freedom and corporate authority within such a comprehensive institution. Anglicanism has, moreover, in the past — particularly during the nineteenth and early part of the present century — suffered from too close an identification with the landed and professional classes. This was particularly marked in Wales and Ireland.

The formation of the Baptists and Congregationalists, as well as other Puritan bodies, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the break-away of the Methodists in the eighteenth, show that even Anglicanism did not satisfy everyone. During the present century, however, these denominations have realized more and more the need for Church unity and come to a renewed understanding of the liturgical worship. There are already signs of a renewed Protestantism, at once strongly evangelical but also strongly church-minded. The recent conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, Presbyterian since the Reformation — apart from a few episcopal interludes, already suggest a new form of Protestant Christianity in the making. It remains to be seen how far genuine concern for tradition and vested interest will prove impediments; but that economic and ideological pressures will ultimately bring about a transformation of Protestant Christendom seems certain.

Missions

Throughout its history the Christian Church has sought to obey the command of its Founder to go into all the world and make disciples.⁴⁴ The face of Europe and America would be very different today had not the Early Church ventured beyond the Mediterranean; and today Christianity is still the most missionary-minded of all religions. Because of its sacramental outlook the Church concerns itself not only with the conversion of people to the Christian religion, but also, in its medical missions and educational institutions, with the physical and intellectual well-being of mankind.

Both Roman and Protestant Christianity, the former through its orders, such as the Jesuits, and the latter through its missionary societies, made striking headway in Africa and Asia during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and present centuries. They were fortunate — and in some ways unfortunate — in having the backing of the European powers, Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, Britain and more recently the United States, who were governing and exploiting these continents. But in the last decade India, Ceylon, Burma, Indonesia, have all asserted their independence. China, too, has thrown off economic subservience to the West. Already the African states are looking forward to nationhood, with Ghana in the lead. As far as Asia is concerned, the departure of European rulers has been followed by a revival of the Eastern religions — of Hinduism in India, of Buddhism in Ceylon and Burma. And even China, while not reverting to its ancient faith, looks to a Russian socialism rather than to Christian liberalism for its ideology. The future will be harder for Christian missions than has been the past; but there is a strong likelihood that the basic universalism of Christianity will at length prevail over the nationalist creeds which at the moment have a temporary advantage. If any religion menaces Christianity today it is not Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam, but the worship of Society, the materialist philosophy of Russia and her satellites. Communism is the extreme manifestation of scientific humanism; and many do not realize that it is by no means limited to the other side of the Iron



Curtain. Western Europe and America are also mission fields, where the Church must proclaim the Gospel.

Dogma and the Modern Mood

In the face of the insidious, widespread, contemporary decline into materialism, many Christians have been attracted to a strongly dogmatic form of Christianity. Some go in the direction of the Roman Church, others in that of Protestant Fundamentalism. This reaction is understandable; but, to the intellectually honest, it must also be alarming. The resurgence of fundamentalism is justified on the grounds that a dogmatic enemy needs dogmatic opposition. But this is only to prefer one tyranny to another. The shape of Christian history should teach clearly the lesson that dogma is not the heavenly treasure but only the earthen vessel that holds it.

The truth is far too great to be contained for ever in any one set of doctrinal formulae; and to justify belief in rigid dogma on the grounds of expediency is to deny the truth. It has been one of the great achievements of European philosophy since the time of Kant (d. 1804) to show the inadequacy of language as a means of communicating religious ideas. Kant himself had grasped that this was so; and in our own time the empiricist philosophers known as 'Logical Positivists', even if they appear iconoclastic, have provoked a great deal of clearer thinking about the nature of religious statements. Christian theologians have, of course, always realized the limitations of language; but by and large the Church has tended to regard its doctrinal system as itself the truth rather than as a set of working principles only approximating to the truth.⁴⁵ It will be a sad thing, therefore, if during the second half of this century official Christianity retreats so far into dogmatism that it excludes the very large number of sincere, intellectually honest people who see clearly the limitations of doctrinal statements.

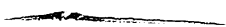
It must be remembered that Christian doctrines are only intellectual propositions: they are not themselves the Christian revelation. It is because of this confusion that so much misunderstanding and persecution has occurred in the past.

Christianity is primarily a proclamation that certain divine events have taken place. The ways of recording these events and, still more, of interpreting them are bound to vary from age to age. In this life our knowledge must always be something of an approximation to the absolute truth; and any attempts to imprison that knowledge in a formula must be even more an approximation. 'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.' Doctrine is a kind of painting of what Christianity is. It is not itself Christianity — only a representation to start us off on our spiritual enlightenment. Each age will have its own painting in its own idiom. Just as a Byzantine painting of Christ, or a piece of mediaeval sculpture, or a Renaissance painting, had more meaning for their own age than for ours, so our age must depict Christ in its own way. And what is true of the visual arts is true also of the art of language. We shall only perpetuate the controversies of the past if we suppose, say, that the Judaeo-Greek doctrinal statements of the Early Church, or the Scholastic theology of Aquinas, or the Liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century are the only valid verbal statements of Christianity. Dogma, in any field of life, is inescapable as an educational device; but it must be flexible and never be confused with the final truth, which is most fully understood in silence, since it is past telling.

The future is a challenge to adventure; and, under the inspiration of God, the Christian can expect to find even greater riches in his religion. Were he a monist, believing only in an abstract World Soul, he might well despair and fold his hands in idleness; but he believes that God is more than he is and not less, and so overrules our little systems.

The Centrality of Christ

We should find that the classical theologians were wise men, if we took more trouble to understand them. St Augustine saw that only God's action could restore the gulf between him and between fallen, sinful man; and, likewise, Aquinas reasoned that the finite creature could never behold the infinite Creator. For them Christianity was a supernatural but not an irrational



revelation. This sounds incredible to many modern ears; but it is only incredible if we insist that only by means of his own intellectual efforts can man ever know the truth. They knew only too well the limitations of the human intellect and will, and in consequence appreciated the wonder of Christ. The simple Christian, untroubled by intellectual problems, is often equally enlightened. It is the majority in between who let the intellectual problems of their religion confuse them. The Christian Gospel is really simple: it is the relationship between oneself and Christ. This stands out clearly in the writings of St Paul and almost every great Christian writer. Christ is central to Christianity; and, whether we believe or not, it is dishonest to contend otherwise. Christianity will ultimately stand or fall on the sovereignty of Christ. If that sovereignty is no more than a pious myth built up round the figure of a Jewish teacher of long ago, then we can expect no more of Christianity than of an open humanism; and perhaps less, because of its fraudulent element. If, on the other hand, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,'⁴⁶ Christianity is of all religions the most to be reckoned with. The person of Christ, therefore, presents each of us with a personal problem, on which he cannot escape decision. Such is the Christian contention.

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION AS DECISION

Our survey of the religious experience of mankind, past and present, shows that man has always sought for communion with a divine power; and this experience has found its noblest expression in two main types of religion, monism and monotheism, Buddhism being the crown of the former, Christianity that of the latter. Both are religions inculcating humility before the mystery which confronts us, if we are large-minded enough to recognize the limitations of human intellect. Neither is sympathetic to the economic and scientific materialism which now threatens the whole world. A pathetic secular faith has grown up, particularly in our western modern society flushed by its powers of organization in thought and practice, which believes that science will reveal all the truth and that we have only to go on researching long enough to have enough knowledge to be able to organize a perfect society. We readily admit that the Victorians and their 'Century of Hope' were foolishly optimistic in anticipating a golden age of peace and plenty; but the heresy persists. We are so bewitched by the gadgetry of our civilization and so dependent upon it that we think technology will save us. Hence the planning and research so fashionable in our time.

Now these are not evil but necessary things in a world with a rapidly increasing population, which is being thrown into increasingly closer contact. The tragedy is that these things and the techniques that go with them are regarded by many as the only truth. All else is a matter of idle speculation. In Russia we see a conscious effort to put an end to non-scientific ways of thinking; but we should not suppose that this attitude is absent in our own society.¹ Religion plays little part in our national and international councils, and is regarded by many as a purely



personal luxury. The results are already apparent, particularly in a widespread sense of frustration and a shaky sense of values. Scientific and economic determinism can only lead in the end to an unprincipled struggle for power by small groups. How much wiser were the peoples of the past and primitive peoples of today in their view of religion and the whole of life as one and the same thing. The folly of the contemporary mood is well exemplified when we compare our utopianism with the healthy belief of the old Hebrew preacher that 'there is no new thing under the sun' and his conclusion of the whole matter, 'Fear God and keep his commandments.'²

The religions of the world make an unwearying call away from complete trust in man as the ruler of his own destiny to humility before the Reality which lies behind the universe. Their answers are, however, different. And this should be clearly acknowledged; for a great deal of confusion is caused by supposing otherwise. Unfortunately many nineteenth-century students of religion approached their study with a pre-conceived notion that some form of philosophical idealism is the foundation of all the great religions. We are now realizing that this is not so: at least a scientific study of religions has shown that. As we have seen, all the advanced religions teach humility. They also teach that 'here we have no continuing city'. They recognize the stark fact that our lives are short, that what lies beyond death is of tremendous importance, and that our life here must be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. They all seek to liberate man from dependence upon material things; but their methods vary and, equally important, their views of the Reality with which man should establish spiritual contact likewise vary.

The monistic religions, of which Buddhism is the most representative, attempt to reach this transcendent goal by a process of dehumanization. For them, not only the world but also man's own nature is a hindrance. The Buddhist way of life, therefore, is one of escape. Matter, including physical human nature, is rated low: the ineffable peace of *nirvana* is the final goal, partially realizable now, fully realizable at death by the saint as *parinirvana*, complete peace. In this process each

individual alone is the maker of his own spiritual fortune. There is no overruling God: there is nothing permanent even in man himself. Such a creed shows a fundamental distrust of the material world, and an implicit faith that abstraction is the key to the truth.³ A study of the more refined teaching of Eastern and Western apologists for monism is often impressive in its abandonment of physical imagery. The Unknown and Unknowable is always a marketable commodity, because it appears to be a highly intellectual commodity. It has a snob appeal, but must, at heart, always remain unsatisfying.

This is not to deny that the attempt to pass beyond sense to intuitive awareness of the truth is possible. It would be presumptuous to question the sincerity and genuineness of mystics of any religion, monist or monotheist. Their experience means so much to them. Moreover, every great religion has always acknowledged that language can never adequately convey the full truth about existence. The Mediaeval Christian theologians saw that when they said that God could only accurately be spoken of in negative terms — that he is not this and not that — since positive affirmation immediately applies the limitations of human thought to the Supreme Being. But Christianity does not on that account assert that man and the world have no bearing at all on the nature of Reality. The Christian view is at least humanistic, though, as we shall see, it is much more.

Its view of the world is not that it is a hindrance, but that it is rather a help to our understanding. This is God's world, and, as such, it provides the key to the truth. The sacramental teaching of Christianity affirms that imagery has an important place in religion, and that any religion without it is poor, not rich.⁴ The persistence of mythology in the Eastern religions themselves admits as much; and we suggest that it is not the intellectualist wings of Hinduism and Buddhism which have the clearest insight, because of their abstraction, but those schools which, having found such abstraction unsatisfying, make extensive use of myth. It is a daring thing to say, but a necessary one, that in India Ramanuja was nearer the truth than Sankara, and that Mahayana Buddhism is nearer the truth than

Hinayana. Even within Mahayana, we suggest that the Jodo and Shin schools are richer far than the Zen. The fallacy of monism is that it substitutes philosophy for religion. Although the religious man will use philosophy in order to systematize his beliefs, religion is not dependent upon philosophy. Unfortunately, ever since the Renaissance in the West a mentality has grown up which has interpreted myth literally; but today there is a growing appreciation that 'spiritual things are spiritually discerned'. The renewed interest in the writings and thought of the Early Fathers, who clearly understood these things, is a welcome sign.

When a Christian, in reciting the Apostle's creed says, 'I believe in the Resurrection of the Body,' he is not dogmatically affirming that one far off day a trumpet will be blown by a Rubens cherub, and that there will be a reassembling of flesh and bones. He is affirming something much greater: that our future state will be not less than this but fuller. An abstraction will not convey this idea. He must use the hallowed imagery, which centuries of experience have enriched and handed on to him. St Paul's magnificent poem on the Resurrection in I *Corinthians* xv is one of the sublimest instances of such imagery. It is, however, an imagery which can hardly be understood from without: we must lose ourselves in it, if we are to grasp the truth behind it. Perhaps detachment, so-called objectivity, is one of the misleading notions of our contemporary world. We are most of us critics, and few of us artists in religion.

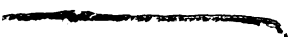
In discussing monism and monotheism we have not so far compared their idea of what Ultimate Reality is. The monist is content to say that Reality is simply Suchness, Namelessness, the One, the Absolute. The vaguer the name the better. The monotheist, be he Jew, Muslim or Christian, affirms that Reality is God, Father, King, Judge. He delights in metaphor; and he does so, because he believes that the images of this world are manifestations of the truth. Reality is not less but more than this world; and, because human personality is the most wonderful thing in our sense experience, the monotheist cannot regard God as less than personal. Whereas the monist believes that the

unknowable One is itself a kind of shadow universe emptied of all imagery of the physical universe, the monotheist believes that God is a greater Being than man or the world, and that the universe, spiritual as well as material, is his creation.

We now pass on to review the second main problem thrown up by the study of religion, that of revelation. Is the truth about the ultimate nature of things shown to man, and, if so, how is it shown? Here the monist asserts that the human mind — a higher intuitive reason rather than discursive thinking — is the only medium of such revelation. As such, the monistic religions of the East have much in common with the idealist philosophy which was so popular in Europe and America during the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the present century. The theories of religion of the German philosophers Kant and Hegel and their disciples contributed considerably in this direction.

The modern scientific outlook in some measure supports this point of view. Scientific method, which in practice still consists of the observation of the things of the apparently material world and the reduction of the data so obtained to a mathematical formula, has been so extended to every department of life that people imagine that the physical world works according to unchanging laws; and these laws are taken to be the only truth. Any alleged variation in the natural order is assumed to be untrue. In addition to this, today we have far wider knowledge about the religions of the world. Each is found to have its own mythology, none of which is regarded as anything more than a product of the human imagination, often beautiful but rarely true in the factual sense. The application of historical criticism to the Bible has also produced a belief that the Bible is no different from other literatures, except that the values which it teaches accord with modern humanitarianism more than other ancient literature. The miraculous element is dismissed on the dogmatic ground that miracles do not happen.

These and a number of other factors have produced an attitude which regards religion purely as the human quest for its ultimate spiritual satisfaction. Religions are assessed on the



basis of value-judgment rather than existential-judgment: in other words, since we are unable to say much about existence because scientific enquiry is regarded as alone competent to speak on that subject, religion has become for many simply a matter of moral and aesthetic values. All religions then become true in so far as they teach men to live better. The famous words of Matthew Arnold, 'Religion is morality touched with emotion,' still find widespread approval.⁵

The old distinction made by classical Christian theology between natural and revealed religion has for long been unpopular. Instead it has been held that all religion is a revelation, because the human mind alone is the medium of such knowledge. If it is denied at the outset that God has revealed himself in a special way to men, and asserted that, if there is a God, he is passive in the relationship between the world and himself, then it necessarily follows that man will find Reality for himself. But one wonders in that case whether the quest is worth while; for we know only too well how hopeless the quest is. Christian theologians have always been aware of this, and recently some, such as the modern German theologian, Karl Barth, have gone so far as to deny that the search by man for God will ever avail. Certainly the confusion of the world today makes such a view attractive.

Christian theology, however, has on the whole respected the dictates of the human reason, since it is our reason and our will that makes us what we are, human as distinct from sub-human beings. The monotheist believes that he is made in the image of God, and that consequently human knowledge is not misleading. One of the dangers of the present time is that, because they find the intellectual side of religion so bewildering, many people are tempted to abandon reason altogether in their religion and surrender themselves to some dogmatic creed which seems to offer them peace of mind. Such a step may lead to greater confusion still, since it will encourage all kinds of strange religions to make headway.

We can detect revelations of God in nature, in the way in which the history of men and nations has worked out, in music,

in the arts, in poetry, in science and in every venture of the human mind. But none of these minor revelations takes us far. We are still left with our own ideas. God remains silent, unknown. The distinctive claim of Christianity is that this is not so. God is not passive, but has revealed himself in Christ in a special way. To think of Jesus as one of the many noble teachers of history, perhaps the noblest, is to miss the point of the Christian Gospel, and make the life of Christ just another human achievement. Christianity proclaims that God himself became incarnate in this temporal-spatial world. This is not an idea, but an historic fact. None of the other great living religions makes such a claim. It is difficult to believe; but such incredulity is natural, because this revelation is different from the everyday discoveries made by our own minds. This twofold nature of our knowledge of religious truth, human discovery and revelation by God, reflects two important monotheistic beliefs about God. God is both immanent in the world and yet transcends it. The monist, if he believes in God at all, can at the most believe in an immanent God, who pervades the universe. Such a view gives rise to pantheism, the doctrine that everything is God, and the consequent moral chaos. On the other hand, if we believe in a transcendent God, the Creator who is greater than his creation, the human attitude towards him can hardly be other than humble. And humility turns to adoration when men believe that their Creator is also their Saviour.

Of all human qualities the sublimest is that universal love, or charity, sung of by St Paul. This is, of course, a rational and not a sensuous love, an enduring compassion; and the monotheist's conviction that God is personal and infinitely good has led him to believe that God is Love. The Old Testament abounds with confessions of faith in the loving kindness of God. The *Quran* constantly declares to the Muslim that Allah is 'the Compassionate, the Merciful'. And it is significant that those schools of Mahayana Buddhism which have moved away from negative monism to quasi-theistic faith in the saviourhood of the Buddha address him as Amida, the Compassionate One. Similarly, the theistic phases of Hinduism, such as we find in the *Bhagavadgita*,

despite their departure from the absolutism of Vedanta for a more positive, if more anthropomorphic, view of deity, imagine that Vishnu has appeared as an *avatar*, or descent, out of compassion for men, calling them to offer him their loving devotion, *bhakti*, in return. But the difference between such monist ideas of divine Compassion and the Christian idea of the love of God is that the former acknowledge it to be no more than a myth, whereas the latter believes the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ to be actual historic deeds of God in his Redemption of mankind.

In the view of the classical theologians this act of Redemption is the only satisfactory way out of our human impasse. For St Augustine man's sin inevitably sets a moral barrier between him and God. For Aquinas human imperfection renders it unreasonable that man, the finite creature, should ever of himself be able to know the infinite Creator. There is a natural religion, which is the human search for God: there is a supernatural religion, which is God's rescue of man. This is the two-fold structure of traditional Christian theology. The desperate cry of Job, which sums up the anguish of the human race,⁶ is answered by the Gospel: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.'⁷ This is perhaps the best known of all the words in the New Testament. Anyone who prefers the moral maxims of the Sermon on the Mount to it reveals that he is not yet humble, that he still trusts in himself and human ingenuity. He has not arrived at the appalling truth of our own sin, so well summed up by St Paul: 'The good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not that I do.'⁸

It is not surprising that the loss of faith in the personal love of God which has characterized Western society over the last one hundred years has also brought with it a loss of a sense of sin. But so violent has been the manifestation of human wickedness in our own century that many are now realizing that there is something radically wrong with human beings — not an emotional or mental disorder that psychological treatment may be able to help, but literally an essential, or ontological, warp in our nature. This is traditionally described as the Fall of man,

which is only a symbolical way of saying that we are constantly trying to impose on the universe our selfish wills instead of the will of God. The reconciliation of the creature to his Creator can in this case only be effected by God in his infinite Love. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.'

Unfortunately, the majesty of God and the depth of his Love have often been made commonplace, even obscured, by Christian theology itself. Doctrines, such as those of the Incarnation and Atonement, which were meant to enshrine the mystery of Christ, have so often become formulae bandied about by scholars and repeated mechanically by worshippers. The same stricture applies to much Biblical exegesis. However mistaken he may have been regarding religion as morality enlivened by feeling, Matthew Arnold was right in pointing out that

Terms like *grace, new birth, justification* . . . people have blunderingly taken in a fixed and rigid manner, as if they were symbols with as definite and fully grasped a meaning as the names *line* or *angle*. . . . Terms, in short, which with St Paul are *literary* terms, theologians have employed as if they were *scientific* terms.⁹

This conservative tendency, found in every human activity, is present in every religion. It is not without its justification in that it seeks to safeguard corporate wisdom, which is only another name for tradition, against the destroyer and the crank; but it is also often the undoing of religion. As we remarked in an earlier chapter, doctrines are simply 'educational devices'. They are needed to start people on their way. They are the artist's rules: each individual will probably always need them in some measure, but as he progresses in his art he will need them less and less. The art of religion, rather than its science, is much more likely to convey the truth; for in art we try to look behind the symbol, whereas in philosophy we usually take language at its face value. The sin of man and the love of God are, then, elemental things which are conveyed more fully in imagery than in conceptual language. A poem on the theme of man's sin and God's love by one of the saintliest of our seventeenth-century poets well illustrates how this is so.

Philosophers have measured mountains,
Fathomed the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
Walked with a staff to heaven, and traced fountains:

But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove:
Yet few there are that found them: Sin and Love.

Who would know Sin, let him repair
Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see
A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
His skin, his garments bloody be.
Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruel food through every vein.

Who knows not Love, let him essay
And taste that juice, which on the Cross a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.¹⁰

Here is a magnificent insight into the historic fact and its meaning for man. In his last line Herbert even links up the love of God shown on the Cross with the Eucharist; and in so short a space he does so far more effectively than could several pages of a theological treatise. But he could never have written this if he had believed that the Cross was just a human idea. He was moved to write because he believed that God had himself acted to save men from their sin.

This leads us to the last problem accentuated by our study of the great religions. This is the problem of objectivity and subjectivity. In other words, how far must we be detached from religion and how far consumed by it? There is a common view that the only intellectually honest approach to religion is to withdraw from it and consider it as one of many human phenomena. We should empty ourselves of all preconceived ideas, study the religions of mankind, and then. . . . What we should do then is not always clear. Generally one of two courses seems to be implied. Either we are to decide which religion to adopt for ourselves or we are to make a composite religion drawing the

best from each. Doubtless many people who take this line are sincere; but they are certainly not being profound. The task is not so easy as it seems; and the probability is that they will never arrive at any decision. They will remain sitting on the fence of objectivity in their intellectual garden, until it rots beneath them or is swept away by the storms of life. Objectivity has a place in religion but its place is after faith. St Anselm wisely spoke of faith seeking reason, and not of reason seeking faith. Faith is a distinct organ of knowledge which yields up the truth which the reason cannot grasp by itself. We have only to apply the same criterion to the other fundamental things of life to see how right this is. A man does not love his friends because reason dictates that he should: he does so out of deeper compulsion. It is only when he loves that he brings his reason to bear on his activity in order to discover the best way of loving them.

There must be commitment to a religion if religion is to yield up its treasures. There must be an unselfconsciousness, a losing of oneself in religion, not as an academic abstraction, but as an activity. What the author has written elsewhere sums up the folly of detachment.

It is almost criminal to adopt, as many apparently intelligent people do, the attitude which advocates that young people should not be conditioned by a religious atmosphere, but should be allowed to choose their own religion when they are old enough and can understand what each religion offers. No religion is simply a set of propositions to which we give or withhold assent. To adopt such a policy is to deprive any young person of his spiritual legacy, and to place upon him the burden of having to undertake in his own relatively short lifetime the quest of the human race for the past half-million years.¹¹

Now that the age of extreme individualism is passing and a keener social conscience is at work, we may hope for a corresponding social approach to religion. Tradition is one of the most important things in the world, for it contains the corporate wisdom of the race. Doubtless it must be checked and cleaned periodically, but normally we must lose ourselves in it if we are to find its heart.



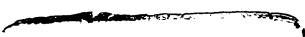
For a long time now our society has disregarded its religious tradition. Society has become secular, and is the poorer for it. The quality of society necessarily determines the quality of its individual members. We are none of us religious Robinson Crusoes living on a desert island. Yet many people fondly imagine they are; and, where religion is concerned, they even wish they had been born without parents on a desert island. We cannot escape our ancestry, our parentage, our society, our environment. A society without religion will inevitably mean individuals without a religion. Our society must choose for the future; and we suspect that there are really only two courses open to choose from. A third choice, that of allowing each individual to make his own composite religion when he has learned enough is frankly unrealistic. There may be such a theory; but there is no such religion.

There remain, therefore, two alternatives. We can decide to have no religion at all. That, however, would be flying in the face of the experience of the whole race, as this book shows. In any case, it is doubtful whether any such programme could be implemented. Religion is far too deep-rooted to disappear. Indeed, where attempts have been made to eradicate religion it always comes back in some veiled form. We saw in our first chapter how in France during the Revolution and in contemporary Russia attempts have been made to stamp out traditional religion, but how a substitute religion has taken its place. In the case of modern secular socialism Society has become the deity. Kant's interpretation of religion as the recognition of our duties as divine commands combined with Hegel's view that morality is the subjection of the individual to the common consciousness eventually produced the cult of the monster state, which now threatens the dignity of man and denies any power greater than itself. The Ingsoc of Oceania in George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's 'brave new world' are the fruit of the Kant-Hegel ideology. In our own country secularization has penetrated far into our national life: we are not so very different from the communists on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The number of people who believe and worship is only a

fraction of the population. If, according to Marett's view, religion began with the birth of humility, our society must be irreligious indeed: for its attitude towards all things is arrogant. The challenge of religion is ignored. We are fairly far gone in apostasy — to use the old-fashioned word; but our steps are not irretracable. Unwittingly a national decision on the challenge of religion has been taken; but that decision is not irrevocable.

The challenge of religion comes, however, most plainly to the individual. Dependent as we are on our heredity and environment, we are none-the-less separate persons, each with his own private inner world. How are we to answer? We may be sure of this — that, having surveyed the religions of mankind, to stop at this point will benefit neither us nor society. To study religions and leave the matter there is an academic luxury. Life is not long enough to enable us to become a disciple of each religion in turn; and, even if it were, we should probably still be unable to choose from our detached standpoint. Our best plan is to renew our Christian allegiance by throwing ourselves into the life of the Church, which has preserved for us more good than we usually realize. And we can try to bring into the Church, gradually and carefully, such features from other religions as will add to her riches. The Church has in fact done this many times in the past. But we suspect that what we shall honestly want to borrow from other religions will be very little; for the Church contains riches which most of her members have not fully discovered. We take so much trouble to learn more and more about other things, and so little about Christianity.

A personal answer to the question of Christ, 'Who say ye that I am?' is inescapable.¹² Indecision is tantamount to denial. He still calls us to spiritual adventure. Christianity does not consist of reading books or talking about religion, valuable as these things are. It is an activity — conducting our lives in obedience to his commandments, and worshipping him in the community which he called into being. To accept him as the revelation of God in history, as well as in idea, does not mean that we have blindly to accept every dogma of the Church which intellectual honesty questions. It means rather undertaking the spiritual



adventure of acknowledging the limitations of human knowledge and accepting it as fact that God is not the passive Unknown but that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. To see the world about us as his and not ours, to regard all our fellow men as equal to ourselves in his sight, to obey his commands, to hear his Gospel, to sing his praise, to receive the tokens of his love at his table — these things are not the end of our religious adventure but the beginning.

NOTES

CHAPTERS I AND II

¹ 'The problem of the "definition of religion" has been a favourite topic of philosophers, and their labours have at least been fruitful of a large crop of formulas, if not perhaps in great illumination.'— W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, London, 1930, p. 5.

'To attempt to reach a verbal definition, which should set forth the characteristic common to all types of religious belief, is for the purpose of a philosophical treatment, at any rate, a perfectly futile undertaking.'— G. Dawes Hicks, *The Philosophical Basis of Theism*, London, 1937, p. 34.

² v. D. W. Gundry, 'On Defining Religion', in *Church Quarterly Review*, vol. cxlvi, no. 292, July 1948, pp. 199 ff.

³ Most of the peoples of antiquity, like most modern primitives, have no word for 'religion'.

⁴ v. F. Harold Smith, 'The Philosophy of Primitive Religion', in *Laudate*, vol. xvii, no. 65, March 1939.

⁵ H. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, London, 1876, p. 440.

⁶ In *Fortnightly Review*, vol. vi, 1866, p. 84; also *Primitive Culture*, vol. i, 1871, p. 427.

⁷ *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 3rd ed., London, 1927.

⁸ *The Making of Religion*, 3rd ed., London, 1909.

⁹ *The Melanesians*, Oxford, 1891. It is strange how most text-books copy one another in wrongly describing Prebendary Codrington as 'Bishop'.

¹⁰ *The Idea of the Holy* (Engl. tr.), Oxford, 1923.

¹¹ London, 1914.

¹² *Orpheus: histoire générale des religions*, Paris, 1904, p. 4.

¹³ In the *Thebaid*. Also attributed to Petronius and Lucretius.

¹⁴ E. Durkheim, *Les Formes elementaire de la vie religieuse*, Paris, 1912.

¹⁵ v. also S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (Engl. tr.), London, 1919.

¹⁶ v. B. Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, London, 1927.

¹⁷ v. W. E. Hocking, *Science and the Idea of God*, North Carolina, 1944, for a criticism of this viewpoint.

¹⁸ *Being* and *being known* are not the same thing, though unfortunately a habit of thought has grown up which identifies the two. 'The identification of priority in logic with priority in practice has vitiated thought . . . from the first discovery of . . . logic by the Greeks.'— A. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Cambridge, 1928, p. 75. In practice we know God before we know about God; but often we come to think the opposite.

CHAPTER III

¹ Or an even later time in the year.

² H. Frankfort and others, *Before Philosophy*, London, 1949, illustrates this

point, but is perhaps too uncritical of the philosophy which followed mythopoeic thought.

³ For a fuller discussion of magic, *v.* chapter IV on primitives.

⁴ Sometimes this Old Kingdom is sub-divided into the Old (*c.* 3300–2000 B.C.) and the Middle Kingdom (*c.* 2000–1550 B.C.).

⁵ Cleopatra's Needle on the Victoria Embankment, London, is much older than Cleopatra, and was a monument put up by Tuthmosis III, sometimes referred to by the Greek version of his name, Thothmes. Because our first knowledge of ancient Egypt came from literary sources, *e.g.*, Herodotus, rather than archaeology, Egyptian proper names are often better known in their Greek form. Thus, Osiris = Asari, Memphis = Mennefret.

⁶ *Exodus* i, 11.

⁷ *II Kings* xxiii, 29.

⁸ Old Testament scholars sometimes use the term 'henotheism' as a synonym for 'monolatry'; but monolatry is rather the worship of a particular god by a particular tribe without the denial of other gods for other tribes.

⁹ For a discussion as to whether Akhenaten was a genuine monotheist or a political 'centralizer' *v.* A. W. Shorter, *An Introduction to Egyptian Religion*, London, 1931, chapter IV. For the *Hymn to the Aten*, *v.* J. B. Pritchard, *Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., Princeton, 1955.

¹⁰ Probably the Amraphel of *Genesis* xiv, 1, though there appear to have been several kings named Hammurabi.

¹¹ More accurately 'Nebuchadrezzar'.

¹² *II Kings* xv–xviii.

¹³ *II Kings* xxv.

¹⁴ *II Chronicles* xxxvi, 22–23; *Ezra* i, 1 ff.

¹⁵ For a brief account *v.* *The Babylonian Legend of the Creation*, British Museum, rev. ed., London, 1931; for a fuller study, A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Cambridge, 1943; also J. B. Pritchard, *Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., Princeton, 1955; and, for the Sumerian version, S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, Philadelphia, 1944.

¹⁶ *Bel and the Dragon* in the Apocrypha is clearly the Sumerian story adapted for Jewish apologetic purposes many centuries later.

¹⁷ For a short survey *v.* *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge and the Epic of Gilgamesh*, rev. ed., British Museum, London, 1929; also A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, Chicago, 1945. *v.* also J. B. Pritchard, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *I Samuel* xxviii, 14.

¹⁹ *Genesis* xi, 4 ff.

²⁰ *Herodotus* ii, 52.

²¹ A. W. Persson, *The Religion of Prehistoric Greece*, California, 1942, gives an up-to-date interpretation of pre-classical Greek religion.

²² But the Greeks themselves saw no inconsistency here, since they believed man was a kind of god. *v.* W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, London, 1950, pp. 113 ff.

²³ Or from the *Peripatos*, a walking place in the Lyceum.

²⁴ Greek tragedy grew out of the Dionysiac ceremonies; and it was

probably because the goat was their sacred animal that goat masks were worn by the chorus.

²⁵ C. Bailey, *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome*, Oxford, 1932, p. 36.

²⁶ 'Auspices' is derived from *avis spicere*, so indicating the observation of birds.

²⁷ Cicero's *De Divinatione* tells us a good deal about Roman soothsaying.

²⁸ From *flare*, to blow, so indicating those who kindled the sacrificial fire.

²⁹ 'Far more than any other cult, that of Vesta represents the reality and continuity of Roman religious feeling; and the remains of her latest dwelling, and the statues of her priestesses with no statue of herself among them, may still give the visitor to the Forum some dim idea of the spirit of Roman worship.'—W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People*, London, 1911, p. 137.

³⁰ In origin they were the priest guardians of the sacred wooden bridge, the Pons Sublicius. Hence their title, 'bridge builders'.

³¹ The word 'numinous', the supernatural, was coined by R. Otto in his famous book *Das Heilige*, translated by J. W. Harvey as *The Idea of the Holy*.

³² In his *De Iside et Osiride*.

³³ v. Robert Graves's excellent translation, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*, London, 1950.

³⁴ One of the latest to be discovered was that in the City of London in 1954. Perhaps the most famous is that underneath the Basilica of St Clement, Rome, found in 1867. v. H. A. A. Kennedy, *St Paul and the Mystery Religions*, London, 1913, for a discussion of the relationship between Mithraism and Christianity.

³⁵ *Galatians*, iv, 4.

CHAPTER IV

¹ Following the philosopher Hegel. v. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abr. ed., London, 1922, p. 711.

² F. B. Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion*, London 1896, p. 25.

³ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 11 ff.

⁴ London, 1914.

⁵ By Frazer and by W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 3rd ed., London, 1927. v. also E. O. James, *The Origins of Sacrifice*, London, 1933.

⁶ *Shinto* is a Chinese word, meaning 'the Way of the Gods'. The Japanese equivalent is *kami no michi*. It is a tautology to speak of 'Shintoism', because Shinto is an 'ism'.

⁷ A summary of the pantheon is given in W. G. Aston, *Shinto: the Way of the Gods*, London, 1905, a pioneer work, still one of the best on the subject.

⁸ Quoted in D. C. Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan*, London, 1938, p. 77.

⁹ v. D. C. Holtom, *op. cit.*, p. 30; M. Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, London, 1930, pp. 44 ff., by a Japanese Buddhist scholar, gives extracts from the ritual.

CHAPTER V

¹ 'Idealism', in the philosophical sense, does not mean the 'pursuit of high ideals', as it often does in common parlance. It is rather the 'belief that mental ideas are the only abiding things'. Plato is regarded as the first great western idealist; and his famous cave myth in *The Republic* is perhaps the best illustration of philosophical idealism.

² For translations with introductions v. L. Giles, *The Sayings of Lao Tzu*, London, 1905; and Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, London, 1934.

³ The best picture of Confucius is given in his *Sayings*, translated as *The Analects of Confucius* by W. E. Soothill, Oxford, 1937.

⁴ v. L. Giles (tr.), *The Book of Mencius*, abr., London, 1942.

⁵ v. H. H. Rowley, 'The Chinese Philosopher Mo Ti', in *Submission in Suffering*, Cardiff, 1951.

⁶ *Analects* XI, 11.

⁷ The classic English translation is by J. Legge in his *The Chinese Classics*, 5 vols, Hong-kong, 1862-79, and in his *The Texts of Confucianism in The Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford, 1879-85.

⁸ *Analects* IV, 36.

⁹ Pelagianism, the teaching of the British monk Pelagius (c. A.D. 400) that man has no original sin and needs only to exercise his will, without divine grace, to lead a good life.

¹⁰ Thus, today Spanish and Portuguese are the languages of South America, English that of North America as well as of the majority of Scots, Welsh and Irish.

¹¹ Cf. Latin *video*, to see: hence 'to know'.

¹² *Brahmin* is a variant transliteration. *Brāhman*, a priest, should be distinguished from *Brahman*, meaning the 'Absolute' or 'Reality'.

¹³ *Rigveda* X, 90, 12, from N. Macnicol (ed.), *Hindu Scriptures*, London, 1938.

¹⁴ *Rigveda* I, 164.

¹⁵ *Rigveda* X, 121.

¹⁶ *Satapatha Brahmana* II.

¹⁷ The lasting power of Hinduism is largely derived from the fact that the priests were the only teachers. Cf. the saying often attributed to the Jesuits, 'Give me a child of six, and he is mine for life.'

¹⁸ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* I, 3, 28. v. R. E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 2nd ed. rev., Oxford, 1931.

¹⁹ P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, Edinburgh, 1906, p. viii.

²⁰ *Svetasvatara Upanishad* I, 16.

²¹ *Chandogya Upanishad* VI, 13.

²² *Karma* literally means 'action': hence its philosophical use to denote the activity of the universe, including human life.

²³ v. S. Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism*, Oxford, 1915.

²⁴ Two Jain orders came into being: the nudists, those 'clothed in air', and the robed, those 'clothed in white'.

²⁵ From the Sanskrit root meaning 'to thread together', so indicating a tradition.

²⁶ Modern Sanskrit grammars are still based on that of Panini, who systematized the language c. 300 B.C., when it was obviously dying as a vernacular.

²⁷ *Samkhya* means literally 'number', and probably arose from Kapila's 'calculation' of how the universe began. *Yoga* is parallel with the English word 'yoke'. Hence *Yoga* is a system for uniting the adept, known as a *yogin*, with the Divine. Often *Yoga* suggests that God is personal.

²⁸ There are many translations. The *Gita* is included in *Hindu Scriptures* in the 'Everyman Library'. E. J. Thomas's translation, *The Song of the Lord*, London, 1931, has a simple, non-technical introduction. Fuller introductions are given in L. D. Barnett, *Bhagavadgita: or the Lord's Song*, London, 1936, and S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, London, 1948. The latter is dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, who regarded the *Gita* as the greatest religious writing in the world. He was able to reconcile its belligerent teaching with his pacifism by the convenient device of interpreting Arjuna's warfare allegorically as the fight of good against evil.

²⁹ J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, Oxford, 1920, p. 88.

³⁰ *Bhagavadgita* XVIII, 73.

³¹ It is confusing to translate *avatar* as 'incarnation'. It signifies rather an appearance of deity, often sudden, on the human plane in literature, art or devout imagination.

³² *Bhagavadgita* IV, 8.

³³ *ibid.* XI, 15, 16, 23 and 29. Otto regarded this section as one of the great numinous passages in world literature.

³⁴ *Kurma Purana* XXIII, 43, specifically states that Vishnu is the god of gods, while Siva is the god of devils.

³⁵ The *a* is privative, like the *a* in 'atheism'; and *dvaita* is cognate with the Latin numeral *duo*, two. Hence *advaita* means 'without-a-secondness'.

³⁶ J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, New York, 1915, is still the most readable and well-documented account of Neo-Hinduism and its kindred sects.

³⁷ Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-1886), whose headquarters were at a Kali temple, the obvious place for one who said, 'God tells the thief to go and steal, and at the same time warns the householder!'

³⁸ For a short survey v. E. J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, 3rd ed. rev., London, 1949. *Gotama* is the Pali form, *Gautama* the Sanskrit. His personal name was *Siddhattha*. He is also known as *Sakyamuni*, 'the saint of the Sakyas'. The term *Buddha*, 'the Enlightened', is a title. Buddhists often call him *Tathagata*, difficult to translate into English, a near equivalent being 'He who has attained Reality'.

³⁹ Since Pali is the language of the Buddhist canonical books, we use the Pali term rather than the Sanskrit *nirvana*.

⁴⁰ From *The Discourse of the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Doctrine*, a version of Gotama's first sermon, contained in the *Samyutta-Nikaya*, part of the *Sutta Pitaka*, or 'Sermon Basket', of the Pali Canon. v. H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Cambridge, Mass., 1922; and E. J. Thomas, *Early Buddhist Scriptures*, London, 1935, for translations.

⁴¹ From the Buddha's last sermon in *The Sutta of the Great Decease*, also in the *Samyutta-Nikaya*.

⁴² Hinayanists do not use the term *Hinayana*, since they do not acknowledge their school to be the lesser. They prefer *Theravada*, 'the Way of the Elders'.

⁴³ Because there is a Sanskrit version these books are often referred to by the Sanskrit name *Tripitaka*.

⁴⁴ Two readable but scholarly books are Sir Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, Oxford, 1931, and *Portrait of Dalai Lama*, London, 1946.

⁴⁵ v. D. W. Gundry, 'Planes of Revelation in Buddhology and Christology', *Church Quarterly Review*, vol. cliv, no. 313, October 1953.

⁴⁶ E. Steinilber-Oberlin and K. Matsuo, *The Buddhist Sects of Japan*, London, 1938, gives a fascinating picture from personal contacts with the sects.

CHAPTER VI

¹ According to the theory worked out by the Wellhausen school of biblical criticism, which has been held for nearly eighty years, the Jahvistic document, known as J from its use of the name *Jahveh*, or *Yahweh* (Lord), for God, is thought to date from the ninth century B.C., the Elohist, designated E from its reference to Deity as *Elohim* (God) rather than *Yahweh*, from the eighth century; and their combination is one document from the seventh. The Deuteronomic revision, D, is also regarded as seventh-century in origin, and the JED combination as early Exilic — the sixth century; while the Priestly Code, P, is generally thought to be fifth-century; and the final combination JEDP fourth-century. But there are now serious doubts about this documentary hypothesis; and it is safer to speak of 'traditions' or 'sources'. For a survey of the history of modern Old Testament scholarship, v. A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, vol. II, Copenhagen, 1949, pp. 12 ff., and E. G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation*, London, 1955.

² The *Habiru* mentioned in the *Tell-el-Amarna* letters of the XVIIIth dynasty are probably the Hebrews.

³ v. G. E. Wright and F. V. Filson, *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*, rev. ed., Philadelphia, 1956, pp. 37 ff, a book useful for the study of most of the ancient Near East; also L. H. Grollenberg (tr. Reid and Rowley), *Atlas of the Bible*, London, 1956.

⁴ The Ras Shamra tablets from the north of Canaan, discovered between 1929 and 1933, when compared with what is known of pre-Hellenic Greek religion, that of Mesopotamia and that of the ancient Indus valley, show how widespread was this fertility myth and ritual.

⁵ *Isaiah* i, 10 ff.

⁶ *Isaiah* vi, 1 ff.

⁷ *Micah* vi, 6–8.

⁸ E. O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood*, London, 1955, pp. 78 ff, contains a valuable exposition of the rôle of prophet and priest in Hebrew religion.

⁹ Israel never revived as a nation. Only the southern kingdom, Judah, retained her identity and survived her exile: hence, after the fall of Samaria in

721 B.C., we no longer speak of Israel, but only of Judah, Jewry and Judaism. 'Judea' is the Greek version of the Hebrew 'Judah'.

¹⁰ Mattins and Evensong in *The Book of Common Prayer*, which consist of the reading of the Scriptures, the singing of the *Psalms* and the saying of prayers, are modelled on the mediaeval monastic 'hours' of Mattins, Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sext, Nones and Vespers, which in turn grew out of early Christian devotions of synagogue pattern.

¹¹ *Daniel* is not a prophecy of future events written during the Exile, but a pseudonymous tract encouraging the Jews to remain faithful to their race and religion.

¹² *Matthew* xxii, 23 ff. Cf. *Psalms* cxv, 17.

¹³ The New Testament shows how the Jews despised the Samaritans: *John* iv, 9.

¹⁴ v. A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a Preliminary Survey*, Oxford, 1952; Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, London, 1956; and T. H. Gaster (tr.), *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect*, London, 1957.

¹⁵ *Matthew* xxiii, 15; *Acts* xiii, 43 and 50; xvii, 4.

¹⁶ The Greek *kanon* was borrowed from the Hebrew word meaning 'measuring rod'.

¹⁷ The order of the books in our English version is derived from that of the LXX and the Latin Vulgate.

¹⁸ *Yasna* xxxi, 8. An English translation of the *Gathas* is given in J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, London, 1913.

¹⁹ *Matthew* ii, 1 ff.

²⁰ J. H. Moulton, *The Treasure of the Magi*, Oxford, 1917, p. 24.

²¹ *Quran* lxxiv, 1-4.

²² A. H. = *anno hegirae*. *Hegira* is a latinized form of the Arabic *hijra*, flight.

²³ Mosque is derived from the Arabic *masjid*, a place of prostration. It is a mistake to suppose that polygamy is universal in Islam. It is permissible only if a man is able adequately to support more than one wife. Today, largely through western influence, polygamy is on the decline.

²⁴ *Quran* viii, 9.

²⁵ *Islam* = submission (to Allah). A follower of the religion is better called a *Muslim*, one who submits, than a Muhammadan. The Persian equivalent is *Mussulman*, the plural of which is, of course, *Mussulmans*.

²⁶ *Caliph* = successor (to the Prophet).

²⁷ 1453, the year of the flight of Christian scholars from Constantinople to Italy, is the conventional history-book date for the beginning of the Renaissance, which had in fact started before then.

²⁸ The most famous English translation is that of Sale (1734), another well-known one that of J. M. Rodwell (1861), available in the 'Everyman Library'. A good modern translation with a separate introductory volume is that by R. Bell, Edinburgh, 1937. A. J. Arberry's selections, London, 1953, is an experiment which aims at conveying in translation the peculiar exclamatory style of the book.

²⁹ *Quran* xiii, 37-39.

³⁰ *Quran* iv, 169 ff.

³¹ *Quran* ii, 100.

³² After the seventh *imam*, Ismail, *c.* 770. The main body of *Shiahs* is sometimes called 'Twelvers', and the Ismailis 'Seveners'.

³³ *v.* J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha'is*, London, 1932.

³⁴ The mosques at Southfields, South London, and Woking, Surrey, are run by Ahmadiyyists.

³⁵ *Quran* lxv, 12.

³⁶ *John* i, 1-14.

³⁷ *Acts* xv. *Cf.* *Colossians* iii, 11.

³⁸ An easily accessible English edition of this great but much neglected book is that by R. V. G. Tasker in the 'Everyman Library', 2 vols, London, 1945.

³⁹ Aquinas used the Greek philosophy of Aristotle; but his language was Latin and his background that of the Latin Church.

⁴⁰ The *Apocrypha*, though rated less highly, is acknowledged by Roman Catholics and Anglicans as part of the Bible; but Protestants, on the whole, have tended to ignore it.

⁴¹ From the *Catechism* in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

⁴² Strictly the words are the *ritual*: what is commonly spoken of as ritual is really ceremony.

⁴³ The word 'Catholic', from the Greek, means 'whole' or 'universal'. Strictly, there has been no one Catholic Church since the Great Schism between East and West in 1054.

⁴⁴ *Matthew* xxviii, 19.

⁴⁵ R. H. Thouless, *Authority and Freedom: Some Psychological Problems of Religious Belief*, London, 1954, is a particularly wise discussion of this subject.

⁴⁶ *II Corinthians* v, 19.

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¹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, London, 1932, is more than a novel: it is an allegory warning of the trend in modern society.

² *Ecclesiastes* i, 9; xii, 13.

³ *v.* the 'Twelve Principles of Buddhism', set out in C. Humphreys, *Buddhism*, London, 1951, pp. 74 ff, which sum up contemporary intellectualist Buddhism.

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⁵ *Literature and Dogma*, London, 1883, p. 16. R. B. Braithwaite, a representative modern British philosopher, quotes Arnold with approval in his Eddington Memorial Lecture, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Experience*, Cambridge, 1955, pp. 24 ff.

⁶ *Job* xxiii, 3.

⁷ *John* iii, 16.

⁸ *Romans* vii, 19.

⁹ Matthew Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ The poem *The Agony* in *The Temple*.

¹¹ *Hibbert Journal*, vol. li, no. 4, July 1953, p. 372.

¹² *Mark* viii, 25.

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INDEX

- Abhidhammapitaka*, 105
 Aborigines, Australian, 16
 Abraham, 116f.
Acts of the Apostles, 125, 145
 Adonis, 50
 Advaita, 96, 174
 Aeschylus, 51
 African (Bantu) Religion, 66
 Ahimsa, 88, 90
 Ahmadiyya, 142, 177
 Ahriman, *v.* Angra Mainyu
 Ahura Mazda, 132
 Akbar, 97
 Akhenaten, 34, 37f.
 Akkad, 42
 Alexander the Great, 35, 91, 123, 133
 Al-Ghazali, 141
 Amaterasu, 71, 73
 Amenhetep IV, *v.* Akhenaten
 Amesha Spentas, 132
 Amida, *v.* Buddha
 Amon (Amon Re), 36f.
 Amos, 117
Analects (Confucian), 81
 Analogy, 24
 Anesaki, M., 172
 Anglican Church, 99, 151
 Angra Mainyu, 132
 Animatism, 17
 Animism, 14f., 58f.
 Anselm, St, 166
 Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), 123
 Anu, 45
 Apocalyptic, 123, 147
 Apocrypha, 123, 124, 127, 147, 177
 Apuleius, 63
 Aquinas, St Thomas, 130, 146, 154, 163, 177
 Arberry, A. J., 176
 Aristophanes, 51f.
 Aristotle, 55f., 123, 128, 129, 130
 Arjuna, 94f.
 Arnold, M., 2, 161, 164
 Arya Samaj, 100
 Asoka, 91, 103
 Assyrian Religion, *v.* Mesopotamian
 Aston, W. G., 172
 Aten (Sun Disc), 37
 Atman, 89f.
 Augury, 60f.
 Augustine of Hippo, St, 146, 163
 Augustine of Canterbury, St, 146
 Authorized (King James I) Version, 148
 Avatar, 94, 97, 142, 163, 174
Avesta, 131, 132f.
 Aztecs, 69
 Babism, 141
 Babylonian Religion, *v.* Mesopotamian
 Bahaism, 142
 Bailey, C., 172
 Baptists, 151
 Barnett, L. D., 174
 Barth, K., 161
 Bell, Sir C., 175
 Bell, R., 176
 Bentzen, A., 175
 Bergier, N. S., 13
 Besant, Mrs A., 100
Bhagavadgita, 92, 93f., 162, 174
 Bhakti, 94, 96, 163
 Bible, 147f.
 Blavatsky, Mme H., 100
 Bodhisattva (Bodhisatta), 104
Book of the Dead, 33, 36, 40
 Bradley, F. H., 74
 Brahman (Absolute), 89, 96f., 173

- Brahmanas*, 88
 Brahmans (Priests), 86, 87, 173
 Braithwaite, R. B., 177
 Brama Samaj, 99
 'Broad Church', 151
 Brosse, Ch. de, 13
 Buddha (Gotama), 101f., 162
 Buddhism, 90, 101f., 156f.
 Buddhism, Expansion of, 106f.
Bundahish, 133
 Burrows, M., 176
 Bushido, 71

 Caird, J. and E., 74
 Caliphate, 138
 Canon, Buddhist (Pali), 105f.
 Confucian, *v.* Chinese Classics
 Christian, 147
 Jewish, 126
 Zoroastrian (Parsi), 133
 Carey, W., 99
 Caste, 86
 Celtic Church, 146
 Ceremonial, 177
 Chandragupta, 91
 Chinese Classics, 81
 Chinese Religion, 75f.
 Christ, 144f., 154f., *passim*
 Christianity, 140, 144f., 156f., *passim*
 Christianity, Expansion of, 145f.
 Chthonoi, 56
 Chu Tse (Chu Hsi), 79
 Chuang Tse, 77
 Church, 145f., 149f.
 Church, Celtic, *v.* Celtic Church
 Eastern, *v.* Orthodox Church
 of England, *v.* Anglican Church
 Roman Catholic, *v.* Roman
 Church
 of Scotland, *v.* Scottish Church
 of South India, *v.* South Indian
 Church
 Syrian, *v.* Syrian Church
 Cicero, 3, 172
 Cinvat Bridge, 133
 Circumcision, 69, 126
 Codex Sinaiticus, 147

 Codrington, R. H., 16, 170
Common Prayer, Book of, 149, 176
 Communion, Holy, 149
 Comte, A., 13
 Confucius (Kung Fu Tse), 76, 78f.
 Congregationalists, 99, 151
 Constantine, 145
 Cosmogony, 39f., 44f.
 Counter-Reformation, 150
Creation, Epic of, 45
 Crete, 49
 Croce, B., 74
 Crow Indians, 20
 Cumont, F., 63
 Cyrus, 122

Daniel, 123, 126, 176
 Darius, 91,
 Darwin, C., 11, 13
 Davids, Mrs C. F. Rhys, 102
 Dead Sea Scrolls, 125, 127
 Deluge, 46
 Deussen, P., 173
 Dhamma (Dharma), 111
Dhammapada, 105
Dharmasastras, 91
Diamond Cutter Sutra, 110
Dinkart, 133
 Dionysus, 51, 57
 Dispersion (Diaspora), 128
 Divination, 45, 60
 Dogma, 153f.
 Drama, Greek, 51
 Duff, A., 99
 Dalai Lama, 104, 108
 Dupont-Sommer, A., 176
 Durkheim, E., 20

 Ea (Enki), 45, 47
Ecclesiastes, 124
Ecclesiasticus, 127
 Ecology, 33
 Egyptian Religion, 33f.
 Eightfold Path, 102
 Einstein, A., 11, 128
 Eleusinian Mysteries, 56f.
 Elijah, 121

- Elisha, 121
Enoch, 123
 Enlil, 47
 Epictetus, 54
 Epicureans, 54
 Eschatology, 114, 159
*Esdra*s, II, 123
 Eskimos, 66
 Essenes, 125
 Ethiopia (Abyssinia), 136
 Euhemerus, 14
 Evans, Sir A., 49
 Exile, 118, 121f.
Exodus, 34, 116
Ezra, 121

 Fall of Man, 163
 Farquar, J. N., 174
 Farrer, A., 177
 Fathers, Early Christian, 146, 148
 Fear, 19
 Fetichism, 13
 Fire Temples, 134
 Five Pillars of Islam, 142f.
 Flamines, 61
 Flight (Hijra) from Mecca, 136
 Four Noble Truths, 102f.
 Fowler, W. Warde, 172
 Frankfort, H., 170
 Fravashi, 133
 Frazer, Sir J. G., 32, 67f., 172
 Freud, S., 21f., 128, 170
 Fundamentalism, 147, 153

 Gabars, 130
Gathas, 131, 133
 Gaster, T., 176
Genesis, 45
 Gemara, 129
 Gentile, G., 74
 Ghandi, Mahatma, 174
 Giles, L., 173
Gilgamesh, *Epic of*, 46
 God-fearers, 126
 Gotama (Gautama), v. Buddha
 Greek philosophy, 52f., 145
 Greek religion, 49f.

 Green, T. H., 74
 Group Theory of religion, 20
 Guru, 97
 Guthrie, W. K. C., 171
 Gymnasia, 51

Habbakuk, 125
 Habiru, 173
 Haggadah, 129
 Haj (Pilgrimage), 143
 Halachah, 129
 Hallaj, 141
 Hammurabi, 43, 171
 Harappa, 48, 84
 Harrison, J., 49
 Hebrew religion, 114f.
 Hegel, G. W. F., 13, 32, 74, 160, 167
 Heidel, A., 171
 Hellenes, 50
 Henotheism, 37, 86, 171
 Hera, 51
 Herbert, G., 165
 Herodotus, 49, 131, 171
 Hicks, G. D., 170
 'High Church' (Anglo-Catholicism),
 151
 High God, 16
 Hijra, v. Flight from Mecca
 Hinayana (Theravada), 103f., 159,
 175
 Hinduism, 84f.
 Hirata Atsutante, 72
 Historical Criticism, 160
 Hocking, W. E., 170
 Holtom, D. C., 172
 Hosea, 117
 Hubert, H., 20, 69
 Humphreys, C., 177
 Huxley, A., 100, 167, 177
 Hyksos, 33, 116

 Idealism, 54, 74, 112, 160, 173
 Imam, 141, 177
 Incarnation, v. Avatar
 Incarnation of Christ, 163
 Indo-Europeans (Aryans), 50, 58, 85
 Injil, 139

- 'Instinct', Religious, 18
 Iraquois, 16
 Isaiah, 117, 119, 122
 Isherwood, C., 100
 Ishtar, 46
 Isis, 39, 62f.
 Islam, 97f., 135f., 176
 Islam, Expansion of, 137
 Ismailis, 141, 177
 Israel, 114f.
 Jabarites, 141
 Jainism, 90f.
 James, E. O., 69, 172, 175
 Janus, 59, 60
Jatakas, 106
 Jen, 83
 Jerome, St, 127
 Jerusalem, Fall of, 118, 128
 Jesuits, 99, 152
 Jesus, *v.* Christ
 Jevons, F. B., 67, 172
 Jodo, 109, 159
John, St, 145
Jonah, 121, 122
 Josephus, 125
 Judah (Judaea), 117, 175f.
 Judaism, 121f., 128, 129f.
 Judas Maccabaeus, 123
 Judges, 117
 Juno, 59
 Jupiter, 58f., 62
 Kaaba, 136
 Kabbalah, 129
 Kabir, 97
 Kali, 101, 174
 Kalima, 135
 Kami, 16
 Kami no michi, 172
 Kant, I., 2, 153, 160, 167
 Karma, 89, 97
 Karma Mimamsa, 92
 Kathenotheism, *v.* Henotheism
 Kennedy, H. A. A., 172
 Kethubim, 126
 Khadijah, 135
 Kharijites, 141
 Kings, Hebrew, 118
Kojiki, 71
 Kracling, E. G., 175
 Kramcr, S. N., 171
 Krishna, 92, 94
 Lactantius, 3
 Lamaism, 108
 Lang, A., 15
 Lao Tse (Laocius), 78f.
 Legge, J., 79, 112, 173
 Levy-Bruhl, L., 20
 Liberal Protestantism, 154
 Liturgy, 149
 Logical Positivism, 153
 Logos, 76
 Lord's Supper, *v.* Communion
Lotus of the True Law, 109
 'Low Church' (Evangelicalism), 151
 Lucretius, 170
 Luke, St, 145
 LXX, *v.* Septuagint
Maccabees, I and II, 123, 127
 Magi, 132f.
 Magic, 31f., 66f., 78
Mahabharata, 92, 93
Mahavastu, 106
 Mahavira, 90f.
 Mahayana, 103f., 106f., 108f., 162
 Mahdi, 141
 Maimonides, Moses, 129
Malachi, 122
 Malinowski, B., 170
 Mana, 16f., 65f.
 Marcus Aurelius, 54
 Marduk, 45
 Marett, R. R., 16, 32, 68, 168
 Mars, 59
 Marx, K., 8, 128
 Mass, *v.* Communion
 Massoretes, 126
 Matsuo, K., 175
 Matthews, W. R., 170
 Mauss, M., 20, 69
 Maya, 96

- Mecca, 136, 137, 142
 Medes, 43
 Medina, 136, 137
 Melanesians, 16, 66
 Mencius (Meng Tse), 76, 79
 Mesopotamian religion, 42f.
 Methodists, 151
Micah, 117, 120, 122
 Midrash, 129
 Minoan-Mycenaean civilization, 49f., 84
 Mishnah, 128f.
Missal, 149
 Missions, Christian, 99, 152f.
 Mithraism, 63f., 133
 Mo Ti (Mo Tse), 80
 Mogul Empire, 97, 138
 Mohenjo Daro, 48, 84
 Monism, 74f., 156f.
 Monolatry, 121, 171
 Monotheism, 15f., 31, 112f., 121, 143f., 156, 159f.
 Moses, 116
 Mosque, 136, 176
 Mother Goddess, 46f., 50
 Motoöri Norinaga, 72
 Moulton, J. H., 135, 176
 Muezzin, 142
 Muhammad, 135f.
 Muhammadanism, *v.* Islam
 Müller, F. Max, 37, 86
 Mulungu, 66
 Mummification, 41
 Murray, G., 49
 Mutazilites, 139, 141
 Mystery religions, 56f., 62f.
 Mythology, 158
 Nebi'im, 126
 Nagarjuna, 108
 Nalanda, 108
 Nanak, 97
 Natural religion, 161f.
 Nebuchadnezzar II, 44, 117, 171
Nehemiah, 121
 Neo-Platonism, 129
 Nero, 145
 New Testament, 147
 New Year Festival, 45, 47f.
 Nibbana (Nirvana), 89, 102f.
 Nichiren, 109
Nihongi, 71
 Norito, 71
 Nous, 52
 Numa, 59
 Numen, 16, 62
 Nyaya, 93
 Objectivity in religion, 165f.
 Oedipus Complex, 21f.
 Oho-harahi, 72
 Olcott, H. S., 100
 Old Testament, 147
 Om, 108
 Opening of the Mouth, 41
 Orenda, 16
 Ormuzd, *v.* Ahura Mazda
 Orphic Mysteries, 57
 Orthodox (Eastern) Church, 149
 Orwell, G., 167
 Osiris, 36, 38f.
 Osiris, Judgement of, 41
 Otto, R., 16, 172
 Pales, 59
 Pali Canon, *v.* Canon, Pali
 Panini, 174
 Papacy, 150
 Parinirvana, 157
 Parsis, 134f.
 Path of Purity, 106
Patimokkha, 105
 Paul, St, 64, 145, 162, 163
 Pelagianism, 83, 173
 Penates, 59
 Persia, 121, 114f.
 Persson, A. W., 171
 Peter, St, 145
 Petronius, 170
 Pharisees, 124f.
 Philistines, 50, 116
 Philo, 124
 Phusis, 52
 Pilgrimage to Mecca, *v.* Haj

- Plato, 53f., 89, 123f., 128
 Pliny, Elder, 131
 Plutarch, 63
 Pontifex Maximus, 61
 Pre-animism, 17
 Presbyterians, 99, 151
 Priests, Hebrew, 118f.
 Pritchard, J. B., 171
 Projection, Religion as, 23
 Prophets, Hebrew, 118f.
 Proselytes, 126
 Protestantism, 149f.
Proverbs, 124
Psalms, 117
 Pseudepigrapha, 123
Puranas, 96
 Pure Land Sects, 110
 Pygmies, 16

 Qadarites, 141
Questions of King Milinda, 106
 Qumran, v. Dead Sea Scrolls
Quran, 136, 137, 138f., 143, 176
 Quraish, 136

 Radhakrishnan, S., 89, 174
 Ramadhan, 143
 Ramakrishna Mission, 100, 101, 174
 Ramanuja, 96f.
Ramayana, 91
 Ras Shamra, 48
 Re, v. Amon
 Redemption, 162f.
 Reformation, 149f.
 Reinach, S., 19, 172
 Reincarnation, 89
 Religion, Definition of, 1f., 170
 Origins of, 11f.
 Renovation, Age of, 132
Republic of Plato, 54
 Resurrection of Christ, 163
 Revelation, 160f.
 Richards, J. R., 177
Rigveda, 86
 Ritual, 177
 Rodwell, J. M., 139, 176
 Roman Church, 149f.
 Roman Religion, 58f.
 Rosetta Stone, 35
 Rowley, H. H., 173
 Royce, J., 74
 Russell, B., 23
 Ruth, 121, 122
 Ryobu, 70, 107

 Sacraments, 148f., 158
 Sacrifice, 68f.
 Sadducees, 124f.
 Samkhya, 92f., 94, 174
 Samurai, 110
 Sangha, 110f.
 Sankara, 96
 Sargon II, 43, 117
 Sati, 98
 Schliemann, H., 49
 Schmidt, W., 16, 112
 Schools (Darsanas), Six Hindu
 Orthodox, 92f.
 Scholastics (Schoolmen), 146, 158
 Scottish Church, 151
 Sectarianism, Buddhist, 108f.
 Christian, 149f.
 Hindu, 95f., 99f.
 Jewish, 124f.
 Shinto, 72
 Sekhet-hetep, 40f.
 Seleucids, 44, 123
 Sentiment, Religious, 18
 Seppuku (Harakiri), 71
 Septuagint (LXX), 127
 Shamanism, 66, 107
 Shang Ti, 80
 Shiahs, 141, 177
 Shin, 109f., 159
 Shingon, 109
 Shinto, 70f., 107
 Shogunate, 70, 72
 Shorter, A. W., 171
 Sikhs, 97
 Siva, 96
 Smith, F. Harold, 170
 Smith, W. Robertson, 15, 170
 Socrates, 52f.
 Sophocles, 51

- South Indian Church, 99, 150
 Spencer, H., 13f., 68, 170
 Spiritism, 14, 66f.
 Spiritualism, 14, 113
 Statius, 19, 170
 Steinilber-Oberlin, E., 175
 Stevenson, S., 173
 Stoics, 53f.
 Subjectivity in religion, 165f.
 Sufis, 141
 Sumeria, 42
 Sunnis, 139, 140
Sutras, 91
Suttapitaka, 105
 Synagogue, 122
 Syncretism, 39, 63
 Syrian Church, 99

 Tabu, 15
Talmud, 128f.
 Tammuz, 47
 Tao, 76, 77
Tao Teh Ching, 76
 Taoism, 75f.
 Tathagata, 174
 Tathata, 109
 Teh, 77
 Tell-el-Amarna Letters, 34
 Temple at Jerusalem, 121, 123
 Teocalli, 69
 Theosophy, 100, 142
 Theravada, *v.* Hinayana
 Thomas, E. J., 174
 Thouless, R. H., 177
 Tiamat, 45
 Tibet, 107f.
 Tien, 80
 Titus, 128
 Torah, 126
 Totemism, 15, 22, 36
 Towers of Silence, 134
 Trinity, Christian, 143
 Egyptian, 36, 39
 Hindu, 96
 Mesopotamian, 47
 Roman, 59

 Trinity, Muslim view of, 39, 139
 Trikaya, 109
Tripitaka (*Tipitaka*), 105
 Tulsi Das, 97
 Tylor, Sir E. B., 14, 32, 68, 172

Upanishads, 88f., 92, 95, 173
 Ur, 116
 Ushabti, 41
 Ussher, Archbishop J., 12
 Uttara Mimamsa, 92

 Varuna, 85, 86
Veda, 85f., 108
 Vedanta, 89f., 93, 94, 96, 100, 111
Vendidad, 133
 Vesta, 59, 61, 172
 Via negativa, 24, 158
Vinayapitaka, 105
 Vishnu, 85, 92, 93f., 96, 163
 Vishtaspa, 131
Visparad, 133
 Vulgate, 126

 Wahabis, 141
 Waley, A., 173
 Wellhausen, J., 175
 Whitehead, A. N., 21, 170
Wisdom of Solomon, 127

 Xavier, St Francis, 99
 Xenophon, 53

 Yang and Yin, 82
 Yengishiki, 71
 Yoga, 93, 94, 174

 Zarathushtra, 131f.
 Zealots, 125, 128
 Zen, 109f., 159
Zend-Avesta, 132
 Zervanists, 132
 Zeus, 50, 123
 Ziggurat, 47
 Zoroaster, *v.* Zarathushtra
 Zoroastrianism, 114, 130f.

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