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The Journal *of* *Theological Studies*

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NOTES AND STUDIES

PRIMITIVE MONOTHEISM¹

PERHAPS one of the most significant phases in the history of religion is the critical study of the world's religions. It has, it is true, been concentrated largely upon the beliefs and practices of rudimentary peoples; but it is becoming more clearly recognized that between such peoples and those regarded as more advanced or higher no rigid dividing line can be drawn. Indeed the trend of research is towards developments more crucial than hitherto, partly because of the growing opposition to simple evolutionary views of the history of religion, and partly through the activity of competent Roman Catholic scholars in the comparative study of religions.² Not among these alone is there a tendency to restate the well-known theory of a 'primitive monotheism', and when one considers the present position of problems of evolution and of the 'evolutionary' way of thinking of things, one welcomes the appearance of a book by an eminent Roman Catholic ethnologist which, more than any other of recent years, provokes a deeper enquiry into the question whether 'primitive monotheism' is a fact or, as it has been styled, a 'modern dream'.

'The name of Father Schmidt', says Professor Rose 'is known wherever Anthropology and Comparative Religion are studied; his learning and industry are as familiar as his name; these facts are quite enough to warrant the introduction of his own short statement of his views to the English-speaking public, especially as he accompanies it with a review of the whole history of the subject, remarkable alike for its completeness and its brevity.' The book comprises an account—some-

¹ *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories.* By Father W. Schmidt, Professor in the University of Vienna. Translated by H. J. Rose, Professor of Greek, St Andrews. (Methuen, London, 1931, pp. xvi, 302.)

² Cf. the valuable book of Father Pinard de la Boullaye on comparative religion, noticed in these pages, *J.T.S.* xxvii 332 sq.

what polemical at times—of modern theories of religion (animism, totemism, etc.), a determined rejection of the ‘evolutionary’ standpoint in favour of the ‘ethnological’ method (with the introduction of which into this country the name of the late Dr W. H. Rivers is associated, cf. p. 224), and a description of the increasing approximation of other writers to his own position. From the evidence for the prevalence of beliefs in High Gods or Supreme Beings among people who are ‘ethnologically’ primitive, Father Schmidt argues that a monotheism of a strikingly pure character distinguished the very beginning of the history of religion but has been overlaid by the less pure when not degraded cults of peoples living at higher stages of development. His confident attacks upon the types of research which English readers connect with the names of Tylor, Frazer, Hartland, and others, and his assurance that the ethnological method provides him with an absolutely objective foundation, combine to give a certain authoritative-ness to a book which emphasizes with uncompromising distinctness the cleavage between the two main lines of enquiry into the history of religion.

From his survey of the peoples who are held to be ethnologically primitive, Father Schmidt constructs a picture of the worship of a Supreme Being, a personality transcending all experience (p. 266), omnipotent, universal cause and creator, omniscient, beneficent, all-righteous, father, giver of moral law, and the centre of cult (pp. 262–282). These Primitives include pygmies, Tasmanians, Algonkians, Eskimo, etc., and are food-hunters. Above them in the scale are the Primary peoples, living at the stage where man exploits nature. They fall into three classes, each with religious characteristics (pp. 238 sqq., 247, 287 sqq.): (a) matrilineal, agriculturists (with lunar ideas, mother-goddesses), (b) patrilineal, totemists (solar ideas; men are prominent), and (c) patrilineal, nomads (sky-gods, social hierarchy). Next, with all sorts of complex crossings come the Secondary and Tertiary cultures, the latter comprising the old civilizations of Asia, Europe, and America. Now it is found by the ‘ethnological’ method that beliefs in Supreme Beings are at their strongest and purest among the Primitives, and Father Schmidt believes he can say ‘with practical certainty’ that the pygmy culture is the oldest; and the pygmies practice magic but little (pp. 124, 285). Beginning with the ethnological stage which—*ex hypo.*—lies nearest the starting-point of religion, the aim is ‘to put gradually together from many faded fragments a life-like picture’ of the prehistoric primitive religion (p. 290), and to determine the course which the development took. So, the data of religion are examined according to their ‘ethnological’ age (p. 212, cf. p. 113 on the age of totemism), and it is claimed that this gives an objectivity to the conclusions touching the

history of religion in contrast to the subjectivity of all other methods and arguments.

It is evident, at the outset, that this ethnological treatment does not cover the great historical religions. Much is said of the soundness of the new 'historical' method, as it is also styled,¹ but it is applied to areas of whose history relatively little is known, and not to those where the development of religion can be traced historically, and is found to illustrate typical and fundamental processes in the vicissitudes of religion. There is, in fact, a failure—and it is not confined to Father Schmidt's school—to co-ordinate the 'lower' and the 'higher' religions: it is as though writers had not made up their minds as to the real relationship between them. Moreover, while there is no doubt that the tendency is growing—and not among Roman Catholic writers alone—to recognize the existence of Supreme Gods among rudimentary peoples, it has to be observed that Father Schmidt goes far beyond those whose admissions of conclusions approximate to his own²; and when, as often, these gods are found to be devoid of cult and otiose, he must contend that they are the faded and unworshipped gods of the later stages (cf. p. 141), and, in addition, claims to have made a more intensive study of the problem than other writers (p. 241).³

The book is in no sense the manual or handbook that it purports to be (*Preface* p. v sq.), and it is often not easy to grasp the author's views.⁴ However, on his own shewing it would seem that the monotheistic Primitives went to the wall. Squeezed into unattractive and remote parts of the globe (pp. 252 sq., 261, 281), these peoples, once vigorous

¹ See Index, *s.v.* Historical Method; also pp. 96, 133, 217, 237.

² This applies to Tylor (p. 77, naturally enough), Andrew Lang ('perhaps the first modern essayist in Great Britain', p. 172), Söderblom (pp. 141, 207), Preuss (p. 200), Radin (p. 203), Pettazoni (p. 212), Ankermann (p. 244), and even Graebner (p. 238), to whose ethnological work Father Schmidt is much indebted (p. 230).

³ As regards some details: the book, which appears practically at the same time as the German original, is based upon a much larger work (three volumes total over 3,000 pages). Owing to condensation the reference to Jevons (p. 108) does not do justice to his sceptical attitude to primitive monotheism as does the fuller German work (*Ursprung d. Gottesidee* i 30). The argument that the natives of South-east Australia are more primitive than those of Central Australia (p. 246) scarcely agrees with other authorities (e.g. Frazer *Belief in Immortality* i 141 sqq.). The remarks about paganism assimilating itself to Christianity (p. 22) must be checked by Cumont's studies, and that about the Manichaeism of the Albigensians (*ib.*) by Burkitt *Rel. of the Manichees* p. 32. Prof. Rose has introduced a number of useful notes and remarks, especially on Indo-European religion (pp. 18, 20, 48-54), and sometimes also to modify Father Schmidt's personal remarks (e.g. pp. 81, 135, 138, 145, 212).

⁴ For this reason I have multiplied references, lest I should unintentionally misrepresent them.

and intelligent (p. 136), had a religion that would satisfy the total sum of human needs and give them 'the prospect of becoming the master of the world and not its slave' (p. 283). But, socially and economically backward (p. 254), they lapsed into a condition of stagnation, poverty, and insignificance (p. 289). They fell before peoples more advanced and self-confident, with a keener intellect (pp. 159, 208 sq., 247, 256). In place of the individual or family religion of the Primitives, we meet with tribal or group religion (p. 159); and along with this more effective social organization, we learn that pastoral nomads become ruling races (pp. 239, 241). The higher cultures (Primary, Secondary, etc.) have developed from the primitive stock—perhaps, indeed, from a common Asiatic home (p. 234)—and they have preserved elements of the primitive religion (pp. 255 sq., 261). But while the primitive monotheists have declined, suffering loss of religious vitality (pp. 253, 255), among the higher peoples the Supreme Beings are superseded, and we mark the prevalence of myth, magic, animism, totemism, and so forth (pp. 203, 262, etc.).

Two questions at once arise, (*a*) the place of religion in this scheme of ethnological development, and (*b*) the cause of the persistence or survival of monotheistic and other forms of religion. First, if on the evolutionary view monotheism was a high, if not the highest form of religion, how are we to appraise primitive monotheism and the succeeding stages? It is true that Father Schmidt blames the evolutionists for relying upon a 'judgement of values'; and indeed it is arguable that the question of the relative value and truth of particular religions or stages in religion is not the concern of the really impartial student (so p. 5). Yet the book as a whole does give the impression that the development of cult spelt religious decay or disintegration, or at least decreasing purity (pp. 140, 203, 289). We may agree that their very simplicity enabled the primitive children of nature to have simple ideas of a Supreme Being, a conception high in content yet unreflecting and naïve (p. 184, after Lang). Heaven lay about them in their infancy. But more advanced races, like adults, have outgrown the 'child' stage; and although it gives a man little joy to feel he's farther off from heaven than when he was a boy, a man has man's tasks. As the life of individuals and of peoples becomes more complex, that is, more differentiated, there are problems for which naïve unreflecting religion, however sublime and impressive in itself, does not avail. In some respects the theism of Islam is—or seems to be—simpler than that of Christianity; but the latter is conscious of problems of which Islam—like Judaism, Brahmanism, and other religions—is ignorant. And in Christianity itself the extreme complexity of certain intellectual and other problems—due to the multiplicity of legitimate interests which

must be taken into account—sorely perplexing though it is to some minds, is not realized by, still less has the sympathy of, others to whom what is—or what seems to be—a simpler type of religion is enough. Is one to say that the test of the strength of a religion is its relation to its proper environment, and, in particular, to the non-religious and secular parts of it? When we are apt to see deterioration as we pass from Primitive Christianity to the Early Church or from the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew prophets to the Post-exilic age (cf. *J.T.S.* xxx 301 sqq.), we are in danger of forgetting the very different and incommensurable environments, the sources of the data upon which our estimates are based. Yet no one can ignore the ebb and flow of religion, the decay or the growth of that which gives it vitality. But if the ‘evolutionary’ way of looking at the history of religion is, to say the least, imperfect, the ‘ethnological’ method of Father Schmidt and the school to which he belongs, has not yet given us one less imperfect. The question remains, if their exalted monotheism did not benefit the Primitives, Are we to suppose that the more advanced peoples, who *do* shew signs of becoming ‘the master of the world and not its slave’ (p. 283), were in any way helped by their religion which, on the theory, is developed from primitive monotheism, but is marked—or, is it marred?—by the prevalence of magic, animism, totemism, and the rest?

Next a question of cardinal importance arises when we learn from Father Schmidt that only a certain conception of Deity enabled man’s earliest ancestors to struggle onwards (p. 283 sq.), that in spite of the failure of the monotheistic Primitives, elements of the old monotheism were preserved, retained or kept (pp. 256, 285, 288), but that ‘the inner kernel of religion often disappeared and its essential strength was weakened’ with harmful results (p. 289). Details of phraseology which may appear pedantic are vital when the implications of terms is under discussion, and we ask, how and why did monotheism persist or survive, and what connexion is there between the monotheistic tendencies among rudimentary peoples and those elsewhere?¹ Take, for example,

¹ The notion of the ‘survival’ of religious or other beliefs and customs is not met with so much to-day as formerly; but it has not died out. Did men become totemists because of an alleged incident in pre-history when the father of the horde was killed and eaten by his sons? Father Schmidt very justly condemns Freud’s ‘myth’ which tells how totemism thus first entered the world (p. 110 sq.). But he in turn uses misleading phraseology when he seems to derive from the matrilineal cultures (where ideas of matter and of spirit are divorced) the materialistic and the spiritual trends of thought which appear respectively in the materialistic Sankhya philosophy of India and the various spiritual philosophies of the Greeks (p. 86). Are we to think of actual historical connexions, or of certain types of temperament and thought recurring more or less independently of each other? Cf. *J. T. S.* xxxii 247 sqq. on our ideas of origin and derivation, and in particular, p. 247 note 2.

his quite legitimate rejection of the assumption that the beliefs in Supreme Beings, which are to be found among savages, have invariably been introduced by missionaries (pp. 183, 197 sq.). None the less, no one doubts that teachers and preachers have been able to exert permanent influence upon the beliefs of rudimentary peoples. Hence the ability of the latter to acquire simple though profound religious convictions and make them their own, points not merely to the successful influence of *A* upon *B*, but to *B*'s potentiality. Indeed, characteristic of the profoundest experiences is the intuitive assurance that here 'there is neither east nor west, border nor breed, nor birth', but, peculiarly private and personal though they are, they can be evoked in others and realized by them for themselves.

It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish religious experience, as such, and its content; and when one considers the enormous antiquity of man and the possibility of the influence of men of a higher type of religion upon the lower, even in remote times, it would seem that the problem of 'primitive monotheism' is being handled too mechanically and artificially. Too much attention is being focussed upon the supposed sublime monotheism of the Primitives at the beginning of history, and too little upon the nature of religious experiences elsewhere. We can agree with Father Schmidt that religion could not 'develope' from magic or from a stage where there was no religion (p. 137 sq.).¹ Religion is, in certain respects, *a priori* (p. 148, quoting Vierkandt); 'certain ideas and certain concepts are ultimate for man as a social being as specific physiological reactions are for him as a biological entity' (p. 204, quoting Radin). But a distinction must be drawn between the content of a religious experience and the experience as such, for it is the latter we have in mind when we agree with the names mentioned; whereas the former, the content, is conditioned by local, temporal, and personal circumstances, and can be treated historically as undergoing development—or evolution.

Monotheism has been treated too absolutely, both by those who place it at the beginning of the history of religion—where it failed to help Father Schmidt's Primitives—and by those who regard it as the climax, as though no further development or enrichment of religion were needed. Its value has been exaggerated apart from its content, for beliefs and rites that *seem* religious are not necessarily ethically or intellectually commendable: the conviction of a life after death has been one that justified or tolerated crude and cruel practices, and the belief in a Supreme Being has not been so important as the ethical aspect of the belief and its effective place in a people's life and thought. Even a high

¹ Of course it is not denied that certain fundamental ideas admit of taking a magical or a religious form.

type of monotheism may not be what is needed by the growing consciousness of mankind, for what could have seemed more noble than the Judaism of nineteen centuries ago, when this fine ethical monotheism was confronted by a religion logically higher by reason of its claims, its implications, and its potentiality? Again, when writers enlarge upon sundry pre-Mosaic tendencies to monotheism, they tend to forget that it was Mosaism, a new stage, however obscure its details, which made history—if it was not the great prophets some half-dozen centuries later. Also Father Schmidt himself emphasizes the monotheistic ideas in Arabia before Mohammed (pp. 192 sqq.); but it was not these elevated though scattered ideas of Allah that made Islam a force. Hence, since he recognizes among his Primitives 'three, and perhaps four completely different cultures, with different religions' (p. 255), it is surely more reasonable to recognize varieties and qualities of monotheism (monolatry, henotheism, etc.)—consider, for example, the Deutero-Isaiah—even as there are of animism and totemism, than to combine the data and reconstruct a primitive monotheism which, all said and done, came to nothing.

In general, since Religion, throughout history, has had typically practical and social aspects, and in Christianity has developed unique ideals of a universal religion, a heavenly kingdom, and the Fatherhood of God, it may be claimed that the 'evolutionary' standpoint, admittedly imperfect though it is, is entirely justified in its endeavour to trace the social, economic, and all other phases of human development. But Father Schmidt and the ethnological school leave off too early, in that *they* ignore the great historical religions, and *our* interest extends back, not to a reconstructed monotheistic period, where man had not yet tribal, social, or other human authority (p. 274), but to stages where we can pursue the growth of social order and inter-tribal—later, international—relations.¹ The co-ordination of diverse types of religious and related experience has a practical value for this age, and it is of theoretical value for the comparative study of religions; so, whatever be the faults of Otto and his doctrine of the 'numinous' (some scant criticism on p. 142) and of Durkheim and the sociological school (blamed for over-emphasizing the community, p. 130), it is to the problem of effective social-religious relations and the ideal of a real universalism that the modern study of religions has been continuously, even if unconsciously, moving. Hence, as we look back upon Andrew Lang and his successors, we can understand his failure to convince his contemporaries (pp. 173 sqq.). There are problems more important, more tangible, than that of Primitive Monotheism—indeed Father Schmidt has unintentionally made it clear that even if his theory be correct, the monotheism

¹ The development begins with the nomads (cf. pp. 239, 241, also p. 67).

of his Primitives is of scarcely more than antiquarian interest. But his book is thought-provoking in the best sense, and though we unhesitatingly reject his theory—Monotheism being a psychological tendency rather than a stage in an evolutionary system¹—it would be a serious error to assume that the evidence behind it is negligible.

Among rudimentary peoples the Supreme Beings are often found to be, in a special sense, 'causes'. This requires examination. In the first place, Father Schmidt entirely agrees with the words of the ethnologist Graebner: 'the Australian does not consider the natural to be supernatural, but rather the reverse, the supernatural is natural to him' (p. 245). The statement has a much more general application, in that, from a religious standpoint, the profoundest phenomena may be felt to be 'natural': to the Hebrew prophets all Yahweh's activities were 'natural' operations, however marvellous or inscrutable to men. The Transcendent is within the Rational: God is a 'natural' part of the *ultimate* Universe, that of which our accounts, based upon part only of total human experience, can be, however self-contained, but partial. And since spiritualism, occultism, and crude superstitions are part of the 'natural' world of those who believe in them, we may say that besides the dichotomy of the natural (secular, profane, rational, etc.) and the supernatural (sacred, religious, supersensuous, etc.), there is a standpoint which comprehends the latter under a higher or, rather, a more inclusive conception of the former.² It is not to be supposed, however, that primarily no distinction was made between the supernatural and the natural, between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious' spheres, and that there was once some undifferentiated matrix (cf. p. 128). It is true that the sphere of the former often does seem to bulk excessively in the lives of some rudimentary peoples; but, speaking generally, there are everywhere taboos, *rites de passage*, etc., which indicate a consciousness of the gulf between ordinary workaday experiences and the more intense experiences of the realm of the 'numinous'. No doubt the line between 'natural' and 'supernatural' causation was thin and intricate, but rudimentary men do much in ways that are entirely devoid of aught that is 'religious' or 'magical'.³

¹ Cf. E. O. James in the *New Commentary* i 673 c (see *J.T.S.* xxx 308).

² Cf. W. Robertson Smith *Prophets of Israel* p. 311 and elsewhere on the realism of Semitic mysticism and supernaturalism; also Schmidt, p. 16, on the approach of 'critical realism'; and Kreglinger *Études sur l'Origine et le Dévelop. de la Vie Relig.* (1919) p. 163: 'realism and materialism are the fundamental characteristics of the thought of primitive man.'

³ Cf. Schmidt, pp. 129, 162; and especially, Malinowski *Science, Religion and Reality* (ed. Needham) pp. 32 sqq., and *Science and Religion: a Symposium* pp. 70 sqq. But when Father Schmidt emphasizes the absolute priority of 'normal' or 'profane' causation, 'magical' causation being later (p. 153), it is not clear

Next, while insisting—very justifiably—on the priority of Religion over Magic, Father Schmidt regards the control of ‘magical’ powers (by which he means impersonal powers) as an expression of man’s self-confidence (p. 288), whereas prayer, which is widely distributed among his primitives (pp. 279, 282), is an appeal to another personality. When primitive man felt his helplessness he prayed to his god (p. 154 sq.); but, later, on the higher ethnological stages, the necessity of overcoming difficulties is, we are told, an active cause of the origin of magic (p. 152): the idea of exploiting ‘magical’ (i.e. impersonal) powers being more agreeable to man’s self-confidence than prayer to a god (p. 155). Really, it is hard to grasp Father Schmidt’s conception of the history of religion! We know that men are wont to pray for things, or they try to do them for themselves in accordance with their notions of causation; or prayer and action are combined—sometimes in ways that lead us to call the acts ‘magical’ or—less unkindly—‘magico-religious’. But the self-confidence which, according to him, characterizes the higher races and enabled them to fight life’s battles (cf. p. 159) is indispensable throughout human history, though it has its obvious dangers. And whereas ‘magic’ (in the wider sense) has been a factor in human development,¹ reliance upon prayer has its own extreme—in quietism: at all events the monotheistic Primitives could not hold their own in the struggle for existence. Moreover, in the history of Israel itself we perceive how a genuine religious confidence became spiritual pride and led to the assurance that Yahweh *must* protect his people. ‘Magic’, in the wider sense of reliance upon imperfect or wrong ideas of causation, must constantly have failed; and in the place of Father Schmidt’s schematic ethnological theory of early religion, a more historical survey would have shewn that the vicissitudes of religion, with prayer and quietism, and with self-confidence and over-confidence, are psychologically intelligible and recurrent.

His restriction of ‘magic’ to impersonal powers aggravates what is admittedly an excessively intricate subject, bound up with our ideas of the content and progress of religion on the one side, and, on the other, the progress of ideas of causation. Broadly viewed, ‘magic’ involves the exercise of control or compulsion in the sphere of the supernatural (the religious, supersensuous, or numinous); it is irrelevant, futile, and contrary to our ideas of ‘natural’ causation, and it is doubly wrong, or dangerous or blasphemous when it runs counter to men’s

whether he means ordinary causation, from our secular point of view, or refers to or includes that which is associated with Supreme Beings, but is more or less ‘normal’—though hardly to be styled ‘profane’!—simply because, as we have seen, these beings are ‘natural’ from the religious standpoint.

¹ Cf. Malinowski (ed. Needham), p. 46.

ideas of God and Religion. It is not so much imperfect, as wrong and unprogressive. But it is not merely 'anti-social', because what *we* style 'magic' (wrong causation) may be the religion of a community, or indissolubly mingled with it; and for the same reason, it is not enough to say that 'magic' is employed when ideas of ordinary causation fail. Nor is it merely the apparent exploitation of some automatic process, since the data of religion represent alike gods and men controlling from outside the processes upon which depended production, property, and wealth.¹

Father Schmidt naturally repudiates Vierkandt's suggestion that magic can be recognized in the sacraments and mysteries of the Church.² But he does not touch the core of the problem, for, in the history of religion, while we distinguish the spheres of the 'religious' and the 'non-religious', there is constant interpenetration and flow from one to the other; and within the sphere of the 'religious' itself there is that which is there and then regarded as irreligious or anti-religious, as distinct from what belongs to the sphere of the 'non-religious'. There is, in fact, 'bad religion'—the widespread recognition of what is in some sense within the category of the 'religious', but opposed to it.³ From the Australian native and upwards there are conspicuous examples of this in the opposition to witchcraft, sorcery, and magical rites. In the higher religions the phenomena are much more subtle, and are illustrated in the great struggles in the history of the religion of Israel—false prophets and Messiahs, false conceptions of the relations between Yahweh and Israel. To be sure, the evidence from the O.T. would perhaps hardly be called 'magical', yet in so far as the prophets were contending against erroneous and dangerously wrong ideas of Yahweh's activities ('divine causation'), ideas which, as we can see, would have been inimical to the progress of Yahwism and the rise of Christianity, and which were apt to be grossly imperfect, and ethically or intellectually inferior, the conflict in Israel was either between Religion and Magic or we must say that it was between 'good' and 'bad' religion.⁴

¹ Cf. the note in W. R. Smith *Rel. Sem.* 3rd ed. p. 638 sq. There is no doubt that gestures and actions do not necessarily imply the magical control or compulsion which we are apt to read into them (cf. also Schmidt, pp. 127, 152, 278).

² The reply (p. 127), that these are symbolic, do not involve 'impersonal' magic, and make a moral demand on the individual, could of course be often adapted to the rites of rudimentary peoples.

³ Cf. e.g. Marett's 'good-sacred' and 'bad-sacred', cited by Julian Huxley in *Science and Religion* p. 5. For Australian evidence see *Rel. Sem.* p. 551 and n. 3.

⁴ The threefold 'temple of the Lord' in Jer. vii 4, 'gives the formula a kind of magical force' (Peake in *Century Bible*), 'it seems intended as a charm' (*Stréane Camb. Bible*). But the line between Religion and Magic was a thin one, note the symbolical acts of the prophets, e.g. Ezek. iv, Jer. xxvii 2, xxviii 10-14, 1 Kings

Father Schmidt's restriction of the term 'magic' to impersonal powers, as though it were, in a sense, the forerunner of science, obscures the history of religion.¹ He seems to have no definite place in his scheme for 'bad religion', still less for the repeated occasions when it was difficult to determine whether a given phenomenon was 'good' or 'bad', in the interests of religious progress or the reverse. The genuine difficulties which—as can be seen—occurred from time to time in the past, especially in periods of movement, reform, or transition, lead us next to refer to the difficulties which the modern interpreter has in labelling some datum which may be 'religion' or 'magic' or neither. Thus, there are social ceremonies which, according to Malinowski (ed. Needham, p. 55), are not 'religious'; yet under given circumstances they clearly are religious, that is, *if* our conceptions of 'religion' and what is really the religion of a people at a given time are correct.² Indeed, sooner or later it becomes necessary to form working dynamic conceptions of 'religion' and also of 'magic', 'monotheism', and so forth. A *system* of conceptions is needed; and although the problems have arisen in dealing with rudimentary and early religions, they also concern modern religions—unless lines are arbitrarily drawn between one religion and another.

From all that can be inferred of the history of religions as known to us, the contemporaneity of 'good' and 'bad' religion will go back to a remote period. The religion of rudimentary peoples is not so simple as Father Schmidt implies. Now he thinks that the recognition of Supreme Beings arose through the desire to determine the cause of things and the tendency to personify (p. 155). They are First Causes,

xxii 11, and see H. Wheeler Robinson, 'Prophetic Symbolism', *O.T. Essays* (ed. D. C. Simpson, 1927). The diviners and soothsayers against whom the prophets contended would have agreed with Amos (iii 7) that Yahweh did nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants. But who were his servants?

¹ On the difference between the attitudes of 'magic' and 'science' see Malinowski *Science, Rel. and Reality* pp. 71 sq.; *Sci. and Rel.* p. 73 sq.

² Father Schmidt treats certain offerings to the dead as non-religious, 'merely the continuation after death of the customary duties of social life' (p. 68). But care for the dead is constantly part of the customary religion of a tribe. Further, he denies that totemism is a religion (contrast Malinowski, ed. Needham, p. 46; and Frazer's evidence, *Rel. Sem.* p. xli n.). If so, what is the religion of totem clans? He speaks, it is true, of their identification of the Supreme Being with the sun (pp. 96, 288); but the question recurs in those Mohammedan areas where under a veneer of Islam the cult of the saint or *weli* alone has real social-religious value. And what of the religion of the Jews when the apocalyptic writings flourished—is orthodox Judaism to be our criterion? In general, we are faced with the difficulty that data constantly fall outside our categories or our schemes of development, and at certain times we can hardly say what the religion of an area is. This, too, is a methodological problem that demands the attention of all schools.

for the Primitives contemplated the universe as a whole (p. 136) ; while, conversely, the belief in a single god encouraged generalizing and causal reasoning. Thought was not broken up (p. 246), and we are to contrast the impression made on primitive man by the Universe as a whole with the differentiation of thought when 'other and lesser deities arose out of the impressions made by the various parts of nature upon men's minds' (p. 209). There is an intelligible connexion between the continuous subdivision of nature and the increase of spirit powers : we may compare, for example, the later functional gods and *indigitamenta*. But, on the one hand, the desire to find a cause does not necessarily involve ideas of the supernatural, unless the occasions are especially strange, crucial, or impressive ; while, on the other hand, gods who stand in close relationship to men are not necessarily thought of as causes : they are commonly far more than merely causes. Indeed, since rudimentary religion is essentially practical (cf. p. 274), it is difficult to suppose that the impression made by 'the Universe as a whole' had much influence upon the childhood of our race ; and the more unsystematized we understand the social and economic conditions of the Primitives to have been, the more likely it is that the idea of 'God' was emotional, with relatively little significance for their ideas of causation.

The existence, in fact the prevalence, of certain types of theistic experience among rudimentary peoples, may be readily granted : here we owe much to writers from Lang to Schmidt, even when allowance is made for exaggeration. Moreover, one can appreciate the existence and prevalence of modern theories of the priority of beliefs in a Supreme Being over beliefs in spirits,¹ for it is not so much a matter of a First Cause as the overwhelming and life-filling impression which theistic experience can make upon man, 'God' so transcending all else that it is meaningless, from the religious point of view, to suppose that theism is 'derived' from or 'originated' out of ancestor cults, totemism, animism, and so forth. Now, since Father Schmidt himself at least implies that religious and related experiences varied in depth, content, and effect, throughout the Primitive, Primary, Secondary, and higher cultures, we have to take into account this variety of quality and of content, some occasions being far more significant than others for the history of the individuals, tribes, or peoples concerned. Moreover, since every fresh step in their religious development must always have been conditioned by the current environment, the farther back we ascend the less able are we to imagine at all usefully the sort of environment and the general social and other conditions amid which new and effective religious movements

¹ Also over beliefs in a *heilbringer*, Schmidt in the *Semaine d'Ethnol. Relig.* pp. 247-261 (Paris 1926).

began. If, then, we confine ourselves to the available data, we learn how the Supreme Beings of rudimentary peoples have blended with nature-gods (p. 199, citing Preuss), or with lower, less worthy, and more human beings (p. 203, citing Radin); and when Preuss and Schmidt agree that two 'totally different' sources have contributed to the result, we can realize how the monotheism—if it may be so called—derived its content from the environment.¹ Indeed we are told that beside the Supreme Beings there may be superior but subordinate beings which, however, 'do not deserve the title of gods' (p. 264)—an obvious indication of differentiation of thought—and, elsewhere, opportunities for contamination of the postulated primitive Supreme Beings are admitted (p. 257). Consequently, the fact that we find among the pygmies first-fruits and other offerings to the god (pp. 207, 280) surely supports Graebner's view that these people are 'embedded in or engrafted upon the areas of later cultures' (p. 248, where Father Schmidt deplores the defects of this well-known ethnologist) rather than the reiterated argument in favour of a pure, primitive prehistoric monotheism, where the first-fruits were an offering to the Supreme Being the absolute proprietor of all things (cf. p. 280).

Subjectively impressive and intense though the religious experiences of even prehistoric man may have been (cf. p. 150), the ideas of a Supreme Being would become 'individualized' (p. 211) only as current conditions provided or suggested the religious content. However, Father Schmidt is bound by the exigences of his theory to argue both that 'the outlines of the Supreme Being become dim only among later peoples' (*ib.*), and that the growth of myth, etc., is secondary (p. 263). But surely, the 'purer' the monotheistic experience, the less likely was it to avail and prevail outside special individuals? Of course there must have been a time when what we can effectively call 'Religion' had a beginning; we may even imagine some splendid prehistoric *religious* impulse with all the sublimity of child-genius, like the historically isolated *artistic* phase in the cave-paintings of south-west Europe. But we do not know the environment of these prehistoric *artists*—with the religious or magico-religious interpretations of the paintings I am not now concerned—nor can we conceive the prehistoric 'monotheistic' communities, whose conditions must have been far more elementary than those of the more or less modern Primitives who have furnished Father Schmidt with his evidence. Prehistoric 'religion' we cannot deny, also art and ethics and what in course of ages

¹ The wording of Schmidt and Preuss (who speaks of 'two poles' of religious thought) is especially instructive, since I cannot feel quite confident that we are dealing with the same set of facts: it is an illuminating illustration of our common task—the best description and formulation of the data.

could be called 'science'—but the theory of Primitive Monotheism is untenable and unintelligible, since the serious study of the growth of religion demands a more historical treatment of the known facts, and in particular a certain continuity in the evidence.

Presumably it is the content of religious experience rather than the *a priori* experience as such that Father Schmidt has in mind when he makes this otherwise extraordinary remark: 'we are not yet in a position to answer, *positively and with scientific accuracy and certainty*, the question how the primitive high god and the religion of which he is the centre originated' (p. 286, my italics). At its highest, the god-idea is an experience for which man has no model in his ordinary life (p. 284, cf. p. 150), and Schmidt finds that 'the point emphasized is not his humanity but his personality, a personality transcending all experience' (p. 266). If we may say that God is both transcendent and immanent, a survey of the vicissitudes of religion does suggest the constant recurrence of originating or creative experiences of this sort, the later stages leading readily to the excessive development of the one attribute or the other.¹ Yet one cannot conceive the content of such experiences as they began to take shape in the mind whether of early man or of the individual of all epochs; and when one speculates upon the way in which the religious ideas of the infant and child are evoked and shaped by his earliest knowledge of his parents, the religious experience as such is not to be confused (as it is in certain theories) with its particular content or with the factor that evoked it.

The enquiry into the source of religious experience has not been Father Schmidt's aim, although sooner or later it arises, at least if the endeavour is made to trace the growth of religion through the contribution made to it by countless individuals of varying types of religious feeling. His aim, he says, has been to 'describe' the history of religion 'only in so far as it can be done by means of purely natural knowledge and the methods of historical ethnology' (p. vii). Now the best 'description' is, as already observed, our common task, and here we can go further and attempt to classify the answers that have been given when men sought to 'explain' the origin of their religion. Thus it is said that religion is *a priori*, or it is due to revelation; or one may refer to 1 John iv 19, or to the words of St Augustine—'fecisti nos ad te'; again, those who hold the Traducian theory of the origin of the soul could undoubtedly develop its implications; moreover, the philosopher could tell of the theories of the transcendental origin of the categories or the mystic bases of knowledge. In other words, it would

¹ Cf. *Rel. Sem.* pp. xlix, 552; and on a logically primary synergism ('our will') leading to extremes of quietism ('Thy will') and over-confidence ('my will'), see Hastings *E.R.E.*, art. 'Religion', §§ 19 (3), 31, and *Rel. Sem.* p. 682.

be the work of Comparative Religion to collect, classify, and analyse such data as the above, and draw out the consequences. Meanwhile, as Father Schmidt speaks of 'natural knowledge', we must recall how the 'supernatural' can be part of the 'natural' (p. 245; above, p. 8); indeed, the entire history of the growth of religion carries with it the implication that the fundamental realities of religion are a natural and normal part of the Universe, a Universe in which the physicist's Universe must find an intelligible place. To build up theories of religion upon the 'natural'—in the exclusive sense, as contrasted with the 'supernatural'—is to run the risk of relying upon a question-begging type of theism, even if such a 'natural' religion is not a contradiction in terms and the mental processes of the enquirer are not already indebted to prior 'transcendent' experiences.¹

In any case, it is evident that the study of religions is passing from the data themselves to the very complex questions of theology and philosophy that arise therefrom. It is *à propos*, therefore, to observe that Robertson Smith in his early days once declared that a religion without theology was a religion without God,² while, later on, the social-religious system in ancient and rudimentary religions was the centre of his studies. The connexion is an intelligible one, when we remember that early religion was *not* religion unless it fulfilled certain requirements, and these are primarily social, communal, and therefore, in a sense, ethical, and later gradually become explicitly ethical and intellectual (theological and philosophical). The early *social* co-ordination becomes one that answers *intellectual* demands. Similarly, our modern endeavour to *systematize* the data of religion, in order to make them intelligible to ourselves, corresponds to the earlier *systems* of religion, apart from which religion was too miscellaneous to be effective to early peoples. Hence it is that the theory of a Primitive Monotheism hangs in the air, and is of as little intellectual help to our study of religion as it was of practical assistance to the alleged Primitive Monotheists of our race.

In conclusion, it is strange that a writer who entertains the admirable

¹ To the problem of the inclusive ('religious') and the exclusive ('secular') 'natural', the world's religions (outside Christianity and Western modes of thought) have much to contribute. The history of the idea of a 'Natural' theology has been well sketched by Söderblom *Beitr. z. Rel. wiss.* i (Stockholm, 1913-14), cf. *J.T.S.* 1915 p. 299. Father Schmidt comments on current exaggerated fideism, and is at pains to emphasize the intellectual factor in man's spiritual life, especially in the search for a cause (p. 149, cf. p. 34); but when he states that 'even in the earliest period there is discovered by means of these rational and causal powers [of primitive man] a personality superior to all others . . .' (p. 137), this is hardly the 'God' of religious experience.

² *Lectures and Essays* pp. 310 sq., see *Rel. Sem., Introd.* pp. xxxii sqq.

ideal of a 'synoptical grouping of religions and religious phenomena', a 'typology of religion', and that not a mere static one (p. 3), should have failed to see that the great historical religions must be included, and that the methodological problems have a significance for modern religion, not excluding Christianity. Here and elsewhere there is a lack of the real historical spirit, and it is a serious defect, seeing that he is unable to replace the 'evolutionary' standpoint by any other.¹ With the question of the *best* evolutionary standpoint this article is not concerned; in any case a relatively near future will know much more about the nature of the 'evolution' of religion than ever we who live in the midst of the process can foresee! And of Father Schmidt's rather pointed references to Protestant writers and Protestantism² it is enough to say that his exposition of Primitive Monotheism has decisively—though quite unintentionally—exposed the frailty of a theory in the form it usually takes, especially among Roman Catholics.

So far, an immense amount of labour has been devoted to the study of the growth or development of religion, on 'evolutionary', historical, or even ethnological lines; and all writers necessarily rely to a very large extent upon the evidence drawn from more or less contemporary areas. But our theories have some bearing upon the religious conditions among 'primitives', nomads, totemists, animists, and the rest—the modern representatives of the stages we endeavour to trace when, instead of taking a cross-section, we look back upon the past. In other words, theories of the growth of religion, of revelation and inspiration, and of the relations between God and man in History must be correlated with our theories of the conditions now subsisting. Father Schmidt's highly thought-provoking book, the most authoritative of its kind on Primitive Monotheism, is likely to have the result of turning us from the problems of pre-history which specially interest *him* (Preface p. vii) to problems of more immediate theoretical and practical importance, and the work of Roman Catholic and other writers on Primitive Monotheism will not have been in vain if it leads us to the question of the sort of monotheism or universalism that may, on religious-historical grounds, be looked for as a goal.³ Meanwhile, it is impossible to resist the feeling that our attention is often being diverted to unfruitful topics of enquiry, though the writers themselves, like

¹ His many onslaughts upon 'evolutionists' and their theories (e.g. pp. 5, 8, 116, 128, 170 sq., 220) quite ignore the facts of religious 'development'—if not 'evolution'—in certain areas (e.g. India), or that which can be traced behind the Bible. Yet curiously enough he believes in a spatial continuity where there is no *per saltum* (pp. 100, 231 sq., 286). Cf. *J.T.S.* xxvii 334 n.

² Pp. 107, 144 (where Leuba is specially named), 145, 169.

³ To this Baudissin makes a valuable contribution in his *Kyrios* vol. iii (cf. also Eissfeldt in *Z.D.M.G.* 1926 p. 123).

Father Schmidt, are providing valuable material for those who take a more historical view of the growth and development of religion, and are more awake to the course of intellectual development and the needs of the age.¹

S. A. COOK.

FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL²

BARON VON HÜGEL left two books, begun but uncompleted. One was to have been his Gifford Lectures for 1924–1925 and 1925–1926, for which he accepted the invitation in 1922 and worked at, in spite of serious illness and failing strength, for two years before he died. He set down as title of the whole, 'The Reality of God: Concerning the Reality of Finites and the Reality of God: a Study of their Interrelations and their Effects and Requirements within the Human Mind.' This was to be divided into three parts—Epistemology, Ethics, Institutional Religion. A few, more or less finished, chapters and a considerable quantity of fragments of the first two parts have been selected and arranged with excellent judgement by Mr Gardner. Of the last part Mr Gardner found nothing that could be used except this final dictated sentence—he quotes it in his Preface, and it shall be set down here, as key to the plan, method, and temper of the whole destined work:

'What a happiness, what a joy it is to be *quite* sure that there is a God, not anything built up by mere human reasoning, no clever or subtle hypothesis, nothing particularly French or German or English, but something as infinitely more real than the air around us, and the pollen of the flowers, and the flight of the birds, and the trials and troubles and the needs of our little lives stimulated and enriched by the lives of creatures so different from ourselves, touching us continually all round; and the fundamental assurance is not simply one of variety or even of richness, it is an assurance accompanying and crowning all such sense of variety, of a reality, of the Reality, one and harmonious, strong and self-sufficing of God.'

The other book is also incomplete, but not fragmentary. It forms the second part of this volume and fills nearly half of it, being a real part of the continuous argument and vivifying the whole. Baron von Hügel began this intimate study of his friend Sir Alfred Lyall in 1912, after the publication of *Eternal Life*. He intended to call it '*Agnosti-*

¹ Cf. the criticisms *J.T.S.* xxvii 333 sq.

² *The Reality of God and Religion and Agnosticism*, being the literary remains of Baron Friedrich von Hügel, member of the Cambridge Philological Society, Hon. LL.D. (St Andrews), Hon. D.D. (Oxford), edited by Edmund G. Gardner, Fellow of the British Academy. (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1931.)