BORROWING BETWEEN RELIGIONS

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TO a student of the laws of the evolution of religion the problem of religious borrowing is important. I am not now speaking of synthetic religions, formed from the elements of their environment, like Gnosticism or Sikhism, or, in the modern world, Theosophy. The problem there is relatively easy. I mean borrowing by an already established religion of elements which it proceeds to assimilate into its own structure. The problems of relationship in such cases are often extremely difficult. There has been too little work done on the conditioning circumstances, to try to determine when borrowing is or is not probable.

Mere general likeness does not prove borrowing. The human mind has a great deal of uniformity. It often reacts to kindred situations in kindred ways. The same guess as to what will please an angry god, or similar myths of creation, do not prove borrowing. Two further conditions must be satisfied: (1) There must be at least some likeness of detail. (2) The relations of the contact between the two religions must be such as to make borrowing probable. This paper deals with an attempt to formulate the conditions of such relations.

The justification for bringing the subject to this Society is that before the exile a large part of the history of Hebrew religion is concerned with either accepting or repelling elements from other religions, and after the exile the relationship with Zoroastrianism presents one of the most intricate and interesting problems in the history of religion.

Borrowing between religions may take place under the following conditions of contact:

1. When a weaker, smaller or younger religious community is immersed in a stronger, larger or older community. In that case, some measure of borrowing by the first almost always occurs. Examples are the early Hebrews among the Canaanites, the early Christians in the Greco-Roman community, Buddhism in China.

2. When a religion, newly risen or newly migrant, absorbs members from other religions, the new members bring with them certain elements which are taken up by the adopted religion. Examples are Christmas and Easter customs in Europe, much of the philosophical background of Christianity, the worship of nats in Burmese Buddhism, the reverence of many of the welis and saints by Mohammedans in Palestine. Since, after the Hebrew nation was formed, there was little absorption of other peoples, this classification has little application in the Old Testament. Since the New Testament precedes any great influence of Gentile ideas upon Christianity, it has also little application in the New Testament.

3, the opposite of 2. When a vigorous religion, newly risen or newly migrant, is aggressive for converts, the religion with which it competes borrows from it elements which seem valuable for religious education or influence. Illustrations abound in India, China and Japan. One of the most striking cases in the world is in China, where Taoism borrowed temples, images, the monkish order, and many points of detail from Buddhism. A curious instance in our own day is the vogue, a few years ago, of faith healing in some of the orthodox churches, under the influence of certain well known healing cults. A much more interesting modern example is the Buddhist Sunday Schools, Buddhist Young Men's Associations, hymns, and other Christian institutions in Japan.

4. When religions are in incidental, rather than intimate, contact.

(a) Where a non-missionary religion is immersed in a community of another religion. In such cases the religions are much more liable to run in parallel channels without

mingling; for example, the Jews in Christendom, the Parsees in India, the Mohammedans in China. Unconscious borrowing of minor matters may take place in the smaller religion; seldom is there borrowing in the larger, encircling religion. Here lies one of the most fascinating problems in religion: Did Buddhism in China borrow from the small group of Nestorian Christians domiciled in its midst?

(b) Where religions are only incidentally in contact, through the media of travel, trade, general knowledge, or the contact of small communities of one religion with another, borrowing may take place from either side. The element borrowed must, however, make a definite appeal for a definite reason. In some way it must fill a need for which the borrowing religion has no adequate supply. This is the classification of most interest to the biblical student. It is the one into which falls the problem of borrowing between Judaism and Zoroastrianism. An incidental illustration of this class is the rosary in Christianity, probably ultimately derived from Buddhism.

In all cases of suggested derivation of elements of one religion from another, we must always move the previous question; namely, just what were the relations between the two religions? Were they such that borrowing is to be expected? If not, were there special and definite reasons for the borrowing? Unless there were, the internal development of the religion should be studied with care, and the supposition of derivation from the other religion only used as a theory of last resort.

More interesting still is the classification of elements borrowed between religions.

A. Most prominently, ceremonials and cults; sacred places and sacred times; feasts and fasts. Here the Bible furnishes as good examples as any in history, in the agricultural feasts of the Hebrews taken from the Canaanites. When these shepherd tribes came in contact with the agricultural peoples, especially when they themselves became farmers, and had need to insure the fertility of their fields, the feasts of springtime and harvest lay at hand. They did not need to invent;

they could borrow, and borrow they did, seemingly with freedom. Scarcely less apt as illustrations are the feasts of the Christian church, the ceremonies of Christmas and Easter and of saints' days, taken over from the older religions. As to sacred places, the world is full of them, serving each generation as it passes by in the pageant of history. Palestine itself abounds in such cults and sacred places, as was shown by Professor Curtiss twenty five years ago in his *Primitive Semitic Religion Today*. Sometimes the place is sacred to two or more religions at the same time, like the high places of Palestine, serving for sacrifice both to Jahveh and to Baal. In Ceylon, at the top of Adam's Peak, is a depression in a rock which is the footprint of Siva to the Hindus, of Buddha to the Buddhists, and of Adam to the Mohammedans. The most abundant of all borrowing is that of matters connected with the cult.

B. Closely connected with cult and ceremonial are social customs and what might properly be called educational methods; everything which makes religious nurture and propaganda, but which is not distinctly worship. Borrowing in this field is sometimes, but not always, under the influence of competition, as suggested in (3) above. Sometimes it is simply the imitation of an element of recognized value. In ancient Israel the feasts adopted from the agriculturalists were as valuable for what we should call religious education as for worship. Here should probably be placed the feast of Purim, not at first a part of worship, but from the beginning of value for impressing national ideals.

C. Gods, heroes and spirits may be borrowed. The most amazing instance of this in history is the identification of Shinto gods with Buddhist bodhisattvas. Buddhism is ever an adept at such absorption of deities, for reasons which do not concern us here. Hinduism has also a record of borrowed gods. Old aboriginal gods of India were baptised into the Hindu pantheon without stint; as when Puliar, worshipped to this day among the Tamil people, is identified with the Hindu Genesa, son of Siva. Gods, however, are not borrowed as readily as ceremonies. A religion does not

simply annex any god on which it can lay its hands. If there is any question of doubt, a theory of borrowed gods must be ready to present specific reasons why such borrowing was probable. So far as I am aware, such reasons are evident in well authenticated cases; except where the shadows of the dawn of history obscure the facts concerned.

Here lies the problem of the origin of Jahveh. Leaving that aside, the Hebrew religion, as represented by the writers of its literature, presents no such phenomena. It was not, in that sense, an assimilative religion. But the religion, as represented by the people who held it, had quite a different character. All the work of the prophets shows how eager the people were to borrow the gods of the peoples about. They did not give up the worship of Jahveh, but set the other gods by his side. The borrowing of the local Baals was most natural. If the Hebrew farmers wanted a good bean crop, they must propitiate the Lord of the land. By all the principles of the history of religion, the normal thing to do was to worship the Baals, thus adopting them into the national religion. A later wave of borrowing appears when the kings and courts of Israel and Judah brought in the worship of the Tyrian Baal. The vogue of that cult cannot be explained wholly by the dominating personality of Jezebel. The Baal and his worship appealed to the people. Without the prophets the tide would have run to the absorption of this god into the religion. The position of Astarte in Israel seems to have been the same. There is no evidence that the refugees in Egypt, who so contemptuously scorned the protest of Jeremiah against their worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44 15-19), were prepared to abandon Jahveh. They only claimed the right to worship Astarte also.

We commonly think of the religious problem of Israel as either Jahveh or other gods. So doubtless it was after the exile. Before that time it was not so much "either—or" as "both—and." The foreign colonists of Samaria after the Assyrian captivity solved their problem in the natural way of the history of religion. "They feared Jahveh and served their own gods" (1 Kings 17 32). Among the Hebrews the

prophets interfered with the natural course of religious history by their insistence on the worship of Jahveh only.

D. Abstract religious ideas. This is a field where the problem is much more difficult to handle than in any previously mentioned. Especially difficult is it where the relations between religions are incidental rather than intimate, class 4 of the previous classification. Synthetic religions are made from adopted ideas; like Gnosticism, so much of a conglomerate that it is impossible of analysis with our incomplete knowledge; or Sikhism, compounded of Hinduism and Islam, or modern Theosophy, with its compound of Hindu, Buddhist and Christian ideas. But these present a different situation from that which makes the problem of borrowing.

It is fair to say that in the borrowing of abstract ideas the burden of proof rests upon those who make the claim. First, there is much less of this than of the borrowing of rites and ceremonies, or even of gods. Second, under the influence of kindred circumstances the human mind evolves kindred ideas. The hope of a future life has probably been developed by more tribes than history can reckon. Nor will so abstract a thing as an idea or a theory easily pass from one religion to another. It is not like a cult which can be seen and imitated. An idea is part of a general atmosphere, not to be easily separated from it.

Admittedly, then, the borrowing of ideas is not to be lightly assumed. The presumption is against it. It may occur when two religions are in close and intimate contact, sharing the same general intellectual background, having a common body of fundamental principles to form a bridge over which the ideas may pass. Such was the case, for example, in the Buddhist influence upon Hinduism, and in the influence of Greek philosophy upon Christianity. It may also occur when the idea in question fills some conspicuously empty place. Thus Buddhism gave pictures of life after death to Taoism.

Two of the most fascinating problems in this province are the questions of whether the doctrine of salvation by faith in certain sects of Japanese Buddhism is at all borrowed from Christianity, and of whether Judaism borrowed any of

its ideas from Zoroastrianism. There are four groups of ideas in Judaism which offer such likeness to Zoroastrianism as to raise the question of definite influence, if not of actual borrowing. They are (1) spirits, good and bad; (2) a chief spirit of evil, Satan or Angra Mainyu; (3) resurrection and immortality; (4) the pictures of a future Messianic time, the final outcome of world history.

The resemblances are so many and so various that in no field of religious history is there a greater temptation to leap to the conclusion of borrowing, or at least, of extensive influence. There is, however, one element which bespeaks caution. It is that the relations of the two cultures, at least before the final fall of Jerusalem, during the period when Judaism was taking form, were of the kind described above as incidental rather than intimate (Class 4). Even during the Persian rule the relations were more remote than is usually found where actual transfer of ideas takes place. It is true that the attitude between the two nations was friendly rather than hostile. A feeling of sympathy is indicated by the fact that daily offerings were made in Jerusalem for the Persian government. But a friendly feeling hardly offers in itself ground for the borrowing of ideas, unless at the same time cultural contact is fairly close and intimate. It should require, then, strong evidence before the presumption of borrowing from Zoroastrianism can be assumed.

Further questions must also be raised:

1. Was there such need of the idea that it would be borrowed if not developed in the religion?

2. Are there elements in the Hebrew religion from which the idea would naturally be evolved?

3. Do the germs of the idea exist in the Hebrew religion before contact with the Persian religion?

4. Could the idea, if borrowed, have come from other than Persian sources; from Babylonian, Egyptian or Greek?

5. Can we be sure that the Zoroastrian conception antedates its appearance in Judaism?

The last question is in reality first. Many of the resemblances, and for the most part the closest resemblances, come to us

from the Pehlavi writings, much later than the formation of Judaism. The ideas must be earlier than the present writings which record them, but whether enough earlier to antedate their appearance in Judaism must sometimes be at least doubtful.

The conception of Satan forms a good illustration of some of the principles cited above. The idea itself is a clear case of Hebrew development. The oft noted resemblance to Angra Mainyu is a pseudo-resemblance, not a real likeness. The evil principle of Zoroastrianism first appears in the Gathic hymns. This is early enough to have formed the basis of the Hebrew Satan; but the Persian figure is an abstract force, seemingly not even personified (*Yasna* 30:3). Satan appears first in Hebrew literature in a pictorial, anthropomorphic form, as an accuser (Zech. 3 1 f.; Job 1 6 ff.). Angra Mainyu has a cosmic relation. He creates evil (*Vendidad* 1:1, 4—10). Satan creates nothing. Angra Mainyu is a force independent of and opposed to Ahura. Satan is at first a member of Jahveh's court. His elevation to a hostile power of evil can be explained by Jewish conceptions of the holiness of Jahveh, without the need of borrowing from Zoroastrianism.

Both religions, when they faced the question of the ultimate end of the present world, were confronted with the problem of what to do at last with this force of evil, now become as personal in the Persian as in the Hebrew religion. The answer of Judaism is found as a detail of the apocalyptic picture. Satan and his hosts will be overcome. The four chief angels will cast them into a burning furnace (Enoch 54 6). Satan shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone and be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 20 10). So Angra Mainyu. In the final conflict "the evil doing Angra Mainyu bows and flees, becoming powerless" (*Zemyad Yast* 16:96; *S. B. E.* 23:308). Many other expressions of the same general idea are found, but whether any of them are early enough to make a basis for the Jewish idea is a matter for detailed study to determine.

This paper only tries to offer certain principles working in the history of religion. If it has illustrated some of the conditions under which borrowing between religions takes place, it has served its purpose.