

Books of the Week - Religious Sociology

The Irish Times (Dublin, 1^{er} octobre 1915)

Anon.

S. Baciocchi and F. Théron (ed.)



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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Anon., « Books of the Week - Religious Sociology. 'The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. A Study in Religious Sociology'. By E. Durkheim, Professor of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Paris. Translated from the French by J.W. Swain, MA. London: Allen and Unwin. 15/. », *The Irish Times* (Dublin), Oct 1, 1915, p. 7b.

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ProQuest Historical Newspapers (accès réservé)

- 1 Professor Durkheim's book is an evolutionary study of Christianity. It takes the standpoint of what is called "pure science". It seeks to know the historical facts of the subject before it, and to interpret these facts in their actual historical connections. Probably there will never be a large number of investigators devoted entirely to the work of pure sociology; but the sociological standpoint is gradually becoming more and more common to all scientific workers in the field of history. Sociology was formerly regarded as a campaign to crowd aside the economist, the political philosopher, the moralist, and all other scholars, and to organise their material into a new philosophy which was to take the place of the branches of knowledge already established. While some enthusiastic writers may have conveyed such an impression, nothing could be further from the aim of Professor Durkheim. His aim is to help specialists in all fields of historico-social investigation to work more consciously in view of their common subject-matter – human life as a whole. The author avoids the danger of devitalising his material by treating it

abstractly. As he realises the inter-connection of all studies, he co-operate efficiently in expounding the problem of human life.

- 2 Professor Durkheim approaches history from the point of view of the evolution of the social group. Whatever else primitive society may be, it certainly not individualistic. Therefore, the writer insists upon the value of the idea of the group as a means of interpretation. He knows that society is too vague and abstract a concept. Human history is not concerned with the doings of isolated individuals who, like Robinson Crusoe, live apart by themselves. It relates to the evolution of organised communities. The brilliant account of totemistic beliefs is very much a case in point^[1]. The drift of the author's work is, perhaps, best indicated not by the multiplication of particular statements, but by an appeal to some concrete, practical human interest. Professor Durkheim firmly believes that the still unfinished historical interpretation of the Bible can only be completed in terms of sociology. He writes in the belief that the division of scholarship into departments has cleaved the full appreciation and use of scientific results – e.g., in anthropology – among scholars themselves; and he is of the opinion that the intelligent public may now be taken more fully into the field of Biblical and anthropological study.
- 3 Such a book enables us to understand, for example, the importance of the coalescence between the Israelites and the Amorites. We can appreciate in the light of the Australian examples that the author has so carefully collected the value of the struggle that arose between the standpoints of the two races that united in the development of the Hebrew nation. The local Baal worship became the means whereby the Hebrew religion was detached from polytheism and injustice. This peculiar development took place within the terms of the Hebrew group evolution, as the author clearly points out^[2]. The light thrown on all sides of his subject by Professor Durkheim allows us to grasp more completely the social character of religion, and to see how this conditions the categories of thought at the present time.

NOTES

1. [« The Elementary Beliefs », Durkheim 1915, Book 2, p. 101-298]

2. [« The Elements of Sacrifice », Durkheim 1915, Book 3, chap. 2, p. 342 note 2.]