THE IDEA OF THE HOLY

AN INQUIRY INTO THE NON-RATIONAL FACTOR IN THE IDEA OF THE DIVINE AND ITS RELATION TO THE RATIONAL

BY

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Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil.
Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteuere,
Ergriffen fühlt er tief das Ungeheuere.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS translation of Dr. Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* has been made from the ninth German edition, but certain passages, mostly additions to the book in its first form, have been omitted with the concurrence of the author. The chief of these are certain of the appendixes, especially a long one upon 'Myth and Religion in Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*', and some citations in the text from German and other hymns and liturgies which, besides defying adequate translation, appeared to be of less interest to the English than to the German reader. On the other hand, I would refer the English reader to the brief appendix (No. X) that I have ventured to add, in which I have noted some points relevant to the subject discussed in the book suggested by the usage of English words, and added one or two illustrative passages from English writers.

My warmest thanks are due to the author, not only for the many corrections he has made in the text of the translation, the whole of which he read in manuscript, but more for his generous and patient encouragement, without which it would have been neither undertaken nor completed. My best thanks are also due to the readers of the Oxford University Press for many helpful suggestions and corrections in my English text.

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In the six years since its first publication in 1917, *Das Heilige* has already passed through ten editions. At a time when circumstances are as adverse to writers and purchasers of serious books as they have been for the last few years in Germany, this fact would alone suggest that the author's work has met a genuine need in his own land; and any one who has followed the movement of religious thought abroad during this period is aware that the success of his book is much more

than a mere vogue, and that it is exerting no little influence upon religious thought in Germany and North Europe at the present time. It may be of interest to consider briefly where its chief significance may be found from the point of view of the English reader.

One of the most unmistakable points of contrast between the thought of to-day and that of the later nineteenth century is the increased comprehensiveness and adequacy with which the study of religion is being pursued. Not only has the older, harder, more dogmatic tone on all sides given place to one more tolerant and sympathetic, but the study of religion has come to claim a much wider reference and to draw material from far more diverse sources than would at one time have been recognized; and the frontiers of the subject have been enormously extended in consequence. Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, and the history and comparative study of religious forms and institutions, if they have at once modified and complicated the problems of religious inquiry, have definitely increased the range of observations likely to throw light upon them.

If we consider only the English-speaking countries, a future generation may perhaps judge that no writer did more to introduce or render more effective this new spirit in the study of religion than William James in his famous Gifford lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published just over twenty years ago (1902). In any case the title of that book might be taken as giving the chief characteristics of that spirit, the preoccupation with religion in all its manifold forms as a specific experience, rather than as either the vehicle of a system of dogma or metaphysics on the one hand or as simply the emotional 'heightening' of morality on the other. This latter view is well represented by Matthew Arnold, himself in many respects a very typical child of his age; and Arnold's well-known phrase that 'the true meaning of religion is "morality touched by emotion"' is a fair expression of the limita-

tions and bias of the nineteenth-century mind. It suggests the fundamentally 'rational' temper ('rational' even when attacking 'rationalism') of an age interested almost wholly in practice and conduct, which, rightly reacting against views tending to identify religion with creed and dogma, was content to correct them by one that practically reduced it to an ethic. It has been justly noted[1] that such an account leaves unanswered the question, which to-day so obviously needs asking and which is in part the theme of this book, what *sort* of feelings or emotions it is by which morality is enkindled into religion.

For to-day this almost purely rational and ethical approach to the study of religion has been abandoned. Modern inquiries into the nature of religious experience have indeed tended to overweight the opposite scale. Feeling has, perhaps, something more than come into its own. Instinct, emotion, intuition, the more obscure and the more subjective aspects of religious experience—it is these that are to-day the main centre of interest. The vogue (perhaps now already declining) of M. Bergson's philosophy, in which instinct and intuition are put in fundamental contrast to, if not actually opposed to, rationality and the needs of practical life, has been one, but only one, of the influences making in this direction. Equally significant is the quite modern interest in Mysticism, which owes so much to the admirable works of such writers as Dean Inge, Miss Evelyn Underhill, and Baron von Hügel in this country, and Professor Rufus M. Jones in America. In Germany, where the popular interest in Mysticism is even more recent than it is with us, the same tendency is marked by a special leaning towards the study of oriental, and especially of Indian, religions. There, as here, a constant stream of books indicates how widely held is the conviction that there are essential elements in religion which are not to be comprised in

[1] C. C. J. Webb, *Problems in the Relations of God and Man* (1911), p. 4.

any systematically thought-out fabric of ideas, nor wholly exhausted in practice and conduct—elements which, if they admit of expression at all, can find it only in symbolism and imagery.

If, as one suspects, there are already signs of a new reaction against the possible over-emphasis of what may be called, for want of a better single term, the elements of 'feeling' in religion, such a movement of criticism need not be regretted. We may note at any rate two points in which it may prove salutary.

In the first place, it has been urged, not altogether unjustly, that some modern students of religion, and especially of religion in its 'mystical' forms, have been misled by their interest in the experiences of exceptional men into a distorted account of religion as a whole. They do not see the wood for the trees; or, more accurately, they fail to get a true view of the common nature of the trees in their structure and growth through an undue preoccupation with certain particularly striking examples. It is easy (so it may be urged) to pursue the varieties so far as to neglect the identities of religious experience, those fundamental elements which distinguish it as religious from experience of other kinds. Mystical experience is surely after all something exceptional. Religion is something wider than Mysticism. Yet sometimes one gets the impression that the non-mystic is only rather grudgingly and half-heartedly admitted to have any first-hand genuine religious experience at all. The abnormal is often the more interesting, the more fascinating study, but it ought not on that account to be allowed to usurp the place of the normal; and this, it may be suggested, is one mistake to which the modern comprehensive, fertile, and far-casting study of religion is prone.

This is one possible point of criticism. A second would emphasize the danger of subjectivism. It is possible to devote our attention to religious 'experience' in a sense which would

almost leave out of account the object of which it is an experience. We may so concentrate upon the 'feeling', that the objective cause of it may fall altogether out of sight. Is religious experience essentially just a state of mind, a feeling, whether of oppression or of exaltation, a sense of 'sin' or an assurance of 'salvation'; or is it not rather our apprehension of 'the divine', meaning by that term at least something independent of the mental and emotional state of the moment of experience? In short, it is suggested that by a one-sided over-emphasis of the subjective aspect of it the matter of our study may cease to be 'religion' and come to be merely 'religiosity', to employ a word which, commoner in German than in English, might well be better acclimatized in our language.

The enlarged and emancipated study of religion characteristic of to-day has sometimes given just ground for these two criticisms. It has not always avoided exaggerating the exceptional experience at the expense of the normal; and it has perhaps not infrequently allowed itself to become so far absorbed in the subjective states of mind manifested in religious experience as to ignore or half ignore the objective significance of them.

It is not least in reference to these two points that the value of Dr. Otto's volume lies. He is concerned to examine the nature of those elements in the religious experience which lie outside and beyond the scope of reason—which cannot be comprised in ethical or 'rational' conceptions, but which none the less as 'feelings' cannot be disregarded by any honest inquiry. And his argument shows in the first place that in all the forms which religious experience may assume and has assumed, so far as these can be re-interpreted—in polytheistic and monotheistic cults, non-mystical and mystical worship alike—certain basic 'moments' of feeling (again a word of which our language might well make fuller use) are always found to recur. All genuine religion exhibits these characteristic

reactions in consciousness. They are seen emerging as religion itself emerges, and we are shown their antecedents in the crude and savage stages of 'pre-religion', in magic and in the world of primitive superstition. For this inquiry the author not only draws upon his long familiarity with the theories of the anthropologists and the literature of Naturalism,[1] but also lays under contribution his great erudition in the history of religious development in all its varieties. He has 'ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes'. The remote Mosaic and pre-Mosaic religion of Israel, the Hebrew prophets, and modern Judaism; the religions of Greece and Rome and Islam, of China and of India; the New Testament, the Fathers, the medieval mystics, the reformers, and modern Protestantism: the author calls them all as witnesses. He makes particularly effective use of examples drawn from India through his familiarity with Sanskrit and the great classics of Hinduism. His argument, while laying due stress on the essential differences between religions, emphasizes and establishes their no less fundamental kinship on the side of feeling; and Mysticism, especially, falls into its proper place as neither a morbid freak nor the sole true fruit of religion, but as differing from other forms of religious experience not so much in its essential nature as in the degree in which it 'stresses and overstresses' certain common elements shared with them.

But of still more significance is the author's argument in relation to the second of the two points already mentioned—the question of subjectivism. Here we are shown that the religious 'feeling' properly involves a unique kind of apprehension, *sui generis*, not to be reduced to ordinary intellectual or rational 'knowing' with its terminology of notions and concepts, and yet—and this is the paradox of the matter—itself a genuine 'knowing', the growing awareness of an object,

[1] His book, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (The Naturalistic and the Religious View of the World), has been translated into English under the title *Naturalism and Religion*, 1907.

deity. All the 'feelings' and emotions that recur the same through all their diversities of manifestation in different religions are shown to be just the reflection in human feeling of this awareness, as it changes and grows richer and more unmistakable; a response, so to speak, to the impact upon the human mind of 'the divine', as it reveals itself whether obscurely or clearly. The primary fact is the confrontation of the human mind with a Something, whose character is only gradually learned, but which is from the first felt as a transcendent presence, 'the beyond', even where it is also felt as 'the within' man. Hence the author shows that Schleiermacher, who did so much to emphasize the function of 'feeling' in religion, is wrong in starting his account with the 'sense of absolute dependence', for that is to start from what is after all secondary and derivative, the reflection in self-feeling of this felt presence of the divine.

The 'feeling' element in religion involves, then, a genuine 'knowing' or awareness, though, in contrast to that knowing which can express itself in concepts, it may be termed 'non-rational'. The feeling of the 'uncanny', the thrill of awe or reverence, the sense of dependence, of impotence, or of nothingness, or again the feelings of religious rapture and exaltation, —all these are attempted designations of the mental states which attend the awareness of certain aspects of 'the divine'. In some religions one may be more prominent and in some another; and different individuals will vary widely in their susceptibility to these feelings, or, in Dr. Otto's terminology, in the degree and character of their faculty of 'divination'. But all of these feelings have a necessary and some a permanent place in the developing recognition of the divine nature. The particular aspect of it, glimpsed, as it were, in each of them, he tries to isolate the better by having recourse to a Latin terminology: but such terms as 'mysterium', 'maiestas', 'fascinans', are confessedly, like 'fear', 'awe', 'love', in their religious application, not so much precise and

definable concepts as what he calls 'ideograms', hinting at meanings which elude exact formulation.

A word of explanation and defence (for the English reader does not take kindly to fresh word-coinages) may be offered in respect to the chief new word introduced by the author. Dr. Otto is maintaining the autonomy and uniqueness of a particular sort of 'knowing'. Just as the recognition and appreciation of beauty cannot be reduced to that of moral goodness, just as 'the beautiful' and 'the good' are, in the philosopher's phrase, 'categories' in their own right, so, too, it is with religion. There, too, we have to deal with a peculiar and irreducible kind of apprehension—we employ or apply a distinct 'category'. The natural term for this would be that which stands in the title of this book: 'the holy', or else 'the sacred'. But the meaning of these words is at once too lofty and too narrow. 'Holiness', 'sanctity', are words which are charged with *ethical* import.[1] A large part, perhaps the chief part, of their meaning is moral. This, as the author maintains, is necessarily the case, inasmuch as, the better the character of deity and the divine becomes known, the more intimately it absorbs within itself all the highest moral and 'rational' attributes. But though, in our final experience of God's 'Holiness', *perfect goodness* has an absolutely essential and central place, yet there remains a something beyond. Holiness or sanctity has an element in it independent of the category of the good. And to this the author gives the name of the 'numinous' element, from the Latin *numen*, the most general Latin word for supernatural divine power. 'Numinous' feeling is, then, just this unique apprehension of a Something, whose character may at first seem to have little connexion with our ordinary moral terms, but which later 'becomes charged' with the highest and deepest moral significance. And 'the holy' will be, in Dr. Otto's language, a complex category of the 'numinous' and the 'moral', or, in

[1] See, further, Appendix X.

one of his favourite metaphors, a fabric in which we have the non-rational numinous experience as the woof and the rational and ethical as the warp.

'Numinous' and 'Numen' will, then, be words which bear no moral import, but which stand for the specific non-rational religious apprehension and its object, at all its levels, from the first dim stirrings where religion can hardly yet be said to exist to the most exalted forms of spiritual experience. And then we can keep the words 'holy' and 'sacred', 'holiness' and 'sanctity', to their more usual meaning.

Dr. Otto is concerned in this volume primarily to establish the autonomy and uniqueness of this 'numinous' experience—to show its essential place in religion and its significance in religious development. But so far from claiming that this is all,—that, for example, mystic 'intuition' can dispense with the knowledge that comes through human reason and moral experience,—he asserts emphatically the contrary. And in his later chapters he makes it clear that for him the supremacy of Christianity over all other religions lies in the unique degree in which (as he holds) in Christianity the numinous elements, such as the sense of awe and reverence before infinite mystery and infinite majesty, are yet combined and made one with the rational elements, assuring us that God is an all-righteous, all-provident, and all-loving Person, with whom a man may enter into the most intimate relationship.

What is maintained in this book is, in fact, that religion is something not only natural but also, in the strict sense of the word, paradoxical. It is a real knowledge of, and real personal communion with, a Being whose nature is yet above knowledge and transcends personality. This apparent contradiction cannot be evaded by concentrating upon one aspect of it and ignoring the other, without doing a real injury to religion. It must be faced directly in the experience of worship, and there, and only there, it ceases to be a contradiction and becomes a harmony. And many who are grateful

to Dr. Otto for his clear exposition of the unity of Religion through all the diversity of religions, and for his emphasis upon the objective significance of religious feeling, will be perhaps still more grateful to him for insisting that both elements in the harmony must be preserved.

For in this, too, the argument of this book has something to offer to the thought of to-day. It would hardly be denied that the dominant movement of thought in this nearly completed first quarter of the twentieth century has been what has been called 'humanistic', and what might better be termed 'anthropocentric'. In religion, as in other domains, we have learned to view things, in the phrase of a brilliant exponent of this way of thinking,[1] 'from the human end'; man, an ideal humanity, has come to be increasingly our measure. We see one example of this in such a popular religious philosophy as that of Mr. H. G. Wells, with its virtual apotheosis of the spirit of striving mankind and the sharp antagonism it introduces between the 'God in man' and the Veiled Being, the mysterious Power in Nature. It is only the former who has any religious significance for Mr. Wells. In such cases a standard less merely ethical may be employed than that which the moralistic tendency of the nineteenth century demanded, but it is far more a purely human standard. We need not repeat the taunt of the later nineteenth-century agnosticism which finds nothing in the God of traditional orthodoxy but 'man's giant shadow, hailed divine'.[2] To say that religious thought to-day is too anthropocentric does not mean that it is thus crudely anthropomorphic. But it does suggest that by *undue* preoccupation with the human and the personal we may blind ourselves to that transcendent and supra-personal character of the deity which cannot be surrendered without a real loss to religion.

Is it possible that once more in this too anthropocentric

[1] Dr. L. P. Jacks.

[2] Sir William Watson, *The Unknown God.*

trend in religious thought the tide is on the turn, and that men are beginning to feel it insufficient to think of God in wellnigh exclusively human terms? One suspects that it may be so, and that at any rate a religion which sets God as Person and Friend of Man at scarcely disguised enmity with the inscrutable power and mysterious tremendousness of nature will not for long satisfy the demands of the soul. And those who think thus will value all the more an exposition which recalls us, as this volume does, to the unsearchable 'otherness' as well as to the human likeness of deity.

* * *

In this book there are certain features that may be puzzling and unfamiliar to some readers. Those unaccustomed to such terms may find words like 'category', 'a priori', 'schematize', repellent to them. To the general reader the quasi-Kantian treatment of this matter or that may be a stumbling-block, and to the mystic perhaps foolishness. Again, some may find the argument too much of an analysis; others, too much of an apologetic. To some it may seem too logical; to others, too theological. But it is good that our incurable propensity to think in compartments, to keep, if we admit them at all, our philosophy and theology strangers, should receive a shock now and then. And, for the rest, it is surely good that a book upon religion should be written by a man who feels that religion stands at the very centre and basis of life—that 'the divine' in man is, in Plato's phrase, the head and the root of him—and who can make no pretence of viewing his own religion from without, as though it meant no more to him than any other. For though in so many departments in life it is the detached and unprejudiced observer who can best pronounce judgement, in this one the paradox must hold that he who professes to stand outside religion and view all the religions of the world in impartial detachment will never wholly understand any one of them.

J. W. H.

March 1923.

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CHAPTER I

THE RATIONAL AND THE NON-RATIONAL

It is essential to every theistic conception of God, and most of all to the Christian, that it designates and precisely characterizes Deity by the attributes Spirit, Reason, Purpose, Good Will, Supreme Power, Unity, Selfhood. The nature of God is thus thought of by analogy with our human nature of reason and personality; only, whereas in ourselves we are aware of this as qualified by restriction and limitation, as applied to God the attributes we use are 'completed', i. e. thought as absolute and unqualified. Now all these attributes constitute clear and definite *concepts*: they can be grasped by the intellect; they can be analysed by thought; they even admit of definition. An object that can thus be thought conceptually may be termed *rational*. The nature of deity described in the attributes above mentioned is, then, a rational nature; and a religion which recognizes and maintains such a view of God is in so far a 'rational' religion. Only on such terms is Belief possible in contrast to mere *feeling*. And of Christianity at least it is false that 'feeling is all, the name but sound and smoke'[1];—where 'name' stands for conception or thought. Rather we count this the very mark and criterion of a religion's high rank and superior value—that it should have no lack of *conceptions* about God; that it should admit knowledge—the knowledge that comes by faith—of the transcendent in terms of conceptual thought, whether those already mentioned or others which continue and develop them. Christianity not only possesses such conceptions but possesses them in unique clarity and abundance, and this is, though not the sole or even the chief, yet a very real sign of its superiority over religions of other forms and at other levels. This must be asserted at the outset and with the most positive emphasis.

[1] Goethe, *Faust*.

But, when this is granted, we have to be on our guard against an error which would lead to a wrong and one-sided interpretation of religion. This is the view that the essence of deity can be given completely and exhaustively in such 'rational' attributions as have been referred to above and in others like them. It is not an unnatural misconception. We are prompted to it by the traditional language of edification, with its characteristic phraseology and ideas; by the learned treatment of religious themes in sermon and theological instruction; and further even by our Holy Scriptures themselves. In all these cases the 'rational' element occupies the foreground, and often nothing else seems to be present at all. But this is after all to be expected. All language, in so far as it consists of words, purports to convey ideas or concepts;—that is what language means;—and the more clearly and unequivocally it does so, the better the language. And hence expositions of religious truth in language inevitably tend to stress the 'rational' attributes of God.

But though the above mistake is thus a natural one enough, it is none the less seriously misleading. For so far are these 'rational' attributes from exhausting the idea of deity, that they in fact imply a non-rational or supra-rational Subject of which they are predicates. They are 'essential' (and not merely 'accidental') attributes of that subject, but they are also, it is important to notice, *synthetic* essential attributes. That is to say, we have to predicate them of a subject which they qualify, but which in its deeper essence is not, nor indeed can be, comprehended in them; which rather requires comprehension of a quite different kind. Yet, though it eludes the conceptual way of understanding, it must be in some way or other within our grasp, else absolutely nothing could be asserted of it. And even Mysticism, in speaking of it as τὸ ἄρρητον, the ineffable, does not really mean to imply that absolutely nothing can be asserted of the object of the religious consciousness; otherwise, Mysticism could exist only in unbroken silence, whereas what has generally been a characteristic of the mystics is their copious eloquence.

Here for the first time we come up against the contrast

between Rationalism and profounder religion, and with this contrast and its signs we shall be repeatedly concerned in what follows. We have here in fact the first and most distinctive mark of Rationalism, with which all the rest are bound up. It is not that which is commonly asserted, that Rationalism is the denial, and its opposite the affirmation, of the miraculous. That is manifestly a wrong or at least a very superficial distinction. For the traditional theory of the miraculous as the occasional breach in the causal nexus in nature by a Being who himself instituted and must therefore be master of it—this theory is itself as massively 'rational' as it is possible to be. Rationalists have often enough acquiesced in the possibility of the miraculous in this sense; they have even themselves contributed to frame a theory of it;—whereas anti-Rationalists have been often indifferent to the whole controversy about miracles. The difference between Rationalism and its opposite is to be found elsewhere. It resolves itself rather into a peculiar difference of *quality* in the mental attitude and emotional content of the religious life itself. All depends upon this: in our idea of God is the non-rational overborne, even perhaps wholly excluded, by the rational? Or conversely, does the non-rational itself preponderate over the rational? Looking at the matter thus, we see that the common dictum, that Orthodoxy itself has been the mother of Rationalism, is in some measure well founded. It is not simply that Orthodoxy was dissipated in doctrine and the framing of dogma, for these have been no less a concern of the wildest mystics. It is rather that Orthodoxy found in the construction of dogma and doctrine no way to do justice to the non-rational aspect of its subject. So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation.

This bias to rationalization still prevails, not only in theology but in the science of comparative religion in general, and from top to bottom of it. The modern students of mythology, and those who pursue research into the religion of 'primitive man'