

THE COMMON THEOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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I.

WE have recently heard much about the importance of archaeology for the study of the Old Testament. Just because this importance is great, it should be described accurately.

The need for this caution is shown by the recent exaggeration of the importance of the material from Ras Shamra. That material is admittedly of great importance for the history of the Near East in the second millenium B. C., but for the understanding of the bulk of the OT, which dates from about the middle of the first millenium, it is somewhat less relevant than would be the material preserved in mediaeval French mystery plays for the understanding of the English deists of the early eighteenth century. Linguistically, the two groups are about equally distant,¹ but the fifteenth-century mysteries are much closer in time to the deists than Ugaritic literature is even to Isaiah, let alone Jeremiah or Deuteronomy.² From the mysteries to the deists there is a continuous development of a single culture, whereas between the Ugaritica and the OT lies the complete destruction of the former culture by barbarian invasions.³ However much the religion of the deists differed from that

¹ C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook*, Rome, 1947 (*Analecta Orientalia*, 25) nos. 14.3-9 repudiates as unproved his former classification of Ugaritic with Hebrew as belonging "to the same subdivision (often called Canaanite) of the Northwest branch of the Semitic languages." He concludes that because of our ignorance of the exact relationship of the Semitic languages generally, it is impossible to determine the proper place of Ugaritic, which "has been grouped with everything from Heb. to South Arabic" and had best be treated "as a separate Semitic language."

² W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, Harmondsworth, 1949, p. 187, says "all the datable texts from Ugarit belong to the first third of the fourteenth century." In that event, the poems contained in these texts can hardly be later than the fifteenth century B. C. This would put Ugaritic poetry about as far from Isaiah (late 8th cent.) as Isaiah was from Meleager of Gadara (1st cent. B. C.).

³ W. F. Albright, *The Present State of Syro-Palestinian Archaeology*, in *The Haverford Symposium on Archaeology and the Bible*, New Haven, 1938, p. 23: "At the threshold of the Iron Age we enter a new historical world, in which the great nations of the Bronze Age seem incapable of making a constructive cultural effort, and in which Israel and Hellas play an increasingly important part." So also T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins*,

of the authors of the mysteries, it yet preserved the same dramatic personae and the same sacred literature, whereas the striking thing about the religion of the Ugaritica is its almost total lack of any direct relationship to that of the OT. The weakness of the evidence which has been alleged as proving direct relationship is actually the best evidence against it. A few traces of Ugaritic mythology are found in OT poetry — but the striking fact is the rarity of such references, and when they do occur they are pieces of poetic imagery, probably of no religious significance.⁴ A good deal of poetic jargon also found in Ugaritic is preserved in the OT, but much of it is the common jargon of most ancient Semitic poetry, and to be explained by the common linguistic and cultural background of that poetry.⁵ At any rate, it does not prove the direct relationship of the religions: *Paradise Lost* is full of the poetic jargon of Homer. As for the evidence supposedly furnished by the preservation of proper names: Nothing can be clearer from the entire known course of Israelitic and Jewish history than the fact that, like most other peoples, the Israelites and the Jews preserved place names and adopted foreign names often without any knowledge of the original meaning, and often, when they did happen to know it, without any concern for it.⁶ In sum: Ugaritic literature is of great importance for many aspects of ancient history, but its importance for the study of the OT is at best indirect and incidental, and the recent exaggeration of this importance is symptomatic: Had there been much that was really near, less would have been made of what was really remote.

All this being granted, however, the fact remains that to see the OT against a remote background is better (for historical purposes) than to see it against no background at all. Fortunately, many important fragments of such background as we have are now collected in the magnificent volume produced by Princeton,⁷ and it seems therefore

revised ed., N. Y., 1950, p. 74, "Excavations in Palestine . . . show a definite break between Canaanite (Late Bronze) and Hebrew (Early Iron) cultures, with a number of differences between them."

⁴ W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, Harmondsworth, 1949, p. 233, notes this lack of religious significance. See also p. 235. It is also noted by H. L. Ginsberg, *Ugaritic Studies and the Bible*, in *Biblical Archaeologist*, VIII (1965), p. 54, whence I have taken the comparison to the unimportance of classical mythology in English poetry. Contrast the theories of Dussaud.

⁵ This is the opinion of Gordon, *op. cit.*, 17.4-13. What is true of poetic jargon is equally true of the forms of the poems, which have also been used as evidence of close relationship. Cf. Gordon, *ibid.* 13.98.

⁶ For ignorance in the early period see the false etymologies in Genesis; for indifference in the late, the history of the name Isidore.

⁷ *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1950. Hereafter cited merely by page and column, e. g., 389 a means ANET, p. 389, col. a.

worth-while to try to state in outline just how the theological material in that collection *is* relevant to the theological material in the OT.

By "theological material" I mean that which describes a god (or gods) and his (or their) actions.

Now the striking thing about the theological material of the great majority of these ancient near-eastern texts is that, despite superficial differences, it shows one over-all⁸ pattern, which is the following:

II.

Prayer and praise are usually directed to one god at a time,⁹ and peoples and persons are often represented as, or appear to have been,

⁸ Particular exceptions can be found to every one of the following points, but are not relevant to the argument, which is concerned only to describe the common pattern. This pattern is clearest in the Egyptian and neo-Babylonian material, it is least clear in the Hittite (as might be expected, since the Hittites, in race, language, social structure and environment stand rather apart from the majority of ancient near-eastern peoples, and it is here suggested that this pattern was largely a product of those causes. The Hittite pantheon, like Hittite society, seems to have been more feudal than those of the city states and centralized empires.) But it is contended that the pattern here described gives on the whole a correct account of the structure of belief expressed by the actual devotions to any one of the major deities, including the Hittite — so far as the preserved material enables that structure to be determined. (In some instances, of course, notably in Ugaritic, very little devotional — as opposed to mythological — material has been preserved, but if any arguments are to be made from silence, they should be rather for than against the common pattern.)

Two specifications in the above claim require special notice: one is *structure of belief*, the other, *major deity*.

Any great religion, considered in detail, presents such a bewildering mass of particular practices and convictions as to seem to defy classification, but classification is none the less possible. A comparison with anthropology may be useful here: The average man who lives among and is constantly concerned with the members of one racial group, will be the first to deny that they all look alike, and will be able to prove his point by reference to innumerable particular differences as well as by appeal to his own undoubtedly expert opinion; but the anthropologist will none the less maintain that certain structures are typical of this racial group. This paper, then, is concerned with the underlying structure of belief, not with the accidents of expression.

The structure of belief reaches full development only in the cults of the major deities. No doubt much of the popular devotion was to minor deities, either of unimportant localities (e. g. Meres-ger, 381 a-b) or specialists (e. g. Thoth, 379 a, 476 a). These, of course, were not usually exalted further than was necessary for the purpose of the worshiper. If the deity was by definition "He who does x," then, in calling on him to do x, one had only to remind him of his well-known power. But it should be noticed that, within their own limits, these minor deities remain true to the general theological pattern, e. g. Meres-ger (*v. supra*) punishes her servant when he transgresses, shows her power, and then, on his repentance, shows her mercy and heals him. Notice, too, that her servant is devoted to her and addresses her alone. So, for the scribe, Thoth is "my god" and "a shield about me," 676 a.

⁹ All of the Egyptian hymns and prayers (365 a to 381 b) are concerned with single

particularly devoted to the worship of a single god.¹⁰ The mythology tells of many gods, of course — you can't have much mythology about a solitary being — and it accounts for many of the practices of worship¹¹ — no doubt because it was invented to do so. But the mythology seems rather a literary than a religious product. And just as it, for its own purposes, exploited polytheism, so prayer and praise, no doubt because of their own nature, are usually directed to one god at a time. This fact is characteristic of the rest of the theological pattern.

The god being worshiped is regularly flattered — that is to say, exalted. Though he may occupy a minor position in the preserved

deities (the Pharaoh, of course, is a god), so are all but one of the Sumero-Akkadian hymns and prayers (383 a to 392 b). (The composition entitled "prayer to Every God" should have been entitled "Prayer to Any God" — it is not addressed "to all gods in general" (p. 391 a), but to that *one* god or goddess whom the petitioner supposes to be punishing him or her, and it is significant that the petitioner takes it for granted that this unknown deity is singular.) Even when two deities are worshiped simultaneously, as Bel and Beltiya in the Akkadian ritual, the prayers and praises are directed most often to one or the other *singly*, 332 a–334 a; contrast the magical formula 333 b–334 a. So in the Hittite rituals (346 a–361b) though 9 of the 13 involve sacrifice or prayer to several gods *successively*, yet there are only 3 in which prayer is directed to several gods *at once*. So, too, of the Hittite prayers (393 ff.) only 3 (section b of the plague prayers of Mursilis, the "Prayer to be spoken in an Emergency" and the "Prayer of Arnuwandas") are really directed to many deities. The others, though several of them contain incidental references to a number of gods, are primarily directed, each one, to one single divine being. So, too, most of the prayers put in the mouths of mythological characters or found in the mythological material: The Hittite ritual in the Telepinus myth (126 b–128 b), such prayers as there are in the Gilgamesh epic, the prayers in the Etana story, the prayers in the story of the two brothers, etc.

¹⁰ "King Apophis . . . made him Seth as lord, and he would not serve any god who was in the land except Seth." King Seqnen-Re, on the other hand, "relies upon no god who is in the entire land except Amon-Re, King of the Gods." (231 b) The story is not historical, of course; what is historical is the fact that the author should consider such a procedure perfectly natural and use it as a point of departure for his story. Historical evidence of such behavior in Egypt is provided by the case of Akh-en-Aton. That his policy merely carried to an extreme a common tendency is suggested by many details, e. g., the practical absence, from the records of Thut-mose III (234 b ff.) of reference to any god save Amon (and, of course, Thut-mose III himself.) Montu, the god of war, is occasionally mentioned, evidently by literary convention, but the actual direction of the war is wholly Amon's and there are dozens of references to him for every one to any other deity. Contrast the frequent appearances of Montu in the material of the next Pharaoh, Amen-hotep II. Outside Egypt, Meshah of Moab is almost exclusively devoted to Chemosh, Atrahasis has Ea as "his god" and "his lord" (106 a–b) etc. (see the refs. above, ends of notes 8 and 9). Other instances of cities or individuals especially devoted to the worship of a particular god are numerous, e. g.: Mesopotamian: Esarhaddon to Ashur 290 a ff.; Babylon to Bel 331 a; a priest to Bel 333 a; the poet to Ishtar (cf. the psalmist to Yahweh) 384 b f. Egyptian: Hermopolis to Thot 379 b, Heliopolis to Re 379 b; Karnak to Amon 380 a; Thebes to Amon, *ibid.* Hittite: Puduhepas to the sun goddess of Arinna 393 a; Kantuzilis to the sun god 400 b, a patient to Ulliyassis 350 a (and *v. inf.* end of n. 15).

¹¹ Myths explain rites or practices: 8 b–9 a, 10 b, 11 a–b etc.

mythological works, yet in the worship addressed to him he is regularly represented as greater than all other gods.¹² It is often said that he created not only the world, but also the other gods.¹³ He is the only true god; sometimes, even when worshiped in close connection with other deities, the only god.¹⁴ This does not mean, of course, that he is actually thought to be the only god; the expression is usually no more than a form of flattery; only in a few special cases does it come to be taken literally. As a form of flattery it is often an expression of local patriotism,¹⁵ which achieved it by a chain of exaggeration something

¹² Mythologically secondary or derivative deities who are declared greatest of the gods or ruler of the gods: Ashur 298 a; Bel Marduk 62 a, 332 a f.; Enlil 337 b; Ishtar 383 a ff.; Isis 14 a; Nanna-Sin 311 a ff.; 386 a f.; Ptah 5 a; Shamash 387 a; the sun goddess of Arinna 393 b; Telepinus 397 a. These passages illustrate, but by no means exhaust, the common practice. Even commoner is the representation of a mythologically minor deity as greater in some particular than one of his mythological superiors. More attention should be given the passages in which a foreign deity is referred to as greatest of, or ruler of, the gods: Anath (in Beisan, but by an Egyptian) 249 b, Qadesh and Rashap (in Egypt) 250 b, Marduk (in an Assyrian document) 299 b, Marduk (for Cyrus) 315 b. In most of these instances it is clear that the author has adopted the conventional rhetoric of the god's professional servants, which was evidently very much the same all over the ancient Near East. Theology, in these expressions, is a by-product of politeness. Just so, when the eloquent peasant appealed to the chief steward, he called him "greatest of the great" and attributed to him omnipotence, 408 b.

¹³ El is the "creator of creatures" (132 a ff.) but it is not certain that "creatures" here includes the other gods. The Akkadian creation epic has at least five universal creators: Apsu (61 a), Mummu-Tiamat (*ibid.*), Mother Hubur (62 b), Ea (64 a) and Marduk-Marukka (69 b) (cf. Marduk-Aranunna "creator of the gods, his fathers" and Marduk-Shugurim, 71 a-b). Elsewhere in the same literary tradition Anu and Mammi give birth to all the gods (111 a ff.). Yet again it is Nanna who did so, 385 a; again, Enlil, 50 b. I doubt that for the purpose of this paper it is worth while to distinguish between a "father" of the gods and a "creator" of them. The Hittite Kumbarbis is "the father of all gods" 121 b, ff. Atun of Heliopolis is either father or creator of all other deities, 3 a ff.; Ptah of Memphis created all other deities, 5 a-b; Re created all things, including the gods, 6 a ff.; etc. Notice that Re himself has a father, Nun, 6 b, 11 a, 13 a. Here one sees clearly the conflict between mythology (to which Re is only one figure in a genealogy) and local patriotism (which made him the supreme god and origin of godhead). Note 4 of p. 13 a recognizes this conflict but does not grasp its significance. (cf. the attribute of Marduk-Aranunna, above.)

¹⁴ Bel is sole lord, 333 a; Nanna is unique, 386 a; Amon is unique in nature, 365 a, sole one, 366 b ff.; Aton is sole god, 370 b. Cf. the later Greek expression εἷς θεός —, which means approximately "— is a great god", not "— is the only god."

¹⁵ So H. Ranke, in his note on a Ptah inscription, *Altorientalische Texte zum Alten Testament*, ed. H. Gressmann, Berlin, 1926, sec. 1, no. 4: "This is a typical example of local theology in ancient Egypt. In similar fashion the local divinity at Heliopolis and at certain of the other great temples of the country was set above all other divine beings and credited with their creation." The same process is visibly at work in Sumero-Akkadian hymns, but has not there achieved such full expression. Evidences of local loyalties, however, are numerous, e. g. Babylon's for Bel (331 a ff.), Nippur's for Enlil (455 b) etc. (see 53 b ff. and *inf.* n. 27). The intimate relation of Yahweh to a people

like this: Our god is the greatest of all gods, there is none other like him, there is none other.¹⁶

Such exaltation of the god being worshiped is motivated also by the worshiper's desire to convince himself that this god can grant his requests. Therefore this god has all power necessary to do what his worshippers ask (and this is the important thing; this granted, whether or not he has *all* power is an academic question sure to be answered in the affirmative sooner or later by the natural development of flattery.) His activity is by no means limited to his own land;¹⁷ he regularly discomfits foreign enemies in their own territories, makes over foreign lands to his own worshippers,¹⁸ or gives other lands (or even the lands of his own worshippers)

rather than a place is paralleled most closely by the relation of Ashur to the Assyrians. The reader will, I trust, pardon the application of the term "local patriotism" to such tribal loyalties as well as to strictly local ones.

¹⁶ Examples of this line of thought in various stages of development: 365 a-b (Amon-Re), 383 a (Ishtar), 386 a (Nanna), 71 b f. (Marduk), Exod 15 11 and Ps 50 1 (Yahweh). The final step in the process is to dispose of the other gods. This may be done by reducing them to parts or names or activities of the great god (as in Egypt, 4 a ff.), by reducing them to demons (as the Persians did, 317 a), or by denying their existence altogether (as did II Isaiah). The choice of method was probably determined less by theology, or even by superstition, than by economic considerations. The various gods were sanctions of financial concentrations (esp. local temples) of which the beneficiaries were not inclined to deny their existence. It was probably the annihilation of such vested interests in Judea by the Babylonian conquest (they seem to have survived the attacks of Josiah) which cleared the way for II Isaiah's theological centralization. That, however, was too much for Jewish common sense, which might abuse the concepts of divinity formed by men of other traditions, but would not wholly deny their correspondence to some objective fact. Therefore in this point, as in others, Hellenistic Judaism did not follow II Isaiah consistently, but adopted various explanations of the pagan gods, e. g. it followed the Persians and was itself followed by Christianity in explaining that they were demons. The rhetoric of II Isaiah was preserved as a literary exercise but, even by the Rabbis, was transferred from the deities to the idols, v. S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, N. Y., 1950, p. 126, n. 60.

¹⁷ Gods who are worshiped or said to exercise power outside their own lands (those starred rule the whole world, or all mankind): *Amon-Re 6 a ff. (All-Lord), 27 b, 237 a, 263 a, 366 b ff. etc.; *Ashur 275 a, 281 b ff.; Anath, Astarte, Baal 250 a-b; *Aton 370 a ff.; *Bel-Marduk 72 b, 164 a, 309 a, 331 a ff.; *Enlil 50 b, 159 b, 337 b, 455 b, 481 b; The Hattian storm god 395 a; *Ishtar 383 ff.; Khonsu of Thebes 30 b; *Nanna 385 b; Ningirsu 269 a; Qedesh and Rashap 250 a-b; *Shamash 116 b, 387 b ff.; The storm god of Nerik 400 a; *The sun goddess of Arinna 392 a-b; *Telepinus 397 a. This list has no pretention to completeness.

¹⁸ Amon-Re to various Pharaohs 23 b, 248 a f., 251 a, 263 b. Enlil to Sargon 267 b. The Assyrian rulers regularly claim to be "king of the world . . . king of all the four rims of the earth" 274 b ff., and their kingship is ordained by the gods, esp. by Ashur, who also specifically orders their foreign conquests 275 a ff., and helps them in the conquering 275 b ff. The Assyrian formulae were taken over by the neo-Babylonians (vestiges in 307 a and — applied by Cyrus to Nabonidus? — in 315 b) and by the Persians (316 a) who at first claimed to hold them from Marduk (*ibid.*), later from Ahuramazda (316 b).

into the hands of foreign rulers.¹⁹ Having created the order of nature, he not unnaturally maintains it (makes the crops grow, and so on),²⁰ but he can also change it by miracles. He maintains by rewards and punishments the moral order,²¹ but he is independent of it and can pardon sin at will.²²

He is regularly described by comparisons with the most conspicuous or the most powerful objects known to the culture, for instance, the sun,²³ the father,²⁴ the king²⁵ and the bull.²⁶ His minor attributes are usually those of the objects to which he is compared: As bull he is noisy, violent and fertile. As the sun he is glorious, perfect in beauty, the source of light and knowledge, the enemy of darkness, ignorance and falsity, the witness and judge of all that is done on earth. He is the father and king of his people,²⁷ his child,²⁸ whom he especially favors. The human king

¹⁹ Amon gives Egypt to the kings of Cush, 448 a. El is the god of Udum, but gives it to be harassed by Keret, 144 a. The Hattian storm god "brought people of Kurustama to the country of Egypt," 395 a. "Marduk . . . beheld with pleasure his (Cyrus') good deeds . . . and therefore ordered him to march against his (Marduk's) city Babylon . . . going at his side like a real friend." 315 b. See also n. 49 below.

²⁰ Gods who maintain the order of nature: Amon 366 b ff.; Aton 370 a ff.; Bel-Marduk 71 a, 332 b f.; Nanna 386 a; Shamash 389 b; Telepinus 397 b.

²¹ Gods who back up the moral order by rewards and punishments: Amon 380 a-b; Ashur 300 a; Bel-Marduk 70 b f., 316 a; "The god" of Amen-em-opet 421 ff.; "God" in Ahikar 429 a-b; Hittite gods generally 355 a; Shamash 388 b f.; Telepinus 397 a. Other refs. *inf.* notes 35, 39, 43, 44.

²² Gods who pardon sin: Amon-Re 379 b f.; Bel-Marduk 310 a, 390 a-b, 436 b; the Hattian storm-god 395 b; Ishtar 385 a; Sin 386 b. It is necessary to emphasize again that these lists are intended to be exemplary, not exhaustive, and that considerations of economy have necessitated their reduction to a minimum. Note also that they are derived from a small (but representative, or so the editors claim — pp. xiv ff.) selection of the total material. One should not, therefore, on the basis of these, exaggerate the difference between, say, Ishtar who pardons sin and Shamash who punishes it. As a matter of fact Shamash also pardons sin (117b) and Ishtar punishes it (385 a) but, in the list above, only the most typical passages were cited. This note is intended to forestall any attempt to refute the argument of this paper by splitting up the major divine functions among various specialists. As a matter of fact, most of the major deities have most of the major functions. Consequently I have tried to give full illustration only of attributes frequently denied to the original Yahweh.

²³ Gods identified with or compared to the sun: Amon 365 a ff.; Aton 370 a ff.; Bel-Marduk 331 a ff.; Ishtar 384 a-b; Shamash 387 a-b; Sin 386 b; Telepinus 397 a.

²⁴ Gods as fathers: Amon 365 a ff.; Anu 390 a; El 143 a ff.; Enlil 72 b, 390 a, etc.; the Hattian storm god 357 a-b; the Hattian sun god 401 b; Nanna 385 b; Telepinus 397 a.

²⁵ Gods as kings/queens: Amon 15 a ff., 365 a-b; Anu 101 b; Ashur 281 b; Ea 108 a; El 133 a; the Hittite gods 120 a-b; Ishtar 383 b f.; Marduk 307 a, 332 a; Nanna 385 b.

²⁶ Bulls: Amon 16 a, 365 a; El 129 b ff.; Enlil 455 b; the Hattian storm god 398 b, Horus 244 b f.; Ishtar (!) 384 b; Nanna 385 b.

²⁷ His/her land/city/people: 365 a ff., Egypt, of Amon; of Aton 370 b; 369 a Heliopolis, Thebes, Memphis; 347 b, 398 a Hatti land, of the storm god; 393 b Hatti land, of the sun goddess; 390 b Nippur etc., of Bel-Marduk. See also above, n. 15.

²⁸ Egypt is the only daughter of Re, 377 a.

is his son,²⁹ servant,³⁰ or favorite,³¹ whom he especially protects. But he also protects ordinary men, cures diseases and grants other material favors,³² cleanses sin,³³ and comforts the afflicted.³⁴ In short, the god described by prayer is everywhere the god who will do the things which are most prayed for by the people who have most cause to pray.

But as father and king, the god of worship is just³⁵ as well as merciful,³⁶ an object — not to say an objectification — of fear as well as love.³⁷ His justice has accordingly expressed itself in the law, both the law of his cult³⁸ and the law of the land,³⁹ which he has given or caused to be

²⁹ Sons: Adapa 101 b; the Hittite king 357 a–b, Keret 143 a ff.; the Pharaoh (of Amon-Re) 4 b, 23 b, etc. (Ramses II claimed to be the son of Montu 256 a, and Seth 257 a, as well as Re, 257 a. In such instances the purely conventional — i. e. rhetorical — nature of the relationship is clear.)

³⁰ Servants: The Assyrian kings regularly execute the order of Ashur 275 a ff.; Hammurabi, of Anum and Enlil, 164 a, of Marduk 165 b; Kantuzilis, of the sun god, 400 b; Keret, of El, 144 b; Meshu, of Chemosh, 320 b; Mursilis, of the storm god, 394 b ff., of Telepinus, 396 b; Nabonidus, of Marduk, 310 b; Nebuchadnezzar, of Marduk, 307 a; Sargon, of Ishtar, 267 b.

³¹ Favorites: Cyrus 316 a, Esarhaddon 289 a, Hammurabi 270 b, Mursilis 203 b, Nabonidus 313 a, Ramses II 199 a, Thut-mose III 235 b.

³² Gods who cure diseases or do other material favors: Amon-Re 369 b, Bel-Marduk 70 b, the Hittite gods generally 352 b, Ishtar 384 a, the sun goddess of Arinna 393 b; Tarpatassis 348 b, Telepinus 397 a.

³³ See above n. 22.

³⁴ Gods who comfort the afflicted or help the poor and oppressed: Amon 366 a, Ishtar 383 a, Marduk 436 b, Shamash 391 a, Telepinus 397 a.

³⁵ This is true not only of gods who are singled out as judges, e. g., Osiris 34 a, Shamash 178 a, Yamm 130 a; but also of the major gods generally, e. g. Amon is the source of truth 372 a, and requires truth 381 a; slander and false accusation are “disliked by the gods” of Assyria 289 a, baseness is an abomination to Ashur and Marduk (*ibid.*); further: Bel 70 b, the Egyptian gods generally 410 a, Sin 386 b, Telepinus 397 a. The justice of the gods appears especially in the actions of those who serve them. (E. g. the gods made Hammurabi king that he might establish justice, 704 a; and the messiah, as servant of the Egyptian gods, will establish justice, 446 a.) Also, in the claims of those who seek their favor. (E. g. the Egyptian “Protestation of Guiltlessness,” 34 a–36 b, concludes, “I have done that which men said and that with which gods are content. I have satisfied a god with that which he desires. I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked . . . I have effected justice for the Lord of Justice.”) See further the evidence cited above, n. 21, and cross refs. there.

³⁶ See above ns. 22 and 24.

³⁷ Fear; Amon 11 a, Anum and Enlil 164 a, Ashur 285 a, Hittite gods generally 394 b, Ishtar 384 a, Marduk 69 b.

Love: Amon 366 a, Bel-Marduk 332 b f., the Hattian sun god 400 a f., Ishtar 383 a, Shamash 388 a.

³⁸ Gods who establish cults or cult laws: The Akkadian gods generally 43 b; Ea 68 b; Marduk 69 a f., 311 a, 316 b; Nanna 385 b; Ptah 5 b; Telepinus 397 a.

³⁹ Sumero-Akkadian kingship is of divine institution 43 b, 265 b; Egyptian likewise 4 b f., 17 a. Gods as givers of civil law or legal decisions: Bel 331 a; Ishtar 384 a; Shamash 388 a ff.; Shamash, Sin, Adad and Ishtar 391 a. Egyptian law is inadequately

given. The law of his cult provides that his worship shall be conducted, frequently under the supervision of a special priesthood, by sacrifices which are often strikingly similar from one country to another,⁴⁰ and with the observation of tabus which vary from place to place but show a general similarity of attitude toward the divine.⁴¹ The similarities of ancient codes of civil law are too well known to need description, and their practical independence is well recognized.⁴² But it should be

represented in ANET, as in the remains, but the Pharaoh appears elsewhere as the establisher of the laws given by the gods, e. g., H. I. Bell, *Egypt*, Oxford, 1948, p. 57 (Philometor I, where the title is a dynastic hand-me-down). The goddess Maat ("Truth" or "Justice") will not rest unless the king's decrees be enforced, 213 a and n. 2 *ibid.* "The good ruler, performing benefactions for his father (Amon) and all the gods," is one who sets up justice, 251 b. For Queen Hat-shepsut's statement that the Asiatics "ruled without Re, and he did not act by divine command down to the reign of my majesty" (231 a) the translator (*ibid.* n. 4) proposes Gardiner's explanation that the Pharaoh "ascribed all his official acts to obedience to orders given him by the deity." This is what would be expected, given the practice elsewhere in the ancient Near East. All the law codes of ancient near-eastern origin to which we have coherent preambles state in them the divine authorization of the law. Lipit-Ishtar "established justice in Sumer and Akkad in accordance with the word of Enlil," 160 b; Enlil called him "to the princship of the land in order to establish justice in the land." (*ibid.*) The bas-relief at the top of the Hammurabi stela shows Shamash giving either the law or the order to write it. The prologue says, "Anum and Enlil named me . . . Hammurabi, . . . to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak." 164 a. The conclusion says, "By the order of Shamash, the great judge of heaven and earth, may my justice prevail in the land; by the word of Marduk, my lord, may my statutes have no one to scorn them." 178 a.

⁴⁰ Egyptian bread offerings 416 a, oblations 417 b, incense 420 a, animal sacrifice 36 b, 327 a, 417 b, 447 a. El commands the sacrifice of sheep, goats and turtle doves, and libations of wine and honey, 143 b. Hittite sacrifices involve the same general materials, though the rites seem to have been peculiar, 348 a ff. The similarities of the sacrificial cult of Uruk to that described in the P material of the OT are clear, 343 a ff. Even of later times, when the Jews were self-consciously insisting on their difference from the heathen, Lieberman can remark (*op. cit.*, p. 130), "There was a general pattern in the ancient world of temples and sacrifices . . . which the Jews shared."

⁴¹ The pig an abomination to the Egyptians, 10 b; Sumero-Akkadian tabus 117 a (eating abominations), 344 b (materials tabu in the service of particular deities). Hittite tabus 207 b ff., 400 b. Later parallels, Lieberman, *op. cit.*, 164 ff., esp. 169.

⁴² T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, revised ed., N. Y., 1950, p. 74, finds Hebrew law closest to Canaanite (doubtless because so little is known of the latter) and the relation even between these one of gradual and indirect adaptation. It may be questioned whether even this be not an overstatement of the importance of the connection, for the details in which Meek finds clearest evidence of the influence (pp. 70-73, e. g. the law of the goring ox, with its recognition of the special case of the ox known to be dangerous and its substitution of a fine for a death penalty) easily admit of explanation by common cultural background and by the generally consistent pattern of cultural change from primitive societies, in which death is primarily an occasion of expiation and purification, to more advanced ones, which are more concerned with the financial loss it occasions.

noticed that everywhere the civil law, like the cult law, is the god's law, and an offender against either is an offender against the god.⁴³

Now — since the gods were like men — it was expected everywhere that a god would punish men who offended him and would reward those who did what he wanted;⁴⁴ this, moreover, was what he was for. And since he was everywhere thought to want sacrifices,⁴⁵ it was also by sacrifices that men sought to placate him when they thought they had offended him or to secure his good will when they wanted special favors. The *do ut abeas* and *do ut des* relationships are found in all countries of the ancient Near East. But since everywhere the major deities demanded other things beside sacrifice, it was natural that the different ways of pleasing them should sometimes be contrasted, and that there should be some individuals who decided that it was better not to sin in the first place than to sin and offer sacrifice, or who maintained that the sacrifice of a wicked man was less pleasing to god than the prayer of a righteous one.⁴⁶ Moreover, since religious observance, whether of moral or of ritual requirements, naturally lends itself to abuse by the temperamentally scrupulous (in psychological jargon the 'compulsives'), it is not surprising that everywhere there were some who came to advocate a righteousness greater than that required by law.⁴⁷ Naturally, such individuals were rare, and there was no such economic interest to preserve their works as that which preserved works embodying the priesthood's doctrine of atonement by sacrifice; consequently there is no reason to believe that the earliest preserved instances of their opinions are the earliest which actually occurred. Individual perfectionists, like individuals with other psychological abnormalities, are regularly produced and neglected by every large society.

⁴³ The "Protestation of Guiltlessness," 34 a ff., contains both civil (B 2, 4, 5) and ritual (A 21, 34) offences. Evildoers, whatever the evil, violate the law of Re, 8a. Those who neglect to punish the wicked will themselves be punished by the god (Shamash) 117 a. The law of Hammurabi is the law of Shamash, 178 b. See above, n. 39.

⁴⁴ Gods punish offenders: Ashur 300 a, the Egyptian gods generally 251 b f., Enlil 95 a, the Hattian sun god 400 b, Hittite gods generally 208 a, Marduk 266 b, 315 b. For the general presupposition see esp. the prayer to any god or goddess, 391 a ff. (cf. *sup.* n. 9).

Gods reward their worshipers: Ahuramazda 317 a, Egyptian gods (even non-Egyptian rulers) 27 b, Hittite deities 396 a, Marduk 315 b.

See also above, n. 21.

⁴⁵ Gods want sacrifices: Akkadian 117 a, Egyptian 36 a, Hittite 124 a.

⁴⁶ "The Instruction for King Meri-ka-Re" 417 b.

⁴⁷ "The Instruction of Amen-em-Opet," the *locus classicus* of this "higher morality" has every appearance of having been produced by long accretion. The same tradition has also furnished most of the items in the "Protestation of Guiltlessness" 34 a ff. For similar developments in the Mesopotamian tradition cf. 426 b (recompense evil with good) and 430 b (resist not evil and Shamash will reward you).

As against such eccentrics, most people were probably content to believe that rewards and punishments were given, whether to individuals or to the whole people, according as men obeyed or disobeyed the usual social and religious codes of the society. The relation between people and god was therefore always essentially a contractual one, and the question as to when it was first given dramatic expression in a formal contract is one for the history rather of rhetoric than of theology.

Because of their contractual relationship with the gods, people gave attention to the prophets who everywhere⁴⁸ claimed to know by revelation the country's state of obedience or disobedience and the rewards or punishments soon to be allotted. (All the major prophets — i. e. those whose works have been preserved in quantity — prophesy change. Why? In the first place, because change is 'news'; the prophet was the newspaper editor of his day, and if he had no news he got no audience. In the second place, because change always comes, and those prophets who foretold a continuation of the old order were sooner or later discredited. Of course, given the common theological structure outlined above, change, if for the better, was conceived as divine reward, if for the worse, as punishment.) Now the punishment of a society has to be effected by drought or flood, famine, pestilence, internal discord, or defeat by an enemy.⁴⁹ Therefore the prophets everywhere ring the changes on these five themes,⁵⁰ supplement them by threats of miracles — usually earthquakes and eclipses — and sometimes even foretell that if the people continue in their wickedness their god will utterly destroy them.⁵¹ Likewise, the good things they prophesy are merely the reverse of these, except that, in place of the earthquakes and eclipses, they often foretell, as something no less miraculous, the coming of a good king who will save his people.⁵²

⁴⁸ Oracles of Bel 331 a, prophets in Egypt 30 b and n. 19 *ibid.*, but the presence there of prophets in the ordinary sense of the word is known from references to prophecies (416 a) and from the prophecies themselves (441 a ff.). Prophets of Baal and Astarte in Egypt 250 a, n. 13; Assyrian kings act on oracles of Ashur 275 a ff. Prophets (ecstatics) in the Gilgamesh epic 87 a; Hittite prophets 396 a; oracles of Shamash 388 a; of Sin 386 b.

⁴⁹ The Egyptian gods punish Egypt by military defeat 251 b; "God Enlil . . . gave the accumulated possessions (of his city) to the enemy" 337 b; Marduk punished his land by subjecting it to Assyria 309 a, he subjects it to Cyrus 315 b; the Hittite gods leave their land to its enemies 396 b; Omri "humbled Moab many years . . . for Chemosh was angry at his land." 320 b. The other punishments are too common to illustrate, see the following note.

⁵⁰ See the oracles and prophecies collected on pp. 441 ff. *passim*.

⁵¹ Enlil 481 a, the coming destruction of Babylon, *Cuneiform Texts*, 13.49. Egypt is to be destroyed so thoroughly that Re must found it anew, 445 a.

⁵² Hat-shepsut claims to be the fulfilment of a messianic prophecy, 231 a. Several examples of such prophecies, 445 b–452 b. It is hard to decide whether the customs at the accession of a new ruler imitate these prophecies more than the prophecies imitate

III.

Such was the common theology of the ancient Near East — and not only of the ancient Near East, but of most periods and countries where polytheism has been the religion of civilized peoples. In describing it I have discussed only its appearance in the ancient Near East, because that alone is usually referred to in the study of the OT, and I have tried to suggest how, for psychological, social and rhetorical reasons, it might have developed independently in any ancient near-eastern country. That it did develop independently in each is strongly suggested, I think, by the uniformity of the results, which can be explained better by postulating relatively uniform causes, that is, social, psychological and rhetorical patterns, rather than accidents of historical transmission. The interaction of these patterns produced a single 'pattern for major deity' to which every deity who in that area and time became major had more or less to conform, whatever the historical or mythological accidents of his ancestry.

Consequently, parallels between theological material in the OT and in 'Ancient Near Eastern Texts' cannot be taken off hand as indicating any literary dependence, common source, or cultural borrowing. The number of instances in which the OT has hitherto been supposed to depend on foreign sources — small though that number is — is probably too large. It is only when the texts are parallel in some peculiar, accidental detail, something which *cannot* be explained as a probable product of natural development, that the parallelism can be taken as *proving* literary connection.

The knowledge of this general pattern should serve as a guide and a caution in OT studies. It should serve as a guide by making clear the peculiarities of the OT, the points which need special explanation — for instance, Yahweh's abnormal jealousy and the almost complete neglect of the underworld. It should serve as a caution, not only to those who would discover foreign influences everywhere, but also to those who think it possible to reconstruct the history of theological thought in Israel and then detect and date interpolations by the stage of theological development which they show. In the first place, this procedure depends on arguments from silence, and the OT probably contains so small a selection of the literature of ancient Israel that arguments from silence are utterly untrustworthy. In the second place, it is possible that there never was any major theological development in Israel, that there were only shifts of emphasis and occasional working out of corollaries. The

the customs, or vice versa. For the customs — or, at least, the court rhetoric — in Egypt see 378 b f., parallel Assyro-Babylonian material in R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, vol. 1, Chicago, 1892, no. 2.

system above outlined is essentially that of Philo as outlined by Wolfson,⁵³ but it is quite primitive enough to have been held by a tribe of nomads, and there is no good proof that the Israelites in their nomadic period did not hold it. To suppose that Yahweh's control of foreign nations began with Amos⁵⁴ is to neglect the deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of Palestine. To suppose that Yahweh's concern for morality began with Nathan⁵⁵ is to neglect the divine backing of the law, which is characteristic of such primitive legislation as that from which the present legal documents of the OT must have developed. As for the famous 'discovery of monotheism' by second Isaiah, that was probably not a discovery of monotheism, but an exaggeration of patriotism. Two things, at least, are certain: It has patriotic precedents and it was used for patriotic purposes. No sooner was the God of Israel declared to be the only God than he promised Israel the hegemony of the world. If this be philosophy it is puzzling, but if it be patriotism it may be primitive. In that event the fact that God's rule of the whole world had never before been *so much emphasized* could be explained on practical grounds: As to power, the attribute of the god of Israel was merely that of the major god of any ancient near-eastern people, viz., to be greater than the gods of their neighbors. Thus when he gave them Canaan he was greater than the gods of the hill cities, when they fought the Philistines he was greater than Dagon, when they were established as a kingdom he was greater than the gods of the adjacent kingdoms, and when they were scattered in a diaspora from one end of the known world to the other, what was left for him but monotheism?

⁵³ H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, Cambridge, 1947. By "system" I refer, of course, to Philo's foregone conclusions, not to the philosophy with which he justified them.

⁵⁴ This supposition is made by R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* N. Y., N. D. (1948), p. 580, "Like other religions of antiquity, the religion of Israel before Amos was national in its appeal. Jehovah was the God of Israel, his jurisdiction limited to the land of Israel." Amos, because he extended Jehovah's jurisdiction over all nations, "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of religions." (*ibid.*, cf. notes 18-20 above.)

⁵⁵ R. H. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 359, thinks the teaching, put in the mouth of Nathan (II Sam 12), "that Jehovah would not tolerate criminal actions and that his worship involved moral conduct" . . . "was truly revolutionary in the time of Solomon, when Jehovah was merely champion of Israel and still approved of bloody deeds as treacherous as those of Ehud (Judg 3 20 f.) and Jael (Judg 5 25 f.), and even later, through Elijah and Elisha, sanctioned the assassination of kings (I Kings 19 15-17; II Kings 9)." To suppose a god indifferent to morality because he approves the murder of national enemies or of the patrons of his competitors (or because of his personal peccadilloes as recorded in mythology) is to misunderstand not only ancient, but a good deal of modern religion.



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