



The Contribution of the Bible to the History of Religion

Author(s): Irving F. Wood

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 1/2 (1928), pp. 1-19

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3259514>

Accessed: 09/04/2012 13:28

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BIBLE TO THE HISTORY OF RELIGION¹

IRVING F. WOOD
SMITH COLLEGE

IN 1649 a translation of the Quran was published in London. Its title page read in part, "The Alcoran of Mahomet, translated out of the Arabique in French . . . newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish Vanities." It contained a "needful Caveat or Admonition for those who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the Alcoran." In this Admonition those of weak or unstable minds are warned away from this dangerous book.²

Such was at that time the attitude of the Christian world toward other religions; an attitude unquestioned for many centuries. The only source of religion was the Bible. Outside of Christianity and Judaism lay only "the welter of heathenism," in Calvin's phrase; a mass of unreasonable superstition, unworthy of the attention of any scholar enlightened by the true religion. At best, it was the untaught imaginings of the natural man; at worst, the deceit of the devil. In any case, it was not to be taken seriously as

¹ Presidential Address delivered before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at a meeting held in Union Theological Seminary, New York City, December 27, 1927.

² First American edition, Springfield, 1808. This omits the "Admonition," and has a preface beginning, "This book is a long conference of God, the angels, and Mahomet, which that false prophet very grossly invented."

religion. Religion was found in the Bible, and in the Bible only.

Much water has run under the bridge since then. It is a far cry from that attitude to the condition of thought about religion at the present day. The older attitude seems so antiquated that it is usually called mediaeval. In fact, however, the change has largely come within the last century. It is only fifty-six years since the publication of James Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions*, the first popular expression of the serious attempt to study other religions offered to the American public.

It is not necessary to enumerate at length the reasons for this change. They include the whole range of the modern broadened vision of the world. They grow out of the romance of the discovery that Sanskrit was allied to the European languages, leading to the study of the religious literature embodied in that language; the growing understanding of other races; the gradual approach to the unification of the world; the later application of evolution to the human race and its cultures; and, not the least, the better understanding of the biblical religions themselves. All this led with increasing urgency to the attempt to understand other religions. Understanding bred tolerance. But even a Christian can see that tolerance is a snobbish word, and that sympathy must take its place. The history of religion is the profoundest attempt to understand the inner life, the thoughts and intents of the heart, of all the peoples of the earth, ever made in the field of scholarship.

The result of this has been that the Bible takes its place beside other sacred literatures as only one of the great documents in the religious evolution of mankind. Moreover, since a knowledge of the Biblical religions is often assumed—how mistakenly we all know—to be the common possession of intelligent people, the emphasis of students of the history of religion is often thrown upon those Oriental religions which require much explanation if they are to be understood by Occidentals; or even upon the religious ideas and practices of primitive races.

So far has the pendulum swung in this direction that the student of the Bible sometimes seems to be the acolyte at a minor shrine in the great temple where are placed the altars of the religions of the world. It is time for the pendulum to swing back somewhat. Bible students may well claim the supremacy of the Bible among the literary sources of the History of Religion; not on the old ground that it presents *the* true religion and all the rest are false, but on the ground that it is the literature of greatest importance. It presents much material in better form than any other literature; and it presents some supremely important elements not presented at all elsewhere.

The most important literature for the history of religion is that which meets the following tests:

1. The literature expressing the widest range of religious experience.
2. The literature showing most clearly the growth from lower to higher religious experience.
3. The literature presenting most fully the effects of their religion upon the life of a people.
4. The literature exhibiting most plainly religious standards of permanent value.

In short, the most valuable literature is that from which we can deduce most clearly the laws of the evolution of religion. The formal statement of those laws is yet, for the most part, to be made, because the science of the history of religion is still in its formative stage. It is precisely at this formative stage that the relative value of sources becomes supremely important. I am led to deal with this subject because it seems to me that the history of religion is liable to base its conclusions upon partial, obscure, and sometimes erratic sources, while ignoring a source fuller, clearer, and more widely representative of religious development. The only persons from whom we can expect such a presentation of this source as will redress the balance are the biblical scholars.

1. The first point—that the most valuable literature is that which expresses the widest range of religious experience—

immediately sets the Bible immeasurably above any other literature.

Religion is a protean movement and plays on all the keys of life in one form or another. I am not now raising the question of whether any other people have had as various religious experiences as the Hebrews of the Old Testament and their successors of the New Testament. Be that as it may, no other people have expressed such various experiences in a body of religious literature. Consider the extraordinary kaleidoscope of Hebrew history, all interpreted in terms of religion, and all finding expression in the literature. Add to this the remarkable outburst of new hope and enthusiasm of nascent Christianity in the New Testament, and you have a mass of religious experience before which any other literature pales like the moon at sunrise. Robinson, in his recent *Outline Introduction to the History of Religion*, makes a mild statement when he says, "There is no other religion whose history we trace with more clearness, for we have literature coming from practically all except the very earliest period" (p. 154). Add to this the shifts of religious thought which made the variations of prophet and priest, of national and personal religion, of monolatry and monotheism, of Hokhmah and Apocalypse, and there is here a wider range of material than in any other body of religious literature.

For the nearest comparison, as for so many other things in the history of religion, one must turn to the literature of the two great religions of India. For present purposes we may take them together, treating the literatures of Hinduism and Buddhism as in some measure paralleling the biblical literatures of Judaism and Christianity; though the parallelism is by no means perfect. Acknowledging the impossibility of accurately dating the early Hindu literature, we may say that the extent of time covered by the Indian literature is quite as great as that of the biblical literature. There is also variety in kind. There are hymns, laws, ritual directions, the beginnings of philosophy; if we include the Pali Buddhist scriptures, we shall add biography of a sort. There are fables and folktales, the poetry of quietistic feeling and, in the

Dhammapada, a collection of proverbial wisdom and maxims comparable to the Hebrew Hokhmah.

Does not such a variety equal that of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures? It certainly contains, as we shall see later, one element which is not a part of the Bible; but even with this, and with the wide extent of time and variety of content, it does not present as wide a range of experience.

The reason is this: the Indian scriptures are detached from history; the biblical scriptures are embedded in history. No one could gain from the Hindu writings the remotest idea of the vicissitudes of national life. The priest and the forest hermit are the two classes of persons concerned; and even where, as in the Laws of Manu and the Buddhist writings, the layman and householder come into consideration, it is only as individuals, and even then somewhat nebulously. We miss the throb of the multifarious problems of life. There is only one problem; how to gain good for the individual. The nation and its life never appear at all. The triumphs and disasters of national life, its prosperity and adversity, the judgments of its rulers as righteous or wicked, the tragedy of holding faith in a god who either cannot or will not save his people, the necessity for new standards of conduct and a new conception of God, the enlarging vision forced by the events of the passing centuries, all these things, so familiar to the reader of the Bible, are not in the Hindu scriptures.

"Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness," says Professor Whitehead (*Religion in the Making*, pp. 16, 47). For the historian of religion that is only the beginning of it. What a man is in his relation to others, that is the outcome. No religious literature which takes account only of man as a solitary being facing a solitary Supreme, will ever be a prime source for the history of religion. The religious man must be a social man before his religion is complete. The Bible presents a wider range of religious social experience than can be found anywhere else.

2. The Bible presents most clearly the growth from lower to higher religious experience.

Here are two questions: Which presents the widest range between lower and higher stages of religion; and, which exhibits most clearly the growth from one to the other? Most of the scriptures of the world present only a single stage of religious progress. Obviously that is true of the Quran; so it is of the Confucian Classics and the Taoist writings. In the Avesta the Gathas stand at a different stage from the later writings, though which is lower and which higher might be a nice question. The Christian New Testament also represents only one stage. The Hebrew scriptures give us a wide range from a very primitive to a very high stage. The closest comparison which can be made is again with the Hindu literature. The Vedic hymns represent a primitive type of religion. The gods are mostly nature forces, somewhat vaguely personified into anthropomorphic beings. The worship is simple, though rapidly becoming complex. It represents the stage when the head of the state or household is the sacrificer, but already the priesthood is in process of growth.

But even so, the primitive elements in the Bible represent an earlier stage. The Vedic hymns record a ritual stage approximating the beginning of the Hebrew kingdom, not the patriarchal traditions. The hymns are remembered and recited by attendants already well on the way toward priestly claims of authority, even though the sacrificer is still a layman. On the other hand, no priest dictated the words or the actions of the family heads in the patriarchal traditions. Whatever may be the historic origins of those old stories, they antedate a priesthood. They also present a far wider range of life. Students of the Vedas have exercised much skill in reconstructing from these fossil fragments the living structure of early Indian society. The student of early Israel has a much easier task, in spite of all the problems of Hexateuchal sources. Folk-stories are always richer revelations of the varieties of life than are liturgies.

At the other end of the line the Hebrew and the Hindu literature each reach a conclusion beyond which nothing can go. The Hindu thought issues in a pantheistic monism which

marks the end of the road in that direction. Hebrew thought reaches a personal monotheism which is the end of the road in that direction. But the full, clear statement of Hindu pantheism comes only in the sutras and commentaries of the Vedantic philosophy, after the close of the Hindu accepted canon. In the canon we only have pantheism shadowed forth in the half lights of the Upanishads. It is as though the clear expression of monotheism only came in the Jerusalem Talmud, or in the writings of Augustine.

3. The Bible expresses more fully the effect of their religion on the life of the people than does any other body of sacred literature.

Any real religion always has an effect on the life of the people. The effect is usually, not always, good. Religions usually buttress the best recognized morals of the culture in which they exist. They put upon these morals religious sanctions. They also meet in some measure the spiritual needs of man. They would not have lived so long had they not done so. Through them the Logos speaks to men words of the living God; and some men, listening to the words, have come into fellowship with God. Many of us, I am sure, have known people in other religions whom we are glad to recognize as spiritual kinsmen. We have found ourselves more at harmony with them than we have with non-religious persons of our own race. Dr. K. L. Reichelt says in *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* (Shanghai 1927), speaking particularly of the "Pure Land" sect, "Some are lost in a disintegrating atheism. But there is also quite a considerable body of monks, nuns and lay Buddhists who throughout their lives show that they are inspired with a spirit of strong spiritual power, so that they not only become good and pious people, but also are a help and blessing to society in general" (p. 156). I could, were this the place, speak of others, of whom the same high testimony might be given. I am, however, not now speaking of what the student of the history of religion finds when he comes in contact with living religions, but of the literature upon which he must largely depend for information. His personal contacts

will usually be few; his contacts through literature will be many.

For the most part, the literature of the great Oriental religions is in a social vacuum. It is sometimes liturgical, sometimes abstractly philosophical or theoretical. Sometimes, however, it expresses the experience of the writers in such a way that the thrill of discovered truth is felt pulsating through it. Such is the quietism which reveals itself in certain books of the Pali Buddhist canon. One feels that a peace has entered the minds of the writers and laid its calming hand on the fevered brow of life. It is akin to Paul's experience, "Wherefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This feeling of peace is abundantly expressed in the Thera-Theri Gatha, translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids as *Psalms of the Early Buddhists* (London, 1909). Poem after poem ends with expressions of peace, often in the same words. "Cool am I now, knowing Nibbana's peace," is a frequent wording. (See *Psalms of the Early Buddhists: The Sisters*, p. 19, and often.) There is also another delightful little poem, in which, under the allegory of a herdsman resting at night after his day's work is done, is figured the peace of the man who has conquered desire.³

One is tempted to dally too long in this attractive field of Buddhist literature. Here are weary wanderers on the path of life who have found the peace that passeth understanding; found it, not in mystic trance, but in the quietistic peace that comes with the knowledge that one has entered upon the path to the greatest good, and need wander aimlessly no longer. It is a very genuine religious experience. We can sympathize with the experience, although we should base it for ourselves upon a different foundation.

But after all, that is only one phase of life. What was the effect of religion upon other phases? What of its effect upon the life of the community, upon the state, upon all

³ Sutta Nipâta, Dhaniya Sutta, *Sacred Books of the East* (S. B. E.), Vol. 10. Also Rhys Davids, *American Lectures: Buddhism*, p. 167 f.

that we include in education, upon the codes of business life and the success of the home, and the ideals by which men live?

In the scriptures of the Oriental religions there are some legal and ethical writings which place conduct and social relations upon a religious basis. Such are the Zoroastrian code in the Vendidad and much else in the Avesta, and the Buddhist collection of precepts, the Dhammapada. Here may be classed the Confucian Li Ki, though that is hardly religious in the usual sense. Outside the canons, but in positions of great authority, are the Hindu Laws of Manu, the Chinese Classic of Filial Piety,⁴ and the Taoist Book of Actions and Retributions.⁵ One should perhaps mention the Code of Hammurabi and the famous 125th chapter of the Book of the Dead. But even if certain other writings were added, the proportionate amount of such material in any one religion, possibly excepting Zoroastrianism, would be very much less than in the Bible. The religion of the Bible is, to borrow the bad scholastic slang of the day, extravert, not introvert. It is usually looking out upon its world, rather than in upon the mind of the writers. In the Psalms the writers sometimes speak from the depths of their own lives. One finds repentance, trust and peace, expressed—I hope I do not speak the words of prejudice—with more clearness, if not more beauty, than even in the Buddhist literature mentioned above. More often, however, the biblical writers look beyond themselves. No other religion has a literature like that of the prophets, reflecting like a mirror the thoughts of the times; or the narrative writers, interpreting legend and history in terms of religion. To illustrate: Malachi and Nehemiah present, each in his own way, very remarkable pictures of the effects of religion working under the various concrete conditions of actual life. One would have to look far to find anything equaling these small books in the sacred literatures of other religions.

⁴ *S. B. E.*, Vol. III.

⁵ *S. B. E.*, Vol. XL: T'ai Shang, p. 233-246. Also Chicago, 1906. T'ai Shang Kan-ying P'ien.

4. The literature exhibiting most plainly standards of permanent religious value.

There are certain standards of value upon which most, if not all, religions high enough to produce any literature would unite. They are such as: a clear conception of the Supreme Power, by whatever name it may be named; a plain and open way by which man may come into relation to that Power; the religious expression that we call worship; a conception of the ideal destiny of man; a "way of salvation" by which man may attain that destiny. Here I am not inclined to press the superiority of the biblical literature as I think it can be pressed at other points. I do not think that the Bible states its fundamental standards more clearly than the scriptures of other great religions. If it seems to us to do so, that is probably because of our greater familiarity with it. When I imagine myself coming to the Bible as a new book and opening it at random to find its religious teaching, I sympathize strongly with the Buddhist monk in Nanking who said to me: "I have tried to read the Christian Bible, but I could not understand it. It seemed to me very confused." But I do not think, on the other hand, that the Bible presents its religious standards less plainly than do the scriptures of other religions. As to their being standards of greater religious value, I am quite willing to leave the course of human history to decide.

Laying aside now the general points, may we consider certain special phases of religious history in which the Bible is of particular value.

There is one phase in which the Bible is unique. No other scripture gives the religious biography of a nation. The most fruitful historical classification of religions is into primitive or tribal, national, and personal. All religions run back directly or indirectly into the primitive stage. All high religions are personal, or have strong personal elements. He who would study national religions, however, is driven to the Bible as his source. It is possibly due to this fact that, while we have elaborate studies of primitive religion, and

not less thorough studies of mysticism and other elements in personal religion, the national stage has been much neglected. It is not a necessary factor in the understanding of the Indian religions, of Buddhism, nor even of Islam, and certainly not of Christianity. Confucianism culminates in a fascinating system of state ethics, but it is not national in the sense in which we are using the term.

One feels that Zoroastrianism just missed the national element. In the Gathic hymns there are suggestions of a national situation—other races encroach upon their territories and endanger their flocks. But this nationalism in the religion has two limitations: it relates to only one situation, and it is only stated in these hymns—the prayer-books and laws which make the rest of the Avesta being as blind to national vicissitudes as prayer-books are wont to be. What an opportunity the Persian national history might have offered for religious interpretation! Ahura Mazda was a national god in almost as full a sense as was Jahveh. When Alexander's conquest swept aside the Achaemenian kings there must have been the same sort of religious crisis which met Israel at the exile. The problem of holding faith in their god must have been a real problem. The same situation was duplicated, with probably more intensity, at the Mohammedan conquest. But there was neither a Persian Ezekiel nor Second Isaiah, nor later a Nehemiah, to record the tragedy and hope of the nation's religion. In the Quran there is the consciousness of the Arab people; there is the pride in the city of Mecca and the tense feeling of the sin of her citizens; but there is nothing properly national and, like the Gathic hymns, there is the picture of only one situation. In the Jewish scriptures the national element occupies more than half the material, and covers the entire recorded period of national life.

National religion develops a loftier conception of God than primitive religion held. As the king of a nation becomes more of a personage than the chief of a tribe, so the god of a nation becomes greater than the god of a tribe. He is more remote and lofty, approached with greater respect

and awe. The worship of the god, like the audience of the king, becomes hedged about with formality. This is the stage when great temples, priestly functions, splendid ritual, are natural and right. Now in all the history of the world there is no place where the growth of this kind of deity and his worship are so clearly portrayed as in the Hebrew literature. The tribal stage of the religion remained till after the settlement in Palestine. In Judges 5 the southern tribes are neither summoned nor expected to come to the help of the tribes of the north. The common god served in no effective measure to bind them together. Here is the tribal mental attitude. When at last, under David, the tribes were united, then the national religious attitude arose; and the god became greater. In several ways we can trace the change. One way of detecting it is in the elimination of the cruder anthropomorphism from the older folk-tales. By the time J and E were edited, the national life had placed God on a pedestal of dignity. There seems to have been a growing hesitancy to repeat the old tales in their early form. We are familiar with the use of Malakh Jahveh where, before the story is finished, it becomes evident that Jahveh himself, and no "messenger," figured in the earlier tale. Gideon, discussing the troubles of the country with "Malakh Jahveh" amid the dust of the threshing floor (Judges 6 11); Manoah, conversing with Malakh Jahveh (Judges 13), are illustrations.

Now what had happened in Israel between the time of the Judges and the ninth century, that their original anthropomorphism needed to be shaded down? The greatest thing had happened that could happen to a religion at that stage. It had passed from tribal to national, and God had been placed on a throne of higher majesty. Another mark of the growing greatness of God is the more formal organization of worship. Temple and priesthood flower naturally in the national period. The power of local priesthoods needs no national unity; it has grown on all soils. But the power of a unified, national priesthood is one result of the growth of a nation. The greater God calls for a greater worship, more stately and formal. The elaboration of the worship and the

power of the priesthood act and react on each other, each increment of increased power in one lifting the other a stage higher.

Other elements besides nationalism increase the dignity of worship and the power of the priesthood. In India, during and after the Vedic period, ritualism and priesthood acted and reacted, till the Brahmanas present a religion almost turned magic, and the Brahman caste fastened a priesthood permanently on Indian civilization. The history of Christianity presents another phase of the action and reaction of ritual and priesthood. No other religious history, however, gives any account of the growth of ritual and priesthood as a part of the growth of national religion. This is a unique contribution of Israel.

And how fully the Bible gives the story! How clearly the steps of the development can be traced! The old local shrines of the tribal stage hold their place while the temple at Jerusalem grows in importance from the private shrine of the luxury-loving Solomon to a national religious center. When the time was ripe, the Deuteronomic law swept away the shrines to exalt the temple; but even that might not have been effective without the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. The story of the temple is exceedingly enlightening for the history of national religion.

The shrine which will best compare with this temple is the Altar of Heaven in Peking. That also was a national place of worship. It was the one place in the nation where the highest god was worshipped. But there the likeness ends and contrast begins. This Altar did not represent the triumph of a national priesthood, but was the survival of the pre-priestly stage, when the head of the family or state did the worship for his people. The Emperor sacrificed for the nation. The divine Power, Heaven, there worshipped, became increasingly an abstract principle more than a personal god. Other gods satisfied the religious needs of the people. It is as though in Israel the ritual of the Mosaic day had survived in the temple, the king only worshipping Jahveh twice a year; and the people had developed unhindered their tendency to

Baal worship. The temple would have lost most of its value for the history of religion.

The national tendency to exalt ritual and priesthood had in Israel its checks and balances. One was in the popular worship of the local Baals. It is possible that for a time the growing dignity of the national God may have even increased the influence of the Baals. Jahveh lived above. The Baals lived with the people. Jahveh was the God of Israel's armies. The Baal gave them their corn and wine, if they poured oil on his mazzebah. Another check was the work of the prophets. The tendency of the more formal worship of a greater god is always to transform a living religion into magical forms and priestly fees. It is a great step in progress when national religion lifts a god into greatness, but the next step is over a precipice. This step the prophets succeeded in keeping Israel from taking, but it required all their power to do it. The prophets were themselves ardent nationalists, but their protest was against the fruitage of national religion.

Another unique contribution of the Bible is the record of the growth of personal from national religion. The greatest step in the evolution of religion is that from the institutional to the personal stage. The institution may be tribal, national, or priestly. In any case, the god of the institutional religion holds his relation to man, not directly, but because of man's dependence on, or affiliation with, some other person or group of persons. In India personal religion arose in the midst of a most extreme system of ritualism. It came in two forms, Buddhism and orthodox philosophy. Buddha cut free from institutionalism altogether, and founded a wholly personal religion on the basis of Hindu conceptions. The orthodox religion devised a most ingenious way of meeting the eternal conflict between the institutional and the personal. When a man became old, and his hair grey, and he saw the son of his son, he might leave his home and go into the forest and there seek truth by meditation.⁶ This scheme divides life.

⁶ *S. B. E.*, Vol. XXV, *Laws of Manu*, ch. VI, 1 ff.

During the greater part of it man is under the priesthood. In his old age he becomes an individualist. Thus the irreconcilable was reconciled; but it worked only because of indifference. Most men never passed beyond the priestly stage; which was no great matter, for there were numberless incarnations ahead of them. Some, like Buddha, became forest hermits without waiting for old age. The whole history of the rise of personal religion in India is extremely interesting.

In Israel personal religion was born of national religion, was formed within it and nourished by its blood. The whole process of its development is traced for us in the Hebrew literature. Instead of coming from a conflict, personal religion arose and grew and reached its completion among the most devoted and effective champions of nationalism, the prophets. The religion of the prophets was not unique. It rests on a very wide-spread belief that man can do deeds and speak words inspired by deity. Here was the beginning of personal religion. But the prophet did not immediately draw the conclusion that the relation between God and all men was personal, for his own personal relation was only because he was a messenger to the nation. The second step was his conviction that God required righteousness between man and man. Now sin and righteousness are personal. The actions were of individuals, but the prophets promised reward and threatened punishment to the nation, without discrimination between individuals. This could not go on indefinitely. At some time, under some circumstances, the fact that ethics is personal must break up the national tradition of religion, however hoary with age it might be. That time came with the exile. The great step from national to personal religion was taken consciously by the young priest Ezekiel, as he strove to find a new basis for the shattered religion, its national foundations overthrown by the overthrow of the walls of Jerusalem. It came not without preparation. The experiences of many prophets, and the growing sense of individual responsibility for ethical conduct, had paved the way for the new idea. When once it came to clear consciousness,

personal religion was always thereafter an unquestioned factor of Hebrew religion.

How the national factor still persisted; how the two stood side by side without open conflict; how they nevertheless raised problems not always easy to answer; how Christianity dropped the national and kept the personal; these are facts so familiar that I need not dwell on them. What I am interested in emphasizing now is that the Bible lays out for our inspection the fullest and clearest exhibit available of the beginning, development and culmination of this most important step in the growth of religion.

The growth of monotheism furnishes another element of very great value. The biblical record of it is unique in two ways. First, nowhere else can the development of monotheism be so clearly traced. It is easy to see how the earlier prophetic monolatry led to it. The final outburst of clear and uncompromising monotheism in Second Isaiah has no parallel in other literatures. Chemists speak of the nascent state, when a chemical compound, at the moment of its formation, is more potent than at any other time. To catch a religious idea in its nascent state is one of the joys of scholarship; and here it is, for monotheism.

Second, it is the one place where we can trace the growth of an *ethical* monotheism. Other religions have recognized only one Supreme Power in the universe. Sometimes it came from the exaltation of one god above his fellows. Such was the brief interlude of monotheism which Akhnaton interjected in Egypt's polytheism. In India it came as the result of philosophical reasoning on the nature of reality and issued, not in monotheism, but in an impersonal monism. In China it came from the recognition of a single source for the order of the universe. Here, too, the usual interpretation of this Supreme, Tien, Heaven, has been impersonal, though I have met Confucian scholars who disagreed. So does Bruce, in his excellent study, *Chu Hsi and His Masters*.⁷ In Japanese Buddhism the impersonal Dharmakaya, drawn ultimately from

⁷ J. P. Bruce, London, 1923.

Indian monism, sometimes receives attributes which belong only to a personal God.⁸ But in none of these cases is the monotheism primarily ethical in its origin. To see the development of an ethical Supreme Being we must come to the Bible.

Another idea whose growth can be traced in the Bible is that of the love of God. Rising out of the tragedy of life with Hosea, carried on by the Deuteronomic writers, taken into personal religion by the Psalmists, exalted to be the central attribute of God in the New Testament, its history lies open to view. The conception has one counterpart in other religions, although that is a less vivid, fructifying idea. It is the Confucian conception often translated Benevolence, but which seems really to be worthy the name Love.⁹ We do not know its history, and its interpretation has been more abstract, less richly human, than the biblical conception of the love of God. This is natural, for Heaven, whose chief attribute it is, has itself been mostly regarded as abstract. Love has been a principle in the universe, setting a standard for the actions of man, not because of loyalty to a personal God, but because "a reasonable being should act reasonably."

Life after death is another belief whose history can be traced in the Bible more fully than in other scriptures. It passes from the idea of a shadowy realm of the dead, common in all primitive religions, to a life where punishment and reward redress the seeming injustices of this world.

Three times religion has developed the idea of a future life ethically related to the present life. Once was the karma of India—a karma working itself out at least partly in reincarnations. Once was the vivid, picturesque ideas of judgment and future life in Zoroastrianism.¹⁰ Once was the Hebrew conception of heaven and hell, more clearly revealed

⁸ See Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, pp. 223, 232-241. "It is a living spirit that manifests itself in nature as well as in thought" (p. 223). "Dharmakaya is not only an intelligent mind, but a loving heart" (p. 232).

⁹ Bruce, *Chu Hsi and his Masters*, pp. 263 ff.

¹⁰ Ardâ Virât XVII. See also *S. B. E.*, XXIII, pp. 314 ff., 342 ff.

in the New Testament than in the Hebrew canon itself. The genesis of karma is so obscure that scholars question if it may not be traced to the aborigines of India.¹¹ The Zoroastrian idea has no history; it appears, no one can tell how or whence, in the literature. The Hebrew idea can be traced through its various stages, from the beginning of the decline of the primitive sheol, to the new and independent belief in life after death.

The Bible student cannot, however, claim as his own the entire range of religious experience. Two elements sometimes found in that experience are, one mostly, the other entirely, wanting. The first is mysticism. The cultivation of the mystic trance is not inculcated. That the prophets sometimes had mystic experiences is well known. These were the by-products of their intense devotion to Jahveh. The prophets never erected them into standards of religious experience. They never said to the people, "You must have these experiences if you would come into relation with God." That is exactly what the real mystic, Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi or Christian, does say. The Bible does not teach mysticism as a necessary religious experience.

The other experience is the approach to God by philosophy. The Bible does not philosophize. No writer in it raises the question of what is reality, or of the relation of the essential substance of man to the essential substance of the universe. That this problem, abstract as it is, may be made the basis of religion, and even of emotional religion, Hindu philosophy shows. That it failed wholly to satisfy human needs is shown by the rise of Buddhism, which in its earlier stages rejected philosophy as not having "to do with the fundamentals of religion,"¹² and by the popular devotion

¹¹ "While the conceptions of karma and reincarnation are unquestionably the work of the Aryan mind, it need not be denied that the suggestions may have come from the aborigines, who believed that after death their souls lived in animal bodies." Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 136.

¹² See Warren, *Buddhism in Translation*, p. 122.

to personal gods which India calls *bhakti*. The writers of the Bible do not even reject philosophy; they never consider it. A Hindu said to me: "I think that Christianity is a religion of *bhakti*, and not a religion of philosophy." He was quite right; and the same is true of Judaism.

This paper only touches upon the more obvious aspects of a great subject. There are excellent studies of the religion of the Bible; some of the best of them by members of this Society. I wish to make a plea for the next step in the progress, the treatment of this religion as a part of a wider field. The most important contributions in that field will come, I am confident, from the familiar pages of the Bible. Biblical scholarship will yet bear the leading part in the history of religion.