

ZOROASTRIANISM

By means of an ordeal of fire and molten metal he will separate the good from the wicked and will judge strictly according to justice, punish the wicked, and assign to the good the hoped-for reward. Ahriman will be cast, along with all those who have been delivered over to him to suffer the pains of hell, into the abyss, where he will thenceforward be powerless.

Forthwith begins the one undivided kingdom of God in heaven and on earth. This is called, sometimes the good kingdom, sometimes simply the kingdom. Here the sun will for ever shine, and all the pious and faithful will live a happy life that no evil power can disturb, in the fellowship of Ormazd and his angels for ever.

In one respect with regard to this, there has come about in the later writings a change that is easy to understand. In them the catastrophe and renovation of the world are placed in a far distant future. Whereas in the Gāthās Zoroaster himself is more or less clearly designated as the Saoshyant—i.e., the predestined saviour of the world—the later writings look for the appearance of this Saoshyant only at the end of the present aeon.

The Avesta does not contain any definite statement as to the division of time in the existence of the universe (yet) p. Frahm, *Vend.* 2.24.

According to the *Bundehesh*, the duration of this world is 12,000 years divided into periods of 3,000 years each (p. Plat., *de Is.* 47). In the first 3,000 years Ormazd creates his creation in its spiritual form or proto-type, without Ahriman being aware of it. At the beginning of the second period Ahriman raises himself from hell into the light and perceives the state which Ormazd has obtained. In this period both spirits create their material creation. At the beginning of the third era Ahriman invades the creation of Ormazd, and during this period good and evil counterbalance each other. At the beginning of the tenth millennium, Zoroaster appears, and a new prophet is to spring from his seed after each of the three remaining millennia. As the last of these Messiahs the real Saoshyant shall appear.

The Saoshyant with his helpers will accomplish the renovation of the world (*frashō-kereti*). Ormazd will raise the dead and the Saoshyant will assemble them all in one place. Everyone must descend into the great flood of molten metal. To the pious this lake will seem like a flood of warm milk; but to the wicked it will feel as if they were wading in molten metal. Then, in the name of Mazda, the Saoshyant will distribute unto everyone a reward according to his works. Ormazd will hurl Ahriman powerless back into hell, which is filled up with the molten metal, and the world will become purified for ever and for aye (*Bund.* 30). The younger (later) Avesta speaks of the end of the world and of the last things only in brief allusions. The idea of the resurrection of the dead is quite familiar to it and seems to be referred to several times even in the Gāthās.

The moral and ethical teachings of Zoroastrianism are sound and consistent. The moral code is summed up in the three words: 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds.' Man must enlist in the service of Ormazd and devote himself to the good cause with his whole being, and he must do every injury possible to Ahriman. This fundamental principle dominates the entire religious code and all the ecclesiastical legislation. Because of the general utility of its precepts this code represents a high standard of civilisation when we consider the early times to which it belongs. It imposed upon the faithful the duty of worshipping Ormazd and his spirits, of prayer, sacrifice, the inviolability of his creatures, the sacred respect for the cow (emphasised especially in the Gāthās), attention to agriculture and arboriculture, irrigation of dry lands, extermination of noxious animals, charity toward one's co-religionists, and the observance of absolute truthfulness. Above all stands the law of chastity. The faithful shall preserve purity, both of body and of soul. The soul must be kept pure from heretical doctrines and the influences of the Devs, the body must be kept from coming into contact with unclean persons, with corpses, filth, or other Ahrimanian objects. Man also must not in any way defile the pure elements of Ormazd such as fire, water, and earth. This love of purity,

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which as a principle is already proclaimed in the Gāthās (48.3), has led to the adoption of the scrupulous washings and lustrations and elaborate ceremonies of purification, as well as of many customs, such as the exposing of corpses on the Towers of Silence (*Dakhmas*). According to strict logic, of course, the precepts of the law cannot be undone in the heavenly account they can be counterbalanced by a surplus of good works. The elaborately developed system of Zoroastrianism fixed the doctrine of equity with mathematical precision, and definitely assigned certain useful and pious works as acts of penance for certain sins. But corporal chastisements also prescribed; these, in the main, were for the purpose of driving out the Devs that had taken possession of sinner's body. In later times, however, matters were made easier for the sinner. For corporal punishment times could be substituted, and absolution of sin became more and more a means of grace to be only at the hands of the church. Confession to a high priest, sincere repentance and reform, removal of sin from the body (*SRL* 2165 and *Vend.* 371), such a confession it was obligatory to recite one of the confessional formulas (*Patets*), in which the literature abounds.

The cult of the Zoroastrian religion was without parallel. The sacrifice is described by Strabo (7.32). The sacrifice formed the central point. Sacrificial gifts which were offered meat and milk, and more especially sacred drink Haoma. The main stress was laid on prayer and the ascription of glory to God.

The systematic development of the teaching of Zoroaster and of the Zoroastrian law is embodied in the work of the priesthood which through their exclusiveness became an hereditary caste. In the Avesta they were called Magi; in the language of the Avesta they are termed *Athraivan*; but even in the sacred word Magi occurs in a few instances. The *Athraivan* were the privileged guardians of the religion and leaders of worship. They alone could perform sacrifices (*Hierol.* 112), and carry out the ecclesiastical punishments and penances; they alone could interpret the law. They exercised a sort of spiritual guardianship over the laity. Every young man, after his reception into the community of the faithful, or *Mazdayasni*, had to select a spiritual guide, a father-confessor (*Ki*). The priesthood never attained political power—or even claimed it.

After the fall of the Achaemenidae (330 B.C.) Zoroastrianism lost greatly in power and dignity. It was subsequently rehabilitated, however, by the Sassanians, under whom it reached its highest point. It was at this epoch that the Zoroastrian clergy advanced to a firmly constituted hierarchy, and Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the state, favoured and protected by the government. The foundation of sects was at this period not infrequent (cp. 'Main' in *Z.BP.*). The Zoroastrians flourished under Yazdegerd (420-457 A.D.). They represented Ormazd and Ahriman as twin sons proceeding from the fundamental principle of a limitless time (*Frashō-kereti*). The Mohammedan invasion (630 A.D.), with the terrible persecution of the following centuries, was a deathblow to Zoroastrianism. In Persia itself only a few followers of Zoroaster are now found (in Kirman and elsewhere). The Parsers in and around Bombay hold to Zoroaster as prophet and believe in the ancient sagas; but their doctrine has reached the stage of a pure monotheism (see *Parsi* *Z.BP.*).

If we inquire into the origin of the Zoroastrian religion we must not lose sight of the fact that everything written on this point must necessarily rest upon mere conjecture. Tradition has obliterated every trace of the actual process by which the faith came into existence, and of the particular factors which were active in its formation. As for tradition is concerned the candidate doctrine was revealed by Ormazd in its entirety. Already in the Gāthās belief in inspiration predominates; nevertheless allow us to read between the lines other things as

17. Worship. The Magi.

18. History of Zoroastrianism.

19. Origin.