

## REVIEWS

This volume, as handsome a production as its predecessors, will merit the plaudits which it will assuredly receive in scholarly circles. We may once more admire the industry, skill and learning of the contributors, and again express our gratitude to them for making available yet another rich store of research material in many different fields. There is still more to come. The enormous amount of material from cave 4Q and the manuscripts from 11Q will be presented in the volumes which are to follow. It is good news that the preparation of them is already well advanced.

D. WINTON THOMAS

S. G. F. BRANDON, *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions*. 1962. Pp. xiv + 442. (Manchester University Press. Price: 45s.)

This masterly volume, as instructive as it is erudite, summarizes a prolonged and devout study of the principal religions of mankind undertaken in order to discern what light they throw on man's estimate of his own nature and destiny. It makes use of the widest material: funerary customs and ritual practices, pictorial and plastic art, ethical formularies and legal codes, as well as the usual literary sources. The ground it covers is immense: Palaeolithic man, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Hebrews, Greek culture, Christianity, Islam, Iran, India, Buddhism and China. It concludes with a chapter of general interpretation, a detailed bibliography, and three unusually complete indices of sources, modern authors and subjects. The author recognizes the temerity of any one person undertaking so complex an inquiry covering so many specialized fields of scholarship; but he excuses his attempt, rightly, on the ground that it demands a synoptic view and therefore must be the work of one mind. It should be added that this is not his first adventure in this genre. In *Time and Mankind* (Hutchinson, 1951) he attacked in much the same manner the similar problem of mankind's attitude to the phenomena of change.

In his introductory chapter Professor Brandon, like most Wilde and Gifford lecturers, adverts to the provisions of the founder which confine lecturers to the discussion of "Natural" religion, and explains the nature of his approach. He treats the religions from the point of view not of what they tell us about God but of what they tell us about man; and he declines the easy way of taking the standard categories and topics of Christian theology as a key-pattern for other religions. I am not sure that the first aim is practicable, or that the second is achieved. But the intention is excellent and the detail of its execution of absorbing interest. We have brought before our eyes a vast panorama, each separate point in each religion being fully documented and yet not over-laboured or allowed to obscure the main issue; while the novel approach adds freshness to the discussion and gives it the freedom to bring order into the puzzling and often contradictory information which scholarship has so far provided. The Egyptians, for example, would seem to have been preoccupied with death but they were neither pessimists nor ascetics. "It must be said that they abhorred death because they loved life so much" (p. 57); yet under the influence of the myth of Osiris, the prototype of the "dying-rising saviour-god", they developed the conception of a moral judgement on the individual after death. This is illustrated by a summary of the 125th chapter of the Book of the Dead and the "negative confessions" which offer a list of the moral duties of man in this life, and the

impressiveness of the whole is enhanced by a short description of the vignettes depicting the judgement scene. Professor Brandon presents us here in a few pages with a convincing picture of a fundamentally empirical people with a profound love of the world they saw before them, a profound lack of curiosity as to its origin or purpose; and yet "canny" and taking no chances and evolving ideas which, dependently or independently, less sceptical and less practical peoples were to find of singular significance.

The experts will dissect each separate chapter and pronounce their several verdicts. Readers of this *Journal* will turn naturally to chapters 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8, those on Egypt (Immortality and the technique of its achievement), Mesopotamia ("The life thou seekest, thou shalt not find"), the Hebrews (the Conflict between an ethnic faith and the individual's demand for significance), Islam (Man the creature of an inscrutable God), and Iran (Man's place in a dualistic universe). Some of the contrasts the book exhibits provoke thought. Why, we wonder with Professor Brandon, was Mesopotamian art "grim and brutal" while the Egyptian was "benign and quiet"? Why were the dead for the Babylonians the object of fear so that the underworld was a place of terror, while with the Minoans we find "joy in the exuberance of physical well-being" and no exaggerated concern with death and demonology? Why should the Hebrews have had a "philosophy of history" while even the later Greeks seem to have "virtually limited human life to existence in this present world"? The over-all picture is full of these contrasts and contradictions, and it is no wonder that Professor Brandon's final conclusions contain only the most general reflections.

These centre round the "crucial part played by man's consciousness of time". The whole of the evidence assembled, beginning with the most primitive funerary cairn, shows that man, unlike the animals, realizes, and is afflicted by the thought of, the transitoriness of the world he lives in. But he refuses to "accept the complete negation of the self". He tries therefore in his religion to "secure himself against the changes, personal and communal, wrought by the passage of time" (p. 384). And Professor Brandon sums up vividly:

"If the civilizations of mankind represent the effort made for social and economic security, its religions signify an agelong quest for spiritual security. Conscious of the transitoriness of all phenomena, man is acutely aware that he too is subject to the disintegrating process of time and that the end of his present form of existence is inevitable. Consequently, by virtue of his constitutional inability, except in rare instances, to accept the prospect of personal annihilation, man instinctively seeks for some state in which he will be secure from the everlasting menace of time's destructive logic" (p. 384).

I wish I were more happy about the word "instinctively". Professor Brandon uses it frequently but in a sense which I suspect would not be approved of by psychologists. I offer an instance or two. After describing the view of man and his destiny found in Christianity, he says (p. 235): "Such a *Weltanschauung*, with its twofold orientation of interest, thus does justice to the *instinctive* teleology of the human mind"; and a little later (p. 236), in some remarks on the "deep tension which now characterises Western culture", he describes it "briefly as one between the *instinctive* teleology of the human mind, which has been educated by Christianity to see

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an essential significance in individual existence, and the conception of the universe as the field of the interplay of impersonal forces, where man and his needs and aspirations appear completely irrelevant". Similarly, we read in the chapter on Greek culture (p. 190): "In each generation, while there was indeed a probable majority of those with a predisposition to realism, there were also those who *instinctively* sought the comfort of a faith which assured them that there was hope of something better than the 'black death' which the Homeric heroes contemplated"; and in that on India: "The evidence which the twofold system of Sankara thus constitutes of the *instinctive* need felt by the ordinary man for the assurance of the care of a personal god" (p. 331). Yet in the chapter on China, although "in this part of the world man in the primitive period of his cultural development held that belief in the *post-mortem* existence of his own kind which, as we have now abundantly seen, may be regarded as *instinctive* to mankind" (p. 355), we read later (p. 371): "The native Chinese estimate of man's nature was such that the individual *instinctively* contemplated the future not in terms of his own survival as such but of that of the family of which he was a member." It is to the negation of this instinct ("man's basic *instinct* for the assurance of personal significance", p. 190) that Professor Brandon attributes the "failure" of Stoicism, to its adherence and witness to it the uniqueness (and, through Christianity, the eventual triumph) of the religion of the Hebrews. But many peoples, in different times and climates, as Professor Brandon shows in connexion with the later and more developed Chinese, seem to have lived by their religion without this insistence on the "significance" of "individuals" (p. 152), and when the Jewish Pentateuch says (Lev. xxv. 23) "You are strangers and sojourners with me", the rabbis comment: "Do not make yourselves all-important." We are left with the disturbing impression that, for Professor Brandon, "instinct" is the name given to those very theological preconceptions which he had offered so gallantly to eschew. It is as if the episcopal gaiters (if the levity be pardoned), having been expelled through the front door, have got in surreptitiously through the back disguised as shorts!

The chapter on Christianity (v) rests largely on Professor Brandon's earlier book, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (S.P.C.K., 1951). It is crisp, clear and stimulating, and provides an admirable summary of a highly original attempt to resolve a long-standing but insufficiently appreciated puzzle. It is here that Professor Brandon's recognition of the need for a synoptic view finds, in one all-important theme, exemplary expression. The chapter on the Hebrews is much more conventional, and it is a pity that Professor Brandon did not see the necessity in this case too of giving a jolt to current microscopic analysis. He notes that the "writings of the ancient Hebrews are unique among the sacred literatures of mankind" in that they contain, both implicitly (in their narrative portions) and explicitly (in most of the rest) a "philosophy of history"; but when he comes to explain the nature of its theme he seems to stop short in the middle. He expounds it as that "the god of Israel had determined from a very remote period in the history of mankind to establish the Israelite people in the land of Canaan". "No clear reason", he says, "is given for this divine decision, but its eventual achievement, and then the vicissitudes of fortune experienced by the nation

in the land in which its god had settled it, constitute the basic concern, so it appears, of Israelite religious thought" (p. 106). On "no clear reason is given for the divine decision" we are referred in a note to the later treatment (p. 128) of the story of Noah which recalls an earlier discussion of the problem in the author's *Time and Mankind*, and concludes with the words that "the Yahwist thus provides a convenient justification for the theme of the *Patriarchal Saga*, namely, that the subjugation of Canaan to the Israelites, the descendants of Shem, was the just punishment for an ancient crime". The "philosophy of history" which makes the Hebrew Bible "unique among the sacred literatures of mankind" boils down, then, to this, that the Israelites were put by their god for no apparent reason in somebody else's country, and the early narrative is "framed" in order to justify the maltreatment of the original inhabitants.

And this is the "basic concern, so it appears, of Israelite religious thought"! I wonder. I even wonder whether, if it had been, "Israelite religious thought" would have been of any importance or interest even in its own day, much less in 1962. There is nothing "religious", so far as I can see, in a people being settled by "its" god in a piece of territory, or in its propagandists telling stories about its predecessors. This is a reversion to Judges xi and Chemosh. If there is anything significant about the "writings of the ancient Hebrews" it lies surely in its conscious recognition and presentation of "Yahweh" as being different *in kind* from Chemosh. Jephthah was a buccaneer, not a spokesman of a philosophy of history. His "history" is that of the F.O., not Lambeth Palace. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures, not always perhaps but certainly in his better moments, is something quite special, and he showed this by choosing both the land and the people for a special, *and specified*, purpose. The people is to be a holy people, and the land in which the holy people is to live a holy land: it is God's "holy mountain" in which men "do not hurt or destroy". This stares us in the face throughout the Pentateuch itself: "For I have chosen him [Abraham] that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice"; "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"; "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you"; "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." The "philosophy of history" of the Hebrew scriptures is the demand that politics be made subordinate to ethics, history to morality, not the other way round. It is not the *fact of choice* but the *end for which* the choice was made which is "unique", and this end derives from the unique character of God. The "supreme theme of existence" was not, to quote Professor Brandon later (p. 144), "Yahweh's unique election of Israel to be his own people" but the *purpose of the election*.

I shall doubtless be told that I am rewriting history, and that "purposes" and "ends" and "holiness" and "justice" are later and extraneous interpolations. That is as may be. I do not know whether there are any original, unquestionable, "atomic", "facts" apart from interpolations, any "history-in-itself" apart from our understanding; so-called facts are themselves interpretations or ideas. It is Professor Brandon himself who remarked on the uniqueness of the Hebrews in their manufacture of a "philosophy of history".

It may be that in his view (p. 107) this "philosophy of history" has perverted the "authentic record" and given it a "tendentious character" which can be revealed by literary analysis. I suggest that it is just this "tendentiousness" which constitutes the fact which is to be inquired into and which makes it worth inquiring into. It is precisely the departure from the "record" which shows the difference between "Yahweh" and Chemosh. The "tendentiousness" is the religion.

This consideration leads me to a more general point.

Professor Brandon, as explained, abjures the conventional way of studying religions in order to discover their conceptions of God, and the success of his book is due largely to the courageous way in which he carries out this difficult resolution. But in the last analysis is this method possible? Is there a better way of revealing man's idea of man than the study of man's idea of God? One need not refer to Xenophanes or Man Friday in order to realize that the gods of the Ethiopians are black or (as Spinoza put it) the gods of triangles triangular. I incline to feel that it is for this reason that, on a final summation, Professor Brandon's book, although astonishingly comprehensive and rich in detail, is ultimately incomplete and cries for supplementation. He himself admits the breakdown of his formula in his treatment of Islam. "Muhammad's doctrine of man and his destiny", he says (p. 250; cf. a similar remark on p. 243), "was essentially conditioned by his concept of God." May it not be necessary—would it not have been wiser—to have admitted the same in respect of all the rest? After all, religion, at least in the usual sense of the word, does centre on God! It has been defined, indeed, as God's intrusion into our lives. The most vivid and powerful ideas on man and his destiny are expressed therefore in man's idea of God.

But in this too Professor Brandon gives us the necessary hint himself, and in the words of that universal genius Augustine. "For Thou", he quotes (p. 26), "madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." From his own self-imposed limits Professor Brandon can only offer us the fact that throughout the long centuries of recorded time, and even in the dark backward of the palaeolithic age, man has rebelled against the idea of extinction, and religion is the myth and action he takes in seeking to evade it. But so jejune a conclusion after so exhaustive an inquiry and so remorseless a sifting of fact suggests that we should look further. Perhaps the "tendentiousness" of later interpretation might be called in evidence, perhaps even, *in modo Augustini*, the "restlessness" which prompts it. Even the most rudimentary rock-tomb, the most elementary cave-drawing, may be held to evince a stirring of adventurousness, a stretching out towards something which is not merely human or bound up with human needs. A former professor of philosophy in Professor Brandon's own university spoke of the "nismus" of the whole universe towards the quality of deity, and he thought he could identify the religious feeling of the individual as a part of that cosmic urge. An earlier philosopher wrote: *Sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse*: is not this, too, perhaps, an element in religion, and a positive element at that? Can we really believe that any religion is only, or is basically, the running away from the fact of death? And are not these premonitions, or intimations, of man's views on his nature and destiny as important, and as definite, as scholars' often conflicting interpretations of scratches on rock or daubs in

caves? Do we not perhaps overestimate the value of the alleged testimony from archaeology?

It has become an urgent matter for consideration whether we are right in understanding religion, or for that matter anything else, in the light of the achievement, real or imputed, of primitive man. Professor Brandon shows us the common denominator of faith, but "common denominators" are notoriously the "lowest". Perhaps the men of the pre-Frazer generation saw truer when they proclaimed the principle that the lower should be interpreted in the light of the higher, not the higher in the light of the lower. Aristotle (was it not?) remarked some time ago that if there is a better there is a best. Perhaps he (too!) was right, and perhaps herein, and not in recondite diggings into remote antiquity, lies the fruitful approach for human beings to the divine.

Professor Brandon is singularly helpful in drawing attention to the central place in these problems occupied by the fact of time and man's attitude towards it. But what is time and what has man seen in time? Surely not only mutability, decay, degeneration, breakage, loss. Time means for man, as well as decay and dissolution, growth and improvement and ascent and novelty and increase and gain. Homer may salute time as the all-destroyer. In fact, time is more obviously the all-creator.

For surely time creates and is for us the medium of creation. The passage of the seasons—seedtime and harvest, sowing and reaping—means for us the very possibility of physical life. That "whining schoolboy with his satchel"—does he not, before he loses teeth and eyes and the mourners go about the streets, produce a living image out of the marble, or a harmony out of a fog of sound, or an Ode to the West Wind from a jumble of words, or a Night Watch from canvas and paint? And what of moral change? Is not moral improvement also a fact of time, and as much so as disease and death; and is it not a fact which we welcome and do not bend all our energies to escape from or even evade? Professor Brandon emphasizes throughout his book the importance of "eschatology"; but eschatology is not only, and not principally, the doctrine of an individual or communal judgement after this life: it is not necessarily (although it sometimes is) "soteriological". It is a doctrine of "last things", and it depicts the ideal life, not life as it is "here and now" but as it should be "then and there". It serves as a goal to which we strive *in* time, not a description of what may happen *after* time. "in *that* day there shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt"; "in *that* day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria"; "in *that* day it shall be said, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him." The days of the "last things" are the "latter days" in which swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and every man sit under his vine and fig tree and none shall make them afraid. These visions, not yet fulfilled, offer a view of man's nature and destiny which is bound up with time, but time as healer and builder. They see time as that which gives man his chance.

It is this which would seem to constitute the "philosophy of history" so rightly pointed to by Professor Brandon as making the scriptures of the Hebrews unique. The individual life is of too restricted a compass to fulfil, under present conditions, what they would seem to consider the purpose of God. If I may revert to the call of Abraham, we are told that he was "chosen"

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in order to make God's way of justice the way of human life, and was ordered to leave his home and environment in order to set on foot a movement in which the whole of humankind would be blessed. What happens to us as individuals we do not know; but potentially we are all members of a Messianic people pressing—and pressed—on to a goal which, in and through time, is in our power. Books like this of Professor Brandon strengthen the weak hands.

LEON ROTH\*

CYRUS H. GORDON, *Before the Bible*. 1962. Pp. 319 with 14 plates of photographs. (Collins, London. Price: 35s.)

In the book here reviewed Professor Gordon develops the theory, which he has already sketched elsewhere, that the Hebrew and the Greek civilizations were parallel cultures built on the same East-Mediterranean foundation. Neither grew out of nothing, he argues; but culture is transmitted not through abstract processes but by people, and cultural fusion is a consequence of the intermingling of different groups of people. The evidence for the theory here advanced may be found in the abundance of elements common to the Old Testament and early Greek literature, especially the Homeric poems; and the author's method of presenting it is that of the card-index. Every idea or custom or episode in the Old Testament and the Homeric poems has apparently been entered on a slip; and, when any resemblances can be detected, they are worked into a paragraph and cemented together in mosaic fashion with brief comments.

Reading a catalogue of notes becomes tedious, and duplication resulting from the entry of the same point under different heads is apt to produce needless repetition: for example, the comparison of the Ugaritic princess Hurrai (if the story is rightly interpreted) and Abraham's wife Sarah with Helen of Troy (pp. 132-3, 285), the relation of the Ugaritic king Keret to the "brook Cherith" (which may well mean simply "cutting") and the Cretans (pp. 132, 138, 150, 284), and apparently two explanations of David's name (p. 213 and p. 286, when the note explaining the name, in which the Acc. *dabdu* "defeat" is mistranslated "victory", is not strictly correlated to the text). Many of the parallels are superficial or trivial, especially when the concept is one characteristic of the whole human race and therefore valueless as an argument: for example, the selection of "chosen young men" for the army (pp. 260-1), who are the same as the Greek *ἐπιλεκτοί*, here not mentioned but found long afterwards, and cutting off the thumbs of prisoners so that they cannot wield a spear (p. 298), of which the modern equivalent is self-mutilation by shooting off the trigger-finger to escape battle. Others are exaggerations: for example, that "Aramaic absorbed a host of Sumerian words" (p. 49); for Zimmern could find only 83 such words in all the languages of the Near and Middle East! The description too of the story of

\* It is with profound regret that the Editors have learnt of the sudden death of Professor Leon Roth—philosopher, Hebraist, and humanist. Roth was Lecturer in Philosophy at Manchester University before he was appointed Ahad Ha'am Professor of Philosophy in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was Rector of the University from 1940 to 1943 and one of its principal pioneers. In 1948 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.