

Again, myths about the gods come in the long run, in many cases, to be written down, especially by the priests, and themselves acquire a considerable degree of adventitious holiness. Thus we get Sacred Books ; and in most advanced races, the sacred books tend to become an important integral part of religion, and a test of the purity of tenets or ceremonial. But sacred books almost always contain rude cosmological guesses and a supernatural cosmogony, as well as tales about the doings, relationships, and prerogatives of the gods. Such early philosophical conjectures come then to be intimately bound up with the idea of religion, and in many cases even to supersede in certain minds its true, practical, central kernel. The extreme of this tendency is seen in English Protestant Dissenting Bibliolatry.

Rationalistic and reconciliatory glosses tend to arise with advancing culture. Attempts are made to trace the pedigree and mutual relations of the gods, and to get rid of discrepancies in earlier legends. The Theogony of Hesiod is a definite effort undertaken in this direction for the Greek pantheon. Often the attempt is made by the most learned and philosophically-minded among the priests, and results in a quasi-philosophical mythology like that of the Brahmans. In the monotheistic or half-monotheistic religions, this becomes theology. In proportion as it grows more and more laboured and definite the attention of the learned and the priestly class is more and more directed to dogma, creed, faith, abstract formulæ of philosophical or intellectual belief, while insisting also upon ritual or practice. But the popular religion remains usually, as in India, a religion of practical custom and observances alone, having very little relation to the highly abstract theological ideas of the learned or the priestly.

Lastly, in the highest religions, a large element of ethics, of sentiment, of broad humanitarianism, of adventitious emotion, is allowed to come in, often to the extent of obscuring the original factors of practice and observance.