



IT was said long ago, and it has been frequently repeated, that "the proper study of mankind is man." And the study of man can never be complete unless it includes the study of religion, for there is no more widespread, impressive, or significant thing in his history than religion. Whatever may be one's private opinion concerning religion or one's personal attitude to it, one cannot but admit that it is a most important and outstanding feature of human life. It is, indeed, in many ways the biggest thing in the world. Whoever takes a comprehensive survey of human experience soon discovers that religion has from the earliest times and throughout the ages occupied a central place in life and history. However crude religion may have been in origin, and however gross the superstitions with which it has often been associated, its omnipresence and centrality in the history of the race are facts to be reckoned with. In a sense, as Comte admitted, religion embraces the whole of existence, and the history of religion resumes the entire history of human development.* We should not be far wrong in saying with Max Muller that the true history of man is the history of religion.

**Positive Policy*, vol. ii. p. 119, quoted by A. S. Pringle-Pattison in *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (1917), p. 137.

In recent times a large number of diligent investigators in the fields of anthropology, the history of religions, the comparative study of religion, the psychology of religion, and in the study of human life and culture generally, have accumulated an enormous mass of facts about the religious rites, customs, activities, beliefs, sentiments, aspirations of men and of communities. Philosophy, which claims to be the apex of the whole process of intellectual inquiry, cannot be satisfied with a mere accumulation of facts as such, even with a more or less complete classification of facts and a grouping of them into coherent systems phenomena by the discovery of the laws of cause and effect or of uniformity of sequence which binds them together. This work of accumulation, classification and generalization is the task of science. But the task of philosophy is to penetrate into the ultimate meaning of facts. Facts are records of experiences, or, more accurately, a fact is the objective aspect of that which in its subjective aspect is an experience or an element within experience; for of facts that no one has ever in any way experienced we can know nothing and so nothing. This sciences are all concerned with particular aspects of human experience, abstracted for their purpose in hand from experience as a whole. Philosophy has, however, for its subject-matter the whole of experience, and seeks to apprehend its ultimate meaning, validity, and ground. It is not simply the sum of all the sciences regarded as another science. It seeks to transcend the particular sciences by contemplating

the universe from the point of view of the totality of interests or the inclusive experience. Science is abstract, analytic, and is governed by a selective interest; philosophy is concrete, synthetic, comprehensive, and seeks an insight into the meaning of the whole.

Now, religion, too, is in one sense an aspect of experience, and so comes within the scope of science, or of a whole group of studies which may be comprehended in such a term as the science of Religion. But in common with all other facts it demands philosophical interpretation, in order that its real significance may be understood, and that it may be set in its proper place within the context of experience as a whole. Moreover, religion claims to be more than one fact among many, more than one kind of experience side by side with other kinds on the same plane. The religious consciousness at least in its advanced stages, claims to be in an intimate sense *en rapport* with the ultimate nature of things. By this we do not mean that religious experience is nothing more than an intellectual attitude to reality or a theory of the universe. Oftentimes, indeed, it is intellectual only in a very secondary and subordinate sense. Doubtless feeling lies nearer than thought to the living centre of religious consciousness. Nevertheless, religion always *surpasses* an interpretation of the nature of reality; it involves an interpretation of the meaning of the universe in terms of its value for human life. The religious consciousness does not merely "accept the universe"—on its face value. It

postulates beneath the surface, or beyond the veil of things visible, an inexhaustible fund of spiritual resources and power which is available for the practical support of man in life's warfare and for the satisfaction of his deep-rooted needs. It looks "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." It makes vast demands on the universe upon the assumption that the universe is capable of satisfying those demands. Even if and when it approaches reality through feeling rather than through thought, the feeling itself is a valuation and therefore an interpretation of reality. Religion is man's reaction to the totality of things as he apprehends it, but that very reaction implies an apprehension. It is a way of life rather than a theory, but a way of life which by implication contains or at least suggests a theory. Hence it is that, more than any other class of facts, the facts of religion are a perpetual challenge to philosophy, compelling it to investigate the claims of religion to be a valid interpretation of truth and reality and to examine its assumptions. The philosophy of Religion is the response of philosophy to this challenge. It is a philosophical inquiry into the nature, function, value, and truth of religious experience, and into the adequacy of religion as an expression of the nature of ultimate reality.

Like all philosophy, the Philosophy of Religion must find its data in the phenomena of real experience, and must also endeavour to pass beyond the phenomena as such in order to evaluate them in the light

of ultimate principles and to discover their ground in the nature of reality. Its task is therefore twofold: first, the historico-psychological investigation of religion as a normal and practically universal fact of human life; secondly, the metaphysical investigation of the relation of religious experience to the real truth and nature of things. These two departments of our subject are necessary to each other, and each is incomplete without the other, when viewed as contributions to any philosophy of religion which aims at being complete. Just as Kant declared in a famous sentence that "thoughts without content are empty, perceptions without conceptions are blind", so we may say that a philosophy of religion without history is empty, a history of religion without philosophy is blind.

Sometimes the temptation has been to speculate prematurely on the nature, function, and validity of religion, without adequate knowledge of the concrete and varied facts of religion in its historical development and its psychological manifestations. This is a case of "conceptions without perceptions," which are "empty", void of that content which only a knowledge of the facts can give. It is like trying to make bricks without straw or like building a castle in the air without any solid foundation on which the imposing structure may rest. "Without the materials supplied by anthropology and history, [we] could do nothing more than erect a spacious edifice of mere hypotheses and fancies, an amusement by no means harmless, in which the speculative

philosophers of former generation used to delight. Our first duty therefore, is to gather the necessary material from the wide realms of anthropology, sociology, the history and comparative study of religions, the psychology of religion and to seek to discover some principle of classification and some law of religious evolution by means of which we may be able to arrange the bewildering mass of material in an intelligible form so as to bring forth some sort of order out of the apparent chaos of incoherent facts. We can only discover what religion is by a knowledge of the way in which it works and has worked in various environments and at different stages of man's progress.

On the other hand, the mere gathering and arranging of the material does not constitute a philosophy of religion. For "perceptions without conceptions are blind." We have to interpret and evaluate this infinitely complicated system of arranged facts and experiences, and we have to face the question how far the religious conceptions of mankind correspond to truth. Some modern thinkers tend to regard this more purely metaphysical problem as beyond the scope of the Philosophy of Religion, and, indeed, beyond the competence of human mind. The tendency of thinkers of the more empirical type—for instance, Ritschlians and pragmatists—is to deny the necessity or possibility of a speculative interpretation

*C. P. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion* (1897), vol. i., p. 13.

of religion, at least in the sense of a metaphysic of the Absolute, and to limit the task of Philosophy of Religion to the description and arrangement of religious phenomena. The objective truth of religion must, it is claimed, be left undecided. It is enough that its functional character in human evolution be exhibited and the practical value of its effects on social life be traced; this is the only vindication of the truth of religion that need or can be undertaken. On this view the function of the Philosophy of Religion is simply to gather up the results of the empirical study of religion under a general point of view. Doubtless this philosophical empiricism, as we may roughly designate it, came as an inevitable and in some ways healthy reaction from the airy confidence with which the speculative enterprise, following the *a priori*, deductive method, was undertaken in the previous generation, often barren though pretentious results. Matthew Arnold, adapting Joubert's sentence on Plato, described the poet Shelley as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." A variation of this sentence might not inappropriately be applied to a certain type of idealistic speculative thinkers, who also have been apt to beat their wings in the void of *void of a priori*, or at least in a thin rarefied atmosphere all too remote from the tough facts of history. The modern spirit has somewhat clipped the wings of the adventurous and presumptuous spirit of speculation which would soar into the empyrean with easy confidence. There is

certainly need of a kind of reverent agnosticism to teach us humility in the presence of the deep mystery of things, and to restrain the tendency to indulge in what William James, in his criticism of "some Hegelisms," characterized as "outrages on the chastity of thought."

Nevertheless, even the purely empirical study of religion proves to us that the religious consciousness itself points to a super-empirical reality as its ground and support, that therefore its essence is not to be understood empirically, that religion in its development strives for an ideal which derives its validity and authority from "beyond the veil of sense"—that is, from "the beyond that is within," the world of spiritual values which transcends the empirical world of space, time, and events, and yet which is immanent within it as constituting its deeper meaning. Without this ground and support religion is nothing more than the baseless fabric of a dream, a beautiful (or un-beautiful) illusion with no foundation in objective reality. The inner dissolving of religion into a mere subjective illusion cannot be concealed by its supposed beneficial effects in practice. It can be beneficial in practice only to the extent that the religious consciousness believes that it has the universe behind it. If the uncomfortable suspicion were to creep into the religious consciousness that it is a mere subjective state of feeling, the result would be to undermine the confidence of religion in itself, and then religion would rapidly lose whatever functional or

pragmatic value it might have. The religious man had better be kept in the dark about the superior knowledge of the savant who has discovered that religion is a subjective state the value of which lies solely in its social efficiency and not in the fact that it is "in tune with the infinite," for the possession of this higher knowledge will be suicidal to that very efficiency. Religion *means to be true* as well as effective, and effective because true. In its own view, at least, it contains a knowledge (as yet imperfect, but true as far as it goes) of suprasensible realities, a knowledge which is capable of being progressively purified and made more accurate and adequate. Hence the Philosophy of Religion cannot shirk the task, difficult though it undoubtedly is, of furnishing a rational ground for the world view implied in the religious consciousness. And if it cannot discover any such ground, or if it actually discovers, on the contrary, that at the "heart" of things there is a "heartless" indifference to ethical and spiritual values, or even that the universe at its core is hostile to the religious demand, it is obviously its duty to say so, and to place its negative findings frankly before the world. Let the truth be told though the heavens fall. We are driven, we repeat, to this inquiry by the fact that religious experience itself looks beyond itself and points to a supra-subjective reality in sympathy with it, and from which it derives its very life. We cannot but follow up its claims and inquire into their validity or be untrue to the very phenomena we are studying.

1. We have seen that the first business of the Philosophy of Religion is to study the phenomena of religious experience. The department of our subject is sometimes technically described as the *phenomenology of Religion*. Now, this phenomena may be studied from two points of view: firstly, from the point of view of the inner or subjective experience of the religious consciousness (the *psychological* point of view); secondly, from the standpoint of religious experience as externalized in rites, institutions, events, myths, creeds, theologies (the *historical* point of view). These two points of view cannot be kept absolutely apart for the subjective and the objective aspects of experience are ever intimately intertwined in the unity of life. We cannot fully understand the inner experience without studying also its embodiments in objective history, neither can we understand the external history without a sympathetic insight into the inner motives and desires which operate within the religious consciousness. For, on the one hand, religious experience is conditioned by and derives much of its content from its social environment—*i. e.*, the traditions, customs, beliefs, which constitute the social heritage of the time and place in which the individual finds himself. This is less true of the mystic than of other types of religious people, but it is largely true of him, too; more so than he himself is often aware of. On the other hand, such traditions, customs, beliefs are themselves vitally rooted in certain psychological motives, even though such motives operate to a large

extent in the subconscious mind rather than in the full daylight of consciousness. But though the subjective experiences and the objective phenomena of religion belong organically together, yet for convenience's sake they may be treated apart, provided we remember that the two methods of treatment are supplementary to each other and that the one cannot take the place of the other. The facts of history, are meaningless to us except in so far as we are able to discover *within* us certain feelings, impulses, cravings, beliefs, which supply us with the key to their meaning; while, on the other hand, subjective religious experiences are elusive, inarticulate, individualistic, except in so far as they are embodied in historical forms of worship, institution, activities, doctrines.

The study of religion as a fact of experience and history brings us face to face with certain problems which the Philosophy of religion has to seek to solve. It has not only to know the facts, but to understand and explain them. Some of the questions that arise are: What *is* religion? How are we to define its essential nature and function? Where, if anywhere, are we to draw the line between the religious and the secular? How is religion related to other aspects of life and culture more or less akin to it? How, for instance, is it distinguished from, and how is it related to, morality, art, science, philosophy? Here comes in the difficult question of the definition of religion, which one might suppose should logically come at the very threshold of our discussion, for it might well appear

that the first requisite of a philosophy of religion is a definition of its subject-matter, so that from the outset it might safeguard itself against wandering into irrelevancy. But as a matter of fact the logical order is not in this case practicable, for we cannot hope to arrive at anything like an adequate definition of religion until we have patiently studied the phenomena. The essential nature of religion will only reveal itself to us when we have surveyed its psychological and historical development and studied the infinitely varied forms of expression which the religious spirit of man has from time to time assumed. We know already well enough for practical purposes what religion means, so that the question of the exact definition of its nature may be postponed to a later stage. Then there are problems concerning the origin and development of religion. How and why did man, in the course of his evolution from the sub-human plane, come to be religious, why does he continue to be religious? And by what law or necessity did man advance from the crude beginnings of religion in the life of the primitive savage to the higher and more refined forms of religion? It is obvious to the most superficial student of history that there has been progress, though by no means constant and unbroken progress. Can we discover what laws, principles, factors, have been at work in the process of the evolution of religion?

2. We have also seen that from the study of the phenomena of religion and of its nature, laws, and

principles of development, we have to pass on to the question of the validity and adequacy of the religious view of the world. We have to justify it as a reasonable attitude for reasonable beings, or, if it cannot be justified, to show why it is an indefensible attitude. This problem divides itself into two. First, there is the epistemological problem. Is the mind of man competent to pronounce judgment on the nature of reality? Is knowledge of the suprasensible possible? Or is it a contradiction in terms to speak as if human experiments could know or experience that which *ex-hypothesi* transcends experience? And what is the nature of religious knowledge, or that which claims to be such? It is essentially of the same kind and acquired by essentially the same methods as "secular" knowledge? Or is it something qualitatively different from it and of such a kind as to be able to penetrate to realms that are closed to ordinary knowledge and out of the reach of the ordinary faculties by which knowledge is acquired? Is faith a higher mode of knowing? And can the claim of the religious consciousness to possess a superior intuition of truth be vindicated?

Then, secondly, there is the *ontological* problem. The claims of religion having been examined in the light of the capacity of the human mind, they have to be further examined in the light of the nature of ultimate reality itself. Is the nature of reality such as to justify the religious view of the world, or is that view an error and an illusion? And if the characteristic religious view of the world can in general be

maintained, the question arises, What specific form of religious belief is the most adequate expression of the nature of reality? For the religious *Weltanschauung* is by no means everywhere and at all times the same. Religious beliefs, doctrines, creeds, are amazingly varied in character, and cannot without much criticism and reconstruction be fused into one consistent system of thought. The beliefs prevalent in many religions seem to be a strange conglomeration of truth and error, of rational faith and irrational superstition. Some religions seem to have arrived at a higher and purer form of truth than others. For instance, probably no educated Western would defend primitive animism as the best interpretation of reality that the mind of man can arrive at. What, then, is the highest form of religious truth that we can reach? Is it, for instance, Theism, or Pantheism or Pluralism, or Absolute Idealism, or must we accept the view of some Neo-Realists who think of God as gradually emerging out of a space-time world? Or is there some other construction truer and more adequate than any of these? Whichever view we adopt has to be expounded, and defended in the face of difficulties—e. g., difficulty involved in the problem of evil. Thus the Philosophy of Religion has its own contribution to make to the discovery and exposition of the most adequate form of religious belief, one that shall at once satisfy human needs and be in harmony with the best scientific and philosophic

*see S. Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity* (1920).

knowledge that we possess.) We do not mean to suggest that religion ever was or can be the mere product of philosophic thought. It is rather the more or less spontaneous expression of the deep cravings and desires of our whole nature. In the religious consciousness all sides of the whole personality participate, and not the reason alone. (But the Philosophy of Religion can render an important service to religion criticizing and refining religious beliefs, by separating the essential from the accidental and secondary elements of faith, by disentangling what is true and of permanent value from all admixture of superstition and crude fanaticism, and by constructive articulating the true view of God, man, and the universe as far as this lies in our power. This critical and constructive thinking out of a whole system of truth may be mere ideal, by no means immediately attainable. It may be a kind of flying goal ever receding into the distance as we pursue it.) But it does seem to be at least the ideal that should control all our thinking in this field of inquiry, even though our constructive efforts may be at best provisional and tentative. The fact that the ideal is not immediately and fully realizable should not paralyze our thinking, but should stimulate a sustained and patient search for truth, inasmuch as the diligent and sincere search for truth brings its own reward, even though the whole truth can only be approximately and progressively reached.

(In this final constructive effort the Philosophy of

Religion merges in philosophy in general. For the truth of religion cannot be essentially different from truth as the object of philosophical inquiry generally. This is what Hegel really meant when he identified, as to their real content, the *Vorstellungen* (ideas, more or less pictorial) of religion with the *Begriffe* (pure intellectual notions) of philosophy, the difference between them being a difference of form rather than of content. Certainly truth is one and indivisible, and we cannot philosophise about it in compartments. The beliefs implied in religious experience can only be valid when they are in substance consistent with the postulates on which experience as a whole rests, for experience, too, like truth, is ultimately one and indivisible and cannot be cut in two with a hatchet. The facts and truths implied in man's secular experience and the facts and truths of his religious experience must be at bottom in complete harmony with each other, otherwise experience—and the universe which it reflects—would be like unto a house divided against itself, which cannot stand. For instance, if materialism is true in general philosophy, it cannot be false in the philosophy of religion. Hence there can be no real line of demarcation between the Philosophy of Religion and Philosophy in general, in their ultimate interpretation and thought-construction, though they may differ in their way of approach and in the preliminary stages of their work. And nearly all the great philosophical systems have culminated in some kind of a philosophy of religion. On these and other grounds some thinkers would go

so far as to deny that there is any such thing as a philosophy of religion as a separate discipline, distinct from philosophy in general.* But in view of the specialized interest of the philosopher of religion in that aspect of experience which is distinctively religious, and the fact that he approaches the general problems of philosophy through that special avenue, it is convenient to retain the distinction, even though in the end the problems of both the special and the general study are the same, so that the special study cannot be regarded as something rigidly departmental.

Further, it might appear as if there can be no real distinction between the Philosophy of Religion and Theology—*i.e.*, Systematic or Doctrinal Theology—for each aims at a systematic interpretation of truth. In practice, however, there is a sufficiently clear distinction between them. Theology is a system of doctrines developed on the basis of a definite historic religion—say Brahmanism or Mohammedanism or Christianity—or even on the still narrower basis of one particular school or denomination within that particular religion, as of the Roman Catholic Church, the Calvinistic school, or the Unitarian school within Christianity. But the Philosophy of Religion is not tied to a particular religion or sect, but takes for its province religion as such, religion as a universal phenomenon in human experience. It gathers its data from all quarters and includes within its sweep the whole process of religi-

*See, *e. g.*, R. G. Collingwood's *Religion and Philosophy* (1916), pp. 15f.

ous evolution from the lowest stages of savage life to the most advanced levels of culture. It studies the religious consciousness in general, and not any particular form of it taken in isolation from all the other, or arbitrarily selected as the true type or norm. Its attitude is thus far removed from that of the Reverend Mr. Thwackum in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (Book III chap. iii.), as represented in the words, "When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England." Some such narrowing of the field at the very outset may be necessary in Theology, but the philosophy of Religion recognizes no such limitation. It may ultimately lead up to an *absolute religion* and a rejection of all other forms of religion as inadequate. But such can only be the goal of its inquiries and not its datum or presupposition.

Thus the Philosophy of Religion occupies an intermediary position between Philosophy in general on the one hand and Theology on the other. Just as Philosophy in general is a critical interpretation of experience as a whole, whereas the Philosophy of Religion is a more intensive study or *religious* experience as such, so Theology finds its data in a still more special aspect of experience—to wit, in some particular *form* of religious experience (e.g., Christian experience) regarded from the start as the perfect or ideal form. Yet here again the distinction is relative, not absolute.

For Christian experience is after all, organic to the whole religious experience of the race (including the non-Christian), as that in turn is organic to the total body of human experience (including its "secular" aspects). And as Theology enlarges its outlook it tends to broaden out in the direction of a Philosophy of Religion, though it need not wholly lose its identity in it. It may be added that the Philosophy of Religion, too, on its side, will gain in vitality and wealth of content if, while not surrendering its impartiality, it remains in sympathetic communication with the Theology of some definite historic religion; for if it assumes a purely detached attitude its construction may become too academic and remote from life, a mere "unearthly ballet of bloodless categories", as Bradley said in another connection, or a kind of artificial product of one man's brain, like Comte's Religion of Humanity, a religion which never was on sea or land and which lacked the spontaneous creative impulse of a real live religious movement grounded in history. Yet we admit that the Philosophy of Religion must, in comparison at any rate with Theology, maintain a free and detached attitude, inasmuch as Theology is frequently tied down *ab initio* to some external authority such as the Bible, the Church, or dogma (hence Doctrinal Theology is often called "Dogmatics", a word of ill omen and ill savour as we venture to think), while the Philosophy of Religion is in principle free from bondage to any authority except the authority of truth itself. And we would agree with Dr. Galloway

that "in the end, the ground of authority"—for Theology as well as for the Philosophy of Religion—"must be the character of the spiritual experience itself," rather than anything external to it.* We believe that it is this alleged authority of dogma which stands in the way of a better understanding between the Philosophy of Religion and Theology. The dogmatic spirit and method is certainly alien to the genius of the former.

Even the vast programme we have roughly outlined in this chapter is not exhaustive. But it is more than we shall be able to do justice to within the limits of this book. It may serve to map out the ground that we shall attempt to traverse.

*George Galloway *The Philosophy of Religion* (1914), p. 50.

Chapter

ONE
is to
has to
or w
and c
gion
tion
and
learn
the
giou
from
are c
wha
in h
of t
outs
dep
be
itse
hig
val
fac
mo