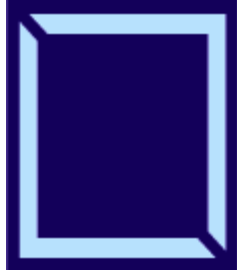


The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 6.23

Western Religions

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism



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Western Religions

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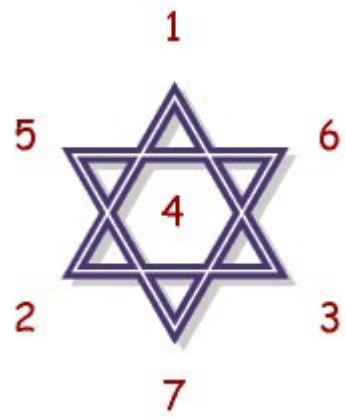
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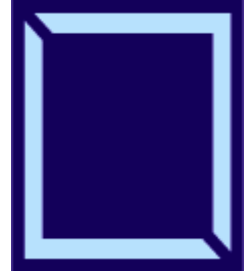
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Chapter 6.23

Western Religions



Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism

- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three pillars of the western religious tradition. Judaism contributes directly and substantially to Christianity. Judaism and Christianity contribute directly to Islam. Islam and Zoroastrianism are traditional faiths of the Middle East. While Judaism and Christianity have their devotional aspects, Islam is predominantly devotional and idealistic (sixth ray). All contribute directly to the world religion.
- Western religions include Judaism in its several major forms and its mystical component (Qabalism), Christianity in its several major and many minor forms, Islam and its mystical component (Sufism), the Bahai Faith, and Zoroastrianism. All of these religions have emerged from the Middle East, but it is primarily Judaism and Christianity that have provided the predominant religious tradition of Europe and the western hemisphere.

Western Religions

Western religions include Judaism in its several major forms and its mystical component (Qabalism), Christianity in its several major and many minor forms, Islam and its mystical component (Sufism), the Bahai Faith, and Zoroastrianism. All of these religions have emerged from the Middle East, but it is primarily Judaism and Christianity that have provided the predominant religious tradition of Europe and the western hemisphere.

In terms of progressive revelation, one can perceive Judaism as a precursor to Christianity, and Christianity as a precursor to Islam, even while each continues to be viable. The Bahai Faith is seen as an outgrowth of Islam with some relatively more universal sentiment. And Zoroastrianism is seen as a continuing religion with strong ties (influence) with these other western religions. While Judaism and Christianity have their devotional aspects, Islam and the Bahai Faith are predominantly devotional and idealistic (sixth ray). Judaism has a strong first and fifth ray flavor, while Christianity is properly a second ray religion with a strong sixth ray aspect. The single predominant characteristic of western religions as compared with eastern religions, is the emphasis on the individual human being as a separate entity (ego) (and his or her relationship to God), which leads to western religions being relatively more separate and separative than most of the eastern religions. Yet all contribute nonetheless to the whole (world religion).

In the west one tends to be considered a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, a Bahai, an atheist, an agnostic, etc., but not generally more than one of these, least not simultaneously. While in the east one can generally embrace more than one religious tradition, or aspects of more than one religious tradition, without inherent outer conflict. But in fact, the western religions are not inherently separate or separative. They tend to be separate and separative because western peoples (and people in general) tend to perceive themselves and express themselves as (if they were) separate peoples. Even those religions or denominations that teach more universal principles, e.g., the Bahai Faith, Unitarian, Unity) are staffed primarily with adherents who are themselves separate and relatively separative. This is because the ego tends to dominate,

in east and west, and western religions have catered more so to the ego than those in the east (with exceptions of course).

Western religious adherents perhaps tend to be more outgoing and promulgational and proselytizing than their eastern colleagues. This simply reflects the relative insecurities of peoples and their faith(s). Faith that is embraced emotionally or intellectually, rather than simply felt in the heart. Faith that is somehow enhanced if others believe as they do. Or faith that needs to convert others in order to justify itself. While some adherents are doubtlessly sincere in these regards, imposition (on physical, emotional, and/or mental levels) remains a crime against humanity. Those who are converted are rarely genuinely so. Which weakens the faith as a whole. True religion cannot be sustained through artificial means. True religion endures not by virtue of the attitudes and behaviors of its adherents but by virtue of its intrinsic value, the value of its principles and practices.

But it is the inner aspect of religion that really matters, that remains true to its origins rather than adapting to peoples and cultures and transient needs. And the inner traditions of Judaism and Christianity and Islam and the Bahai Faith and Zoroastrianism are one and the same. And the innermost tradition of the western religions is the same as those in the east.



Section 6.231



Judaism

- In the sense of progressive revelation, Judaism is the precursor to Christianity (as Christianity is the precursor to Islam). But in the deeper sense of the esoteric tradition, the deeper (cabalistic) elements of Judaism continue to provide the underlying mystical and occult basis of Christianity. In another sense Judaism is a bridge between tribal religion and "world" religion. The ray nature of Judaism is primarily first ray and secondarily fifth ray.

Judaism

Judaism began in the Middle East, in the region now encompassed by Israel. The two principal prophets of Judaism were Abraham and Moses. The principal scripture is the Torah. And there are three major sects, namely Conservative, Orthodox, and Reformed.

In the sense of progressive revelation, Christianity can be seen as having emerged from Judaism. And in a deeper sense of the esoteric tradition, the deeper (Qabalistic) elements of Judaism continue to provide the underlying mystical and occult basis of both Christianity and Islam. In another sense Judaism is a bridge between tribal religion and "world" religion. The ray nature of Judaism is primarily first ray and secondarily fifth ray, which are also the rays of the Jewish peoples. Indeed even while Judaism is a religion, it is in some sense also synonymous with Jewish culture and the Jewish peoples. The Jewish peoples have been scattered about the world and yet retain a very strong religious and cultural identity. That adherence is both a blessing and a curse.

It is a blessing in the sense that there is considerable spiritual encouragement and inspiration derived from the Jewish faith. A blessing in the sense of the many and varied contributions that Jewish peoples have made to human civilization and progress. A curse in the sense that strong attachments to tradition and racial-cultural identity mean that the Jewish people tend to be generally more separative, more self-isolated, and less assimilable than most. Those of any religion or faith or dispensation (disposition), who see themselves separately from the human race as a whole, are doomed to suffer, until such time as they rejoin humanity. Many "humanists" have incarnated within the Jewish peoples in recent times, and the race as a whole is moving toward reconciliation.

According to Moses Mendelssohn there are only three central principles in Judaism, namely God, providence, and legislation. God is (only) one, the creator and sovereign of all things. This is the first ray aspect. Sovereignty in the deeper sense means that God qualifies all aspects of creation, through providence and legislation. God does not control the details of manifestation except subjectively through qualification. Providence refers to karma, the

underlying (divine) principle of cause and effect that encourages good and discourages evil and ignorance. This is the second ray aspect. Some think that God is aware of everything within creation, to the smallest detail, but in fact, God (the Logos) is aware in ways that are well beyond human comprehension, and is no more aware of details of human life than the human being is aware of the details of molecular and microscopic lives within his or her own body and consciousness. But there is a collective subjective awareness, a realization of relative well-being (harmony with intention) and a deliberate conveyance of energy (life, consciousness).

Legislation refers to the divine (cosmic) laws that govern creation, manifestation, life on earth, human experience and expression, etc. This is the third ray aspect. There are many formulations and perceptions of God's laws for human expression, including the Ten Commandments. Most (laws) are conveyed through conscience, which is how the human being in incarnation connects with the higher Self or God within. That which is consistent with divine intention will tend to ring true to conscience (accumulated wisdom); that which is inconsistent will tend to ring not true. The problem of course is that many do not listen to their own conscience.



The Qabalah

The Qabalah (Cabala) (Kabbalah) is the mystical and occult dimension of Judaism and provides the underlying basis of western mysticism and occultism. Kabbalah is a Hebrew word meaning to receive or to reveal, and it is through the study of the Qabalah and through its practices that one is purified and enlightened.

The basic teachings of the Qabalah are contained in a relatively modern book known as The Zohar, written in the 1200's. And there are many, many documented interpretations. There are, however, only two basic approaches to the Qabalah, one being the orthodox approach, steeped in conventional Judaism, the other being the western magical approach, steeped in various occult traditions and derived to some extent from the Qabalah.

The basic teachings of the Qabalah are not fundamentally different from the mystical tradition of any of the world's great religions, but the Qabalistic system is nonetheless a quite powerful and symbolic key to the mysteries of life, beginning with the nature of God and creation, looking deep within the human being and finding God (communion), and ending with human evolution in consciousness. In the orthodox approach, the emphasis is upon purification and a continuing process of revelation. In the less orthodox approach, the emphasis is upon understanding the mysteries, purification and training leading to qualification, and the application of Qabalistic (magical) principles for good.

The Qabalah explains not only the nature of God but also the nature of man, and how the inner life of one leads to the inner life of the other. Qabalists utilize magic words from the scriptures, for understanding, for healing, and for warding against evil. But for the most part, Qabalistic practice is about personal spiritual development and self-realization. It is closely coupled to the map of consciousness represented by the Tree of Life. This map or diagram symbolizes the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of the Qabalah.

The problem of the Qabalah and the Tree of Life is the problem of the inner, deeper, more esoteric teachings within every major faith, which is two-fold,

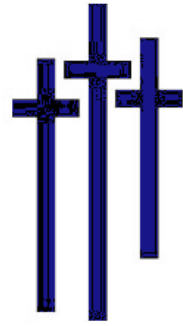
namely that most people cannot apprehend the inner, deeper, more esoteric teachings and that those who presume to understand without really understanding simply add to the confusion surrounding the teachings.

Consequently, those who truly study the Qabalah and embrace its teachings and principles, like esotericists of all faiths, tend not to share their insights with those who simply cannot understand. Within Judaism, Qabalists are a distinct minority. Within the western mystical-occult tradition, however, Qabalists are a distinct majority, though many are more profane than genuine.

In some sense the mystery teachings of the Qabalah are the gift of Judaism to Christianity and to Islam. The deeper aspects of both Christian mysticism and Islamic mysticism have strong links to the Qabalah. The Tree of Life may not be embraced directly by non-Qabalists, but the teachings derived from the Qabalah persist. On the other hand, the Tree of Life is only a representation and the Qabalah is only a system of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Truth is greater and deeper and more profound than any representation or system. But every representation and every system has at least some basis in truth. Thus while the Qabalah is profound, it is not the only valid system.



Section 6.232



Christianity

- Christianity is the religion of Jesus who became the Christ (in the same sense of Buddhism being the religion of Gautama who became the Buddha). While, like most religions, in its outer forms Christianity has suffered a great deal of distortion, in its inner forms Christianity continues to provide a mystical path for union with God through the medium of Christ consciousness. In this sense, Christianity is no different from the mystical traditions of all of the world's (true) religions (which are, after all, one and the same). And in the same sense, the (original) scriptures of the Christian faith provide a wealth of symbolic representation of the inner teachings. The ray nature of Christianity is primarily second ray and secondarily sixth ray.

Christianity

Christianity is the religion founded indirectly by Jesus the Christ, i.e., he inspired the founding of the religion but it was not his contrived intention to do so. Christianity has several major components or sects, namely Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant. The protestant sect has numerous separate (and generally separative) denominations.

But despite denominational diversity (and richness), the real components of the Christian faith have to do with principles and teachings. The Christian faith in the highest, most noble sense, is based on the underlying ancient wisdom (as are all proper religions). The actual teachings of Christianity, as expressed mainly through the Holy Bible and to some extent through other Christian writings, are about cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, about the nature of life on earth, human nature, the evolution of consciousness, and the spiritual path. The actual teachings of Jesus were the inner, spiritual teachings, symbolized in the scriptures. But unfortunately people have (in most cases sincerely, in some case not sincerely) distorted these teachings a great deal, so that much of what is taught as Christianity today is merely the outer cultural teaching, adapted to the needs and whims of people.

Jesus was a human being, a spiritual student of considerable training and preparation. He achieved enlightenment. He became the Christ. In one sense "Christ" is a title, in another sense "Christ" is a living more-than-human being. And in yet another sense Christ is the second aspect of the Trinity, the second ray. Jesus achieved communion with the Christ. He allowed the Christ to overshadow his life and live through his vehicles. Thus he was inspired, but remained human. While Christ remains Christ, in the higher sense the principle and aspect of consciousness (love-wisdom), in the lower sense a super-human being much closer in consciousness to God than is humanity.

The real essence of Christianity is simply the way to achieve communion. Jesus showed his disciples, his students, how to meditate, how to live in accord with the God within, how to evoke the inner, higher, deeper, more noble nature. How to achieve liberation (salvation), not through faith, nor through works per

se, but through (inner) communion. All of the principal events in his life symbolize the stages of the spiritual path, of evolution in consciousness, and the various degrees of self-transformation undertaken on the path. Thus the life of Jesus is demonstrative of Christian-spiritual values. It hardly matters whether or not he was real, whether or not he was Christ, whether or not the events described or attributed to his life actually occurred. A literal reading of the scriptures is far less significant than a symbolic reading. What matters is the symbolic value of each of the principal events in the life of Jesus. What matters are the ethics and morals and principles of living. Living a "Christian" life in the higher, more noble sense. But much of what is currently considered important by many Christians is simply not so in any higher, deeper sense.

Likewise the history of the Christian Church is not important, and there is little in its history for the adherent to be proud. The antagonism between outer (superficial, polarized) Christians and those of other faiths, and the antagonism of outer Christians within their own faith, e.g., between sects or denominations, are simply not consistent with the actual teachings of Christianity. The actual (inner) teachings are not inconsistent within the various denominations, nor inconsistent with the actual (inner) teachings of other faiths.



Christian Denominations

Christ of course was not the founder of the religion that bears his name. He simply provided the spiritual basis and fundamental principles or teachings that subsequently energized the emerging Christian faith, which became a religion. Christ was indeed the inspiration. But it was Jesus of Nazarene who embodied the teachings and energy of the Christ.

Religions are of course never the actual intent of those who inspire them. Religions emerge as human beings interpret (and misinterpret) the teachings, and sincerely (or insincerely) live according to their understandings. Because of the strong human (personality) factor, religions are rarely integrated, and yet they still embody the needed inspiration and serve a considerable and useful purpose, especially in the sense of providing a preliminary spiritual path for millions of adherents.

Christianity is actually single religion having many and diverse facets or denominations. It has a long history of division and occasional reconciliation. Each division or denomination allows its adherents to believe and practice their faith according to what is comfortable for them.

The two principal surviving divisions of the Christian faith occurred in the middle ages. The first being the division of the "church" into the Eastern Orthodox tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition. The second being the division of the Roman Catholic tradition into various Catholic and Protestant denominations. In some sense, the Orthodox and Catholic traditions are quite similar, while the Protestant tradition is somewhat more divergent and certainly more diverse.

Within the Protestant tradition, the principal divisions occurred during the Protestant reformation in the 16th century. One branch has led to the Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal churches. Another branch has led to the Mennonite and Amish churches. Yet another branch has led to the Lutheran church. A fourth branch has led to the Reformed churches, which

in turn have led to the Presbyterian branch and a branch leading to the Congregational and Baptist churches.

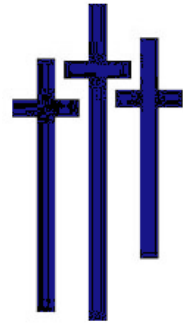
In many instances, each branch has suffered or enjoyed numerous further divisions, such that there now number some eighteen major groups of Christian churches containing some 170 identifiably distinct denominations or organizations of churches. These churches represent a spectrum of Christian faith and beliefs and practices, from very conservative or fundamental, to moderate, to liberal. The more fundamental churches focus on the presumed inerrancy of the Bible, and their prescriptive beliefs and practices tend to be a matter of rigid or literal interpretation. The very liberal churches encourage each adherent to interpret the Bible however he or she chooses. While the moderate churches fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

Of course denominationalism is not true Christianity. The fragmentation of the Christian faith into various sects and denominations is merely a convenience of "outer" Christianity, and serves the needs and interests of its members and adherents. The inner, higher teachings remain integrated and the true faith is not subject to denominationalism.

The issue is really one of separativeness. With separativeness, people see and focus on differences and distinctions. With inclusiveness, people see a greater, more unified whole, where differences and distinctions are simply not important. If one focuses on the inner, higher teachings, then it is those teachings (and the way of life that they convey) that are important.

One of the most remarkable aspects of denominationalism is that each denomination has some members who truly understanding the inner teachings. Thus within each denomination there is a core of relatively enlightened Christians who simply live according to the inner teachings and do not really concern themselves with superficial elements of their denomination.

Section 6.2321



Aspects of Christianity

- There are many and various aspects of Christianity. Central to Christianity is the relationship of Jesus, representing or symbolizing "man," to the Christ, representing or symbolizing God. It is this relationship that provides salvation through communion.

About God and Man

Attributed to Robert L. Moore

Human nature has outgrown the old presentation of the ever-needed truths, particularly the presentation through the dogma and ritual of the orthodox churches.

Traditional belief in a "God out there" is disappearing, but even if there is no longer a "God out there," as they say there was for our ancient forbearers, that is no valid reason to declare that God is dead, or that there is no God, as many now do. It is just that those who make such statements are looking in the wrong place, and not finding Him there proclaim that He is dead or never existed. They have not yet discovered that "God is in here" and in their ignorance and in their inability even to start to know how to look "in here" they write Him off as just a "myth." Slaves of the objective, they refuse even to admit of the existence of the subjective, much less to develop the techniques for its exploration. Particularly this seems to be true of some humanists who declare that "men have but one life to lead ... and need no sanction or support from super-natural sources, which in the form of heavenly gods or immortal heavens does not exist." Their philosophy is "that our only home is in this mundane world and there is no place else to go."

This type of thinking seems to be taking root in the age of the secular city, which is tending to become an age of no religion at all. Our intellectuals are particularly susceptible to this ailment. Charmed with their own brilliant minds and enamored with their supposed "advanced" thinking they consider that they have outgrown God and myth. Actually they have freed themselves, as all should, from subservience to authoritarian dogma and arrived at a mid or neutral point which they smugly consider an end instead of what it is, a beginning.

This new beginning should be to start the exploration of "in here," the search to find and know the Divine inner spark latent within the composition of every

human being. To find and then nurture it until enlightenments it produces transforms them from caterpillars to butterflies.

There resides in the depths of each human being the same powers of transformation that are inherent in the atoms of uranium and similarly capable of vast releases of energy which can transform the objective into subjective, the illusory into the real.

To turn inward, then, it is for me a search for such spark of Divinity as I believe lies within the core of every human being. Call it the God immanent or as a generalization just God as He is personal to each of us.

In this context God is not external to man. Man and God are one. Neither is complete without the other. They are the two sides of the same coin. They are the greatest of all the sets of opposites -- the Spiritual and the personal or material. Man the personal, God the Spirit; Love -Law -Life. These are manifestations of God through man.

Recognizing God immanent as well as transcendent we can then view Him as the great power-house pouring forth a perpetual Spiritual love -- a symbol of which is sunlight; Creator of great impersonal Divine Law and Plan; Source of the "Élan Vital" (Holy Spirit) generating Life in all things. Man the personal can encounter God the Spirit through man's Divine potential of apprehending and coming to an understanding of the great Laws and principles which underlie the Universe. And man longs to do so. God has an equal longing to become personal in man. For this He created man and endowed him with the Divine Spark to make this potentially possible. God seeks to perfect himself in man as man does in God.

Divinity can only find expression through humanity and God must work out His will through man. The Divine Plan must be implemented by mankind. Mankind is free and men determine their own destiny. Man, gloriously created imperfect was yet endowed with the potential of perfecting himself and thus the God-man unit. This is the fundamental purpose and meaning of evolution of this planet. The Divine Plan was placed in the custody of man to work out and it is this task and responsibility to modify, qualify and adapt the Plan in accordance with the needs and environments of evolving humanity. Man is

given the free will to do this. As individual souls we inhabit individual physical bodies and live individual lives. God is the Divine incarnation in humanity as a whole, providing the unifying power that can make all men one and endowing them with the potentiality of self-transformation into His likeness.

He sent His Son to show man the way to perfection. Now man must work toward that perfection through his divine capacity for self-transformation. Thus the great opposites are to be reconciled in divine integration, each working toward perfection and needing the other for its own salvation -- Man's salvation is in God but equally God's salvation is in man.

If then our task is to come to an understanding of the Divine Plan and to "modify, qualify, and adapt" it to the needs of humanity we must never turn away from concern with humanity's problems, we must unify ourselves with all that is, and working with and through things as they are, develop that loving understanding that alone can build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. I suggest that this is a new and higher type of religious activity, a new method of drawing nearer to God, that may be the true way of achieving the "mystical union" of God and Man.

The way to the Union has already been pointed out by the Christ who unified in Himself God and Man. He has shown to man how he can draw on the great sources of Life, power, and Grace to live in conformity with the Divine Plan in recognition of the true meaning of our existence.

The devotee stresses the idea of gratitude to God: for his Mercies, for his Grace, and often for personal favors. I am grateful to Him for one great reason, that His Divine flow of Love, Law, and Life is so utterly, completely, perfectly, impersonal in its spiritual greatness.

Consider the great symbol of his Love and His Power, the sun. Truly the sunlight represents both. It is available to all to use and make their own. And it is so beautifully impersonal. It can warm or it can burn, it can make nature grow lush or it can scorch it dry, life giving or life consuming. We adapt ourselves to its best use. And so we must also adapt ourselves to all His great laws.

Divine Law grants to each of us, automatically and impersonally the chance to work out our own personal and self-controlled salvation. I am grateful for His great Law "as ye sow so shall ye reap." For that leaves it up to me and I shall have no one to answer to but Him -- He who is my Soul and deepest heart. He, Source of Love, of Energy and Power, pours it out on us constantly and freely. We can use it as we will. We can take it or not. We are responsible. We can progress (or retrogress) on our own. And if we choose to try to progress His Energies and Powers are ours to use to the fullest extent that we make ourselves capable of assimilating and directing them.

The great laws of life are impersonal -- automatic in their workings. The laws whose workings we understand little we often label "moral" laws simply for want for knowledge of the real workings of cause and effect which they represent. We understand the law of gravitation and so do not have to attach a moral label to it. We do not have to say that to break this law is wicked or to promulgate a commandment "Thou shalt not jump off the roof." We do not have to because we know just what would happen.

We do say "Thou shalt not steal -- or kill," or do a number of other things which violate other laws, the effect of which is not quite so apparent but really just as definite and automatic in their workings as gravitation. We lack the understanding of the consequences of our actions and perceive only the short term material results. When we "break" one of these so-called "moral" laws, most of which have as their underlying basis the great law of harmlessness, we do ourselves an injury just as definitely and surely as if we were to jump off the roof, and just as surely will we have to work out the pain and bad results to the injury we have done ourselves and others as we would have to go through the pain and time of a broken leg.

The moral progress of a man or a nation is measured by his increase in understanding of the real effects of contraventions of the great natural laws. You do not seek to hurt those whom you love, you know that hurt to them is just to you. If you loved every one you would do harm to none as you grow in understanding you love more and more, since the scope of your relationships increases. When you "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself" and expand the definition of neighbor to include all humanity you have made progress, and not

progress in just becoming “good” but progress in knowledge of how things really are.

From this knowledge comes progressively the sense of the meaning and significance of life and a guide to its direction, and as we progress upon the path of self-transformation ever new meaning will appear.



The Christ

In the context of humanity, the Christ is that person (soul) who fills the office of bodhisattva within the spiritual hierarchy of the planet. The name of the Christ as a particular or historical personage is not important; what is important is the role of the Christ with respect to humanity (and all life within the planetary scheme) and the relationships of the Christ to the planetary logos, the hierarchy, and the Christ principle.

The role of the Christ is to embody the cosmic Christ principle and relate that principle to all within the scope or field of evolution for which the planetary (spiritual) hierarchy is responsible. The Christ principle is the cosmic principle (second ray) of love and wisdom (and all that that implies). The Christ principle is preeminently the principle of higher consciousness, and consciousness per se. In embodying that principle, the Christ is a channel (focus) for (cosmic) (solar) (planetary) love, wisdom, and consciousness, to stimulate the evolution of consciousness and afford all lives within the domain the opportunity of higher (greater) consciousness.

The Christ does not and cannot work alone or beyond planetary (group) (individual) karma. The Christ is the leader and focus of the spiritual hierarchy but remains accountable to and responsive to higher authorities (e.g., the solar logos and the planetary logos). The members of the hierarchy are all highly qualified souls of considerable evolutionary achievement (all having fully mastered the human phase of evolution), who support the Christ and his role in this planetary (human) context. Thus the Christ works largely within the Hierarchy, in invoking and evoking proper energies for humanity and distributing (sharing) those energies of evolutionary encouragement. Though the Christ is an extremely potent soul, the Christ is necessarily limited in his work in two ways: (1) by the evolutionary plan, for it is the plan that provides guidance even to the Christ for its fulfillment, and (2) by karma on all levels, for none can override karma in any absolute sense.

The soul who is presently the Christ is simply the best qualified and most appropriate to that position. The time will come when that soul must pass

beyond this scheme of evolution and another must take his place in succession. The person of the Christ should not be embraced; it is the principle (energy) (qualification) (love) (wisdom) (consciousness) of the Christ that should be embraced, without regard to religious preference (for the Christ is common to all major (proper) religions, though the name afforded varies, the principle and context is essentially (albeit symbolically) the same). It is not the Christ who saves souls, nor is it by faith alone that souls are saved, but it is by virtue of the afforded Christ principle (higher consciousness, potential within all lives) and the embracing of that principle by each individual that the individual is saved (being saved meaning simply becoming one with the higher or Christ (soul) consciousness, completing the human phase of evolution, and passing on into a higher, more challenging field of evolution).

The return of the Christ symbolizes and indicates not the physical reincarnation of the Christ, but the return (upliftment) of the mass consciousness in embracing the Christ principle intelligently. As more of humanity turn to the higher (inner) consciousness for guidance (qualification), so can the energies and qualification of the Christ (through the Hierarchy) pour through more broadly to all who are responsive. The Christ and the Hierarchy of masters stand ever to encourage the evolution of consciousness by sharing whatever energies are needed and merited (allowed by karma).

† Commentary No. 1243

Neo-Christianity

The scope of the Christian faith is considerable, from the traditional mystical dimension to the conventional scope of liberal-moderate-conservative Christianity, to neo-Christianity. Neo-Christianity is actually much closer in scope and content to the traditional mystical dimension (which conventional Christianity seems necessarily to neglect, as conventional religion tends to be focused on cultural needs rather than real union), which means that it is also much closer in scope to the mystical dimension of all the world's great religions.

In a sense, then, neo-Christianity is the mystical tradition, that underlying (more real) Christianity that embraces the inner essence of all those religions,

where differences between religions are realized to be merely and actually quite superficial. Neo-Christianity is free from dogma, and free from doctrine. There is nothing to prove. Nothing to impose. There is simply an appreciation for the spiritual path in its pragmatic mystical sense, i.e., the ways and means of achieving communion with God-Christ. As Christ is appreciated as the universal aspect of consciousness, then neo-Christianity is equivalent to neo-Hinduism, neo-Buddhism, etc. In fact, the word "Christ" is not at all essential. What is essential is the realization of that universal aspect of consciousness, the existence of the God-within, by whatever name it is apprehended.

The neo-Christian sees "Christ" as living within all human beings, regardless of their various cultural and racial and religious diversities. The neo-Christian sees "Christ" as living within all lives, human and otherwise. The neo-Christian sees "Christ" in all things, whether alive in the conventional sense or otherwise. For Christ is the essence through which all lives and all things are ultimately and irrevocably linked. Christ is the bridge between matter and spirit. Thus the spiritual path in all religious traditions requires the student to seek union with that God-Christ-soul within, for it is only in embracing that inner God-Self that one can achieve union (communion) and transcend this earthly (worldly) (personality-centered) existence (illusion) (delusion of the senses) (delusion of self-centeredness).

While the outer characteristics of the various religions may be different, while the cultural adaptations and superstitions may differ, the core of each of the world's religions is the same. The God-Self. Even the (essential) process, the methodology of transcendence, of the Buddhist, the Christian, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Taoist, etc., is ultimately the same, regardless of nomenclature or framework. Purifying the outer self. Embracing honesty and harmlessness. Turning within. Embracing the silence. Evoking the higher Self. Allowing the Heart to unfold.

In this sense, the conventional Christian churches may be closer to the mark than the various metaphysical (new age) (more open-minded) churches, where the emphasis tends to be on self-development (personality-centeredness) (self-centeredness) (self-indulgence) (self-esteem) rather than the qualities needed for transcendence (e.g., humility). Clearly they all encourage the development and expression of many needed values, but more so in the outer, cultural sense, than

in the more essential, inner sense. Thus the mystical path, the path of neo-Christianity, depends not on the church, or even the fellowship of the church, though these can serve as encouragement (or distraction). Yet the church (conventional or more metaphysical) can serve nonetheless as a meaningful context for inner work.

† Commentary No. 1452

The Trinity Correlation

The Trinity consists of three aspects of God which correlate to the three aspects of the human being and this correlation provides for human participation in the Trinity. The three aspects of God are the Father, the Son or Christ consciousness, and the Holy Spirit. Although these particular names are associated with the conventional Christian formulation, they are known by many other names in formulations other than that of conventional Christianity. The human trinity consists of the monad, the soul, and the personality.

The lowest aspect of Trinity is the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. This is the intelligence inherent in matter, which underpins all of manifestation. The lowest aspect of the human trinity is the personality or form that provides a basis for experience and expression in the lower (material) worlds. If one works through the personality consciousness one can embrace the Holy Spirit in various ways. But this is relatively dangerous, for there are few if any safeguards at this level. The Holy Spirit is a source of tremendous power, but it is the power of matter. And unless the participant is properly trained and qualified, that power or potency is often and generally unable to be controlled.

Moreover, if the student is properly trained and properly qualified, then there is no appeal to working at this level. Thus those who do work at this level are those who are ignorant, untrained, and unqualified. This is where great damage can be done to the human form and lower consciousness. This is where most "possessions" occur. The fundamentalist Christian practice of Pentecostalism, speaking in tongues, etc., is not a genuinely spiritual experience, but is rather a matter of getting entangled in the realm and world of demons (the lower astral). Any intense and untempered (unbalanced) emotional practice leads to increased

and increasing psychic vulnerability. The Holy Spirit is “intelligent” but very substantially conditioned by matter (indeed it is matter).

The middle aspect of Trinity is Christ or Christ-consciousness. This is the forum through which God embraces all life in the lower worlds. It is the realm of consciousness and the means of salvation (in the sense of facilitation of evolution in consciousness). The corresponding aspect of the human being is the soul (atma-buddhi-manas), and it is the soul that is wholly “connected” to Christ consciousness. Thus the real work of the human being (waking-consciousness) is to transcend the lower self (personality) and connect with the soul. This is the proper role of religion and spiritual practice. To temper and qualify the lower self. To achieve alignment with the higher self (soul) and be receptive and responsive to God in this second aspect. The lower self is artificial. It is form. It is matter. The ego is an illusion, born of matter. The soul is real and endures from life to life. The soul remains with God-Christ. And the student does not properly participate in God (higher consciousness) until and unless the lower self is properly purified, tempered, uplifted, and transcended.

The highest aspect of Trinity is the Father or spirit. The highest aspect of the human being is the monad. The monad stays on its own level, with God the Father. It does not participate directly in the lower life (consciousness or matter). Consequently, the spiritual student is not generally concerned with the monad except to realize its presence deep within. It is properly the soul that matters, in practice, not the monad. But finding the soul and embracing the soul are very, very difficult. Because matter (form) (personality) (mind) (ego) all exhibit independence and separateness.

Humility and Graciousness

Humility is perhaps the most potent aspect of spirituality, but it is not so easy to understand and practice. Graciousness without condescension provides a focus for beginning to embrace humility, in a way that is perhaps easier to understand and practice for most people.

Humility is a matter of being, in relation to God, the transcendence of ego, while graciousness is a matter of practice and relationships with other people. Graciousness is characterized by kindness, warm courtesy, tact, and propriety. Graciousness implies mercy and compassion. Graciousness is “marked by kindness, sympathy, and unaffected politeness.” Inherent graciousness implies or conveys poise under duress, genuine appreciation for others, and a non-judging, non-imposing, non-separative manner. It is not properly about conforming to social standards, but about being kind and gentle. It is not about responding in kind, but responding with kindness. It is a benevolence and affability in relationship that builds or encourages comfort, considerateness, harmony, and respect for one another. The original meaning of the word (graciousness) is godliness, a generosity of spirit.

One might think that love or compassion is the most important quality to be cultivated by the spiritual aspirant, and indeed it is. But love and compassion are rather qualitative and subjective and neither love nor compassion tempers the ego. It is the ego that is the single most formidable barrier to higher consciousness. And it is humility that provides a means of transcending that barrier. So while humility is the quality to be cultivated in approaching and embracing higher consciousness, it is graciousness that is the quality to be cultivated in approaching and embracing humanity. Love is so all-embracing that it tends to lack the focus required for substantive progress. Humility provides a viable (essential) inner focus, while graciousness provides a viable (essential) outer focus.

Some think that approaching God is all there is to the mystical journey, but this is not entirely correct. One cannot effectively separate oneself from the world, from humanity, and simply approach God. For God lives as much through the

world, and through humanity, as God lives within. Approaching God through the inner experience needs ultimately to be balanced with approaching God through embracing the world and humanity, gently, graciously, humbly. This is not embracing the world in its worldliness or humanity in its humanness, but embracing the world as a manifestation of God, and embracing humanity in its higher sense. Being gentle and civil toward people engenders harmonious and respectful relationships, and helps to transcend the separative tendencies of the ego. Judging and criticizing are separative. Feeling superior likewise. But seeing or feeling God within every human being, within every lifeform, respecting that divinity within all, is essential. But this cannot be simply an intellectual accomplishment. To be truly effective it must be (made) real, embraced physically and emotionally as well as mentally.

This means living in harmony in the world and with people, without being absorbed by the superficial aspect of the world, without becoming or remaining part of the mundane world and having superficial relationships. It means having genuine, gracious relationships with all peoples. It means remaining awake and aware while embracing people who are asleep, without that distinction being separative. This is a great challenge. But with both graciousness and humility the spiritual student is enabled to proceed much more deeply within the higher consciousness.

† Commentary No. 1454

Salvation

Salvation refers to the means and process and state of “liberation from clinging to the phenomenal world of appearance and final union with ultimate reality” (God). In the more fundamental (fundamentalist) (superficial) Christian interpretation, salvation is “the saving of man from the powers and effects of sin” by virtue of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection.

Sin is based in materialism and includes egoism. In this sense all human beings live in sin to some extent, for all are separated from God in consciousness in the sense of being immersed in the material and phenomenal world. Many Christians believe they are saved by virtue of professing their sinful nature and

accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. That Christ died for their sins, through substitutionary atonement. These things are true, symbolically. But the greater truth is that Jesus became the Christ (achieved union with God) and through his life demonstrated the ways and means of salvation, through the processes of self-purification, through embracing higher principles, and through deepening in consciousness. The life of Jesus is quite symbolic and filled with lessons for all of humanity (which is also true of other great ones). But salvation does not come easily or quickly or through some great-and-wonderful emotional experience. It comes only through growth and deepening in consciousness, through evolution. Salvation comes only when one has mastered all the principal lessons that this world has to offer. When one has achieved both goodness and wisdom.

Salvation comes necessarily gradually as one emerges from sleep (the sleep of materialism, immersion in the senses, egoism). Living in the world a person is naturally influenced by the illusions of separateness, and through the process of liberation (salvation) a person gradually realizes the higher, deeper truths, and attains freedom. That freedom is indeed through Christ (higher consciousness), in the sense that as one becomes more purified, as the personality is tempered, one becomes more responsive to higher, deeper, inner guidance (of the true soul or higher nature which is one with the God-Christ within). Salvation is indeed the process of self-mastery and self-realization, and can occur through any of the various religious and spiritual frameworks. Thus all true religions offer the means and encouragement.

The related notions of eternal life in heaven compared with eternal life in hell are also true, symbolically. Life is eternal. Heaven and hell are both here on earth. Realms of consciousness. If a person transcends the lower self and achieves communion (union with the soul) then one lives in the higher self (heaven). If one has not yet done this, then one lives in the lower self (hell) (ignorance) (evil) (sin). This is not bad. It is simply a matter of consciousness. But God is above all a God of love-wisdom. There are no chosen people. There are no shortcuts to heaven. Eternal damnation refers properly only to those souls which ultimately cannot progress, which are completely corrupted by materialism (sensationalism) (egoism), which are very, very few. Eternal life is eventually earned by almost everyone.

But the keys to salvation are simply learning and growing and serving, for it is through growth in consciousness, through embracing the ethics and principles demonstrated by Jesus and other enlightened souls, that one is enabled to see and embrace the truth and reality of one's own nature, one's condition on earth, and the path (and process) of salvation. There are no shortcuts or tricks or exclusive means or easy paths.

† Commentary No. 1455

Communion

Communion is defined in conventional Christianity as "a Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are partaken as a commemoration of the death of Christ." The symbolic food and drink represent the body and blood of Christ. It is a potentially powerful ritual in which the adherent (potentially) participates consciously in communion with God and Christ.

The problems of communion in this conventional sense are several. Wine is wrongly inferred from scripture, and consequently many properly substitute grape juice in lieu of (alcohol) wine. The word in the Bible interpreted as "wine" originally meant "drink" and the consumption of alcohol was never even implied. But this is a minor issue. The spiritual student who understands these things is not tempted by alcohol, not even in small doses or through the ritual of communion. The larger issue is that any ritual loses its significance if the connection in consciousness is not properly understood and maintained. Many think that simply performing the ritual (mindlessly) is sufficient. But this is not true.

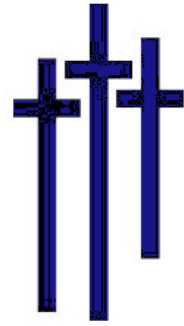
The intent of the ritual is to symbolize and encourage actual communion. To remind the adherent of the work to be done, of the practices to be undertaken. To renew one's commitment to the process of communion. Sacraments only have genuine value if the deeper meanings are actually embraced in consciousness, in practice, not merely through ritual. All of the scriptures of the various religions proper encourage communion. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples is conveyed through the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. But even Christian "yoga" or mystical practice is powerful, if it is understood for what it

is, a means and process for achieving actual communion, through purification (refinement) and through contemplative prayer and meditation.

Communion proper is the conscious union of heart and mind and soul with God (through the intervening consciousness of Christ (the soul)). In order to achieve this one must emulate the life of Jesus in the sense of embracing the principles and practices of his spiritual life, in terms of ethics and morals and other spiritual practices. One must also move above and beyond the barriers created and sustained by the ego or artificial self. The heart must be purified and uplifted to God. The mind must be purified and clarified and in quiescence reflect the intuition of the higher self. The soul is already in communion, so it is a matter of the waking-consciousness (mind) discerning the distinctions between the lower (personality) consciousness and the higher (soul) consciousness, and transcending identification with the lower. That is what spiritual practice, spiritual discipline, etc. is all about. Facilitating the removal of artificial (perceptive) barriers between the human being and the higher, divine nature.

One cannot simply say that one is a whole and achieve communion. One must work through the distinctions and move beyond the illusions and barriers and actually achieve communion. It is a letting go of the lesser self which impedes communion. It is a letting go or emptying of oneself of the attachments of living in the world (materialism, egoism). It is achieving a quiescence in which there is no lesser self. There is there only God. One communes with God simply by being. Not by thinking or even feeling. Indeed, it is not simply a matter of approaching God, but also of relating to other souls. For one communes properly with other souls only through this communion with God. In communion there are no distinctions among peoples, individually or collectively. It is a communion that embraces all of life. At the highest, deepest level.

Section 6.2322



The Bible

- *The Bible* is the principal scripture for Christianity and consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible

The Christian Bible is the only widely-acknowledged scripture of the Christian Faith. The Bible consists of two main divisions, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is common to both Judaism and Christianity and consists of some 24 books in the Jewish version, some 39 books in the Protestant version, and some 46 books in the Catholic version. The New Testament consists of some 27 books. There is a third group of books called the Apocrypha, included in some versions of the Bible, which some Christian groups also acknowledge as scripture.

The Bible is considered by Christians to be the Word of God, but there is a very large diversity in belief and interpretation among the various denominations. Many, more fundamentalist Christians, believe it is inspired by God, literally true, and inerrant. Others, more moderate Christians, believe it is inspired by God and valuable in some sense literally, in some sense symbolically. To the metaphysician, the Bible is a wonderful source of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, but predominantly through symbolism. The real value to most spiritual students is its “speaking” to anyone at any time according to his or her circumstances and consciousness. Thus it can be interpreted on many levels, from the superficial literal reading, to profoundly symbolic reading.

One of the problems in interpretation is that it has been translated from the original languages by different people at different times in history, in different ways, according to the assumptions, cultural and personal biases, and consciousness of the translators. Many words have been sincerely but poorly translated. For example, the word “meat” has been confused with the word “food” and the word “wine” has been confused with the word “drink” ... Thus it is important for the student of the Bible either to go back to the original language and place the translation into a higher context or to simply rely on the spiritual intuition for guidance in context, meaning, and import.

Of course, the esoteric student does not rely on any scripture as a source of knowledge, understanding, or wisdom, but as a compilation of threads for higher consciousness. As the student evolves in consciousness, and can rely to some

extent on the higher intuition, the student can read scripture and evoke threads of consciousness.

And needless to say, God is infallible but human beings are not. And while many scriptural writings are genuinely inspired, they still reflect to some extent the weaknesses, limitations, biases, and consciousness of the authors.

For many Christians the real import of the Bible is in the New Testament teachings concerning salvation. However, these have been seriously misinterpreted and misunderstood.



The Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of symbolic scriptures canonized into three parts. The first part is called the Torah (the Law) (the Pentateuch), and contains the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second part is called the Nebiim (the Prophets), and contains the books of the former prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and the books of the latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (minor prophets). The third part is called the Kethubim (the Writings), and contains the poetical books: Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; and the five scrolls: Ruth, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther; a prophecy, Daniel; and a history in three sections: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

The books of the Old Testament were written in various dialects of the Hebrew and Aramaic languages by a number of different authors and at various times spanning at least a millennium. This inhomogeneous mixture of authors, times, and variations in language contains fragments of the original literature which ranges from pure fictional writings to semi-historical legends. Many of the original manuscripts (now lost to exoteric investigation) were written without vowels and in some cases without separating the letters into words.

Considerable variations in meaning can arise depending upon where and how the vowels are inserted and how the words are separated. In evolving a standardized Hebrew text, scribes have unconsciously (and some deliberately) altered manuscripts, so that not all words or phrases may contain the original symbolic undertones. Many Hebrew words are ambiguous and may be alternately translated into a number of different English words, each having a distinct but different meaning. Another complication in translation is that persons of earlier centuries did not think or speak as persons do today. Even the contemporary view of history can be quite wrong and misleading due to substantial changes in mental and cultural patterns.

The authors of the Old Testament writings include disciples who were well-trained and well-versed in the sacred symbolic language and the ancient

mysteries, as well as those who were not. Some of the scribes who assisted in the work of translation and standardization were also well-trained, but most were not. Thus the resultant Hebrew text today contains both inspired and uninspired works, symbolic teachings mixed with those which are not, and relatively complete works as well as fragmentary and rewritten works. In spite of these problems, the Hebrew language (and to a certain extent, the English translations) still contains a great deal of symbolic teaching on several levels. With keys to the Hebrew language, and with keys to the sacred symbolic language of allegory and correspondence, much that is otherwise hidden can be found. The literal and presumed historical reading should be taken lightly, for the passages of literal value are relatively few. The symbolic and intuitive reading reveals the places and degrees of symbolic wisdom to be found.

Like the words of all scriptures, the words of the Old Testament are the vestments of wisdom and should not be confused with the wisdom which is contained within them. Much that is contained within the scriptures is the message of enlightened authors to others of comparable illumination. Very little of the teaching was actually intended for the unenlightened, yet persons of various degrees of consciousness can find some teaching of value in the Old Testament. The grand scheme of cyclic evolution and purpose is outlined and the steps leading to the path of spiritual values and expanded consciousness are given for those who would apply the right effort and the right motive.

† Commentary No. 72

Genesis 1

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament and the first book of Moses, the book of eternal beginnings, an outline of the evolutionary scheme and an instruction (and esoteric key) to the entire Bible. The remainder of the Bible is mostly an elucidation of the basic ideas presented in the Book of Genesis; therefore much attention has been placed on this first book.

The first story of Genesis is the story of the process of creative manifestation. It is one of the most cryptic and concise presentations of ageless wisdom. The first chapter (and part of the second) is a description of cosmogenesis, the

emergence from a single unified source (God) (the logos) of a host of creative beings (Elohim) who prepare the foundation of manifestation for the evolutionary lives which emerge as the proper evolutionary conditions are properly prepared for them. These emerging lifewaves recapitulate their earlier experience and continue their evolutionary progress along the cyclic chain.

It is an eternal beginning, for the whole process is periodic (cyclic) (progressive spiral), filled with new beginnings at every turn. The dawn is a new dawn, a great cycle that begins with the emergence of finite being from the infinite, the emanation of cosmos (activity) from chaos (inactivity). The solar cycle of manifestation (the incarnation of the logos) begins and the seven planes of consciousness (dry land) are reestablished. Seven (ten) simultaneous (horizontal) planetary schemes emerge, each one of which experiences seven great days of manifestation (creation). Each of the creative days is a vast period of time (of activity) (experience and expression). And each great day is naturally followed by a night (pralaya) of rest and assimilation. Each such great day contains many lesser cycles of activity and assimilation.

The spirit of God is the masculine (active) (positive) creative force; the face of the deep is feminine (passive) (negative) creative force. Heaven is spirit (unmanifested substance) (subjectivity); earth is matter (manifested substance) (objectivity). To be without form is to have potential existence. The God of creation is Elohim, a plurality of creative beings within one God. These creative agents work in accordance with the divine plan. Creation implies emergence (outgoing) and differentiation followed (at the end of manifestation) by absorption (returning) and integration (the Sabbath) (completion and full realization). From darkness (formlessness) (chaos) the many lives emerge into the light (form) (cosmos). The terms darkness and light are reversed in meaning from the standpoint of physical existence (darkness) with respect to spiritual existence (light), as such distinction is always relative.

The firmament refers to the ring-pass-not of the solar system and to the illusion of separation of the physical and spiritual (higher, nonphysical) worlds. That it was good signals the end or completion of a season (cycle). To bless is to provide certain potential powers (seeds of potential to be developed). Naming refers to the creation of archetypes (models) (patterns) from which the forms can be developed. The image of God is the inner spiritual and creative essence (life).

Man is the spiritual microcosm. To be fruitful is to become the creative self. Dominion over the animals means the responsibility of men as the elder brothers of the animals, etc. The information used to describe each day of creation may refer to any or to all of the greater or lesser cycles having numerological correspondence. There is a mixture of cosmological references with those for lesser earthly cycles (some of which refer to humanity). That which is above is reflected in that which is below. Hidden within man are the keys to the mysteries of Genesis.

† Commentary No. 77

Genesis 2

The story of Adam and Eve, and the subsequent fall of man, is the story of the human lifewave and its natural (intended) descent into the realm of matter. The garden of Eden represents a sphere of activity that precedes the incarnation of humanity, in which are planted the seeds of evolutionary development, intended to be brought to fruition through experience on objective levels.

On one level, the garden of Eden is the home-world (in consciousness) of the human spirit (monad). As part of the overall evolutionary pattern, the monad (through its reflection, the soul) must descend into the denser worlds of matter for the experience and development afforded there. Before the actual descent, man is spiritually conscious (group conscious in a passive sense) but is not self-conscious; as a consequence of the path of descent (and the subsequent path of ascent), man evolves self-consciousness. But during his worldly encounter he is blinded (by matter) or separated (in illusion) from the spiritual self. The path of ascent is the path of the self-conscious individuality back into the group-conscious self, resulting in greater (active) spiritual consciousness.

The tree of life is both a path of consciousness and the subtle thread of the relationship between the highest aspect (the monad) and the lowest (the incarnating personality). Knowledge means first-hand experience, the means by which the life within the form evolves. On another level, the garden of Eden represents the etheric domain of human existence preceding the final "fall" into the dense physical world. On this level is described the history of humanity beginning with the third root-race. The four rivers symbolize the four ethers, the

four elements (fire, earth, air, and water), and the quaternary vehicle of man (physical, etheric, emotional, and mental bodies).

Adam (before Eve) represents early humanity which was androgynous (hermaphroditic), dual-sexed and self-reproductive. The soul itself has no sex, but in order to properly develop the latent creative faculties, the human evolutionary experience involves polarity, and at an early age, the human forms were gradually separated into sexes. Adam and Eve (together) represent the human race after the separation into sexes. The expulsion from the garden implies the final fall into the dense physical world and the opening of the eyes into physical awareness. This coincided with a measure of blindness as far as the higher worlds are concerned. The Adamic knowledge was quite unlike that of the present humanity, as at that time it was a passive or involutory experience. The serpent represents the knowledge and wisdom to be gained as a consequence of eating the fruit, or experiencing the temporary death (illusion) to the spirit that is physical reality. The serpent also refers to the dual creative force (male-female). Nakedness implies the innocent (inactive) state prior to the degradation (from the standpoint of the spirit) by matter. Humanity has since passed the nadir of materiality and is upon the path of ascent, or returning to its former spiritual state (with the expanded consciousness that is developed along the way).

The story of descendants of Adam and Eve shows humanity at successively later stages. Cain illustrates the lower self or personality, whereas Abel illustrates the higher self or soul that is slain (blinded) by materiality. On another level Cain and Abel (through Seth) portray the two paths of development for humanity: Cain depicts the head-centered path (fire) and Abel (Seth) depicts the heart-centered path (water). The names of the various descendants indicate the qualities and characteristics of the two paths. The two paths are ultimately blended as the individual completes the requisite experience on each.

Genesis 3

The story of Noah and the flood is a story of preparation, a transition (migration), and new beginnings, on several levels. In cosmic, solar, and planetary terms it is the story of gatherings (abstraction) of experience to be carried over into the next cycle of activity, the gathering of seeds for further development. Evolved archetypes and patterns of life-forms are saved (withdrawn to safety), the forms are destroyed, but the life remains (on its level). On another level is described the human transition which is called death: the ascent and descent of human consciousness in preparation for a new birth. The old forms (bodies) are discarded and new forms are created from the fruits of past experience. The story of Noah also describes symbolically the end of the Atlantean (fourth) root-race and the beginnings of the Aryan (fifth) root-race.

Whenever old forms crystallize and become unresponsive to further spiritual (evolutionary) impulse, they are destroyed so that new, more flexible, more responsive forms may be created and utilized. Such is the case on all levels of manifestation. The Atlantean civilization had declined and degenerated such that only a few were still spiritually responsive. Noah and his family represent those few (generically), the remnants of the Atlanteans who were saved by migration and prepared for a new beginning, and from which the Aryan root-race was developed. The flood described was the fourth and final cataclysm which destroyed the old Atlantean continent. The migrations from Atlantis provided for a rebirth of the Atlantean mystery schools in Egypt, Chaldea, and India. The liberated souls (freed from the old forms) were then able to incarnate as new Aryan bodies were provided for further development.

The story of Noah is filled with numerological and linguistic symbology. The forty days and forty nights symbolize foundation and preparation. The ark is a vehicle of higher consciousness (the causal body). The raven and the dove represent the lower self (intellect) and higher self (intuition) respectively. The (purely symbolic) animal sacrifices refer to the purification (burning) of the animal nature in man. The covenant refers to the link between God (the monad) and man (the soul and its reflection, the mind), and to the link or thread

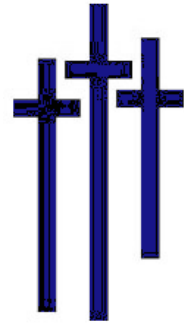
of life between the various cycles. The names of the descendants of Noah (and in subsequent genealogies) offer further insight into the nature of man and his enlightenment.

The story of the Tower of Babel is the story of the diversification of humanity from an original unified race into various sub-races and branch-races (and individualism), each with its own language and particular experience. The east represents the unified source of light and spiritual perception. The lower plain implies lower (external) (objective) consciousness, materialism, and intellect, all of which must be transformed before higher consciousness can be made manifest. At the conclusion of diversification, humanity (and all life) shall return again to the unified source.

The story of Abraham considers the great journey of spiritual unfoldment in which each major event in the life-story of Abraham marks a stage or step upon the spiritual path. The tests and trials are many, as the disciple progresses. Each place and each person in the story has its symbolic value. Ur in Chaldea represents the light of the mysteries. Egypt represents darkness and materialism. Palestine represents spiritual consciousness (the promised land). Lot denotes the lower nature from which Abraham withdraws. Lot is finally redeemed (purified and disciplined). And the mystic marriage of feminine and masculine principles is consummated and consciousness is exalted.



Section 6.2323



The Spectrum of Christianity

- Like most religions, Christianity exhibits a dynamic range or spectrum of forms or denominations. At one end of the spectrum are the more conservative churches which exhibit fundamentalism. At the other end of the spectrum are the most liberal churches where almost anything goes. One end is marked by exclusivity and rigidity, the other by uninhibited personal expression (flakiness).

The Spectrum of Christianity 1

Like most religions, Christianity exhibits a dynamic range or spectrum of forms or denominations. At one end of the spectrum are the more conservative churches which exhibit fundamentalism. At the other end of the spectrum are the most liberal churches where almost anything goes. One end is marked by exclusivity and rigidity, the other by uninhibited personal expression (flakiness).

At the most conservative end of the spectrum, the Christian "religion" is authoritative and prescriptive and adherents are told what to believe, what to think, how to groom themselves, and how to behave. Fellowship tends to be restricted to adherents only, and "outsiders" need to be saved and reformed (molded) before they are "acceptable" for membership. The world is divided into two well-defined groups, adherents and others (heathens). Even other Christian faiths are not considered to be truly Christian. Anyone whose beliefs are "different" is a threat and considered to be misguided or deluded at best, or servants of Satan at worst. In this extreme form of religion, scripture is considered to be literally and absolutely true and all other writings are considered to be uninspired at best and false at worst.

Religious leaders exhibit considerable power and influence, and even if sincere (as most are), their treatment of adherents and prospectives is equivalent to brainwashing. Adherents are not allowed to think for themselves. Education and worldly experience is discouraged because adherents might be corrupted by "other" teachings. They must give every question and every decision, however personal or petty, to God. Of course "true" answers are entirely conforming to the ways and means (doctrines and practices) of the church. In fundamentalism the emphasis is upon being saved, through God's grace, and not through good works. Which is rather like finding an unearned shortcut to heaven, restricted only to the chosen few. Except that "good works" are important to character-building, and one should emulate Jesus.

One might wonder how this fundamentalism is so appealing to so many people. The answer, perhaps, is that there is comfort in conformity. For many it is indeed comforting to not have to think, to simply acquiesce to church doctrine,

to conform. In such conformity one is accepted and “loved” and there are no threats to one’s well-being except from “outside” the restricted fellowship or close-knit community of the church. Fundamentalists are subtly discouraged from any experience or practice that is beyond the “control” of the church. The ways of the “outer” world are considered ungodly or unholy and threatening. The “us” and “them” of course is extremely separative. As is the presumption that one is right and everyone else (outside) is wrong.

There is of course a positive side to all this, namely a strong sense of ethics and morality and personal discipline (purity) and sense of devotion and service to God. The problem is that adherents cannot really experience much beyond the limited experiential framework of the church, and consequently there is little opportunity for learning or growing meaningfully. In separating themselves from “humanity” adherents are unable to realize the deeper, higher, broader dimension of God’s love, namely that all creatures are to be loved, respected, and accepted as they are, without coercion or judgment. But the fundamentalist tends to judge others based upon the (relatively narrow) church doctrine, and rigidly so. But in truth, it is not a human’s place to judge others, or to project his or her own truth and understanding and values upon others.

† Commentary No. 1450

The Spectrum of Christianity 2

Some fundamentalists actually divide heathens into two groups, namely those who are savable (or worthy of the attempt) and those who are not. The rules for this can be quite rigid. This can give rise to evangelism and similar practices, which however sincerely embraced, constitute imposition, which is (ultimately) a crime against God and humanity. From a metaphysical or theosophical perspective, adherents at this very conservative end of the spectrum are simply asleep. They may be “good” people but they are generally not very highly evolved because they are lacking the needed experience.

At the other end of the spectrum things are not necessarily much better. In the very liberal churches, while notably more inclusive, what one believes is determined more by trendiness and convenience than true realization, and how

one behaves is determined more by self-justification (whatever one wants is good) than by higher principles. There is there a feel-good fellowship that is also quite comforting, for it basically supports the “adherent” in whatever he or she wants to believe or do. While fundamentalism discourages ego development in some sense, the ego can nonetheless run rampant in the guise of leadership and evangelism. In liberalism, there is definite encouragement of ego in the guise of building self-esteem and through self-justification. Of course this self-reliance (in the lower sense) is not altogether or inherently “bad” but it does tend to undermine real spiritual growth (which is based necessarily in the combination of intelligence and humility).

So. Where is the middle path in this spectrum of Christianity. It is perforce a much more challenging journey than either acquiescence to fundamentalism or acquiescence to self-serving liberalism. The path of moderation involves intelligent balance, between guidelines and self-expression. The rules or encouragements are more basic (sensible) (understandable) (practical) and while not prescriptive or controlling, if properly embraced nonetheless facilitate growth. In the conservative extreme it is most important to be saved and to conform. In the liberal extreme it is most important to be true to oneself (in some lower, self-serving sense). But in the middle path of moderate and sensible Christianity, it is most important simply to embrace the ethics and morality of the church (teachings) to the extent that these principles and practices are understood. To be honest. To be kind. To be charitable. To respect all peoples, regardless of their faith, culture, race, etc. To embrace God’s love for all creatures. To encourage learning and growing (deepening) and serving, without prescription or coercion or imposition or judgment or even expectation. To actually forego criticizing (mentally or verbally), to forego judging others. To be gentle in all things. In other words, to embrace God’s nature.

And this ultimately requires only one thing, which is God’s love or grace. Embracing God’s love. Which can also be perceived as two things, namely intelligence and humility. Intelligence and humility are both the result of embracing God’s love, of deepening in the spiritual sense. Of approaching the God-Christ within. Of working through and transcending the illusions of materialism, the senses, and the ego (evil). Of realizing that “moderate”

Christianity is essentially the same as the moderate component of every other major religion.

Ultimately, intelligent people think for themselves. But really intelligent people transcend thinking altogether, and rely on the intuition, which is the voice of the God-Christ within, however it is labeled or perceived.

† Commentary No. 1451

The Spectrum of Christianity 3

There are several other dimensions of Christianity in addition to the primary spectrum that ranges from conservative fundamentalism to liberalism. There is also a relatively moderate conservatism, e.g., in the Episcopal Church. And there is some dynamic range even within the conservative fundamentalism that embraces both evangelism and Pentecostalism.

Fundamentalism is a movement within Protestantism which emphasizes a number of fundamental teachings, such as the literal inerrancy of scriptures, the second coming, the virgin birth, physical resurrection, and substitutionary atonement. Within fundamentalism there is an evangelical dimension. Evangelism embraces the zealous winning of souls and the revival of personal commitments to Christ (in this fundamentalist sense). In evangelism there is salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. In evangelism there is emphasis on salvation through personal conversion, the authority of the scriptures, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual. Perhaps the extreme of evangelism is found in Pentecostalism, where revivalist methods typically include great emotionalism.

As is the case for most belief systems, there is an underlying truth for each of the Christian teachings, even those of the two extremes of fundamentalism and liberalism. But the specific teachings are tailored to the needs of particular peoples and they serve a purpose. The various teachings are simply framed in the language that people can understand. The more fundamentalist teachings discourage thinking, while the least fundamentalist teachings encourage mindless self-expression. The problem with fundamentalism is narrow-

mindedness, which precludes or inhibits any real spiritual growth. Fundamentalists tend to be so attached to their truth that they cannot accept or embrace any broadening or deepening. At the other extreme, people tend simply believe whatever is convenient, and this also precludes or inhibits any real spiritual growth.

It is in the middle ground that truth is found. Without unreasonable attachment to beliefs, and without the bias of self-serving beliefs, the middle path affords opportunity for learning and growing. Provided the seeker is genuinely seeking the truth. Many simply stay where they are, comfortably believing whatever they have come to accept, wherever they are in the spectrum. But the earnest seeker must study more broadly, and ultimately must go within in order to realize the truth. One of the biggest revelations for many Christians comes from understanding that many of the scriptures and "teachings" are more symbolically than literally true. That the message is contained in the symbol, not in any historical fact. And as one studies the various religions, one finds essentially the same teaching, provided one goes deep enough into the scriptures (and deep enough into oneself).

The second coming, the virgin birth, resurrection, and substitutionary atonement are all primarily symbolic events. But if they are interpreted literally or out of context, then the substance of the message is missed. Instead of looking outside to (presumed) literal (narrow) significance, the student needs to look inside and see how these ideas have meaning in the greater context (evolution in consciousness). There are no shortcuts to self-realization (salvation). Being saved is about preparation and approaching Him in consciousness. The spiritual path is a process and requires effort. We are saved and redeemed through that process, through growth in consciousness, through achieving mystical union with God within.

Section 6.233



Islam

- Islam is directly related to Judaism and Christianity, being the third of the three pillars of western religious tradition. Islam is, literally, "submission to the will of God." Central to the Islamic faith is the concept of Jihad, or the holy war between the lower self and the higher self.

Islam

Islam is directly related to Judaism and Christianity in the sense of (perceived) progressive revelation. The problem is exclusivity, as adherents of each new religion tend to perceive their faith as more noble or more final than that of earlier religions and as adherents of older religions tend to remain attached to their beliefs and traditions, resisting the newer faiths. Of course these conflicts are entirely at the ego level, there being no inherent conflict between the (proper) teachings of any of the (proper) religions, and instead of perceiving any religion as more noble or better or more final than any other, the spiritual student (properly) perceives all religions as equal and each as continuingly contributive to human welfare.

Islam means submission to God (Allah). An Islamic adherent (Islamist) is more properly called a Muslim, or one who submits himself to the will of God. Islam was founded by Mohammed and the principal scripture is the Koran or Qur'an, the word of God as revealed through the prophet Mohammed. The two principal groups within Islam are the Sunnis and the Shiites. Sunnis are the majority of Muslims and are followers of the political successors of Mohammed, while Shiites are a (substantial) minority of Muslims and are followers of the Mohammed's family successors. Sunnis are considered "orthodox" and "traditional" while Shiites differ from Sunnis mainly regarding the issue of succession.

In Shi'a the (hidden) imam (Mahdi) is the unqualified authority or spiritual leader of the community, represented by mullahs, while in Sunna the head of the Islamic community is the khalifa or caliphate. In addition to the Sunni and Shiites are two significant spiritual groups or sects, the Sufis and the Baha'is. In some sense Sufism and the Bahai Faith are within Islam, in some sense they are also religions both within and beyond Islam.

In Islam there is a somewhat precious balance between fate and freedom. The human being should do his (her) best and fate is determined both by one's striving (actions) and through the grace of God, but there are tendencies toward fatalism. For Muslims there are five religious duties or pillars of faith, namely

the confession of faith (shahada), prayer (salat), alms (zakat), fasting (sawm), and pilgrimage (hajj). The confession of faith is a declaration of there being no God but God (Allah) and recognition of Mohammed as “the” prophet. Prayer rituals play a significant role in Islam, with daily prescribed prayers, Friday as a main day of prayer, and Mecca (birthplace of Mohammed) as the direction for prayer. Islamic Mosques are special places for prayer and worship. Alms are more usually compulsory taxes to benefit the poor than voluntary offerings. Ramadan is the month of Islamic fasting (between dawn and sunset). Pilgrimage refers to the obligation for the adult Muslim to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca.

Other features of Islam include the jihad or holy war, and Islamic law. Jihad is sometimes perceived as the war against unbelievers, but is more properly considered the war (noble efforts) against injustice. In Islam it is not so easy to separate the church from the state, as Islamic law is rather imposing. Muslims are prohibited from gambling, from drinking alcohol, from adultery, from slander, for theft, from violent crime, etc. Penalties tend to be rather severe. Given the relatively unconditional nature of Islamic faith, cultural stability usually comes more from the coincidence of church and state, though there are tensions even within an Islamic state, as there are variations of beliefs and a tendency of those in power to impose on others.

† Commentary No. 944

The Seven Selves

According to Helminski, “in classical Sufism the continuum from the false self to the essential Self has been (is) described in seven stages.” This is simply one perspective on the progression of quality of consciousness (and associated character, temperament, and values) from the animal stage through the human stage to the super-human stage. In this context, the self is the waking-consciousness at whatever level it is manifesting while the Self is the soul on its level or the soul manifesting through the self. The seven stages of passage or pilgrimage in Sufism are quite consistent with perspectives engendered by or through other religions. Being a relatively heart-centered religion, Islam (Sufism) emphasizes the heart quality and recognizes the progression of the self

in terms of its mystical character. This perspective masks a comparable (and included) head-centered development.

“The self of compulsion seeks satisfaction primarily in satisfying its selfish, carnal desires and its will to power.” This is the level (stage) of the human animal (and to some extent most of humanity), self-centered and self-indulgent. In ignorance (and inability to discern causal and conditioning factors), people tend to live according to their (personal) desires, pursuing their self-interests without much regard for others. Those who live at this level of compulsion are simply wholly enslaved and dominated by their own lower nature, identifying themselves with their desires rather than realizing their transience. This identification with the lower nature (false self) is the starting point for “human” evolution.

“The self of conscience has begun to discriminate between right and wrong, and can sometimes resist the temptation to evil and selfish actions.” This is the second stage, in which the assimilation of experience has led to the beginning of conscience. Temptations arise from within and beyond (but resonating with) the lower nature. As conscience develops there arises a growing measure of ability to see beyond self-indulgent behavior. This second stage is the whole arena of ordinary human experience and expression leading from the stage of the human animal (unconscious self-indulgence) to the stage of humanity proper (conscious self-indulgence tempered by social constraints and intellectual factors).

“The self of inspiration is inspired with spiritual knowledge and can reliably follow the voice of conscience.” This is the third stage and marks the beginning of the spiritual path (and follows the important transition from tempered self-indulgence to seeking truth and understanding). It implies a measure of understanding the rules of the path (law) such that one’s own interests are seen in a broader context (and law). “The soul of tranquility has reached the level of presence in which a conscious intimacy is possible.” This is the fourth (relatively advanced) stage in which (some measure of) soul contact is achieved. It implies passing beyond personality-centered existence.

“The soul of submission has reached the level where its desires and actions are in harmony with Reality. It accepts each moment as it is and submits itself to

Reality." This is the fifth (advanced) stage, of soul contact resulting in expression of soul quality. "The soul of total submission is even more completely identified with the Universal Will. This is the stage of the great saints whose lives may be a profound and miraculous example of human wholeness. These people are lost in God." This is the sixth stage and beyond the expectations of the bulk of humanity. "The soul of perfection is a theoretical absolute, the perfected or complete human being ...," the seventh stage.



The Qur'an

The Islamic-Muslim Qur'an (Koran) is the only widely-acknowledged scripture of the Islamic faith. It consists of some 114 chapters or suras written in rhymed Arabic.

While the Christian Bible was written by many different authors, in various styles, over a considerable period of time, the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammad over a relatively brief period of time, and written down by his followers. The name Qur'an means recitation, and Mohammad is considered by Muslims to be the most recent and last prophet in a line of prophet's who have received God's recitations or revelations.

The central tenet of Islam and the Qur'an is that there is only one God. In Arabic the word for God is Allah. But the one God of Islam is the same as the one God of Christianity and the one God of other faiths. There is only one God. It really doesn't matter what language one uses to refer to God. The Qur'an also teaches Islam, literally "submission" to God. This is also not unique to the Muslim faith.

The Qur'an refers to prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, as being God's messengers to various peoples. While Mohammad is referred to as the last prophet, it has been (wrongly) interpreted as if there will be no more prophets, while in fact God speaks through many souls, in many ways, and continues to do so. Islam glorifies Mohammad, as Christians glorify Jesus. But it is not the prophet or teacher that really matters. What really matters is the teaching. Understanding God and God's creation. Understanding the human being and the role of the human being in God's plan.

The Qur'an requires certain daily prayers. Character is important. Thus the real import of the Qur'an is to encourage evolution in consciousness, through character-building, humility, and submission to the God within. The Qur'an and the Islamic faith have inspired many millions of people to become more spiritually-focused. And like Christianity, there are both fundamentalists who interpret their faith narrowly and rigidly, and more spiritually-inspired

adherents who embrace the real teachings of their faith, in humility, benevolence, character, and consciousness.

The Qur'an is a holy book that deals with man's relationship to God. It provides a legitimate and meaningful spiritual path for many. It leads to jihad (the struggle between the lower nature and the higher self). And ultimately it leads to Islamic mysticism, and the mystical core of Islam, which is the mystical core of all the world's faiths.

† Article No. 99

Jihad

Jihad is commonly understood to mean a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty, or a crusade for a matter of principle or belief. But the true meaning of jihad is the holy war between a man's lower nature and higher self.

This is the real message in all of the world's great religions, not just Islam, namely that one should purify oneself, build character, embrace the true principles of one's faith, evolve in consciousness, and achieve communion with the God within. In order to do this one needs to recognize the difference and distinction between the lower nature and the higher self, recognize that one is living through the lower nature, and work toward embracing higher consciousness, through purification, self-discipline, and self-mastery.

The discipline required or encouraged by the Qur'an is an effective starting point for many adherents. But one must also embrace the struggle, and overcome the lower nature. This is why "modern" culture and secular worldliness are deemed as threats, because they tend to lead one away from the spiritual self and keep one mired in materialism, the lower senses, and ego, all of which ultimately have to be overcome.

Guidance concerning this "holy war" can be found in all the major scriptures of all the world's genuine religions. In the Bhagavad Gita it is the struggle of Arjuna the warrior. In the Bible it is the struggle between good and evil, where "good" means the higher self and "evil" means the lower nature. In the Qur'an it is called jihad.

Jihad proper has absolutely nothing to do with religious war or conflict between people or cultures or faiths or races, except that as one truly embraces jihad one is no longer in conflict with others, in part because one rise above such outer conflicts, and in part because one is focused on the inner struggle. The problem is that the language of the Qur'an, like the language of the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible, can be interpreted literally and wrongly, when it is really the language of "warfare" that should be applied to one's own inner struggle.

Religious leaders who are more spiritual than religious, who realize the deeper meaning of scripture, realize this and teach this, but religious leaders who are not so enlightened misinterpret and misunderstand and thereby mislead others regarding jihad.

Most Islamists recognize the existence of both a greater jihad and a lesser jihad, but confuse which is which. To true Islamists the greater jihad is the struggle within, while the lesser jihad is the struggle with others. But to many fundamentalists, these are reversed. Those who argue about these distinctions are not really focused on jihad proper. Those who are focused on jihad proper do not argue and do not embrace violence in any form. They simply embrace the inner struggle.

In some sense there are at least five common forms of jihad. There is jihad by the sword or armed fighting in the way of God, which of course is not in the way of God at all. There is jihad by the hand, which refers to the struggle between good and evil in the world, properly meaning advancing the cause of human health and welfare. There is jihad by the pen and knowledge and jihad by the tongue, which refer to the struggle of good against evil through studying the scriptures and preaching in some form or another (but not properly through proselytizing or imposition of beliefs). And there is the greater jihad, the jihad of the heart and soul.

Section 6.2331



Sufism

- The depth and breadth of the inner teachings of Islam are revealed primarily through Sufism, the mystical dimension of the Islamic faith.

Sufism

Sufism is the mystical element of Islam where the inner teachings, common to all proper religions, are embraced. In Sufism there is a natural focus on unity, oneness, and communion with the God within. Indeed, the Sufi aspires to the state of fana or union with God, and the practices of Sufism are the means of achieving fana.

While outer Islam may have its (superficial, worldly) conflicts with Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism (and other faiths), Sufism is a bridge between these faiths. Sufism has strong (inner) links to Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. While in some sense unconventional and challenging, Sufism is also a moderating influence within Islam, wherever it is allowed to function openly, otherwise it is a moderating influence on more subjective levels. In Sufism there is appreciation for the love of God, and this love is reflected in the love of humans for life and for each other. And while there is naturally both inner and outer forms (elements) of Sufism, this focus on love forms a bridge in both directions, to humanity and the world (without) and to God (within).

Thus Sufism is in a very real sense the awakening of the heart. Among the aims of Sufism are the abandonment of desire for worldly things, the purification and refinement of the body (and emotions (and mind)) (transcending self-centeredness), the search for truth within (living an inner, spiritual life), purification of the heart and achieving communion with God, ultimately to approach God in consciousness such that one becomes absorbed in that higher, deeper consciousness. Sufism represents a relatively simplified lifestyle, and in some sense is threatening to those in authority because it fails to embrace the human ego and all of its comforts. Sufism focuses on the spirit of the Islamic teachings rather than the blind implementation of law (legalism) and ritual. And although (outer) (organized) Sufism tends toward the worldly (ego), inner Sufism remains true to the deeper principles, the proper union of (balance between) inner and outer.

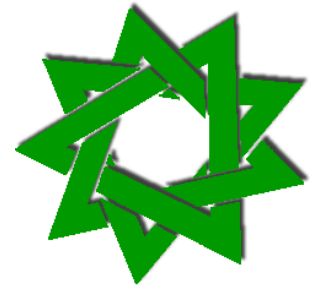
Twelve principles of Sufism are abandonment (tark) of the world of illusion, repentance (tubeh) or returning to a higher state, virtue and abstinence (tugha)

or obedience to divine laws, patience (sabr) in the sense of allowing the heart to unfold, truthfulness (sedgh) or consistency between faith and practice, purity (safa) or adherence to truth and not to the ways of the world, love (vud) or living in and through the heart, remembrance (verd) of God at all times, loyalty (vafa'a) to the spiritual path and its principles, isolation (fard) or non-separative detachment from the world, poverty (faghr) or freedom from worldly and egoistic attachments, and annihilation (fana) of ego or achievement of perfection.

Sufism is the bhakti yoga of Islam. It is the recognition of the soul of its source and embracing the means of its returning to the source (love, devotion, living from the heart). It is the mystical journey, of meditation, of finding oneself, of preparation, of transformation of the heart, of communion. From the heart emerges a longing, an otherworldliness, that gradually transforms the outer person(ality) and leads the seeker to communion. Sufism is, in some sense, the ancient wisdom of the heart, in an Islamic context (through the Qur'an). It is an awakening to the pain of separation, a listening the voice of the silence (the soul). It is embracing the inner ideal of Islam, submission to God, in the most noble way, progressively without impediment of coarseness or ego, through love.



Section 6.2332



The Bahai Faith

- In a sense, the Bahai Faith is (arguably) an outgrowth and extension (reformation) of Islam. While each such outgrowth contributes to the whole of the religious tradition, the Bahai Faith embraces some of the deeper aspects of Islam and Christianity (and Judaism).

The Bahai Faith

The Bahai Faith has emerged from within Islam and is a moderating influence with respect for other religions and with more universal appeal than traditional Islamic faith. The founder of the Bahai Faith is Baha'u'llah (meaning, the glory of God), who was a Persian prophet who is perceived by Baha'is to be part of a succession of prophets (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed) in the sense of progressive revelation. Each new prophet builds upon the existing tradition and offers encouragement (influence) in some particular directions (reformations).

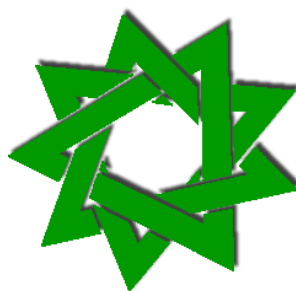
While some religions compete with each other for adherents and influence (more properly it is the misguided adherents of religions and not the religions per se), Baha'is tend to be more gracious and accepting of other faiths. Thus one of the principal characteristics of the Bahai Faith is non-separative respect for other faiths and traditions. Indeed Baha'is have actively and fundamentally promoted the ideal of unity in diversity, and Baha'is have actively and fundamentally promoted the ideal of human equality regardless of race, religion, even before these notions have become popular. Indeed in some sense religions emerge within the world religion as a consequence of need (balance), and the Bahai Faith has emerged for these purposes (social and spiritual teachings) in complement to other religions. The Bahai Faith is more of an outer religion than Sufism, has the strong devotional aspects of Islam, yet remains (properly) connected to its mystical core. There is of course a tendency to emotionalize Baha'u'llah and therefore miss some of the import of his message, but the community of Baha'is and many of the practices of Baha'is are nonetheless progressive and encouraging.

Among the principles and teachings of the Bahai Faith ... The singularity of God, the non-anthropogenic nature of God, the immeasurability and unfathomability of God, the transcendent and immanent nature of God, God as creator, existence of non-physical dimensions to manifestation, evolution in culture and consciousness, the notion of God living within all human beings (and all lives), the existence and continuing evolution of the soul which transcends the human physical form, the body and mind being merely

instruments, the need for progressive revelation (fresh collective spiritual impetus), the golden rule, the spiritual nature of our true existence, the need for spiritual growth, the balance of social and spiritual teachings, the inherent harmony of science and religion, etc.

While some religions rely on and promote blind faith and (fearful) obedience, the Bahai Faith encourages perceptive faith (self-realization) and voluntary (loving) obedience to the principles as they are understood. Bahai principles tend to be more affirmative and less prohibitive or prescriptive, although there are admonishments that preclude the use of alcohol and drugs, gambling, premarital and extramarital affairs, and backbiting. There is an openness to the Bahai Faith that promotes honesty and discourages derisive activities. While many religions have become institutionalized and ritualized to the point where much of the substance has faded for the outer (more worldly) adherents, as a young religion, the Bahai Faith remains relatively fresh.

In principle, Baha'is actively encourage social (societal) progress through facing the various problems of humanity and living lives that encourage progress in these regards (overcoming poverty and injustice, promoting universal education and the development of human potential, promoting unity in diversity, promoting peace).



Section 6.234



Zoroastrianism

- While Islam and the Bahai Faith are relatively modern religions, Zoroastrianism is the ancient religion of Persia, albeit with strong links to Judaism and Christianity. While the Christian faith popularly embraces the One and the Three (and esoterically the Seven and the Twelve), Zoroastrianism popularly embraces the One and the Seven."

Zoroastrianism 1

Zoroastrianism is a religion founded by the prophet Zarathushtra Spitama (Zoroaster). Zoroastrianism is the ancient religion of Persia, albeit with strong links to Judaism and Christianity, and not without some influence on and of Hinduism, Islam, and other noble faiths.

God (the one God) in Zoroastrian terms is known as Ahura Mazda, wise lord. Ahura Mazda is the creator and represents good (evolution) (progress), while the opposing force is called Angra Mainyu, destructive spirit, representing evil (ignorance) (forces that inhibit evolution). Zoroastrianism is also known as the Mazdayasnian religion (i.e., the worship of Mazda). Zoroastrianism is also the precursor to Mithraism (or vice versa). The central scripture of the Zoroastrian faith is the Avesta. Following are a few excerpted Zoroastrian concepts.

Adar or fire, representing the original light of God, holds a special place in Zoroastrianism, e.g., there are consecrated fires and prayer is often performed in front of a fire. Fire is not worshipped, but serves as symbolic focus. Asha is a key Zoroastrian concept, and embraces truth, righteousness, world-order, eternal law, and fitness (holiness). Ashavan refers to a righteous or noble person, one who embraces asha. Baj is ritual silence, or a ritual utterance or prayer which frames an action with the power of a manthra (mantram). Barashnom is a major ritual of purification. Hamistagan is purgatory, a neutral place between heaven and hell where souls go when their good deeds equal their evil deeds. Khwarrah is divine grace. Kriya is ritual action. Namaskar is a short prayer of homage. Paywand is a connection or ritual contact between persons serving as a shield against evil.

In Zoroastrian terms, God is the creator and architect who provides human beings with conscience, the inherent ability (potential ability) to discern between the ways of good (righteousness) (enlightenment) and the ways of evil (ignorance). The Zoroastrian creed is humata (good thoughts), hukhta (good words), and havarastra (good deeds). The Avesta teaches the immortality of the soul, and in some sense, Zoroastrianism has many more similarities with Christianity than with Hinduism, e.g., notions of heaven and hell, and of

purgatory. And like modern Christianity, notions of reincarnation and karma have been deliberately erased or minimized even while the core teaching (mystical dimension) (of both religions) embraces a sense of progressive reincarnation. Similarly with Judaism, for the Zoroastrian, ethnic identity and religion are synonymous and marrying outside of the religion and conversion to the religion are oftentimes discouraged if not prohibited. And much like the case of fundamentalist Christianity and Islam, there are Zoroastrian fundamentalists who are inherently separatist. But there are also more noble adherents (in each religion), who transcend this sense of separativeness. There is of course a tendency in each religion to remain faithful to what is believed to be the original intent of the religion (i.e., resisting external influence), and also a tendency to relate more effectively to the rest of humanity without losing anything in the process.

Zoroastrianism also teaches the progress of sacred time, and the eventual end of time. The belief is that the collective good acts of humanity will slowly transform the imperfect material world into its heavenly ideal. This is known as the *frasho-kereti*, or making-fresh, that is, renewal. Like most religious “truths” this has a strong basis in the ancient wisdom (theosophy) and is derived from an understanding of the evolutionary framework.

† Commentary No. 1299

Zoroastrianism 2

Other notions embraced by (some) Zoroastrians (Zarathushtri) ... “All religions are equal in stature. Converting from one religion to the next is assuming that one is greater than the other, and is a violation of this belief, i.e., the righteous of every noble religion go to heaven. We are born into the religion that we were meant or pre-destined for, i.e., meaning that before birth, our soul chooses the religion we are born into, the parents, the circumstances, etc. Each religion is like a prescription for spiritual enhancement. If the soul needs some particular kind of preparation to reach perfection (the ultimate goal for the Spirit), then it manifests itself as a human soul and is born into the required religion.” Indeed, all noble (sincere, God-centered) religions are equal. And the soul chooses the parameters of each lifetime. But this does not (should not) preclude needed growth or adaptation. Sometimes the soul is born in one place

and circumstances, and over the course of a lifetime is (intentionally) drawn elsewhere.

“All Zoroastrians must wear the sudreh-kusti: the sudreh is a white cotton shirt and the kusti is a woolen tube worn around the waist on top of the sudreh. Both are specifically designed for spiritual significance. The tying of the kusti is a part of the basic daily prayers of a Zoroastrian.” These are of course cultural aspects of Zoroastrianism, and if sincerely embraced, i.e., with meaningful understanding and not merely superficially ritualistically, they have value.

“Zoroastrian prayers are best be recited in the sacred language of Avesta, whose words are manthric, in that they are thought or holy words of Ahura Mazda and have more meaning and power than their mundane, literal translation.” Indeed, translation into other languages nullifies the mantric effect. Effective prayers are both mantric and consciously understood and embraced and not merely ritualistic. “The Zoroastrian book of daily prayers is the Khordeh Avesta. It is a collection of prayers selected from major Avestan works. God has given us an enlightened mind and we are free to choose our path, be it the path of good or evil, but must be willing to accept the consequences for our actions.” This is karma.

Zoroastrianism is an inherently mystical religion, rooted in principles of seeking enlightenment and self-realization. Zoroaster was not satisfied with the conventional wisdom and sought higher and deeper truth through meditation. He was a mystic and truth-seeker who found himself (the soul) (God) within, through traditional (ancient, esoteric) mystical practices. In the lower sense of Zoroastrianism (much like the lower sense of Christianity), good and evil are entities, but in the higher sense (of both religions), good and evil are mentalities (one being progressive (spenta mainyu), the other being counter-progressive (angra mainyu)) (natural forces) to be resolved. Embracing goodness leads to wholeness (and immortality); embraced evil leads to darkness and dissolution.

“Moral rectitude, the good and the bad consequences of one’s deeds follow every act one performs. Zarathushtra’s divine message advocates that every person should choose to serve God, the society, and the living world. It advocates human progress through harmony with the beneficial nature. It accords perfect equality to men and women. There exists no racial superiority.”

In principle, Zoroastrianism (and every legitimate religion) promotes goodness and harmony and respect for others, and encourages individual and collective growth (evolution in consciousness).

