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## ***The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. A Study in Religious Sociology.* Émile Durkheim. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. George Allen & Unwin. 1915. Pp. xi, 456.**

George P. Adams

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Lucifer, the prince of hell, and his prime minister, Satan, are contrasted with each other—Lucifer, a hypochondriac, longing and wailing for his former angelic estate, nervous, capricious, sentimental, swaggering, a cowardly despot; Satan, ever active and optimistic, versatile, bold, full of fun, a loyal though misguided servant. The subordinate position of Satan as compared with the official status of Lucifer is very plausibly traced back by Dr. Rudwin to the Gospel of Nicodemus, where "*Inferus*" appears as Satan's superior.

To sum up—Dr. Rudwin's book is descriptive rather than analytic, statistical rather than historical. But it is a decidedly useful book. No one interested in the popular theology and demonology of the Middle Ages can afford to overlook it.

Two little details may be mentioned at the end. It is hard to see how the author can think (p. 51) that Satan in the John the Baptist episode of the Alsfeld Passion Play changes his disguise from that of an old woman to that of a prior, in the face of so obvious a correction of the text as Creizenach's substitution of "*habitu priori*" for "*habitu prioris*." The quotations from the *Zehnjungfrauenspiel* (p. 63) should have been from the edition of Otto Beckers, not from the older one by Bechstein.

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KUNO FRANCKE.

THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. A STUDY IN RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY. ÉMILE DURKHEIM. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. George Allen & Unwin. 1915. Pp. xi, 456.

The distinguished French sociologist, É. Durkheim, offers in this work an elaborate and painstaking analysis of the rôle which religion plays in human societies. Durkheim is already well known as the editor of *L'Année sociologique* and as the author of *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, *De la division du travail social*, and *Le suicide*, and as the leader of a brilliant group of sociologists whose influence has been increasingly felt beyond the borders of their own country. *La vie religieuse* is of profound interest to the philosopher, theologian, sociologist, and anthropologist. The author offers us an interpretation of religion, and he supports and illustrates that interpretation by an elaborate and penetrating analysis of Australian totemism. The noteworthy aspect of this most recent book of Durkheim is not that the author studies the social aspect and function of religious ideas and ritual, but that he undertakes in a radical and thorough-going fashion to derive every enduring and significant aspect of religion from man's social experience. Until you can see the way

in which religious ideas and rites are thrown off by the mechanism of social contact, by the life of men in groups, you have no proper understanding of what anything religious means. This is what Durkheim in substance says. And, incidentally, once you understand these processes of man's social life, you will comprehend not only his religion but the fundamental categories of his thinking as well. But that is another story.

Before coming to his own definition of religion, Durkheim clears the way by a criticism of some of the more common definitions of religion. It is entirely inadequate to define religion in terms of the supernatural and the mysterious; the idea of the supernatural is but a late-comer in the history of religion. It is foreign to primitive peoples as well as to the lower levels of culture. Nor is the idea of divinity, of the gods or of God, any more satisfactory as an earmark of religion. There is no such idea in authentic Buddhism, and even in the theistic religions there are many rites which have nothing to do with a god. How then shall we define the essence of religion? Durkheim's answer consists of two parts. First, religion centres around a distinction between the sacred and the common. This distinction differs from that between the supernatural and the natural in that both the sacred and the profane fall *within* man's natural experience. But magic, as well as religion, makes use of the distinction between common things and sacred things. Another constituent of religion must be found which distinguishes it from magic. Religion is always an affair of a church, of a social community; magic is individual and anti-social. "There is no church of magic" (p. 44). This idea of a church is no incidental concomitant of religion; it enters into the very essence and definition of religion. The most important thing you can observe about religion is the way in which it both cements and also gives utterance to the collective life of some group. Combining these two essential elements of religion, Durkheim gives us the following definition (p. 47): "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them."

With this preliminary definition Durkheim next offers a trenchant criticism of two traditional conceptions of religion, animism and naturism. He contends that dreams cannot possibly account for the idea of the soul, that the phenomenon of death does not explain the transformation of a soul into a spirit, that neither the cult of the souls of the dead nor religious anthropomorphism at large is

primitive. Moreover, and more important, animism cannot be an adequate interpretation of religion, for it reduces religion to nothing more than a system of hallucinations. The author's words are worth quoting:

"It is inadmissible that systems of ideas like religions, which have held so considerable a place in history, and from which in all times men have come to receive the energy which they must have to live, should be made up of a tissue of illusions. Today we are beginning to realize that law, morals, and even scientific thought itself were born of religion, were for a long time confounded with it, and have remained penetrated with its spirit. How could a vain fantasy have been able to fashion the human consciousness so strongly and so durably?" (p. 69).

The naturism of Max Müller does not offer any more satisfactory account of religion. According to it, religion is permeated with illusions and fallacies, and it is unable to account for the division of things into sacred and profane. Where animism and naturism fail, totemism succeeds. The greater part of *La vie religieuse* sets forth a theory of totemism, and its significance in generating and sustaining religious rites and beliefs. The following is a summary of Durkheim's views: Totemism stands for a form of tribal organization in which "the men of the clan and the things which are classified in it form by their union a solid system, all of whose parts are united and vibrate sympathetically" (p. 150). The quality of sacredness — which is one of the two essential attributes of religion — attaches preëminently to the totem. This quality, like a subtle, impersonal force, also pervades the entire totemic group, composed of men and things. And totemism is in truth the religion of "an anonymous and impersonal force" (p. 188). This Mana—for such the anthropologists call it—is the essence and the vital principle which confers sacredness upon whatever comes in contact with it. To see the source of this idea of Mana is then to penetrate to the tap-root of religion. It is here that Durkheim is most bold and most original. The concept of an impersonal Mana, the force at once physical and moral which confers sacredness upon things and thus generates religion, is itself the creation of social pressure, of social contact and experience. Society alone, of all known empirical forces, has the power of "constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones" (p. 212). Religion is a symbol for the reality and the might of social forces. Society too is the literal object of religious worship; religion turns out thus to be no myth and no illusion precisely in so far as the collective life of man is no myth and no illusion. From this totemic principle, at once the giver of all sacredness and the

deposit of social experience, there is derived the idea of the individual soul, the ideas of spirits and gods, in short, all of the later religious concepts. The last part of the book studies the principal ritual attitudes involved in religion. Durkheim derives all religious rites from one and the same mental state and need: "In all its forms its object is to raise man above himself, and to make him lead a life superior to that which he would lead if he followed only his own individual whims. Beliefs express this life in representations; rites organize it and regulate its working" (p. 414).

In a brief conclusion Durkheim deals with some of the larger topics suggested by his interpretation of religion. It is to be hoped that he will return to these at greater length in a future study. He also here voices his hope for the future of religion in these noteworthy words:

"If we find a little difficulty today in imagining what these feasts and ceremonies of the future could consist in, it is because we are going through a stage of transition and moral mediocrity. The great things of the past which filled our fathers with enthusiasm do not excite the same ardor in us, either because they have come into common usage to such an extent that we are unconscious of them, or else because they no longer answer to our actual aspirations; but as yet there is nothing to replace them. . . . A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulæ are found which serve for a while as a guide to humanity; and when these hours shall have been passed through once, men will spontaneously feel the need of re-living them from time to time in thought, that is to say, of keeping alive their memory by means of celebrations which regularly reproduce their fruits" (p. 427).

To criticise this book with any justice would be to trespass upon most of the live issues in contemporary philosophy so far as they touch the practical interests of men. That Durkheim's studies as sociologist and anthropologist have led him to see the full measure of religion in the achievements of primitive societies and to be relatively indifferent to the individual pole of human life, is perhaps to be expected. The thoughtful reader is not likely to find all his problems solved. Nevertheless he will be grateful for so comprehensive and masterly an indication of the intimate and still problematic relation between men's religious life and their social experience.

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