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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

Religious Conditions in New England Around 1800

In a paper entitled "Probationers for Eternity," with the secondary title "Notes on Religion in the United States in the Year 1800," published in the *Harvard Theological Review*, some interesting information is submitted pertaining to conditions in the United States 144 years ago. We quote one paragraph:

"Timothy Dwight went abroad in this New England that year and noted that the inhabitants of Groton (Connecticut) 'are now generally regardless of religion,' and in Newport in September he recorded that, in spite of the number of churches, religion and morals were 'not on a high scale.' Bishop Asbury put in his journal on July 4th, when he was in New Hampshire, that he felt some of the people 'had broken good order and become independent of strict sobriety.' Later that month in Massachusetts he deplored the white steeples and the stalls for horses outside the New England churches, 'Oh, religion in New England!' he wrote, 'will Methodism ever live in such white halls and painted sepulchers as these people?' Good Thomas Robbins in Danbury entered in his diary February 8th: 'Amazing stupidity in all matters of religion prevails in this quarter.' Nor were all signs of disaffection in the North. Jenson observed the Sundays in the Carolinas to be passed in riotousness and drunkenness and noted that the people of Edenton were so far lost to the sense of religion 'that they have suffered a handsome brick Episcopalian church, the only place of public worship in town, to fall into decay.'"

The Religion of Primitive Man

A valuable article appearing in the *Watchman-Examiner* of September 21, 1944, and written by George R. Horner, contains a helpful discussion of the religion held and practiced by man in the early dawn of human history. Mr. Horner writes in part:

"According to the evolutionary view of the growth of religion, the lowest rung is called 'animism.' Animism was first promulgated by Sir Edward Tyler in his book *Primitive Culture*. Animism, Tyler says, 'characterizes tribes very low in the scale of humanity, and thence ascends, deeply modified in its transmission, but from first to last preserving an unbroken continuity, into the midst of high modern culture. . . .' Animism is, in fact, the groundwork of the philosophy of religion, from that of savages to that of civilized man. It is, according to Tyler's theory, the first idea primitive man had of a soul, that is, of something different from the body, and was from two groups of biological phenomena: the first, sleep, ecstasy, illness, and death; the second, figures in dreams and appearances in vision, which seemed to present the incorporeal principle, the soul, in isolation. From this beginning of a 'soul' in himself (and other men), it is said he applied it to plants and animals. The next step was ancestor worship, or cult of the dead, in which man revered, through prayers and offerings, the

souls of his ancestors. This was followed by various forms of nature worship: water, trees, beasts, totems (blood relationship with some animal), to polytheism. The final step of monotheism was, according to Tyler, 'by the simple process of raising to divine primacy one of the gods of polytheism itself.'

"This evolutionary interpretation of God is contrary to the Bible in Romans 1:19, 20. 'God is angry; because what may be known about Him is plain to their inmost consciousness; for He Himself made it plain to them. For, from the very creation of the world, His invisible perfections—namely, His eternal power and divine nature—have been rendered intelligible and clearly visible by His words, that they might be without excuse' (Weymouth).

"This revelation of which Paul speaks is the general revelation of God in nature and in man and is objectively present to all men in all times and, *per se*, is not passed into successive cultures. It would not, therefore, be surprising to find evidences of this revelation among primitive cultures in all parts of the world. Let us consider this revelation of God's character as revealed by His attributes.

"Pastor W. Schmidt in his monumental work, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories* (English translation), demonstrates that the attributes of the Supreme Being are known by the primitives. He gives examples. Concerning God's omniscience, he states that the Batwa Negroes, of Ruanda, say, 'There is nothing which Imana (God) does not know about; He knows everything.' Of God's beneficence, he says that the Wiyot-Maidu Indians of north-central California believe the Old One above bids men pray and tell Him all their troubles. Of God's rewards and punishments many primitives believe that after death there will be a good life for the righteous and a bad one for the evil. The South Andamanese believe the rainbow is the bridge leading to the other world; while the Ainu of northern Japan hold that the fire-goddess presents an accurate account to the Supreme Being of the life of the person on trial. Of God's omnipotency, several southeast Australian tribes say God can go everywhere and do everything; while among North American tribes God is greater than other 'supreme' beings. God's creative ability is expressed in its highest form among the Algonkin Indians, who believe in creation 'ex nihilo.'

"With regard to revelation in cultural institutions, the evolutionist Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, chapter 37) would have us believe:

The ecstatic frenzies, which were mistaken for divine inspiration, the mangling of the body, the theory of a new birth, and the remission of sins through the shedding of blood, have all their origin in savagery, and they naturally appealed to peoples in whom the savage instincts were still strong. Their true character was indeed often disguised under a decent veil of allegorical or philosophical interpretation, which probably sufficed to impose upon the rapt and enthusiastic worshipers, reconciling even the more cultivated of them to things which otherwise must have filled them with horror and disgust.

"This view is basically antagonistic to the Christian conception of revelation. Besides the general revelation of God in nature and in man, there was a special revelation, as in the fall, the flood, and in the institution of blood sacrifice. Space does not permit us to consider

the fall and the flood at this time, but only the institution of blood sacrifice which was manifest to man in the cradle of civilization. Although we may not be able to place our finger on the time of this divine institution in prehistory, thereby dating this special revelation, we do find survivals of it in many groups. Though these cultures are different from each other, they do have certain elemental traits which can be detected by subtracting the nonessentials which have grown upon each tribe due to isolation. May I repeat that special revelation may be handed down to succeeding generations and to neighboring groups through normal cultural diffusion, or the manner that certain traits are known to posterity. General revelation, *per se*, is an active continuous revelation to all men by God regardless of time and space, and is not transmitted by man either to his children or his neighbors."

A Roman View of Satan's Fall

Before us lies a pamphlet having the title "Neath St. Michael's Shield." It is issued by the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Mo. It bears the *nihil obstat* of Stephanus Schappler, O. S. B., Abbas Coadjutor Im. Conceptionis and the "*imprimatur*" of Carolus Hubertus Le Blond, Bishop of St. Joseph. The first edition, issued in 1938, was printed in 30,000 copies. Most amazing information is here submitted to the faithful. After stating that the angels upon their creation were magnificently endowed, but, before being admitted to see God's unveiled glory in heaven, were placed under probation, the author continues, "The end of the trial to which the angels were subjected is not known with certainty. Learned and saintly theologians hold, however, that the heavenly Father revealed to the angels the future incarnation of His own divine Son, whom they were to adore in His sacred humanity. At the same time He revealed to them the surpassing beauty and dignity of Mary, whom as the mother of God they were to venerate as their queen. Lucifer, one of the most glorious and exalted princes of the heavenly court, dazzled by the splendor of the gifts he had received, rebelled at the thought that human nature should be preferred to his own angelic nature. He could not bring himself to acknowledge that a woman inferior to him in nature should at some future time be made his queen and that the Seed of that woman should be preferred to himself for the honor of the hypostatic union. Desiring for himself the prerogatives of the God-man, he raised his great battle cry of rebellion: 'I will be like unto the Most High!' (Is. 14:14.) Enmeshed in this web of pride, one third of the angels joined Lucifer and took up his rebellious cry." Michael, however, so the author continues, was filled with joy and admiration and remained loyal to his Creator. In the battle that followed, described in chap. 12 of the Apocalypse, he and his associates won a glorious victory. Mariolatry evidently is mounting ever higher in the Roman camp.

A.