

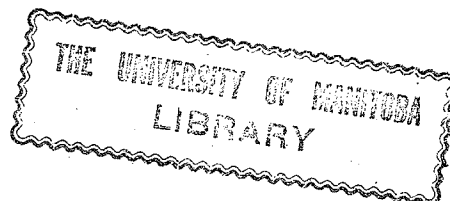
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*The Evolution of Religion*

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## THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION: CHRISTIANITY AS ABSOLUTE AND FINAL.

R. E. Speers<sup>①</sup> makes this significant statement in one of his latest productions. "We are standing to-day in the midst of a world of wrecked religions, and they are all proving their inadequacy to meet the needs of men."

We hesitate to accept this popular verdict, and feel that something should be said in behalf of the Non-Christian Religions.

We believe and shall try to prove that the four great historical religions, namely: Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Buddhism are not wrecked, but rather are vying with Christianity for supremacy in the Oriental World.

It is our aim in this thesis to show that there is a great fundamental principle connecting all the great religions; that the various faiths of the world are not false, but rather the evolution of an original constituent principle of humanity.

Then having established this principle we shall endeavor to show how and why Christianity is destined to be the Universal Religion, and hence Absolute and Final.

C. P. Tiele has said that, "Religion is the Universal Phenomenon of humanity," and Prof. Menzes<sup>②</sup> is still more exact when he terms religion as a "Psychological Necessity." However it is expressed we are forced to believe that man is fundamentally religious. It is a well known fact that wherever the Missionary travels, either in darkest Africa or over the isles of the sea, he finds men everywhere erecting alters to the "Unknown God." We believe with Judson Savage<sup>③</sup> that, "This universal religious consciousness is the central essential and eternal thing in human life."

Religion is not only necessary but it is indestructable; it was the Prophetic Carlyle who said, "Religion is not dead; it will never die. It has its dwelling place and birth place in the soul of man; and it is eternal as the being of man."

A man's religion is that which speaks to him of realities and certainties in a world higher than this mundane existence and links him to the unseen and eternal, thus constituting one of the real permanent forces in the universe.

In the next place an analysis of the religious instinct will help to solve several very important problems in connection with the relationship and bearing of the great historical religions of to-day.

<sup>①</sup> Copied from Address given before Nashville Convention of College Students.

<sup>②</sup> Allan Menzies "History of Religion" page 24.

<sup>③</sup> Minot Judson Savage. "The Passing & the Permanent in Religion", pg. 13.

It should help the Occident to understand the Orient better; it will show how the great religions supplement and complement each other in the search for truth; it will point out a fundamental principle of unity, which will ultimately bind all the great religions closer together and prove that they are not false but only inadequate.

This study will exhibit a development of the religious consciousness which in the main is continuous from the most elementary to the highest stage; it will show that an inevitable logic will force men to finally agree upon a Universal Religion in accordance with a fundamental, synthetic law of mind. It is said that "all religions may be regarded as the unconscious effort of the human spirit to express and unify its relationship with the Infinite."

"The growth of human need, says Allan Menzies, is the cause of religious change and progress, and hence the key to the development of any religion is found in the successive emergence in human experience of higher and greater needs." If we can discover the order in which higher aspirations successively emerge in the development of humanity, we may determine the course of religious advance.

There are at least four successive conditions or stages of human history which may be traced in the development of civilization as man climbs from the lower to the higher levels.

First. In the scale of development the material needs are all absorbing; man's religious consciousness is scarcely awakened; the religious life as a whole is a mass of childish fancies; the gods are petty and capricious beings.

Second. As civilization develops there comes a freedom from material needs; the higher aspirations and ideals are concerned with the safety and advancement of their national life. At this stage the religious life becomes associated with patriotism, men have begun to believe not only in the tribal, but in the national god or gods, and hence a national religion is borne. The true principle of classification is based upon the difference between the tribal and national religion.

Third. As the nation consciousness gains in power and influence men begin to realize their own value apart from the state; they dare to think of a higher moral law than the priestly

Allan Menzies' History of Religion.

system and accordingly develop a personal ideal which is their final authority. Thus the individualistic stage of religion succeeds the national.

Fourth. The individualistic stage is a part at least of the Universal stage where men recognize the unity of all truth, and endeavor through a synthetic law to trace all to a final harmony. At this stage of development the mind of man is emancipated and Prophetic men catch new visions of truth, which finally crystallize into great national religions.

While there may not be an absolute law of growth in the development of the religious consciousness, yet a deep study of the Great Historical Religions seems to indicate several distinct stages, according to the advancement of their civilization as indicated above.

This principle is in harmony with a second great principle as stated by Principal Caird<sup>①</sup> "It is natural for man as a spiritual conscious being to transcend the finite, and to rise above the world of mine and outer experience and to endeavor by a synthetic process of mind to harmonize all truth into one organic unity."

In the dim mists of antiquity it is difficult to find the sacred writings which bear upon the early awakening of the religious consciousness. History proves that in the childhood period of the race, the religious life and energy were almost entirely occupied in the struggle with nature and fighting opposing tribes.

Many great scholars, among them being Max Muller<sup>②</sup>, would go as far as to say that the earliest forms of religion could not be considered religions at all; that man's consciousness was not awakened to anything higher than impulse or desire.

Perhaps that is true, but even the lowest and most ignorant savage seems conscious of spirits, ghosts or fetishes in some form or other, and they at least relate him to a higher world and to an unknown God.

At this stage of savage life, when all the energies are absorbed in the endeavor to provide daily sustenance, the religious instinct finds expression in attempts to avert evil, which experience teaches, nature does inflict.

As scholars disagree concerning the different gods which are first worshipped, whether spirits, fetishes or powers of nature, we shall use a more comprehensive term and designate animism as the first stage in this great development. The principle remains the same wherever we begin the analysis.

<sup>①</sup> Principal Caird, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, pg 307.

<sup>②</sup> Max Muller, Introduction to the Science of Religion.

(A) ANIMISM.

For our purposes animism may be considered a real starting point, for it marks the stage of man's development when the consciousness is awakening to a large life. At this time mankind has advanced from a primitive worship of spirits to a worship of gods, which differ from the spirits in having a marked personal character.

If fetishes spirits and nature-worship have not entered into the sphere of religion, yet they form the basis of a principle of selection and thus become the source of a new spiritual consciousness in the mind of the worshipper.

For example, in the history of the early religion of India, the principle of selection may be noticed as the worshipper prefers some material object above all others, which at length becomes his god. At one time he worships the Sun and Stars and at another time the winds and storms, but he is ever striving to find some thing permanent and lasting.

Another advance is made in the evolution of the religious consciousness when the mind begins to reflect on the meaning and relationship of the surrounding phenomena; speculation busies itself with religious ideas and objects of religious worship. The conclusion is reached that the gods possess similar powers to men.

(B) ANTHROPOMORPHIC STAGE.

This stage brings us to more definite historic ground where proof is more positive. The sacred writings of all the religions will be important for investigation, but the Bible will be the best authority for it traces the development of the religious consciousness of the Hebrew people from the Anthropomorphic stage, onward, through the Monism of ideal Christianity.

It comes about by an inevitable logic that when man finds his gods in nature he discovers a number of them; when he discovers a new god he does not at first deny the existence of the other gods; his mind struggles to find some kind of a synthesis among the gods and at last he comes to think of one god with higher powers than the others, and in this circle he considers someone as supreme. It is when the gods are thought of in the likeness of human beings that the decisive step is made in the development.

(C) POLYTHEISM.

Polytheism is a natural development in the evolution of the religious consciousness. It may be studied in the great Eastern Religions or even in the early history of the Jews.

The Jews thought of "Javah" (Jehovah), as being the god of battle who resided on the Mount Sinai; they also worshipped Baal, god of harvest, and several other minor deities.

At this stage of development man has not reached the conclusion that there can only be one god; when he is worshipping he feels as if there were only one, but this feeling applies at different times to a number of things, and thus he lacks the power to free himself.

Nature as a whole may be at one stage of development a symbol of that infinite unity which men seek after, but the Universe broken into parts must be explained by a higher synthesis. For example, towards the close of the religious epoch reflected in the Vedic hymns of India an effort is made to break down the limits which isolate each particular divinity and to blend them in one fluent indivisible whole; the god invoked at any one time is regarded as the type or representative of all the other gods. This is a latent recognition of a unity beneath the multiplicity.

#### (D) HENOTHEISM.<sup>①</sup>

Henotheism is closely related to Polytheism as each tribe recognizes its own supreme god and at the same time respects the gods of surrounding tribes or nations.

The Hebrew people late in their history referred to Jehovah as their special god, but they also recognized Remosh as supreme god of the Moabites and Ashtoreth god of Babylonians.

The tribal religion has given place to a national religion and as they have their own king they also have their own god; but there was no harm if they worshipped other gods and hence the king would set up the images of neighboring gods in the temple. When the Hebrews were taken prisoners to Babylon they felt duty bound to erect altars to the god of the Babylonians because their own god, Jehovah, was back in Jerusalem.

The advance from the religion of the tribe to that of the nation must now be considered for it forms one of the most momentous epochs in the whole history of religion. The development of a national consciousness is the slow process of years and is not always achieved in the same way.

We have reached the second stage of human development where the material needs are not all-absorbing, while the highest

① - This title was invented by Mr. Max Müller, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion.

aspirations are directed to the safety and advancement of the Nation in which they find themselves united.

As mankind ascends in the scale of civilization this synthetic process of mind is accelerated; the leading men gain some measure of security and leisure; the mind becomes emancipated and as a result great organic movements take place in society.

Law takes the place of custom; the community undertakes to punish crime and to protect the helpless; patriotism becomes linked with religion as the great battles are fought to preserve the nation.

The priesthood becomes a very powerful class and acquires a personal holiness, which marks out its members from other men; the sacrifices acquire the character of divine mysteries; religious books are written and at length are regarded as inspired and come to possess absolute authority.

In the meantime the national faith grows richer and more consistent and the religious consciousness attains the very highest degree of power and authority; it commands all the resources of the nation both intellectually and materially, but this success marks another era of development. Man learns his own value apart from the state and becomes individualistic in order to preserve his own integrity.

Prophetic men feel a call to personal goodness; they strive for a closer communion with the Divine as they realize that a priest or intermediary agent is not necessary for worship, and reformation after reformation sweeps through the state.

The worshipper now knows of a god greater than his nation and his mind does not rest in its synthesis until it affirms one God over the whole world.

#### (E) MONOTHEISM.

This new era of development stricks the shackles from the mind of humanity as the individualistic stage of religion succeeds the national. Great religious systems of truth are born as Prophetic men trace out various relationships to the Divine.

When civilization has created this need for a larger conception of Divinity it develops a religion which is adapted for that people and thus the religion of any nation becomes the product of the forces which gives it birth.

' Prof. Jastron says the Monotheism tendency exists among all peoples after they have reached a certain level of culture.

We believe that the fundamental principles of the great religions are quite similar and yet each age or nation must cloth in creed or doctrine its own conception of truth and the relationship to the Deity.

As stated above there may not be an absolute law in the development of the religious consciousness, but the principle remains that men everywhere are seeking to find God, as Professor Sabatier says, "Man is incurably religious."

Surely the sixth century B.C. was a period of emancipation throughout the whole world when Prophetic spirits spelled out the Monotheistic conception of the Infinite in crude systems of truth. It is the age of Confucius and Yaotsze in China, of Gautama in India, of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in Palestine, of Pythagoras and Herachus in Greece.

However the Jewish race with a peculiar genius for religion produced a type of Prophetic men who emancipated the world with a new conception of Deity.

Isaiah and Jeremiah not only teach a monotheistic conception of God, but a God who is a moral ruler; one who is more interested in the maintenance and promotion of righteousness than in the advancement of any nation. They have identified God with the ideal of righteousness and mercy, and in so doing they have made the great step, at least in principle, from a national to a universal religion.

As the light and truth dawns, the Jew becomes aware of his own imperfections and limitations when he strives to know God in a higher sense. In his desire for righteousness he comes to think of himself as evil, while God becomes a Loving Father directly interested in the establishment of a world wide kingdom of truth.

#### (F) DUALISM.

As the Jewish race takes preeminence in its search for truth and a higher synthesis, we may follow its history. Individual responsibility developed a dualistic conception of the Universe which marks an advanced stage in the civilization of any people.

Prof. Menzies says, "It is the gift of the Semitic race to bring the thought of God to bear on life with a direct practical force such as Aryan religion never by itself exerted."

Professor Jastron - The Study of Religion, pg.76.  
Allan Menzies - History of Religion, pg.194.



As the Hebrew Prophet thinks of this ideal to be attained he is baffled by the limitations of Life. God is good yet he seems to be defeated in the establishment of a world wide kingdom of truth. He can only explain it by thinking of a power which opposes the good and endeavors to overthrow it.

The mind of man endeavors to transcend the limitations and to reach finality, and thus he forces himself to believe in the supremacy of good.

Science becomes the handmaid of theology as men realize the divine laws of the Universe; men understand that this is God's world and all the laws tend towards establishing truth and righteousness.

A new light dawns in the consciousness of the race, when men realize that the Infinite is a loving Father, but the question of the ages remains unanswered. What is the exact relationship of humanity to Divinity? How is it possible to harmonize the apparent dualism of life?

The Jewish Prophets thought of a coming one, the Prince of Peace, who would establish their nation in power until their religion would be recognized the world over. Each great religion looks backward or forward to the great emancipation. Louis Jordan says, 'If Buddhism or Confucianism or Mohammedanism could produce to-day the leader equal in endowment to the leader they possessed at the beginning, they would assuredly experience the thrill of a new life and amaze the world by their energy and progress.'

Jesus Christ, the Emancipator of the world came to the best of the now-christian religions and announced the truth "which doth make us free." Not only does it make men free but it unites men in the highest synthesis possible for the mind of man to conceive.

Christ dared to say that He and the Creator of the Universe were one: that humanity was Divinity in its Infancy; that He was the Son of Heaven, which was the rightful inheritance of all men.

#### (G) MONISM.

Monism is the final stage in the development of the religious consciousness, and is destined to become the ideal for the coming ages. Monism, says A. S. Mories, is now admitted by scientists and christian scholars as the ultimate aim of human thought." Sir Oliver Lodge says, "Philosophically, Monism is the aim of all of us."

Louis H. Jordan, Comparative Religion, page 353.  
A. S. Mories, The New Theology, page 63.

Christ has emancipated the world by his great truth of man's intimate relationship with God: this is the undying truth which was and ever shall remain, the life-blood of Christianity. This great truth made Christianity unique among all the religions of the world, and announced the highest synthesis yet reached by man.

We have endeavored to trace the development of the religious consciousness of the race from prehistoric times to the advent of Christ the emancipator of the world. We shall now endeavor to point out the unique features of Christianity, and give the reasons why Christianity is destined to be absolute and final.

### CHRISTIANITY.

The unique feature of the Christian religion lies first in the spiritual dynamic which it possesses and by means of which it can translate its truth into life forms for each advancing age.

Dr. Martineau makes this significant statement in referring to the evolution of truth, "The symbols of one age are the archaeological curiosities of the next." Christ announced a very simple creed but the fundamental principles of Christianity are universal and possess the power of adaptability for each age.

Christianity presents an ideal to be reached which is within the scope of human attainments.

In the second place Christianity is unique in the fact that the ideal to be reached has been attained by the greatest life ever lived upon earth. Jesus Christ was the great living illustration of the truth he taught.

In the third place, what Christ affirmed for himself he affirmed for his disciples, and what he affirmed for his disciples, he affirmed for the world.

The Fatherhood of God is now a greater truth than it was in the time of Christ. Christ also taught the truth of Sonship with God, which is a truth so comprehensive that after nineteen centuries the world is just beginning to understand its significance.

We believe that Sonship with God as expressed by Christ gives expression to the highest Synthesis possible for the mind of man and prepares the coming ages for the great emancipation.

Christ gives expression to a great Universal principles which are destined to be more far reaching than the spiritual dynamic of his own life as he said, ① "Greater things than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father."

① - John 14th chapter, 12th verse.

Christ realized that great principles grow as men develop, and hence they require a new setting for each age. The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of man as principles are greater and more comprehensive to-day than in the time of Christ, and Prophetic men are still reaching up for a larger revelation of truth.

Christianity is growing richer in truth as the religious consciousness of the race develops a higher and a more universal synthesis.

Christianity, almost the youngest of the great historical religions, has had a unique development, as it came into contact with the great ocean currents of religious and philosophic thought and in a measure has become the heir of the thoughts and aspirations of a hundred empires.

All the noble sentiments that flowed from every quarter of the world has helped to enrich its life and make it the reservoir of truth. It seems that each of the great historical religions are destined to contribute something towards the efficiency of the other religions until truth is recognized the world over.

Truth discovered by one religion is the rightful heritage of all men.

We believe that the highest development of the consciousness of the race has been reached in Christianity, but we are indebted to all the great religions of the world.

Christianity is becoming Universal as She infuses her life and spirit into the non-Christian religions of the world, and in turn assimilates the richer truths found there. The thoughtful student of the Japanese religious life is forced to admit that Buddhism and Shintoism have received a new impetus in their contact with Christianity in the last decade. What is taking place in Japan is true throughout the Orient; either the great National religions are catching the vital truth of Christianity and receiving a new life, or a new National Christianity adapted to their own day and generation is developing, but in either case truth is being disseminated and the world made one.

When the seeker after truth turns back the pages of history he is able in some measure to appreciate the contribution which each nation and age has made to Christianity,

### JEWES.

Christianity grew out of the greatest of the oriental religions and it was centuries before it could emancipate itself from the influences of Jewish thought and sentiment.

The Jewish religion was itself the product of many external sources due to their unique history; the great nations of antiquity, namely Egypt, Persia and Babylon, all made rich contributions to the Jewish religion.

The Christian's Bible is largely the product of Jewish thought and sentiment, and its truths will live for ever in the consciousness of the race.

This inheritance has given Christianity the richest literature of all the great religions, and has inspired the best productions of the Ages.

### GREEKS.

Again consider the rich contributions which Greece made to Christianity. It was the great labours of Dr. Hatch, Prof. Harnack and the French scholar, Ernest Renan who helped the Christian world to appreciate the contribution from this source.

The instinct for unity was the one passion of Greek thought.

The Greeks taught Christianity to think out a theological system of doctrine which was related to life.

Charles Ringsley says, "I boldly say that I believe the Alexandrian Christians to have made the best, perhaps the only, attempt yet made by men to proclaim a true world-philosophy, whereby I mean a philosophy common to all ranks, races, and intellects, embracing the whole phenomena of humanity."

Christianity without a doubt possesses the finest system of related truth which any religion possesses, and is in the language of Max Muller ① The Religion of Humanity.

### ROMANS.

The contribution of the Latin races with their great organizing genius bequeathed by Rome, gave Christianity the great organizing power so unique among the religions of the world.

① Max Müller, Introduction to the Science of Religion, page 37.

The great ecclesiastical system of the Roman church is considered by many as the greatest product of man's genius. We believe that the organizing power of Christianity is one of the chief factors which will help to make it universal.

#### TEUTONIC RACES.

The Teutonic races taught the world that man is a spirit and greater than any system of truth or philosophy.

The reformation of the sixteenth century emancipated mankind and made Christianity the religion of the free man.

As a result, wherever the religion of Christianity goes it causes reformation or revolution. The Teutonic spirit has taught the world where the real source of authority lies, and in our own day has precipitated the second great reformation which teaches that the source of religions' authority does not lie in the Bible<sup>①</sup> "per se," but rather in the Universal Christian consciousness of the race.

#### ANGLO-SAXONS.

It is difficult to say which is the greatest contribution of the Anglo-Saxons. The great ideal of this age seems to be, "Life truths in life forms," and as a result Christianity is being purged of many false conceptions. This age is practical and progressive. As a result Christianity is being carried to the ends of the earth with this slogan, "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation." It is generating a Universal sentiment of Brotherhood which is inspiring the world and has taken definite steps towards Universal peace. An atmosphere is being generated which is to revolutionize all social conditions and prepare the masses for great development throughout the whole world.

#### ORIENT.

The end of development is not yet; as we study conditions and religions in the Far East, we are convinced that Christianity is to receive a great new impetus in its development as a Universal religion.

The great Prophet Schopenhauer as far back as 1818 penned these significant words. "I anticipate that the influence of the Sanskrit literature will not be less profound than the revival of Greek in the fourteenth Century."

① This thought principle was received from Dr. Bland, Wesley College.

The great Prophet was right, for scholars are studying the ancient religions of the Orient as never before, and we dare to prophesy that there is a Monistic conception of God found here that will deeply enrich Christianity and offset the dualism of the Western World.

The great doctrine of the identity of God and the soul, reached and announced three thousand years ago in the Hindu Upanishads, is certainly one of the deepest truths of Christianity. F. D. Maurice says, "The Hindu starts from the discovery to which the Hebrew had been led by a long and painful discipline."

The great power of mysticism and Christian pantheism are yet to be assimilated by Christianity before it will reach the vital life of the Orient.

The great truths of the Eastern world have all been subjective and introspective, hence non-progressive.

The essential divine nature of man is the revolutionary contribution of Indian Religious Philosophy to Christianity.

The great truths of Jesus cannot be understood by our practical age until the deeply devotional and mystical spirit of the East grips Christianity.

The Orient and the Occident are both making a unique contribution to Christianity and thus are preparing this faith for Universal Dominion.

History proves that Christianity has become richer each time it has been engrafted into the national life. Who possesses the Prophetic insight to say what a power Christianity is to become when linked with the patriotism of Japan, the filial piety of China, and the mysticism of India?

In conclusion we would dare to say that Christianity is only in its infancy; there are great mental and spiritual factors in man, co-extensive with the race, which are as yet undeveloped; we can only know in part the laws and forces of the spiritual world as they gradually unfold, but we believe that ideal Christianity and genuine truth are synonymous terms.

This is the ideal for Christianity in the coming ages, when she will assimilate truth from every source and become the heir of all the ages, and mankind the world over will realize that all truth is related and united and will recognize Christianity as the Universal Religion, and hence absolute and final.