

# Northrop Frye's Lectures



# Northrop Frye's Lectures:

*Student Notes from His Courses,  
1947–1955*

Transcribed and Edited by

Robert D. Denham

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For Margaret Kell Virany, Peter Evans, Gordon Wood,  
Margaret Gayfer, Richard Stingle, Ross Beharriell, and Allen Bentley



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## PREFACE

During the course of editing Northrop Frye's diaries I had occasion to correspond with the more than one hundred of his students who were mentioned in the diaries. My immediate purpose in writing was to gather information for annotating what became *The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 1942–1955*, volume 8 in the Collected Works of Frye. But I also asked the correspondents whether they might reflect on Frye as a person and teacher, as well as on the scene at Victoria College in the 1940s and 1950s. The correspondents responded generously, and eighty-nine of their extraordinary reminiscences have been brought together in *Remembering Northrop Frye: Recollections by His Students and Others in the 1940s and 1950s* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2011). Several of the correspondents offered to send me their notes from Frye's classes, and what is collected in the present book is a transcription of the notes that eventually came to me from these students.

Outside of the video recordings of Frye's course in the English Bible, these notes are the only other available extended record, so far as I know, of what Frye said in the classroom. For all those who wish that they could have sat in one or more of Frye's classes, the present collection of notes will perhaps partially fulfill that wish. One can now sit in on fifteen of Frye's classes, as it were, without having to pay tuition.

Student notes do not constitute a widespread category of writing, but there are sufficient examples of published student notes from courses taught by recognized writers to consider such notes as at least a minor academic genre. Examples include Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933*; Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*; Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*; Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will To Know*; Alfred North Whitehead, *Lectures, 1926–1937*; Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966*; John Maynard Keynes, *Keynes Lectures, 1932–35: Notes of a Representative Student*; and Harold Innis, *Notes and Papers from Innis Seminar* (Toronto, 1947/48). Just as these texts, which come from student notes, are now a part of the canon of the separate writers, so the notes collected in the present volume help to amplify the corpus of Frye's work.

The notes come from an eight-year period, beginning in 1947, the year *Fearful Symmetry* was published, and continuing through the spring of 1955. This was during the period that Frye was deeply engaged in writing *Anatomy of Criticism*. One might expect, then, to find in these lectures material that would later find its way into his published work. As is well known, Frye came to many of his central insights early, a fact that these notes, like the theology papers he wrote as a student at Emmanuel College in the 1930s, help to validate. Similarly, Frye lectures provide a more complete picture than we have had about the roots of his later work. He often remarked that his writing kept circling back to the same issues, and his lectures illustrate that his insights into a number of the questions that were to preoccupy him for more than sixty years came to him quite early. The relationship between his teaching and his writing is clearly a symbiotic one. There are scores of examples of topics in the lectures that receive more expansive treatment in Frye's books and essays: the medieval theory of four levels of meaning, the difference between the spiritual body and the natural body, the bardo state in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the imaginative versus the imaginary, and so on.

Early on in his fourth-year course in Religious Knowledge, Margaret Gayfer reports Frye as saying, "The accuracy of history in the Bible is in inverse proportion to its spiritual value." Such an iconoclastic epigram, which dismisses the higher criticism of the Bible in a single gesture, could well serve as an abstract of Frye's two books on the Bible, *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*, which appeared decades later, 1982 and 1990 respectively. At the same time he introduces his students to the Wellhausen or documentary hypothesis, which postulates that the Pentateuch was composed over the course of 450 years by redactors who brought together four or more independent narrative strands. Frye's 1947–48 fourth-year course in Religious Knowledge provides a kind of template for the theories of Biblical narrative and imagery that emerged some thirty-five years later in *The Great Code*. Readers will find scores of other examples of topoi in the notes for the Religious Knowledge courses that Frye developed more fully later: the unity of Biblical myth and metaphor; the categories of time and space, as opposed to eternity and infinity; the development of consciousness; the centrality of the dragon-killing myth; the symbolism of the Leviathan; the royal metaphor; and the relation between ritual and myth.

In 2009–2010 I transcribed the more than 200,000 words in the class notes, generally following the various formats of the originals. I have silently corrected punctuation slips and spelling errors, and I have maintained the note-takers' underlinings of headings and of words that were

apparently intended to indicate a point of emphasis in Frye's voice. I have put titles of poetic and other works, which Frye's students sometimes underlined and sometimes did not, in italics. Finally, I have expanded the students' abbreviations and other shortened forms. Square brackets indicate an editorial addition. A question mark inside of square brackets means that I am uncertain about the transcription or that I have guessed at what the word or phrase might be. The note-takers' square brackets are represented by braces: { }. My own endnotes largely provide bibliographic information for books Frye mentioned and for quotations, or at least what his students thought were quotations by their setting off passages within double quotation marks.

No one expects student note-taking to provide a complete or even an accurate record of a classroom lecture, Aristotle's *Poetics* being the classic example of what results when the student note-taker yawns. Readers will encounter passages in the present notes that seem to make little sense or are incoherent or cryptic. Rather than altering what the students wrote, I have reproduced their notes without emendation, although occasionally I speculate in square brackets about what the note-taker might have meant. When Margaret Kell Virany writes that, according to Frye, the Greeks were practical and the Romans speculative, we suspect that she reverses the commonplace. But as my goal has been to transcribe what was written, not to ghost write, I have let such passages stand as written. Still, exact reproduction was often a challenge, especially for the five sets of Margaret Kell Virany's notes that were written partially in Pitman shorthand. It is clear that Virany's shorthand skills resulted in a more complete record of what Frye said than the notes of students who relied simply on their own handwriting. Her notes, which are for nine of the fifteen courses, form the backbone of the present collection, and my editing chores were made substantially easier by the fact that Virany typed some of her own transcriptions.

The endnotes are largely bibliographic, supplying publication information for books and articles mentioned in the text and identifying the source of material that the note-takers have put within quotation marks.

Frye did not write his lectures or even prepare notes for them. He told David Cayley that he made up his mind early on that he wouldn't write out his lectures until after he had given them (*Northrop Frye in Conversation* [Toronto: Anansi, 1992], 142). He makes a number of arguments for the lecture method of teaching, as opposed to the seminar. What was Frye like as a teacher? Here is a sampler of his students' tributes drawn from the introduction to *Remembering Northrop Frye*:

- Northrop Frye was the greatest single influence in my life. His view of things permanently altered the shape, not only of literature, but of life as I saw it. And even now, though inevitably modified—& I fear sometimes distorted—Norrie’s view of literature and the world still shapes my own. (Phyllis Thompson)
- My own memories of Frye are filled with respect and gratitude. What incredible luck to have been “brought up” by him! I remember the excitement of his first lecture every fall. There was a *ping* of the mind, like a finger snapped against cut glass. You came back from your grungy summer job and then there it was, the whole intellectual world snapped into life again, the current flowing. (Eleanor Morgan)
- I still cannot believe my good fortune in having been taught so many stimulating courses by a person of such brilliance and compassion. His ideas were electrifying, encyclopedic, and revolutionary. . . . Each year when I returned to the university, the hinges of my mind sprang open, and my brain pulsed with the excitement of Frye’s thinking, his eloquence, and his wit. But what keeps his influence on my life vivid and profound to this day is that he enabled us to translate the leaps of intellect we experienced in his lectures into the emotional underpinnings of a way to look at the world and one’s place in it—in short, to be in the world, yet not of it. (Beth Lerbinger)
- Frye would lecture without notes, yet the class rarely turned haphazard. He asked questions constantly that required a knowledge not only of the Bible and classical mythology, but also of the major works in English and American literature. No one could keep pace with all the references, but still the effect was to illuminate and give a structure to a rich and fascinating verbal universe. And then, as an added bonus, just when you thought he had reached the conclusion his investigation was leading to, he would use that “conclusion” as the opening position in a new line of investigation. (Ed Kleiman)
- In short, the Frye course [Religious Knowledge] in one way made for a lot of fun at home. In another way it changed our lives forever. (M.L. Knight)
- In 1950 while at library school there was no need for me to run hard at either studying or football so I and a classmate would range the campus auditing lectures and we found Frye had the largest, most intent crowds and the most graduate students. Even now I take up my lecture notes, particularly on Job and Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, and find him stimulating. (Douglas Fisher)
- The outstanding lecturer, the one who made my university education a spiritual one, setting the mode for the rest of my life, was Northrop

Frye. . . . My memories of Northrop Frye are fond and precious. I still have the essays I wrote for him, with his comments on them. I have a collection of almost all of his published books. . . . I wrote to him a few times. I recall that one letter, probably the one that occasioned his notation in his diary, was to thank him for what he had taught to me, because of the perspectives he gave me about life. (Jodine Boos)

- His shyness and genuine modesty, coupled with a witty self-deprecation, made him the quintessential Canadian. Underneath all that, of course, was the finest literary mind in the Western world. (Don Harron)
- I was in Philosophy & English and we had marvellous, thrilling courses with Frye on the Elizabethan period, Spenser & Milton, 19th Century Thought, The English Bible . . . They filled my thoughts for three years! Frye *was* university for me. Nothing else counted. I couldn't just take notes on his lectures, I had to try to write down every single word he said. . . . I got so spoiled listening to Frye that I couldn't stand other lecturers. (Gloria Vizinczey)
- I expect a lot of people, when they heard he had died, said to themselves, "I may as well lay down my pen since there is no one in the world for whom I can now write, no one whose good assessment I crave." (Catharine Hay)
- Frye's teachings were the main influence in my life and thought. . . . My friends and I always left his classes feeling elated. We felt we were extremely privileged. In later years we knew we had been. (Gloria Dent)
- Frye was the most stimulating of all our professors. The mind expansion was incredible. (Barbara Beardsley)
- He was the finest teacher I ever had; my two post-Frye years at Cambridge offered no one within miles of him. He was demanding, very, brilliant in his lecturing, very, gave no student an easy grade, ever (not me, anyhow); he tugged at and stirred undergraduates' minds every class, if your mind wandered a half-minute you were lost, hardly anybody wandered. He was witty and very funny too. (Don Coles)
- I had asked permission to attend a lecture with a good friend of mine who was doing graduate studies and had chosen a series being given by Professor Frye. This lecture was on a winter afternoon, on the top story of the great old stone building, at the end of a brilliant sunny day with a golden sunset. That light, coming through the immense west windows, turned our lecturer's thick fair hair into an angel's head. His language, however, was precise, and his presentation was concise—truly brilliant but also modest. We saw and *heard* a very sharp, intelligent, clever (but modest) angel. (Jessie Adams)

- As Frye often said later, the class of 4T8 was the first that he came to know so thoroughly and we were certainly devoted to him. A group of us would appear at any outside lecture by him whenever we became aware of it. (Richard Stingle)
- I had taken a first year Religious Knowledge, and a second year English, with Professor Frye. When I was choosing third year courses, his English and the History class I wanted conflicted for one of the two hours a week. When I approached Professor Frye and told him that, he asked if I had a class at 10 o'clock, and as I said I did not, he told me he would repeat the conflicting lecture in the following hour, each day necessary. I accepted without argument; I remember being in wonderment at such generosity, but did not even consider further discussion. I went to his study each time, and sat quietly if he were not yet there. I would look around at his book shelves, not brave enough to go near or touch. He gave his lecture, and I took notes, rarely questioning him, and so it did not require a full hour of his time. I doubt that it was rewarding for him, but it has been a treasured memory for me over the years. (Belva Walker)
- My course from Northrop Frye was Religious Knowledge. It was a first-year pass arts elective. . . . he was a brilliant lecturer with a vast command of his subject and the course made a deep impression on me that lasted all my life. (Don Weinert)
- No one could forget the "Paradise Lost" lectures by "the Great God Frye," as he was known even then. The students from U.C. [University College] and Trinity who used to crash our classes were jostled to the back of the room. After all, he was "ours." To comment on the brilliance of his lectures seems to me to be redundant. When I think of Northrop Frye, I remember late one afternoon when a few of us gathered in the music room of the old Wymilwood on Avenue Road and listened to him play the piano and chat about 16th-century music. Because our course was small we were able to meet our professors more informally than perhaps they do today. (Judy Bowler)
- I think, in retrospect, I would have been more moved if Frye at the end of the course had delivered himself of Prospero's epilogue. I think, looking back, that I wanted on some level to release him and ourselves from the sheer spell of his brilliance that at the time had swallowed me whole and even Blake whole. (Ross Woodman)
- Apart from his brilliant mind, the most amazing aspect of Frye was his complete humility. Needless to say, as undergraduates we felt that writing an essay for Frye was like writing an essay for God, but he never failed to give thoughtful specific evaluations of our work in a

positive encouraging way. We loved him as a sympathetic friend, admired him as a brilliant scholar, and were very proud of his loyalty to his own University, even though he enjoyed teaching in the great universities of the world. (Marie Gardner)

- Norrie was a brilliant teacher from the start, breath-taking in his insights, dazzling in his clarity and inspiring in his challenge to the life of the mind. He was above us but still he was one of us. (Newton Rowell Bowles)
- As a teacher, he gave the impression of having read everything (and I mean everything, not just the text or author or period under discussion) just the day before, and seeing all of it in an intellectual context where everything made sense or could make sense. At the same time, his lectures were delivered, never read nor dependent on notes, and appeared to be the thoughts of someone thinking through the subject right before one's eyes. . . . Norrie . . . was the epitome of self-confidence or self-assuredness in the classroom, devoted to clarity of expression appropriate to the level of his audience and to challenging it by seeming to be saying things that were just above its present reach. The effect was that of having one's head literally lift off one's body several times a week. He was simply the best lecturer—inspiring, stimulating, coherent, incisive, and truly knowledgeable—I have encountered or heard. . . . quite simply the best embodiment of thinking and learning and teaching I have ever known. (John B. Vickery)

Enough superlatives. Time to go to class.





CHAPTER ONE

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE,  
FOURTH-YEAR COURSE (1947–48)

NOTES BY MARGARET GAYFER  
AND RICHARD STINGLE

*Course notes for twenty-four lectures compiled by Margaret Gayfer from her class notes, incorporating some notes by Richard Stingle. The notes are repetitive in places because they are assembled from two sets. They also include some of Frye's answers to questions, and his review of the previous week's lecture.*

*Margaret Gayfer and Richard Stingle were members of what Frye said was the "most brilliant" class he ever taught (1947–48). Gayfer became an editor for the International Council for Adult Education. She is the author of *The Multi-grade Classroom—Myth and Reality: A Canadian Study* (1991), *An Overview of Canadian Education* (18 editions published between 1974 and 1991 in English and French), and numerous other publications on adult education. Richard Stingle (1925–2014), who received his M.A. from the University of Toronto and did further study at the University of Wisconsin, taught for most of his career at the University of Western Ontario. He authored a book on James Reaney.*

*Religious Knowledge (or a Religious Knowledge option) was a subject that all arts students, except those in commerce and finance, were required to take during each of their years at the University of Toronto. Frye taught one of the several offerings for both first- and fourth-year students in the Honour Course. The first-year course, on the English Bible, was intended primarily for students in language and literature. The fourth-year course, also on the English Bible, was as "a course in the appreciation of Biblical literature." Both of the Religious Knowledge courses met for one hour each week.*

**Lecture 1. 30 September 1947**

The Bible is the grammar of Western civilization; it brings down an entire culture and civilization to us. Christianity and Judaism represent the only religions which have a sacred scripture; both have tried to achieve a single, definitive scripture.

The Bible is unique in its symmetry. It represents a vision of the whole of human life. Its aesthetic beauties are accidental. It contains transcendental genius and ridiculous genealogies side by side. It is crude, shocking, funny. The Bible has a beginning, middle, and an end. In telling a single narrative from Creation to the Last Judgment, it takes an epic survey of time. The Bible sees the whole of time as a category of time and as a thing separate from itself. Time is seen in the perspective of eternity. Jesus is the centre of the Bible. Jesus and the Bible are identical.

The traditional approach to the Bible is synthetic, to see it as one work. The modern approach is analytical and scholarly. For Frye, the synthetic approach is the real approach to the Bible, to see it as a unity. Several theological systems are based on the Bible and all claim to be equally correct. All religions are on a level as far as moral doctrines are concerned; the moral loftiness of the Bible is accidental, like its aesthetic beauty.

The synthetic approach sees certain recurrent symbols in the Bible that form a single pattern of symbols. The structure of the Bible is complicated and must be studied. The original authorship is a very minor point. The literary person can see lyrics, parables, letters, memoirs, and so on—literary forms that have been smothered by repeated editings. The Bible is as much an edited book and its editorial processes must be regarded as inspired, too. The whole Bible is the history of man's loss of freedom and organization and how he got it back.

There are two kinds of symmetry. One is chronological, seeing the Bible story of creation, etc., as a legendary and mythical story of the fortunes of the Jewish people from 2000 B.C. to 100 A.D. and the spread of the Christian Church. (Some books are out of order. John should be the opening book of the New Testament since it is the Christian statement of the opening of the Old Testament.)

The second is a kind of symmetry that does not correspond to the chronological pattern exactly. The difference between time and false history doesn't arise in the Bible. The whole conception of true and false as we think of it is not dealt with in the Bible. The fall of man and the apocalypse have nothing to do with history. The Bible is not a straight line of chronology; its time is a circle. The beginning and end are the same point.

You can't "jimmy" Adam and Eve into ancient history. The whole question of causation, order, purpose, etc., is not dealt with by the Bible.

Christianity clings to revelation, and the only practical way to do this is in a book. All we know about God is in the Bible; there is no God in nature or "up there" in the sky. The association of God and Man is the basis of Christianity.

### **CATEGORIES OF EXPERIENCE**

Time and space are the categories of experience. Historical studies deal with Time, and science with Space.

The primitive mind arrives at the religious experience early, and a place is assigned to religious myths, so that God resides in various places. In this way, religion reflects the society of the people. Foresters and farmers have a particular god, for example. The dying and reviving god of the farmer reflects the pattern of the farming life.

When you get a Federal God, he is placed "up," that is, in the sky, like Jehovah who is a mountain god. All gods fall under the monarch of the sky, a god who is "up" on a mountain, either Sinai or Olympus. This conception is seen in the theology of the Middle Ages in which God is "outside" the primum mobile. In Dante, one goes through spheres "up" to God. Although since Copernicus there is no "up" and "down" in the universe, the idea persists. However, in religion, space is vanished. Heaven and Hell are not places. Even after Copernicus, God is still enmeshed in time; He started it and it will end. With Darwin, the lid blew off time; it has no beginning and no end. To go back in time gets you no nearer to God, since God is banished from time. The 19th-century deist position of the universe running according to a God who started things was blasted by Darwin. Evolution showed that nature can create itself; there is no need for bringing in an outside God.

Time and space are indefinite and shapeless, and in that indefinite universe there is no God. Time and space are categories of reality, and yet they are grotesquely unreal. Time has three phases—past, present and future—all of which never exist. The same is true of space. Man has an "up" and a "down" category of experience and yet there is some time in indefinite space which eliminates the idea of "up" and "down."

Man operates with points of reference—time and space—which he calls real. Time makes a distinction between Now and Then, even though neither of them can be proved as real. Our conception of space turns on Here and There, which also do not exist. "Here" in space and "Now" in time are the central points of man's reference. One of the functions of religion is a perspective of reality concerning these worlds.

Religion does not deal with time and space but with eternity and the infinite. Eternity seems to be indefinite time; infinity seems to be indefinite space. But this is not so; we are just confusing categories. Eternity and infinity are concerned with the real Here and Now. The religious perspective gets us clear of time and space to the point where you look down on both.

The Bible presents reality in eternal and infinite terms: time begins and ends as a circle. The Last Judgment re-establishes the world as it was before Creation. Time has a shape. Space has a shape too, a beginning and end which are the same place.

The Creation myth shows the tendency in the human mind to look at the world as not being subject to time and space. For most of us, Creation involves time. Actually, Creation never happened in time. Man's mind is hunting for something central to hang on to. The real Creation myth is one which defines the present and continuous relation of God to Man. It happens in the real Here and Now.

"In the beginning" is right now. God creates. The Gospel story is not the biography of Jesus. It doesn't tell how Christ *came* but how he *comes*. This is what always happens; this is the way redemption comes. The apocalypse never happens in the future; it happens *now* within the individual soul. The nature of religion is that it reveals something; it does not threaten man with something he cannot see.

"Metanoia" is the word for repentance, and it means "a leap of the mind." The Bible responds to the child's request, "Tell me a story." The sophisticated mind wants an answer and will not relax and listen to the wisdom of simplicity. Simplicity comes from a relaxation of the mind which enables you to say, "Well, why not?" The parables are stories because the mind cannot take in abstract ideas.

### **NO FACTS, ONLY TRUTHS**

The historical Jesus is not the basis of Christianity; the present Jesus is. Historical legends are in the Bible because they represent something which is timeless. There are no facts in the Bible, only truths. God defined by man is but a shadow of the human mind. It is like putting a corset on a finite thing; it won't do. The naive man thinks of two realities, subject and object. The Wisdom Literature shows that both subject and object are unreal. Reality is in the contrast between the two.

The usual primitive process is that natural forces become symbols. This is a conception of personal gods which appear as natural objects although they are not identified with them. To see God as the epiphany of

nature is all through 19th-century poetry. But the quest for a God outside of man breaks down. We must look for him inside. But, where is “inside”?

What it breaks down to is God versus nature, and yet, there is something called human nature. Man is a natural being, and in the human mind there seems to be no eternal object or subject. The usual notion of the soul is of a spirit, breath. This is nonsense. The Bible talks of a spiritual body. Leviathan in the Bible is organized monstrosity. He is surrounded by water. The activity of salvation is drawing a fish out of water into the higher sphere of air. In the New Testament, light and fire are presented as higher elements.

People talk of the tyranny of the past. The Christian is delivered from time, but he is still involved in an irrevocable causation which makes every free moment done and accomplished without recall. How much of man can be redeemed from that? What about the Leviathan within us?

First, we must separate human nature and humanity. In Adam all die; human nature always falls. Christ becomes Man, but not human nature. Not one person is with Jesus when he dies. With Pilate, we all deny the possibility of the union of Christ and Man. We either condemn Jesus or condone him. Every man is Caiaphas and Pilate, who would not see God in Man.

“My river is my own” [Ezekiel 29:3] is the key to the Book of Job. Leviathan is the king of “all the children of pride” [Job 41:34]. He rules the world of humanity as well as of tyranny. Every tyranny is the epiphany of Leviathan.

The fact of death is the fact of time. The world of death is the world of human nature which proceeds in time to death. There is no end to life for man but death; for natural man, that is. To see the end of life as *life* means you are not talking about human nature but *humanity*.

## THE WORD OF GOD

The Word of God is in the Bible, the person of Christ, God’s power of creation. In Genesis, it is the words God speaks that create; they are what Blake calls “the originals of creation.”<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel of John, “in the beginning was the *Word*,” which restates Creation.

If the central figure of Christianity is the God-Man, why isn’t the Bible merely the Gospels? How can we make the same phrase apply to the Bible and to Christ? The Bible is the revealed form of Christ. The present Christ appears in the form of a book. A real God must be anthropomorphic. It is an anthropomorphic universe he created *for* Man. God doesn’t create Man and then think up a job for him. Man is born into a pattern of what he shows forth.

Milton's individuality is his poetry. He is a man born to write poetry. The part of Milton that survives is his book, as for all creative people. The men themselves have disappeared into the unreality of the past. Their ego has gone. The book is not something salvaged from the life of the dead man. It is something alive, not dead. The revealed form of Milton is his book; nothing else in Milton's life ever did exist.

The life of the Bible is in its contact with the reader. It must be chewed and digested, an organic process. After you have got to that point, then it doesn't matter about the editing, the censorship. The vision of the Bible in which you operate is your justification of faith. The fulfillment of man's being is an eternal progression open at the top. The Protestant revolution affirmed the autonomy of the Word of God. The church should never interfere with the contact of man with the Bible. The variety of readers is not important, but the reading *is*; there is unity there. The church is one Man, one unity; yet there are individuals within it.

Christianity adopts the Jewish idea of redemption but places it in the eternal present.

In the Bible, Egypt symbolizes the state of bondage into which man is born, while the Promised Land is the paradisaical state of man. The forty days in the wilderness ends the "legal" phase of Jesus' life. The law of Mount Sinai is the climax of the Hebrews' forty years of wanderings. The Sermon on the Mount is the climax of Jesus' time in the wilderness and reinterprets the Ten Commandments.

During their wanderings in the desert, the Israelites were rebellious and God sent a serpent to bite them. Moses intercedes, and puts up the Serpent of Brass on a pole and tells them look at it and be healed of the serpent's bite. The brazen serpent is the imprisoned sun on a dead tree. This is the Crucifixion.

The New Testament tells us what the Old Testament means. It is the consolidation of everything the Old Testament says about Jesus. In the prophetic mind, the recognition of God-Man, the epiphany, is always present. The apprehension of this pattern is there in the Old Testament prophets. The articulation comes in the New Testament with the Word of God.

The whole effort of education is to discover the simplicity that is always there. First we must wander through the wilderness of sophistication, which is really the commonplace. The child lives in a universe in which all things are possible; that is, God's universe. The child doesn't leap over nature to get the transcendent but stays within his own experience. Leap over yourself and get to God. The simple transcends the commonplace. Some fairy stories search the centre of experience and are myth, that is, they are true. Once the myth is in your mind it matures and is never lost.

**Lecture 2. October 7, 1947**

The writers of the Gospels were writing about Jesus, but they are not writing a biography. The events are there because they fit the pattern of what the writer was trying to present. The life of Jesus is the drama of spiritual Israel. When we study the Bible we see that in the Book of Isaiah fragments are pasted together and that a lot of editing has been done. We cannot accept the Bible as the work of one man, but we can look at it as a complete book, a unity. It has editorial unity, and this is true of the whole Bible.

The first part of the Bible is arranged by people influenced by the Prophets. The opening books are later, written by men impressed by the earliest Prophets, such as Amos, in the 8th century. The Exile took place around 586 B.C. Before that, there were attempts to reform the early religion, such as taking old traditional laws and reforming religion according to the teaching of the Prophets. Then you'd have the Law and the Prophets.

The Book of Laws is an attempt to reform religion according to the spirit of the Prophets that there is no God but our God. The Prophets taught a historical dialectic and Genesis to Kings is written in this light. The sanctity of the Law and the truth of the prophetic interpretation is their dialectic of history. The Torah is the Law, the first five books. The former prophets were historians, the latter were like Isaiah.

The Torah is the Jewish kernel of their Bible, and the Christian Gospels are the commentary on the Law. The Law in the first five books has an elaborate ritual and ceremonial code, as well as the moral duties of the law and punishments, as in the Ten Commandments.

In a primitive society there is little distinction between moral and ceremonial law. The framework of the narrative tells the story of the Hebrew people from the Creation to the entry into Canaan. The kernel is the descent into Egypt and the deliverance into the Promised Land. The narrative focuses on a different level: Abraham is the Hebrew tribe; Jacob is Israel. Here we are dealing on a plane in which the nation is conceived as a single person. The story of Jacob's descent into Egypt is the story of the people. It is based on historical reminiscence, but we don't know what. However, we needn't worry about it as history, but look at it as a single pattern.

The Israelites go down into bondage, a kingdom of darkness, another fall, of Israel. The plague of darkness is the most deeply symbolic. The dream of the Promised Land is the Garden from which man fell. The leader, Moses (Son), leads them through the wilderness to the boundary of the Promised Land. But Moses does not conquer it; that is reserved for Joshua,

whose name means Jesus. Israel was guided through the wilderness of the dead world by the power of the Law and a man named Jesus began the assault on the Promised Land.

The Exodus is the central story of Israel. Here you get Joseph, one of the twelve brothers who goes to Egypt. There is a cruel king, a massacre of the firstborn. Then comes deliverance by Moses (son), the Exodus, the crossing of the water, the Red Sea, the forty years in the wilderness. The New Testament parallel is Jesus, Egypt, a cruel king, leaves Egypt, twelve followers, baptism in Jordan, forty days in the wilderness. Moses is the law, so he can't enter the Promised Land, but Joshua (Jesus) does. The Annunciation in the New Testament is the annunciation that the assault on the Promised Land has begun. Egypt is the fallen world, the Promised Land is the Kingdom of God.

The symbol and allegory of the Old Testament become reality in the New Testament.

<b>Old Testament</b>	<b>New Testament</b>
Manna	Bread of life
Water out of the rock	Water of life
Serpent of brass	Crucifixion
Promised Land	Resurrection
(Joshua)	(Jesus)

The Gospels are indifferent to proof, historical proof. The people who saw Jesus' life are a mixed bunch. They are not concerned with how He came but with how He *comes*. This is what always happens.

### **Lecture 3. October 14, 1947**

There is a historical background to the Bible, but what is important is the imaginative ordering of the events.

*Assyria* destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 715 B.C. David and Solomon illustrate a brief interval of prosperity. The Kingdom of Judea struggled on longer because Assyria (Nineveh) was destroyed. The Chaldeans come into prominence with the Babylonian captivity. The Jews in Babylon kept their own religion, literature, pedigree. The fall of Jerusalem consolidated them spiritually and nationally.

Then came the *Medes and Persians*, especially the latter, which took over. The Persian Empire was organized under Cyrus, who became the pattern of the Great King. He had a different policy and let the Jews keep their religious traditions and allowed them to return. Nehemiah describes



the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Cyrus cleaned up on Croesus and got all of Asia Minor. Darius I was the great organizer and Xerxes carried on the conquest of Greece. The Persian Empire was destroyed by Alexander in the 4th century B.C. The Greeks enter oriental history in migratory droves. The Philistines were Aryan and closely related to the Greeks. For example, Goliath is described as “gigantic.”

At the time of Alexander’s empire, Palestine was ruled by Seleucus and Egypt by Ptolemy. These dynasties became absorbed into the country; Selcia [Seleucia] became Syria. The tolerant policy was succeeded by attempts to force the Jews to abandon their religion.

At the time of the Maccabean rebellion, the third brother, Julius, was the field commander, and his success was consolidated by Simon. This independence gave them a small period of prosperity because the Romans had not penetrated that far. The rebellion lived on; people looked for a Messiah to deliver them. This was not very long before Jesus’ time. The Maccabean period saw the consolidation of Jewish literature, and the patriotic party of the Pharisees was formed.

The Romans expanded under Pompey. Octavius became the first emperor and Jesus was born during his reign. The Romans became more intolerant; they couldn’t stand the Jews and, therefore, the Christians. In 71 A.D. Titus wiped out Jerusalem and Hadrian completed the process that made the Jews a wandering people. They embarked on a new Babylonian captivity in which Babylon is the whole world.

We must see that the history of the Bible is a mental life, like a child’s memory. Other events become superimposed upon another. For example, for the Hebrews, the Egyptian and the Babylonia captivity become one. Jerusalem is a squalid little town; its magnificence is in the mind.

History is not important, but the imaginative pattern is. The Jews are an oppressed people; therefore their imaginative pattern is greater. The Celtic imagination, for example, creates gigantic heroes, magic, enchantment, a super-nation idea to compensate for being oppressed. This leads to imaginative literature. In the USA, you get a historical sense of fact. What persists are not tall tales, like Paul Bunyan stories, but stories about Washington and Lincoln. America is a successful nation and therefore needs no compensating imaginative history.

#### **Lectures 4 and 5. October 21 and 28, 1947**

In dealing with mental truth we must detach “truth” from the Bible as it is known in history and science. The first fact we are aware of is that we live on a flat surface and the sun rises and sets. Then, by explanation, we know it is an illusion. But the fact of experience is still real. The truth as it ap-

pears in the Bible is like the truth of that fact of experience. The accuracy of history in the Bible is in inverse proportion to its spiritual value.

In the Old Testament we see a chasm opening between two types of minds. One type sees experience in historical terms, and the other, the prophetic mind, transforms human reminiscence into drama. The shape and form of that story becomes a parable. A cleavage emerges between the literal and the spiritual comprehension. The literal acceptance survives in Judaism and represents a type of attitude that Jesus condemned in the Pharisees. The Gospels bring the spiritual approach.

### **RITUAL AND MYTH**

Ritual is the act, the thing done. Myth is the Word, the revelation, the scripture, the story of how this came to be; that is, what is said in the Bible. Ritual comes earlier because the act must precede its explanation. Myth is the explanation of the ritual. The Bible is a gigantic myth, a mythic account of human life. It is definitive myth which gets everything in and consolidates all mythic tales of any significance.

What ritual is the myth explaining? The ritual of human sacrifice. This must be dug out of the Bible because it is clear only in myth. Much editing has covered up this human sacrifice ritual and it survives only in odd and lurid passages in Judges, etc.

All myths do not explain a ritual. The explanation of customs of various tribes have mythical explanations. The anthropologist is looking for different explanations because a different conception of myth is necessary to him. Myths deal with gods.

God is the God of Christians; god is a supernatural being.

All products of human civilization are products of myths; they are attempts to reflect on life. Man doesn't evolve; he resists evolution. The development of consciousness is an evolution of mental form. Evolution takes place in time, while consciousness looks back at time. Myth is word, idea.

Natural	Human
Ritual	Myth
Act	Word
Will	Idea

*Monolotry* is the stage of religious statement in which the Hebrews say "Jehovah is *our* God." It is not polytheistic nor monotheism, but a kind of halfway house. Other people have gods and each god chosen is a war-god—

–“my god can lick your god,” which means no tolerance of someone else’s god.

*Monotheism* is when *our* god becomes *the* only true god, the only possible God. This represents the advance of civilization.

*Polytheism*: Man never assumes he is the greatest thing in the world. He is a natural being among nature. God here is seen as unknown, which means we separate him from the known, that is, from nature. To make god knowable, he must combine subject and object, human nature and the forces of nature. There becomes a god for each natural phenomenon; the god humanizes the natural force of the storm, for example.

Man never forgets the circumscribed nature of his power. He can use his intelligence to harness natural animals but he never forgets the power in nature. He knows it is nonetheless powerful for being stupid. Man creates God in his own image because he exists in a split world of weak intelligence versus powerful *natura*. Therefore, God has intelligence and power.

## GOD

subject	object
known	unknown
man	nature
intelligence	power
creator	creation
myth	ritual
word	act

We must approach God through the left side . . . . To look for God in nature, you stupefy God, you get a brutal God. There is a kind of stupefied sense of justice in nature, one of natural consequences. In nature you see an order and a form, cause and effect. Science tries to see how cause follows effect, to make nature predictable. Once power is predictable, intelligence subdues it. The ultimate aim of science (which is the application of intelligence to nature) is prophetic: science judges truth by predictability. It is true because it will work. Science stops before mystery, before what it cannot predict.

The prophet in the Bible is dealing with human life which is unpredictable. He doesn’t tell the future of man’s behaviour and life. If that is true, science can reach it. When you look for God in man you see lack of power, the babe in the manger. Intelligence is vital, alive, but weak. Intelligence makes form out of chaos, but it is not a thing that is measurable. We

also use the term “intelligence” in the sense of knowledge, which is the accumulation of comparative judgments.

The true God is the creator God. The deepest intuition of religion is that God must come out of the human side, not the natural side. You can't approach God as a creator of nature, although He did create it. The God of creation, of unknowable power, is a god of superstition. God as creator, as Son of Man, is true Christianity. Ritual comes from man in nature. Myth is concerned with stories of God. The Bible works along the line of myth, creator, intelligence. There is value in understanding that God is a person, has a sense of humour, loves children, prefers mildness to cruelty, and in understanding that there is an evil in nature that God loathes. He is not a lazy pantheistic god who has his own way. He has enemies to fight.

(Example of ritual act and myth. Judges 11, Chap. 30,<sup>2</sup> the rash vow which is followed by the ritual act; the four-day feast of lament is a mythical explanation. The ritual is growing out of human sacrifice. The God to whom Jephthah sacrifices is a much cruder God.)

Faith is not the uncritical acceptance of what is rationally absurd. Faith is associated with doubt. There are no limits to human comprehension. The sceptics set limits to the possibilities of knowledge. The same is true of a religion that says the Will of God is already completely known. Myth does not limit; it suggests infinite meanings.

### MAN AND NATURE

Primitive man contrasts himself with what is outside him. He knows he is inferior to nature. The contrast between the human world and the world “out there” is the beginning of religious experience. The more conscious man is of himself, the more marked the contrast is. The original impulse to postulate god or gods is to complement man's weakness. But the farther we go from man the more stupid nature is.

Freedom	Death, hell, bondage
Intelligence	Stupidity
Consciousness	Unconsciousness
Morality (conscious fabrication of a social unit)	Indifference
Weakness	Power
Form	Monstrousness

Conventional Christianity begins with strength—God the Father, etc. Christianity starts with intelligent consciousness and moral weakness—the child in the manger. God the Almighty has been annexed to Christianity.

The Christian instinct is that one finds God in Man, not in nature. Religion then becomes polarized between a monster and the tamer of the dragon—Leviathan and the Messiah. The Messiah is the God-Man who grows in power and kills the dragon. He is also the tamer of chaos.

Man seeks a state of freedom. As long as he is in the natural world, he is in bondage to its power. The Messiah, then, frees man. The fight between the giants and the gods in the Elder Edda saga, for example, suddenly ends and you wake up and find yourself in a garden. The human mind can wake up from the nightmare. The original sin is the fact that man is born into a stupid, unconscious world. The natural within man drags him down to the level of nature. The human deliverer is to overcome the stupidity of nature.

Nature has an order, a cyclic movement of natural law, repetitive and predictable. Science predicts what nature will do. The arts are divided into the arts of rhythm and pattern. The basis of human effort is the conception of predictable pattern of energy. In the cyclic movement, light and life conquer death. The sun fights the powers of darkness, the young, divine hero battles the dragon of death and darkness; he is swallowed but coughed up again.

The religious experience is crystallized in the dragon-killing myth. The Saviour withdraws man from the dragon so that he can see that the dragon is not alive after all. The rhythm of the seasons shows that life goes underground in winter, as in the Greek myth of Persephone. The power of the seed, of life, is imprisoned for half the year and returns in a cyclic victory. Human life has its analogy. Beyond man are civilizations that rise and collapse. The Israelites see the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians come and go. The cyclic movement of history is strong.

The divine deliverer is like the sun, the spring, and the national hero. A definitive myth about such a man will include these symbols. He is born at the solstice when the sun is weak; he is swallowed and coughed up; dies and revives in the spring. He has the same qualities of the national hero and will deliver the Israelites from Rome. He will suffer and die and his triumph is not simply killing the dragon, but his death will defeat the dragon. When you focus on the defeated deliverer, you get the dead sun pinned to a dead tree, mocked as a national hero. Yet this is the reverse of the real situation. The image of the dead hero is turned inside out—the physical defeat is eternal victory.

This intuition of the divine deliverer is seen in the prophets. Amos teaches of a God who has human qualities, plus more: justice and spiritual balance. Hosea tells of a God who is concerned with man (Israel), a God who is willing to help Israel indefinitely, no matter if the people do go wrong. The exile supplies the key to this problem. The exile is the dawn-

ing of the conception that the deliverer cannot come from somewhere else; he must be Israel and go through the same suffering.

### Lecture 6. November 14, 1947

There are three periods to the Hebrew religion: Pre-prophetic, prophetic, post-prophetic or priestly.

The *pre-prophetic* is a mixed cult. The pre-exilic prophets—Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah—represent a spiritual awakening in history. It might be part of the general movement of Zoroaster whose teaching affected the life of the Hebrews. The *prophetic* follows the worship of Jehovah. The post-prophetic (priestly) is the legalizing of Jehovah. This period is Judaism, the founding of the second temple, the synagogue, the Pharisees, and an organized cult.

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Amos is one of the earliest prophets. Genesis and Kings II have four or five main documents showing the people affected by prophetic teaching. There is no “pure” pre-prophetic phase. First there was YHWH (Yahweh) which became Jehovah, the tribal, ancestral God of the Hebrews. This is what the prophets preached. The pre-prophetic religion which the prophets attacked as not “pure”: that is, it had a mixture of other gods. The mixing of cults was wrong, and the wrongness hinged on the ritual and the ceremony.

### REVELATION IS CONSOLIDATED REALITY

One Leader	Tyranny	Human	Community	One human body
Serpent	Beasts of prey	Animal	Domestication (flock of sheep)	One lamb
Dead tree	Wilderness	Vegetable	Cultivation (graden)	One tree
Stone	Ruin	Oragnization	City (corner-stone)	One stone

The prophets emphasized doctrine and teaching. Judaism, or the priestly period, was the synthesis of religious doctrine with the prophetic teaching. The prophets were actuated by a feeling of moral evil on the part of any mixed cult.