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THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO UNIVERSAL RELIGION

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in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts.

By Albert William Keeton, B.A., B.D.

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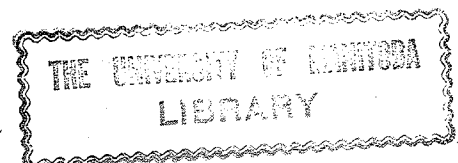
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| Chapter 1 | Universal Religion |
| Chapter 2 | The Contribution of the Ethnic Religions |
| Chapter 3 | The Contribution of Christianity:
A. The Fundamental Character of Christianity |
| Chapter 4 | The Contribution of Christianity:
B. Transient Elements |
| Chapter 5 | The Contribution of Christianity:
C. Eternal and Universal Elements |
| Chapter 6 | The Religion of the Future |

Note:- The references to 'The Truth of Religion' by Rudolf Eucken are from the Second English Edition, translated by Dr. W. Tudor Jones, and published in the Theological Translation Library of Williams and Norgate, London.



THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Chapter 1

UNIVERSAL RELIGION

There is manifested in human life a force, other than thinking, feeling or willing, which, being a whole in itself, uses all these as the instruments of its expression, and which impels man to rise above the impulses of mere self-preservation, to regard life as a whole, and to reach out, seeking an infinite reality over and beyond the tangible world, in which all else shall find its significance and life's mystery its solution. To this force the name Spiritual Life has been given. In the first faint and blurred manifestations, in magic and animism, the Spiritual Life began to make its presence felt; but it is in the great religions of the world that we find the spirit of man seeking to express its own uneasy consciousness of life, thirsting for that which might satisfy its yearning for unity, setting out on its quest for God.

No religion can live unto itself. Nor can any religion be understood, as to its origin and evolution, without reference to the other religions which have met it in its course and influenced its development. Each religion, being an attempt to meet the same human instincts and needs, to express the same emotions and experiences, might be expected to manifest points of affinity with kindred faiths, and to betray a certain commerce of ideas between itself and others with which it has come into contact. Intercourse has increased so enormously in

the modern world that the necessity for mutual respect and toleration has been more widely realized, with the result that men have come to recognize that religion is not merely local and temporal in character, but universal and eternal.

We have come to see in the crudest beginnings of religion phenomena whose inner significance is to be sought in higher expressions. The meaning of no religion can be grasped except in its relation to the development of the human race. The religious life of humanity cannot be satisfied with scattered and apparently unrelated manifestations, but seeks unity and cohesion. Streams which have had their sources in the far distant mountains yield at length their waters to that one vast ocean whose waves wash every shore.

No race of men progresses very far in its development before the instinct for religion is recognized and provided for. Hence have arisen the numberless religions of the world, some of which have made so effective an appeal to large sections of mankind, that they may well be called "world religions." Some of these contain elements which are repugnant to the adherents of other creeds, but it is highly significant that there appear common factors which seem to be of permanent and universal validity, and that there is to be traced an evolution which moves ever forward in the direction of the more spiritual and eternal.

In the study of Universal Religion every authentic manifestation of the religious life must be recognized, but special importance must be attached to eternal and universal elements, and it must be our first care clearly to define these,

and to disentangle them from that which is merely local and temporary. The more fully any religion embraces and expresses such elements, the more perfectly will it minister to the spiritual life of humanity, and the higher, therefore, will be its place in the scale of world religions.

These considerations will point the way in which we ought to approach a study of the relation of Christianity to Universal Religion. We must first review, however briefly, the outstanding ethnic religions, in order to discover the contribution each has made to the spiritual development of the race. For this purpose we have selected four: Confucianism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism and Judaism. We shall then attempt to ascertain the place of Christianity as determined by the contribution it has made to Universal Religion.

In connection with this study there naturally arises an important question, and one which we cannot altogether ignore: Is there any existing religion which is capable of becoming the universal religion of the future. Christianity is not alone in cherishing such an ambition. The great test to be applied to any religion making such a claim is to determine the relation in which it stands to Universal Religion. In order to do this, we must separate those elements which are local and temporary and find whether they are essential to the being of the religion in question, and then discover how much is really universal and eternal. The final test, which the future alone can adequately apply, but which alluringly invites speculation, is to determine whether the religion is capable of meeting the demands of the spiritual life of humanity for all time.

Chapter 2

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ETHNIC RELIGIONS

"Anthropomorphism controls the ordinary conception of religion from remote antiquity. Can we deny that man is here wont to project into the universe a somewhat magnified and ennobled replica of himself, and to deal with the Deity as with a man-like being? The insufficiency of this was not only brought up as a charge against religion, but it was also fully felt within religion's own circle. Hence the effort to drive out such a human notion; and this elimination seemed to be most thoroughly effected by ontological speculation which excluded every closer determination of the Godhead as illegitimate, and retained as valid for the nature of the Godhead pure being without any qualities and above all concepts." - Eucken: 'The Truth of Religion' page 209.

CONFUCIANISM. It has been charged that

Confucianism, the ancient religion of China, is not really a religion at all, because, although it affirms the existence of God, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, it does not seek communion with him, but only avoids giving annoyance. "We have not yet performed our duties to men, how can we perform our duties to spirits?" says Confucius. "We know not yet about life, how can we know about death?"

It is true that Confucianism teaches that religion results in rebellion and calamities, because thoughts and speculations about another world detract attention from this and its duties. So far as the masses of the people are concerned, very little is provided beyond a lofty moral system, placing a high value upon the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge and good faith, and emphasizing the three superior claims of the sovereign, the father and the husband, while extraordinary importance is attached to filial piety, resulting, in practice, in ancestor worship. In this

system there are recognised the cardinal relations existing between the sovereign and the subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, friend and friend, which are valuable for their social importance.

This moral code has, however, a distinctly religious basis, embodied in a system which is interpreted as the worship of the universe by the worship of its parts and phenomena. Strictly speaking this is confined to the emperor and his deputies, except for the provision that the people may worship their own ancestors. As a matter of fact they do also worship the other deities. The emperor, as the head of the realm, represents all the people. He is responsible to heaven, whom, under the name of Shang-Ti, the Supreme Emperor, he worships with elaborate ritual. In the same manner, by himself or by his deputies, the emperor worships his ancestors, the Chinese heroes of the past, and the spirits of natural phenomena, such as the sun, moon, winds, etc. Furthermore the mandarins offer certain sacrifices in the name of the emperor, and the state authorities throughout the empire offer sacrifices for the repose of the departed.

How this system of state worship will be affected by the present revolution remains to be seen. It is of course, here described as it existed under the emperor, and it is a matter for speculation whether the system will be able to survive the change to a republican form of government. For our purpose, however, the main features of Confucianism, as one of the ethnic religions, are unaffected.

BUDDHISM.

Deeply conscious of the suffering in the world, Buddhism seeks to solve its mystery, and finds the solution in the thought of the subjectivity of sorrow. Unsatisfied desire results in re-incarnation or rebirth, which is the thing to be avoided. Hence, what is needed is self-conquest, which is to be attained by following the Noble Eight-Fold Path, consisting of right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right rapture. To have reached the end of this eight-fold path is Nirvana. We are thus delivered from sorrow by the elimination of desire. We must realize that the ego is a delusion. Says Buddha: "I am nowhere anything for anyone, and nowhere is there for me anything or anyone."

There is really no God in Buddhism, but only gods whose immortality is in proportion as they have attained to nothingness. Whoever would be divine, let him take the path of negation. This life is indeed to be lived in the interests of eternity, but "in Nirvana there is a complete fading-out and cessation of desire. Therefore is Nirvana called a letting-go, a loosening-hold, a relinquishment, a non-adhesion." The four fundamental doctrines relate to evil, man, God and immortality. But the solution of each is negation. Evil is escaped by the negation of desire; man finds salvation in the negation of personality; the *gods* do but attain to negation as they go higher in the scale; the highest immortality is Nirvana.

MOHAMMADANISM. "The religion of Islam has for its basis faith in the unity of God and the mission of the prophet. If you declare that there is one God and that Mohammed is his prophet, you are a Musselman and our brother, for all true believers are brethren." - Shoik-ul-Islam.

The Mohammedan conception of God starts from this basic idea of unity, which is always and everywhere insisted on. He is an ideal Oriental despot, magnified to infinity, absolute, all-powerful and all-wise. To his loyal subjects he is all-merciful, but upon all his adversaries he wreaks vengeance. Being above all law, there is no right or wrong but as he wills, and submission to his will is the highest virtue. Hence, determinism deeply influences the life of the true Moslem.

There is in Mohammedanism no kinship between man and God; believers are not the children of God, but his sheep, and they are brethren. But unbelievers are dogs and wolves. If they submit quietly to Moslem rule they are to be treated with kindness; otherwise the men are to be slain, and the women and children sold into slavery. The resurrection of the dead, judgement, future rewards and punishments are taught; there are special favors for soldiers who die fighting for the faith in a holy war and for martyrs, while faith in the Moslem creed annuls all sin.

The five religious duties are confession of the creed, prayer, fasting, alms and the pilgrimage to Mecca. The belief in spirits - angels, jinn and devils - has much influence on the religious life and practice. Circumcision is the rite of initiation. A month of fasting and two great feasts are prescribed. One of the latter is the Feast of Sacrifice,