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## I. Literary.

### ICONOCLASTS.

BY J. W. LAPSLEY.

“YE shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves.” This was the divine command to Israel as they invaded Canaan. Policy as well as reverence for the divine authority demanded strict obedience to the command. But it was not so obeyed as to put out of sight the temptations to idolatry; and again and again Israel sinned after the example of the heathen they had supplanted, became image worshippers, and suffered grievously for their apostasy. Hence image breaking was accounted a sign of devotion to Jehovah. Jehu said, “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord,” and he went and broke down the image of Baal, and the house of Baal, burnt his images with fire, and slew his priests and votaries with the sword. But this was as far as Jehu’s zeal for the Lord carried him. While he had no real devotion to God, and, in fact, renewed the idol worship at Dan and Bethel, he made the divine commission an excuse for pursuing with lavish bloodshed his own schemes of worldly ambition. And there have been others besides Jehu in other ages who have trod in his steps. “Mohammed,” says Dr. Schaff, “started as a religious reformer fired by the great idea of the unity of the Godhead, and filled with horror of idolatry.” And he and his Caliphs, long after they became world-wide conquerors, full of ambition and given up to every cruel and sensual passion, continued to proclaim, “There is but one God,” and continued to the last their warfare on image and image worship. They made their professed zeal for the one God a cover and ex-

## WHAT IS RELIGION ?

BY REV. W. S. BEAN, D. D.

THIS may appear to be a superfluous question ; yet, as is the case with many other familiar terms, a satisfactory definition is not easily found. Apart from the widely-differing schools of thought which define religion, either as a merely psychological product of the human mind, or as the divinely ordained method for the perfection of human nature, there will be found a variety of views expressed as one or another feature of religion is chiefly emphasized.

It would be tedious and unprofitable to collect all these definitions or descriptions of religion. A few of the more prominent must suffice. In the Holy Scriptures themselves we have no formal definition of religion, for they are all concerned in unfolding its essence, its functions, and its fruits. Sometimes injustice is done the sacred writers by quoting as complete definitions certain sentences which bring out only one side of the religious life. Among these are Micah's statement : "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" ; and the saying of James, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Micah's statement is not so simple as it looks, for the "walking humbly with God" requires a true spiritual life out of which the ethical qualities of doing justly and loving mercy flow, while the beautiful statement of James emphasizes that side of religion which may be seen of men, and which is also acceptable to God.

One gain has been made in our generation, that henceforth the claim of infidels that religion was devised by the priests for their own advantage, is regarded as untenable and absurd. It is recognized that religion is a factor in all human society, and the naturalistic school now treat it as simply a product of man's complex organization. As Aristotle declared that man is a "political animal," so the rationalists of our day admit that man is also a "religious animal," in the sense that at certain stages of mental

development some kind of religious belief and practice emerges. Of course, with their limitation of our knowledge to "positive" truth, religion would be displaced by scientific knowledge and ethical culture.

Before attempting a definition let us glance at some of those given by the great thinkers of the past and present.

Cicero describes religion thus: "Religionem eam, quae in metu et ceremonia deorum sit appellat" (*De Invent.* ii. 22-26). He derives the word from *religere*: "Qui omnia, quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent, diligenter retractarent et tanquam relegerent, religiosi dicti sunt ex relegendo."

Lactantius comments on these words in his *Divine Institutes*, Book LV., Chapter xxviii., and says, "For we are created on this condition, that we pay due and just obedience to God who created us, that we should know and follow him alone. We are bound and tied to God by this chain of piety from which religion itself derives its name, not as Cicero explained it from carefully gathering." Lactantius derives the word from *religare* instead of *religere*. Coming down to later writers, we find Kant defining religion, subjectively considered, as "the knowledge (Erkenntniss) of all our duties as divine commands."

Max Müller, in 1873, gave a definition of the subjective side of religion thus: "Religion is a mental faculty which independent of, nay, in spite of, sense or reason, enables man to apprehend the infinite under different names and under varying disguises." In his Hibbert Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, delivered in 1878, he criticises his former definition and comes to the conclusion that "it may be impossible to give a definition of religion that should be applicable to all that has ever been called religion, or by some similar name."

Still, it may be worth while to attempt some definition that shall embody what is admitted to be present in all religions which deserve the name.

Without further citation of other writers, let us attempt such a definition, and then proceed to examine it. We may define religion then as that conscious sense of dependence on a higher Power which manifests itself in a creed, a cultus, and an ethical code.

Some writers lay stress on the element of knowledge in religion; some on feeling, and some on ceremonial. Others, like

Kant, make the moral law the essential feature, the religious element being added by recognizing this as divinely ordained. Some make religion dependent on revelation, yet all admit that there is some consciousness of a relation to a higher power or powers. Now, whether we call this a knowledge or a feeling, we are equally at fault. Its origin is lost in the remote ages of the world's infancy, and we can only conjecture what it resembled by studying the mental processes of the savage or the child.

If we call this a "sense," we use a word which, because it is somewhat vague, is more suitable than a term more accurately defined. We do not attempt to distinguish between the element of knowledge and that of feeling. We may have a physical sense, as of cold; or a mental sense, as of recognition; or an emotional sense, as of shame. The sense of dependence may be more or less developed, but it would hardly assume a religious form until it comes clearly into consciousness, and we distinguish between ourselves and some Power beyond ourselves on which we seem to depend. This may take various forms, as in nature worship, or the worship of symbols, or the veneration of purely abstract ideas. But the common element is the recognition of the power outside ourselves, whether it be recognized yet as "making for righteousness" or not.

Now, where this sense exists, it always manifests itself. Its presence is known by outward phenomena, and these may vary according to the stress laid on certain elements. If we go back to what we may call the creed of Abram, we find there the intimation of all these: "I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect." There is an Almighty God; there is a relation possible between him and his worshipper, and that relation consists in a "walk," which includes both the practical life of obedience and the ceremonial life of worship.

The creed is not the religion, then, but the product of the religion. The real basis of a true religion is the knowledge of the true God, but this is expressed, not in terms of knowledge, but of faith. "We believe in God the Father Almighty," though our reason is satisfied with proofs of his existence. In accepting any revelation made by God himself, our reason is convinced and our emotions are aroused.

The most conspicuous element of a religion is usually the cultus. The elaborate ceremonial, the order of a priesthood, the

erection of temples, the hallowing of certain times and places, and the numerous rites of sacrifice and cleansing, strike the most careless and superficial observer.

These rites may be simple or elaborate; they may be stately and awe-inspiring, or grotesque and hideous; but the religion needs the cultus to give outward expression to its existence. The science of "Comparative Religion," as it is called, has done much to collect facts concerning the rites of savage nations, and has attempted to explain their origin and significance. Christianity itself has its rites, and observes its sacred days and times, and sets apart certain places for the worship of God. The cultus is no obsolete stage of a passing superstition, but an essential element in the maintenance of any religious faith.

The ethical code in the cultivated nations of Greece and Rome consisted largely in the observance of certain rites and ceremonies. The reverence paid to the local divinities, the consulting of oracles before undertaking important actions, the proper observance of ancient forms before entering on wars, were in the primitive times of supreme importance. So in Israel, the tendency among the worshippers was often to consider the ceremony as the essential element in worship.

Against this exaggerated view of the value of rites we find the prophets inveighing in some of their most eloquent and impressive words. The law based its precepts on moral principles, and the prophets declared that without this true obedience, sacrifice, and oblation would not be acceptable to God. But the ethical code was not separated from the religion; it was itself one of its factors.

Even when some religious teachers among the Gentiles, as Buddha and Confucius, laid stress chiefly on ethical principles, and largely did away with any communion with God, the national tendency was to replace the remote gods by all kinds of divinities, so that later Buddhism degenerated into gross idolatry.

Some writers contend that nothing ought to be called religion but pure Christianity, on the ground that as there can be no relation between the human soul and a false god, such an attempted relation should not be dignified by the name of a religion. But Paul recognized some knowledge of God among the heathen. He appealed to their own religious sense and conscience; and certain truths as to God's attributes remained with men, even when

darkened by clouds of superstition. Christianity owes its purity and power, not to the higher development of the unaided reason, but to the revelation of God through those holy men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While we may recognize, then, all these elements in Christianity, the creed, the cultus, and the ethical code, we may go beyond the definition given for all religions, and claim that in Christianity we have that true relation between God and the human soul which results in a real spiritual life, progressing toward complete attainment of the divine image.