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UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Editorial Note—The progress of scholarship depends upon the interchange of ideas among those who are engaged in the work of research. Scholars are constantly conscious of important problems to which insufficient attention is being given. A clear statement of a matter which demands investigation may be the means of stimulating profitable discussion. The editor has asked a few scholars to state concisely certain problems which they would like to see solved in their several fields. It is hoped that this department of the *Journal of Religion* may be used for the brief, informal discussion of questions on which, perhaps, no one is yet ready to write at length.

WHY DO RELIGIONS DIE?

A subject upon which I have long wished for further light, and one which seems to me to possess great theoretical and even some practical interest, is the question, *Why religions die*. Leaving out of account the various primitive cults with their beliefs and mythologies, we are acquainted with some fourteen "historical religions"—sixteen if we include the religions of the Teutons and the Celts. Of these fourteen or sixteen faiths, each of which once commanded the unquestioning adherence of millions, only ten today survive. Among these ten, moreover, two (Buddhism and Zoroastrianism) have perished from the land of their origin, and a third (Jainism) is with difficulty sustaining a precarious life, and notes with every census the steady decline of its numbers. Why have some of these religions died? Why are some of them dying? May religions perish of disease or only by violence? If by disease, what are its symptoms and its causes? How many diseases are there which in the past have proved fatal to religions? Are the symptoms of any of these diseases to be found in any of the present religions of the world? Are they to be found in our own?

Plainly the solution of this problem requires the combined resources of the history and the psychology of religion. In one sense it is a historical problem. But it is a problem which no historian of religion can solve unless he is possessed of considerable psychological insight and has studied his facts from the psychological point of view. While he

must base his conclusions on an exact and detailed historical knowledge drawn from many fields, the conclusions which he reaches must be largely psychological in their nature, and they will be sound conclusions only if drawn both from exact historical investigation and also from a thorough understanding of the psychology of religion.

As is indicated in what I have said, there are nine or ten historical fields from which the major portion of our data must come: namely from the death of the Egyptian religion, the Babylonian, the Greek, the Roman, the Teutonic, the Celt, from the disappearance of Buddhism from India and of Zoroastrianism from Persia, and possibly the present decline of Jainism and the secularization of Shinto.

A consideration of this list enables us at once to begin a hazy and tentative outline for our investigation. It is plain that some religions die from violence while others fall prey to internal and more subtle evils. Some of them disappear before militant rivals through a process of peaceful conversion—as for example the Celtic and Teutonic religions and presumably several of the others. But this fact, true as it is, only puts our problem in a new form instead of solving it. For when one religion supplants another through peaceful propaganda, what are the characteristics of the two religions which make this process possible? Christianity was a much *better* religion than that of the Teutons or the Celts; but can one safely conclude that it supplanted them *because* it was better? If so, better in what respect? Is it always the *purser*, or the *more rational* religion that wins out in the struggle for existence? If not, what are the sources of strength and the sources of weakness?

But it is not always through hostile attack, whether of the sword, the tongue, or the pen, that religions weaken and die. Paganism died out of Europe and Buddhism died out of India not merely because they were attacked by hostile religions; for long before there was any violent propaganda against them they seem to have been in something approximating a moribund condition.

It is in these two fields, in fact, that we are likely to find our investigations the most fruitful. This is partly because it is in the decline of paganism and of Indian Buddhism that we get the question of religious pathology most sharply separated from the factors of violence and hostile missionary activity, and also because nowhere else can we find so much data bearing on our question. Our question in fact has already been answered in part by writers on these fields. There are a few good books dealing with the history of Buddhism which throw out suggestions as to the causes of its decline; and as to the death of paganism in Europe we are even better off. Many excellent books have been

written dealing with the triumph of Christianity and the rise and fall of the various Oriental cults in the Roman Empire which give us a good start toward the answer to our question. Yet no book with which I am acquainted attempts to give a complete analysis of the various causes, internal as well as external, which brought about the decay and death of Indian Buddhism or of the Greek or the Roman religion. What we need, moreover, is a work which should not only investigate the downfall of one of these but should compare the Indian and the European cases, glean what could be found in the decline of the other religions which have died, and seek to get at the social and psychological factors involved.

The intrinsic interest of such an investigation must be evident to all. It is conceivable, moreover, that it might bring useful practical information to those who care for the health and welfare of religion today. It is perfectly possible that such an investigation as I have suggested might treat us to some mild surprises. It may be that the forces most feared by religious people are not truly dangerous but that the most insidious disease germs are not greatly feared, and perhaps not recognized. At all events, a scientific autopsy carried out in the case of each of the dead religions could hardly fail to be of service to all those who, for either academic or practical reasons, are interested in knowing wherein lies the strength and wherein the weakness of the various religions of our own day, Christianity among the number.

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CRUCIAL PROBLEMS IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

It may be permissible for me to take the question asked in a broad enough sense to include the work I would like to see done, and the books written, in the different parts of my own field of biblical theology.

In the history of Old Testament religion I do not think the last word has been said about the beginnings of the ethical element which is so distinguishing a mark of this religion. The first inclination of the modern school of Old Testament science to attribute the ethical interpretation of religion to Amos and his successors was natural, but is certainly an inadequate account of the matter. Amos would not recognize himself as the discoverer of the truth that God is one who requires righteousness of men rather than sacrifice. How far can literary criticism and the comparative study of religions carry us toward the real secret—to put it as Wellhausen did—of the difference between the place of Chemosh, the god of Moab, and that of Yahweh, the god of Israel, in the spiritual history of mankind? The blending of ethics and religion which is the