PREFACE

In his eloquent tribute to the Bureau of American Ethnology, Claude Lévi-Strauss made the shrewd observation that "anthropology is the science of culture as seen from the outside", that "anthropology, whenever it is practiced by members of the culture it endeavors to study, loses its specific nature and becomes rather akin to archaeology, history and philology."[1] The same principle, *mutatis mutandis*, has guided my understanding of the enterprise of History of Religions as well as the organization of the essays reprinted in this volume, more than half of which are devoted to Western religious materials.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that those essays which are most narrowly focussed on specific texts from Late Antiquity (chapters 1-3) appear largely to surrender the characteristic stance of the historian of religions and seem more closely related to traditional exegetical procedures. Common to each of these essays is a comparative enterprise within closely adjacent historical, cultural or linguistic units which insists (in conscious distinction from the "parallelomania" that sometimes overwhelmed practitioners of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) that the comparison be between a total ensemble rather than between isolated motifs.

Such comparative endeavors have a double thrust. They seek both to situate a text within a "family of resemblances" and to clarify the complexity and limits of this "family" by examining a specific document. They are exercises in that most rudimentary, but also most basic, of scholarly procedures: classification.[2] I take seriously the oft-repeated remark that, in the history of a discipline, such a taxonomic enterprise is more indicative of a "natural history" than a "science"; indeed, as an *historian* of religions, I am content that this be so. The former stage appears to be the necessary precondition for achieving the latter.

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[1] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963-1976), Vol. II, p. 55.

[2] I intend a distinction between the enterprise of *classification* and that of *definition*. Definition is an essentially atemporal procedure that requires the specification of a unique principle of division thus resembling traditional, logical monothetic classification. Classification, in the sense I intend, is a polythetic grouping or clustering procedure which requires temporal specificity.

The three taxa that are being explored in chapters 1-3 are Gnosticism, Judaism and Apocalypticism. Each is a complex grouping term. That is to say, no single 'red thread' defines them; rather each is a constellation of characteristics in which judgements of relative *degree* may lead to judgements of differing *kind*. All three have most usually been treated as reified, substantive nouns (indeed, as proper names); I should like to reduce each to the status of qualifying adjectives.[3] There is no essence of Gnosticism, Judaism or Apocalypticism. Rather, there is a shifting cluster of attributes which, for a particular purpose and in terms of a given document, makes one or another of these labels appropriate. A specific instance (e.g. the *Apocalypse of Adam* [*C.G.* V.5]) may well be classified under all three headings—but the purpose will have shifted according to each label as well as those texts and associated religious and social phenomena with which it might be most usefully grouped. Therefore the strategy in each chapter has been to take a text which has been labeled on the basis of a single trait and explore the possibilities for reclassification on the basis of an internally coherent set of traits.

In the first two essays, the argument is essentially one of economy. The *Gospel of Thomas* is ostensively a Christian text; the *Prayer of Joseph* is ostensively Jewish. But both have been assigned other labels in the scholarly literature. Each essay seeks to demonstrate that there is no necessity to go beyond the ostensive identification. There is nothing in the text, when taken as a whole, that would prevent some type of Christian or some type of Jew from having written each detail in the text. This can be determined by careful comparison of each motif with Christian and Jewish materials. But the argument hinges on the identification of the "type" of Christian or Jew. This can only be determined by the *ensemble*. It is not enough that each isolated element be found within other members of the taxon, but that these elements be combined in a way that is similar to the text in question. Thus the *Gospel of Thomas* is located with respect to Syriac Christian baptismal practice; the *Prayer of Joseph*, to the Hellenistic Jewish "mystery of the Patriarchs" as elucidated (for all its problems) by Erwin Goodenough.

Both of these essays were written at a relatively early stage of my research. Today, I find them insufficiently historical. Chapter 3 is more representative of my current work. Borrowing the useful

[3] See my review of the Messina Colloquium's attempt to define Gnosis and Gnosticism in *Kairos*, X (1968), esp. p. 299.

term, "trajectory", from Koester and Robinson,[4] I have come to insist that it is not sufficient to merely name a text; rather, it is necessary both to locate a text within a history of tradition and to provide some sort of explanation for the processes of continuity and change. A central preoccupation of all my work has come to be the notion that, regardless of whether we are studying texts from literate or non-literate cultures, we are dealing with *historical processes of re-interpretation*, with *tradition*. That, for a given group at a given time to choose this or that mode of interpreting their tradition is to opt for a particular way of relating themselves to their historical past and social present.[5] It is for this reason alone that, as an historian of religions, the Hellenistic period and the religions of Late Antiquity have proved so interesting. While usually studied as "background" for the emergence of Christianity, such a perspective radically and illegitimately foreshortens the phenomena and, thus, radically distorts what is most illuminating. In almost no case, in this period, do we study a new religion. Rather almost every religious tradition has had a two thousand year history. We study archaic Mediterranean religions in their Hellenistic phase. To be able to trace the Eleusinian mysteries from their origin as a fourteenth century family cult to the gnosticization of their central myth in the *Naassene Sermon* in the third century (A.D.) is to be able to truly function as an historian of religions in contradistinction to the usual static comparison of isolated items such as the "raising" of Kore with the resurrection of Jesus or Adamas among the Naassenes with the Son of Man in the gospels or some generalized Anthropos myth.[6] Therefore, chapter 3 attempts to develop the history of apocalypticism in relation to wisdom traditions by tracing its trajectory from archaic Babylonian and Egyptian materials through late gnosticized texts and by correlating shifts in the literature with historical and social change.

The second set of essays (chapters 4-9) are related thematically and, therefore, have a somewhat different character. They have their origin in a theoretical issue: the adequacy of the description

[4] See H. Koester and J. M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), esp. pp. 13-15.

[5] Compare J. Z. Smith, "The Social Description of Early Christianity," *Religious Studies Review*, I (1975), 19-25 and "A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams," *History of Religions*, XV (1976), 1-19.

[6] For a general statement, see J. Z. Smith, "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions*, XI (1971), 236-249.

of sacred space as developed within the general History of Religions represented, preeminently, by the writings of Mircea Eliade (chapter 4). In each instance the model has been tested, either explicitly or implicitly, against Jewish materials in order to determine what the model can illuminate in the data and what alterations in the model are required to account for the data.

The model was first developed in its essential details by the Pan-Babylonian School and represented a conservative polemic against contemporary notions of evolutionary change.[7] It closely meshed with the *ideology* of the ancient Near Eastern texts which it sought to interpret by placing a high premium on conformity. In chapters 4, 6 and 7, I accept and elaborate this ideology, terming it a locative view of the world as elaborated by an imperial figure. Such a view is typical of early Near Eastern urban, agricultural, literate, hierarchical, bureaucratized, imperialist, slave cultures (including Israel). Its most persuasive witnesses are the production of priestly and scribal elites who had a vested interest in restricting mobility and valuing "place". The texts are by and large the production of royal courts and temples and provide their *raison d'être*. Scholars have been insufficiently attentive to the "hermeneutics of suspicion" with respect to the adequacy of this self-serving ideology for interpreting the *realia* of such societies; the model may not be extended, as it has by many historians of religions, to the hunting and gathering world of primitive man. Therefore I would insist, on both theoretical and methodological grounds, that the model is flawed with respect to those societies where it is applicable and illegitimate when it is universalized for all archaic or primitive societies.[8]

The locative model does provide a useful point of departure for understanding both ancient Israel's ideology of Holy Land and later Judaism's mythology of Exile (chapter 5). In my research, the phenomenon of exile proved to be particularly fruitful both for the understanding of the counter-locative elements of religious rebellion and incongruity which I term the utopian view of the world as organized by a salvific figure and for the particular interpretation of the history of Mediterranean religions during the Greco-Roman period in which the phenomenon of exile was characteristic of many religious traditions (chapters 4, 6 and 7).

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[7] Compare my description of the morphological method in chapter 11, below.
[8] See further chapter 13, below.

To summarize and make more complex the model that underlies these various special studies:[9] Almost every religion in Late Antiquity occurred in both its homeland and in diasporic centers. With few exceptions, each of these religions, originally tied to a specific geographical area and people, had thousand year old traditions. In their homeland, they were inextricably tied to local loyalties and ambitions. Each persisted in its native land throughout Late Antiquity, frequently becoming linked to nationalistic movements seeking to overthrow Greco-Roman or Christian political and cultural domination. Indeed, many of these religions underwent a conscious archaicization during this period. Old texts in native languages were recopied (especially those which were related to such resistance themes as sacred kingship), national temples were restored and old, mythic traditions revived (especially those which contained such resistance themes as the creation battle of the national deity against the forces of chaos—now reinterpreted as the foreign dominators).[10] From Palestine to Persia one may trace the rise of Wisdom, Messianic and Apocalyptic traditions which reinterpret and maintain these central themes: the importance of the ancient, traditional lore; the saving power of kingship and the revival of myth.

Each of these native traditions likewise underwent, in their homeland, what might properly be called hellenization. This was frequently related to the establishment of a Hellenistic *polis*. Here, while the old, native religion continued uninterrupted in its traditional shrines (in some cases exhibiting a revival), the authority of the native priests remained unchallenged and the native language persisted (although in some instances being reduced to a learned or liturgical tongue), new religious practices and sensibilities were introduced. Sometimes the native and native-hellenistic forms remained apart; other times they mutually influenced one another, occasionally resulting in the discovery of genuinely new forms of an archaic deity. (Sarapis is the best documented example. His name and some of his functions antedate the Ptolemiac period; his iconography and much of his theology are novel).

Each native tradition also had diasporic centers which exhibited marked change during the Late Antique period. There was a noticeable

[9] See further, J. Z. Smith, "Hellenistic Religions." *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15ed. (1974), Vol. 8, pp. 749-751 and "Native Cults," n. 6, above.

[10] See my review of M. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster* (Leiden, 1973) in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCIV (1975), 442-444.

lessening of concern on the part of those in the diaspora for the destiny and fortunes of the native land and a relative severing of the archaic ties between religion and the land. Certain cult centers remained sites of pilgrimage or sentimental attachment, but the old beliefs in national deities and the inextricable relationship of the deity to particular places was weakened. Rather than a god who dwelt in his temple or would regularly manifest himself in a cult house, the diaspora evolved complicated techniques for achieving visions, epiphanies or heavenly journeys. That is to say, they evolved modes of access to the deity which transcended any particular place. Some traditions gave renewed emphasis to Protean deities, divinities who were interstitial in the older locative system, figures of uncertain form and habits subject only to their own inscrutable initiative.

Within diasporic religion, the chief religious figures were no longer priests or kings but rather god-men, saviors or religious entrepreneurs. The chief mode of religious activity shifted from celebration to initiation. Rather than being born into a divinely established and protected land whose glories one celebrated, one was initiated (reborn) into a divine protector who was tied to no land.

For the native religionist, homeplace, the place to which one belongs, was *the* central religious category. Ones self-definition, ones reality was the place into which one had been born—understood as both geographical and social place. To the new immigrant in the diaspora, nostalgia for homeplace and cultic substitutes for the old, sacred center were central religious values. For the thoroughly diasporic member, who may not have belonged to the deity's original ethnic group, freedom from place became *the* central religious category. Projecting the group's diasporic existence into the cosmos, he discovered himself to be in exile from his true home (a world beyond this world), he found his fulfillment in serving the god beyond the god of this world and true freedom in stripping off his body which belonged to this world and in awakening that aspect of himself which was from the Beyond. Diasporic religion, in contrast to native, locative religion, was utopian in the strictest sense of the word, a religion of "nowhere", of transcendence. Finally, I may note the existence of 'feedback' between these two points of view, especially in reaction to *the* central fact of Late Antique Mediterranean culture—the cessation of native kingship and sovereignty within the domains of Alexander's successors. If there was no native king, then even the homeland was in the diaspora. If the king is the divine center

of the human realm just as the king-god is the center of the cosmos, but if the wrong king is sitting on the throne, what does this imply about the world and the deity? [11] In my later work, the implications of such a perception of radical incongruity have been expanded and made more complex both with respect to Late Antique (chapters 8 and 9) and primitive materials (chapter 13).

The third group of essays (chapters 10-12) are a set of methodological reflections. Three central problems are taken up which must preoccupy the historian of religions whatever his field of expertise: the possibility of developing a rigorous argument, methods of comparison and the issue of the truth and interpretation of religious statements. Each is a sample of the sort of historical "test case" that, I believe, is the prerequisite for the History of Religions becoming a responsible, academic discipline.

The final essay (chapter 13) which gives title to this collection, represents an attempt to sum up many of the themes in the previous papers and to suggest a new set of concerns with the incongruous which will preoccupy me in future research.

I have resisted the temptation to revise these essays and to add the numerous additional references accumulated since each was first published. I have welcomed my editor's suggestion that each essay, where appropriate, be provided with a brief afterword calling attention to the most important subsequent scholarship.

It is natural, in gathering together some of the scattered fruits of a decade of writing and study, to call to mind not only the specific occasion for each essay but also those institutions, teachers, colleagues, students, friends and loved ones who, in a multitude of ways, made them possible. But this would be only to hint at in public what has been and will continue to be said in private.

I would be remiss if I did not record my gratitude to Jacob Neusner, the editor of this series, for encouraging me to produce this volume as he has encouraged me at every stage of our long standing friendship and association and to the Max Richter Foundation for subsidizing the cost of the indexing.

It is with an intense sense of a debt that can never be discharged as well as with both joy and pain that I dedicate this volume to my parents: joy that they were both able to see these cold-print children of mine

[11] See below, chapter 3 and my further development of this theme with respect to both Gnosticism and Apocalypticism in "A Pearl of Great Price," n. 5, above.

from conception to original appearance, alongside of their sharing in my warm-blooded family of Elaine, Siobhan and Jason; pain in the fact that my father, my most faithful and enthusiastic supporter and collector, did not live to see them bound together in a form that would have given him pleasure and pride.

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JONATHAN Z. SMITH