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## **Studying Religion Scientifically: Motive and Method**

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**Nmah, Patrick Enoch** - Department of Religion and Human Relations,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University – Awka

### **Abstract**

*Motive and method provide one of the most contentious and thorny sets of issues in contemporary academic debate in the study of religion. Byrne (1988), opined that the debate on the motives and methods of studying religion academically or scientifically has not yet ended, which can equally be confirmed by a quick survey of recent books and articles on the topic. This paper, while not pretending to say last word on the debate, has the hope that the clarifications of these methods and motive may in some way facilitate the achievement of the ultimate aim of the scientific study of religion (Religionswissenschaft), which is intellectual knowledge (wissenschaft) and understanding (verstehen) or what Budolph (1981) calls the “intentional meaning” of religion qua religion.*

### **Introduction**

The academic study of religion is sometimes called “the scientific study of religion” or simply “the science of religion” (Religionswissenschaft). Smart (1973) has defined the scientific study of religion as “an enterprise which is aspectual polymethodic, pluralistic, and without clear boundaries. Having given that definition, Smart proceeds to explain what he means as follows,

It is aspectual in the sense that religion is to be treated as an aspect of existence. Men behave and react religiously, and this is something the study of religion picks out: just as economics picks out the economic behaviour of people. The study of religion is polymethodic in the sense that differing methods or disciplines are brought to bear on the aforesaid aspect. Thus one needs to treat religion by the methods of history,

sociological inquiry, phenomenology, culturally, economically, politically and so on. It is pluralistic because there are many religions and religious traditions. The study of religion is without clear boundaries, for it is not possible or realistic to generate a clear-cut definition of religion (pp.8-9).

We shall return to some of the above statement, especially in connection with the polymethodic character of the 'scientific study of religion.' Indeed the whole enterprise of studying religion can justifiably be called 'the science of religion' (Penner and Yonan, 1972). Hence religion is an interesting academic study one should embark upon to study.

### **Studying Religion Scientifically**

Sharp (1975) has quoted someone as asking rhetorically: "if there is science in all things, is there no science in the dispensation of God?" Etymologically, the English word "science" is derived from the Latin word "scientia" which in other word means knowledge or epistemology. Thus, the word "science" in its current usage, does not merely mean ample knowledge fortified with numerous facts, but also knowledge that is systematized. The systematization of knowledge necessarily involves the accumulation of facts. According to Brand (1959), the facts thus accumulated formed the basic data for classifying, analyzing, and comparing. From such classifying, analyzing, and comparing, emerge a series of general laws or hypotheses or theories which are relevant and essential to the interpretation and advancement of knowledge. These general laws or theories constitute, therefore, "the content of empirical science" or "the sum total of statements rationally inferable from observation and experiment. Hence, the fundamental philosophy of "comparative religion", according to Muller (1973), is that he who knows only one religion, knows none, and can therefore make no judicious general statements or theories about even the one religion which he knows, let alone about the phenomenon of religion in general.

The method described so far for acquiring, systematizing, and advancing knowledge (scientia) through the process of accumulating, classifying, analyzing, and comparing the data (facts) and arriving at general theories or conclusions about the subject or object of study, is what is usually described or referred to as "the scientific method" of investigation in any discipline. This method has now come to be embraced by a new science – the science of religion – which is more than two centuries younger than the scientific method itself. Thus, the academic study of religion or "the science of

religion,” claims to comply exactly with the scientific method described herein.

At this juncture, let us x-ray some of the approaches in studying religion scientifically.

**(a) The Polymethodic Approach**

Polymethodicality, according to Smart, is the fact that the scientific study of religion employs a variety of methods to study religion. It can use either separately or in any combination the methods of history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, phenomenology, philology, social psychology, politics, economics, medicine, physiology, literature, and so on. These various disciplines are to be regarded as co-workers in the “field” of religion-co-workers using different tools but working in the same “field” for the common goal of understanding religion as such. In other words, polymethodicality as a way of studying religion scientifically is interdisciplinary. Penner, and Yonan asserted that “methodological pluralism is necessary for an adequate study of religion” (p.III). The scientist of religion cannot reduce religion to anything other than what it is essentially religion *sui generis*.

In this connection, Bianchi’s (1985) definition of “the history of religion” (or “the science of religion”), “a science which using accepted historical method and with the support of psychology, sociology and phenomenology, establishes and examines facts in order to identify, historically integrated religious worlds and to study their respective characteristics. The study of religion must remain the meeting-ground of complementary (not competing) methods – historical, sociological, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological, etc. Great harm has been done to the study in the past by those who have insisted that their approach excludes every conceivable alternative. Only as methods and approaches meet can we hope to understand and appreciate religion in all its complexity (Sharpe, 1975).

**(b) Methodological Neutralism and Objectivity**

A particularly useful and recommendable approach to the academic study of religion is the one called “methodological neutralism” or simply “methodological bracketing” – a principle which phenomenologists call *epoche*. This approach, which “steers that golden middle path between reductionism and dogmatism, “calls for and encourages the principle of suspended personal bias or prejudice; or the principle of value – free and objective judgment on the religion under study, there, the true scientific or

academic student or scholar of religion is not expected to believe in order to understand the aspects of the religion (s) which he is studying, for it is quite possible for one to understand something without believing it to be true (or good) or untrue (or bad).

He is not allowed, according to the rules of methodological neutrality and morality, to pass value – judgments on the religious phenomena he is studying especially if those phenomena are other people's. Neither should he allow his personal belief (religion) to influence his scholarly scientific objectivity nor is the scholar of religion expected to ask or answer questions about the truth or falsity of religious claims, experiences or belief. He passes no value judgment on the religious teachings or beliefs of other people. He must bear in mind that the science of religion is a descriptive and analytic – not normative – science, he remains methodologically agnostic about questions of truth or falsity in the religious systems which he may be studying but describes and analyses the religious systems phenomenologically as they present themselves to the five physical senses. He does not allow himself to fall into the trap of doctrinal debates or theological or metaphysical speculations or guesses. For speculations or guesses are the very antipoles of science. His conclusions must be based on empirical research findings, not on personal feelings or preconceived opinions. He must always remember that the ultimate purpose of his work is to seek, in an attitude of methodological disinterestedness, intellectual knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of religion and its role as an aspect of human life and social reality, not increased piety or spirituality on his part or on the part of those who come to study his work.

### **(c) Non-empirical Aspects of Religion and Scientific Methodology**

Does the scholar of religion have any scientific way of knowing and understanding the interior religious experience and consciousness of religious people? In other words, have religionswissenschaft methodological tools for measuring such subjective matters as religious and religious consciousness of religious people-two important dimensions of religion?

Religionswissenschaft have the methodological tools for measuring such subjective (interior religious experience and consciousness of religious people) matters. It would seem, then, that the answer to the questions raised in the preceding paragraph must be negative: the scientist - of religion or other-has no scientific method of knowing and understanding subjective, indemonstrable experience or dimensions of religion or religious behaviour

or belief, but does that mean that the scientist of religion has, therefore, simply to ignore all questions related to the subjective, indemonstrable dimensions of religion, such as narrations about religious experiences, dreams, visions, special revelations, private beliefs and convictions, values, feelings, fears, hopes, emotions, and the like.

No, true scientist of religion does not, indeed ideally should not, simply ignore religious claims or belief that border on the subjective. He takes them as given with all amount of objective seriousness and sincerity, for even the subjective, empirically undemonstrable claims and beliefs of religion or religious persons are among the basic data which academic religious studies accumulates, classifies, compares, and analyses for the purposes of understanding religion and what it does to the religious. Such data are especially valuable in the psycho – social – scientific analysis of religion in that they serve as indicators of aspects of the influence or impact of religious belief on social beings, and how these beings transfer such influence to the larger society through their actions and behaviour. For instance, no psychologist of religion worth his salt would ignore the potential effect of religious emotions, hopes, feelings, and fears on the religious.

There are other approaches in studying religion scientifically such as religion and culture, appropriate method for appropriate subject and so on.

### **Motives Precipitating the Study of Religion**

The methodological implications of the motives that under lie the study of religion and more particularly, the academic study of religion have not received the attention they deserve. They are of the utmost importance, however, for the differences of motivation between the study of religion legitimated by the modern University and the scholarly study of religion that antedates it, sponsor radically different, if not mutually exclusive, approaches to its study.

When we talk of the motives, we classify them as missionary motive, vocative motive whereby a vocative religious scholar is subdue subjective, pre-conceive ideas and face objectivity; a study for the betterment of the individual concerned and ultimately, is concerned with salvation. There is also the recognition of the psychological, cultural and political roles religion has played in society and of its continuing importance in these respects, in terms of tolerance, harmonious living, peaceful co-existence and development not over looking its dysfunctional roles in our own context seems for many to imply that the study of religion ought to be undertaken as

support to religion in its manifold tasks-that is, that it ought to complement religion. It deals with historical fact that aims such as these have emerged in the development of Western culture.

There is no assumption here, that is, of the *sui generis* character of such systems of experience and belief and consequently no argument for the recognition of, say, magiewissenschaft as a new discipline or call for the establishment of departments of magic or astrology. The postulation of the *sui generis* character of religion but character of religion but not of magic, it appears, rests on the uncritical assumption that religion, in some fundamental sense, is true while magic (astrology, etc) is not. The academic or scientific study of religion is, I would argue, simply one of several special areas into which the scientific vocation of which Weber speaks is organized and that, like the others, it seeks self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is necessary in this essay to give a precise formulation of the aim of the study of religion qua study and to explicate the implications this has for the method of the study and how the subject ought to be taught in the academic university setting.

The motive for studying religion must base on academic, that is, purely intellectual/scientific reasons and not as instrumental in the achievement of religious, cultural, political or other ends. This means, quite simply, that the academic/scientific study of religion must aim only at understanding religion where understanding is mediated through an intersubjectively testable set of statements about religious phenomena, and religious traditions. As with any other scientific enterprise, therefore, the academic study of religion aims at public knowledge of public facts, and religions are important public facts.

Religion it must be recognized, is a form of human activity and therefore like any other form of human activity can become the object of human reflection. According to Wiebe (1985), this does not of course, imply that persons who are religiously committed cannot be scientific students of religion or, for that matter, that Marxist atheists ought to be excluded from departments of religious studies. That institutional commitment is a kind of epistemic morality-a commitment to what can reasonably be called "the morality of scientific knowledge". 'Morality' here does not refer to the moral effects scientific knowledge may or may not have-the uses to which scientific knowledge be put-as important as that may be, but rather the behaviour required for the achievement of the goal of public knowledge of public facts.

The goal of the academic study of religion, therefore, to reiterate, is an understanding of the phenomena/phenomenon of religion contained in scientifically warrantable claims about religion and religious traditions. All the simplest logical level the student of religion functions somewhat like the scientific naturalist with a concern 'to collect', describe and classify the phenomena observed.

The range of data, obviously, is enormous, involving rites, rituals, beliefs, practices, art, architecture, music, and so on. Some departments of perspective in the descriptive accounts is provided in relating it to the field of events and structures of which it is a part; in comparing it to similar phenomena in other cultural and social contexts; and in providing at least a narrative account of its emergence and historical development.

Though knowledge of religion at the descriptive level is richly informative, it is not primarily that for which the student of religion strives. Indeed, an increasing flow of such information soon inundates the individual for it is simply not possible for any one person to know all the particulars of the world's religious traditions. If these are the aims or motives of the academic of study religion then that study is structurally indistinguishable from other scientific undertakings. The academic study of religion is, then, a positive science and not a religious or metaphysical enterprise in that it concerns itself with religion as a public fact and not a divine mystery.

The study of religion that appropriately finds its place within the university curriculum is that that deals with a critical study of a human cultural phenomenon and not a quest for some ultimate meaning or truth. It seeks 'objective' knowledge of particular aspect of human culture. It is, therefore, essentially a positive, (not positivistic) social scientific endeavour that, although not necessarily behaviouristic is nevertheless behaviouralist in its approach to religion in that it attempts to provide a public rather than a private knowledge (Comstock, 1981). It is the search for "objective" knowledge gained-free of presuppositions for its own sake alone.

### **Modern Methods of Studying Religion**

A very large number of scientific enterprises have studied religion: anthropology, sociology, psychology, the phenomenology of religion, Religionswissenschaft, the history of religions, and "comparative religion," whose place among religious studies is no less of a problem than its name is a matter of course in English – speaking countries. No methodological approach, it seems fair to state, can be entirely wrong, provided it is not

explicitly paradoxical or sectarian. But a methodological approach can be “reductive,” not in Husserl’s sense but in the sense that it is not adequate to its subject matter, that is that it is complete.

One of the modern methods in studying religion is the culture-area approach. The notion of “culture-area” or “subculture -area” as used in this text is not to be limited to the linguistic, cultural and socio-political map of West Africa as drawn by the colonialists. Rather, my idea of a culture-area includes the entire geo-political space occupied by people of a given cultural identity, irrespective of the extent of the space occupied by that people through the process of migration. For example, there are Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Biron, or Tiv Communities in say Lagos, Kaduna or Ibadan. Similarly, there are Northern Hausa, Nupe, Fulani Communities in the Southern parts of Nigeria. Wherever people from any of these culture-areas migrate to, they carry with them, if not the whole of their religion, at least substantial elements of it clothed in aspect of their total culture.

Many teachers of West African traditional religions in African institutions of higher learning send their students back to the ethnic communities and subculture areas from where those students come, to research on various themes and topics in the traditional religions of this people. This approach provides an opportunity for both the teachers and the students to compare notes – a very important stage in the comparative study of religion. Over a period of many years, a particular University Department of Religious Studies will thus be in possession of valuable research material for analyzing, classifying, and comparing.

The need to avoid reductionism does not require a “religious” hermeneutics of things religious, if by “religious hermeneutics” one intends to contrast “religious” and “cultural” or to distinguish them absolutely. According to Bianchi (1985), from the point of view of the history of religions, religion is a part of culture. Not that it can be reduced to culture. It is culture, and it shares in culture’s creativity and variety. The history of religions must be holistic in two senses. It must study religion – a particular religion or a particular religion phenomenon – within the context of culture, that is, within the context of that culture or set of cultures to which it belongs. At the same time, it must be prepared to hold together the threads, that is, the morphological or historical continuities that link the particular religion or some of its elements to the polymorphous and problematic world of religion.



Before proceeding further, however, let me emphasize that it is not necessary to identify “systematic” with “phenomenological”. For example, no one would want to substitute “phenomenological” for “systematic” in such expressions as “systematische Religionswissenschaft” or, even more clearly, “systematische Religionsgeschichte,” for to do so would engender an epistemological monster with the name of “phenomenologische Religionsgeschichte.”

Phenomenology and history complement each other. Phenomenology cannot do without ethnology, philology and other historical disciplines. Phenomenology, on the other hand, gives the historical disciplines that sense of the religious which they are not able to capture. As it is conceived, religious phenomenology is the religious understanding of (Verstandnis) as aforesaid of history; it is history in its religious dimensions. To Pettazoni (1959), religious phenomenology and history are not two sciences, but are two complementary aspects of the integral science of religion, and the science of religion as such has a well-defined character given to it by its unique and proper subject matter.

In the end, Rudolph (1981), too, seems to approach a history of religion conceived holistically as a discipline that expresses itself in historical comparison when he writes that this “comparative or systematic study of religions-which is not, according to Wach, normative – is proper to vergleichende Religionswissenschaft” (“the comparative science of religion”) or better, to vergleichender Religionsgeschichte (“the comparative history of religions”). In the discussion about the systematic and historical aspects of the history of religions, two interconnected topics call for urgent clarification: the question of definition – that is, the meaning of our categories (“religion”, “deity”, “ritual”, “myth”, and so on) and the process by which they are formed – and the question of comparison, particularly historical comparison, as a path that will enable historians of religion to enucleate categories which, far from establishing a limit, may serve as tools for the study of the fundamental dynamisms in the religious history of mankind. The study of such dynamisms is, clearly, the basic aim of our discipline. Only the “historicization” in the sense of philosophical historicism or of anthropological “cultural relativism” – will allow us to overcome the difficulties to which Van Baaren pointed out.

The history of religions is a way to unity of religions. It is the bringing to light of the unity of all religions one of the most important tasks of the

science of religion. The science's inquiry into truth, Sharpe (1975) citing Heiler indicates,

*The important consequences for the practical relationship of one religion to another. Who ever recognizes their unity must take it seriously by tolerance in word and deed. This scientific insight into this unity calls for a practical realization in friendly exchange and in common ethical endeavour, fellowship and cooperation (p.25).*

He was here putting into words what has become a widespread popular assumption in recent discussion about comparative religion (the science of religion): that the only ultimately justifiable reason for engaging in this study is to improve relations between the adherents of different religious traditions. Assuming that a student of comparative religion, it may be asked, does not hold the key to better understanding between Christians and Hindus, Muslims and Jews, what can be the purpose of all the effort he has put into his studies?

Those who ask such questions as these may be depressed, or puzzled, that the academic specialist in this area often answer that the study is its own justification, and that the introduction of such "subjective" and emotionally loaded categories as 'dialogue' into the discussion will inevitably mean the loss of precision and quality, and his calling. There is another reason for examining this material. An impression common among orthodox Christians (and perhaps others) is that the student of comparative religion is by nature only comparatively religious, that is, that he is committed to religious relativity and syncretism and hence not to be trusted. The Patriarchs of comparative religion such as C.P. Tiele, Max Muller, J.G. Frazer and P.D. Chantepie, dela Saussaye – were 'liberals', in that they were uncommitted to any very specific external seat of authority in religion (Sharpe, 1975). To these men, the only religious authority was the authority of truth discovered by a process of free inquiry. Although they were mainly concerned with problems of religious origins, the problems of living religion were not foreign to most of them such as Max Muller.

The study of comparative religion does contribute to the creation of a sense of universal brotherhood. Who will save the world out of its common and enormous want and distress of religious extremism, fundamentalism, radicalism or 'mayhemism', into which we are sinking deeper and deeper? Politics, Science, Economics? They avail nothing with the vital thing. The vital thing they failed to avail is the unanimous, strong and common will or

responsibility of the entire cultural civilization to master evil through mutual effort and a mutual aim, through a reciprocal responsibility and a well planned interchange of purpose.

Only religion with its organizations, its education, its pronouncements, its chosen leaders and standard bearers is capable of fulfilling this purpose. Consequently, if the churches and other religious institutions of the world could only be enlisted on the side of this type of quest for understanding, what might not be achieved? Perhaps spiritual foundation would be created for a general conviction, out of which enduring forms could develop into powerful intrastate, interstate (international) organizations of nations and classes (Sundkler, 1968). This is aimed at the unification of the world of humanity, the welding together of the world's different religions, the reconciliation of religion and science, and the establishment of universal peace. The religious world forum should not be a meeting of opposition to the common enemy variously called 'materialism' or 'secularism'. The different religious men of the East and the West are to share their visions and insights, hopes and fears, plans and purposes.

Unhappily, just as in the political region, so here also this is more an aspiration than an actuality. Comparative religion helps us to further this ideal of the sharing among religions which no longer stand in uncontaminated isolation. They are fellow workers toward the same goal. Accordingly to Sharpe (1975), the different religions are to be used as building stones for the development of a human culture in which the adherents of the different religions may be fraternally united as children of one Supreme. All religions convey to their followers a message of abiding hope. The world will give birth to a new faith which will be but the old faith in another form, the faith of all ages, the potential divinity of man which will work for the supreme purpose written in our hearts and souls, the unity of all mankind. It is my hope and prayer that unbelief, religious mayhem, hatred, jealousy and envy shall disappear and superstition shall not enslave the mind and we shall recognize that we are brothers, one in spirit and one in fellowship. There should be regular state, national and international congress of faiths just as the ones held in 1933 United States, and Britain in 1936, 1937 and 1938 etc.

Reduction stands opposed to religion as a prayer object of study, but it is also opposed to history and to the "ideological – critical function of the history of religions". According to some Philosophers, the historian of religions is

committed only to establishing and describing facts, not to understanding them. Once the intuitionist flavor – of “understand” is bracketed or eliminated from our discourse, we cannot, but oppose such philosophers as well as others who support an alleged “metascience” that is not metaphysics.

### **Conclusion**

It is not the aim of this paper to say the last word on the methodological issues involved in the science of religion. The religions of the world face a completely new situation today. The challenge is acute or enormous for the Semitic or Western religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. They have been accustomed to think of themselves as supreme, in religion and culture, possessing the highest truths and the oldest and best philosophy.

Most of the religions of illiterate or animistic peoples are dying before the onslaught of modern civilization (Parrinder, 1976). Here the anthropologist almost becomes an archaeologist and often prefers what he believes to the “untouched” village to the modern town Christianity and Islam between them are sweeping millions of animistic Africans and Asians into their fold, as Christianity did in America. No doubt many old practices will linger long, as they in Europe, but to understand the dominant religion its leaders and scriptures must be studied. The study of religion scientifically requires complete charity, tolerance, wisdom and understanding. Huston Smith opens his study of the religions of man with a picture of men at prayer, in different lands and varying traditions. From mud huts in Africa to igloos in Labrador Christians are kneeling today to receive the elements of the Holy Eucharist, Western Christianity is emerging from its isolation and only slowly adjusting its thinking to the fact that not only do other religions exist, but that they persist.

Grudgingly it might be admitted that the Jews had a form of religion to which they strangely held fast: their past was sacred history but their present religion could teach nothing. Christianity has faced Islam too, but their relations have not been the happiness. The bloody history of the crusades offsets Turkish atrocities. When the first crusaders captured Jerusalem in the name of God, they massacred nearly all the inhabitants, including women and children, mostly Muslims but even some Jews and Christians. The Muslim world or ummah has still not forgotten this evil deed.

Muhammad, when Muslims regard as the greatest and seal of all prophets, was constantly derided by Christians; even Zwingli who was willing to see Hercules and Socrates in heaven accepted the current slanders about Muhammad, calling him a blind leader of the blind and a slave of sensual pleasures (Parrinder,1976). Christianity has faced many conflicts. For the first three centuries there was sporadic persecution of Christians and the significance of the Cross at the heart of the religion is that it has constantly grappled with suffering and tragedy. In modern times the antagonism with the spirit of the age has left a deep mark, often leading to a divided life wherein the claims of daily life and religion are separated and secularism tolerated. Not only the struggle of science and religion, but the materialist outlook on life and the claims of the state have brought ever-increasing pressure. It is part of the irony of the situation that Christianity has accompanied secularism to other lands, and is sometimes identified with it, a religion of materialism in the eyes of many Africans. But the religious challenge is new, and Christianity tends to regard other religions as rivals without stopping to ask whether they might be allies.

The effect of Christianity has been powerful in education and social reform, less in religion. Christianity has destroyed no temples, as Islam did, and has not spread itself by force. Its greatest successes even in India have been among the outcastes, banned from Hindu temples but welcome into Christian churches.

On the whole the methods employed for the study of religion in the ancient world were not much as different from our own as might be supposed. A different type of Greek tradition was represented by the much-travelled historian Herodotus (c.484 - 425 B.C.), who described many of the religious customs of the Egyptians, Babylonians and Persians. Not only did he describe what he saw and was told (apparently with accuracy he exhibited more than a passing interest in exotic religious phenomena. He was an initiate into the mysteries of Osiris, and believed that Greek culture and religion had derived in large measure from Egypt. He identified Greek gods and goddesses with their Egyptian 'prototypes'- Zeus with Amon, Apollo with Horus, Hephaistos with Ptah, and many more - and has been called one of the first syncretists (Sharpe,1975). It was, however, with the Stoics that the study of religion first became in a real sense "cosmopolitan" (a Stoic word). A pioneer in this area was Chrysippus (280-206 B.C.), to whom Cicero paid tribute in this fragment of comparative study.

The Judaeo - Christen attitude of exclusiveness and intolerance in matters of religion contrasted sharply with the Hellenic attitude of curiosity and intellectual hospitality. The roots of this are to be traced far back into the history of Israel, to the period when the existence of Israel as a nation, being bound up with the maintenance of the pure worship of Yahweh, was considered to be threatened by the worship of “other gods”, notably the gods and goddesses of Canaan

The Old Testament represents the Israelites as inveterate idolaters, despite the divine injunction, ‘You shall have no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:3-4). And throughout the Old Testament there is an intensive polemic against such apostasy. To be sure, there is a measure of recognition of the existence of gods other than Yahweh, and of their proper sphere of influence within their own nations (in e.g. Micah 4:1-5); but what might be tolerable in the non-Israelite world was utterly intolerable in the nation to whom Yahweh had revealed himself, and with whom Yahweh had made his covenant.

Accordingly the prophets in particular castigate the worship of other gods as “adultery” (Ezek. 16), while the images of gods themselves are called by Jeremiah “scare crows in a cucumber field” (10:5) – useless and powerless objects which can neither walk, speak nor stand without support (cf. Ps. 115:3-8). The chief of these theories was thoroughly biblical – that other religions were the work of fallen angels or other evil spirits; such is view expressed by, among others, Justin Martyr, Tatian. Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Cyprian. Another decade of the religious started with the publication of Darwin’s origin of species. Before its end, Herbert Spencer was well started on his elaborate system of synthetic philosophy, Thomas Huxley had confronted Bishop Wilberforce before the British Association in the name of science, E.B. Tylor had launched his theory of “animism”, Benjamin Disraeli had announced that he was on the side of the angels, T.F.M’ Lennan had borrowed the term ‘totemism’ and set it adrift in the scholarly world, and an expatriate German Philologist resident in Oxford, Friedrich Max Muller, had begun to publish a definitive edition of the Sanskrit text of the Rig Veda, written a celebrated book on Comparative Methodology, and suggested to the English – speaking world that so far from science and religion being irreconcilable opposites, there might be a Science of Religion which would do justice to both (Sharpe, 1975).

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