

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS¹

LET us follow the sun in its perpetual rising, as it passes over the earth's scarred surface, crossing illimitable oceans, continents, deserts, and towering mountain ranges, and the eternal snows—silent, glistening, old.

It lights up, with its dawn, the dawn of the world—the superposed strata of archaic cultures, one upon another in an unfolding phantasy, of prolific confusion, yet a crumbling order, proclaiming an ordered growth in the buried millennia of the world's childhood. It tells us things we had never grasped as a whole, till we came to this preparatory contemplative vision (preparatory to all real thought), or, perhaps, which we never knew at all. Giant human forms, of enigmatic origin in the abyss of time, emergent, yet now in retreat, from crumbling stone, among the old decay of Easter Island. The stone lamps, the lavers of holy water, and 200,000 shrines, each with its frail conscious beings, who reason and pray within, in the red dawn of Shinto Japan. The convents of Tibet, and Burma, and Siam, where thousands upon thousands of devoted religious pray, and work, and sacrifice—the daily priestly offering of incense, fruit, and flowers, to the lord Buddha's golden image, and his relics, in their precious shrine. The earth's-dawn mysteries of Ur, and Agade, and Babylon: crumbled, earth-sprawled temples, where vultures call and jackals prowl, and all is distant, and dim, and past, the crumbling symbols of a mighty religious conception—the ziggurats, or "step-temples," of Babylon and Ur, each a consciously planned microcosm, in form and detail, organically symbolizing all creation: the steps or degrees of created being. And the memory of sacrifice going up from the highest step, the flower, and first-fruits, of the world—man's mind, and heart, and will, given back to God, as the head of the cosmic stream of creation's return, to the source, to the Father.

¹ *Religions of Mankind*. By Otto Karrer. Translated by E. I. Watkin. (Sheed & Ward; 10/6.) For our emphasis on the apologetic rôle of comparative religion, cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *De Revelatione*, 3rd. Ed., p. 402, and pp. 585-592.

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And the sun still rises (for it passes ever on), and Christendom dawns, under the red glow, with its age upon age, preserved in stone, and wall, and in its million spires.

You see it as a whole. You see all things as a whole, as you follow the sun. The old earth, and its emerging, revelatory mystery of man, who is that of earth made to bring it into touch with God, the fashioner and sculptor of it all—of earth, and towering peak, and torrent, and temple, and of Church, and mankind.

And you go on still. You glimpse the Americas in their mysterious dawn, where the very religion was all sun—where the jewelled temple of gold received the rising sun through golden doors, and was flooded with the light of the rising god. You see the red peaks of the Andes, beyond two thousand miles of forest, catching the sun first. And you go down into the dawn-life of the world, among the relics of the Incas of Peru, telling of age, mystery, worship, souls of men—million upon million individual human lives, born, and prayed, fought, and died.

These crumbling debris of giant vision, symbols of the soul-life of civilizations, are the lower strata of our collective past, the archaic forms, realized in stone and earth and gold, representing the religious growth of mankind.

And this thing is no mere idyllic poetry. It is a reality, the deepest reality of human life, and known as such. It must be so seen, so known, as a majestic and arresting whole, before we can launch out into the deep, of question and surmise, safely, balanced by reality held in all its parts.

But being so, holding reality so, in the miracle-vision of one human intelligence, whose nature it is to be self-extending to all beings, and beyond them to their reasons, causes, and relations, you question. You require causes, explanations, syntheses, underlying unities, the one behind the many, conjoining the many in the perennial tension of its intelligibility. What is it? What is it made of? Who made it? Why did He make it? So philosophy is born, through one of its determinations. Neither "Comparative Religion," nor a "New Psychology," considered as aggregates of merely quantitative data, but thought. You seek rational

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explanation, in a fourfold unity of causes determining and explaining the essence of the thing you analyze. You want no mere imaginative construction, but single meaning, synthesis. Your imagination has been stirred (in that vision of progressive sunrise). You have seen things, as it were *sub specie æternitatis*, as a whole. And your imagination, serving you truly, leads you on to thought, not further imagination. For thought, knowledge, the soul's receptive-becoming of essences, is richer, fuller, infinitely more alive and ultimate, than imagination, which is but the efficient nurse for thought.

You ask, therefore, as a metaphysician (one who passes beyond the material givenness of things, to their inner realities, ultimate causes, and purposes), and as a theologian: what is the exact synthetic concept underlying and explaining all this? Where is the permanent essence terminating this flux of sense-phenomena, this chaotic material stream unknowable without it?

And then, by this particularizing question, the true study of "Comparative Religion" is born, from the womb, and potential unity, of the rational whole—the architectural vault of the eternal witness to the Catholic Faith, the perennial apologetic of the Church.

And the answer? The meanings, explanations, causes?

We know in part, in essential, underlying things, the large ideas behind. But only in part. It is a study which necessarily grows. It has always grown. It will go on growing till the world ends. For the subject is endlessly deep—buried in material beings, human nature and human history. And what is buried in matter is infinitely discoverable, because ultimately unanalyzable, unintelligible, in the abysmal recesses of its concrete being.

"Comparative Religion" was an integral part of the Church's apologetic from the first. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." "What, therefore, you worship, without knowing it, that I preach to you" (Paul to the Athenians). And there is the long line of apologetes: Aristides, Irenæus, the Epistle to Diognetus, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria (especially he), Cyprian,

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Augustine (again especially), Gregory the Great, used this partial approach, and were intelligently fascinated by its endless possibilities. It was the background to the thirteenth century Jewish and Arabian thought-infiltrations into Christendom, and it was St. Thomas who reacted intelligently—saw the point, the dangers, the possibilities, and played for synthesis, a cosmic vision (surely this is the true inspirational background for the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, with its unprecedented width of vision, its genuine *Weltanschauung?*). It was the background to the very interest of St. Thomas, and of his Arab and Jewish predecessors, and of Erigena, in the thesis of creation's hierarchic unfolding and cosmic return to the source, to God. And in modern times the names of Görres, Möhler, and Newman, stand out.

Indeed, it was only in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that this study shifted from its focus and became a mere "positive" science in the bad Cartesian sense of a positive "science."

The change of essential orientation, and consequent substantial change of the science itself, headed for disaster. For this merely "positive" study was, as all such studies are, an incoherent aggregate of unsynthesized, reductively purely quantitative, phenomena. They so remained, and must so remain, until they are taken up into the synthetic unity of the Catholic apologetic, which breathes a soul into them from within, and which alone can deal adequately with the specifically supernatural realities which they reveal.

There was indeed a line of great students, like Möhler, Müller, Görres, Newman, Schmidt, von Hügel. Also Troeltsch. And these all held to the synthetic path. But the positivists were in the ascendant. And it was their popularizers who brought the science into discredit, even among Catholics. It was their journalists who caused the even now present complex of those "œcumenical" (Heiler) and variously "theosophical" (largely the influence of Goethe) doctrines, which are often supposed to be bound up with any serious study of the empirical facts. The subject was made to seem dangerous, the very reverse of the truth. The books, indeed, did become dangerous. And the more journalese,

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the more repetitively second-hand, the more dangerous. And this danger remains—especially in England, where lay exponents of continental scholarship continue to write as if modern thought attained its zenith with Christian Baur, Strauss, Renan, and Hæckel, and, since that golden age, “stayed put.”

But all along there has been a counter-current of suspicion—that all was not quite fair, that this pseudo-enemy of faith might be, in reality, one of our oldest and most powerful weapons of polemic offence. The above outlined catena of Christian apologetes shows the reasonableness of that suspicion. Now, after thirty years, there is a measurable change again, a resurrection within the Church.

And even now the science goes on growing. We know, still, only in part. But some hard outlines are now laid down. They are, indeed, the eternal outlines, glimpsed by the apologetes, now grasped into unity, defined, applied to our recent, enormously extended, data, and “got across.” It is no exaggeration to say that Dr. Karrer’s book, with its masterful outlines and clear vision of principles, combined with a genuinely deep penetration of things human, marks the change—the turning of the tide. For it at once discriminates courageous reaching out to what is a desperately needed clarity of synthesis, from temerarious “luffing.” It is Catholic.

Having indicated the certain position of the book in the historical genesis of its important subject, it is almost undesirable to outline the thesis. For the whole should be seen and carefully appreciated (including the inevitable criticisms of a work of such ambitious scope in its first edition²) by every priest and layman seriously interested in the conversion of England—interested, that is, in the unglossed difficulties of non-Catholics to-day. *A fortiori* every non-Catholic should read it and see it as a whole.

² (i) “The logical reasoning of the so-called proofs of God’s existence” (p. 120), is hard to reconcile with the excellent analysis of the Vatican Council doctrine (on p. 236).

(ii) It is not clear how far the early part of Ch. V is a reflection on the mytho-analytical theory of Dacqué, and how far the author’s

But some indications are not out of place:

“ ‘One and the same Divine Father and His eternal Word are from the beginning and in every age close to the human race and approach man by many ordinances and many operations of assisting grace’ ” (p. 149, from Irenæus).

“ ‘The Spirit of God moves over the face of the waters.’ And the lowest and darkest depths are lit by the gleam of light which penetrates through all obstacles.’ ” (p. 175).

“ ‘As all the great cultures of whatever type are identical (all alike unfoldings of a single life³), the features which compose the great myths are always the same, and the entire religious development a single plant which the Spirit of God planted originally and which, fed by His light and dew, has unfolded its joyous growth through the ages’ ” (p. 176, from Görres).

“ ‘The old passes away, the new arises, and in that novelty the old is always comprehended. Below lie the forms of the past fossils buried in geological strata, but above the surface life is still weaving its web, and, a reversed Deucalion, casts behind it men and their works that turned to stone they may abide through the time to come’ ” (p. 177, Görres).

Man has always been the same. On human nature is the primary emphasis. For it is the first manifest unity in the chaotic flux of the phenomena of history. Man has always been the same. And with the human race, in all its members, grace is co-extensive, in its prevenient, inchoate, sense. For Christ died for all men, and the contrary is Jansenism, heresy. And because man has always been the same, and

attitude. Hence our confusion on reading of an “intuitive” faculty almost literally identical with the Aristotelian *intellectus*, and posited in contradistinction to it, because the inadequacy of the latter, as a true *facultas entis*, is assumed! This is caricaturing and question-begging.

(iii) No *rapport* whatever is established with the Freudian psychology. We mean, especially, Jung’s now classical work. No thesis in Comparative Religion, however transcendently valid, has universal probative strength for its recipients, to-day, if it ignores Jung. It is not a question so much of theories and difficulties, but of overlapping data and of *light* thrown on the entire field by an inspection of Jung.

³ The metaphysical *essence*—human nature. Cf. pp. 1, 2.

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grace is offered to all, therefore in all the religions of mankind there is discoverable an essential element of saving truth, power to move to supernatural love. The essential elements are there, somehow, in type, and figure, and half-glimpsed things to come. "Truly God hath never left Himself without witness." And "In every age of the world and in every generation the Lord made purification and conversion possible to all who sincerely turn to Him" (Clement of Rome). For "all good men from the beginning of the human race have Christ for their Head. They have a vague notion of redemption (inasmuch as they believe in the Divine Love, Providence, Grace and Mercy) as we believe in the accomplished atonement. By this belief they, like ourselves, are redeemed. The times change, the substance remains the same" (Augustine).⁴

Nevertheless—and here is the absolutely essential point, which the "oecumenicalists" and "theosophists" ignore—the sole source of all grace-life, all eternally valid and real in the religions of mankind, is the Church of Christ. Incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ is the literal and exclusive source of salvation. And any distinction, between the "soul" of the Church and the "body" of the Church, which separates the two, making them two things, is invalid. Better indeed to speak of the "visible" and "invisible" Church. But even this is false, unless we grasp the exact meaning. Not two Churches, but one Church under two "aspects." Or, better still, one sole cause with two kinds of effects—those in which dependence on the cause is manifest, and those in which it is hidden but none the less most real.

The Church, therefore, is unique. She is not merely the term of an evolutionary process. She is specifically different. Any "Comparative Religion" which literally "compares" her with pagan systems is radically false. For she "transcends them not comparatively, but absolutely" (p. 182). And "every lower religion is understood by the higher, the part is rendered intelligible by the whole. But the higher cannot be understood by the lower" (p. 185). And this be-

⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIæ, q. 2, a. 7, *corpus*.

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cause the lower is for the higher, as vegetative life is for sensitive life, and sensitive for rational life, and all three are integrally present and participatively rationalized in the last.⁵ "The course of religious history, as the Christian sees it, is directed to the establishment of a single and universal kingdom of God on earth" (p. 178). "The holy Fathers did not make use of the legal sacraments as realities, but as images and shadows of what was to come. Now it is the same motion to an image, inasmuch as it is an image, and to the reality . . . Hence the ancient Fathers, by observing the legal sacraments, were borne to Christ by the same faith and love whereby we also are borne to Him, and hence the ancient Fathers belong to the same Church as we."⁶ Hence Gertrud von le Fort's grand cosmic vision of the total Body of Christ (p. 277):

I have yet flowers from the wilderness in my arms,
I have yet dew in my hair from the valleys of man's
 dawning,
I have yet prayers to which the meadow hearkens,
I still know how to make the tempest devout and bless
 the waters . . .
I was concealed in the temples of their gods,
I spake darkly in the sayings of all their sages,
I stood upon the towers of their star-gazers.
I was with the lonely women on whom the Spirit fell.
I was the desire of all ages.
I was the light of all ages, who am the fulness of the ages.
I am their mighty comprehension.
I am their eternal harmony.
I am the road of all roads—
On me the centuries march to God.

Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus. Outside the Church is no

⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, A. 5.

⁶ "Ad idem corpus Ecclesiae ad quod nos pertinemus." St. Thomas *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3. Dr. Karrer, as we understand him, would extend this integrally to pagan religions, in virtue of that universality of the world's great "myths," in so far as these prefigure Christ. With this assumption, the principle's applicability is obvious. But the non-Catholic wants vindication of that assumption. We even suggest that he might require discriminating treatment of Ch. V of Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*—both for a solution of implicit ambiguities and for a suggestive source of confirmatory evidence.

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salvation. "No man can have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother," and "No man can attain salvation and eternal life who has not Christ for Head." Although we must hold with "certainty that those who are afflicted by ignorance of the true religion, provided that ignorance is invincible, are not accounted in any way guilty by God on that account,"⁷ nevertheless, Pope Pius IX says, in the same pronouncement,⁷ "It is to be held as an article of faith that outside the apostolic Roman Church no man can be saved, for it is the sole ark of salvation."

But that ark, hidden or manifest, is present with men from the beginning of the world, and eternally operative. Her testimony to the minds of men is perennial, and her saving power extends its loving offer of a life incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body, to every human creature born into this world.

"The merely 'material infidelity' of ignorance is not a moral fault. Not knowledge and ignorance as such, but simply obedience or disobedience to the light received, are moral or religious qualities. This is the doctrine of the Church explicitly laid down in opposition to Jansenism. How is a man to blame for being born in Mecca, Benares or Tientsin rather than in Rome? 'If with the best will thou art ignorant,' says Augustine, 'it will not be reckoned against thee for sin—but if thou refusest to enquire thou art guilty' " (p. 261).

For when Christ preaches to you openly, and you refuse the full light of His unveiled manifestation, this, indeed, "is the judgment: because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light."

But that is another subject. We have attained underlying unity, drawing intelligible synthesis from our vision of primeval sunrise—the Body of Christ, in its utterly exclusive yet all-inviting Catholicity.

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⁷ Cf. Denzinger, 1647.