

Christ and Truth

Fifth Edition

"A faithful God without deceit,
How just and upright he is."
~ *Deut. 32:4*

By Wm. Thomas Sherman

Fifth Edition, updated

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Preface to updated 5th edition

This present work has evolved over the years, and insofar as it is, in no small part, a reflection of my own growth and development as a Catholic person of faith, new thoughts and insight will undoubtedly continue to come my way, but which (as things stand at present) *probably* won't be possible to incorporate into this work in future. Likewise, and it goes without saying, there are subjects and questions I might have covered, but overlooked or else had to leave out owing to personal circumstances and time constraints. I therefore, for what it is worth, at least make passing mention of all this being the case; and, as well, remark on the simple and undeniable fact that others have, do, or will address the topics I raise in a far better, more thorough, and satisfactory way than I have done. When and where such are available, we gladly would and do refer readers to these other writers and their works, yet and in the meanwhile hoping that something will have been left over to be introduced or said, coming from us, that is still else of help and of value to some. Though some do or will disagree with some of my conclusions, indeed moreover should I indeed turn out to be wrong on the given point, I still believe just getting people to think (that is, when they might otherwise not do so) will have made it worth any bother.

William Thomas Sherman
Seattle, Washington

*“Arise, my soul on wings enraptur’d, rise
To praise the monarch of the earth and skies,
Whose goodness and beneficence appear
As round its center moves the rolling year,
Or when the morning glows with rosy charms,
Or the sun slumbers in the ocean’s arms:
Of light divine be a rich portion lent
To guide my soul, and favour my intent.
Celestial muse, my arduous light sustain,
And raise my mind to a seraphic strain!”*
~~~ Phillis Wheatley, “Thoughts on the Works of Providence”

## Introduction

For over the past two millennia, “Christianity,” in its various forms and denominations, has been the predominant -- at least openly -- orthodox religious faith in Western societies and cultures. After the passage of these twenty centuries and our entry into a new millennium, it seems not inappropriate time to ask, once again, whether Christian faith is still relevant, while possessing and making possible the higher truth, life, strength, peace, hope, well-being (both heavenly and practical) it has always taught or implied. To some skeptics, Christ is merely a wishful thinking beggar or else con-artist mountebank out for his own selfish profit. To a believer, he is the final bestower of all treasure that is infinite and everlasting. Now he can’t be both, so which then is it?

Should “Jesus Christ” be seen as the actual manifestation of God almighty, and consequently all that is both truly good and all powerful?<sup>1</sup> The final judge and arbiter of all judges and arbiters? If so, what evidence and argument are legitimately available to establish such (and similar) claims and propositions rationally and, where possible, scientifically? It is then with a mind to attempt to answer these and related questions and explore possible answers that the work before you has been written.

Rather than being a mere personal testimony or “apologia,” my interest here is to show Christianity as a faith and belief that is epistemologically sound, consistent, and in most of its basic tenets more than plausible; while having us bear in mind that it is, after all, a faith. To say that Christ defeats Hell, death and the grave, but cannot refute the disputations of honest and polite philosophers and scientists, seems, after all, inherently contradictory and self-defeating. What then I have endeavored to do in this work is

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<sup>1</sup> Some Christians insist that belief in Christ, properly speaking, is not “religion,” but rather a personal relationship with God. In this work, without disputing or rejecting such a thesis, I refer to Christianity, or belief in Christ, as *a religion*. This I do with the wish that such people who make the above distinction will understand and pardon my doing so for convenience sake. As it seems to me, “Religion,” in its most ostensible form, concerns that which a given people, as a community, love and believe in the most. A church, mosque, synagogue, or temple, then is a place where that love is shared and celebrated. It is also my belief that Religion is arguably the most wonderful of enthusiasms, but like any great love, if it is taken regularly to an unduly irrational mania it can be harmful of its own purpose; including then sometimes among those who claim a personal relationship with Jesus. Further, but somewhat differently, “God,” the usual focus of religion and whatever to us his manifestation, is the who or whatever that is the ultimate embodiment and or source of what is most loved and yearned for by a religious community. It would also seem a wise and at the same time practical assumption that God can be discerned and found on any level of life; if we look aesthetically and morally at who or whatever it is on the given level; though, understandably, some persons, things, and circumstances, etc. we will find more preferable or suitable for this purpose than others.

critically examine, and, if possible, justify and account for objective<sup>2</sup> belief in the *essential* principles and wisdom of Christianity; while supplementing this with more subjective, yet nevertheless (or so they seem to me) fair and reasonable, arguments and “proofs.”

In undertaking this, I have tried as much as (I thought) possible to be unflinching, unbiased, and thorough in my presentation and analysis. If one believes in God; if one says “Christ is God,” these are clearly very momentous choices for one to make. If they are correct beliefs, then it only makes sense that such beliefs be able to withstand (or at minimum, be not too inconsistent with) the very strictest scrutiny and standards of truth verification of which *we* are capable. The too abrupt and casual use of unexamined assumptions (sometimes of a categorical or unqualified nature), often based on subjective judgments, has been a traditional failing of much religious argumentation, and this kind of thing I have tried to avoid here. Though raised a Catholic, there was time during my undergraduate years when, even if I didn’t actually *not* believe in God, I thought him unprovable or irrelevant. Swept away as I was by the persuasive and beguiling vision of the atomists (both ancient and modern), the underling unity in things was atoms and their arrangement. I could not see how the order of things could really be better explained, analyzed, or broken down otherwise. I mention this to show that I am very much familiar with and how it feels to be materialistic and skeptical toward traditional religion, and while still retaining my respect and appreciation for the “atomists.” I have therefore tried to frame questions and arguments about God, Christ, and Truth, in such a manner as would (I believe) have suited myself in those “modernist” years of my intellectual development.

It is probably assumed on all sides that one cannot expect to debate another into adopting real Christian, or any deeply held religious faith or love. Refined and thoughtful arguments can suitably contribute to persuasion, but faith is ultimately a movement of the heart, prompted (as some must hold and believe) by the Spirit. One cannot then legitimately tell another why they *must* believe in God or why they *must* be a Christian; any more than they could properly insist that one must not believe in God or must not be a Christian. For, in the final analysis, these are choices we can only make as unique and separate individuals. Yet what it seems one can with justification do is provide convincing and credible facts and reasons why it is a good idea that one *should* believe; while, at the same time, conscientiously respecting, indeed painstakingly defending, others right not to believe. Though myself a professed Christian, I have endeavored here to be as impartial as I thought was possible. Moreover, I have tried as much as I could to deprive Christianity the benefit of the doubt on certain points it is often commonly granted -- even such points granted by some non-Christians.

French mathematician and inventor Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote: “The infinite distance between body and mind symbolizes the infinitely more infinite distance between mind and charity, for charity is supernatural.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The topic of objectivity I explore at greater length and depth in *Peithology*.

<sup>3</sup> *Pensées*, XXIII, 308.



If what Pascal says of charity is true, how much greater so must be the distance between mind and a devoted love of God and whom (unlike an ordinary object of charity) the mind strains to comprehend! One cannot rationally or scientifically prove why someone or something should be loved and revered higher than all other persons or things. Deepest love comes from within, and yet at the same time is to be validated by conscious choice. Reason and science do not tell us what *deepest* desire is. At best they can attempt to describe and explain what and why we desire or love the way we do. Reason and science themselves are, after all, things a person values (i.e., loves) or doesn't value; since they will not be accepted as valid unless they are valued (even if assumed, as merely a matter of social convention, to be correct or predictable methods otherwise.)

How then might reason and science we brought to bear with respect to one's decision to love or not love "God?"

(Right) Reason and science, at minimum, provide that objectivity which brings us closer to intellectual harmony and consistency. Without them there is only chance, chaos or some indeterminate force and external intelligence left governing people's relationships and joint actions, and to which they may be said to be in bondage to. What we will want to do then is attempt to find in (right) reason and science a way of enhancing greater mutual appreciation and understanding of who and what God is and means (or what he might be and might mean) to us collectively and communally; the possible meanings and significance of devotion to him, and perhaps also, acquire a better understanding of the nature of love and valuing to begin with, and which are fundamental and necessary to both our intellectual and active lives.

A general rule I will be observing in what follows is that judgments as to what is most valuable (for we mortals at any rate) are ultimately subjective. Yet this said, if a certain "good" (or "goods") is agreed upon or assumed at the outset, it is nonetheless possible to *objectively* justify (or *better* objectively justify) why other "goods" are to the advantage or benefit of the assumed "good."

For example, if we value our garden as a highest good, it naturally follows that we will value water as a good necessary to its well-being. On this sort of basis, I believe one can make a properly rational and convincing case for why belief in Christ can be said to be both conducive and beneficial to what people (most people at least) are generally understood to love or value most. While, again, one cannot prove why something should be one's ultimate love or ultimate good (such choices being subjective), as a practical matter, one can, still yet inquire and ascertain what factors best work to the advantage of those "goods" which *are* commonly accepted: such as truth, reason, wisdom (understanding), moral virtue, purity, beauty, liberty, health, wealth, justice, strength, compassion, *greatest unity*, harmony, and peace. In what follows, these as assumed highest or higher goods we will allow ourselves to take for granted; though understandably and in specific circumstances, we might well want or need to adjust that which is of most value to us at a given moment (for example, if they happened to conflict; such as, is "personal liberty," i.e., freedom of action or movement, better or more important than "public health and safety?")

To some greater or lesser extent, we all value and believe differently. This, after all, is what most makes us what we are as individuals in the first place. “Goods” will differ in value among us, and we all accept this as a matter of fact given. Where then we line up our own individual ideas of highest good with ideas of highest good held by others is, as is to be expected, bound to be a source of disagreement. Nonetheless, as long as we caution and qualify ourselves in this manner, it seems not unreasonable to go ahead and designate “truth, reason, wisdom, moral virtue, purity, etc.” as highest goods.

While sharing with them most (if not all) basic beliefs, there are many Christians whom I personally admire or adore as people, yet whose theological views or emphases I am less than enthusiastic for, or find unacceptable, or else deplore. Yet it would genuinely pain me very much to think to ever somehow offend their heart felt ideas and principles of faith. Despite this, it would obviously be too much to attempt to reconcile all the different “Christian” explanations and viewpoints. Though Christians are a *community* of believers, they are also believers as *individuals* also; just as the apostles (and other disciples) were together in their faith in Christ, yet distinct in their personalities, perspectives, and attitudes.

If then what I express in this work possibly offends the views of brother and sister believers, I respectfully request that though they question my judgment or understanding, they not question my good intention or sincerity as a fellow. For those who agree with my basic points, but feel that I somehow fail to grasp the robustness of the basic Christian perspective, I hope they will at least receive *Christ and Truth* as a well-meaning, if, even so, a poor man’s Christianity. All in all, I admit I have tried to speak in this work more as a person who doesn’t claim to know, and less a person who does. Others will have treated these same questions and issues far more comprehensively and meticulously than myself; so that I continue to welcome improvement, suggestions and correction from others on the various topics considered. The actual or potential scope of this study and inquiry is, after all, immense -- to say the least. If someone says that on a given point I speak mistakenly, far better their doing so than my unconsciously wronging the truth or insult a wiser and more sensible person’s intelligence. While fully acknowledging then my capacity to possibly err, my earnest and sincere devotion to the principle that it is the truth above all things which “sets us free,” will, I hope, be borne out and admitted as much as anything else I have to say.

In forming my own somewhat unusual perspective here (or, more specifically, the perspective I prefer), I have drawn from, and, as suited me, distilled arguments from traditional philosophers and theologians like the pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Pyrrho of Elis, Philo of Alexandria, the many Church Fathers, Boethius, Moses Maimonides, St. Thomas Aquinas, Samuel Clarke, John Locke, Kant, F. H. Bradley, Josiah Royce, and others, including Asian sources. My focus and selection then are diverse, eclectic and derived from thinkers and texts who, *as a general rule*, seem to me, and as much as anyone else, to have a relatively more correct idea than others who might also be cited or quoted.

In asking whether philosophy or theology should, properly speaking, come first as a criteria or method for highest truth, my assumption is that philosophy takes precedence. Theology, as a form of advanced rational discourse, is philosophy's child. It not uncommonly permits the acceptance of revelations and dogmas which philosophy (and scientific and scholarly analysis) must usually forbear from accepting too casually. Yet significantly, philosophy can be said to have had its origins in religion, pointing out in support of this the Memphite Theology of 700 B.C. (with antecedents probably going as far back as at least two thousand years earlier.)<sup>4</sup> The historical beginnings and chronological connection then between the *two branches* of study seems to support the view that monotheistic God (or, alternatively, "the Absolute"), whether as reality or else a mere practical conception and measure of ultimate truth, necessarily lies at the center of rationally coherent and consistent knowledge.

It would seem a both reasonable, and a scripture supported assumption, as well, that God desires us to ourselves desire wisdom, and to become more wise in our thinking and how we live. But both human experience (internationally) and an inner sense (which some say itself comes from God) tells us that our own desire for wisdom must be in accordance with Truth, Love, Logic, Morals, Justice, and Beauty, and it is by means of these we can come to acquire wisdom, and a higher understanding and meaning of life. In the interest of improving and clarifying our understandings then we should not be afraid to ask meaningful questions which might otherwise seem too offensive or potentially blasphemous. In fact, we are actually to be blamed for indifference and loving wisdom less, while promoting irrational fear, to do otherwise. It seems only right to say that that *any* theological question or historical questions concerning religion may be asked and answer attempted if we are not frivolous in our inquiry, and keep an eye to objectivity, facts, fairness, logic, and rudimentary morals.

St. Clement of Alexandria (150?-220? A.D.), a rather eclectic Church Father well versed in classical philosophy and culture, expresses the crucial significance of *Reason* with respect to man's relationship to God this way:

“(T)hat man in whom reason (logos<sup>5</sup>) dwells is not shifty, not pretentious, but has the form dictated by reason (logos) and is like God. He is beautiful and does not feign

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<sup>4</sup> See “The Memphite Theology of Creation,” found in *The Ancient Near East* Vol. I, edited by James B. Pritchard.

<sup>5</sup> “Logos,” frequently translated as “Word” or “The Word,” can also mean rational calculated thought, order of things, legend, story, narrative, speech, argument, choice. “Lego,” the root from which it derives, means to pick, out, gather, pick up, to chose for oneself, to count, recount tale, to say, declare, to call by name. The word “Word” is perhaps most notably is first found in Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 B.C.), though it is reported that earlier Zarathustra and or his followers used the notion as well. From it the Stoics are thought to have coined the word “logic,” though Aristotle who preceded them had referred to what we know as logic as “analytics.” Sometime much earlier than either Epicharmus of Syracuse (c. 550-460 B.C.), had written:

“The Logos steers men and ever preserves them on the right path. Men have the power of calculation, but there is also divine Logos. Human reasoning is born from the divine Logos, which furnishes each man with the passageway both of life and of nourishment. The divine Logos is present in all the arts, ever teaching men what they must do to obtain good results. For it is not man, but God who discovers the arts.” (Phillip Wheelwright, translator.)

In the “Hymn to Zeus” of Cleanthes who led the Stoa (The Porch) from 264 to his death in 232 B.C., we find:

“Vehicle of the universal Word [Logos],  
that flows through all of stars both great and small...  
“...in thine eyes, The unloved is lovely, who did’st harmonize  
Things evil with things good, that there should be  
One Word through all things everlastingly.  
One Word – whose voice alas! The wicked spurn;

beauty. That which is true is beautiful; for it too, is God. Such a man becomes God because God wills it. Rightly, indeed did Heraclitus say ‘Men are gods, and gods are men: for the same reason is in both.’ That this is a mystery is clear. God is in man and a man is God, the mediator fulfilling the will of the Father. The mediator is the Word (logos) who is common to both, being the Son of God and the Savior of men.”<sup>6</sup>

On grounds such as this, we can affirm and announce then at the outset that the pursuit of right, purer, and cogent Reason needs to be seen as lying actively at the heart of this inquiry and study before you. If God is anything he is the ultimate mind, and we cannot trust our own minds, how can we begin to know his? The validity of scriptural revelation, on the other hand, we endeavor as much as possible to avoid having to assume; while simultaneously qualifying its value as a source of historical knowledge.

It is made to seem that advocating Reason is somehow irreligious, citing the Enlightenment (so-called) rationalists, who were often deist and atheists, as an example. Yet when was *honest* rationalism ever truly and adequately embraced, *and at large* no less? *That* would have been never.

Often I have taken it for granted and spoken of right reason as synonymous with godliness, yet why should we think this is so? Well, for starters, let us ask who is it that rejects thoughtful, impartial, just philosophical reasoning? More than ample instances and experience over my own lifetime indicate that it is *most noticeably* those of the “devil’s party;” who doggedly avoid or would thwart honest, rational discussion, and are notorious for preventing and censoring such who are disposed to be duly honest and rational.

Further, when it comes to falling short or playing rhetorically fast and loose with right reason, are not both the church and secular world *at times* and *in some measure* to be faulted? and is it not this perhaps that lies a responsible, sane and proper addressing of (such as) moral and scientific issues? Too often it is the tendency of people, like those ancient Sumerian sculptures with huge wide eyes, to assume absolute knowledge and intellectual competency which they simply do not possess, and this typically owing to false pride and the perceived necessity of rhetorical or persuasive success (at the expense of honest truth?) Will those who are ready (and probably rightly) to question and in the process perhaps take down scientific myths willing to do the same when it comes to the purportedly divine visions of some saints? Again, I myself am a Catholic, and while inclined to give accounts of saintly visions the benefit of the doubt, is the church, on the other hand always duly honest and fair in assessing such things? Why, to cite one instance, should someone like Catherine of Sienna, and without impugning her good intentions, have “Jesus” speaking to her personally? Was not the Holy Spirit sufficient?

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Insatiate for the good their spirits yearn:  
Yet seeing see not, neither hearing hear  
God’s universal law, which those revere,  
By reason guided, happiness who win...  
Nor higher meed belongs  
E’en to the gods, than justly to adore  
The universal law for evermore.” (Moses Hadas, translator)

<sup>6</sup> *Paidagogos*, III.1.1.5, William A. Jurgens translator.

Might she have been duped by an imposter? Is the admonition "Physician heal thyself" *perhaps* called for in such who are otherwise and *rightly* skeptical at the conclusions of worldly, oligarchical science? Is it possible meanwhile to ask what, when it comes to factual scrutiny separate from matters of core church faith and doctrine, the church's epistemology consists of? If scientific authority can be misused and abused, is and cannot religious authority, whether by the well or not well meaning, be misused and abused as well? Don't get me wrong, I am one who values highly, indeed treasures, things like the Rosary, and am devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and I fully recognize that religious mysticism (if you will allow that expression) can be legitimate and does serve a real and most useful and (for some) necessary need and purpose. Yet when it comes to individual accounts of visions and visitations, it is not inconceivable that on occasion even the most well-meaning might be fooled and misled if cautious suspension of judgment, based in honest rational scrutiny, is not availed of. Such caution does not bespeak unbelief, but is rather and simply a warranted application of healthy common sense, and a guard against both worldly *and* other-worldly charlatanism.

We are enjoined to love God, and the true means of attaining to the love of God, says Aquinas, is the consideration of his blessings. But does this then not also and in part necessarily imply our loving honest truth, along with justice and mercy, charity, and beauty, etc.? When we say we love God, is it not implied that we love these as well; insofar as we view these notions as among the greatest of blessing; having their sole source and are only possible in and through him? If this is true, then when we thank God we might say this includes, by inference, our thanking right reason, wisdom, courage, charity, beauty, etc., as traditionally assumed adjuncts or attributes of his being.

Our Lord himself, as a routine matter of course, did employ right reason as necessary for purposes of getting at the truth of a question. Indeed, it only makes perfect sense to assume that God's judgment does not neglect, negate right reason, or approve of cheating and bullying in the illicit application of dogma, semantics, and crowd pleasing of the hour. Can we not then insist that in the world we live in that people behave themselves honestly, rationally, and morally, at least if they have pretensions to being or speaking as authority? If the price of ultimate hope, indeed immortality, is faith, charity, self-denial and obedience, what possible objection could there be to a more than casual insistence on our regularly employing honest and right reasoning, when it comes to forming opinions and judgments? Needless to say, most people, religious or otherwise, are not overly disposed to be carefully rational; so that it is pointless and futile to insist on intellectual caution with such. However, and at the very least, it only makes perfect sense that those who *are* more thoughtful and better educated hold themselves to a more demanding standard than "everybody else;" that is, those many who rarely, if ever, think closely or deeply to begin with.

I have covered some points and not others in this work simply out of personal predilection and a desire to emphasize what seems to me of special significance. Naturally, this does not necessarily imply that points not covered are not significant. A topic such as the meaning of Baptism or the Eucharist for example, are of utmost importance to most or at least many Christians. Yet here I speak little, if at all, on these

topics. Part of my reason for this is that Baptism, the Eucharist, etc. have been already so well considered by others, that there is little (at the time of my composing this work at any rate) I feel I need add. At the same time, also needless to remark, the omission or briefly passing over of many and sundry topics has made a rather ambitious undertaking such as this more manageable. Yet I think this, under the circumstances, has been accomplished without seriously detracting from an otherwise, and under the circumstances, adequate and fair consideration of *most* of the fundamental questions and concerns relating to Christian belief.

Last to be mentioned, I use “Christ”<sup>7</sup> rather than “Messiah” or “Maschiach” as the designation more common, and perhaps one more appropriate to the largely Greek founded sort of analysis I will so often be using. Yet I do so not without some real regret, given the more euphonious and poetical beauty of the Jewish title.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Christos” in Greek means anointed, but there is also coincidentally the word “chrēstai” in Greek that, according to one etymology, means “goodness;” and, as well, “traders” and “speculators;” and which latter definition, among gentiles, might further (and by implication) refer to Jews.

<sup>8</sup> My preferring “A.D.” and “B.C.,” to “B.C.E.” and “C.E.” is for aesthetical and stylistic reasons, and as well an admitted bias in favor (in this instance) for tradition; though I elsewhere accept from others the more recently adopted acronyms. It was in the 6<sup>th</sup> century the monk Dionysius suggested years should be dated B.C. and A.D. Yet because the 1<sup>st</sup> century, as he designated it, is really the “0<sup>th</sup>” or “zeroeth” century, we are accustomed to call a century by one hundred years greater than it actually is (e.g. the century from 1901 to 2000 is called the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not the 19<sup>th</sup>; the years 490, 442, 401 B.C. are spoken of as being in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; 600, 649, and 672 A.D. are in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., etc.) That this flawed system of dating is, after all, human, is not anything anyone should take offense at, for no Christian monk of his time could probably have done any better. Besides, the matter can be considered one of convention in the first place, and not actually an error as to fact.

# Part I

## 1. God as an Objective Notion

“The aim of ‘Science’ is to attain conceptions so adequate and exact that we shall never need to change them.”

~~ William James <sup>9</sup>

“For one to attempt to speak of God in terms more precise than He Himself has used: -- to undertake such a thing is to embark upon the boundless, to dare the incomprehensible. He fixed the names of His nature: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whatever is sought over and above this is beyond the meaning of words, beyond the limits of perception, beyond the embrace of understanding. It cannot be expressed, cannot be reached, cannot be grasped. The nature of the subject itself is such that it exhausts the meaning of words, its impenetrable light obscures our mental perception: -- whatever is without limits exceeds the capacity of our understanding. But in the necessity of doing this, we beg the indulgence of Him who is all these things: and we shall venture, we shall seek, and we shall speak.”

~~ St. Hilary of Poitiers <sup>10</sup>

Though probably not something many frequently bear in mind or even consider, the term “God” is one far from agreed upon in essence and meaning. Exactly what it refers to, its basis, its rationale will to some extent differ and diverge according to a given religion, philosophy or culture -- sometimes so radically as to mean its opposite from how others define it. Indeed, it is so charged with numerous and diverse associations that the word may be unsuitable for who and what I will be presently discussing. In what follows, on more than a few occasions the word “Absolute” (drawing from G. W. F. Hegel and others) would be a more desirable term because it carries less historical and associative baggage with it, and in that way is more objective, more value neutral. Even so, I will use “God” rather than “Absolute,” for the purpose of this work’s larger plan; while in the meantime requesting readers to understand that in many respects the latter term is often much more appropriate and precise -- particularly from a philosophical and objective stand-point.

Although the matter is far from clear, it might seem historically that the intellectual concept of a “god” or “gods,” preceded the monotheistic one of “God”: the Old Testament’s record being the notable exception. But even in the Old Testament, somewhat curiously, God has two names, “Eloheim” (i.e., God or Chief) and “Ya-he-vey” (Lord), which represent two apparently distinct manifestations of Him. The two names are understood to represent originally separate religious traditions which later merged. Perhaps part of the reason also for two different names is to suggest God’s

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<sup>9</sup> *Principles of Psychology*. Vol. II, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> (c.315-c.268 A.D.) *De Trinitate*, 2.5.

indescribability and *un-nameability*; with a distinction being made between God *as He is* versus *how we know him* in our interaction with him.

Pharaoh Akhenaten's (or Ikhenaton, 1375-1358 B.C.) one God, *Aten*, who antedates the Bible, was both supreme ruler *and* the sun.

*Ahura Mazda*, introduced by Zarathustra (c. 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), was the one God for the ancient Persians.

Although the origin of the practice has been questioned, it otherwise seems to have been a long standing custom for many Native Americans to speak of "the Great Spirit."<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, the more pronounced and cultivated forms of monotheism in western culture do not seem to have come about till the theologies of Judaism, neo-Platonism, Christianity and later Islam were more fully developed. It ought to be pointed out, however, that farther to the east the teachings regarding Brahman, (not much later than the earliest Bible) of the earlier Hindus (800-500 B.C.), taken apart from the other Vedas, contain some of the most thoroughly thought out and devised doctrines of monotheism ever enunciated.

Most are in some way familiar with how *the gods* of the various well known pagan religions acted, in say Egyptian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hindu and Greek societies; as handed down in stories and myths. Sometimes they act as a force for justice and benevolence, at others they are simply more powerful, albeit flawed beings, compared to us. <sup>12</sup> Zoroastrianism saw them, that is the "devas," as devils. The early Christian church was quick to point out that people serving different gods in the Roman Empire was a source of disunity among peoples. If nothing else, monotheism seems to have been a logical development towards the means of resolving this problem, and what were before thought of as gods were relegated to the status of (usually) demons or else, when not actually demons, mental metaphors for and didactic personifications of general traits and qualities we find in nature and or human character, e.g., the ocean, amorous love, graceful beauty, mechanical expertise; these latter often becoming personages in common story telling, folklore, drama, and poetry. Although there were good and powerful angels, these were not to be confused with what had been known as the gods; unless perhaps the fallen angels were meant.

Yet whatever the actual history, the monotheistic, as opposed to polytheistic, view seems originally to have been the exception, and for most societies known to us, the universe was ruled and created by gods, rather than God. Certainly in pagan religions, some gods were viewed as greater than others. Nonetheless, even the greatest of the gods

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<sup>11</sup> "Did the Indians before the white man came conceive of an all powerful spirit, a Supreme Being, a 'Great Spirit'? There is disagreement on this matter, not only among the missionaries and teachers who knew and wrote about the Indians in the early days but also among the anthropologists and mythologists who have studied their myths and rituals in more recent years...

"In some other stories, it is not clear whether 'The Great Spirit' (Tyee Sahale) was the chief of the sky spirits, some other powerful spirit or a native concept of a Supreme Being. The Great Spirit, or the Great White Spirit, occasionally referred to by today's storytellers seems to be a blending of aboriginal concepts with the Christian idea of God." Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest* (1953), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Epicurus, the atomist, held a rather unusual view in saying that gods exist, but they do not control phenomena, have no concern with man, and did not deal out rewards and punishments.



was invariably an individual dependant on the assistance of some other god or gods to carry out his or her reign. The reason for this (assuming the premise) apparently would be that it is was intellectually easier and more practical for people (certainly as *objective* thinkers and communicators) to conceptualize an “important” god or gods, than an absolute, unchallengeable, and completely independent God. The concept of a single God, the universal of all universals,<sup>13</sup> by contrast, seems to suggest a higher level of culture and intelligence that took mankind time to develop -- or else *rediscover* if we accept the Judeo-Christian view.<sup>14</sup>

A noun or pronoun is a name or label for someone or something that we believe to exist (or believe possibly to exist, whether in reality or fiction), and is in some way or other traceable to a physical or intuitive (intellectual) cause. So to define something, we simply, by means of a subject-predicate formula, join and frame our “who” or whatever it is (whether in reality or just in mind) to a name or label we or someone else assigns. Definitions of God can be brought about by *connotation* as when someone says God is [i.e., connotes or necessarily implies] “the One” (or also e.g., God is or implies omniscience), or by *denotation*, if we say the One is [i.e., denotes; an attribute refers to someone/something] God (or e.g., omniscience denotes God.) Whether or not a connotation can serve as a valid means of describing God, or whether denotation can serve as a means of “proving” God (i.e., proving Him to be whatever is predicated) is, at last, up to the person making the decision to believe or not. God cannot be known by reason, says Boethius (480?-524? A.D.) because he is a simple.<sup>15</sup> Deduction (and reason itself) assumes and begins with simples (out of which subjects and predicates are formed); and reason cannot establish and prove what it already assumes. Therefore, we are in a sense left to establish our primary intellectual knowledge and understanding of God based on these connotative or denotative predicates; which we can then assume (in earnest or for theory’s sake) and then reason on the basis of them to secondary and or speculative predications. The value we then place on these secondary predications can be used to either bolster, clarify or enhance our primary descriptions or proofs, or else it can be denied (given God’s most pure simplicity) that either are permissible or even worthwhile. The upshot of all this seems to be that God, understood *noetically and objectively*, is a problematical concept. For concepts known by subject-predicate are contingent, yet “God” as an omnipotent being, omniscient being, and or *being* itself, etc., is and cannot be contingent.

Consider the following statements and inferences:

*Note.* Before going further, for simplicity’s we will assume for testing purposes that the statement (as listed here, e.g., “A.”) is posited as automatically or assumed true; though, of course, arguments could reasonably be made for the opposite being the case.

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<sup>13</sup> Animals, it is rightly or not claimed or assumed, do not know universals, only humans do.

<sup>14</sup> Cleanthes, in his "Hymn to Zeus," refers to Zeus as God of the universe who reigns by reason. But does he mean to challenge or impugn Zeus by slyly implying that he is not actually God of the whole cosmos? Or else does he mean Zeus is God of the cosmos, but only because he rules in a fashion consistent with right reason? Most gods in myths are shown as frivolous and self seeking, and much more rarely kindly and philanthropic. And if they are kindly and philanthropic it is to favor a devotee, or else someone whom they are a fan of.

<sup>15</sup> “Reason does not grasp a simple form, therefore reason cannot grasp God.” *Consolation of Philosophy*, V, 4.

On the surface, a statement like “Omniscience connotes God,” strictly speaking, would seem to be false; because it would seem to imply necessity. Yet because the predicate “God” (as predicate) is contingent, this could be said to make the subject contingent on the predicate; hence *theoretically* “Omniscience connotes God” *could* be true. If such a predicate statement based on “term uncertainty” is possibly true, it presumably is possibly false also. “Term uncertainty” refers not to absolute uncertainty but to human, objective uncertainty.<sup>16</sup> As used here then, “God” refers to *actual* God, and “Omniscience” refers to *actual* omniscience, not their mere concepts.

If we say, as in our first example here, [Omniscience connotes God] and if we assume this true<sup>17</sup> (and the same for all the initial predicates which follow), then:

A.[Omniscience connotes God] (theoretically could but)<sup>18</sup> does not imply B. [God connotes Omniscience]

and

A. [Omniscience connotes God] does not imply B. [God denotes Omniscience]

A. [Omniscience denotes God] does not imply B. [God connotes Omniscience]

A. [Omniscience denotes God] does not imply B. [God denotes Omniscience]

A. [God connotes Omniscience] does not imply B. [Omniscience connotes God]

A. [God connotes Omniscience] implies B. [Omniscience denotes God]

A. [God denotes Omniscience] does not imply B. [Omniscience connotes God]

A. [God denotes Omniscience] does not imply B. [Existence connotes God]

Now even if God cannot adequately be known through mere predication and inferences arising from them, it still remains that God *may* possibly be known and posited based on assumed values (which are heart-soul felt in origin), such as faith, and secondary cognitive inferences (which may be practical ones) following from those values; the Spirit; or all or some combination of all three, heart,<sup>19</sup> intellect, and Spirit. It is interesting to observe how in our seeking knowledge of God we try to label, describe,

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<sup>16</sup> My own personal interpretation of these predicates would be this:

\*God denotes omniscience is False (because omniscience is merely a concept and God is greater than omniscience.)

\*God connotes omniscience is True (because if God is not omniscient then he could not rule over all, and it is the “all” that makes this so, that is that makes “God” God.)

\*Omniscience denotes God is False (because it is possible in theory that omniscience could not be God.)

\*Omniscience connotes God is False (because someone *theoretically* could be omniscient and not be God.)

<sup>17</sup> “God” who is someone real connotes “Omniscience” which is something real.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly “theoretically could” for the statements, which follow based on “term uncertainty.”

<sup>19</sup> One way to define ‘heart,’ according to my usage here and elsewhere, it is that in us which tells us we *really do* or *really don’t* care about someone or something. This said, and depending on the given individual, time and circumstances might (in theory at least) affect and change what a person *really* does or does not care about.

instantiate, and prove him, consistent with what? With the same methods for knowing truth by which we know truth otherwise. This is to say, intellectually speaking, *the concept* of God, like every other concepts we know is contingent for it's understanding on other concepts.

For many who have tried to predicate him, God is like light. We know him based on his effects and cannot be said to know him by his true essence. The light itself we cannot quite know or perceive, but we can know they light by its effects and the shadows it casts. Further, we only know these effects through his invisible and mysterious presence in us and others. We therefore cannot see him any more than we can actually see seeing. We can think of ourselves seeing, and see others seeing, but these are representations of one sort or another, the act and nature of seeing alone and by itself we cannot see. Until we could see "seeing," therefore, how could we see God who is presumably the source of and greater than seeing?

If God is infinite, eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient, as, for example, he<sup>20</sup> is ordinarily assumed to be, then it would seem simply impossible for we who are finite to sufficiently define him, and therefore speak of him objectively. Moreover, it would seem also we cannot properly use predicates with God in an assured, objective sense, but only as practical constructs, which must be qualified, or else as explicitly acknowledged subjective belief. Plotinus, for instance, might say: God cannot properly speaking be called "I am" because then he would then have a quality, i.e., existence. All properties and qualities derive from God, but God himself, being the source of them, transcends all properties and qualities. We don't know whether we are in a position to ascribe predicates, and which are both comprehensible and accurate, with respect to God. One argument goes thusly: speech implies subject-predicate, predicates are compounds, God is not a compound, therefore God cannot be spoken of. If God cannot be spoken of then he cannot be known objectively except, perhaps, in theory.

We will assert then here a fundamental objection to attempting to define God objectively, or at least attempting to define him in a way that is not based on speculation or assumed subjective givens.

"Dionysus' Mystical Teaching" (also called "Pseudo-Dionysus," also "Dionysius the Areopagite"), written by an anonymous author, probably a Syrian monk of the late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., had a decisive influence on the development of scholastic philosophy and theology.<sup>21</sup> In this work the author divides our knowledge of God into two kinds: *affirmative theology* where we construct our knowledge of God based on things most like him (the sun or a great mountain for example); and *negative theology* where we start with things least like God (a created object for example) and begin, one at

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<sup>20</sup> Although, I will speak of God as "Him," it is not strictly necessary for purposes of addressing the question of the *philosopher's* God that this be so. The choice, at least philosophically speaking, is simply one of convention and tradition. Were I to use "Her" as pronoun instead, this would suit just as well for this purpose. "It," on the other hand, might be objectionable because we must call God a person, because to call him an it, as a practical matter renders him a material object or something like, which is degrading, and therefore inappropriate, to the notion. Yet while God might be above personhood as well as thing hood, personhood is as high as we go, so it is this way we choose to view him.

<sup>21</sup> The earlier scholastics, or schoolmen, used philosophy almost entirely to argue for or explain scripture and revelation.

a time, of removing them from our definition of him. The negative approach the author believes, and many who came after him, is the preferred of the two. He states:

“So first of all we remove from God everything that has no substance, and everything that has no existence, beginning with the most remote; for such a ‘thing’ is more remote than those things which exist but do not live. And then we take away these existing but not living things, for they are further off than something that exists and lives. After that we eliminate the existing, living things which have no feeling, for they are further off than those that can feel. Next go feeling things that have no reason or understanding, for they are more remote than those which possess both. And together we remove from God everything that is physical, and all that has to do with bodily matters like shape, form quality, size, weight, position, visibility, sensitivity, action, and suffering; the disorderly, fleshly greed; the complications of material passions; the weakness controlled by haphazard senses; the necessity of light; all breeding and corrupting and dividing and suffering; and all the passing moments of time. For he is none of these things, nor has he any of those things, nor any other thing that we know by our senses.”<sup>22</sup>

When we have done this we will find that God is above every other kind of description. “For the perfect and unique cause of all is necessity beyond compare with the highest of all imaginable heights, whether by affirmation or denial.”

Yet even earlier St. Gregory of Nyssa (335?-394? A.D.) had written: “Human thought, busying itself with solicitous inquiry through such reasoning as is invaluable to it, reaches out and touches His inaccessible and sublime nature; for its discernment is neither so sharp nor so clear that it can see the invisible, nor is it yet so remote of approach that it is unable to catch a glimpse of what it is seeking. Not that the human mind is able to see precisely what that nature is, about which it is reasoning, but from the knowledge of the properties which that nature has and the properties which it has not, it sees as much only as can be seen...From the negation of properties not inherent in that nature, and from the confusion of what may piously be inferred about that nature, the human mind grasps something of what is.”<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Novatian (?-258 A.D.): “Whatever you would state in regard to God, you would really only be shedding some light upon some condition or His power, and not upon Himself. What could you fittingly either say or think of Him who is greater than all words or thought?...We must think of Him as being that which cannot be understood either in quality or in quantity, and of which we cannot possibly conceive.”<sup>24</sup>

Philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037), Averroës (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) say we can speak of God rationally with precision in a sense that is at least useful to us, yet must do so with qualification and respectful circumspection. But when they assert with something

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<sup>22</sup> Clifton Wolters, translation.

<sup>23</sup> *Against Eunomius*, Bk 2 (12B).

<sup>24</sup> *The Trinity*, 2.

more than probabilistic certitude, they fail to make a distinction between subjective and objective knowledge; so that while what they contend *may* be subjectively true, and objectively plausible, their arguments are by no means objectively irrefutable. Further, they do grant that there are things about God that are necessarily unknowable, and yet cannot avoid predicating God; that is, fit God into human terms, language, and representation when it is arguably a matter of opinion whether such are adequate, and if so how much.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of objectively demonstrated truth, and this attained with the most minimal of assumptions, what then we arrive at as adequate conceptions of God, would seem, are bound to fall decisively short of our intellect's capacity for truth compared to what else we might objectively know. At the very least, the potential risk of error is such that a more humble and cautious approach is warranted.

While in one sense this might seem disappointing, we cannot (except perhaps on a practical level) adequately comprehend God, it can be argued that, in this very special instance, and for necessary moral reasons, our inability to fully comprehend something intellectually (in this case God) provides us with a life-saving humility. And were we otherwise able to rationally and intellectually *comprehend* the almighty, it would puff up our pride and undermine our understanding of the nature of our relationship to him. To use a loose analogy, better it is that one of our limbs know its own function and relationship to ourselves rather than have a full grasp of who we are. Were it even capable of doing so, it is not necessary or desirable that my finger fully know who I am; for its capacity to live and function are entirely subservient to myself, and would have no true being or purpose outside its role as a physiological appendage. If my finger rejected this conclusion, and it were possible for it to quit my person and start a life on its own somewhere else, it would lose its greater power and purpose, thereby becoming less than it otherwise would be. While this example of a sentient limb is conjectural and assumes much, nevertheless, it offers what seems a perhaps useful analogy for explaining the dependency of our knowledge upon the authority of God; which latter precedes our own authority, and consequently our inability to know or prove him with *objective* necessity, at least in this our mortal state.<sup>26</sup>

Yet though we here take the position that God, due to his profound nature and our limited one, is objectively unknowable (except as a mere theory), we will go ahead and assume that it must be possible for us to have a hypothetical understanding of him and that it is *possible* to prove him a true notion. Otherwise, by definition, we will have to dismiss the notion of God entirely. Some of course do this, though not necessarily for good epistemological reasons. Consequently, we will want to argue the existence and reality of God for us based on 1) what seem to be his effects, 2) the need and incomparable value for God as a concept to explain what is otherwise inexplicable, 3) both 1 and 2, bolstered and circumscribed by coherent and consistent reasoning and plausibility. Part then of understanding the notion of God involves explaining what otherwise cannot be explained, while at the same time making such characterizations

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<sup>25</sup> Curiously, their view that we can know God might, at first, seem the more pious. Yet from a different angle, their viewpoint might be seen as impious on the grounds that it was presumptuous.

<sup>26</sup> As I address in *Peithology*, God may be known subjectively as necessary, and (theoretically) with absolute certainty, but we (again as mortals) are not in a position to establish these with or as *objective* necessity.

(i.e., 1 and 2) consistent both with each other and with what other facts we do know. This will still leave God as merely a theory -- again, and I emphasize, *intellectually* speaking. But Christian faith is not dependant on the refinements of the intellect. And though we say God is only a theory intellectually, we can, despite this, say God is not any less plausible than other cosmological and epistemological theories. At the same time, there are strong practical arguments in support of the notion of God. Moreover, the argument for God explains and accounts for much else; while accepting the converse argument (i.e., that there is no God), makes our explanations of the universe more strained -- though this, of itself and we grant, still doesn't necessarily overcome the arguments of the rational atheist.

St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) argues we must first believe in God, that is assume God, and then reason. Yet he adds: "Far be it from God to hate in us that faculty by which He made us so much more excellent than other living creatures. Far be it, I say, that we should so believe that we would neither accept nor seek a reason for our belief; for if we had not rational souls we could not believe at all. In some points, then that pertain to salvific doctrine, which we cannot grasp by reason, -- though someday we shall,-- let reason be preceded by faith, which cleanses the heart, so that the heart may receive and retain the light of great reason; and this too is reasonable. Therefore, it is reasonable for the Prophet to say: 'Unless you believe you shall not understand.' In this passage the Prophet undoubtedly makes a distinction between believing and understanding and advised us to believe first so that we might afterwards understand what we believe. Hence it is reasonably demanded that faith precede reason."<sup>27</sup> Once we have faith then we are free to use our rational faculties with which God has blessed us, and indeed it is right that we do so. It only makes sense to say God allows us to question who He is if we do so rationally, deferentially, respectfully, fairly, impartially -- because we love wisdom and which can only be a good thing. Even so, reason is not always so encouraging to faith, and in this way faith can be (though not necessarily so) a cross to reason; just as abstinence or mortification are crosses to the flesh, and yet when engaged in wisely such self-denial can ultimately be of advantage to the flesh.

If God cannot be intellectually conceived or believed except by faith and speculation, there are what we might call epistemological roles and cognitive manifestations (if not attributes) of God which seem to strongly imply, if not as such necessitate, his reality and existence. Again, the idea here is that we can somehow both prove and know him by these roles (denotations earlier) and manifestations (connotations), i.e., describe what he is or might be, and deduce and adduce his reality from these apparent effects and epistemic principles. Or if we cannot prove him by these roles and manifestations, they do at least furnish worthwhile and encouraging grounds for supporting our belief in him. In this sense, God can be said to exist because we need him. Voltaire's adage that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent him, while usually interpreted as a piece of sarcasm, if, looked at differently, is an epistemologically sound argument. If we don't allow for the existence of God, the basis of rational and scientific knowledge becomes a great deal more convoluted, if not flat out insoluble.

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<sup>27</sup> *Letter to Consentius.*

Yet again if “God” is desirable as an intellectual construct, does that make it a necessary one?

St. Anselm (1022-1190) and Renée Descartes’ (1596-1650) answer to this is yes, and they offered the following ontological arguments:

(Anselm) If there is someone or something greater than all else (say the universe) than that someone or something is God.

(Descartes) Nothing is perfect which doesn’t exist. God is the completely perfect being, and such a being must include among its attributes that of existence. In a separate argument Descartes asserts that the fact that we who are finite and imperfect beings can conceive of an infinite and perfect being shows that God exists; since only he would be capable of producing in us this conception.

For such as Kant such reasoning is unpersuasive in establishing God’s necessity. But such a reaction to theology is not so strange when we realize that cognitive and apodictic necessity eludes us *everywhere* else. As Arcesilaus (c.315-242 B.C.), Pyrrho of Ellis (c.365-c.270 B.C.), Sextus Empiricus (c.160-c.210 A.D.), and their followers, and at a later date (unintentionally) Hegel, and then Bradley, showed, all *our* knowledge is contingent and that there is really *nothing* which we can demonstrate or assert as such possesses indisputable or irrefutable necessity. The kind of necessity, metaphysical and otherwise, historically insisted on in pre-modern theological arguments then simply will not do for those who would be rationally consistent.<sup>28</sup>

Yet if God is problematical as a necessary and objective notion, what then might we as mere *mortals* say for and about *God*? The following are further theistic conceptions of note which we might at least consider as hypotheses.

Oddly enough, Plato (427?-327) seldom or never speaks of “God.” There are gods, but otherwise Plato sees no need to explicitly invoke an ultimate deity; his “Demiurge” being as close to any such notion as he else expounds. In spite of this, subsequent philosophers have seen no difficulty in eliciting from his thought the idea that God is the Being of all beings and the Form of all forms, or else the necessary source, essence, and validation of all being and form.

To Aristotle, God is the first and primary being, universal, substance, and perfection; from whom springs all others. He is eternally occupied with contemplation and has no deficiency whatsoever.

To Zeno of Citium (334-262 B.C.), the founder of Stoicism and a materialist, God is a fiery ether that passes through the physical universe like a honeycomb. He is known

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<sup>28</sup> It is not true, on the other hand, that because the arguments for God’s existence haven’t proven him absolutely necessary, that they are, therefore, without weight. Neither is it true that just because we are incapable of valid apodictic beliefs or knowledge, that there is nowhere possible such a thing.

and exists to us by means of reason confirmed by experience. His essence is one, but is differentiated in a variety of things. He may be called, Nature, aforesight, or Fate. In Chrysippus' (c.280-c.206 B.C.) view (also a Stoic and a materialist), God is known through reason. Reason itself is a *physical* (if rarefied) power (pneuma) which cuts through and moves all things, but with the understanding that God's (or True Reason) supercedes all other reason. This said, the heart's logic is as important as the (cognitive) mind's in all this. Even Chrysippus himself makes the former the seat of intelligence rather than the latter.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), from Cordoba, Spain, and successor to a long tradition of Jewish sages versed in Western rationalism, as well as someone who benefited from the Aristotelian revival and Islamic enlightenment of the early Middle Ages, maintains that no definition can be given of God; nor can any attribute be predicated of him except loosely and for purposes of moral instruction. All persons and things which can be expressed are composites. God is not a composite therefore God cannot be adequately expressed by us. God can, in what we might think of as a practical sense, be known only by his actions, i.e., with these as his attributes; otherwise his essence is unknowable. Maimonides does however allow of saying that God is an incorporeal pure unity. If God were corporeal, he would be finite. What are spoken of as God's attributes (such as Justice, Power, Wisdom, etc.) are really all one and the same thing, namely Himself. God is known by his actions, or, again as we might say today as pragmatists, his effects. Yet notwithstanding we know God better by what he is not rather than what he is. Because God (and his angels, though differently) are incorporeal they are seen only through intellectual perception.

For Aquinas, although Reason is not of itself sufficient, certain necessary truths can be brought to man's understanding by means of it. Theology is a sacred science that accepts principles revealed by God; all other sciences are the handmaiden. It, more than any other branches of study, is devoted to a final end than other sciences. That end is eternal beatitude, and those who possess true charity will be the most beatified. He states: "If our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by argument, but only of answering his objections -- if he has any -- against faith. Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the proofs brought against faith are not demonstrations, but arguments that can be answered."<sup>29</sup>

We can know God, says Aquinas, from his effects, and from his effects we can know his essence. God is the reducing of all things to one principle; just as Nature is the reducing of all material life and interacting matter (in its various manifestations) to one principle. His divine essence is Being itself. Being in thought then stems from the divine essence. Although one in reality, God is many in idea. God can be seen only by the intellect, but not by senses and imagination. To make out the essence of God via the intellect is made possible by grace, not nature. God, by his grace, must literally unite himself to a persons' intellect for them to know him. Our thoughts, when rational, are

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<sup>29</sup> *Summa Theologica*, I. I. 8.



manifestations of his own thought; which, when applied to him, participate in his own contemplation of himself.

John Duns Scotus (1265?- 1308?) held that the human intellect in this life has no immediate or intuitive knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup> Further God cannot be known by this or that essence. He is the essence of all essences (to which we might also infer that he is the will of all wills.) If our knowledge of God is merely negative, it is no knowledge at all or else inadequate. “Being.” as we know it, does not apply to God because all being as we know it derives from him. The most perfect concept of God we are capable of is that which we obtain by conceiving of all the perfections in their highest degree. Yet this most perfect conception will ultimately fall short of his being; given his infinite nature and the restrictions and limitations of our own means of knowing and expressing ourselves. This said, natural reason can, nonetheless, demonstrate the existence, unity, and infinite perfection of God. God is the necessary basis of all contingent truths. As the source of all possibility, God is the implied and necessary basis of all contingent truths. All possibilities have their existence because of him, and consequently he himself could hardly be only probable.<sup>31</sup>

Boethius, whom we cited earlier, is a pivotal and ironic figure in the history of philosophy; representing the tail end of Greek and Roman classical culture, and yet who (for his locality) lived in a predominantly Christian era. Though scholars are inclined to see him as a Christian in sentiment, his most well known theological writing, the *Consolations of Philosophy*, contains no overt reference to Christ.<sup>32</sup> This I take to be the result of his desire for consummate objectivity and purest clarity in his thinking. As Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) said “the mind is pagan,” and on this premise Boethius (in the thought he expresses) seems to be creating both an image and intellectual vision that doesn’t see mind as capable of anything beyond the “pagan” view, yet an image and vision which, even so, is fully compatible and supportive of Christian belief.

He speaks of God as “lord, maker, source, path, goal.”<sup>33</sup> These assumed characterizations (or roles and manifestations) I will use to construct a basic, working conception of God here. For one thing, these offer us appropriate means to establish God as an objectively legitimate and desirable, if not absolutely necessary, concept. Using these somewhat religious terms as the basis for epistemological-theological constructs also seems fitting given the Christian premise of this work. While Boethius’ exact and intended meaning of “lord, maker, source, path, goal” might be somewhat different than my usage, they will despite this serve as a suitable terminology on which to establish a better understanding of “God” as a sound, reasonable and objective concept, if not an absolutely necessary one. In addition these proposed primary definitions provide us with

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<sup>30</sup> Unlike St. John of Damascus (645?-749? A.D.), for example, who thought the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all.

<sup>31</sup> *De Primo Principio*, chap. iv.

<sup>32</sup> Gibbon *does* specifically state: “The church was edified by his [Boethius’] profound defence of the orthodox creed against the Arian, the Eutychian, and the Nestorian heresies; and the Catholic unity was explained or exposed in a formal treatise by the indifference of three distinct though consubstantial persons.” *Decline and Fall*, vol. IV, ch. 34: Gothic Kingdom of Italy, part 3. This same treatise on the Trinity by Boethius is also cited on several occasions by Aquinas in the *Summa*.

<sup>33</sup> *Consolations of Philosophy*, Book III, ch. IX.

an elementary, yet useful preliminary understanding of what, for many, a *rational philosopher's* God is.<sup>34</sup>

### a. LORD

“It is not mind we should want to know: We Should Know The Thinker.”  
~~~*Kaushitaki Upanishad* <sup>35</sup>

“No man has existed, nor will exist, who has plain knowledge about the gods and the questions I discuss. For even if someone happened by chance to say what is true, he still would not know that he did so. Yet everybody thinks he knows.”
~~~ Xenophanes of Colophon, as contained in Hippolytus' *Refutation of all Heresies*. I.1

Before we can determine whether the assertion “God” (in one sense or other) exists, or that the statement he exists is “true,” it is only mete to ask what we mean when we say an assertion or belief is true or not to begin with, and what is referred to when we speak of “truth” (i.e., contingent truth; using lower case “t”), versus, say, “Truth” (absolute truth.)

Judgment, on one level or other, is necessary for us to assert there is reality, and to describe anything as being real, and without both judgment and someone to make and formulate that judgment is to make reference to something that, in our experience at any rate, is not possible. One could, naturally, have a sense of reality or what is real without having to make a formal assertion about what they know or realize, or without our being specifically conscious that we are making such an assertion. But such unreflective, or haphazard and incommunicable states of consciousness need not concern us.

An assertion is said to be “true,” i.e., *contingently* true, inasmuch as it is deemed to be *in accordance with* experience, logic, reason, morals, the opinions of others, and or whatever criteria of knowledge we deem most correct. A “truth” may be subjective, or objective in character, or both. Inasmuch as all “truths” (as we know them) come from fallible mortals, they are merely opinion; though, among more rational and scientifically minded people objective truths are, *communally speaking*, almost always thought to be superior or more true than subjective truths.

“Truth,” (with upper case “T”), by contrast, refers to a statement or belief that is *absolutely* true and more than mere opinion. As a belief, a “Truth,” in theory could be either subjective, objective, or both. Yet the more important question here is whether we are capable of knowing “Truth” in the first place. My own response to this offhand, and with some qualification, is no -- at least not objectively. It is *possible* we may know absolute truth *subjectively*. But, whether or not such is possible, most certainly *we* ourselves are incapable of adequately establishing such knowledge *objectively*. For

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<sup>34</sup> Or, if you prefer, the philosopher's God.

<sup>35</sup> Juan Mascaro, translator.

without someone or something “divine” to somehow validate it as such, we have no way of knowing that a subjective belief is absolutely true, at least objectively speaking; since if we could, it would require invoking thoughts and language that are contingent in order to know and describe them.

The vast majority of people no doubt do not consider all that they believe to be mere opinion. Some of what they believe they assume to be true in a sense that is more than mere opinion. For example, most people assume Vietnam and the planet Venus exist, and would not think to question the fact. This belief would be considered “a truth,” and if it wasn’t true in an apodictic sense, it would be seen as “true enough” to render it something more than mere opinion. Yet while they might not care about the nice distinctions of philosophers, close examination will reveal that they are wrongly assuming that certain criteria confers on certain judgments (which they make) the quality of necessity, or at minimum a very high degree of probability. Assertions such as that there is Australia, or there is a moon should, it would seem if insisted on with precision, be spoken of as practical truths, but not as absolute truths which are strictly necessary. *Absolutely necessary* truths are beyond our pronouncing, objectively speaking. Practical truths which are necessary would be analytical deductions, such as a square has four sides, and (synthetic *a priori*) mathematical statements like  $7 + 5 = 12$ .

A “truth”, or a supposed “fact” is something both asserted to and asserted by at least one person. There is no assertion or decision (and hence no truth) without someone to make them. A non-asserted or non-adjudged truth is like an unknown or undetermined fact; which is to say either a contradiction, a mere potentiality, or else something useless.<sup>36</sup> This applies to both judgment/assertions of fact and value. A truth connotes a judgment, and a judgment connotes a person. The person then who makes a judgment (i.e., holds a belief), or makes an assertion, and thereby has selected the criteria for validity, is what we will here refer to as an *arbiter*.

If we know something as “true” (as in a practical truth), and or if we can know “Truth” (i.e., absolute knowledge or belief somehow greater than mere opinion), *who* (or what) says what a “truth” or a “Truth” is, or whether something is or is not true? If we can establish or know a fact or correct conclusion, how does one know what criterion (or criteria) is (or are) the correct one(s)? Who (or what) will tell us or confirm its being so?

If we take the claim  $7 + 5 = 12$ , this assertion is only true if *someone* validates it as such. It will not do to say  $7 + 5 = 12$  is true and no one believes or asserts it is true, or that it can be true without there being an authority who is a person, and therefore an arbiter. The assertion is true, as a statement that has meaning for more than one person, only if *someone* says it has. It may well be that  $7 + 5 = 12$  is true in some sense without anybody saying so. Just the same, it has no objective truth value for us and based on experience unless (somewhere along the line) there is *someone* (or someones) to both assert and validate it as a truth. “ $7 + 5 = 12$ ” as a fact that is not asserted is a fact which; although it may well be true, is not known by anyone, and therefore has no value or

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<sup>36</sup> Hypotheses while valuable as tentative truth, cannot, by definition, be considered valuable *as fact*.

meaning. In cases where we say logic or calculation tells us something is true, this takes place only because we have admitted logic and calculation based on others and or ourselves concluding at the outset that these are valid criteria or rules for truth determination. Logic and calculations are not what we think of as *persons*, yet they can only be believed if a person assumes and to that extent adjudges and accepts their being valid tools for truth determination. Logic then is not a valid truth determination tool and has no practical meaning or relevance unless someone judges it to be appropriate for such. But unless and until that validity and meaning were assumed and accepted, logic could not be said actually possess them. Truth *as we know it* then must involve a person.

Allowing that there is Truth beyond mere opinion, and if then there is such a thing as final and incontrovertible Truth (or a Truth), there must be someone to both to assert and adjudge it to be such. If it is possible to speak of a final and absolute Truth there must be *a someone* who states and decides this very special sort of claim or pronouncement. Such a person we (here) can call an *ultimate arbiter*.

In brief, we might say:

\* Does someone decide whether something is True?

If no, there is no Truth beyond opinion.

\* If someone does decide whether something is True, does that someone answer to someone else?

If no, then that someone is an ultimate arbiter.

If yes, then there is an ultimate arbiter that person must answer to.

As a practical matter we (as individuals) who think that there is such a thing as Truth will choose who we believe to be an ultimate arbiter. Our choice of ultimate arbiter, whether made newly or else implied by past choices, might be ourselves, someone else, or God. In turn, a given person might invoke any one or all of these as arbiter depending on circumstances and or the assertion made.

Clearly the reason why the ultimate arbiter (in its highest and purest sense) must be God (and or the Absolute) is that we need someone *most* knowing and *most* capable understanding to make right (or the most right) judgments. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to define God, for conjectural purposes at least, as what such a being or person is. Of course, anyone we choose as ultimate arbiter we will be inclined to characterize as most knowing and most understanding. By the notion of God, we mean someone who is more knowing and more understanding than all others. We might identify God as this or that one, but according to our otherwise common understanding, God is the single individual or entity who is all (or the most) wise and omniscient. Why can't we ourselves or anyone else other than God be the ultimate arbiter? Because if we assume that all reality can somehow be known, the one person who could be omniscient

(by definition) must be God.<sup>37</sup> If there is no God to decide all of reality, all ultimate and final questions of true and not true, all such questions of fact and not fact, all such questions of good versus bad, then there is no absolute truth, no ultimate reality, and arguably as well no reality (beyond contingent opinion) at all.

This, at least, is the argument and point of view I wish to propose and explore here.

Perhaps someone will say we can know objective truth in a way that is more than mere opinion, and without the need of “God.” If we take this view, what criteria do we use to determine such truth?

a) We could believe there is truth (whether trivial or profound); as for example when we speak of a fact, conviction, or judgment, but deny our ability to conclusively know it (either because we are deceived, skeptical, or suspend our judgment about it.)

b) We could believe there is truth, and there may be a way of conclusively knowing it.

If we have an assertion (whether held by a single individual or more than one person) that something is true, then there must be someone who by some standard or rule determines that the assertion in question is true or false (or partly true, or partly false, etc.)

So let’s say “Alfred” or else a community which we can call “experts,” is this person. Who then designates this person(s) as being the one who determines the truth of the assertion? Themselves or someone else? If themselves they would be the ultimate arbiter. If “someone else,” we might well ask the same question about this “someone else.” Who designated this someone else as arbiter? Upon these questions we follow a chain of authority until we arrive at our ultimate designator (of arbiters.) We are, of course, assuming that any of these assertions are actually true or false. If we say all such assertions that these people decide are merely a matter of opinion, then an ultimate arbiter isn’t necessary. An ultimate arbiter *is*, however, necessary if we assume mutually understood truth, and that assertions which do not conflict with reality are possible. Not only a purportedly absolute truth, but a purportedly objective “truth” without there accompanying it someone to validate it as being such cannot be anything more than opinion or a mere subjective truth.<sup>38</sup>

How else does one distinguish between practical truth (i.e. more desirable opinion), and real truth? I defy anyone to do it ~~ you cannot make the distinction successfully unless and until we bring in someone as an ultimate arbiter. If an assertion is

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<sup>37</sup> I don’t feel this is a crucial point for now, but if someone wants to object that we could also say there are Gods (versus one God) who are omniscient, or a number-neutral “God” who is omniscient (being neither one or many), we could say either of these as well.

<sup>38</sup> True, the belief that there is truth is itself an opinion. Yet just because a belief is an opinion it does not necessarily follow that it is not a true or correct belief -- or so I would contend.

true, and (as an assertion) needs *someone* to assert it, then if they are not an ultimate arbiter, then they are merely expressing opinion. If we choose to abandon reason, how else will we be able to know or distinguish between whether a claim is actually true or merely opinion and conjecture?

The ordinary difference between an opinion and a truth is that a truth is something that fulfills certain objective criteria. However, our choice of criteria, including reason, are themselves opinion. Whoever chooses the criteria and then decides whether an opinion rises to the status of truth is an arbiter. If there is no truth, then what I say about an arbiter or ultimate arbiter can be ignored. But if there is an opinion that is true, that is if there is a belief that is consistent or not inconsistent with reality (assuming there is such a thing as “reality”), such belief requires an arbiter. Now an arbiter may use reason to arrive at his choice (that is arrive at his judgment), but who then will say then that reason is an *ultimate* criterion? This would presumably have to be an ultimate arbiter.

As one of the foremost criterions of judgment, reason (roughly speaking “an intelligent person’s understanding of how to apply logic to experience, and including their actually doing so”), doesn’t just “happen.” Reason requires *someone* who reasons. Even the logical calculations of a computer have no bearing in beliefs (or true/false assertions) unless a “someone’s” judgment is involved. Reason is generally accepted among more thinking people to be a proper standard or method by which to resolve differences of opinion. Yet reason itself cannot rid us of the need of an arbiter. Someone must finally decide and tells us that reason is a proper standard, no matter how useful and reliable experience and intuition tells us it is. Whether or not the arbiter concurs with reason or experience, we ultimately will not believe something is true (beyond opinion) unless an arbiter says or asserts that it is so.

A person could claim themselves as ultimate arbiter, but this would only have meaning as more than opinion if another person agreed with them; which if that took place, would render the judgment as objective *between themselves*. Granted a given person could think they themselves were the ultimate arbiter; perhaps even be correct. But unless someone else agreed with them, anyone else would assume such a view to be merely subjective opinion and not true beyond that.

As people who express ourselves, and by this means make judgments we are like a painter’s assistant, say, working on the painter’s project when he is not in the studio. We can speculate on how he wants something depicted, but will not really know unless and until he returns to the studio to see the work we have done for him in his absence. For one reason or other, we have faith that we are painting what he wants painted, and doing this painting in a way he wants it done. Yet we will not *really* know whether our faith is justified until he sees what we have done and judges it.<sup>39</sup> One odd implication of this view is that it in effect says we do not really *know* that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and indeed perhaps never did. What we have done is believed it to be true, and in effect had a certain faith

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<sup>39</sup> I am leaving aside the question of whether we ourselves require a separate arbiter to determine to determine whether our understanding of the ultimate arbiter’s identity and judgment are correct. Offhand, I would assume the answer is no, and conclusions we make of this kind must be treated as subjective in character.

that someone or something will justify both our arithmetical assertion and our faith in it; all the while assuming certain steps and method as consistent and reflective of true judgment. This is not saying that  $2 + 2 = 4$  cannot be absolutely true; rather and only that we, by ourselves, are not in the position to establish it as so.

The definition of an ultimate arbiter people can formulate and perhaps to some extent agree upon. Yet whether their characterization or definition of arbiter is correct, whether it is true or not, we, paradoxically, would not know unless our arbiter pronounced it such. In which case the truth of the matter would be pronounced in a manner that no one could refute it. How pronouncement of absolute truth (or falsehood) by an ultimate arbiter might take place would depend on the ultimate arbiter. Even so, it is not unreasonable to say we can form a legitimate or plausible opinion or practical idea of how the ultimate arbiter does this; though understandably we can expect people's views would or might differ on this point. This understood, unless and until such "arbiter" is somehow made manifest and acceptable to all concerned, all assertions are opinions which may or may not be true. Otherwise, common assertions of truth and falsehood are accepted on the basis of pragmatic criteria; unless and until our ultimate arbiter can be established and pronounce on their validity in a way something more than this.

If say "we" all agree that logic or reason is the highest criteria of truth, then this "we" in effect becomes the ultimate arbiter. However, it might be objected that this "we" cannot be the ultimate arbiter because this "we" is a group made up of fallible individuals. It could be argued that there might be "gods" (or if you like "experts") who together act as ultimate arbiter. Yet even so, only in their united agreement and judgment as one would they arrive at truth determination, such as in the case of a committee of judges.<sup>40</sup> If God is two (or more) who or what holds them together? Then who or whatever that something is would be God. In the case of a committee of judges, we might say what presides or rules is the laws of procedure (or such), but laws cannot function until an arbiter appoints them. No committee then could have come together by rational or natural principle unless someone had the authority or power to be the ultimate arbiter to begin with, and by that power authorize rational or natural principle as true. Rational or natural principles, as we know them, need someone to pronounce their validity and supremacy. At the same time they must be stated. This someone who states what are our foremost principles is the ultimate arbiter, and it would seem to follow that if there is no advanced, pre-ordained rule of, say, rational or natural principle, then there must be an ultimate arbiter which precedes and validates all rational and natural principle. One is inclined to think of this arbiter as one God,<sup>41</sup> but, at present, we don't need to insist on this.

If there is more than one reality (or let's say universe), there may or may not be someone who knows those realities (universes) in his one person. Now if there is such a person, he might know them in a way consistent with true reality or might know those realities merely as a matter of his personal perspective and opinion of them. If he knew

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<sup>40</sup> If we say a bench of judges decides 3 nays and 4 yeas, the conclusion of "3 nays and 4 yeas" can be considered *one* judgment.

<sup>41</sup> Melissus of Samos (mid 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), a later Eleatic proponent: "If something is real it cannot be two, because two would be bounded by something else."

these multiple realities as or in their true reality, and if he knew all true realities (which there might be), that person would be God (i.e., our “omniscience connotes God” again.)

If we deny there is God who can act as the ultimate arbiter, and say instead that ourselves are the standard for final truth, we can do this, except how would we know we were right except arbitrarily? To say we, of and by ourselves, can validate our own judgment as being absolutely true (as some most certainly do) is objectively speaking meaningless. We can say we believe such and such, but *we* cannot say that our belief is objectively or necessarily *true*; because by invoking the notion of truth we are invoking a common standard or arbiter who proclaims the validity and soundness (or invalidity and or unsoundness) of whatever is asserted.

The key term in addressing questions as to the identity of the ultimate arbiter is “justified.” What standard(s) is invoked to justify a belief is invariably a matter of someone’s choice. That there is one truth potentially knowable and agreeable to all has been used as a connotative argument for God; since only God would be that someone to decide what the standard or criteria of truth is. Otherwise, standards of true versus false belief are decided by given communities and or ourselves as individuals. Hence, the necessity of God, as many philosophers have argued; for there would be otherwise be no absolute independent authority of truth for any and all of the universe, and the criteria of truth and falsehood would be decided by someone less than God, and hence imply criteria less than Truth qualified. Without God there is no objective knowledge that can truly be characterized as necessary and absolute truth, and instead would leave us only with objective truth that is, at best, only relatively or pragmatically necessary. This would include even analytical and tautological propositions. Again, criteria that are chosen by anyone less than God are ultimately subjective or at best of only practical, and non-absolute validity, including even the most elementary assertions (such as the belief that a given belief can be true or false.)

Truth and justice without God then makes truth and justice subjective; objectivity being merely (as generally understood and accepted) a superior form of subjectivity. With God, it is at least hypothecated that truth and justice are pure objective notions, or at least notions superior to human deficiency and limitations. Only if we presuppose God can we say there is absolute truth, whether that truth can be understood subjectively, objectively or both. But notice, we must pre-suppose, and this pre-supposition is a faith, not itself irrefutably confirmed knowledge. As Aristotle, in *Posterior Analytics*, says, unless we *already* know *something* to begin with, we cannot learn or determine anything.<sup>42</sup> For those who believe in God this pre-supposition is no problem, yet they must respect the logical objections of opponents who might say that such pre-supposition is a subjective belief, and cannot be used to validate itself; at least if the unbeliever opts to see it that way.

If we believe in God, we can believe God will justify our belief. If not, we can say any and all beliefs are subjective. In this sense the justification, as a practical matter for

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<sup>42</sup> The next step from this, for some, such as Hegel, is to then say if there is this *something* it must be God (or the Absolute), or of God (or the Absolute.)



us between humans, is ultimately formed by people's assent; except for those who choose to believe in God; in which case of the latter, the justification, for them is already established. But they cannot characterize such "God" belief to a non-believer as anything more than subjective; which objection a reasonable believer will (if he is fair) concede as being (objectively) just.<sup>43</sup>

Until God (somehow and this is possible) shows up to say "this is Truth," we decide what is Truth or truth, and any such decisions between people are ultimately subjective; that is, if we desire to be consistent. Subjective belief does not imply a given such belief is not absolutely true; only that it requires God or the Absolute's validation to make it so. Subjective belief may then be demonstrated as absolutely true if God "somehow" manifests Himself and validates to the acceptance of all concerned that it is absolutely true. Until then it is just a subjective belief. Whether such manifestation (or, if you like, revelation) is forthcoming, has already taken place, or is even possible, is open to question. But apparently only such manifestation could establish a belief as both objectively and or apodictically true, that is, in an absolute and more than subjective sense.<sup>44</sup>

Looking at all this from a different perspective, let's assume there is an all powerful God. If it were possible that he would have the veto power, so to speak, over any other sentient beings assertions of potential truth (including the most matter of fact kinds of belief such as "I exist," or "I am presently at such and such a location."), this might be one sense in which he could assert his authority as ultimate arbiter. It would not follow, however, that because one person could somehow change the thoughts of another that he would necessarily be the ultimate arbiter. With someone who brainwashes another, he merely changes the person's opinion, by means of manipulating their information source and or affect the person's thought processes. An ultimate arbiter, by contrast, would be able to actually change the truth status of a person's belief, without needing to manipulate our personal or psychological thought processes.

Despite these arguments, God as arbiter must be something chosen for the simple reason that in theory we could choose to believe whatever we like, including choosing to believe that God is not the ultimate arbiter; even if it were otherwise affirmed by both God *and* everyone else that he was. We could, of course, be wrong in our choice of belief. Yet there is nothing in theory or potentially we could choose not to believe. We therefore choose or, at very least, have the potential to choose, our arbiter. Regardless of whether this is how it must or should be, the fact is that is, as best we know, how it is and always has been. If we have no choice in who we believe or not believe to be arbiter then we will have lost all intelligence; because intelligence requires belief, which, by definition, implies choice.

Though God's judgment (as ultimate arbiter) is presumably fixed and unchangeable, yet our own judgment, and *our own idea* of His judgment are, based on

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<sup>43</sup> The Greek word for judgment is "axiomas" which derives from "worthy;" which serves as an additional reminder that any and all conclusions we reach are value based.

<sup>44</sup> a=a, according to my way of thinking, is objectively and necessarily true, but only for practical purposes, and not absolutely.

past experience, liable to error. In order to correct such possible errors we have recourse to sociability, benevolence, morals, logic, the dialectic, and science (which are, in turn, fostered by culture and institutions.) It is by these means, at least traditionally and conventionally, that we can most correctly determine whether our judgments are in conformity with God's. These then are adopted as or become our guides to who he is objectively.

As to why sociability, morals, benevolence, morals, justice, the dialectic, aesthetics, analytical and empirical sciences, based in altruistic love, are our guides to knowing God, I will address and attempt to bring out in the greater course of this work; while remarking for the moment that established wisdom of the ages and around the world have generally seen these as most necessary for achieving higher Good, either personally or communally. Otherwise I will take it for granted that God must be known through sociability, morals, benevolence, morals, justice, the dialectic, aesthetics, analytical and empirical science; since, as I understand the matter, these are most consistent with the highest truth we are capable of knowing it.

If we accept the idea of God as the ultimate arbiter, one cannot disagree with God and be right; since God is more moral, rational and just than we are. So does this mean that God must answer to our own idea of right reason? The answer is, of course, no. If God is ultimate arbiter, it would seem he could (at least in theory) overrule our ideas of right reason and morals as he "sees fit." Meanwhile, because experience has shown rationality and morals (at least in the form of sociability and basic honesty) are necessary for the best estimation and evaluation of what is true (and what is false, real and not real), we have good grounds for believing, if not insisting, that God can best be determined and known through these as basic criteria. As well, it has been many times attempted to be shown by theologians like Aquinas that God himself, by his grace, gives and bestows on us epistemologically justifiable grounds for us to assume him, and that, (as a practical if not an apodictic matter) our knowing of and relationship to him is rational and moral in character. But such presupposition, of course, can, and as it stands in this contingent, mortal realm of things, only be established by faith.

Now of course we can choose to believe otherwise. As I have already said, our potential power of choosing belief is phenomenally great, and includes our choosing who we see as the ultimate arbiter despite his own rebuttal of us otherwise. That is, we might reasonable posit that despite the ultimate arbiter's own formal pronouncement, we could even then still deny his authority as ultimate truth arbiter. What is the limit of choice of belief? Can a person or power (even the ultimate arbiter) authoritatively revoke our trust in Right Reason,<sup>45</sup> Love, Morals and Beauty? No doubt people will feel differently about whether this would be possible. Yet what is wonderful to remember is that unless and until such revocation took place (and is possible), we have a choice, a choice which is confirmed and supported by reason, and which we see in the very nature of Reason (itself), Love, Beauty and Morals. For what are Reason, Love, Beauty, and Morals without choice? Now a clever skeptic might argue that choice or no choice, he does not

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<sup>45</sup> The dialectic, proper science, etc. I take to be forms of Right Reason.

value or care for them. Whether or not the skeptic is himself consistent between what he says and what he actually believes, his very posing of a point of view demonstrates that he has a choice, or, at minimum, we can say there are persuasive grounds for demonstrating that he has choice or potential choice. The very existence of choice, so essential to Reason, Love, Morals and Beauty, itself strongly supports a case for their high importance; else why do we have these available to us, and why have they been recognized by wise and intelligent persons from time immemorial as the penultimate standards? To say they are meaningless accidents of chance, while perhaps plausible, doubtless sounds most strange.

If we say God does not measure up to right, we contradict ourselves; since whatever standard we go by to know whether something is right is God's standard according to my definition here.<sup>46</sup> For instance, someone might say "I see people starving, therefore God, who is all powerful, is to blame." Yet it is God, as the higher moral principle you appeal to, who tells them that people starving is something wrong. How then can he be blamed for the starvation? If it is not he who validates and justifies our belief that starving is wrong, then who or what does? If we say he is acting illogically (i.e., by telling us starvation is bad and then somehow bringing it about), then who do we say authorized moral and logical inference? If God, then he would not do such a thing. If not God, where ultimately is the strength of reason on which the moral and factual judgment are based?

A rational person who sees God as ultimate arbiter will understandably believe that if they seek the truth, honestly, sincerely, rationally and morally they can always say they are in agreement, or sufficient agreement, with God. One of the practical advantages of this outlook, especially for a sensitive and conscientious believer, is that it helps them to avoid thinking that they are at odds with God when deep down they don't want or wish to be. What they can say is: this is how I see such and such to be. God knows whether I am right or wrong and I will always defer to his judgment. Yet until I know that this or that is God's view of the matter, I will hold the view reason, morals and justice tell me to, and I assume because he is (at least in his relationship to me and my relationship to him) rational, moral and just then he will not only condone the method and approach I adopt, but would approvingly bless and encourage them.

The question might again be asked: if we choose our arbiter, does this mean that an *ultimate arbiter* can never be forced on us? If truth and reality to begin with are forced on us, then either choice in thought and judgment is only temporary to this human state of things, or else we could conclude the ultimate arbiter will always grant us a choice, but that unless and until such divine validation we will never be sure of his final judgment. We cannot dismiss or defy the ultimate arbiter if we choose to assume that absolute truth can be known. But in another sense it would seem the ultimate arbiter cannot force belief on us. For him to be able to do so would be to say we have no intelligence; since (transposing Samuel Clarke's dictum) intelligence without liberty is no intelligence. While beliefs are, in day to day life forced on us, nonetheless, we could, at least in theory,

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<sup>46</sup> That is, there is a standard of justice independent of opinion.

reject *all* of them: though (as a practical matter, viz. in our mortal state) rejecting some beliefs, needless to say, is not always so easy as rejecting others. Yet because we could reject any judgment or belief, that neither does nor does not imply that our judgment or belief is absolutely correct. Only an ultimate arbiter, properly speaking, could do this. We could have what we consider to be good ideas of the ultimate arbiter's judgment is. But we ourselves could never pronounce our own judgments of and by ourselves as being ultimate or absolute. There are invariably some beliefs which are compelled, such as that a belief may be true or false, that knowledge is possible, or that our own well-being matters. Yet just because a belief is compelled or is inborn in us does not (at least it seems to me) automatically qualify that belief as absolute and objective truth.

In *Peithology*, I take the position that what matters more is not *so much* what we know but what we love.

What we are concerned to know and what matters to us to know is invariably connected to what we love or desire. Knowledge that does, or does not offer potentially to, further "our" interests or desires is, as a practical matter, meaningless. In this sense, love precedes "knowledge," yet it cannot be emphasized too much as well that love without a known "object" or person (and therefore some kind of knowing of that object or person) is meaningless as well. Therefore there is some kind of knowledge that is innate; because before we can truly know, there must be something we already both know and desire, and for us to desire something, we must have at least an inkling of it, if not actual or true knowledge of it as such. This knowledge is an opinion; a hope that we desire to be at some point fully realized. We might for example, desire love itself, yet, in our full consciousness, not have *true* knowledge of it. Yet starting from a shadow, trace, or image of love, we seek love in its true reality. That there is a true reality of love is an opinion; which we (or some people at least) have faith will or can be realized as ultimate, universally irrefutable truth. Again, just because an assertion by us that falls short of (the alleged) confirmation by the (alleged) Absolute can never rise higher, among ourselves, than an opinion, it does not necessarily follow that such an opinion cannot be in harmony with Absolute truth. All that is being claimed is that we would not know the opinion was Absolute truth unless we presuppose the Absolute (i.e., God), and, in addition, that such Absolute can or will at some "time" (or other juncture of sequence) validate that opinion as being absolutely true.

The question might be asked, could God will another or something to be absolute? Possibly. Could God will another or something to be absolute and then himself not be the absolute? Our own logic would seem to imply not. But if we posit God as unfathomable to our finite intellects, and assuming a sequence,<sup>47</sup> he might, in theory at any rate, be capable of doing such.

In conclusion here, a quite different sort of argument for God as "Lord" is this:

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<sup>47</sup> This sequence could conceivably be in time, and or space but in not principle, because the ultimate arbiter is himself the principle to be decided and who decides.

There is no object or event that is not potentially under the control of some will or volition (whether that control is immanent or occurs over time), and there is no will properly speaking without some mind to guide it. To speak otherwise of an object or event being controlled without will or mind has no meaning. Temperature may be loosely said to “control” whether water is solid, liquid, or gas, but then the question can be asked, is it impossible that someone could or does control the temperature?

It would seem from this you could never prove materialism; because if the above is true it does not seem we could ascertain that a given object or event was not brought about by conscious will and mind since the control in question could conceivably have originated with a mind cleverer than our own, and which could thus conceal itself from us. This sounds rather strange I admit, but let the materialist, if he is rational, refute it.

But let’s try. A Stoic might say God, or the most rarefied fire-ether is a material object. If he accepts that no object is not potentially under the control of some volition and mind, and God is an object, then the Stoic might conclude that God himself is controlled by a more rarefied God; who is controlled by an even more rarefied God, ad infinitum (since divisibility of what is material is infinite, or such, at any rate, is how it appears in Chrysippus’ view.)

## **b. MAKER**

“Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not -- the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows or perhaps he does not know.”

~~~ *Rig Veda*, Creation Hymn

Belief in God has not always entailed that he was the creator, or that the universe was ever created.

Among primitive cultures, creation would seem to be the more commonly held belief and understanding. In cosmologies, such as ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, and Greek (Hesiod and Homer), in which God or some god(s) form the universe, they do it out of chaos, material and forms somehow already existing. In Genesis there is an abyss *prior* to creation. Whether this implies chaos is somehow either real or eternal by itself and exactly what God’s relationship to it is (or would be) is not entirely clear or evident. However, the case can, could and has been made that the concept of God is evidently superior or prior to chance or chaos; which latter assume an existent; whereas God is, in theory, the assumption underlying all existents.

In Stoic and typical Hindu thought the universe has always existed, but it is being regularly born destroyed, reborn, in a continuous, never ending cycle.

Plato, in his dialogue *Timaeus*, drawing evidently to some measure from Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500-428 B.C.), has it that the universe was created out of

indistinguishable matter already existing; that came into *known* being after God (in Plato actually “the Demiurge”) conferred form on it: the four elements earth, air, fire and water (these constructed from the shapes of various triangles) being the most elemental of material forms. This view was later expanded upon and developed by several thinkers, perhaps most notably Plotinus (204-270 A.D.)

Democritus of Abdera (c. 460-c.370 B.C.), the atomist, spoke of the universe as being infinite and uncreated.

In Aristotle the universe emanates as a necessary extension of God who is supreme over it. But it was never actually created. Rather, like and along with him, the universe always existed. Aristotle further maintains that the will of God is necessary for the world’s existence, and the world is not necessary of itself -- except that God makes it so.

Skeptics, thinking especially of Pyrrho of Elis, and those who were before or came shortly after him, did not think we could know whether the universe was created or not.

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the tradition of the ancient skeptics, convincingly demonstrates that we cannot *objectively* prove the universe was created -- or that it wasn’t. The question of whether it was created or not, according to this view (which serves as one of Kant’s metaphysical antinomies), simply cannot be proven conclusively one way or another. As I think most philosophical and scientific minded people would probably agree, neither the Big Bang of modern science or religion-based creation theory has been able to refute his argument.

This said, Kant’s view does not forbid us from speculating and theorizing whether the universe was created. It simply says, given the limitations of human cognition that (outside of subjective faith) nothing decisive and incontrovertible can come of it. One who attempted a rational justification of the pro-creation perspective was Samuel Clarke (1675-1729.) As presented in his *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, his argument, and which has an Aristotelian basis, goes something like this (though here somewhat roughly and with some interpolation of my own):

1. The universe is either caused or self-existent. If it is caused, certain philosophers will posit that cause as God and God is self-existent. If self-existent then the universe itself is God.⁴⁸ God, as the only self-existent, whether as Himself and or along with the universe therefore precedes everyone and everything.⁴⁹

2. Intelligence implies willful volition capable of bringing about motion.

⁴⁸ For Clarke’s response to Spinoza and the “pantheistic” interpretation see his *Demonstration*.

⁴⁹ We are assuming here the self-existent must be one for reasons discussed earlier, while acknowledging it is not impossible that the self-existent could be many, or both one and many.

With respect to 2., it is not sufficient that we can choose a thought, but can move absolutely nothing. Granted one can speak of someone being paralyzed so that all action arising upon their choice could (at least in theory) be somehow frozen or suspended, and assuming also by paralyzed we mean they could move nothing within their person or body except their own thoughts. But sooner or later, they are going to have to be able to move something of their own free-thought choice (including their own person.) Otherwise to speak of them having intelligence has very slight or no meaning. If one individual's intelligence is pre-determined by another, we would simply then say that the other has intelligence; while the former has none (really.) If we say no one has intelligence, we may well do this. But then we are naturally left to ask why do we speak of intelligence to begin with?

If we must choose, it intuitively makes more sense to us that matter would spring from mind rather than mind from matter; since mind as intelligence (or power) implies volition; volition implies effecting someone or something else. A mind, as we know it, is potentially a pure unity. Some assume that it is. All matter (and energy) as we empirically know it is composite. It has no real being (other than perhaps brute existence), and is a mere "blob," without the mind to identify, label and categorize it. Mind arising from deaf, dumb, blind and thoughtless composites is more difficult to conceive. How could a blind, dumb universe (assuming this is what matter is⁵⁰) create a being that could begin to comprehend itself and the universe (both?) From whence do imperfect being (like ourselves) derive the idea of perfection (God) and the desire to become more perfect? How can we describe ourselves as evolving (i.e., in a progressive and positives sense), to something that is better than we are, and yet which isn't ever *yet* known; which has not to our knowledge ever existed and yet which is somehow better? What can this "better" (or if you prefer "worse") be? Better (or worse) compared to and based on what?

In addition, how could unintelligent motion be possible, and how, given its dominance, could it precede intelligence either in sequence, importance, or both? If one will say, like some materialists, that intelligence is itself just a mechanical cycle of images and or objects, then again one intelligence is no more valid than another. If all intelligences are equally valid or correct then one intelligence is no more superior than any other intelligence, and that therefore there is no true or false, and there is no reality, except as a matter of convention. Some, of course, such as the Greek sophists, maintained this. Can there be unintelligent motion? At best, and taken all in all, we can say *perhaps* unintelligent motion is possible.

What thing then is not potentially an agent of some mind? If anyone or anything can exist and act as an agent of some mind, then naturally we will want to know who and what this mind is. So if a puppet (matter) attacks us we look to the puppeteer, not so much the puppet. The question then becomes what process do we use to identify the puppeteer because everything lies in him; and it is to him we go if we are to seriously deal with the puppet. One could never then prove that there are any physical actions which did not arise, nor were capable of arising, due to someone's will, and hence

⁵⁰ A Stoic might maintain that God, as the most rarefied ether-fire is material or a material substance, but this belief assume God and does not necessarily go against what we are trying to prove.

someone's intelligence. To say something arises out of chance or fate tells us nothing. Such words are simply labels for "unknown," about which little definitely can be said except with relation to certainty, and it is simply impossible to prove purposeless motion, given the infinite, or practically infinite, variety of causal connections in the universe. If all or any motion has a purpose, an a priori mind or order would seem to precede it. The possessor of such mind which rises in intelligence and understanding over all others would be God; whether or not we see God as One, Many, or both.

If then motion ultimately requires intelligence, and there was an initial motion of all things, that intelligence arose from God, i.e., a Prime Mover connotes God. If not, then: intelligence is ruled by non-intelligence, or intelligence is meaningless. If we say the universe possesses motion, but not intelligence, then we fail to account for why there is intelligence, and of what significance it is.

If we say more than one intelligence causes original (or else is the source of all) motion, we are left to ask what intelligence is it that unites their intelligences? True, they might disagree on important points, but the very fact that they possessed intelligence in some form or other (such that the same term could be applied to different persons) still implies a basic unity and identity.

Intelligence implies motion; therefore there is motion which is intelligent. If there is a source or highest intelligence, that intelligence is God. God therefore is the source of greatest motion, and therefore he either created the knowable universe, or else the knowable universe in some manner is contingent on him.

There are other arguments for creation based on design; which bring to our attention the incomprehensible complexity of different aspects of the physical cosmos, and how they are all interrelated according to patterns that intelligence can comprehend. We often -- at least so it seems -- very vividly see love in creation, yet how could there be love with no intelligence/choice?

These arguments are not irrefutable proof of the creation vs. non-creation question. Again, when it comes down to it, such a question is simply beyond scientific knowing. Yet the above briefly enumerated points do add weight to the creation view, and, if human thought has any say in the matter, certainly render it a credible and formidable scientific theory.

Whether to believe or not in the theory of evolution has been a major bone of contention between the religionists and modern materialists. Often this is simply a result of misunderstanding on either side of the possible truth in the other's view. Yet there seems no reason to assume that evolutionary theory (that is that man evolved from "lower"⁵¹ life forms, including primates) is somehow necessarily incompatible with the

⁵¹ Aristotle views *all* beings and things as capable of excellence; so that to say we biologically evolved from what we ordinarily refer to as "lower" life forms can also be said that in us they have (through evolution or progress) greater realized their excellence in us, and that we share a common bond of life. Possibly along the way, if not at the outset, God designated one chain of life "humankind" which then progressed to a special time when they "became" (perhaps under divine impetus) homo sapiens. Other interpretations are possible

creation viewpoint. And while evolutionary theory (which incidentally originated with ancient Greek thinkers Anaximander of Miletus (c.612-545 B.C.) and Empedocles of Acragas (c.495-c.435 B.C.), and later Anaxagoras and Democritus) may perhaps be incompatible with certain interpretations of the Bible, this does not mean that it is necessarily incompatible with a creation theory itself. Nor should the religionist, in my opinion, need feel so uncomfortable about accepting such a theory. After all we come into life from being cells, then grow and develop into fish-like looking beings in the womb. So why then should the idea that, *biologically speaking*, we derive from lower species be thought so threatening to religious belief? Personally, I see so reason why believers should feel imperiled or threatened by a biological theory. For even if our physicality in some way derived or develop from animals, this does mean our souls or spiritual nature did. Nor must it somehow or ipso facto follow that just because we have souls that animals don't.

The rejection of biological evolution comes from the sense that we are born spiritually; that our true beings are spiritual. Yet there doesn't seem to be any strong reason we can't properly respect our spirituality, without ignoring or distorting our physical origins. Perhaps both "evolution" and "Bible" are true, but in a way that would perhaps amaze and startle us. Thoughtful believers certainly should at least be willing to entertain this possibility. Evolution, it could be argued, does not do away with Adam and Eve. It would or might merely suggest that either a) Adam and Eve were individuals created from the existing proto-human species, or that b) the "creation" of Adam and Eve took place *spiritually* and outside, above and beyond mere materiality; which is to say it took place as the "next" course of evolution; sometime after (millions of years?) and contradistinction from the creation of the natural or physical universe.

Would Christianity make sense if there were no creation? Leaving aside scriptural mandate, it does not, on the surface and to this writer, seem that Christianity could not make sense if there was no creation. Even if we say that humanity needed a starting point (as in the persons of Adam and Eve), this does not necessarily imply *the universe itself* had to be created. That is, yes, it will be necessary for God, as our Father, to have created us, but not the universe. If then only God's supremacy is insisted upon -- and not revelation, scripture and tradition (at least on this particular point) -- there does not seem a strictly necessary and compelling reason why, from a Christian stand-point, we could not say (in theory) that the universe itself always existed, and was therefore not created as such (while allowing for the possibility of birth, death and re-birth of the otherwise always existing universe.) It is very unlikely such a viewpoint would change any Christian's creation beliefs, yet it is, even so, at least one worth mentioning and considering.

Finally, though without in any way asserting their validity or invalidity, it is worthwhile to list (albeit briefly) some of the gamut of possibilities on this subject.

One could theoretically say:

as well. Of course, some Christians will view such interpretations as unscriptural and therefore unacceptable, preferring instead the literal interpretation of Genesis that man was created directly from the clay of the ground.

- * God (unchanging, self-sufficient) created the universe.
 - * God (unchanging, self-sufficient) created gods who created the universe.
 - * God (unchanging, self-sufficient) created God, who created God, who created God, who created the universe.
 - * God (unchanging, self-sufficient) created god, who created God, who created God, who created gods, who created the universe.
 - * god (unchanging, self-sufficient) created gods who created the universe.
 - * gods (unchanging, self-sufficient) created god who created the universe.
 - *gods (unchanging, self-sufficient) created god who created gods who created the universe.
- Etc. and perhaps their converse.⁵²

c. SOURCE

“There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From his light all these give light, and his radiance illumines all creation.”

~~~ *Katha Upanishad*

As all things we otherwise know of are contingent, who or whatever is self-existence and absolute self-sufficiency is understood to connote God. Yet even if God is self-existent (or self-existence) and self-sufficient (or self-sufficiency), there doesn't seem reason to necessarily assume that there are no beings (of some sort or other) who are not also self-existent, yet who are not necessarily God. This admitted, it would not appear to make much sense to assume or speak of there being self-existing and self-sufficient beings separate from God and who are also “self-existence” and “self-sufficiency.”

The way our mind, and its ability to understand the world, functions is on the basis of objects and classes (or concepts) of objects. All classes are subclasses of greater classes, except for the universe itself (unless it is considered sub-classed under God). Is the universe a sub-class of the concept (i.e., class) God? Or is God a sub-class of the universe? Or is God a class/concept exclusive of the class universe? Or should God be seen as existing “separate” from spatio-temporal reality? If *universals* (conceptions that unify otherwise separate and individual entities) don't originally come from or originate

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<sup>52</sup> To say, for example, “gods created God, etc.” would not seem to make sense because the “gods” it would seem would already in some way or other already be or imply “God.”

with God, where do they come from? Even if we cannot actually prove him, will we not wish there was God to give our mind's the ultimate unity, harmony, and peace? For some it is simply a matter of: if there is ultimate unity, harmony, and peace, and these preferably consistent with justice and mercy, then that is God, or there is God. And what perhaps cannot be established in fact, is established based on and as a matter of faith.

Diogenes Laertius (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) in his *Lives of the Philosophers*, of all the great thinkers of ancient Greece first mentions Musaeus (chronologically), saying Musaeus,<sup>53</sup> “maintained that all things proceed from unity and are resolved again into unity.”

A much later, but still very early figure in Greek thought was Anaximander of Miletus who is recorded as saying “There is a unity from which springs all qualities.” What emanates, literally, from this Unity are all things as qualities and contraries, which then return to the Unity, ad infinitum in a cycle. There is a sense in which this unity, the [qualitatively] unlimited,<sup>54</sup> or indeterminate (this “something” which precedes all conceptions and which all conceptions presume), and the source of all qualities and contraries, is by definition Fate or Destiny. But this isn't clear. By the time of Pericles, i.e., the early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Anaxagoras of Clazomenae came to state it was Nous or Mind, which is infinite, and which sorts, distributes, and matches everything. In Musaeus, Anaximander, and Anaxagoras is an attempt to identify the greatest unity by immaterial abstraction, as opposed to some physical element such as fire, earth, air and water. Though the views of Thales of Miletus (c. 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), Anaximenes of Miletus (c. 546 B.C.), and Heraclitus could in a sense be called materialistic, theirs were also, in their various ways, attempts at identifying ultimate unity. Note again how in the case of this group of thinkers an abstract name is used: unity, the unlimited, or Mind, as opposed to speaking of Water, Air, Fire and Earth as the ultimate unity.

Cognitively speaking, it would appear self-evident that everyone and everything (i.e., the All and everyone and everything it contains) partakes of unity and existence,<sup>55</sup> and that unity and existence are the categories under which everything are subsumed, and, as well, everything has its source. They are, in effect fundamental and essential qualities or attributes if anyone or anything is to be known or spoken of. If unity and existence are somehow real or based in something real, the one necessarily implies the other. Both, in some form or other are encountered in everything we know, whether we speak of a person, an object or an event. Though I suppose it isn't necessarily obvious, it would seem we possess these notions both innately and from experience. But as we grow

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<sup>53</sup> If we go with what Diogenes has, Musaeus was roughly a contemporary of, or immediately preceded Linus of Thebes, and Orpheus of Thrace, and are understood to be pre-Homeric chronologically speaking. *Lives of the Philosophers*. I.1.

<sup>54</sup> Phillip Wheelwright, translator.

<sup>55</sup> Existence might be seen in two ways: a) any person, things or event which occupies thought or space exists, and empty space can then be said to exist or, b) relation does not constitute existence, and therefore the only persons or things which exist are space bound entities. Put another way, relation as quality could be said to exist as a thought but not as a thing itself. To think of “relation,” according to this interpretation would be to think of a thought that is a principle of thought, but not an existing thing as such. As a thought, relation is a sort of tool, but there is no such thing otherwise discernable in space; and rather like empty space, relations are a non-existent where existents dwell. If we accept the limited definition (b), then existence cannot be constructed out of mere relation, and there is no such thing as empty space. However, if we accept the expanded first definition then existence is indeterminate; so that it might be said to be either finite, infinite, or perhaps somehow both. (Does an event exist? If so, where do we measure its beginning and end?)

our sense and understanding of these conceptions takes on a more lucid and defined form, depending on the individual.

To say that here is something that has no unity and which exists doesn't make sense.<sup>56</sup> When we speak of, say, a hippogriff as not existing, we mean that a literal hippogriff does not exist, but as an imagined notion, hippogriffs certainly do exist. Therefore there is a way in which all things that can be spoken of or referred to do exist in some way, even if only as fictitious notions. It might be argued that unity and existence are intellectual constructs and abstractions, and not real things. Here, however, we will take it for granted that unity and existence are real things, or at least real as abstractions that have practical application.

Unity and existence are qualities. Qualities (or properties) we assume to be effects, i.e., the effects of someone or something. Our perception followed by thought proper identifies the quality, and thought attributes the quality to the person or thing we are perceiving. Unity and existence as qualities are notions which it seems we best know and recognize intuitively and also by degree. "By degree" I mean we can recognize (at least in a rough way) something that possesses "more" existence and "more" unity. A towering city skyscraper would seem (at least on the face of it and from a common point of view) to have more existence and more unity than a small, broken down shed. In these examples, existence is seen in the form of a physical presence and unity in the solidity and cohesiveness of a physical structure.

Unity and existence are finite, contingent terms and imply their opposite, i.e., chaos and non-existence. If unity and existence did not by implication refer to chaos and non-existence, there would be no need to mention them. We could then be said to know unity and existence by their contrary or opposite, as well as each other, all in relation to each other, each in relation to the whole, each in relation to the whole in relation to each other, etc.

Now when we ask what unifies unity and existence, seeing as neither is real to us in isolation, that higher "unity" and "existence," if there is such, is God. We could also perhaps express this by saying that God is the essence and source of unity and existence. Though these somehow derive from him, there is no clear way of knowing whether we can speak of his requiring these, or that he himself somehow embodies or possesses these as qualities.

Someone could argue, even admitting there is somehow an underlying basis or substratum to unity, and existence, why must it be characterized as God? Technically, it need not. We could speak of the Absolute or use some other name. Yet the peculiar uniqueness of this notion does lend itself to being interpreted as God. For Descartes this very tempting explanation became his proof of God's existence. We don't need to go so far here. Rather we'll be satisfied with observing what an extraordinary and awesome

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<sup>56</sup> We may of course speak about degrees of unity and existence, quantity with respect to each separately and or in relation to the other, whether such quantity is interpreted literally or as a practical abstraction.

concept and idea this is; whether it is or isn't God, or whether it reflects or doesn't reflect God as he is commonly conceived.

Last, we might also remark, experience shows that if we are attacked by a powerful unity, we need a more powerful unity to resist and defeat it. Life itself is a unity, and can only persist as a unity. What greater unity could there be to preserve and protect us than he who is the source of all unity?

#### **d. PATH**

“By the path of the good lead us to final bliss, oh fire divine thou god who knowest all ways. Deliver us from wandering evil. Prayers and adoration we offer thee.”

~~~ *Isa Upanishad*

There is a right or correct way or method to get to where we want to go, or achieve what we want to achieve. This is what is meant by “path.” Yet must we say God is necessary to secure a correct way or method to attain some destination or goal? The answer, strictly speaking, is no, of course; since we can think of innumerable instances where someone can get to where they want to go or achieve what they want to achieve without God as such; or at, the very least, certainly it is not necessary to think of or invoke him to get to where we want to go. True, one can argue that nothing can be attained or achieved without God, but this is only possibly true if we assume God's existence to begin with, and therefore, itself, is no proof.

Faith and devotion to Christ in its earliest form was known not as Christianity, but rather (as given in Acts of the Apostles) “the Way;” clearly implying that belief in Christ and His teachings provides us with a way or path to reach God (who is both good itself and the highest of all goods.)⁵⁷ Other religions, and philosophies as well, of course, have a “way” of their own to reach or become nearer to the supreme good. Taoism not only has its own “Way,” but more than this, it, in effect, sees “the Way” (the Tao or Dao) as God and God as “the Way.”

When Boethius speaks of (or implies that) God is the necessary path to good he has a certain good in mind: in particular, ultimate or divine goodness. Yet only if we accept the idea that God is, or else the source of our highest good, does it make sense to speak of Him as “path.” We must therefore first ask what it means for God to be the “goal,” or ultimate good.

“Progress” is the realization of some higher state. It may be the return to an ideal state of goodness, the moving forward to an entirely new, never before realized ideal/state of goodness, or a combination of both of these. Whichever it is, or all of them, the highest or ultimate end of progress could be defined as God, or else requiring God.

⁵⁷ Eusebius says the term Christian first came into use at the church at Antioch about the time of Paul and Barnabas' mission journey there. *History of the Church*, II.3.3.

Of course, the theist assumes that good necessarily emanates from God and or is only possible with his involvement and participation.

On a related, but lesser point, it could be contended that progress could not attain to something entirely new; because if new it would be something God previously was without, and if God was previously without it, he would somehow be imperfect and therefore not God. We might get around this by saying progress realized can be something entirely new to the universe, if not to God.

e. GOAL

“Where there is the Infinite there is joy. There is no joy in the finite. Only in the infinite is there joy: Know the nature of the Infinite.”

~~~ *Candogya Upanishad*

By “Goal,” is meant ultimate end or greatest good to be attained. An end achieved or greatest good attained can also, for purposes of what follows, be termed happiness; with the caveat that there are those who might disagree that the ultimate end or greatest good should be defined or characterized this way.<sup>58</sup>

God as either ultimate happiness or greatest good is not a notion that is readily obvious to most of us. If we were rather to speak of peace, love, hope, beauty, virtue, wisdom, liberty, health, or friendship, these would make more immediate sense to us as true ends or aspects of true happiness. And even these would only be realized, say, through love of family friends, loved ones, pets, and nature, before we would even conceive, let alone love, the abstraction “God.” It might be said then that unless we know God somehow instinctively or intuitively, our idea of his goodness is constructed out of accumulated instances in day to day life of “goodness;” which then are brought together intellectually under the category “God” or God’s goodness.

For *most* people, ultimate, end and be all good rarely comes up as an issue in their lives. By comparison, practical goods and pleasures are by far more our regular concern. Despite this, if there is to be a coherence and consistency to the pursuit of happiness, accumulated, or the sum of all justified pleasure in our lives, it makes sense to speak of an ultimate end or good. If then there is an ultimate good, either collectively, or for ourselves as individuals, we could denote it God. And if God isn’t actually the final goal of our happiness, we could think of him as being the creator or source, as well as permanent and immoveable safeguard, of whatever our ultimate good or happiness is or we think to be.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For example, Kant speaks of fulfilling one’s moral duty as an end in itself, I would simply, and for practical purposes, interpret this fulfilling one’s duty as essentially his idea of happiness; though granted he phrases his argument otherwise. Similarly a Buddhist might say that they don’t seek happiness, but rather Nirvana or peace. Here, again, I stretch and broaden the definition of happiness to include Nirvana or peace, without presuming on the Buddhist’s own distinction.

<sup>59</sup> Happiness, it might be said, like moral excellence in Kant, is something we never (in this life at any rate) quite reach; though we can come ever near to it, except perhaps at specific and unusual times; such as when perhaps someone is truly at one with God.

To use our examples, (such as) peace, love, hope, beauty, virtue, wisdom, liberty, health, or friendship are contingent. Allowing that we would more likely know these as goods before or prior to our ever knowing God as Good, we, nonetheless, cannot experience or have any of these things without a someone or something else. And when we go to that someone or something else, we find they also are contingent (i.e., they depend on another or others to both be realized and or to function.) This continues ad infinitum; unless and until we bring in God as the non-contingent, final goal or happiness. Or at least, for ultimate end or happiness to be attained, there must be someone or something who is not dependant, and non-contingent. If there is someone, or something, who is non-contingent, and on which all contingent happiness is based, that person or something is God. We can express this another way by saying that God is what necessarily underlies the strength of any and all happiness; otherwise happiness is finite and limited, and therefore mere pleasure and not true happiness. Indeed, declares St. Augustine “There is no other good which can make any rational or intellectual creature happy except God.”<sup>60</sup>

This argument is, of course, very similar, if not identical, to the St. Anselm-like argument we have already been using with respect to “Lord” and “Source.” Now it does not necessarily follow that God is final end or happiness. All the argument as applied to Goal says is that if there is an ultimate happiness it depends on God, i.e., what is non-contingent; if it is more than ephemeral pleasure and something possessing lasting strength, reality, and power.

Elsewhere, Augustine also states: “Though shalt see God, good not by any other good, but the good of every good.”<sup>61</sup> According to Aquinas, everything is good according to and with the necessary condoning and approval of divine goodness, and those most like the divine are more good than those less like him. Presumably influenced by such as Augustine, Pascal has it: “Happiness is neither outside nor inside us: it is in God, both outside and inside us.”<sup>62</sup>

We can say an end or good that changes in value has relative value, and, further, that there is no necessary reason that one’s ultimate good, as something we desire, cannot be something that changes value. On the other hand, it could be maintained that if the value of a good is relative and subject to change, it cannot be an ultimate good because it could then just be a matter of time before it is supplanted in importance by something else, and therefore cannot be good in a final or ultimate sense. But whether we accept the first or second view, more consistent thinking suggests that if there is a value that is always fixed and absolute, by which all other values are measured; that value, by this definition, can be titled “God.”

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Aristotle, by contrast, states: “Happiness, as we said, requires both complete goodness and a complete lifetime.” *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b32-1100a5.

<sup>60</sup> *City of God*, XII.1

<sup>61</sup> *On the Trinity*. VIII, 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Pensées*, II. 465.

As we said, the vast majority of people it would seem do not think or guide their conduct in terms of (the abstraction) ultimate Happiness as such, but rather particular pleasures they have in mind of obtaining or achieving. Even for someone who greatly loves virtue, the pursuit and realization of virtue could be considered a particular pleasure. The immediate heirs of Aristippus of Cyrene (c.435-350 B.C.), a student of Plato, the Cyrenaics taught, "...there is a difference between 'end' and 'happiness.' Our end is a particular pleasure, whereas happiness is the sum of all particular pleasures, in which are included both past and future pleasures."<sup>63</sup> If we accept this position, "the sum of all pleasures" or "ultimate good" must be a hope or a theory, because, of course, it is not anything we can atheistically point to. Notwithstanding, it is a viable hope and theory; made all the more plausible by the argument that all good or goods are derivative from someone (as when we spoke earlier about God being ultimate "Source.") Perhaps also it can be maintained that if we don't have an ultimate good, or God is not our ultimate good, someone else will intervene in our lives (say the devil) and create a false ultimate good for us, or else manipulate our pursuit of smaller goods; such that out of these an ultimate (yet really inferior) good will be created for us by another. Put differently, if we don't make God our ultimate good, then we are susceptible of having others create or foisting on us their (perhaps immoral or otherwise harmful) ultimate good; which, in addition to being contrary to our own wishes, might be something less than wise, healthy, and duly moral and safe.

In speaking of pleasure and happiness, there is an interesting and related issue of whether we can speak of Value somehow preceding Existence or whether Existence precedes Value. The sequence could be viewed temporally (with respect to creation), or as a priority which either God has pronounced, or which we otherwise have decided for ourselves, or somehow both.

Although he understandably sees Being as prior to value as a logical matter, Aquinas notes that among the names signifying divine causality goodness precedes being. Otherwise he holds that Goodness and Being are really the same, but only differ in idea. Goodness expresses that trait of desirableness; which the concept of Being only implies but does not directly express or, to most people, readily imply.

On the other hand, to say Being (or Existence) precedes value seems to suggest that being isn't valued, or else is somehow valued only after the "appearance" (in some sequence) of value. Therefore Value must precede or be prior to Existence. To go along with this approach, we might in a sense think of Value as having supra-existence which precedes or somehow and mysteriously co-present with Existence.

Conversely, someone could contend that Existence precedes Value. This view says you can't have Value unless it exists first, and would be for many a common sense view.

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<sup>63</sup> D.L., *Lives of the Philosophers*, II.87-90. Epicurus, by contrast, denied happiness being the sum of all pleasures, and looked instead to being happy and tranquil regardless of one's circumstances, at least inasmuch as a person's rationally developed character and habits make this is possible.



Either of these perspectives recognizes that all that has value (or are valued) *exists* as something necessary to them (even if it is else somehow assumed that not all existence is of value.) There is no thing that is valued that does not exist; while there may be things that exist that are not valued (at least in theory.)

A case could be made that valueless Existence comes first, Value second, and then Existence has Value conferred on it. This might seem to us a somewhat novel or unusual viewpoint. Nevertheless, there does not, off hand, seem anything to single-handedly or necessarily require our rejecting it.

In addition to these, we could argue, if strangely, there is no Value, or else no true Value we know of. That is, assessments of or what is deemed “value” are, when all is said and done, some kind of illusion or futility. Further “Value” may perhaps, in some sense, be spoken of, but which is somehow not something existing or else which “exists” in a manner that is somehow a separate existence from what we normally think of as persons, things and events existing. Otherwise, we might say Value and Existence appeared simultaneously (neither one precedes the other), or else that a sequence with respect to value and existence, either in reference to time or any order of sequence (including hierarchy) cannot be spoken of.

Assuming the question is a legitimate one in the first place, the issue of whether Value precedes Existence, or Existence precedes Value, or whether both “appeared” simultaneously, is then one of those metaphysical issues for which there is no easy and obvious (perhaps for us not any) answer. It would seem that if we say Existence precedes Value that all values are somehow less than they are. At the same time, if Value precedes Existence then this would suggest that Value is more “important”<sup>64</sup> or more necessary than existence, or would *at least* imply that Existence does not exceed Value in either “importance” and necessity.

In sum, all this, I would suggest matters because (in its basic form) if Value precedes Existence then Value is more “important” than Existence. We see this when, customarily, some people are more inclined and prefer to say “God is Love;” than to say “God is Existence.” Oppositely, we would be saying Existence is more important than Value. The first is a Heraclitean viewpoint (i.e., Value somehow both is and isn’t), and Value’s mysterious preceding (of) Existence offers hope that no matter what Existence is quantitatively, Value always exceeds it either in “importance” or necessity. The second view is Parmenidean in character (Value is not real, only Existence is) and suggests stasis and limit, and happiness that is limited (by Existence) and thus is not true happiness, but only delusive pleasure. This second may then be said to lend itself to certain kinds of Buddhist belief and other asceticisms which seek non-Existence as a solution to there being no real happiness, only illusory pleasure. Of course, it could and has been maintained that we needn’t say Value or Existence comes first, and instead simply say they arise or emerge simultaneously. Yet if we do pose that a demarcation be made, the practical, daily-life implications are very striking and worth reflective consideration.

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<sup>64</sup> That is to say important as measured by quasi-value, or values unique to God, values which are noumena to us, or value otherwise somehow different from value as we think of it.



## 2. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS PERTAINING TO THE PREVIOUS

### Lord, Maker, Path, Source, Goal

What we have sought to do prior to this juncture is to present a working epistemological and objective idea(s) of what thoughtful and intelligent people could expect God to be, or entail. We have not proven that God is absolutely necessary; nor did we set out to do so. Again, the main reason for this is that we don't think we are capable of proving anything with absolute necessity, at least objectively; because to do so we must first assume God. And since we know nothing that possesses absolute necessity (so I have previously argued) then who or whatever is necessary and or can confer necessity is God. Yet God is what we seek to prove to begin with and therefore cannot assume him. What then we have rather tried to do is show or support the view that if we initially grant certain beliefs and conclusions then God, as a practical matter, is objectively necessary, or at least a good case can be made for such.

The initially assumed beliefs are:

- a) Logic, in the form of Reason, is a valid criterion for establishing objective truth.
- b) Language is adequate to discuss theological questions and issues of this kind.
- c) We have choice in most beliefs we hold and in the judgments we make.
- d) There is truth and reality beyond mere opinion or beyond mere "phantasms."
- d) Existence, in some form or other, is a *quality* all things must possess in order to be known.
- e) There is someone or something that doesn't change.
- f) There is such a thing as Happiness, beyond mere individual pleasures.
- g) There is a value that is fixed, unchanging, above all other values, and which is the ultimate standard of worth.

So...

If there is truth beyond mere opinion, then there must be God to ultimately (and at least potentially) proclaim it such.

If the universe or all existence was created or "emanates" (as, for example, per Aristotle), then the one who created it or who is its source can be denoted God.

If the universe or all existence has a source or center then we can denote it as God.

If there is true, unchanging existence that is not contingent that existence must be and or derive from what we can denote as God. The idea that existence changes otherwise seems a contradiction. Even if a given something changes, the notion that existence itself could or does change strikes one as incomprehensible.

If there is a fixed and unchanging value, he or it can be denoted God. Otherwise all values change, and there is no fixed value. If there is no fixed value, there *may* be pleasures, but no happiness.

True Happiness, that is the end or sum of mere pleasure, is or derives from God.

*If the above conclusions are granted and accepted, then were we to reject God we simultaneously reject:*

That there is truth beyond opinion (even this conclusion itself then is questionable, ad infinitum.)

That the universe was created.

That the universe has a center or source.

That there is real existence (except as a matter of opinion and even this much is questionable, ad infinitum.)

That there is such a thing as Happiness (i.e., something ever enduring and more than temporary satisfaction.)

It is important to note that “Lord” (as we have used it here as drawn from Boethius) does not of itself imply “Maker,” “Source,” “Goal;” nor do any of the other divine “attributes” (i.e., Maker, Source, Goal) imply one or more of the others. They are compatible and complimentary, but not logically obligatory for each other as such. It is not strictly necessary then, for example, that Source be Goal, or that Maker imply Lord, etc.; though, with the understanding, there are, as naturally we could expect, sound and legitimate theoretical arguments for claiming that such predications are necessary.

### **a. Questions Relating to God and the Divine Attributes**

In order to expand our possible understanding of God, the following are questions about him and his attributes or qualities that have been or could be raised. One interesting thing especially deserving of note is that, in addition to their variety, the preponderance of these questions we would not think to ask about Man, but only God. Yet if God is a fictional notion (or else only a practical principle) consider the numerous and consequential implications questions about God have raised with respect to any number of issues vital to our lives, including and such as those relating to truth, happiness, and morals.

Another intriguing aspect of these questions is that the answers (in the way of alternative explanations) can be simple and neat, or else complex, and can tangent off into all kinds of sub-questions with further implications for other assumptions or as yet undetermined qualities. Theology then it would seem, despite proofs such as those of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) propounds, does not seem (on the surface anyway) to line up into so uniformly a consistent geometrical pattern of argument as we might think. Because of their large number, we will not attempt something like a full exploration of

these key theological questions, but only a few which seem of special significance to a basic understanding of the concept of God.

This list of questions does not pretend to be complete, and the main idea posed in one may easily overlap that contained in another question. One thing to be borne in mind also is that we might catalog our answers to these questions according to what *we* can know absolutely, conditionally, practically, what purported *angels* can know, and what *God(s)* himself can know. Our main concern here then has been with what we humans can posit and or know based on customarily received standards of empirical objectivity.

### **1. Questions of Primary Importance**

\* Can God be known cognitively?

\* Can God can be known emotionally?

If the answer is yes to either of the above, the next question would be could such knowledge of God be known objectively *and* communicated to another as objective knowledge? If yes to this second question, we could ask what are the limits and rules for such objective validation and (language) description? That is, even given how much can be known, how much of theological knowledge can still be put into adequately objective and cognizable terms?

\* Does God have attributes (or qualities)?

Now it can be objected that we must assume God exists (or is existence) before we can ask if he has any qualities, and that therefore the first question should be whether God exists. Though not categorically rejecting this view, it makes more sense to me personally to take the position that existence, while the most unique kind and fundamental quality of anyone or anything, is still nonetheless a quality. If existence, such as God possesses, is (and *somehow*) something *more than* a quality, then it might be construed as a something mortals cannot know or comprehend except speculatively.

\* If God has qualities (or attributes) can these be expressed in human language, and predicated of him?

As mentioned, if God has qualities, and which can adequately be spoken of, it is possible they could be characterized as absolute (actual), or conditional. With respect to the latter, for example, one person might say that what another would call God's *absolute* attributes (or qualities) are not *actual* attributes but merely *practical* constructs devised to help our understanding (while denying, given our finite natures, we know anything absolutely, or else deny that anything exists absolutely.)

### **2. Questions of Secondary Importance**

\* Does God exist?

- \* Is God existence itself or else highest existence?
- \* Does existence have its origin in God?
- \* Is God Goodness or the highest good?
- \* Can God be quantified (e.g., is he one or many)?
- \* Is God infinite?
- \* Is God a person?
- \* Is God is Spirit (i.e. immaterial power) or is he physical?
- \* Does God occupy space and time?
- \* Is God self-existent?
- \* Does God have a free will?
- \* Does God think and have ideas?
- \* Does God have desire (s) and or emotions?
- \* Is God all powerful, or conditionally powerful?
- \* Is God omniscient?
- \* Can God contradict or act in real conflict with his own principles (such as those contained in divine Reason), or contradict or act in real conflict with his own actions? Subsumed under this might be questions like “can God create another like himself?;” “can God destroy himself?;” and “could God create a universe in which accidents preceded essences?”

From these kinds of questions we can educe, build and create categories (such as Being, Unity, First Cause and other such supreme universals.) Naturally, a good case could be made that the philosophical notion of God itself arose out of a need to create a source or explanation for Being, Unity, Causation, etc. Be this as it may, with these sort of theologically created or established categories it became more possible to refine questions and concepts in various areas of philosophy and science, as they pertained not only to God but to humanity as well. We might, for example, have found ourselves asking does Man exist? Does Man have free will? But who would it occurred to have asked “is Man self-existent, infinite, Highest good, etc?” Most fascinatingly then, in asking these questions about God, humanity has been dramatically able to increase our knowledge and understanding of ourselves. Questions like "is man actually in time and

space?,” or “are time and space merely modes by which the mind thinks?,” are also such we would not normally think to ask. Kant who did end up doing so was essentially building upon the reasoning of the ancients and scholastics; except that in Kant’s case he took the questions originally about God and related them to humanity and cognition.

We certainly wouldn’t ordinarily think to ask “is man all knowing or all powerful” literally. It is questionable we could even ask questions whether there is a highest good, or whether man is good without at least hypothecating the notion of God. And in the case of goodness, if we say there is a highest goodness it could not unreasonably be claimed that this is, by definition, God, as per Anselm’s reasoning.

Below is a brief examination pertaining to the question of whether God can be quantified.

### **3. Is God One, Many, both, neither, or something else?**

The initial answer to this seems to be that given the limitations of human cognition we simply have no way, objectively speaking, of knowing definitely whether God can or should be rightly spoken of quantitatively. Religious viewpoints will, of course, describe God as One and or Many. But they know or believe this on the basis of revelation, doctrinal faith, or a desire for logical consistency, and otherwise have no irrefutable reasons for asserting God as one or a multiplicity, except as a matter of consistency based on other assumptions, plausibility, scriptural teaching, subjective preference, faith, or opinion. In addition, it could be argued that being numbered is a quality. God himself is the source of all qualities, and is therefore above possessing qualities. Therefore, God cannot be spoken of in numerical terms.

In asking questions of this kind relating to God’s (for us) potential numericity, it must be recognized that there are preliminary questions which one would probably do well to address before hand. For instance, does “one” exist in (physical) nature? In thought? If there is a one in nature and a one in thought what makes a correlation of the two (i.e., the one and nature and the one in thought) possible? Does one apply only to nature, only to thought, or both nature and thought? Is there a true and pure one anywhere? These preliminary questions having been posed, however, it is sufficient for our purpose here to have merely mentioned them.

#### *\* Arguments for God as One<sup>65</sup>*

Our minds naturally conceive best by means of singularities. But does this disposition of our minds imply that God must be singular? The mind after all functions on the basis of images or representations which we call concepts and ideas. So must God (as Lord, etc.) be answerable to the capacity of *our* representations? Perhaps needless to

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<sup>65</sup> Note (in asking these questions) how by comparison a human being is or is made up of ones and twos, giving here some examples:  
**One:** self, soul, mind, brain, whole body, nose, head, reproductive organ, mouth (to eat and to speak)  
**Two:** eyes, ears, nostrils, arms, shoulders, hands, legs, feet.

say, there is no known compelling necessity for such a belief; that is, unless certain prerequisites are stipulated.

This having been said, and assuming God could be known and spoken of in some quantified way to begin with, there are things about oneness which suggest it as inherent to God.

For a start, any given something, is a one of this or a one of that. So that if you can speak of “a one of this,” or “a one of that,” you could, based on inductive and linguistic inference, say “everything is one.” At least as nominalists we could accept this; since they might otherwise object that the abstraction “everything” is not a concept of something actually real, and is not the same as “each *individual* thing examined” (i.e., is one.)

Unity, on which all love, harmony, and peace depend, refers to the *one* of an aggregate; so that in this sense One can mean the uniting and coming together of all ones. As the greatest strength of anything is so many ones joined *as one* (in some fashion of another), one then implies power, and presumably therefore the greatest power must possess the greatest oneness.

“One” could be said to imply no change, while Two does imply change -- i.e., due to the possibility of movement, perspective. God is more likely One than Two since, based on other reasoning, we would not expect him to be subject to any substantial change (if change at all.)

The infinite, non-existence (or non being) chaos, and chance, inasmuch as they can be spoken of, are ostensibly one. Certainly they are not known of without the concept of one, and in this sense could not exist or be real without one (or the one.)<sup>66</sup>

By the same token, it makes logical and conceptual sense to think that there is a One, from which all ones either derive, stem from or have their reality. While there is, at least conceivably, a One without multiplicity, as say Parmenides of Elea (c.515.-? B.C.) believes, there is no multiplicity conceivable without one. Similarly, a multiplicity is divisible, but one is not except in the form of fractions or decimals. This suggests that One takes precedence and is more important than multiplicity. Even if we accept and believe in the Trinity, the doctrine itself presupposes its Oneness.

Yet a non-composite, pure One evidently does not exist in Nature. Our thoughts can speculate on there being a pure and true one, but as soon as we grant that such a One exists we grant God. Else, because our thoughts are contingent, there is no “one” that we know of naturally or cognitively that we can speak of and which is not a composite in some measure. Name any single someone or thing you like and we will easily find an attribute, property, or part for them; thus making them a composite. Either then there is no real One, or else if there is, he or it could reasonably be denoted God. Inasmuch as

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<sup>66</sup> If chaos is God, then God is unknowable since chaos, as a concept, is something, by its nature unpredictable and therefore, unknowable (other than to say it is unpredictable): similarly chance and infinity, or so it could be reasonably maintained.



power implies, unity, and unity implies one, and the notion of greatest unity and power suggest that it is one, and if there is no real One other than God, then God must be both One and consequently the greatest power and unity.

In ordinary experience, when we make a mistake we fix on some one thing and or other. Yet truly the error is in the thing or things, not in the one. No error is in truly one thing. It consists of multiple factors which are inconsistent with the One, and, which conjoined, *are* what make it a mistake.

*\* Arguments against God as One*

There is in experience no one we can know or speak of without multiplicity. There may be such a one in theory and as a practical, mathematical label, but from experience we know of no thing that can be spoken of which cannot in some way be described as a composite. Granted we can assume there is a One who is non-contingent and call them God, but that already decides the question and can scarcely be deemed proof.

Observe also that historically there has been no pure monotheism and that does not invoke some contingent or ancillary who is needed to explain or denote the presumably One God. *One* may be everywhere, but everywhere is not one, or at least doesn't seem to be except, perhaps, in a theoretical or conjectural way.

Moreover, is not also the principle of One at the basis of false pride and selfishness? Are not there times when One is bad; as in say a situation where one individual unduly dominates a group of others in some way? If then God is seen as One, does this not make him seem selfish, and seem to conflict with ideas that he is benevolent? Also, One suggests isolation. If we say God is One does this mean that God suffers from isolation and even possibly loneliness? How then could the One be God?<sup>67</sup>

As Aristotle observed, isolated notions cannot express truth or falsehood. Therefore, if we say God exists is "True," he cannot then be One since Truth requires a composite, typically at minimum, a predicate (and therefore multiple) statement of some kind. God then either is not one or else, if he is One, he cannot be spoken of in a way that conforms with truth as we are capable of knowing and articulating it.

*\* Arguments for God as Many*

Since there is no true One that we know of (i.e., all things are composites to some degree) this would suggest that if there is a God, as "totality," then "He" is many. In order to avoid the possible contradiction that if God is Many this makes him also One, it could be argued that God's multiple nature is mysterious, and otherwise beyond our finite human knowing or numerical categorizing as to be merely any given number. For this

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<sup>67</sup> By contrast, see Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for a positive presentation of selfishness and self-importance when such selfishness is of the high-minded sort.

reason, it could be said that while we are correct to speak of God as Many (i.e., this is his ultimate reality -- as best we might know it), this does not, nor should it mean, he is One or necessarily One also. To speak of Many being One in conceptual terms, while perhaps permissible, *may* be due merely to the nature of our knowing, and having little or nothing to do with God.

All of life moves and acts owing to opposites and contraries: as in male-female, hot-cold, true-false being-not being, wet-dry, above-below, life-death, health-disease, too much-too little, earth-sky, beginning-end, short-long, peace-strife, love-strife, sweet-bitter, sweet-sour, acids-bases, right-left, straight-curved, odd-even, loud-quiet. All these dualities, combined with the fact that we find no pure one in experience, *might* suggest that if there is God he must be more than one.

*\* Arguments against God as Many*

In theory at least, there may be oneness without multiplicity. But there may not, so far as we know, be multiplicity without oneness.

If there is more than one God, they are either united or not-united.

If united what is it that holds them together or unites them?

What ever it is must be God or exclusively of God.

If not united, then none of them is God, and there is no God.

If there are only gods, but no God then:

Nothing unites them that is decisively superior to any of them. And any one at his or her greatest power is never more or greater in overall power than another. Should the power of one outweigh the power of all others, say on a particular occasion, that person might (if one chose to) be said to be God -- but for that occasion only. If we say one god is the supreme power at one task; one at another, and another god the supreme strength in his/her own specialty or expertise, this would not fit our earlier intended definition of God, and consequently none of these gods could be said to be God properly speaking.

Now if someone or something united all gods or else members of the universe, and was therefore presumably superior to them, that person would be God.

If all gods or all members of the universe exist co-equally in powers, then in some sense their co-equality could be said to be God or derived from God.

If something unites them that is equal or (merely) marginally superior to any of them, then it would seem as a practical matter there is only chaos; because law that does not rule and govern is not properly law but amendable custom. In this sense, chaos could

be said to be God, and chaos being one kind of something, this could still mean that God is one.

This said, one imagines that those who think God is chaos (or else chaos is God) would be probably few; since they could embrace chaos as the ultimate power or “order” without having to invoke its being specifically conceptualized as God. On the other hand, it might be part of their idea of chaos to do otherwise.

*\* Arguments for God as both One and Many*

Both the arguments for God as one (above), and for God as many (also above) together speak to the support of this argument; though, of course, with the assumption that the two assertions are compatible and not an insuperable contradiction; which viewpoint we are free to chose or its opposite depending on the truth criteria we use. Though God being One and Many might seem to be a contradiction to us, God, nevertheless, being who “he” is, is not subject to the restriction imposed by this contradiction (assuming it is one); nor *perhaps* is answerable or subject to *any* contradiction.

*\* Arguments against God as both One and Many*

It seems illogical to think that God can be both One and Many since the two conceptualizations conflict, and if accepted would seem to imply that God is a contradictory or incoherent being. Granted in theory the idea that God can be One and Many may somehow be possible, but even if so, this does not seem to be anything we are in a position to know or comprehend. Taken a certain way, one might, for instance, construe the Nirvana of the Buddhist’s as God; though God which cannot be ascribed number and which is devoid of personality: such a thing being superfluous to “it.”

*\* Arguments against God being described as either One, Many or both*

Since all of the suggested designations have their arguments, no single one has sufficiently compelling reasons to assert its necessary superiority over one of the others. Therefore none of these designations are true, insofar as *we* can know or categorically assert; except possibly as a matter of subjective convention.

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In conclusion, the argument that God, if he can be ascribed a number at all, is One seems, *in this writer’s opinion*, overall the most persuasive of the choices available. At the same time, acceptance of God as One leaves open the possibility that he is also Many; both One and Many, or neither One or Many. In any event, whatever version of God one decides on, it will still be necessary one some level for us to conceive of God as One, if only for reasons of cognitive, linguistic, and practical comprehension and disquisition.

4. Is God necessary for our Knowing Reality? ⁶⁸

This question is related to the ultimate arbiter issue considered earlier, and what follows here should be considered in conjunction with what was said there.

If the world can be realized there must be something in us or something else which gives us the potential to realize it. Our very ability to see, and accompanying or following this, the ability to think, arguably stem from what we can denote as God. If all of reality is known, God, by one definition, is the one who most knows it. If this is true, it would then seem to follow if God does not actually confer on us the ability to know reality, we nonetheless must at least look to him to have our judgment of reality approved with regard to its correctness.

Malebranche, in the tradition of Aristotle, Augustine, and the scholastics, maintained that we need God to think if we are to assume that knowledge is true, true for all, and true beyond any individual's opinion (not counting God's, of course; since properly speaking we don't speak of Him as having an opinion.)⁶⁹ He remarks:

“God is the intelligible world or the place of minds, as the material world is the place of bodies, that from His power minds receive their impressions; that in His wisdom they find all their ideas, that through His love they receive their orderly impulses, and because His power and love are but Himself, let us believe with St. Paul that He is not far from any of us, and that in Him we are, move and have our being.”⁷⁰

Put another way, if there is a common currency by which reality can be known, either it is or comes from God. Else how could we expect all or any parts of reality be known as connected or in connection with another?

Aquinas, harking back to Plato, argued that we know things and we do this by way of ideas or forms. These ideas or forms come about through natural reason or divine reason, both of which come from God. If you don't know God, you cannot better know ideas or forms and hence cannot properly know things (except as fictions or subjective constructs.)

It could be argued that if God is the basis of absolute morals⁷¹ (or absolute excellence if we like a more Aristotelian viewpoint), and morals are necessary for higher truth and our understanding of (beyond opinion), then there is no real, non-subjective truth, nor can we speak of knowing reality, if we do not assume God. This all takes for granted that morals are necessary for truth and that God is necessary for morals. While I refrain from addressing this claim here, it is taken up at length in my *Peithology*.

⁶⁸ My approach here, and in what follows, is, for convenience sake, presented less in a formal dialectical way than the preceding question.

⁶⁹ God may, in some way, be said to have an opinion, but if so, it would seem that it could rise to no higher status than any other opinion, since (in His case) if it did it would then be truth and not opinion.

⁷⁰ *The Search for Truth*, III.2. Ch. 6.

⁷¹ Similar to how we spoke earlier of how God is “necessary” for Happiness, i.e., if we seek more than mere pleasure.

5. Must God be a person?

Even if God is a necessary or desirable epistemological, logical or heuristic principle, does this imply that he is a being(s) or person(s)? Could not he simply be a useful idea like chance or empty space whose necessity is more practical than scientific, let alone apodictic?

Whether God is a mere a mental or verbal construction, a heuristic principle, an ideal representation of person, object, or “something else” will ever be (in this life it would seem) incomprehensible to us. *Objectively and scientifically speaking*, we evidently do not know.

There then does not seem to be any compelling argument to say that God himself *must* be a person. Meanwhile, there is no argument to say that he either cannot be or must not be a person. Yet to say God is not a person, such as we know a person to be, does not imply he is merely a thing, material object or process either, as some might mistakenly infer. At the same time, to go ahead and *assume* God is merely a necessary idea or principle, would as a practical matter be rather rash; since after all we could be wrong on a point with potentially serious implications for our better understanding of “God.”

b. God and the Question of Evil

“Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits -- and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!”
~~ Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát*

If we allow that God exists, and is both “Lord” (arbiter), “Maker” (creator), “Goal” (goodness), etc. then why is there evil in the world? Hardship, inconvenience, and disappointment most of us can, normally, understand, and it’s not hard to see that a certain amount and kind of destruction is both natural and necessary to life; certainly life as we know it.

There is *dearth* that is beneficial and compatible with natural harmony (as in the occurrence of winter.) There is *destruction* that is beneficial, as when food is gathered, processed, and consumed. *Pain* serves the purpose of assisting our self-preservation. There is also natural *conflict*, strife, or tension, as in competition; as that which brings about ecological equilibrium, and which can work to help the quality of living for all affected.

Yet there is a point where and when certain kinds of actions or events are taken to an unwelcome extreme, or state of unnaturalness, that they are seen as evil. Certainly, we might think so if we had (or have) to endure or experience them.

In the ordinary sense then, we see evil in experience when destruction becomes something more than what would be “natural.” It implies more than discomfort, strain, or inconvenience. It implies unhappiness or a serious threat to happiness, rather than the mere denial or frustration of pleasure; though the accumulated frustration of pleasure might constitute genuine unhappiness, and therefore evil, depending on the circumstances. Evil then might be seen in the taking of what is natural and distorting or taking it to the point of excess.

What puzzles and astounds us is not that there is harm or hardship, or difficulty, but that these should be purposely be taken to level of cruelty, gross injustice, atrocity, or catastrophe. Some destruction seems to be good, as say in cutting down a weed or vine that is choking another plant. Yet there obviously must be some limits on such destruction, and it is when such limits are exceeded that we might arrive at one definition of evil: namely evil is destruction in excess of what would otherwise be proper to Nature (at least Nature as a conscientious responsible, intelligent and informed person would expect it to act.) This definition is obviously not without its vagueness. Is how most people expect Nature to act an accurate assessment on their part of the nature of Nature? Must Nature answer to people’s expectations? Clearly what might seem natural to one person might seem unnatural to another, eating meat as a luxury for instance; so that attempting to define evil as unnatural destruction or harm understandably leaves itself open to a potentially broad range of construction and interpretation.

A second definition of evil is to see it as a willful intention or act that violates certain known or explicitly stated laws or rules. From this, we might add or propose one or more of the following sub-definitions.

- * The absence of good, such that the more good is absent the more evil is present (at least as defined by absence of the good.)

- * The mere intention (i.e., intention without an accompanying action) to unjustly⁷² harm another.

- * An act of conscious will which unjustly harms another. An act is unjust inasmuch as it is done in overt defiance and disobedience of rules of right reason, goodness, and wisdom, such as the Ten Commandments, or the Golden Rule and its negative corollary (enunciated, incidentally, at Tobit 4:15.) In other words, rules of conduct based in just and fair reason, and which we can denote as the moral law.

- * An action to unjustly harm another, with or without intent.

- * The intention to unlawfully harm another, yet without the ostensible perpetrator being able to fairly make the distinction between just and unjust.

- * An action to unlawfully harm another, whether or not the law is otherwise just.

- * Failure to choose according to God’s wishes or His Law.

⁷² Justice is measured by usually by God, divine law. God and divine law might or might not be determined by right reason and morals based in right reason, depending on a persons disposition and view point. In the case of “unlawful” acts if the law being violated is unjust or else relatively trivial in its importance, we would not probably characterize such behavior as evil (leaving aside the question of whether breaking a law of itself constitutes injustice.) Though an act is illegal this does not necessarily imply serious wrong-doing, which is what we mean when we speak of evil.

Evil is known by its being different from good, says Aquinas. Otherwise evil (apparently) would not be known. Would good be known without evil? Some have argued it would not be; saying, for example, we know pleasure only from having known pain; light from only having known darkness; rest from only have known exertion, etc. Another perspective would be to say while what is “bad” (say, bad behavior) might be helpful or even necessary to see good, evil as such isn’t. The difference between bad and evil being that both are kinds of wrong-doing, but what is evil includes malice, hatred, or extreme recklessness; while what is “bad” (minor negligence for example) does not.

Now evil that results from intention and or action naturally assumes that there is a person who has some power or say in the matter. If a second individual takes a first person completely by surprise and by means of physical force compels the first to commit an act of wrong-doing (say they grabbed the person’s hand and forced them to strike another), we would not say the first person committed an act of evil. Can someone force our *ultimate* intentions? Offhand, this does not seem to be possible. But leaving aside this question for the time being lets focus on an evil act.

Properly speaking for an act to *actually* be evil would seem to imply that the person committing it have had “reasonably sufficient” power to refrain from the act, and that the more power a person has to refrain from committing an evil act, the more they will be seen as being potentially culpable. Here again we encounter the problem of degree; for how much and how able a person is able to refrain (or prevent themselves in advance) from committing an evil act will vary depending on the individual and their circumstances. Otherwise, we can assume that an act of evil involves an evil motive or intention or ultimate motivation; which in turn would appear to imply the intention or motive is something, more or less, freely chosen. When the act of evil takes place there is some mistaken intention underlying it.

I assume free will for the simple reason that without choice there is no value (such as Love.) Value without choice has no practical meaning to us. To say, for example, this watch, this stock portfolio, this tree has value, doesn’t mean anything unless we have something to compare them to, and therefore choose between. Now if there is more than one something to value then, given the nature of valuing, we can choose or not choose to value one thing over another. There is value; hence there is choice. If there is choice, then there is free will. This, at any rate, is the assumption I will proceed on the basis of.

Inasmuch then as evil is an act of conscious will involving choice,⁷³ it is an act which follows upon a wrong judgment we make. Yet there are two kinds of wrong judgments: those which pertain to value and those which pertain to fact. Wrong judgments which precede an evil act are value judgments; because if an act of wrong-doing arises out of mere factual error, it tends to lessen the culpability of the perpetrator. True, recklessness is often treated as being tantamount to malicious intent. But even in such cases, the fault is seen as lying in the person failure to *appreciate* the value of

⁷³ It might be considered redundant to speak of a “conscious will;” since what sense does it make to speak of a will that is unconscious, or of consciousness without will? Yet someone might contend otherwise, and hence the distinction in order to avoid any such possible objection.

conscientious and responsible behavior, rather than solely the person's mere factual error. Evil then perhaps should be seen as fundamentally a willful mistake as to value; while error or more ordinary wrong-doing, properly speaking and by comparison, should refer to mistakes as to fact. Ironically, few or no one loves evil. Rather it is, I think, generally understood that people do evil with a mind to achieving good, and an evil intention or act is seen mistakenly on the part of the perpetrator as away of actually *avoiding* evil. In this sense, no one desires evil rather they always seek good, but will intend or do evil when they see evil as a means to good. In the book of Wisdom (14:27) where it says: "For the worship of infamous idols is the reason source and extremity of all evil," it is clearly implied, if not explicitly stated, that evil is the mistaking of false good (idols) for real good (God.)

Malebranche, argues that there is no evil act as such. Instead what happens is that when we refuse the good God offers, it is then only that evil takes places. Again, by this view evil is some sort of mistake as to value judgment. But all events otherwise are not evil of themselves. So according to this view also, evil, at heart, consists of valuing lesser over greater good.

Where does mistake as to value versus mistake as to fact begin? Clearly, the two each in some way partake of the other, and we can easily see how a person's error as to value can be equated to an error of fact, and vice versa. "I thought I needed to graduate this year, so I cheated on the test." Is the error here their valuing too much the need to graduate, or does their error consist in the mistaken factual belief that (based on the mores of the society) cheating is a commonly accepted practice, excusable under certain circumstances?

There are degrees of evil and degrees of error, and the two, of course, can and do overlap. Someone who does an act otherwise deemed evil could be said to act in error; while at the same time someone who makes or acts upon an error could be said to be doing evil, albeit unintentionally. Although it doesn't seem difficult to imagine error without evil, is it possible to speak of pure evil without error? For such as Socrates (c.470-399 B.C.), for example, the answer is no, and evil necessarily implies error.

Again, by evil I mean an *act* of harming another committed by someone with a conscious will.⁷⁴ True, we can speak of there being evil thoughts, but either such can, if necessary, be subsumed under evil acts or else such are not pertinent to our discussion. An object in motion without someone's intention behind it is not evil (in the sense in which I mean.) Given this, we could further describe evil as a person or person-directed-object in motion that inflicts unjust harm or else which unjustly offends another. A mere object that somehow inflicts harm on another cannot really be called evil; because evil requires a person responsible for the motion of the object. Further we say that the person who moves their own self or another, or an object to harm another must either intend injustice or be acting with excessive recklessness for their act to be considered evil. If

⁷⁴ For simplicity's sake here, we are leaving aside the question of acts of omission. An irresponsible parent or pet owner neglects to feed a child or pet, or refuses them food, *could*, and under certain circumstances, be considered acting evilly of course. In such a case, the error consists of their failing to fulfill an obligation they have taken up or failing to fulfill an obligation that can legally and or morally be reasonably assumed to apply to them.

they acted in complete or extreme blindness or by accident, we do not speak of them as acting evilly. Now, of course, the question is one of degree of wrong intention or recklessness; so that for an act to be evil it must be of such a character that it transcends mere error.

This said, it does not seem *technically* unreasonable to speak of all error as evil. Our ordinary sense is that something can be done in error without being evil. But this can be explained as simply being a matter of convention, and that the greater truth is that just as all evil implies error, all error (to some degree or other) implies evil. For example, if someone out of carelessness or being distracted drops their pencil, it would seem silly to speak of their carelessness as constituting an act of evil. Yet it could be argued that although the dropping of a pencil seems a most insignificant occurrence, the carelessness that brought it about could be seen as reflecting a greater kind of wrong-doing going on. This is true, *at least*, if the individual possessed the ability and “reasonable” opportunity to reflect upon the matter in question. Admittedly, the act of wrong-doing here would not be of the level of evil; as, say, the evil involved in gratuitously assaulting another. Nevertheless, it could still technically -- and I emphasize the word *technically* -- still constitute a manifestation of evil in that person. Yet here once more, if evil is seen as being manifested in a person’s dropping a pencil, the evil is not so much the result of the person’s error as to fact, but rather an error as to value, i.e., in this example, the failure to value the need to sufficiently control their physical actions. Having said all this, we will naturally want to make allowance for the fact that external forces could so work upon a person that one’s clumsiness arose not so much out of *their own* neglecting to value the importance of comportment, but rather was the result of physical or psychological forces which overwhelmed their otherwise sufficient appreciation of classroom or office comportment.

To sum up, our more specific definition of evil involves:

1. An act, or intention to act, which unjustly harms or offends another or others.
2. This act must be brought about by someone’s more or less intention and free choice, but may include negligence or living up to what could, *at least* according to moral and or social convention, be reasonably deemed an implied obligation.
3. The choice involves both error in factual and value judgment, yet evil consists more of a faulty *value judgment* than a *factual judgment* as such (though there will always be the one present, to some extent, whenever the other is present.) It is in the mistaking evil for good that evil arises, and decisions as to what is good (or not good) are primarily value judgments. Thus, an evil choice is a value judgment made in error.⁷⁵
4. A conscious or reckless intention to commit the act of wrong-doing, with an awareness that the act in question is wrong, or else a degree of recklessness that is tantamount to such awareness.
5. If or since evil implies choice, then evil must not be strictly necessary.

⁷⁵ Leibniz corroborates this by saying that feeling measures the extent of good and evil, to which we can add: value judgments ultimately stem from desire, hence feeling.

Now what might be considered “evil” in one situation might not be evil in another situation, or else might be significantly less evil.⁷⁶ Also what is good because it is appropriate in one circumstance, may be bad in another circumstance. And a corollary to this might be: if everything that exists is good by reason of its existing, how then can something (or someone) be bad or evil? *By being where and or when it is not supposed to be.* This is at least potentially true of everyone and everything except God. A devil off on some abandoned, barren planet, for instance, might not be construed as evil, yet if he somehow changes location and is suddenly in our midst then it might be said he then becomes so. By this rule, evil then is an object and or action located outside its proper location, but that otherwise the object or action is good.

This does not mean that all acts considered to be good or evil are ultimately the same and that the difference is merely relative. Though, for the sake of speculative argument we may conclude as much, here we need not assume it.⁷⁷ All that is contended here is that the given culpability ascribed to a given act considered how evil, or the degree of evil, could vary depending on the circumstances in which the act took place. Not all acts of wrong-doing are equally bad, some acts are clearly worse than others. Whether an act is worse than another depends both on a) the nature of the act itself, and b) the circumstances in which the act took place. Murder, for instance, is ordinarily worse than a common lie. Yet for a soldier to kill an enemy soldier in a war (“murder”), might be less serious an evil than someone else’s telling a lie which directly results in unjust and serious injury to others. Needless to say, the possible variations in comparing one “evil” act versus another one would expect to be quite extensive and numerous. If a grain merchant in a time of tranquility was found guilty of adultery, society might frown upon his behavior. Yet if that same merchant succeeded in helping to succor and feed a starving city, his offense would very likely go entirely unnoticed -- at least by society.

There are then ways to measure whether one act is more evil than another, and when mere error in a value judgment arises to being evil. Assuming this to be the case, we can fairly ask what is it that makes one act of evil worse than another? Answers we might give are:

1. The degree of harm the victim or victims of the act suffer, this could be divided into immediate, short term, and long term harm.
2. The number of individuals harmed by the act, i.e., the more that are hurt by an act, then the worse it is.⁷⁸

Next, let us ask, what makes a person more rather than less culpable who perpetrates a given act of evil, as defined above? To this we could respond:

⁷⁶ Chrysippus said nothing is good and bad of itself, only how it acts or is used that makes it one or the other.

⁷⁷ The idea that no given act (taken by itself) is good or bad but that circumstances make it so is an interesting argument. However, I refrain from addressing such a question here for of brevity sake.

⁷⁸ In an instance where incapacitating, say, a much needed doctor is worse than incapacitating a number of otherwise ineffective or worthless people, we might say harming the single individual is worse than harming many, but only because harming, in this case, the doctor, would result in a much greater number of people harmed overall.

1. Circumstances and external forces acting upon the person, which to some greater or lesser extent delimit a person's otherwise free choice, i.e., the less free choice preceding their action would mitigate the offense.
2. The person's knowledge and malice aforethought, and intention, such as their conscience or their having been previously warned by experience or another person not to do such and such an act.
3. The person's valuing lesser "goods" (or good) more than goods of greater value; thereby causing them to make the erroneous value judgment which we say is the prerequisite of an evil act.
4. The evil act is accompanied by gratuitous and excessive spite and malice.

If what is stated above, both with respect to what makes something more rather than less evil, and what makes a person more rather than less culpable, are allowed, we can now return to our main question regarding the relationship between God and evil, and how the one can be characterized with respect to the other.

If God created the world, if he reigns supreme in it and He is good, why is there or does he permit evil?⁷⁹ This perhaps is the most baffling of all questions. There are some things a person is not permitted to do; such as leap up and, of their own bodily strength, land on the moon, or swim across an entire ocean. Yet if one wanted to commit a heinous crime, how enormously easier it is compared to doing one of these other feats! And yet nature does not (much) stop the person if they are really intent on committing a grave act of evil. Why is this? Should there not have been built into the order of things some sort of mechanism to prevent someone one inflicting great evil on another, the way there are mechanisms or forces in nature which prevent us from leaping onto the moon or swimming across an ocean?

God is supposed to rule (as seems to be generally agreed by most religions) by means of or consistent with reason and justice and morals. Yet in this world he has created, it far too often seems as if reason, justice and morals do not prevail. When Job asked the question of why is there evil, the answer he received in effect was that he as a limited mortal could not comprehend God's greater purpose -- at least that is how the response he got might be put. While there is certainly valuable truth and wisdom to this explanation, perhaps it is possible for us to expand and develop our understandings of this issue further.

One usual explanation is to say we don't always see the realization of high reason or justice in our day-to-day experience because of our human limitations, but that God does ultimately see to these things, and that we must have faith in this. What seems evil to us is not evil in greater reality, or if it is evil, it will be one day remedied in such a way that it will then seem to have been as nothing. This of course requires faith and can be extremely difficult for many people, emotionally, if not intellectually, to accept.

⁷⁹ To which might be added: context creates and makes value possible, and God is and creates the ultimate context for what in creation is or can be valued. Would the Creator of all that is truly good not foresee or else permit its possible destruction? Who then else would or might seek to destroy it?

Using the illustration of a vine that chokes other plants we might or might not see evil intention on the part of the vine. In this instance the action of choking is, in its way evil, but an evil act not apparently done with evil intention. If the occurrence is interpreted as involving intention, who is responsible for the vine's choking action? There is no obvious answer to this, yet it is perhaps reasonably true we could say it was God since he (according to the more commonly accepted view) ostensibly created or was the original source of Nature, and in turn all plants, including vines.

Yet a problem arises. Causation as we know it is based on phenomena. We cannot justifiably assume that the causation involved in God's act of creation (or what emanates from Him), and which *might* be considered taking place on the level of noumena, is the same kind of causation found with phenomena. On the level of noumena, causation may be irrelevant or else altogether different than that which we find on the level of phenomena.⁸⁰

If this is or at least possibly the case, we ought not take for granted that evil as manifest in the world is something created or brought about by God. If this is true, one explanation for the "evil" vine might be posed that Nature became disrupted by Man's (or the angels) fall (a choice) and it was this choice, and the chaos brought about as a result, that, in effect, was the "cause" of the vine's misbehavior, or in some other instance, an "unnatural" mutation. I mention this merely as one possible explanation or interpretation some may find of interest. But for Man's fall (or related explanation), nature's seeming misdeeds would otherwise understandably be thought of as originating from or, in some way the result of God's actions as creator (or source) of Nature. Philosophers and theologians have, of course, tried to argue around this problem, but their efforts do not seem very compelling; except perhaps for a person who has accepted faith in God to begin with.

As claimed earlier, for something to constitute an unjust harm or an erroneous choosing of lesser over greater good, a value judgment is required. All assertions as to value are contingent. If there is real or absolute value, versus mere opinion or relative value, then this implies God. Real "good" therefore implies God. If good is not real in an absolute sense, then there is no God, and therefore he cannot be blamed for evil. If also we say there is no evil, there is nothing to blame God for. But here we are assuming there is evil in the world. Now if we say Good is real in a way more than mere opinion, then we cannot say God is responsible for evil since evil is the opposite and opposed to good. If God were opposed to good (i.e., and given our assumed definition of God), he would not be God. "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand," and therefore if God is divided against himself, disunited, and in conflict with himself he cannot be God. He might be someone very powerful, but he cannot be God in the sense of supreme power and authority; because these we assume imply greatest harmony and unity.

⁸⁰ This interesting point might be speculatively pursued by interpreting the "if-then" of deductive logic as a cause, or else seeking the possible relation between cause as in phenomena and the if-then of deduction.

Also we could add, in order to make a judgment as to real value we need God as the ultimate arbiter; else there is no real, but only relative good; for the same reasons that we say there is no real truth, but only opinion (i.e., if we assume no God as the ultimate arbiter as to fact.) If there is no real, but only relative good, then we can say there is no real evil, and evil also is relative. If we say there is real evil and good is relative, this doesn't make sense since we only know evil by good; just as we only know darkness because we are first possessed by the notion of light, or of non-existence because we know of existence. At least, I myself am baffled otherwise as to how we could explain evil as being real, and good as being something only relative to it.

Someone might argue. "Admitting all that you contend, we can still say evil is not real and is only relative. It matters little to me if there is real evil in any objective or absolute sense. If something causes me or another evil, then there is evil in the world, and either God (as you speak of him) is to blame for it, or else we can say there is no God." To this we can respond, if you take harm being done to you or another as being evil, we presume you mean to say that the harm is unjust. If the harm is not unjust then it is not, properly speaking, evil. Harm, by itself can't be evil.⁸¹ Rather, there must be a way of determining whether it is just or unjust harm.

Now if the harm is unjust, then it must be possible for an action to be unjust, and there must therefore be a standard for determining an act to be such. If that standard is relative, we don't need God. We could have one standard on one day, and another standard on another day. If the standard is not relative, we need someone or something who sets or is the source of the fixed standard. If an act is only relatively unjust, what we are in effect saying is that justice is merely a matter of opinion, and there is no truly unjust act, and that the claim that there is evil is merely a matter of opinion.

Speaking for myself, there is, it would seem, evil in the world in a way that is more than opinion. If my understanding is mistaken, then evil is not of sufficient importance to concern ourselves with whether God is or can not be made responsible for it. Others may differ, but it is hard for me to see why we should be upset to any significant degree over what we believe to be only an opinion or a mere possibility. If an act is only conjecturally evil, then it also possibly may be good; so that we have that much less reason to be bothered by harm done to us or another. If evil (or anything) is real, God must be real, and if God is real He cannot be responsible for evil; since God, by our definition and assumption, is the highest good, and it is people *choosing to make him absent from their presence* that evil could very plausibly be ascribed to.

If evil is only relative, then presumably good is also; such that what is good (or bad) changes with individual pleasure (or harms.) If good is merely what changes with individual pleasures, there is no happiness, since happiness, by our earlier definition of the Cyrenaics, is the sum and end of all our pleasures. If we *can* speak of an aggregate of all pleasures, or a single highest good, toward which all our pleasures lead us, then there is happiness. And the converse is true. If we *cannot* speak of an aggregate of all

⁸¹ Leibniz makes the distinction between natural evil (in effect, harm which is not unjust) versus moral evil (unjust harm.)

pleasures, or a single highest good, toward which all our pleasures lead us, then there is no happiness.

If there is no happiness, there is no reason to lament evil, since then there would no happiness we or another were being deprived of by an act of harm, i.e., an act of harm would only deprive us of mere individual pleasure or pleasures. If all or most of our pleasures are thwarted by harm done to us, we have no reason to be unhappy in any significant way; since the possibility of happiness is assumed to be impossible (happiness, in this example, being a notion we have rejected at the outset.) Evil then becomes a mere inconvenience, a frustration, an annoyance, and not properly speaking “Evil” in the commonly held understanding of the word. Even so, we are free to do this and we won’t be rationally inconsistent. But if this is all evil is then I for one do not feel compelled to refute the argument that God is responsible for it. Some might argue that it is only because people harbor the false idea that there is happiness (or that happiness is possible) that evil “exists.” But for this false idea, we would not see people’s intentions or actions as evil. If we give up happiness, there will be no evil to trouble us. Offhand, this argument seems a fair one, yet why would anyone even bother to offer it? To increase their own pleasure?

Yet even if God, as well as being good (or goodness itself), is ultimate truth and ultimate value, does that mean he is also the greatest power over that which is physical? While even allowing He could be said to ultimately decide matters of truth and value based on right reason, morals, and aesthetics, does it follow that the rest of the universe must follow or answer to His judgment? Further, could the universe, or someone in the universe, be in a position to remove or destroy God?

We could answer the question in one of these ways:⁸²

- a. The physical universe must answer to his rule.
- b. The physical universe may or may not (somehow) answer to his rule as it sees fit.
- c. A part, but not all, of the physical universe may answer to His rule.

Which is the true explanation? The simple answer to this is that we don’t know, and that God, insisting on his being “Lord” and “Goal,” may somehow be weaker than, or even at the mercy, of the physical universe. Of course, this point of view conflicts with most people’s notions about God. Yet on the face of it, there doesn’t seem anything in logic or scientific reason to conclusively refute the possibility. One interesting and apparent fact worth mentioning to support this view is that in the physical universe there seems to be more void and darkness than matter and light, whether we look inward toward atoms, or outward toward space. One response to this has been to say that although darkness (void) exceeds light (matter/energy), Mind or Spirit (i.e., God’s Mind or Spirit) exceeds both.

⁸² We might also make the distinction between most powerful temporarily and most powerful in totality and the final analysis.

The bottom line is that while we may have faith and believe what we like, and while we may be correct in our belief, the plain fact is *we* really don't know what the extent of God's power over the physical universe is. Even if it extends universally, it is still open to question whether he always exercises his power, or whether he lets others assume it; who neither believe in nor answer to reason or morals.

This is a devastating conclusion; since, at least for many, if God is not "Lord" over creation whatever authority he has otherwise means rather little, and for those who doubt God's power the result for many has been angst and sorrow. For many religious, including some Buddhists for example, the way to deal with the problem is to say that even if the universe as a whole is somehow beyond God's full control, God, as spirit, or spirit as God, offers a means of escape and or salvation. None of this is to say that arguments that God is all powerful, all good, and has a solution for us to the problem of evil, are somehow wrong. It merely states such arguments, while they are persuasive, do not carry with them the weight of compelling necessity; as say we find in mathematics, or even scientific demonstration; such that a greater kind of faith and trust is asked of us.

What does it mean to say someone or something else (such as "chance") rules the physical universe or shares in the rule of the physical universe other than God? The following are three possibilities:

- 1) Universe is ruled by chance and chaos
- 2) The universe is ruled by gods
- 3) God is absent most of the time, but is present at important beginnings and endings

With respect to 1), we addressed the problematical nature of the terms chance and chaos earlier. Both imply certainty or order to given them meaning, and are otherwise labels for "unknown cause" or "unknown order."

Regarding 2), now if the physical universe is ruled by gods, (and or 3., i.e., God is absent most of the time, but is present at important beginnings and endings), it becomes open to question what the relationship of these gods to God is. This relationship might a) the gods are subservient to God and willingly so, b) gods are subservient but only if "forced," c) gods are subservient, but mostly unwillingly so, d) gods have joint or co-equal power with God, or e) are superior in power to God in the rule of the physical universe.

If, like Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, we say justice (at least in the physical universe) is decided by the strongest (who we here understand as being not entirely answerable to God), then happiness, serenity, peace and freedom for that community become a matter of chance and caprice, and no single power is able to realize or enforce these with any real lastingness. Without God we relinquish mind, trusting to someone else who rejects God. We may choose to believe this, as much as we have any power to choose to believe anything. But who will or has the authority to *ultimately* confirm whether our view is opinion or truth? That would be God, but, again, even so, this would

not imply that God controlled the physical universe. It would merely mean that He possibly knew or could potentially know all that was going on it, and assess its value.

There is a notion proposed by Josiah Royce and some others, that the purpose of Evil (that is very extreme or sinister evil) is its defeat, seemingly implying that the purpose of Good is the defeat of Evil. This, I think, is very much mistaken or else unintentionally misleading. We defeat Evil so that we can get on with Good, for Evil is by no means a necessity but that people make it so. And neither is Good a necessity; for both must be accompanied by choice, and by definition, choice is not a necessity. We can assume that God makes Good a necessity. Yet even if this is true, we have no objective means of determining such a thing. Again to speak of Good without there being a choice is incomprehensible. On the other hand, we could say that Good without a choice is necessity itself; though it is hard for us to understand what purpose then the idea of Good would have for us if this is the case.

Evil (as in willful maliciousness) requires Good, but not vice versa. Therefore it is false to say Evil is a necessary or complementary opposite to Good. Now some might think this is merely an academic point. But if you don't already, there have been and are some people in this world who do think Evil is necessary for Good, and that the latter somehow could not exist without the former. Moreover, others not bothering to reflect on this, are mentally manipulated into adopting such a belief, with some sometimes horrendous or even fatal consequences.

Evil requires good, for good is that something which needs harm done to it for Evil to take place. Pure Evil cannot do Evil to pure Evil. Evil, being contingent, therefore is not infinite.

Good does not require Evil; because Evil is a choice; nor do we, in addition, have either evidence for or means of comprehending how Evil is necessary for good. If then anything is infinite, Good is. If Good is not infinite, then this would seem to imply that Evil is infinite, i.e., in the absence of Good or good being so. But as we have shown, Evil cannot be infinite because it requires Good.

Similarly, we can say, Good is infinite and does not require Evil. Evil is finite, and does require Good. Although Evil is finite, finite does not necessarily imply Evil. What would otherwise be bad can, under certain circumstances, be good. Yet never can Evil be good.

If then you seek Good, then, as some Brahmins or Bodhisattvas could tell you, know it, have it, it is infinite -- that is, if you in truth and with sincerity seek it; for true Good by definition must be true, and cannot therefore be false.

As mentioned, Evil could be defined as God's absence. If we feel bad, it's because it seems God isn't there. If he were, we wouldn't feel bad. If someone fools us as to God's absence, then one explanation for this offered is that we are in part ourselves to blame for this, i.e., as fallen and deluded people.

With a mind toward the monotheistic viewpoint, why doesn't God help us with evil? The answer seems to be that He does, but can or will only do so under certain circumstances. Despite the often apparent absence of God in times of evil, and the kinds of hard arguments we face above, people continue hope in God for purposes of happiness.

It has been argued that God's allowing someone such as Satan (the mighty pirate or bandit king among criminal spirit people) such phenomenal power and sway only shows how important he deems a person, and as well that person's power of choice, even compared to the whole physical universe. This makes sense when we remember how value determinations, including love, can possess or confer preeminent dignity and high worth insofar as they necessarily involve free choice. To the extent love is compelled or made obligatory by fiat only acts to dilute and enfeeble, if not negate, its force and splendor.

The striving to obtain happiness (or a life that is *mostly* happy) is generally believed an effort which allows of success, but which in this universe, *insofar as we know*, is not guaranteed (except perhaps for a minority.) If God is good and rules the universe, why then isn't there automatic, unconditional happiness for all?

Obviously a full answer to this will have to remain, at least in this life, a mystery. Yet as best one can discern, one reason seems to be that there is something greater than happiness *as we know it*, and in order to achieve such we must overcome evil. If true, this is wisdom beyond us; since such happiness as most of us will have known would seem more than sufficient. But the question may be one of individual's interests versus the whole, and the two are not necessarily the same thing. Yet could we not insist that all should be "reasonably" happy if the whole is to be happy? Off hand, there seems no argument why we would could not so justly insist. But if we see in this a reason to blame God, we face the ultimate arbiter dilemma.

If we say God created evil, then apparently the one who created evil also created ourselves. And yet we challenge evil. Why would we do this? If the world is flawed or evil, and we are dismayed, what is it in us that makes us think things could somehow be better than they are? For some, this voice of conscience is or represents the voice of God speaking to us. We have hope that evil can be overcome; while knowing from experience that doing things the right and moral way works (and is to be preferred over evil.) Because of Man's fallen state, even if we ourselves are somehow able to avoid it (a tall order indeed), we are "tied" to or must live alongside others who do evil; so we suffer from their and or our own wrong-doing.

Perhaps evil can be explained as simply God, in effect, allowing people to do what they want to do and if there are seriously problems its because people allow those problems, and on these grounds God, ultimately, has nothing to do with evil. Samuel Clarke states: "[moral evil] arises wholly from the abuse of liberty which God gave to His creatures for other purposes, and which it was reasonable and fit to give them for the

perfection and order of the whole creation. Only they, contrary to God's intention and command, have abused what was necessary to the perfection of the whole, to the corruption and deprivation of themselves. And thus all sorts of evils have entered into the world without any diminution of the infinite goodness of the Creator and Governor thereof.”⁸³

Augustine argues that what seems evil in God’s creation is simply our mind’s distorting things. “If the beauty of this order fails to delight us, it is because we ourselves, by reason of our mortality, are so enmeshed in this corner of the cosmos that we fail to see the beauty of the total pattern in which the particular parts, which seem ugly to us, blend in so harmonious and beautiful a way. That is why in those situations where it is beyond our power to understand the providence of God, we are rightly commanded to make an act of faith rather than allow the rashness of human vanity to criticize even a minute detail in the masterpiece of our Creator.”⁸⁴

The response to this might be: “It is not the bad, but rather the good we see is an anomaly. While it may have been more prevalent in the past, as time goes on there is less and less good, and evil will finally succeed in overwhelming good, or else it will be seen that there is no more good in the world than evil.” The problem with this argument is that it seems to imply God is not good, and if God is not good, how do we define evil? Again if evil is mere thwarted pleasure or painful inconvenience than it really isn’t “evil” to begin with -- as we have been saying; thus the person propounding it is in effect saying there is no evil to begin with.

In his *Theodicy*, G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716) goes to greater lengths than most in attempting to tackle the issue of God and evil, and offers some interesting explanations and proposals of which we might mention a few. God, he explains, not only allows a certain amount of evil, to achieve a greater good, he even on special occasion⁸⁵ cooperates to promote them. Evil which happens to the wicked, which is natural evil (not moral evil), is for their correction and natural evil which happens to the good is chastisement to assist their better development. The purpose of pain (natural evil) is conservation of our bodies. God uses evil for good. Evil persons are ultimately punished for their evil, and in this way their evil is used to God’s glory. Leibniz agrees with the Platonists, St. Augustine, and the Schoolmen, that evil is privation. Privation is an accident that involves action and force, brought about by will.⁸⁶ God is not responsible for privation; though he is responsible for that formal element (the good) which privation implies exists. If evil prevails only among men (i.e., humans), it need not follow that evil occur among others. The traditional view of both Epicureans and Stoics is that one may overcome misfortunes if one exercises Reason, is insufficient, in itself, to surmount evil in the world. Where evil does occur among men, it is due in the final analysis to their

⁸³ *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, XI.

⁸⁴ *City of God*, XII.4

⁸⁵ For example, the bitterness or sting of a medicine might help to effect its power to cure.

⁸⁶ This is sustained by Aquinas; who states that evil does not contribute to the good or perfection of the universe except accidentally.

rejection of God. Leibniz concludes: God “has attained the utmost good possible, provided one reckon the metaphysical, physical and moral goods together.”⁸⁷

Bertrand Russell states somewhere (in effect) that the idea that man might exist to be tormented by devils is a view not without its support and confirmation in experience. This point of view puzzles us with the question of why would this be and what rational purpose would God’s doing this serve? Even so, there is often much going on in the human experience to support such a notion, and its making God to seem cruel and irrational does not necessarily render it false. At the same time, what we might take to be evil, so it could (and has been further argued), God sees as good, and it is not evil that is actually wrong, but what is wrong is our seeing that there is something wrong with evil, and what we think of as evil is only an illusion. This argument might be qualified by saying that we can properly judge our own actions as being potentially evil but not those of others; only God and they of themselves (i.e., these others) as individuals can do this. Such qualifier aside, the problem with this argument is that it seems self-contradictory; because in one sense or other it is saying “it is wrong or evil to say that something is wrong or evil.”

Would it not be possible to change the world so that it would overall be less painful than it is, while still achieving its same purpose? If so, then one might say “God is to blame for extreme pain.” But if we say God is to blame for extreme pain, our standard assumes that God thinks that extreme pain is what is (perhaps) most bad, and absolutely must be done away with. In other words, why could we not have had a universe with *no extreme pain, and God’s purpose fulfilled*, instead of *extreme pain is possible, and God’s purpose fulfilled*, i.e., life as we know it?

To a certain way of thinking it might be concluded that God is acting unwisely. But clearly it could be argued in response that since we seek to judge by the most supreme wisdom, and since we see ultimate arbiter and Creator as (being) the same person, that we simply don’t know the true state of things; so that to us God’s judgment seems incorrect. Alternatively, it could be claimed that the ultimate arbiter and creator are not the same, and thus blaming the creator versus blaming the ultimate arbiter are not necessarily the same thing. Such or similar was the view of the Marcionites.

As customarily encountered or experienced, the conflict of “Good versus Evil” (as opposed to evil or an evil) suggests that contraries and conflict are bad. But this is an error. Contraries, or conflicts, it is not hard to see are a greatest good, in fact are both necessary, and are a part of perfection. The problem with the contrary of “Good vs. Evil,” however, is that “Evil” will insist that all contraries are evil; a belief many “Good” minded people will naturally take exception to, and say instead contraries are good, but when one or both ends of a dispute takes on the character of actual “Evil” then that sort of contrary is a bad, regrettable or tragic thing. Moreover, it need not be assumed that because there are instances where there are very real and actual conflicts being “Good”

⁸⁷ *Theodicy* III. Leibniz could declare the world the best possible because what we know naturally has its origin in what is transcendental (monads); so that from transcendental goodness, we can deduce natural goodness.

and “Evil,” it doesn’t necessarily follow that this is how it is in the greater order of things; though it certainly may be so in individual instances.

In conclusion, the above various arguments, taken all in all, are far from highly encouraging to those who desire to believe objectively that God, assuming His existence and Lordship, will defeat and otherwise solve the problem of evil. John Stuart Mill and William James went so far as to conclude that while God’s intention is good, his power is nonetheless limited -- as the evil in the world would seem to undeniably indicate. And, we could add, if God is only a heuristic principle or necessary idea then the hope of vanquishing evil seems that much more remote and far off. Still we must always bear in mind that we may simply not be in a position to properly answer the question. As well, it is vitally important to remember that what we believe affects very much what the world is to any of us, and, regardless of our conclusions, we always have the power to choose to believe one viewpoint versus another.

Yet if otherwise logic, reason and science give us only a partial and not the full answer to the dilemma of God and evil, there is still one perspective that offers us what is perhaps more credible hope, namely that Truthfulness and Love (or if you prefer “Wise Desire”), at last, conquer all.

Part II

God Subjectively

“Why do you not say yourself that the sky and the birds prove God?” -- ‘No’ -- ‘Does your religion not say so?’ -- ‘No. For though it is true in a sense for some souls whom God has enlightened in this way, yet it is untrue for the majority...’”

“It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.”

~~ Pascal, *Pensées*.⁸⁸

As mortals of this world, contingent by nature, we cannot escape or entirely elude subjectivity, and ordinarily religious belief is understood to be something *subjective*,⁸⁹ except, of course, among a given faith’s or denomination’s own members. Add to this the (arguably) inherent intellectual incomprehensibility of God (discussed earlier on), and it is not surprising that heightened personal feelings, and unconventional and idiosyncratic states of awareness commonly become a regular adjunct to a person’s religious ideas and beliefs. Aquinas asserts that man can know God *intellectually* through grace. Yet conceding what he maintains, grace, and belief in grace, would still be something subjective to everyone else.

When we attempt to conceive of “God,” instead of the somewhat vague abstraction, some might instead think of examples we might find or know of wisdom, kindness, courage, heroism, charity, or innocence. For instance, we encounter innocence in experience, and this innocence could be said to be (an instance of) God’s effects (that is, that which God brings about.) By means of this effect we have a kind of testimony of him. Seeing others who possess moral or spiritual virtue can fairly be taken by some as a kind of proof of God. While such “proof” (by itself) perhaps lacks a sufficiently rational basis to pass as theological demonstration, the inspiration from the character or moral example of others, nevertheless, can move people greatly to be persuaded of the existence of God.

We tend to assume, and I think often wrongly, that the ancient believers in a religion were always literalists; when in fact God probably meant more to them as a simple state of emotion arising out of certain associations and practices, rather than a sharply defined intellectual concept: the refinements of more specific theology being more usually the province of priests and philosophers. It is interesting to imagine how God might have been variously conceived by the more common and ordinary Israelites and Jews; who were present in those momentous Biblical times, but who were not directly or especially involved in the dramatic events taking place near or around them.

⁸⁸ I.3 and II.424 respectively.

⁸⁹ Recollect that subjective doesn’t necessarily mean the belief in question cannot possibly be made objective, or that a subjective belief may not be absolutely true.

As a practical matter then, it seems fair to say that God (assuming his reality) can be known non-intellectually in some way; such as by means of unreflective feeling, an unusually stirring emotion, or perhaps some form of spiritual intuition. We, for example, have water as a concept or abstraction, versus water as something physically experienced as in say drinking, swimming, bathing, rain, etc. With our ideas and attitudes about God, it can be similar. Too much abstraction can empty our concept of real meaning. Consequentially, the abstraction is replaced or supplemented with a personally rich emotion or physical experience; which in effect becomes the basis for an improved picture or idea of God. In fact, a sublime or beautiful experience or emotion of someone or something could occur or transpire that we might identify with “God,” e.g., seeing clouds sailing over an ocean, stars and planets glimmering in heaven, the wonder we sometimes experience in seeing animals and plants, and or alternatively man-made phenomena such as an oratorio by a famous composer, a breathtaking canvas by a master, or a stupendous cathedral, for instance; though without perhaps attaching a formal label of “God” to the experience.

Such experiences or emotions, in addition to perhaps being in some way innate to us, can be brought about or realized through Nature, meditation, contemplation, imagination, science, art, poetry, music, mathematics,⁹⁰ and any or all of these may become the basis for religious revelation. The grandeur of what these have to offer in the form of raw experiences bespeaks, or at least seems to bespeak, God or something God-like, such that we can sometimes use words like innocence, love, truth, beauty, goodness, etc. as synonyms (or, if you prefer, *almost* synonyms) for God. These experiences and emotions, in their way, fill the gaps in our understanding about God; which it seems (mere) mind alone can never fill; such that no practicing religion is entirely without them.

Of course, an obvious problem with finding God in feelings and unusual experiences is whether the association of the experience or emotion with God is suitable and justified (i.e., whether it is warranted rationally, morally, or aesthetically.)

We cannot be entirely sure an emotion of itself is or bespeaks God; because, for one thing, emotions and physical experiences lack specificity. To our ordinary eye, the sun is both the greatest and hottest thing we can see. The earth both receives its beneficence and is at its mercy it seems. But fire itself is something more than the sun. Yet for many, they might only know fire by means of the sun; without accompanying scientific understanding of what fire more specifically is. God, probably for most people, is like this. What are otherwise his seeming effects or manifestation are taken to be his attributes or, by mistaken inference, his palpable self. But these effects or attributes cannot be God’s palpable self because God is obviously far, far greater than they are. Effects then might be confused with God himself. In addition, if God affecting us, say emotionally, is brought about by his willing to affect us, how do we distinguish between God doing this and someone else (who say perhaps wants to deceive us)?

⁹⁰ Pythagoras of Croton (c. 6th century B.C.) founded what one might rightly think as the equivalent of a philosophical religion of these last three.

God as well is typically and understandably seen in manifestations of “greatest” power. But what, for a given individual and given circumstances, may seem to be the greatest power may actually be an illusion, or someone or something misinterpreted. On certain occasions, great evil could seem to be the greatest power. Yet we (most of us anyway) would not think that great evil could be God. If greatest power is the sole criterion for God, then perhaps God is evil. Some have and do maintain this. Yet for those who see God as good, it only makes sense to be extremely cautious in how and what we interpret as supposedly being a manifestation of him. As enormously valuable, indeed necessary, as special kinds of experiences and emotions, and manifestations of great power can be, we need to retain and maintain more rational and moral formulations and definitions of God. If we don’t, we risk mistaking say someone else’s mere display of extraordinary power with *true* God.

Now we can acquire this more proper sort of intellectual understanding of God ourselves, or else permit, say, a priest, minister, or philosopher do the more precise thinking for us, or possibly some combination of both.

1. The Bible

“...Or what great nation has statutes and ordinances that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?...”

“Ask now of the days of old, before your time, ever since God created humankind upon the earth; ask from one end of the sky to the other: Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of?

“Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking from the midst of fire, as you did, and live?...”

~ *Deuteronomy* 4:8, 32-33.

“They relate that Euripides gave him [Socrates] a treatise of Heraclitus, asked his opinion upon it, and that his reply was, ‘The part I understand is excellent, and so too is, I dare say, the part I do not understand; but it needs a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it.’”⁹¹

It seems both wise and sensible that *any* religious or religious related question may be asked and answer attempted if we are both sincere and duly respectful of right reason and morals. In the interest of as full and objective truth as possible, we need to be able to allow ourselves to ask rational, if unorthodox or even blasphemous sounding questions. I have then permitted myself a certain latitude in this inquiry on the Bible and related topics. Should I err in the analysis or conclusions that follow, I hope it will be seen as stemming not from a lack of love, respect, affection, or reverence either for God the Bible, or true religion. Much of the tone of the ensuing discussion will take at times a more personal and subjective color. Yet, this acknowledged, I will continue as much as possible to keep my reasoning and conclusions within the bounds of what seem to me appropriate fairness and impartiality. In some instances, my merely raising for reflection certain theories or alternative explanations might, I realize, offend some. Yet as much as I regret this possibility, I have decided that the best course is to let my reasoning and speculation run (more or less) unhindered; both because this is the most just and honest approach to the subject, and because I believe (as stated earlier) that divinity and respect for divinity by devout persons is more than able to withstand the rational scrutiny of a person zealous in their quest for the truth.

Some might think that in taking an unbiased critical approach that I am some how judging God. But, of course, what actually I am assessing and judging, using the Bible as my source, are ideas and concepts (based on symbols the Bible contains) about God. While God can be made more real through these symbols (words); as when, for instance, they are accompanied by inspiration, there seems no forceful reason we cannot attempt to examine such symbols, their origin and what they are supposed to represent in more or less disinterested and objective terms.

⁹¹ D. L., *Lives*, II, 22.

Among the points I want to consider are how the Bible can and should be construed; and how philosophical and more explicitly rational ideas about God can be reconciled with the God we find in the Bible. The first known of many who attempted to do this in something like a systematic way was Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.—50 A.D.), a scholar and thinker of the Jewish colony in Egypt. His writings were popular among educated people and did much to aid the development of Christian rationalism and scripture-based theological philosophy. In fact it wouldn't be at all inaccurate to call Philo, a Jew, the father of Catholic scholasticism.

Off hand, I take the Bible to be for the most part a subjective literary work, more poetry than strict history -- at least by human standards. To say it is objective or scientific, in a way we commonly understand these terms to mean, simply doesn't seem to make much sense. Even fundamentalists or extremists don't really claim so much; rather what they say is that their subjective interpretation of it is ultimate truth. True, it can and has been argued that the Bible, being divine revelation, to those possessing grace, is equal in credibility to, if not also superior to, objectivity. While we will want to be careful to respect this viewpoint, it would be unfair to non-believers to characterize it as objective; since it assumes much without rational demonstration, due and impartial scrutiny, and proof in advance of its acceptance.

At the other extreme, there are those who would reduce the Bible to nothing more than a mere enthusiasm and which they see as undoubtedly based on superstition. Yet if Bible was only based on superstition, why did its particular brand of superstition last *so long*, and have such an extraordinarily profound and lasting affect on others? Why, over the course of not merely centuries but millennia, the amazingly extended, ongoing deference to and reliance on it, and by quite diverse kinds of peoples and cultures?

A question arises: does one have faith because the Bible tells them to do so, or do they believe the Bible because they have faith? Personally I am inclined to think people believe the Bible because they have faith to begin with. True, reading the Bible could very well be a means of instilling faith. But even here it is only because the Bible touches certain truths and sentiments in a person, and it is then on the basis of these that such faith would seem to arise. While it is credible to say someone reads the Bible and from the Bible then acquires faith; for most it starts with faith, and then the Bible comes to fulfill their need to better realize that faith and what it is. Faith then might be said to be acquired (depending on your point of view) through grace, cultural influence, tradition, family, or preaching, or some combination of any of these. This point is important because it suggests that faith in its inception at least, is possible without direct contact with or reading of the Bible. This should be of no surprise to Christians who know their history; since for decades after Christ's earthly life and ministry thousands became Christians who never knew or heard of the written gospels of the four evangelists.

Lest we be too overwhelmed by its seriousness, or misunderstand what might perhaps, after all, be considered its ultimate purpose, it is well to recollect that the Bible teaches cheerfulness (see Proverbs 15:13,15, Romans 12:8) -- something no doubt, in the

interest of a new and more open understanding, any Biblical study surely should not overlook.

One of the great benefits of the Bible is the *de facto* community which can be found among its many readers and devotees, across and including different religions, races, cultures, and eras. It is, I think, possible to feel real comradery with those countless number of people who have read the Bible down through the ages, and throughout the world today, if we read it humbly, sincerely, and with devotion -- though this need not mean we read uncritically.

Should the Bible be taken literally? Some assume the answer to be yes, and again we will want to respect their position as part of their religious beliefs. Speaking for myself, however, I am inclined to think that much of what the Bible contains should be taken as traditional history, inspired poetry and literature, yet which is essentially and at least *usually* based in actual historical fact. The only problem is the question of how much and to what extent? In order to attempt to answer this question, and assuming it can be answered, we will want to examine specific writings and stories, and weigh and assess them individually. On top of this, we cannot always expect to obtain the clear answers we would want, and at times it will not be at all unusual to throw up our hands and say we simply don't know the answer to a given historical question.

Nevertheless, this seems the most level-headed approach. More love and zealous attachment has been shown to this book than perhaps any other. If, in terms of widespread popularity, it has a rival in this way, I would not know what else to name except perhaps the Koran, yet which is, after all, its offspring. Yet I think we must keep in mind the *possibility* that although the Bible was written by genuinely devout people, they may at times have, out of normal human weakness, and been deceived and led astray by powers less than divine. At the same time, a reading of the Bible makes plain that people's idea and conception of God have not infrequently changed, indeed changed radically, in and with the coming and going of eras. As peoples have evolved, so have their ways of seeing and viewing Him.

It is strongly implied in the Book of Ezra that Cyrus' Persian empire was ordained by God.⁹² Now was this merely the personal belief of the author or is what he saying actually true? We have no ready and indisputable answer. For if such is so, then is not God directly and personally responsible for every empire? There is a sense in which we might say yes, i.e., God created the world and therefore God, when all is said and done, created the given leader and empire. On the other hand, we can think of instances where the regime in question has an especially evil reputation, and where it doesn't seem right to say God specifically ordained and empowered it. How then do we tell the difference between *when* God ordains or blesses a powerful and successful regime or empire and

⁹² Somewhat similarly we read in Jeremiah 28: 14 (yet with respect to Babylon rather than Persia): "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke of servitude to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they shall serve him, for I have given to him even the beasts of the field." Babylon at that time was perhaps viewed with somewhat more sympathy by the Jews than otherwise might be expected; since it was Babylon which was responsible for extirpating the brutal and hated Assyrians from the region.

when he doesn't?⁹³ Granted we can simply accept the Bible at its word and assume what is said was true of the Persian Empire at that time. Yet, *and* as well, we might simply state that the author of Ezra, rather than basing his view on divine revelation or deep reflection, was expressing what he saw to be a commonly accepted, matter of fact truth, and this perhaps for expedient political reasons. This sort of combination of an incredible claim which turns out to be literally true; while simultaneously being reported by someone without pretence to divine status and who only enunciates his honest, "common sense," impression, is the sort of thing we have to be very careful to look out for as a possible explanation for what is sometimes being recounted or described in the Bible. And of course there are other combinations; for instance the story presented is not literally true, *and* the author knew this, but gave a more colorful version for didactic purposes. Or: there was an incredible event that did take place, and with a true explanation that would indeed astound us, yet the well-meaning person who reports it in the Bible has a somewhat mistaken or misinformed idea of it.⁹⁴

The Bible then depends so very much on how it is interpreted, and its seeming lack of clarity may, in a given instance, at times be accounted for by the grandeur of its subject, human frailty in its authors, the concerns of the time of when it was written, and or illicit (or ill advised) tampering of the text subsequent to its original composition. As well, some individual books within the Bible's collection come across as more credible, inspired, and or more objective than others. In other words, the Bible's separate authors varied both in their intelligence and ability to express themselves; so that a criticism that is justified with respect to one portion of the Bible is not at all necessarily applicable with respect to another. For this reason, the Bible might be better likened to a diverse library, than a unified book, and it goes without saying that a person is either very shallow and or ill informed to treat it as one whole too summarily and without some qualification.

One aspect of the Bible's unparalleled uniqueness is that several of its old testament books represent the first forays into *serious historical writing*. Previous to the Bible, the histories of other ancient nations consisted of, at best, king (or dynastical) lists and maybe some brief annals of kings. The books of Samuel and the First Book of Kings, by contrast, are the very first instances known of history that transcends the merely cursory and superficial.⁹⁵

Respecting how the Bible should be read, church father Origen (185?-254? A.D.) states: "Since, therefore, as will be clear to those who read, the connection taken literally is impossible, while the sense preferred is not impossible, but even the true one, it must be our object to grasp the whole meaning, which connects the account of what is literally

⁹³ Some, that is certain philosophers, Christians thinkers and those of other faiths, have argued that God is responsible for everything that happens, and therefore such will have no problem accepting the idea that God put into power an evil regime. Their reasoning is that he did so to achieve a greater good. Others, not surprisingly, will object to such a tack because it makes God therefore, notwithstanding the end sought, the author of evil, and which premise to them is unacceptable.

⁹⁴ There has appeared a school of thought among academics in recent decades that would roundly assume that no such person as Moses ever even existed, in part because there is no evidence of him outside Hebrew writings. This view and interpretation strikes me as much more far fetched an assumption than its opposite, and creates what seems the far greater and more daunting complication of how such a supposedly fictional character, and with such real world titanic influence no less, could have been conceived, created, and imposed on learned and thinking persons to begin with (among other objections to the theory that might be raised.)

⁹⁵ For further on this topic, see *A History of Historical Writing*, 2nd ed. (1937) by Harry Elmer Barnes.

impossible in an intelligible manner with what is not only not impossible, but also historically true, and which is allegorically understood, in respect of its not having literally occurred. For, with respect to holy Scripture, our opinion is that the whole of it has a 'spiritual,' but not the whole a 'bodily' meaning, because the bodily meaning is in many places proved to be impossible."⁹⁶

From an early date, *interpreting* the Bible has been seen as very serious business, not to be taken lightly. A major part of Jewish sacred tradition, second only to the Bible, is the Talmud, a principal portion of which is taken up with Biblical interpretation and commentary. It is organized into two basic collections, the *Mishna* and the *Gemara*. The Mishna is made up of Midrash, or Biblical commentary, and Halakah (or Halakot); which are laws and regulations supplementing those of Moses. The Gemara, on the other hand, is a separate body of writings made up of general commentaries on the Mishna. And, of course, some of the most dramatic conflicts that take place in the gospels themselves arise from differences in scriptural interpretation and viewpoint; as, for instance, with respect to the Sabbath and how it should be observed.

It is partly its being a single collection spanning thousands of years that makes the Bible so specially unique, a characteristic shared by the Hindu Vedas which antedate it. Even more remarkable is that despite its considerable length, ages it covers, and varieties of thought and composition it contains, the Bible possesses a thematic, intellectual, and literary continuity that is rightly seen as monumental, and far grander than any epic.

An intact culture and family of people was needed to keep this collection together for so long. There are other peoples which have lasted as long or longer (such as the aborigines of Australia), but the simple fact remains that it was the Jewish people who were assigned the task. One apparent reason for Christianity's success among Greek and Roman intellectuals was the commonly accepted understanding that the writings of the Jews were of greater antiquity than their own peoples, a conclusion largely true.⁹⁷ Were much older Egyptian and Babylonian texts still available to scholars in the mid to late Roman Empire? If so, such texts were perhaps perceived as too parochial, or else their significance seen to have passed their nadir. But perhaps more than this, there was no intact people to attempt keep their spirit alive beyond local borders, and consequently did not command the kind of persistent reverence and respect the Bible did.

What is known as the Old Testament is a collection of books concerned with God and his relationship to Israel, not God and mankind necessarily; though certainly as time went on there was the succeeding notion that God was speaking to mankind through Israel. And yet it is no little significant that Genesis portrays all of humankind as originating from one couple, and from that in effect, one family. But after Noah and his

⁹⁶ *De Principiis*, Book IV, ch. 1, 20.

⁹⁷ Augustine, drawing in part from St. Clement of Alexandria's observations on the subject, estimated that at the time Rome was founded, God's people (Israel) had already been in the promised land for 718 years. *City of God*, XVIII.22. In another passage of *City*, he connects God's statement "I AM who AM" (Exodus 3:14) as foreshadowing Platonic ideas (*City*, VIII.11.) That Jerusalem was located at (what was often seen then) as the center of the geographical world no doubt added significance to Jewish ideas for many. Yet at the same time, it must be remembered as well that many thoughtful and intelligent Greeks and Romans, such as Seneca (4?B.C.-65 A.D.), and Porphyry (c.232-305 A.D.), and probably Plotinus also, remained unmoved or unconvinced by Jewish based culture and theological teachings.

descendants, the focus on mankind at large gradually dims, and Abraham, Israel, and the Jews,⁹⁸ come to take its place; until, that is, the coming of Christ.

Although Israel is not mankind, in a sense it may, on the other hand, be seen as a common denominator of all people. If we ask, “why Abraham,” or “why were these people so important,” the simple answer is if it were another people we would ask the same question of them. If morals of ancient Israel seem at times dubious to us, it would be well to remember that its pagan neighbors were frequently a good deal worse; while not forgetting that future generations might (very easily) one day find good reason to look on the our present day and age as depraved or barbaric. Similar to Christ’s mission to rescue those who had gone astray, Abraham and later Israel’s roles were that of redeeming the fallen. At the same time, the Hebrews themselves were chosen not because they were especially virtuous people, but because they were morally average for their day, and not necessarily better or worse than their neighbors. While Israel’s larger neighbors, and from a very early time, often bested them militarily, they in one form or another adopted Israel’s teachings one way or the other; thus helping to open up the way for Christianity.⁹⁹ Also, as has been observed, Israel, by being unique as it was (and is), blessed its neighbors, and later the whole world, through Christ.

It is both illuminating and instructive to compare where the Bible is placed historically compared to other important ancient text and major turning points in the history of religion. The following is a chronology of the most important ancient writings (known of, and marked here with an asterisk) world wide, with some events of special note included:

- First Dynasty of Ur, c.2850-2450 B.C.¹⁰⁰
- * Instructions [moral and practical] of Ptahhotep, c. 2400 B.C.
- * “Pyramid” texts, at Saqqara Egypt near Memphis, c. 2400-2200 B.C.
- Xia dynasty, earliest in China known, c. 2205-1766B.C.
- (Believed to be) The age of the Patriarchs, such as Joseph, c. 2000 B.C.
- Invasion by Aryans of northwest India around 2000 B.C.
- * Hindu *Vedas*, 2000-1500 B.C.
- * *Gilgamesh* Epic c. 2000 B.C.
- Shang dynasty in China, c. 1766-1122 B.C.
- * Code of Hammurabi, c. 1728-1686 B.C.
- * *Enuma Elish* (Babylonian creation epic), c. 1600 B.C.
- Pharaoh Akhenaten, first recorded monotheism, 1375-1358 B.C.
- Moses and the events of Exodus, c. 1250-1200 B.C.
- Zhou (or Chou) Dynasty, China, c. 1122-256 B.C.
- Reign of King David, c. 1,000 B.C.

⁹⁸ Perhaps, in some spiritual sense, we might say the Jews are to Israel, what Israel is to mankind, that is the more elect as distinct from the more general whole. The Jews and the collective rest of the tribes of Israel, it will be recalled, separated into two kingdoms (Judah and Israel) after the death of King Solomon. But as the Jews came out of and supplanted Israel (and which latter ended up becoming Samaritans), so, it is argued by some, Christianity grew out of and supplanted the Jews.

⁹⁹ Respecting the old law’s laying the foundation for the new, see Hebrews 7:18-19.

¹⁰⁰ In some instances the dates given are somewhat conjectural, and are taken from scholarly estimates; a given one of which might need to be changed or adjusted by a century or more.

- Reign of Solomon, c. 950 B.C.
 Split between Israel and Judah, 933 B.C.
 Elijah and Elisha, c. 9th century B.C.
- * *Upanishads*, c. 800-400 B.C.
 - * Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and Hesiod (*Theogony* and *Book of Days*), c. 7th century B.C.
 B.C.
 Israel taken into captivity by Assyria, 721 B.C.
 - * *I Ching, Book Changes*, a Chinese book of divination and predicting, c. 7th century B.C.
 - * Zarathustra (Zoroaster), *Zend Avesta*, c. 660-583 B.C.
 Reform of King Josiah of Judah, and supported by the prophet Isaiah, 629 B.C.
 Fall of Nineveh and Assyria to Babylon, 612 B.C.
 - * *Tao de Ching* (Lao Tze), or *Daodejing*, 6th century B.C.¹⁰¹
 Mahavira (Jainism), c.599?-c.490? B.C.
 The prophet Jeremiah counseled King Zedekiah of Judah who then attempted some reforms, 598-587 B.C.
 Jerusalem destroyed, and its leading citizens sent into exile in the Babylonian captivity, 587-528 B.C.
 Thales of Miletus, c. 585 B.C.
 Pythagoras of Croton, mid 6th century B.C.
 Fall of Media and Babylon to Cyrus the Mede, and the rise of the Persian Empire, 550-530 B.C.
 Buddha, 563-483 B.C.
 - * Kongzi (Confucius), *Analects*, 551-478 B.C.
 Temple in Jerusalem rebuilt by Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, 520-516 B.C.
 Herodotus, early to mid 5th century B.C.
 Socrates, late 5th century B.C.
 - * *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is a portion of the epic poem *The Mahabharata*, understood to have been written, compiled, and edited from about the 5th to 2nd century B.C.

The Bible then is, once again, by no means the earliest great book, and, in its earliest forms, to some extent certainly, was itself markedly influenced by Egyptian and Babylonian writings.¹⁰² This influence however only tells part of the story; for in other ways it is strikingly original; not least of which in its conception and purpose of explaining and outlining God's relationship to man through the people of Israel. That God was seen as speaking more to one people than another is not unique. It was quite common for a culture or society in ancient times to see themselves as special in a god's eyes. Sometimes it was necessary to do this for military purposes. What made Israel

¹⁰¹ One of the interesting and unusual coincidences one can find in examining the dates (or approximate dates) of writings, is this comparison of chapter 22 from the *Tao de Ching* to Isaiah 40:4-5, both of which are roughly contemporary.

"Those who are crooked will be perfected.
 Those who are bent will be straight.
 Those who are empty will be full.
 Those who are worn will be renewed.
 Those who have little will gain.
 Those who have plenty will be confounded."

¹⁰² "With the exception of the Hebrew historians, ancient oriental historical literature was relatively slight and informal until relatively late times, when the Hellenistic Greek culture had deeply affected the ancient Near Orient." Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (1937), p. 16.

different was its monotheism and its attaching that monotheism to the Law. By contrast, the monotheism of “heretic” Pharaoh Ahkenaten was not fixed in coded law as such, but rather the person of the pharaoh; who was both king and highest priest. This emphasis on the Law, intentionally or not, gave the Hebrews a tendency toward and favoring equal rights among its people unique among ancient near eastern societies. In other cultures, the god (or gods), personified or represented by a human ruler, was king. In Hindu, Jainist, and Buddhist faiths, all taught equality before the divine in some way. But when it came to applying these principles to society, the Hindus, in more everyday life, were ruled by kings; while the (original) Jains and Buddhists withdrew from the every day life altogether (or at least the competition of every day life.) What made Israel different was that they were a nation, which, in principle anyway, had no king but God, indeed God Almighty who gave them a precisely coded and emphatically pronounced Law. Over time various prophets, priest and judges transmuted and or interpreted this Law. When finally Israel was reduced to having a king (Saul), it was only permitted by the prophet (Samuel) with deep and heartfelt reluctance.

The subservience of the patriarchs and later the prophets (Moses being the key turning point between the two) to God and the Law was unmistakable. In a pagan culture on the other hand, the roles of the reigning god and human ruler were frequently blurred, and the ruler could speak for and on behalf of the god as “his” personal whim and interests saw fit.¹⁰³ The prophet on the other hand, was much less free in adopting personal authority for himself and the needs of the moment. Though their expressions of the divine message are typically very personal reflections of their own individual characters and emotional dispositions (not to mention those of the era they are writing in or speaking to), the prophets by and large and as a group adhered to a remarkably high level of thematic and poetical unity maintained over the course of several centuries.

Although not ordinarily seen as conventional history, the many of the Bible’s non-prophetic books show a very clear concern for detail and chronology. The genealogical lists, the lists of kings, information concerning the building of temples, whether with respect to years or materials involved, is rigorously specific; a punctiliousness evidently acquired from the Egyptians. Of note, though the earliest versions of the Bible, as we know it, dates to about the 7th century B.C., the Torah was only formally agreed to be sacred by about 250 B.C.; while the Prophets acquired a like status by 100 B.C.; which is to say more than just a few centuries after both collections were written. It is rather startling, and perhaps somewhat amusing also, to read in 2nd Kings 22:8-13 and 2nd Chronicles 34:14-21 that for many years the books of Moses were lost and only later, and quite by accident in the time of Josiah, re-discovered in the Temple.

The present list of Old Testament books including Daniel and Job was only decided upon by a convening of Rabbis at Jamina in 90 A.D., a time when there was no Sadducaic party left. Flavius Josephus (37-100? A.D.), the Jewish historian of the first century A.D., treats the Bible as literal history, and then, in a matter of fact manner,

¹⁰³ “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you.” Matthew 21: 25.

combines its record with his own obviously more modern and scientific work. The Bible then did not arise a book at a time and with each book being automatically received as divine; as on the surface might seem to have been the case. Rather, it was compiled and formally authorized over long stretches, and sometimes broken up, periods of time and varied political and social circumstances. Many books now accepted as canonical or divine for a certain numbers of years existed as cultural history or inspiration rather than formally acknowledged sacred texts. The books which might have been included in the Bible's official canon, but which didn't receive the final sanction of rabbinic or church councils are known as *Apocrypha*, the book of Enoch being one instance of such.¹⁰⁴ Though the Catholic Church includes the books of Tobit, Maccabees, and Sirach, most Jewish and Protestant Bibles omit them. Among the reasons sometimes given for apocrypha being rejected was either it did not match the true spirit of the canon, was extraneous to its main themes, or else (in a given instance) was deemed to be flat out spurious. At times, reference is made in both the Bible to holy or traditional books, such as histories, visionary works, or epistles, since and otherwise lost to us entirely (insofar as we know.)

When the early Church Fathers sought to standardize the canon and maintain its integrity (which was more or less done by about the second century; with the book of Revelation being still disputed), this was achieved by seeking the direct traditions handed down by the immediate heirs and successors of the apostles and where possible, the surviving memories of the apostles or the apostles followers themselves. Naturally, this entailed rejecting the claims of those who were not part of this established inner community; which was largely Pauline in character, as opposed to a more Jewish or Ebionite based Christianity, or else (but for quite different reasons) perhaps of a Gnostic outlook, such as the Marcionites.

About 200-150 B.C., a Greek translation of the Bible appeared in Alexandria Egypt called the *Septuagint* ("Seventy.") Sponsored in Alexandria by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (309-246 B.C.), it was reportedly translated by 72 scholars in 72 days, all of whose translations were said to have miraculously matched each other; which account is generally taken to be largely mythical. Yet whatever the truth of its origin, the Septuagint's effect and impact were unquestionably enormous. In making the Bible available in Greek, it helped disseminate Jewish beliefs to areas of the Hellenistic and Roman world (particularly of the more cosmopolitan centers of the Mediterranean); which until then had had little or no immediate contact with "the Book."

Is it possible, in the course of its history (going back to its origins and up until the present day), that the Bible's text were ever tampered with? This is a very good question to raise; not less so when we're also reminded that the concern for textual authenticity is not a modern one. "Aratus is said to have asked him [i.e., Timon the philosopher, c.320-230 B.C.] how he could obtain a trustworthy text of Homer, to which he replied, 'You can, if you can get hold of the ancient copies, and not the corrected copies of our

¹⁰⁴ In chapter 38, book XVIII of his *City of God*, Augustine in effect states that some *very* ancient books like Enoch are not included in either the Jewish or Christian canon because there is good reason to assume they have been more than likely altered or tampered with.

day.”¹⁰⁵ We need to be reminded then, I think, that we do not have much or anything like original Biblical texts or manuscripts to make this determination, whether with respect to the New or the Old Testament. In addition, we do know in point of fact that what is contained in some individual books are later insertions and additions. As well, we occasionally come across odd lacunae in passages with no explanation but what a Biblical commentator can provide. But whether something more than this has been done to change a given book from its original state, we have little means of ascertaining. In considering the possibility, might it not be asked that if the devil or other vandal, so to speak, could have ransacked, destroyed the Holy Temples, and carried off the Ark of the Covenant,¹⁰⁶ why would it have been impossible for him at one or various times to have tampered with, re-edited, deleted, or inserted extraneous material into scripture? Also, it seems natural that in the course of its long history there may have been well meaning editors and copyists who thought they could improve upon the original.

How can we not be rather baffled with the preliminary situation presented us in Genesis? Adam and Eve are told by Lord God not to eat of the tree of good and evil. Yet because they did so, God, in effect, then says “Now because of your eating of the tree I will have to die (on the cross) to save you and (some of) your posterity.” It is, one must admit, in many respects a most strange and inexplicable scenario, requiring not a little reflection to begin to try and make sense of. We are asked to accept this mystery without really knowing why things are the way they are described. Why the tree? Why the serpent? What was the source of the serpent’s animosity? Is the actual story as left to us such a distortion that it hardly begins to describe what actually took place? Is the record we have to go by, despite its perhaps being based in real fact, nevertheless, comparatively useless and unreliable as history? One way these sorts of questions are approached is to highlight the spiritual or soul pertaining (i.e., psychological, in the modern sense) aspects of the story; thus giving it story a spin or level profundity above and beyond a mere historical retelling.¹⁰⁷

One can’t help, for instance, to be but taken aback as to why it was necessary for Jacob to have obtained his birthright and father’s blessing by a rather underhanded subterfuge, particularly given his crucial and pivotal role as Israel. But then, it could be said, and on the other hand, such admitting of obvious human failings speaks rather to the book’s veracity.

Likewise, as strange as a given something might sound to us – the wholesale slaughter of peoples (including defenseless women, children as well as cattle) by the Hebrews in books like Joshua, Judges and Samuel, or in incidents like Elijah having the foolish prophets of Baal killed, or Elisha calling down a she bear to attack some unruly children are other instances of mortifying and extremely odd and bizarre occurrences -- we might also keep in mind that there may also be some real truth behind or underlying a unusually peculiar story or anecdote yet which we are at a loss to understand given the

¹⁰⁵ D.L. *Lives*, IX.113.

¹⁰⁶ Which housed God’s contract with his people.

¹⁰⁷ For example, did perhaps humans of a merely animal nature precede Adam and Eve, so that the Edenic couple were made and, as such anointed, to be the first divinely reasoning human beings?

scantiness, or perhaps truncated state, of the (purported) historical record. Or is what is related really the original record or is it a later and malicious invention? St. Justin Martyr (c.105?-c.165 A.D.), a philosophically minded Church Father, said, as part of his faith, he just accepted scripture he did not understand; an attitude shared by many then and since. Porphyry (c.232-305), from Syria, Plotinus' successor, and one of the most well-reasoned thinkers of his age, understandably complained that the Jews and Christian imposed interpretations on scripture for ulterior personal motives and which could not stand close scrutiny: a criticism often justified.

One question that can be asked is: what reason do we have for thinking the Bible is divinely inspired? 2nd Peter, 1:21 insists "Human beings spoke under influence of God: and Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God." In support of this view that it is divinely inspired, let a thinking person read the Bible over the course of years, decades, a lifetime, and invariably they will find and discover new and profound meanings to passages, sayings, and stories that at an earlier time would never have even remotely occurred to them.

Divinely inspired could mean the writer or writes of a given book of the Bible may have been inspired (in the more ordinarily understood sense; as when poets or artists are inspired) or else acted as stenographers to a divine spirit dictating to them, or some combination of both. The former view seems the more plausible interpretation; while making allowance for the possibility that the inspiration was, nevertheless, divinely instilled. This said, neither view lends itself to simple and easy explanation; since all kinds of questions are raised as to exactly what would constitute either divine inspiration or dictation. How would a person know whether the feeling, intuition, or literal voice of someone was *divine* when they felt or heard it? How specifically does a person ascertain who or what is divine as distinct from who and what isn't? What test and criteria might they use? Or do they "know" by, say, their heart and or intuition and without thinking about it as such?

Maimonides' holds the view that meetings with God and angels reported in scripture occurred in dreams and prophetic visions via the imaginative faculty; not in the literal way; as is customarily understood to have been the case. Moreover, only prophets could have such visions, and of them only Moses spoke with God directly.¹⁰⁸ He allows that there are people who are intellectually and imaginatively gifted who can have meaningful and valuable visions, but these should not be taken as literal meetings with God. When Abraham conversed with God then, this should not be taken literally as described. "... (I)t appears to me improbable that a prophet should be able to perceive in a prophetic vision God speaking to him; the action of the imaginative faculty does not go so far, and therefore we do not notice this in the case of the ordinary prophets [as opposed to Moses]...in a prophetic vision only allegories are perceived, or rational truths are

¹⁰⁸ Exodus 33:11: "The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

obtained, that lead to some knowledge in science, such as can be arrived at by reasoning.”¹⁰⁹

Similar to Maimonides, Aquinas states: “(S)piritual things [are] expounded by means of figures taken from corporeal things, in order that thereby even the simple who are unable by themselves to grasp intellectual things may be able to understand it.”¹¹⁰ Yet if Bible speaks in metaphors to the learned, what are its texts taken to mean by ordinary people who receives them more or less literally? Cannot this be dangerous, and if so, how might it be avoided or prevented? Also like Maimonides, Aquinas sees angels as incorporeal. They are intelligences without matter, though they are also created *beings*.¹¹¹

By contrast, the Church historian Eusebius (260-399 A.D.), evidently took the meetings with “the Lord” more literally, and, further, saw “the Lord,” such as met with Abraham and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, as Jesus prior to his incarnation. He writes: “It is clearly not permissible to regard the theophanies as visitations by subordinate angels and ministers of God; for whenever one of these appears to human beings Scripture makes no secret of the fact, but explicitly declares that they are called not God or Lord, but angels, as can easily be proved by any number of instances.”¹¹²

Did even the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament necessarily know who they were talking to, or receiving their wisdom and instruction from? If we accept a literal interpretation that they were spoken to, say by a spirit person, is it possible that in a given instance “Satan” or some malevolent spirit deceived someone by appearing as an “Angel of light?” Think, for instance, of “God” commanding Abraham to kill Isaac. Could this not instead of God have been “Satan;” with an angel from God *then* intervening to stop the sacrifice? Whether or not this or similar was so or possible, it should be understood that in what a person in the Old Testament thought or perceived, as presented in a given narrative, they may have been in error (though not necessarily the author himself reporting what took place.) When further, for example, Abraham sacrificed some animals (Genesis 15:7-12), God initially had only directed him to bring those animals together, not to slay them. The slaying of them (rightly or wrongly) was Abraham’s interpretation. May Abraham then have thought he was acting properly, when in truth he (on his own initiative and interpretation of what he was being told) was doing the wrong thing in sacrificing those animals?¹¹³ Likewise who can begin to fathom the brutality and inhumanity voiced by Samuel in his scolding of Saul for not being more

¹⁰⁹ *Guide for the Perplexed*, II. 46. M. Friedländer, translator. Interestingly also, Maimonides claims that much of the Law took much of the form it did so that Israel would do the opposite of what its idolatrous pagan neighbors were doing. In other words, the Law in stating what was right to do, to no insignificant extent, was actually arrived at based on an understanding of what not to do.

¹¹⁰ *Summa Theo.* I. I. 9. Also for example he says: “Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man’s rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree of perfection man can attain; it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty.” *Ibid.* II. 36.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* I. 49.

¹¹² *History of the Church*, I.2.3.

¹¹³ Likewise, it has perhaps been the erroneous assumption of some that Abel’s offering (Genesis, ch. 4, 1-7) of lambs, was a blood offering. Seeing (that is, and among other reasons we might deduce) how Abel is a proto-type of Christ, there might appear to be more reason to believe that Abel may have loved his lambs (similar to the manner a lamb is loved as described in the parable of Nathan to David, 2 Samuel 12), and that he presented them to God as some friends he loved, rather than as victims for slaughter.

ruthless than he was? Who was it really that was speaking to Samuel in such instances, and how could he himself tell?

Whether we are talking about a character in the Bible, or the author of one of its books, it is not always obvious or clear how a person or event should be taken -- at least for those who want to approach the matter without unreasoned bias and dogmatical assumptions. When therefore someone is mentioned in the Bible as speaking to God (or the Lord) or a messenger of God, we are not unreasonable to ask who it was they were actually speaking to (or seeing, or hearing.) How could any given one of the patriarchs (or other participant) know who they were talking to where it says "The Lord" spoke to them? How could a person being spoken to know whether it was actually a) the Lord, b) an emissary of the Lord, c) someone impersonating the Lord, or d) their own divinely infused thoughts engaged in reverie or meditation taken (mistakenly or correctly) as a person (as per Maimonides and Aquinas?)

The individual Jacob wrestled, for instance, is quite puzzling, and to many of us anyway, seems to have acted quite strangely. Who was this man, whom some assume an angel, really? By what knowledge or analysis was Jacob able to determine this? What made it possible for Bible personages generally to know and decide who was "the Lord" was, and what they should do when speaking or listening to him? The ostensible answer would seem to be that the mind and spirit of the particular individual (thinking particularly of such as the Patriarchs and the Prophets) decided the matter when it came to arriving at a (given) conclusion. It may have been therefore that they were not speaking to the Lord as such, in a given situation, but some manifestation, or a not quite divine spirit the Lord sent (or did not send) yet whom they mistakenly or out of convenience the patriarch or prophet identified as the Lord or one of his angels. In any case, it would seem most plausible that it was reflective mind and conscience, yet guided and moved by the holy spirit, that guided the Patriarchs in discerning what was fact and what kind of choice they should make with respect to a given question, rather than say merely unreflective or miraculous intuition. Perhaps we might think of the intellect as having dialogue or a parley with soul-filled inspiration. Naturally, this is only speculation on my part, and a more close examination and inquiry into the question is desirable before leaping precipitately to a conclusion. Such examination, however, we'll forgo at the moment, and otherwise take it for granted that the Patriarchs and Prophets were (at least for the most part if not always and on every occasion) savvy and intelligent men, and not mere amanuenses and or credulous persons who did not think very closely or carefully.

In its frequent depiction of savagery and atrocity the Bible shows and reminds us how civilization was in ancient times, and how and under what barbaric and backward circumstances some men came to know and conceive God. Again people's ideas of God to a large extent changed, were modified, and evolved over time. We are prompted to call to mind what obstacles forces of evil and the challenges were put in humanity's path on his way to forming a proper conceptualization of God, with God mercifully and benevolently intervening and assisting him. Simultaneously, it is a long, ongoing history of morals of a given people; with one God and one Law governing, yet *a God and Law*

which undergo changes, often very significant ones, in how they are understood, interpreted and seen.

Augustine very correctly observed: “The people of whom I am speaking have the same sort of grievance when they hear that things which good men could do without sin in days gone by are not permitted in ours, and that God gave them one commandment and us another. He has done this because the times demanded it, although men were subject to the same justice in those days as we are in these...Man’s life on earth is short and he cannot, by his own perception, see the connection between the conditions of earlier times and those of other nations, which he has not experienced himself, and those of his own times, which are familiar to him. But when only one individual, one day, or one house is concerned, he can easily see what is suitable for each part of the whole and for each member of the household, and what must be done at which times and places. These things he accepts: but with habits of other ages he finds fault.”¹¹⁴

What was justice to someone living in the Levant and its hinterland thousands of years ago? Just as people even in our own time might prefer the draconian and down to earth methods of someone like Judge Roy Beane, so most or many ancient peoples were comfortable, though some still perhaps alarmed, with the stern methods of justice of their day. For, after all, the question arises, *who* is to judge? Is it not perhaps vain and presumptuous to say that man can effect better justice through extended wrangling and quibbling than by cursory and predictable applications of the law? In addition, bare Lex Talionis combined with swift and sometimes brutal punishment and retribution may perhaps have been seen as necessary to accustom and educating people to the idea of the law’s supremacy and seriousness. Whether or not they were justified in thinking so, certainly it seems only human and more than conceivable that thus was the case.

While it is understandable that the animal sacrifices, some of the violent rituals, and codes of war of the Old Testament Israelites seem primitive and barbaric to us, it needs to be understood that by instituting these God, as understood by Maimonides, was actually endeavoring to wean Israel off of the much worse abominable practices of its pagan neighbors, and laying the crude foundations for and instilling a sense of higher justice in his people. One might liken it to a doctor prescribing a less harmful drug (as opposed to one that is lethal) in order to get the patient off of the worse one. For this reason then, much of Mosaic Law may be reasonably seen as being merely of its time, and not really intended for the ages. It is prophetic of the Christian approach to salvation; indeed became the spring board for the latter, in that it is God reaching out to an unsaved mass of flawed people; instead of merely offering salvation to those already given to being wise and good. And when Jesus says “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished,” Matthew 5:17-18, evidently what in part is meant or implied is that those parts of old scripture which seem out of place (in and for later times) have not been rejected *per se*, but rather supplanted and or replaced by a new law or command.

¹¹⁴ *Confessions*, III.7.

What exactly was idolatry when spoken about literally in the Bible? That people should enjoy idols and images does not seem at all strange, but was *this* the idolatry the prophets decried? Or if people actually did worship idols, for example, prayed *to* a graven image of someone, what is to account for such odd behavior? Were Old Testament writers possibly exaggerating or distorting the religious posture of those they disagreed with?

From the time of Moses to that of the later prophets, the Law went from being a mere listing of written codes to a seeking of the Law as it was even better understood in men's hearts, and not just the hearts of Israel.¹¹⁵ As important as the Law was, there was something even greater than the Law namely God's power to supercede its course in the name of his Mercy.

Last here, a few brief remarks on prophecy are in order. The Bible is often spoken of as being divided between the Law and the Prophets. Prophecy, it should be understood does not necessarily imply literal divination (like reporting the news in advance of its taking place), but spiritual visions, with more the truth of poetry than science, yet which, nevertheless, as some believe, turn out or are fulfilled in real life as foretold.

Prophecies and visions, it should also be noted, were sometimes used for providing both political and moral messages. The prophecy of the multi-layered statue in the second chapter of Daniel, for instance, cannot really be taken as a literal prediction because in giving what it describes, the author is talking about events which (by the time of his writing) had already taken place. Likewise and despite its otherwise apparently timeless character, one cannot but conclude much of what is spoken of and discussed in the book of Revelation was prompted specifically by and in reaction to extremely violent political and social events taking place *at the time it was written*.

¹¹⁵ Jeremiah (31: 31-33): "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

2. The Character of Deity in the Old Testament

“Toward the faithful you are faithful;
to the honest you are honest;
Toward the sincere, sincere;
But to the perverse you are devious.”
~~ Psalms 18:26-27

The character of God in the Bible, thinking particularly (but not exclusively) of the Old Testament, comes across as very odd to many of us. There are not a few occasions, as depicted in the Bible, he seems decidedly unlikable, unreasonable, capricious, overly drastic, and unnecessarily violent. How, for instance, do we reconcile the God of the Old Testament who shows such apparent ruthlessness (as in the blatant extermination of peoples) with the unbiased, compassionate God Jesus teaches? William Blake wrote: “(T)hinking as I do that the Creator of this World is a very Cruel Being and being a Worshipper of Christ, I cannot help saying; ‘The Son, O how unlike the Father! First God Almighty comes with a Thump on the Head, and then Jesus Christ comes with balm to heal it.’”¹¹⁶

To overcome this apparent conundrum, an early Christian sect, the Marcionites, led by Marcion of Pontus (c. 2nd century A.D.), and who were later branded as heretics by the church, went so far as to reject the God of the Old Testament; claiming he was the devil in disguise; offering among their proofs that the differences between the Old covenants and the New covenant show them as being put forth by different Gods (or a Marcionite might alternatively have put it, “gods.”) A somewhat similar but quite different attempt at an interpretive hypothesis might be to say “the Lord,” or one of his angelic emissaries as given in the Old Testament is perhaps *on an unusual given occasion* actually the devil in disguise; the explanation for this being either that the person who met with or heard “the Lord” was deceived into thinking the latter was God; when really it was someone else. This last might not be anymore pleasing or palatable than what Marcion and his not insignificant number of followers were saying (remnants of whom, incidentally, lasted into the 6th century A.D.), but should be mentioned for what it is worth. *If* correct, then Marcion was wrongly impugned for maligning God; since he whom he maligned was, rather than God, someone who pretended to be God and who therefore deserved the maligning.¹¹⁷

Somewhat curiously, “the Lord” appears to disappear as a directly involved and interacting *personage* about the time leading up to the time of the prophet Jeremiah and the Babylonian captivity in 587 B.C. What significance can or should be read into this is open to speculation. Up to that time, the Lord spoke often and directly to many people who weren’t prophets; though *Moses alone* was spoken to face to face. Yet afterward

¹¹⁶ As quoted in *William Blake*, by Kathleen Raine, page 86.

¹¹⁷ It being, of course, assumed by Marcion’s opponents that the person presented or interpreted (say, by someone like Abraham or Moses) as God in the Old Testament was necessarily God, or else an authorized emissary of God’s. Marcion, at least as related by his theological adversaries, did not make the distinction between the God of the Old Testament actually being the devil (Marcion’s view) versus true God but whose identity might be occasionally used as a guise by the devil (as we have posited here), but simply assumed the former; that is that the God of the Old Testament was the devil.

only the prophets and authors of wisdom books were entitled to speak of such personal understandings, “conversations,” or make direct divine proclamations and pronouncements formal legitimacy.

As already noted, The Almighty is referred to in the Old Testament usually by one of two main names: “Eloheim,” and “Ya-weh.” Eloheim signifies God, chief, angels, judges and rulers. Regarding “Ya-weh,” Maimonides states “This sacred name...was not pronounced except in the sanctuary by the appointed priests, when they gave the sacerdotal blessing, and by the high priest on the Day of Atonement, undoubtedly denotes something which is peculiar to God, and is not found in any other being.”¹¹⁸

Other Hebrew names for God are:

Adonai: Lord

Dayyan: Judge

Shaddai: Almighty

Zaddik: Righteous

Hannum: Gracious

Rahum: Merciful

Maimonides explains that the Bible speaks in metaphors, and when it speaks of God it should not usually be taken according to its *surface* description of an event occurring or *surface* sense of divine messages imparted. So when the Bible says God is angry, the purpose of this is not to say God is literally angry but to impart a didactic truth: such as to discourage injustice, foster moral conduct, etc.¹¹⁹ To interpret God as being literally angry or jealous is to misunderstand his true nature and being (i.e., inasmuch as we are capable of knowing it to begin with.) According to Aquinas when Jacob encounters God, he does not actually see God rather but a figure of or stand-in for God, and not a divine essence.¹²⁰ For reasons of this kind, it seems no little fitting to conclude that much, if not all, of the Bible should be read and interpreted in the way poetry is read and interpreted; while making allowance also for its character as popular history, peculiar to the specific age a given book deals with, and as a source and basis for both moral and spiritual instruction.

Yet for all Maimonides and Aquinas’ lofty theorizing and learned disquisition, the Bible is supposed to be able to speak to common people as well as the wise and the learned; at least so it is often assumed. Granted the sage or scholar will be able to make sense of strange characterizations and portrayals of God by the light of philosophy and more deeper reflection. Yet what are more ordinary persons (for that matter most people) to think of the God who -- and of who *it is reported* --

¹¹⁸ *Guide for the Perplexed*, I. 61.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* III.XVIII.

¹²⁰ *Summa Theo.* I.XII.11.

* As a casual, strolling figure he converses with Abraham, and who also, by way of testing the patriarch, subjects him (or allows him to be subjected) to little tricks and deceptions (e.g., appearing as an angel, or in his instructing Abraham to slay Isaac.)

* Provides Moses with magic tricks with which to impress Pharaoh.

* Denied Moses entry into the Promised Land because the latter had struck the rock thrice at Meribath-kadesh rather than twice as he had been directed, and in this way “[failed] to manifest my sanctity among the Israelites.” (Deuteronomy 32:51). He sent lying spirits into the false prophets (1 Kings 22:23.) He struck down Uzzah for touching the Ark (2nd Samuel 6: 6-7), when Uzzah had done so in order to prevent the Ark from toppling over. He punished Israel because David desired to take a census (2nd Samuel 24:1.) King Uzziah of Judah, for example, was stricken with leprosy, because, disobedient to the priests, he burned incense on the altar (2nd Chronicles 26:18-21.) God is also said to have deceived the prophet Ezekiel, (Ezekiel, 19: 9.) What is perhaps most curious about incidents like this is whether Moses (or someone else in a similar circumstance) had sufficient reason to know the consequence of his misdeed would be so extreme or exacting. Sometimes those God punishes are punished without ostensible warning, and this sometimes with acute and extreme harshness and severity; even though we are given to understand that the person, (whether Moses, David, or some other) did not seem to have reason to think they were doing anything so wrong, or indeed wrong at all, to begin with.

It was understood in ancient cultures that God caused great natural events, and such belief was not unique to the people of the Bible. A very clear headed thinker such as Chrysippus believed that famine and plague were God’s way of punishing the wicked; an opinion routinely held then and sometimes held (by some) now.¹²¹

Rabbinic scholars, theologians, and historians, of course, have long had rational explanations for these kinds of cultural beliefs and occurrences. Yet the simple fact remains that the more profound and rational explanations for the above listed incidents and behaviors is bound to be misunderstood or at least puzzling to persons of average intelligence or less who read the Bible. If then the Catholic Church for centuries reserved Bible reading to and for priests, it was not wholly without some good reason for doing so.

A vital part of God’s relationship with his people are his covenants. While it is not quite possible to go into their content and meaning here, it is at least desirable and necessary to list them. Of these covenants then there are eight:¹²²

1. The Edenic covenant (*conditional*), Genesis 1:26-31; 2:16-17
2. The Adamic covenant (*unconditional*), Genesis 3:16-19
3. The Noahide covenant (*unconditional*), Genesis 9:1-18

¹²¹ He also believed the harmony of the whole required that good deeds be balanced by wicked acts (perhaps suggesting the influence of Persian dualism on his thinking.)

¹²² My grateful thanks to Gary Nystrom at <http://www.biblicist.org> for making this list with citations possible. The site contains also more specific descriptions and explanations of the given covenants.

4. The Abrahamic covenant (unconditional), Genesis 12:1-4; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8
5. The Mosaic covenant (*conditional*), Exodus 20:1 - 31:18
6. The Land covenant (unconditional), Deuteronomy 30:1-10
7. The Davidic covenant (unconditional), 2nd Samuel 7:4-16; 1st Chronicles 17:3-15
8. The New Covenant (unconditional), Jeremiah 31:31-40

For all his terrors, harsh disciplines, and perhaps peculiar behaviors, the God of the Old Testament is shown also as being forgiving, patient, compassionate to the poor, intolerant of bribes, disdaining of false pride and arrogance. As important as observing the letter of the Law was the observation of justice, compassion, and mercy. In Psalms (72: 11-14), we read:

“The righteous king rescues the poor when they cry out,
The oppressed who have no one to help.
He shows pity to the needy and the poor
From extortion and violence he frees them.”

And later in Jeremiah (7:4-7):

“Do not trust in these deceptive words:
‘This is the temple of the Lord,
the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’
For if you truly amend your ways and your doings,
if you truly execute justice one with another,
if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow,
or shed innocent blood in this place,
and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt,
then I will let you dwell in this place,
in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever.”

Even if we allow that not all of the Bible is authentic, less than divine, and even maliciously modified, all in all (if not always), it presents a vibrant and vivid picture of the Lord as someone loving the down trodden, merciful, and ever loyal to his people -- despite their own ornery (albeit, for many, understandable) fecklessness and disobedience.

How inspiring also is the story of Jehosaphat’s victory (2nd Chronicles 20); where God becomes the impetus and rallying point of the remaining tried and true, providing hope to lovers of truth and justice everywhere. Time and again similarly, we find in the Old Testament the reassuring and comforting idea that there is *a highest law* that truly *all*, regardless of social station, must answer to; a notion that in combination with the precedent of Greek democracy and the civic principles and deportment of the more high-

minded Roman Stoics has helped to shape and make possible a modern, and hopefully more just and humane, democratic society.¹²³

One of the reasons Greek democracy, which has been so often touted and looked to as an example for us, failed was its lack of a moral backbone; as for instance when it cast out or turned its back on its best citizens, such as Aristides, Themistocles, and Socrates. Without then a solid moral underpinning such as true religion helps to make possible, a lasting democracy appears among the most vain and futile of human endeavors or enterprises.

¹²³ It was the Christian writer Lactantius (c. 240?-c. 325? A.D.) who, centuries before Locke and Rousseau, was among the very first (if not the first) to introduce the idea of the social contract, and that figures so prominently in democratic theories of government. See Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*, Book VI, ch. 10. Needless to add, it is not hard to see how Stoicism egalitarian outlook, where all are equal before God, and co-joined with Christianity's later widespread pervasiveness and encouragement of literacy were instrumental in making modern democracy possible.

3. New Testament Antecedents

“Indeed, it was a wonderful Elevation of Mind in a Man [Socrates], that knew not Christ, nor the holy Scriptures: And therefore, I can scarce forbear, when I read such Things of such Men, but cry out, *Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis...*”

~ Erasmus, *Latina Colloquia*.

One of the reasons Christianity has proven so often easily accepted and influential a force around the world is that it united major ideas and notions from earlier religions and cultures, and integrated them in one complex and profound synthesis. With Judea and Galilee serving as a most ideal geographical crossroads, it combined beliefs and customs from the Jewish people, Egypt, Persia, Greece, India (perhaps indirectly), and possibly others as well. In taking this approach, we need not be suggesting or implying a doubt of Christ’s divinity, and say Christianity came about merely as a result of human and historical forces. Instead, we might, after all, simply maintain that the ideas or moral and doctrinal elements which preceded Christianity in other cultures or religions was simply God’s approach¹²⁴ of revealing, or preparing the way, for Christ among the gentiles -- and, as things turned out, the Jews as well.

But whatever one’s particular religious beliefs or perspective, it is edifying and useful to find out how much of what is taught and expressed in the New Testament can be found in other cultures and religions that preceded it. What follows here then is a *general* survey of notions and ideas, from other cultures and religions; for which we find direct and indirect parallels in the Gospels and Epistles.

While it might seem to imply that this people or culture was the origin of this or that notion, conception or belief, we must be extremely careful on this point. Unless explicitly stated, or otherwise established with something more than pedantic certainty, one should suspend judgment before jumping to conclusions as to who supposedly came up with what idea or belief first. This understood, we can attempt to supply impressions of chronology for purposes of at least a tentative understanding of the course and flow of thoughts and ideas found in pre-Christian history.

Egypt

The story of Osiris (Ausar), the murdered and resurrected God, who presides over the judgment of the dead, has its certain likeness to the Christian story. As well, Osiris’ son Horus (Heru) combating the powers of evil (in the person of Set) reminds us of God’s son Jesus (like Horus) defeating Satan. In the one instance Christ is like Osiris, and in the

¹²⁴ Or perhaps, in given instance, the approach of persons less than godly or even the devil himself, and possibly as means of deliberately confusing or deceiving people. In the ensuing text, I address chiefly general ideas, notions, and principles that antedated and were later manifested in Christianity. Much less do I address, on the other hand, how some pagan mythology mirrored or foreshadowed, to some degree, Christian personages, events, and miracles; as, for instance, in the death and resurrection of Osiris or of Dionysus; or the virgin birth of Athena; or the miraculous healings by Asclepius. These sorts of parallel or semi-parallel stories it was alleged by some early Christian apologists, such as St. Justin Martyr, were the efforts of demons who knew in advance of Christ’s coming, and who therefore used these fabricated tales to mislead people from coming to know and worship the true God.

other like Horus. The “myth” of the dieing and resurrecting God, of course, was by no means restricted to Egypt, and Tammuz of the Babylonians also invites worthwhile comparison. Yet it was in Egypt that the “myth” certainly found one of its earliest known and most memorable expressions.

“The Book of the Coming Forth of Day,” often mistakenly referred to as the “Book of the Dead” since copies of it are usually only found in tombs; while a book of spells and incantations for the benefit of departed souls, also contains some marvelous moral insight, and a majesty of vision that has not been exceeded. Although Egypt is often depicted in the Bible in a derogatory way, and is made synonymous with loose morals and licentiousness, some of the world’s first books enjoining *morality* and *social justice* appeared in Egypt, *thousands of years* prior to the Bible.¹²⁵ The nation of Israel as a global force, in a very importance sense could be said to have been the seed of the Chaldeess sprung from the womb of Egypt, and if this is true, perhaps Egypt might be seen as a kind of grandparent to Christianity. In addition, the Jewish colony and later Christian church in Alexandria, with its many scholars and learned people played a major role in the spread and development of Christianity, giving us the Septuagint, Philo, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and St. Anthony (the Great, c. 250-350 A.D.), the latter considered to be the founder of Christian monasticism.¹²⁶

Persia

The faith in the one God named Ahura Mazda as taught by Zarathustra (in Greek, Zoroaster, and who it is believed lived about the late 7th century B.C.), contains certain aspects similar to Christian belief. In addition to its monotheistic viewpoint, it speaks of evil being the result of Ahriman (Satan), and of an ongoing war between good and evil; which after a certain number of epochs will result in a final judgment and the triumph of good. As a result, although monotheistic, the religion of Zarathustra, nevertheless carried with it a certain and pronounced dualistic outlook. The faith had its own sacred books called the Zend-Avesta, and was adopted as the official religion of the Persian Empire.

As remarked previously, Zarathustra declared the devas or gods to be demons; hence the first known explicitly made association between the two; which was very like if not identical, to later Christian belief. The Magi, who were priests of Ahura Mazda, who figure in the story of Christ’s birth clearly carry with them a significance of a special kind. Exactly in what way though is open to question. Per chance they represent the decayed old order, which had in many quarters been reduced to magic and superstition, yet which was now greeting the new. Jesus in his more stern and draconian judgments, as when he makes reference to Gehenna for example, manifests a Zarathustrian mentality as much, if not more, than other religious cultures that might be named. Zeno of Citium,

¹²⁵ For a good introduction on the subject of morality and religion predating the Bible, while much to be recommended, is *The Dawn of Conscience* (1933) by James Henry Breasted. On pages 334-335, however (and be it further noted), Breasted rather sophomorically and lapses into a presuming agnosticism (i.e., that “man invented God”) which the rest of what his book covers and discusses *hardly* establishes the irrefutable validity of.

¹²⁶ Christian monasticism in part sprang from certain Jewish sects (like the Essenes); including some living in Egypt. The origin of such Jewish sects in turn, it has been observed, may be traced back to early Buddhist missionaries to the Near East.

from Cyprus and a founder of Stoicism, probably carried some Zoroastrian influence to the Greeks in his reactionary monism (a reaction to Persian dualism), and his own brand of human universalism. The notion of God as Fire, as well, figures prominently in both Zeno and Zarathustra.

India

Many of the ideas and theology expressed in the Vedas, which includes the later *Upanishads*, and which subsequently influenced, by way of reaction, Jainism and Buddhism, are wonderfully, indeed sublimely compatible with Christian belief. And though it would probably be difficult, if not impossible, to determine precise links and connections between the cultures of India and Christianity, we cannot help but be struck by some of the suggestive, in some instances, overt similarities.

In the *Rig Veda*, the earliest Veda collection, ritual and sacrifice are frequently the topic, and at one point the whole world is described as one great sacrifice. In the later *Upanishads*, the tendency was to look more toward the deeper meaning and significance of sacrifice *generally*, rather than merely the meaning of specific sacrificial rituals.

Although Hinduism is not, perhaps, ordinarily thought of as a monotheistic religion, its monotheistic ideas relating to Brahman, such as contained in the *Upanishads*, are, rationally and philosophically speaking, quite sophisticated, and can take their place at the summit of all religious and philosophical writings and teachings. Yet, if so, why don't we normally think of Hinduism as a monotheistic religion? One of the reasons for this is the resorting to dualistic "subordinate" gods, Vishnu (power of life) and Shiva (power of destruction), and other intermediaries (avatars) to the One, Brahman. The concept of Brahmins, who make for the highest caste in the very stratified Hindu society, as holy elite invites an interesting comparison with Israel as God's elite (nation.) The perhaps more pure Hinduism as found in Brahmanism was accessible and mostly possible to only a dedicated few, and eligibility to become one of these depended much on your class status. But more than this, pure Brahmanism suggested an indifference to and detachment from the importance of worldly activity difficult to accept, and which polytheism seemed more suited to. It was then, arguably, in both its elitism and failure to maintain monotheistic or monotheistic-like purity for most that, Hinduism, in effect, became the catalyst for Jain and Buddhist beliefs.

Bhatki, a notion found in both some Hinduism and Buddhism, is that in order for some people to reach the divine, it is necessary or advisable for them to seek it by means of a divine friend and intercessor; who in a sense, by believing in him or her, makes the task much easier. The Avatar, such as Krishna, who is the incarnation of Vishnu, was the human name and face of God. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, or "The Song Celestial," contained in the multi-volume epic poem, *Mahabharata*, and which is one of the most supremely eloquent and spirit filled teachings ever composed, ideas are expressed which bear an uncanny resemblance to many beliefs and forms of expression found in the gospels.

[Krishna speaking to Arjuna:] "...whoso thus
Discerneth Me in all, and all in Me,
I never let him go; nor looseneth the
Hold upon Me; but dwell he where he may,
Whate'er his life, in Me he dwells and lives,
Because he knows and worships Me, Who dwell
In all which lives, and cleaves to me in all..."
[Those who backslide are not lost if they pick themselves up and continue on the
Path.]
"Truest and best is he who worships Me
With inmost soul, stayed on My Mystery!" (ch. 6)

[Krishna:] "I am the Sacrifice! I am the Prayer!
I am the Funeral-Cake set for the dead!
I am the healing herb! I am the ghee,
The Mantra, and the flame, and that which burns!
I am -- of all this boundless Universe --
The Father, Mother, Ancestor, and Guard!
The end of Learning! That which purifies
I lustral water! I am OM! I am
Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Ved;
The Way, the Fosterer, the Lord, the Judge..."
"...Death am I, and Immortal Life I am,
Arjuna, Sat and Asat, Visible Life,
And Life Invisible!" (ch. 9)

[Krishna:] "For he that laboureth right for love of Me
Shall finally attain! But, if in this
Thy faint heart fails, bring Me thy failure, find
Refuge in Me! Let fruits of labor go,
Renouncing hope for Me, with lowliest heart,
So shalt thou come; for, though to know is more
Than diligence, yet worship better is
Than knowing, and renouncing better still.
Near to renunciation -- very near --
Dwelleth Eternal Peace!" (ch. 12) ¹²⁷

Jainism and Buddhism

In Jainism, which only nearly preceded Buddhism, you have "Jina," the conqueror, as taught by Mahavira, who by means of a holy life, a vow of non-injury, and indifferent to pain or pleasure stays focused on the divine and, in this way, overcomes

¹²⁷ Sir Edwin Arnold, translator.

life's finitude, while maintaining a love and concern for all life. Among its later practices and institutions, the Jains, as later did the Buddhists, had nuns and a celibate clergy.

Jainism contains a notion of self, as in Hinduism, which is beginningless and endless; an indestructible entity sometimes conceived as inherently self-conscious and sometimes viewed as conscious only when embodied.

The Buddha, Siddharta Gotama (in the Pali language), or Siddharta Gautma (in Sanskrit), also spoken of as Sakayamuni, who lived about the same time as Confucius, and about a century before Socrates, was the first religious figure of ostensibly universal significance; others before were based more in their own or local cultures. Part of what made this possible was India's extremely advanced philosophy and metaphysics which were attained by this time. The Buddha's birth was taught as having been divine and miraculous, and he originally lived under very wealthy circumstances. Mara, prince of Evil tempted him, and in order to avoid his pitfalls and the snares of illusion in general. Life, the Buddha concluded, is pain, and wisdom lies in vanquishing all desire. Evil was to be returned with good, and otherwise desire was to be overcome by means of an eight fold Path of: right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. Many of the Buddhist monks lived as traveling mendicants, somewhat similar to Christ and his followers.

All life is sacred, rich and poor, high and lowly are seen one -- an obvious re-evaluation, if not wholesale rejection, of the Hindu caste system. Life (as was also the case in Hinduism) is driven by the Wheel (or Rebirth) and Law of Karma. Those who did not seek rebirth were continually born or reincarnated into this world. Beyond this to be reached was Nirvana. It is a state of consummate joy attained by eliminating selfishness, annihilation of individual consciousness, and union of oneself with God, usually through meditation, simple (though not necessarily austere) living, and self-discipline. In it is found this statement:

“‘Yes, self-sacrifice is so difficult!’ Mahasattva replied: ‘It is difficult for people like us, who are so fond of our lives and bodies, and who have so little intelligence. It is not at all difficult, however, for others, who are true men, intent on benefiting their fellow creatures, and who long to sacrifice themselves. Holy men are born of pity and compassion. Whatever the bodies they may get, in heaven or on earth, a hundred times will they undo them, joyful in their hearts, so that the lives of others may be saved.’”

Buddhism later broke off into two main branches the *Theravada* (or Hinayana) school that focused on meditation and contemplation, and the *Mahayana* which was more altruistic and outgoing in its piety. These in turn can be broken down into numerous subsidiary-schools. Some of the Hinayana schools embrace the cult of the many Buddhas-to-be (Bodhisattvas) who help others toward salvation, which resembles the Hindu concept of bhakti. Some Buddhas-to-be will not only have been known to give their lives for their fellow man, but sometimes for animals as well, as in “The Story of the

Hungry Tigress”¹²⁸ from the 1st century A.D., where a monk offers himself as food to feed a starving tigress and her cubs.

Although originating in India, by the 3rd century A.D, Buddhism had mostly expired there, yet continues and thrives to this day in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and parts of Southeast Asia.

The quantity of Buddhist sacred literature, as with the Hindus, is quite immense. But perhaps its most well-known writing is the very early appearing *Dhammapada* (or in Sanskrit *Dharmapada*.) Although understood to have been compiled about the 3rd century B.C., it is believed to contain sayings and ideas which originated with the Buddha, some of which it will be well worth our quoting here.

“Hate is not conquered by hate: hate is conquered by love.” 1.5.¹²⁹

“Think not of the faults of others, of what they have done or not done. Think rather of your own sins, of things you have done or not done.” 4.50.

“He who for the sake of happiness does not hurt others who also want happiness, shall hereafter find happiness.” 10.132.

“O let us live in joy amongst those who hate! Among men who hate, let us live in love!” 15.197.

“Overcome anger by peacefulness; overcome evil by good. Overcome the mean by generosity; and the man who lies by truth.” 17.223.

“...lack of self-control means wrongdoing. Watch that greediness and vice bring thee not unto long suffering.” 18.248.

“I will endure words that hurt in silent peace as the strong elephant endures in battle arrows sent by the bow, for many people lack self-control.” 23.320.

“One should never hurt a Brahmin; and a Brahmin should never return evil for evil. Alas for the man who hurts a Brahmin! Alas for the Brahmin who returns evil for evil!” 26.389.

“He who is free from the bondage of men and also from the bondage of the gods: who is free from all things in creation -- him I call Brahmin.” 26.417.

¹²⁸ From *Suvarnaprabhasa*, “Splendor of Gold,” a Mahayana sutra (teaching), and which can be found in *Buddhist Scriptures*, by Edward Conze, editor.

¹²⁹ Juan Mascaro, translator.

China

While we would not think that Chinese culture would be a likely influence on Christianity; still if there is no tangible connection in the derivation of the latter from the former, there are even so notable similarities worth bringing attention to; though granted they might not be such as are at first plainly evident.

The Chinese are an extremely ancient and, in their heritage, a highly cultured people; who have lived in a rather peculiar isolation from most of the rest of the world for thousands of years. Among their traditions, they are honored with a truly beautiful foundation in their ancient *Histories*, *Songs*, and *Rites*. The *Songs* were mostly compiled by about the 6th century B.C., with some originally dating to as early as 1,000 B.C. They are a diverse collection of in most instances wonderfully composed, timeless, and elegant writings. One in particular goes:

“Mighty is God on High
Ruler of His people below;
Swift and terrible is God on High,
His charge has many statutes.
Heaven gives birth to the multitude of the people,
But its charge cannot be counted upon.
To begin well is common;
To end well is rare indeed.”¹³⁰

Of course, by far China’s most well known cultural contribution was the sage Kongzi, better known to us by the latinized Confucius (551-479 B.C.); who was a contemporary of both the Buddha, and Thales. Yet while there are no known writings of the Buddha himself, and Thales survives in a few tiny fragments, Confucius is represented by a very considerable collection of sayings, many of which, if not quite all, are understood to be or reflect his own direct expressions.

At the center of Confucian belief is keeping in one’s mind the lesson’s of the past, and in one’s heart memory of one’s ancestors. Family roles could be said to be at the heart of the universal order. Perhaps the four most important thing for a Confucian are Rites, Music, Family, “ren,” all of which are a necessary adjunct or compliment to the other, and which serve to bring about social stability and individual and collective well being. In its devotion to ritual and music, Confucianism, in its original forms, bears an interesting resemblance to Judaism and Roman Catholicism. “Ren” (sometimes translated as “jen”) refers to humanness, benevolence, and the proper deportment, attitude, and character of a gentleman worthy of being or serving the Emperor, who, incidentally, was known as the “Son of Heaven.” To achieve Ren one must understand the Heavenly mandate, and there seems to be a sense in which the acquiring and development of ren is more of an art than a science. Among other points, arrogance, licentiousness, dissolute pleasure seeking are to be shunned and avoided. Better to be poor and living according to

¹³⁰ No. 242, Arthur Waley, translator.

ren than to be rich and a barbarian. One should be courageous, and considerate. One must love the Way (i.e., the Tao, and which here we might think of as Nature or being natural) and strive to embody it in their person. If a ruler lives according to ren and the Tao, his example is the best teaching possible for his people.

But this is only touching the surface, for there is much subtlety to Confucius' thinking, as presented in the *Analects*; which unfortunately we do not have the leisure to delve into here. We can, notwithstanding, quote some passages which are (or might be) of special interest.

“Someone asked for an explanation of the *di* sacrifice. The Master said, ‘I do not fully comprehend it. One who truly understood it could handle the world as if he had it right here,’ and he pointed to the palm of his hand.” 3.11.¹³¹

“Zigong wanted to do away with the practice of sacrificing a lamb to announce the new moon. The master said, ‘Zigong! You regret the loss of the lamb, whereas I regret the loss of the rite.’” 3.17.

“The Master said of Gong Yechang, ‘He is marriageable. Although he was once imprisoned and branded as a criminal, he was in fact innocent of any crime.’ The Master gave him his daughter in marriage [that is despite the risk of public embarrassment and scandal.]” 5.1.

“...The key to achieving *ren* lies within yourself – how could it come from others?” 12.1.

“...the gentleman only applies names that can be properly spoken, and assures that what he says can be properly put into action. The gentleman simply guards against arbitrariness in his speech. That is all there is to it.” 13.3.

“Zigong was evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of others. The Master remarked sarcastically, ‘What a worthy man that Zigong must be! I have hardly time for such activities.’” 14.19.

“Someone asked, ‘What do you think of the saying, Requite injury with *de*, ‘kindness’?’ The Master replied, ‘With what, then, would one requite kindness? Requite injury with uprightness, and kindness with kindness.’” 14.34.

Mozi or Mo Tzu (480-439 B.C.), spoke in reaction to Confucius, and rejected the idea that benevolence towards one's family should be most focused on; and instead suggested that one's care of others should be impartial and extended to all. He also rejected the heavy Confucian's heavy emphasis on ritual and music, and tended to see these as extraneous and wasteful. In a sense, Mo Tzu is a pragmatist who looks to what works rather than tradition as such. One of the biggest problem in life, he said, is that

¹³¹ Edwin Gilmer Slingerhand, translator.

people too often tend to see small wrongs but not great ones. “Heaven will clearly see you (doing wrong) even if you run to the forests, valleys or hidden places where none lives.”¹³²

Hunzi or Hun Tzu, (c. 3rd century B.C.), a Confucian said: “Of the paths to learning, none is quicker than to like the right person, and exalting ritual comes second. If at best you cannot like the right person, and at worst you cannot exalt ritual, then you will simply be learning haphazard knowledge and focusing your intentions on blindly following the *Odes* and *History*.”¹³³

Long before Christianity was called the Way (as we find in Acts of the Apostles), there was the Way among the Chinese. Taosim (or Daoism) is one of the most unusual of religions, if it should be called that; because it makes no reference to God, but instead speaks of the Tao, or “the Way.” The Tao de Ching (or the Book of the Way, i.e., Tao and Virtue) is traditionally spoken of as being authored by a Lao Tzu (or Laozi), but modern research now is inclined to see him as a quasi-mythical figure, and the book’s actual author was apparently several people over time; all of whom are anonymous to us. Taoism is typically expressed in paradoxical, and poetical ways, and is not thought of as possessing a rigid doctrine. It teaches the path of best resistance is the path of least resistance. One should be submissive as a way of gaining and maintaining strength, and seek tranquility in non-action. It is not worth one’s trouble to act against the world and its ways. Better it is be in harmony with Nature and its rhythms, then to take up worldly causes which are hopeless. In teaching that less can be *much, much* more, all fine artists, craftsmen and musicians could be said to be familiar with Taoist principle.

“Cut off sageliness, abandon wisdom,
Cut off benevolence, Abandon righteousness...
Manifest plainness.
Embrace simplicity.
Do not think just of yourself.
Make few your desires.” (ch. 19)¹³⁴

“Those who are steeped in Virtue are like new-born children.” (ch. 55)

“If one has loving kindness,
in attack one will be victorious,
In defense one will be secure.
For Heaven will save you and protect you with loving kindness.” (ch. 67)

“Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it does?
Even sages regard this as a difficult question.
The Way does not contend but is good at victory...” (ch. 73)

¹³² Ch. 26 Heaven’s Will.

¹³³ Ch. 1

¹³⁴ Philip J. Ivanhoe translator.

“Sages do not accumulate.
The more they do for others, the more they have;
The more they give to others the more they possess.
The Way of Heaven is to benefit and not to harm.
The Way of the sage is to act but not contend.” (ch. 81)

Last, it is fitting we quote Sun Tzu (c. 6th century B.C.), who in his well known *The Art of War* states: “To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”

Greece

In the books of Proverbs and Wisdom, we see the Jews, in this case the *colony* in Alexandria, very much picking up from the Greeks, and imbibing and assimilating Greek mind. Yet in Maccabees the Greeks are represented in a negative fashion. The conclusion perhaps to be drawn from this is that both are to some extent true. The Jews took in Greek virtues, while attempting to resist the latter’s vices; vices at least as seen as being such in the mind of Jewish thinking. It was from this assimilation that we find the saying in Proverbs 17:24 written by an Alexandrian Jew:

“The man of intelligence fixes his gaze on wisdom,
But the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth.”

And in the book of Wisdom 8:7, written about 100 B.C., we read

“For she [Wisdom] teaches moderation and prudence,
Justice and fortitude,
And nothing in life is more useful to men than these.”

Both passages seem (in their content) much like something from Plato, while Wisdom 7:24:

“For wisdom is mobile beyond all motion,
And she penetrates and pervades all,”

sounds like something taken verbatim from early Stoic thought.

We noted already that the New Testament is written in Greek, and time and again we find Greek cultural, intellectual, and stylistic influence in the gospels. The use of logic and dialectical reasoning in Christ’s exchanges with the Scribes and Pharisees, reference to Greek drama in the frequent use of the word “hypocrite,” show that Greek culture was never far away from activities of Christ and his apostles.

The cults of Orpheus and Dionysus¹³⁵ share certain affinities with later Christian beliefs, particularly in their being centered in and around a dying and resurrecting god (like Egypt's Osiris which we spoke of previously.) Cults such as those based around Pythagoreanism and the Eleusian mysteries carried on practices relating to purification, sometimes involving lustration or baptism.

In the several exiles, enslavements, and executions of a number of the Greek philosophers, such as Zeno of Elea, Anaxagoras, and Socrates, we see persecutions and martyrdom; such as several of the prophets suffered.¹³⁶

Here follows a brief sampling of statements of Greek authors which have ostensive parallel with something said in the Gospels or Epistles. Again, one must be extremely cautious when considering who said what first and when. What might seem like an original Greek idea may be something which, albeit expressed in a somewhat different manner, is something which already had been stated in the Bible or found elsewhere, such as among the Egyptians.¹³⁷ Of course, the reverse may be true, etc. What seems to have been first said in the Bible might turn out to have its precedent in Greek, Egyptian, or some other's thought.

* *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

“Blessed is he upon earth who has seen these [Mysteries]. But he who is uninitiated and does not share in them will never enjoy the same fortune after death; he must go down to the place of gloomy darkness, ”

* Ancient Orphic Adage

“God holds the beginning and the end, as well as the middle, of all that exists.”

¹³⁵ Heraclitus in a fragment derisively refers to Dionysus as Hades; so it is tempting to consider to see Christianity as possibly in some ways an inversion and transformation of Dionysian beliefs.

¹³⁶ “And those of the Stoic school -- since, so far as their moral teaching went, they were admirable, as were also the poets in some particulars, on account of the seed of reason [the Logos] implanted in every race of men -- were, we know, hated and put to death -- Heraclitus for instance, and, among those of our own time, Musonius and others. For, as we intimated, the devils have always effected, that all those who anyhow live a reasonable and earnest life, and shun vice, be hated. And it is nothing wonderful; if the devils are proved to cause those to be much worse hated who live not according to a part only of the word diffused [among men] but by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ...” ~ Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, ch. 8. Justin further, in chapter 10 of the same, goes on to state: “Our [i.e., Christian] doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. For I whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they I did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves. And those who by human birth were more ancient than Christ, when they attempted to consider and prove things by reason, were brought before the tribunals as impious persons and busybodies. And Socrates, who was more zealous in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves. For they said that he was introducing new divinities, and did not consider those to be gods whom the state recognised. But he cast out from the state both Homer and the rest of the poets, and taught men to reject the wicked demons and those who did the things which the poets related; and he exhorted them to become acquainted with the God who was to them unknown, by means of the investigation of reason, saying, ‘That it is neither easy to find the Father and Maker of all, nor, having found Him, is it safe to declare Him to all.’ But these things our Christ did through His own power. For no one trusted in Socrates so as to die for this doctrine, but in Christ, who was partially known even by Socrates (for He was and is the Word who is in every man, and who foretold the things that were to come to pass both through the prophets and in His own person when He was made of like passions, and taught these things), not only philosophers and scholars believed, but also artisans and people entirely uneducated, despising both glory, and fear, and death; since He is a power of the ineffable Father, not the mere instrument of human reason.”

¹³⁷ It was generally held by the early Church fathers that Greek philosophy and ideas about God originated with or were in large part plagiarized from the more ancient Jews.

* Homer

There are intriguing parallels in the return of Odysseus to Ithaca, and the latter's taking on the guise of a lowly servant and then wreaking vengeance on the suitors, with the sometimes similes Christ uses to describe the judgment and retribution of the returning Landlord (or his son) on the treacherous usurpers and tenants of the vineyard (in e.g., Matthew 21: 33-46; Mark 12:1-12; and Luke 20:9.) In addition, Homer, and Virgil as well, are on occasion given to using "shepherd" as a poetical title for someone who is a leader of his people.

* Hesiod, *Works and Days*¹³⁸

"I say important things for you to hear,
O foolish Perses: Badness can be caught
In great abundance, easily; the road
To her is level and she lives nearby.
But Good is harder, for the gods have placed
In front of her, much sweat; the road is steep
And long and rocky at the first, but when
You reach the top, she is not hard to find."

* Theognis of Megara, (early 6th century B.C.), *Elegies*,

"Do good and you'll receive it. Why send out Announcements. News of good work travels fast."

"Good becomes bad more easily than bad turns good."

"Don't make your pain worse by worrying
About what can't be done; don't vex yourself..."

* Pittacus (c. 600 B.C.)

"Mercy is better than vengeance."¹³⁹

* Thales of Miletus

"Some one asked him whether a man could hide an evil deed from the gods. 'No,' he replied, 'nor yet an evil thought.'"¹⁴⁰

* Bias (c. 570 B.C.)

"When an impious man asked him to define piety he was silent, and when the other inquired the reason, 'I am silent,' he replied, 'because you are asking questions about what does not concern you.'"¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Dorothea Wender, translator.

¹³⁹ D.L., *Lives*, I.77. This and many of the following sayings are from Diogenes Laertius, wrote about 2nd century AD, so it might (at least in theory) be argued the sayings he quotes are perhaps in some way drawn, indeed perhaps plagiarized, from the gospels. While it would it would be wrong to dismiss this as absolutely impossible, it naturally seems much more reasonable to assume that the quotes are more or less authentic, and these Greek thinkers, if anything, directly or indirectly, may have influenced or at least been in some way known to New Testament authors.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* I.35-36.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* I.86.

* Aesop, the fabulist (c. mid 6th century B.C.)

“Aesop replied to Chilon when asked what was Zeus doing “He is humbling the proud and exalting the humble.”¹⁴²

* Pythagoras of Croton

“No man is wise, but God alone.”¹⁴³

“Friends have all things in common,” and “Friendship is equality.”¹⁴⁴

“So to behave one to another as not to make friends into enemies, but turn enemies into friends.”¹⁴⁵

“Of salt he said it should be brought to the table to remind us of what is right; for salt preserves whatever it finds, and it arises from the purest sources, sun and sea.”¹⁴⁶

* Anaxagoras of Clazomenae

“When someone asked him [Anaxagoras], “Don’t you have any concern for your native land?” he replied with a gesture toward the sky, ‘Speak better and say that my native land is just what does concern me.’”¹⁴⁷

* Plato

While we need not quote him here, Plato rejected crude *lex talionis* such as in his dialogues *Crito* and the *Republic*. No doubt drawing from Socrates’ example, he taught it was better to suffer injustice than to do it. See *Crito* 47d-48a , 48b-c, 49c-d; *Republic* I.335a-e, I.353d-354a.

In 2nd *Alcibiades*, Socrates suggests to the youth that he should ask God (Zeus) for wisdom first and before anything else, in effect mirroring Solomon’s wish in *1st Kings* 3:5-12 and *2nd Chron.* 1:7-11, and which suggestion on Socrates’ part, as Joseph Addison observes (see *The Spectator* 201, 207), anticipates the Lord’s Prayer, i.e., “thy will be done.” Of course, several of the early Church Fathers, such as Justin, Tatian and Clement of Alexandria, were quick to argue and conclude that much if not all of Greek wisdom and philosophy that was of any worth originated with and grew out of the Old Testament.

* Democritus of Abdera (c.460-c.370 B.C.)

from Golden Maxims

43. Repentance for shameful deeds is the salvation of life.

45. He who wrongs is more wretched than he who is wronged.

¹⁴² Ibid I.69.

¹⁴³ Ibid.I.12.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. VIII.10.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. VIII.23.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. VIII.35.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.II.7.

- 46. Greatness of soul is to bear troubles patiently.
- 48. The good man does not value the fault-finding of the wicked.
- 89. The enemy is not he who injures, but he who wants to.
- 90. The enmity of one's kinsfolk is worse than that of strangers.

* School of Hegesias of Magnesia, (or followers of Hegesias, c. 300 B.C.)

"They affirmed that allowance should be made for errors, for no man errs voluntarily, but under constraint of some suffering; that we should not hate men, but rather teach them better."¹⁴⁸

* Bion, originally from Scythia, (c.3rd century B.C.)

"To be unable to bear an ill is itself a great ill."¹⁴⁹

"He used to say that to grant favors to another was preferable to enjoying the favors of others."¹⁵⁰

* Epicurus of Samos (c.342?-270 B.C.)

Adherents of Epicurus, or members of "the garden" (school) as it was known, were very family-like, and addressed each other as friends and intimates. Yet one would have to stretch meanings a bit to take Epicurean maxims like "Live your life without attracting attention,"¹⁵¹ and "Health and tranquility of the soul are the final end of the happy life," and reconcile them with Christian belief. Yet there is *some* kinship after all; since Christians value happiness highly also. According to Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus said that a follower of his "will on occasion die for a friend."¹⁵² Diogenes also says he taught that not all sins are equal, in contrast to the Stoics, such as Chrysippus; who generally believed the reverse. In this respect, the Epicurean view was more like that of the Christians than their rivals.

* The Cynics (c. 4th century B.C.)

In their renunciation of goods and conventions of this world for something higher, and their view of a brotherhood of all mankind, the original Cynics were somewhat Christian-like. Diogenes of Sinope (c. 400-325 B.C.), their most well known expounder, thought nothing of thumbing his nose at authority and shocking people; no doubt in the interest of stirring them to think, or better yet, to re-think, what they believed and assumed. It was from a Cynic, Crates of Thebes (c.365-285 B.C.) that Zeno (the Stoic) was introduced to the idea of a single political order spanning the inhabited world, and from which we get the "Catholic" or universal viewpoint of a social order. This said, notably absent from Cynicism was the empathy and compassion essential to Christian teaching.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. II.95.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.IV.48

¹⁵⁰ Ibid IV.49.

¹⁵¹ There were Epicureans even so, such as some later in Rome, however, who were altruistic and civic minded as any of their citizen peers.

¹⁵² Ibid X.120.

* The Stoics (c.4th century B.C. to about the 2nd century A.D.)

Though as already noted, there were significant differences between Stoicism and Christianity; even so, the Stoic influence on Christianity might be considered quite great. But this is perhaps not so surprising when we realize how much Stoic-like teaching there is in other major religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Native American teachings. All of these, in their independent way, tell us not to give into bodily appetites and excessive emotion; to seek to be indifferent to physical suffering; while encouraging us to strength our resolve with such determination as will surmount all the various kinds of adversity life and circumstances might burden one with. Some of these faiths or their sects share the fatalist and deterministic viewpoint that many Stoics maintained.

“Everything that is morally right is advantageous, and there can be no advantage in something not morally right,” is one Stoic view that accords well with Christian teaching. Already we have noticed how the Stoics contributed the concept of “logos,” to John’s gospel. St. Paul, as others have noted, makes clear reference to well known Stoic ideas in his letters. Christ taking up his cross could be considered the ultimate example of doing one’s duty. Yet the very term “duty” is said to have been first introduced by Zeno of Citium (334-c.262 B.C.)

Probably the main problem with Stoicism was that while its high ideals sounded attractive, living up to them for most people was just too demanding. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) has been described by author Michael Grant as someone who stands halfway between the agnostic who claims that man can be good without whole-hearted adherence to a clearly defined religion, and the Christian who rejects such a notion. And what we find is that even wonderful and virtue espousing persons like Cicero and Seneca sometimes fell embarrassingly short of the Stoic injunctions they had been teaching and writing to advise others about.

For Augustine, the weakness of Stoicism was in its morals; which for all the benevolence they not infrequently advocated, were, at the end of the day, simply too proud and selfish. Or put differently, the Stoics were seen as not (or very seldom) practicing what they preached.

Eusebius says Justin Martyr convicted the philosophers of fraud and gluttony. And Augustine further complained, “How could I expect the Platonists books would ever teach me charity?”¹⁵³ Yet not even these would or could deny the value and help philosophy was and had been to them. So the criticism was not really against philosophy, but against the course philosophy had succumbed to; while emphatically exhorting their hearers to the *higher course* it needed to follow. ¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ *Confessions*, VII.20.

¹⁵⁴ We would not, at least not ordinarily, look to Latin literature for New Testament antecedents, yet it won’t hurt to mention in passing Virgil’s famous Fourth *Eclogue* (circa 40 B.C.); which has by some, as far back and including St. Augustine, been interpreted as prophetically predicting Christ and an accompanying new age.

Hebraic and Jewish

In the Old Testament we find all kinds of parallels to Christ's person and story. Whatever our religious disposition, there is a wonderful historical and literary continuity to be found between New and Old Testament. Christ himself made a connection between Abel and the slain prophets, and was himself later said to represent all of them. The story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis is full of possible Christian meaning: Joseph rejected and betrayed by his brothers, rises to a high station, and later forgives, saves, and reunites his brothers. Elisha's role as miracle worker, even to the extent of multiplying loaves of bread, anticipates the activity of Christ's ministry.

Aside from the obvious role of scriptural Judaism on Christianity, the Jews possessed a number of wise and learned rabbis, notably Rabbi Hillel (30 B.C.-9 A.D.), who expounded ideas similar or identical to those expressed by Christ. Who knows, as well, what other Jewish literature might have been available to New Testament writers as models and inspirations but which are now lost?

Since it is done so regularly by preachers and clergy, I don't see much need to cite like-sounding passages and references between the Old and New Testament. Yet there are two sets of verses I think which are as representative as any (though the second quote comes from Sirach is only in the Catholic, but not the Jewish and Protestant Bibles.)

Proverbs, 24:17-18:

“Rejoice not when your enemy falls,
and when he stumbles, let not your heart exult.
Lest the Lord see it, be displeased with you,
And withdraw his wrath from your enemy.”

Sirach: 28:2-3:

“Forgive your neighbor's injustice;
Then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.
Should a man nourish anger against his fellows,
Yet seek pardon for his own sins?”

4. The New Testament

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.”
~~ Isaiah 11:1-4

One thing that makes the New Testament so different from most of the Old Testament is that it was originally written, not in Hebrew,¹⁵⁵ but commonly spoken (i.e., Koine) Greek, as opposed to the refined Greek of more educated people. The actual spoken language of the people of the four gospels was usually Aramaic; though, depending on the situation or circumstances, Hebrew, Greek and Latin were all used in given quarters. The earliest Latin Christian document of a literary sort dates from 166 A.D.; so that for the faith's first few centuries and outside of Italy and North Africa, Greek was the predominant means of written, and presumably spoken, communication among believers.

As generally understood, the more meaningful distinction between the Old and the New Testaments, as interpreted by Christians, is that the one represents the Old Law, the other the New Law; in effect reminding us, along with the many covenants of Israel and the Jews with God, that justice as realized for mankind is something evolving, both inwardly (going from Mosaic Law, to the Prophets, to Christ), and outwardly (from Christ, the Jews, and Israel to humanity.) This main theme we will pick up on as we get further. Yet for the moment, a look at the particular character and possible source of many Christian ideas and beliefs deserves taking a special look at.

The literary style of the four gospels is of course startlingly fresh and spirited. They are holy books, historical narrative, poetry, philosophical discourse, comedy, tragedy; while at the same time entirely unique in their own right. In some respect, they resemble the temple oracles of many ancient societies, carefully worded, and containing wide varieties of important meaning; only with the difference that with the Gospels the “oracle” is conveyed by means of a narrative and, of course, the message conveyed is usually one with eternal, rather than momentary or temporal, meaning and significance.

¹⁵⁵ Though some books of the Old Testament contains, such as Wisdom, were also originally written in Greek.

According to the very early church historian Papias (who, by the way, is not a canonized saint, despite his being one of the very earliest followers of the apostles; as well as being one of the first extant sources of Christian teaching and history, not counting the New Testament itself), St. Peter the apostle was reluctant to have Christ's story and teaching written down. While he did not forbid it, neither did he encourage it. When, however, Mark did write down his gospel, based on notes taken from his preaching, Peter is reported then to have viewed the idea favorably. The original apostles had the Word or oral tradition directly, and evidently did not have or need a written text to go to in order to share Christ's message. At that time, imbued with the spirit, in no small part imbued by Christ's example, word of mouth was seen as more than sufficient; the difference perhaps being likened to music being performed versus music written down. Each might be said to have certain advantages which its complement lacks.

The gospels (whether we mean the works of the four evangelists, or include the writings of Paul and the Epistle writers) should be understood according to their purpose for which they were written; which was bringing to diverse peoples, sometimes by means of *popular* ideas and expressions, Christ's message and teaching. This sending out of the gospel was the early church's more immediate and priority concern, not scientific-historical accuracy and theological preciseness. Only after weathering many violent and bloody persecutions, and more firmly established, by about the 3rd and 4th century, could the church afford the luxury of erudite history and theological philosophy.

Paul and the writers of the four gospels, it must be recollected, were people living in an age of most extreme violence, political pressure and persecution. So that in attending to the crisis and promise of their time, they were forced to neglect other matters which would have been of interest and importance to us of a later date. It seems at minimum reasonable to give them the benefit of the doubt that such was the case. When then we assess the books and writings of the New Testament (or any of the Bible for that matter), we ought to take care in determining exactly what criteria should be used (and are available) for establishing a given book's purpose, credibility, and worth. For instance, should scientific history be of most concern to us? Morality? Aesthetics (including poetry)? Theological and philosophical consistency? Popular culture and story telling? Studies in comparative religious literature? Church and community needs of the then present day? Such, we might infer, was sometimes the dilemma the writers of the New Testament themselves probably faced at one point or another.

5. Christ Historically

“No one has ever known the Father except the Son, and no one has known the Son fully except the Father.”

~~ Matthew 11:27

Much has been written in the past few decades, indeed since the 19th century, on both the main personages and writings of the New Testament, including the “historical” Jesus, using more scientific methods of analysis, study and research. It is unnecessary and beyond the scope of this work to probe too deeply into these studies and researches, and their related issues; so voluminous have been the findings and conclusions of scholars and historians. Even so, we can afford to touch on (at least very briefly) a few special points and questions that have arisen or been raised concerning the “historical” Jesus.¹⁵⁶

It is by no means always plain or evident how something about Christ and His life should be construed, and at times we are simply left to guessing how to interpret what is reported about him. Some stories and anecdotes strike one as rather peculiar: such as his somewhat hesitant behavior at the onset of his ministry as given in Mark; the parable of the false steward (Luke 16:1-9); cursing a fig tree for not being ripe *out of season* (Mark 11: 12-14); his insistent commands to act utterly and completely and leaving no apparent room for reasonable compromise, as when he tells the would be follower “let the dead bury their dead.” But then many a preacher and priest will have taken up these sorts of topics routinely in sermons, and those looking can find some explication there.

As one of the most powerful, striking, and controversial personalities it is not at all surprising that he would be seen differently by different people. Any number of persons might gaze and think on someone and come up with quite different conclusions, whether as to value or fact. In *Peithology*, I raise the question, did the real Daniel Boone even know who the real Daniel Boone was? How much perhaps more difficult it is for another to know who a given person is “really.” To what extent was “Jesus Christ,” that is, he whom people saw and heard the same as the real Jesus? For example, if our ideas about someone are prejudice or colored, we might not be able to see them as they rightly merit, and as a result come up in our minds with a false picture of them. Is it possible therefore that none or not everyone, including eyewitness and those close to him, could see him as he truly was? It is, I think it will be agreed, not at all unusual for people to look at someone or something and, for various possible reasons or other, and not be able to appreciate that someone or something’s true worth, or *compose* in their minds a wholly fair and accurate picture of who or what they are seeing and or hearing.

To make matters even more puzzling, note how Jesus could be present, right in their midst, and those who had been with him so many times before did not know or could not recognize who it was: for example, in his walking on the water, the disciples initially thought it was a ghost, Mark 6:49; at the resurrection, the women at the tomb

¹⁵⁶ Some (of a number) of the books I’ve found both very helpful and informative on this and related topics are: John and Kathleen Court’s *The New Testament World*; David L. Edwards’ *The Real Jesus*; Howard Clark Kee’s *Jesus in History*; and Carsten Thiede’s *Jesus: Life or Legend?*

took him to be a gardener, John 20: 14-15; only after a considerable time had past did his followers on the road to Emmaus realize who he was; Luke 24:13-35; likewise, there is the episode at end of John's gospel where the apostles are fishing, John 21:4.

As is already well known, the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke drew for their respective writings, from a now lost collection of sayings that has been denoted "Q" (taken from the German word "quelle" which means "source.") Mark, rather than Matthew is believed have appeared first (chronologically), followed by Luke, and John (the latter initially was almost not accepted in the canon.) Paul's and most the epistles in turn preceded all of these.

The four gospels make no reference to Paul, and the latter sometimes speaks of things regarding Jesus and his teaching not mentioned in the gospels. Each in his way provides his own unique witness. This, it would seem, tends to corroborate a powerful idea and reality of Jesus; which existed independently of any of these writers, and thus (in my opinion) demonstrates the New Testament's fundamental authenticity as a record. For, despite their differences, their *core notions* and *essential conceptions* are the same; while at the same time each brings Jesus so vividly to life in how they describe or make reference to him.

Yet out of all that they write, how much can be said to correspond or be consistent with the, empirically speaking, real or historical Jesus? This is a more difficult question. But the long and short of it seems to me, simply, that some of what they say is true,¹⁵⁷ some isn't (perhaps, in a given instance, because some later interpolator wrote the particular passage or sentence), and some is possibly only partly true, and requires much qualification. Such, at least, is my own sense of the matter; which you will know here in advance of what further else there is to be said on or relating to this topic.

Yet though the written Gospels or Paul *may* be in error, say, in what they report as historical fact or state as Christian belief, this of course, doesn't necessarily mean Christ was in error.

Much of what we find the New Testament is frankly puzzling or confusing. But this, it seems to me, is only a problem if we insist on seeing all of what it contains as being divine, and lose sight of how much is or might be simply human. A New Testament author or personage acting in an event may have been writing or acting with regard to the cares of the moment, and did not, nor had reason to give thought to what were supposed to be the church's long term needs or interests; though granted their neglecting to do so does or might perplex us today.

There are not a few mysteries and points for speculation about the historical Jesus and the New Testament writings and era. One could go on perhaps forever addressing these, and the literature confirms this. Here we can provide a few more samples of these to illustrate their general character.

¹⁵⁷ Including things that might sound very strange or unbelievable to us.

* Though usually adroit, at thwarting his opponent's verbal attacks, when Jesus is accused by some Pharisees of casting out demons by the Prince of demons, his argument in response, "A house divided cannot stand," is not really all that logically convincing. If for the sake of argument he did work for the Prince of Demons would he not lie, and use the pre-arranged casting out of spirits to secure people's confidence?¹⁵⁸

* At times spirit people, such as angels (whether good or bad angels) are real, are made mention of, sometimes playing an important part in a gospel event, such as in the Annunciation and Nativity drama, or the casting out of demons into the Gerasene swine herd? Is it possible for us to speak about them as specific historical persons? If not, why not?

* What are we to make about a story like Herod's massacre of the innocent given in Luke? Is it really fair to conclude (as some have) that because other contemporaries, such as Josephus, do not mention the event, it follows that it did not actually take place?¹⁵⁹

* What became of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised?

* Why doesn't John's gospel make reference to apparently important incidents at which the apostle John was present and which are mentioned in the synoptic Gospels?

* In Matthew 11:14 and 17: 11-13, Jesus states that John the Baptist was Elijah returned. In what way was it possible that John could be Elijah?

* How could an entire religion, that has lasted millennia and spread throughout the entire world, be founded on a single individual who had been publicly executed?

Hyperbole is an effective device Jesus sometimes avails himself of in order to make his message clear and vivid, using exaggeration successfully to make the given point more affecting and forceful to his listeners. He also was adept at using logic, humor, invocations of hope, and dread, to enhance the effectiveness of his teaching. Yet all these were only parts of a larger arsenal of expression that took on many forms; both in what he said and how he acted.

Except for a purported letter to King Abgar of Edessa that Eusebius examines, Christ left no writings. The Beatitudes are understandably looked upon as perhaps his most perfect and eloquent statement left to us; though the Last Supper discourses found in John are also especially profound, moving and wisdom filled.

Two curious phrases he uses are "Let him who has ears hear, " and "Let him who can accept this teaching accept it." As tautological imperatives pulled out of the air which say nothing themselves, these are odd, and in some respects (though not exclusively)

¹⁵⁸ Some overtly hostile, including some contemporary Jewish sources and other antagonists of the early church, refer to Christ as a magician.

¹⁵⁹ I myself am much inclined to believe the story is true, but the question, nonetheless, is a legitimate one.

humorous ways of speaking. Apparently their purpose is to enjoin his listener to *think more* or *think again* about the significance of what he otherwise happened to be speaking about, including why he was saying it.

In a very meaningful way, the story of “Christ” is not just the story of Jesus, but the story of Jesus *and* his followers, and in that sense, his mother, and his followers can appropriately be seen as aspects of “Jesus” himself.

As to how one should construe the miracles in the Bible people will differ. Whether this or that otherwise inexplicable event or account (the turning of water into wine for example) took place, or whether it took place but perhaps not quite as described, is ultimately for each person to decide for themselves. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, edited a personal Bible for himself in which he largely omitted them. My own view is that it depends on the miracle in question, and whether or not it should be received literally; while allowing that howsoever astounding as something sounds it may, nevertheless, have taken place, and or was *at least* based in a quite real and meaningful event of some sort.

“Q” contains only one specific reference to a miracle;¹⁶⁰ though it does include Jesus’ relayed message to John the Baptist in which he states: “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are brought good news.”

Something like the question of the Virgin birth is a major point for many in Christian belief, and we simply have no way of determining historically or scientifically the truth of the matter. It is worth noting that in all the New Testament only Luke speaks of it; while other of the evangelists perhaps suggest Mary had children afterward. Jesus is said to have had brothers and sisters. Naturally, how very interesting it would be to have more specific information about who they were; not least so if Mary was their mother. Possibly the virgin birth is something of a riddle, like the riddle of the sphinx; which has an answer and explanation which would not have occurred to most, yet which would make clear sense to us, without compromising its divine nature. Be this as it might, the questions such as that of the virgin birth is a simply a point of subjective faith one can chose or not choose to accept, and for our intended impartiality here, at least for the time being, we will simply leave it at that; yet and while fully respecting that for some denominations the particular or given point in question is a necessary and inalienable component of their faith and doctrine.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ That is the incident of the Centurion and his servant. See Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10, John 4:46-53.

¹⁶¹ Zarathustra and Buddha were said to have been born from a virgin. Also, Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess is hailed as Holy virgin in some ancient texts.

6. The Cross

“Try to do something for your people -- something difficult. Have pity on your people and love them. If a man is poor, help him. Give him and his family food, give them whatever they ask for. If there is discord among your people, intercede.

“Take your sacred pipe and walk into their midst. Die if necessary in your attempt to bring about reconciliation. Then, when order has been restored and they see you lying dead on the ground, still holding in your hand the sacred pipe, the symbol of peace and reconciliation, then assuredly they will know that you have been a real chief.”

~~ Lesson of the Winnebago¹⁶²

Christ’s actual name was Y’eshua, Jeshua or Joshua, which means “salvation” or “God Saves.” Joshua of the old testament, as you may recall, was, along with Caleb, the only one of the original Israelites to enter the promised land. The translation “Jesus,” as such, is the anglicized version of the Greek “Iesus” derived from Y’eshua.

What, to say the least, an extraordinary effect this man had on mankind in the short space of a mere three years! Who else with so little (in the worldly sense) could have accomplished so much and of lasting and wide reaching effect in such an incredibly brief span? Even the Buddha started out materially wealthy, and Mohammed was relatively well to do. Not so Christ.

If there are claims about specific incidents in Christ’s life based on the gospels which are open to question or susceptible to varied interpretation, the basic outline and his achievement speak with an unadorned and forthright clarity. In this way, Christ’s primary life deeds and main actions (i.e., his ministry followed by the cross) manifest him to us more profoundly and eloquently than his sayings. This is not to make light of his spoken wisdom, but rather to better highlight the consummate and unparalleled greatness and of his life and actions. One thing that so impressed the Greeks and Romans of the first centuries A.D. about Christ was that he backed up his words with deeds. When Christ in Gethsemane says “not mine Father, but thy will be done,” he was articulating something a Stoic would have immediately grasped as time honored wisdom. Yet most western people are familiar with this sense of highest duty, not because of the Stoics, but because of Christ. Evidently the reason for this is that *example* teaches conduct better than verbal instruction. We are reminded then of Poor Richard’s “Well done is better than well said;” though in Christ’s case his *spoken* wisdom is of the highest character as well. And of all he ever said and did, including his tireless charity, raising up the lowly, and reaching out to assist others, it was suffering the cross for the sake of redeeming humanity that stands as the loftiest of all triumphs.

In his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, John Locke wrote: “Experience shews that the knowledge of morality, by mere natural light (how agreeable soever it be to it), makes but a slow progress and little advance in the world. And the reason of it is not hard to be found in men’s necessities, passions, vices, and mistaken interests, which turn their

¹⁶² *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*, edited by Kent Nerburn.

thoughts another way. And the designing leaders, as well as the following herd, find it not to their purpose to employ much of their meditations this way. Or *whatever else was the cause, 'tis plain in fact, that human reason unassisted, failed men in its great and proper business of morality.* [my italics] It never, from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the law of Nature. And he that shall collect all the moral rules of the philosophers, and compare them with those contained in the new testament, will find them to come short of the morality delivered up by Our Savior, and taught by his apostles; a college made up, for the most part, of ignorant, but inspired fishermen.”¹⁶³

The gospel story of the Passion, and aside from accounts of some individual battles (such as in Herodotus and Caesar), is unique in all known ancient literature for furnishing a moment by moment record of historical events taking place in the space of 24 hours, and includes among its participants people from all different strata of society: rich and poor, aristocratic and plebian. It is truly remarkable in just these respects alone, whether or not you are a believing Christian. Clearly something extraordinarily dramatic occurred in those days leading up to the Passover in Jerusalem in the days of Pontius Pilate’s rule as procurator that it should be recounted so vividly, and in such close and singular detail. Some might be put off by the idea of (such as) mere fishermen from Galilee, without much of any formal education, should rise to such supreme eminence as the church ascribes to them. But the message here is that God, if he so chooses, can taken even the most humble of persons and raise them in status and importance far above the most famous, most powerful, and illustrious of emperors, kings, and others associated with highest human greatness and achievement.

With the Passion story, we again encounter the question -- is this or that fact, episode or detail actually true? There is nothing in it that seems implausible; though some might object to the earthquakes, the rending of the veil in the Temple, and the appearance of the departed in the city. Some, including some Moslems, question whether Jesus actually died on the cross. Somewhat similarly, others have suggested a conspiracy of some sort in which Jesus’ death was a masquerade. Again, here we come to a point where otherwise well-known events might be open to different interpretation depending on one’s initial beliefs and assumptions. Though a Christian rejects such ideas, as that Christ’s death was feigned, it is only just and impartial to at least make note of such alternative explanations of events which others have raised or suggested.

One of the things that first strikes us is how Christ not only willingly accepts his cross, but goes forward to take it up. Though such heroism might not be at all a common event, we can nevertheless understand how brave soldiers might willingly give their lives as did the Spartans and Thespians at Thermopylae¹⁶⁴ or the elders of Rome sacrificing themselves to the Gauls during the siege of Rome (found in Livy, Book V) as a matter of

¹⁶³ *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 241. Although Locke, of course, did not have available to him the biographies and moral teachings of saints and sages of the far east, the story of Christ’s ministry, death and resurrection had, relatively speaking, a greater immediacy and more ready realism than that generally found in accounts of the former. Such, at any rate, is my own impression.

¹⁶⁴ Note, incidentally, how treachery ultimately became necessary in order to bring about the undoing of the Greek soldiers defending the pass.

principle or in order to protect or rescue others.¹⁶⁵ The case of Socrates of course, dying to uphold the sanctity of the laws, is even better known. Although Socrates it must be admitted was already a relatively old man at the time of his death; not so (apparently) was Zeno of Elea who displayed the boldness and defiance of a true martyr. Laocoön, priest of Apollo, who was punished for attempting to warn the Trojans of the Greek's wooden horse (that is Laocoön tried to speak the truth to the blind and unwitting), bears a certain or somewhat resemblance to what we might imagine Christ's suffering on the cross to have been like. The story of the consul Marcus Atilius Regulus (3rd century B.C.), keeping his solemn word, and returning to face torture and death at the hands of the Carthaginian similarly comes to mind. Of course, Judaism had more than its own traditions of heroes and brave martyrs. The example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's offering themselves as sacrifice with contrite heart and humble spirit, given in the Book of Daniel,¹⁶⁶ remained centuries later an inspiration to many Christian martyrs, such as Polycarp. The account given in 2nd Maccabees of the widow and her martyred sons is as moving and shocking a tale of self-sacrifice as ever there was.

Yet who among the brave both actually prompts and assists their execution? Christ after all had ample opportunity to have escaped his trial as well as his fate, or at least so one might reasonably infer. Such as Alphonsus Ligouri and Fulton Sheehan, among others, observed, he lived *his entire life* looking to the cross; such that he suffered its anticipation while otherwise trying to live and fulfill his life's duties like anyone else. What must have been his feelings at the Cana wedding, having to relinquish such youthful joy in his own life in order to fulfill his very grim and incomprehensibly painful mission? "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."¹⁶⁷

Were the charges leveled against Jesus fair; was he guilty of anything? By the standards of his time, yes, he may well in some way have been. But even if we grant this, for example that he blasphemed by stating or implying he was the Son of God, or incited sedition by saying he would destroy the temple in three days, his surreptitious arrest, the loose procedure of his trial and concomitant violent treatment was quite clearly a mockery of justice and a travesty of the law; and a sorry reflection on the debased integrity of the sitting Sanhedrin.

Pilate, it seems likely, believed Jesus *was* the Jews' king and thought scornfully if they, the Jews, wanted to kill him they were free to do so; as far as he was concerned. Otherwise, he washed his hands of the matter, or so he thought. Following the text of the Apostle's Creed where it reads "crucified under Pontius Pilate" such washing apparently availed little. Pilate conceivably could have refused to execute him, based on 1. Jesus was already unjustly scourged in appeasement, 2. He did not deserve death, as theological infighting was no concern of Rome's, 3. It was not for Rome (or at least it was out of its character) to give into the heavy handed and unreasonable pressures of her subjects. Indeed it was impolitic for Rome to concede when their subject's demands were both

¹⁶⁵ Similar stories of selfless heroism can be found in Cornelius Nepos.

¹⁶⁶ This occurrence took place prior to Thermopylae (the 5th century), but was written about much later; that is in the 2nd century B.C.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 8:20.

unjust and irrelevant to the interests and concerns of Rome. Apparently, however, Pilate felt political expediency of the moment excused the position he was adopting.¹⁶⁸

Quite hideously Christ's very limbs are used to hang him in punishment; as if parts of his own person were used as tools to hurt him; as if his hands and feet were nothing more than boards of wood themselves. To add to the malice of it all, perhaps the wood reminded Christ of his youth as a carpenter, as a way to devilishly mock and intimidate him. At the same time, the wounds from his scourging, pressed up as they were upon the wood of the cross, must have contributed greatly to his suffering, not to mention the lacerations caused by the crown of thorns. One wonders what thoughts passed through his mind as he looked down from the cross; perhaps seeing his mother he thought of his hopeful and happy childhood; in stark contrast to the omnipresent atmosphere of evil with which he was now surrounded. "...this is your hour, and the power of darkness."¹⁶⁹

He was innocent himself, but was taking on the guilt of others and everything else around him made it seem as if he was guilty. If then he was guilty in the place of others, how could he have thought of heaven? It must then it seems have taken took extraordinary faith and an unparalleled effort of love to have said to the repentant thief "this day thou shall be with me in paradise."

And yet he bore his suffering with the utmost grace and manliness, and rather than pity himself pitied both his executioners as well as the inhabitants of the city. While undergoing suffering that passes description, he cried out "My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?" so that those who renounced God could believe in him also and be saved.

What a most poignant moment and quiet kind of irony it was when, after much of the anger, jeering and abuse had subsided, he broke the silence with "I thirst," asking so little after giving so much. At what time else could one have found more reason to love and adore him?

*You made us look foolish.
We could not have expected any such thing,
to come from you;
what you did and what you suffered.
We thought our wisdom knew better...*

*We thought we knew what love was...
but you put us to shame,*

*Yet in realizing our folly and conceit,
we do not so much feel less,*

¹⁶⁸ Justin Martyr in his First Apology makes reference to an Acts of Pilate, a formal state document since lost; in which Pilate reported to Rome about Jesus and his activities.

¹⁶⁹ Luke 22:53.

*but rather feel a desire and inspiration
to be with and more like you.*¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ 1st John, ch. 3: 23-24: “And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.” And when one reads passages like this, who and what should they think of Jesus Christ as being? A mere religious figure? An actor in a grand drama? A cosmic statesman? I would say instead, think of Him as someone who, in deliberately sacrificing his life to save others, is the most noble and courageous person you could at any time possibly imagine. This, as much as anything else, is how He should be thought of; though without detracting from or making light of divine qualities attributed to him by theology. For if there was or is that kind of person, what individual of worldly fame and success can, in hearts that live and feel deeply, begin to compare with Him? And even if we are not sure historically what he was like, we cannot doubt for a moment what he should have been.

7. Some Implications of the Cross ¹⁷¹

“He reached out from on high
and grasped me;
He drew me out of the deep waters.
He rescued me from my mighty enemy
and from my foes,
who were too powerful for me.
They attacked me in the day of my calamity,
But the Lord came to my support.
He set me free in the open,
and rescued me because he loves me.”
~~ Psalm 18:17-20

“Christ, the Son of God, by the command of the Father, became conversant with the visible creature, in order that, by overturning the dominion of the tyrants, the demons, that is, He might deliver our souls from their dreadful bondage, by reason of which our whole nature, intoxicated by the draughts of iniquity, had become full of tumult and disorder, and could by no means return to the remembrance of good and useful things. Wherefore, also, it was the more easily carried away to idols, inasmuch as evil had overwhelmed it entirely, and had spread over all generations, on account of the change which had come over our fleshy tabernacles in consequence of disobedience; until Christ, the Lord, by the flesh in which He lived and appeared, weakened the force of Pleasure's onslaughts, by means of which the infernal powers that were in arms against us reduced our minds to slavery, and freed mankind from all their evils. For with this end the Lord Jesus both wore our flesh, and became man, and by the divine dispensation was nailed to the cross; in order that by the flesh in which the demons had proudly and falsely feigned themselves gods, having carried our souls captive unto death by deceitful wiles, even by this they might be overturned, and discovered to be no gods.”
~ Methodius (815–885), Three Fragments from the Homily on the Cross and Passion of Christ.¹⁷²

To comprehend the greater meaning and significance of the accomplishment of the cross is, no doubt, to be gifted with a beatific vision of some kind; being so timelessly momentous, its life and death affecting implications are sometimes forgotten, overlooked or otherwise lost on us. The image becomes too familiar, and, in the process, we risk losing the disposition and or ability to quite think about what it depicts and represents.

When Pilate asks “what is truth?” is not perhaps the answer that the crucifixion of goodness is a ubiquitous, ongoing outrage yet which is too frequently ignored; yet which as a fact or truth, and given it what it represents, speaks more loudly to people of

¹⁷¹ Others have expressed similar and different interpretations and explanations of the cross' meaning and significance. It is beyond my purpose to begin to try to examine all of these, let alone do them justice, and I will instead consider some points which particularly strike me of special significance.

¹⁷² Also “Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.” ~ 1 John, 3:8.

conscience and true heartedness than anything else? The sadness, horror, and heartbreak that has plagued mankind -- and for that matter poor animal-kind as well -- throughout history, and in current events, is so often glossed over, taken for granted, and accepted with callous indifference. In this sense, the cross is *the ultimate truth* (of all truths) that this irrational and conceited world knows, yet a truth that it disregards, and which stands as irrefutable proof of fallen man's everlasting obstinacy and incorrigibility. It says that man should you do such a thing as this, how can you not wonder what all else woes befall you? And surely we must feel likewise whenever we see *the innocent* (or else in other instances, the not *so* guilty) cruelly suffer.

Augustine states: "(Christ's death) was necessary so that human pride could be convicted and healed by the humility of God; and so that man might be shown how far he departed from God, when through God made flesh he was called back. And so that to contumacious man a model of obedience might be provided by the God-man; and so that with the Only begotten taking the form of a slave, which form had no antecedent meant, a source of grace might be opened and the resurrection of the flesh promised to the redeemed might be demonstrated in advance by the redeemed Himself, and so that the Devil might be conquered by that very nature which he rejoiced in having deceived."¹⁷³

In *Confessions* he had stated more simply, "Our life himself came down into this world and took away our death."¹⁷⁴

If we allow that "Love conquers all," including even death (Songs of Songs 8:6-7), and meaning by Love higher benevolence, charity, kindness, and mercy, what standard of hope by means of higher love is there to go by? The answer, for many, is the cross, and where else, after all, shall we find a more potent symbol and superior model of purest devotion and self-sacrifice? This becomes all the more evident when we consider the many down through the ages who made a point of reflecting and meditating upon the cross in the midst of their or others' grievous suffering; finding spiritual solace and comfort in Christ's example.

For many, Christ's cross shows us how to live, express, show, and demonstrate ultimate love. If we will believe and be willing to suffer like him, then we can make or bring who or whatever we love the most near to God, and in this way triumph over any and everything, including all pain, death, fear, and uncertainty. Such "Christ love" can make our love itself and who we love that much more partake of the divine. In the love for highest love, the cross is the breaking down of the door of finitude into the infinite. When we suffer for what is right, noble and compassionate, our ability to love, and *the value of our love* is made stronger: whether familial or charitable and empathetic, or whatever kind love that is sincere. Yet it is not strictly necessary that our suffering be particularly imposed by others persecuting us. We can suffer through self-sacrifice and self-discipline. Those who endure the cross are more worthy of being loved, and by their very act show themselves most capable of loving, or meeting the challenges of greater love. There can be no objective proof that belief in such love will be vindicated in the

¹⁷³ *Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love*, 28.108, (Jurgens, trans.)

¹⁷⁴ *Confessions*. IV.12.

way it seems to claim. But again, we take it for granted at the outset that Christianity is a faith, not a science.

Christ said: “He that saves his life will lose it. He that loses his life for righteousness sake will save it.” *How*, in this sense, does one lose one’s life? The answer is in the way Christ took up and bore his cross. Of most interest to us are the martyrs and genuine heroes. So when the martyrs were pushed to surrender their faith and principles they knew by Christ’s example how to suffer beautifully and nobly in the face of implacable evil. And one example became an example for others; who became examples for yet others, and so have and do such examples multiply and continue.

Aquinas states “Christ suffered the maximum of pain.”¹⁷⁵ But can we go further and say that no one suffered more than Christ? To begin with, the assessment of whether Christ suffered more than anyone else, of course, highly subjective, and must be seen as a (merely) plausible religious tenet, not an independently verifiable fact. Even so, for those who already believe, there are at least reasonable, if not compelling, arguments to back up such a claim.

There are, arguably, at least three basic kinds of suffering: *physical*, *emotional*, and *spiritual*. While we would expect any one or all of these to overlap in their taking place, nevertheless, they have their own obvious uniqueness and distinction. Presumably, according to this theory of Christ’s suffering, he endured the greatest sum total and combination of all three kinds of pain. Yet apparently because Jesus did not suffer all possible physical pain, and possibly not all emotional pain, he suffered greatest in spiritual pain. It could be argued that even though others might perhaps, in theory, go through more physical suffering (for example, if in addition to the scourging, crucifixion, etc. the person had a limb cut off), really that person could not suffer more than Jesus did because Jesus was pure innocence itself; which means he suffered a worse injustice than anyone; all the more so when we remember how he suffered not only the cross, but knew of and anticipated, and lived with the thought of it from a very early age.

The significance of all this is that we say Christ is and represents *all those* crucified, murdered, forgotten, that is to say all those, whether human or animal, done the most cruelty or injustice. Having suffered the greatest injustice he knows what it is like for these others, and is thus in the best possible position to be the Final Judge. Death merely causes a person or thing to cease and cannot act as ultimate moral judge. There are therefore and it would seem plausible grounds for seeing Christ as the ultimate arbiter, or the ultimate arbiter as Christ; this, in addition, to the idea that he, above all, is the one who can forgive sins having suffered the worst of its effects. Moreover, having been a mortal he qualified or in a position to better and justly judge mortals.¹⁷⁶ As a corollary to the above it could be argued that whoever suffered the worst punishment and injustice that anyone ever endured is Christ; so that this “arbiter who suffered most” principle in theory could be adopted without necessarily assuming that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, by this definition.

¹⁷⁵ *Summa. Theo.* III.46.a.6.

¹⁷⁶ He has “power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man.” John 5:27.

On another level, if we accept Christ as God, it is only befitting that he be seen as the man of most honor (God being the source of all perfections, such as honor), and for this reason be able to bear more suffering than anything he could ask of his followers; like a general who eats, sleeps, and suffers with his troops, foregoing any special privilege due his rank, for the sake of unity and true fellowship with his men. Again, this, of course, cannot be taken as proof of itself that Christ suffered more than any one has or will. But it is a belief that would logically follow upon what his purported character presupposes. One reason Christ was readily accepted by Roman soldiers and certain sorts of barbarians was that he represented an honorable lord or king who would readily lay down his own life for his men; just as his loyal followers would readily lay down their life for him: a notion readily understood by traditionally warlike peoples.

In viewing Christ's suffering these ways, he is qualified, or we might say "equipped," to save others in a way like no one else can. One might imagine a hand, a hand of empowering forgiveness, and yet justified and proven comradeship too, reaching down through the muddy waters of the pain, including pain that is the result of our own guilt (2nd Samuel 22:17). So that no matter how deep someone is in either pain and or guilt, that person might be able to grab and take hold of this rescuing hand if they so chose.

8. The Resurrection, Ascension, and the Success of the early Church

“In every city and village, churches were quickly established, filled with multitudes of people like a replenished threshing-floor. And those whose minds, in consequence of errors which had descended to them from their forefathers, were fettered by the ancient disease of idolatrous superstition, were, by the power of Christ operating through the teaching and the wonderful works of his disciples, set free, as it were, from terrible masters, and found a release from the most cruel bondage. They renounced with abhorrence every species of demoniacal polytheism, and confessed that there was only one God, the creator of all things, and him they honored with the rites of true piety, through the inspired and rational worship which has been planted by our Saviour among men.”

~~ Eusebius¹⁷⁷

The Resurrection is the fulfilled realization of the triumph of the cross. Here was a man so good, and put through so great evil that death could not contain him. And from his life, death, and resurrection, those who believe in him have the assurance that they too shall overcome the grave and come to life eternal. Once more we are reflecting on a reported historical event that will be interpreted differently by people. For some, Christ literally and physically arose out of the tomb. For others the resurrection was something spiritual, or a kind of inspiration to his followers, yet a very unique event brought about by power divine. For yet others it is merely a propaganda story or folk tale device. Once more, this question is simply a matter one has to choose and decide for oneself, and one doesn't have to look far to find supporters of these different points of view (or something similar.)

Christianity, of course, was by no means the first to suggest a positive idea of the after life. The Egyptians were among the first to propose it, and Plato's *Phaedo* is also well known for its addressing of the question; while Greek and Roman poets assumed the hope of the Elysian Fields for noble and deserving souls. Cicero, in his essay *On Old Age*, composed three quarters of a century before Jesus' ministry, movingly wrote: “What a great day it will be when I set out to join that divine assemblage and concourse of souls, and depart from the confusion and corruption of this world! I shall be going to meet not only all those of whom I have spoken [philosophers, heroes], but also my own son. No better, no more devoted man was ever born. He should have cremated my body; but I had to cremate his. Yet his soul has not gone from me, but looks back and fastens upon me its regard -- and the destination to which that soul has departed is surely the place where it knew I must come too. To the world I have seemed to bear my loss bravely. That does not mean I found it easy to bear, but I comforted myself with the belief that our parting and separation would be of short duration.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ *History of the Church*, II.3.3, G.A. Williamson, trans.

¹⁷⁸ One his characters in his *Republic* (VI.13) says: “For everyone who has saved his country, there is a sure place in heaven.”

The Ascension, given only in Luke incidentally, perhaps seems more strange to us. Yet if we pose Heaven as being, say, in another dimension, the ascension may be said to make sense. That Christ should ascend to the mere physical sky, or that the mere physical sky contained Heaven, would seem an outdated idea. On the other hand, ostensibly the physical sky could conceivably and somehow serve as an *avenue* or *route* to the spiritual or Heavenly sky; so that the two are not necessarily the same thing as might seem to be implied.

And yet despite what misgivings one might possibly have on this ostensibly insoluble question, who can deny the extraordinary amount of change and transformation of mankind that took place within the few hundred years, and later as well, following Christ's ministry? Could Paul (or the author) who wrote "until he [Christ] comes" (1st Corinthians 1:26), have dreamed of Constantine? Might this suggest, perhaps, that when Christ spoke of his coming in clouds of glory, he meant in men's hearts *and* minds?

It has been objected that Christian ideas of the end of the *world*, found in the New Testament, showed that the early Christians had a false hope. But perhaps the question needed to be asked is what "world" should we be talking about? Did not the ascension, after all, signal the end of the openly pagan world that had lasted for thousands of years? As well, but for some more regrettably, was it (at that time) the end of the Jewish kingdom on earth; which for many was, in a sense, "the world?" After his victory at Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D., Emperor Constantine became a Christian, and by this event Christianity, at that time, could be said to have conquered the Roman Empire, and subsequently the rest of Europe, and much of Africa and the Near East as well.

Among the reasons for Christianity's early success was that not all men worshipped all gods; hence there was a real need for One God among many and diverse peoples the Roman Empire had joined together, and Christ, not some supposedly divine Roman emperor, rendered this possible. The Jewish people made up as much as 7 percent of Rome's population, and Augustine attributes the success of the spread of the Christian message to their dispersion in various areas of the empire. The codex, or bound volume format, soon was replacing cumbersome scrolls, and thus, in a literary revolution comparable in its sway to the inventing of the printing press, made the dissemination of writings (and that were longer than mere epistles) that much more convenient and easier.

As well as attending to the poor, it was reported that Christians cared for the sick, while heathens had shoved them aside -- even those in their own family. So impressed by such charity was pagan emperor Julian, "the apostate," that he directed and encouraged pagan priests to emulate such compassion and benevolence.

And yet it was the examples and testimony of the martyrs which as much, or more so, moved and convinced people to the faith. A certain Marcion¹⁷⁹ of the congregation at Smyrna (on the west coast of modern Turkey), describes an unusual event leading up to

¹⁷⁹ Eusebius, *History*, IV.15. Not the same Marcion as the heretic incidentally; though he also came from Asia minor.

the martyrdom of Polycarp; of which Marcion himself or someone close to him was a witness of what transpired.

“There the noise was so deafening that many could not hear at all, but as Polycarp came into the arena a voice from heaven came to him: ‘Be strong Polycarp and play the man.’”

Even if this report is assumed to be mistaken, one can’t but still be as much or more struck, given the deadly seriousness of the occasion, by the hopeful spirit of whoever could have even imagined such an occurrence. The accounts of or writings concerning other martyrdoms, like that of James, brother of Jesus and head of the church at Jerusalem; Ignatius of Antioch; Blandina and her fellows at Lyon; Agnes of Rome, and many others as well of course, are no less affecting in the recalling of them today.

9. Love and Truth

“When God is to be seen, it will be by the eyes of the heart.”

~~ *City of God*, XXII, ch. 29.

We must desire, indeed love, to be reasonable, if we are going to reason beyond a highly restricted or routinely practical level. It would seem then that if God is real, then to love him as ultimate Truth (since God, after all, is the one who is Truth, possesses Truth, or from whom emanates Truth) must be necessary; certainly if our intellect is to function beyond a mediocre, fast and loose level. If we are to ever come to better realize the Truth (assuming such is possible), we must seek and love it first. The more therefore we love God (who is, or else is the source of Truth), the more we love who and what we need to love. This is important because love itself, as desire, is at the basis of all our beliefs (whether intellectual or emotional.) So that what we desire most will certainly affect what it is we believe, and consequently what we think we know, this including who and what we see as the embodiment of highest Love.¹⁸⁰ The most elementary knowledge we possess is, in some way and to some degree, tied to some most basic desire we have. Why think of anything if it isn't or doesn't affect something of value to us? If, for instance, we consciously state to ourselves that we know we exist, it is (at least in part) because our lives matter to us and further because we desire in some manner to improve the quality of our lives; and this includes improving our understandings. The same is true of any factual or value determination we make. There is a desire, love, or valuation underlying or accompanying them. If we accept the premise there is God, and that God is goodness itself (or the highest good (including presumably Love itself), then we need to love God if we are to love wisely, and thus be able, in consequence of which, to think wisely and, most especially when it comes to higher levels of thought, more correctly.

Now it could be argued that we needn't love God, but we can instead love some person, or thing else in his place. Alternatively, we could say we could love God through some person or thing. The position I am proffering here is that whatever we say is or could be our Highest love that person or something is, by my definition, God, or else a necessary part of our idea of God.

Bertrand Russell poses the question: if God is self-sufficient, what benefit can our love be to him, and if our love doesn't benefit him, what kind of love is it? The first question is frankly beyond our adequately answering; since indeed it seems strange and paradoxical that God should need anything. And yet because we don't have a ready answer for it, and given further no less the mystery and profundity of the subject, there is no reason either to out of hand assume or conclude that there can be none. The brief and simple response to the second question is that our love of God, manifested in greater charity, moral rectitude, and wiser understanding contributes to the benefit of others; while enhancing our own power to love. From a Christian perspective, God wants us to love others, and apparently in loving the person of Christ, and by following what he teaches, we can all the better effect this.

¹⁸⁰ There are, of course, various kinds of love, but here we are assuming there is one sort above all others, based on the notion that there is one Truth above all others.

The following is a list of ways then God might then be loved; with some brief arguments for their persuasiveness, and implications if accepted. We must know who or what we love, or can love, before we can love them. A given positing of how God can be loved here will, in a given instance, naturally assume God can be *adequately* known in some manner. Of course, whether God can be adequately known or not is at the basis of such positing to begin with. This all having been said, our main intention here is to explore whether how we know and love God affects the character of our higher knowledge and understanding, and this is something we will want to keep in mind in the course of this inquiry.

To say we love somebody or something, prior to our loving God, is not (as it might perhaps seem to some) anything so strange or terrible. If we didn't have a sense of what goodness is before knowing God's goodness, we would not know God's goodness. We understand God's goodness through others' goodness before understanding that -- in theory -- goodness really comes from and originates with Him. In fact, this is quite natural and normal, and to love God's goodness first before or others requires a superior sort of depth of character and understanding very few people are capable of. Assuming this, now let us get on to seeing how and in what way God can or might be best known and loved.

a. *Love God himself*

Advantages:

Aquinas, *largely* following the tradition of Aristotle and Averroës,¹⁸¹ argues that we can know God immanently through his presence in our minds; evidently if accompanied by and or harmonized to the Spirit; which God permits by grace as given in Christ. Apparently then, in this sense, we can in some legitimate way know and therefore love God's essence through ideas, with the highest realization of truth and goodness being the beatific vision. Aquinas aside, in the case of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic beliefs generally such knowledge of God requires the acceptance of scriptural revelation (otherwise such notions of God will not likely make all that much sense to you.) Aristotle, by contrast, had no need for a sacred scripture; so presumably he could have known and loved (albeit perhaps less passionately) God without it.

According to another, yet related view, if we assume we somehow know value prior to or else simultaneously with existence, we might think of knowing God through the notion, consciousness, and or feeling of value; which notion we might express as *goodness* itself (or if you prefer, excellence) and the desire for it,

Disadvantages:

Of course, in every day experience, it is quite common for people to speak of their knowing God directly without any such refinement. But do they really know him? Do they rather think of something else that they otherwise infer is him? If it is in some way

¹⁸¹ In contrast to Aquinas, Averroës saw God in the mind as transcendent to our thought (i.e., potentially ours but not actually, except for more highly developed souls); whereas for Aquinians God is immanent in our thought.

him, do they know him by a thought, an idea, an image, a feeling, spirit, or His own essence as bestowed on them by grace? If any (or any combination) of these, how does a person know these are true representations or else manifestations of his actual self? The problems raised by this make it seem that claims of knowing God are inherently problematical, and fraught with contingency. If then we can't really know God except as a mere intellectual conception, we can all the less and hardly be said to be able to love him in a very deep way.

Some otherwise think they can know God immediately, but actually conceptualize him as a person, say as an elderly man with a gray beard; so that what they think of God is really only some kind of representation or image of doubtful value. Since we only know or communicate anything except by means of representations, we cannot know God himself; otherwise this would mean God can be represented. Got being infinite or incomprehensible, to represent him is impossible, or at best a distortion. And if it is a distortion, than how can a person say they know and then love him? What they know is not God, but a label, and therefore a thing, not or far removed God. We may see a person or thing as God if we like, but either they are not God or they are merely a representation of God. Therefore, if there is God and we know him, it is only and at best as a vague shadow, and a shadow is all we can talk about, and it is only such a shadow we can love. This said, it may be possible that this shadow, offers a potential to somehow actually know the real. But even so, there does not seem means to demonstrate such knowledge credibly or objectively; all the less so if we posit God as being infinite.

b. Love God as a person, or else or through some person

Advantages:

As Fulton Sheehan observed, you cannot fall in *love* with an abstraction or syllogism. God comes to us in Christ that we may love him, at least better than an abstraction. This notion (as mention here much earlier) is in some ways identical to the principle of *bhatki* found in some Hindu and Buddhist schools of belief; by which one seeks communion or unity with God by means of a most saintly or "Godly" personage, or avatar, or intermediary of one sort or other; with the determination as to quite who this is depending on your creed.

At the same time, it seems to make more sense that mind (which implies a person), precedes an object or image to begin with; therefore making it more appropriate to view God as mind and therefore a person in some way also. Since we ordinarily take a person, in general, to be superior to a non-person or thing, in general, it would also make sense to say that if God came (or comes) to us as a representation or else by means of a representative or intermediary, it would be as a person, rather than an object. Love of a person or personality is the most powerful kind of love, and if we are to love God we ought at least be able to love him as a person. If the person is the highest moral example, this (as far as our knowing is capable) is the best means available when it comes to our being able to know and love God.

When we most fall in love with someone, says the Brihad-Aranyaka *Upanishad*, what we fall in love with most is their soul. If this is true, greatest love can only be had toward a person. And if we do not love God as a person, we risk loving someone (or something) greater than we love God, and by doing so thus risk rejecting, or unnecessarily making light of God in favor of a mere created or lesser being.

Any suggestion that representing God is a problem, whether he be taken as a person or not, is solved, it is argued, by the Spirit (including Love) and or higher reasoning; which, when consistent with honesty and essential morals, makes knowledge of God, by means of such incarnation, intermediaries or avatars possible and less theologically problematical.

Now the God of the Old Testament is evidently a person. Is it possible we could love him without a representation or intercessor? To this it might be answered the Torah or the Law serves the function of such “practical” representation, and the person we know of as God comes out in these (and other) sacred writings and traditions when we appreciate and read them in the proper way.

Disadvantages

To say God is a person takes infinite, incomprehensible God and fits him into too neat a box. God is infinite, or above predicates and qualities. Further you can't *really* know a person. You can only know them through representations. If Christ is God, then we know not God, but representations of a representation of God. We may allow this as short hand, but still it still seems awkward, and leaves God as a shadow, a predicate, contingent; so that once more we somehow find ourselves speaking of a contradiction. As far as Christianity is concerned, the Koran makes the practical criticism that Christians believe in three gods: Allah, Issa, and Mary; suggesting that viewing God as a person in a literal way, such as Christianity proposes, opens itself up to real world confusions, and a lapse into polytheism. If we love God as a person, say in loving by, in, and through Christ, we still can't get around loving an abstraction because another person can only be best comprehended as an abstraction, and therefore has insufficient reality to us, and therefore God becomes unreal notwithstanding our good intentions.

c. Love God through some persons (i.e., plural)

Advantages:

If it is accepted that God can be represented by one, it seems only fair to say that he can be represented by many, and by loving those many be able to love God. Some, for instance, think it possible and useful to think of many Christs and many Buddhas; not least of which because it encourages others to become like Christ and or Buddha; that is, become like *a* Christ and or *a* Buddha. The myriad of Egyptian and Hindu gods gives those religions a sort of unpretentiousness and egalitarianism in which the false ego could be said to be drowned in an ocean of “divine” persons. A further advantage to loving God through persons (plural) is that people's idea of God can be more easily adjusted to the uniqueness of their own person and immediate, particular circumstances.

Disadvantages:

This is not a practical thing to believe; because it seems absurd that if we believe in the one God that his being somehow entails someone else. As soon as we look to “someone else(s),” the more we begin to lose sight of God. Even if “Christ,” an intermediary, or avatar is desirable, will not the allowing there to be many of such *open the door only wider* to abuse by the unscrupulous? What will protect someone from being deceived and taken in by someone who falsely presents themselves as divine?

d. Love God as or through a thing (concept or thought)

Advantages:

If we see God as an object whether a thought-object or a material object, we are being most honest with ourselves; since these it seems are all we can really capable of knowing. We know no person or thing as the person-in-themselves, or the thing-in-itself. When we say we love someone, we know them solely by or through representations. While we might say we can love the idea of someone (based on representations), we cannot *really* love a person, only a representation of them. The only person we might be in a position to possibly and truly know is ourselves, and even that is questionable. What is real is either a thought or some form of physical object or event; therefore God must be one or some of these and we are justified in seeing him as such; rather than deluding ourselves into thinking we can begin to know the true reality of another -- let alone God.

Disadvantages:

God cannot be merely a thought, physical object or event; because these and all their possible predications were created or emanate from him. Moreover, a representation assumes something real to begin with; therefore it is false to say we cannot in some measure know or have some sense or idea of who or what is real itself, even if only by inference. Even so, we cannot really love a thing, and that includes mere concepts, representations, or ideas as a highest good or end of all goods. Concepts, representations, and ideas are *means* to knowing what is real, and are not, as such, real themselves. Though it sometimes seems we can make a thing our highest good, this is a mistake. The alcoholic, for instance, who seems to value his liquor above all else, or a miser his money above all else, values himself more (or perhaps someone else, depending on the individual.) The liquor (or money) is merely a *means* of achieving his own, or perhaps as he might think, another’s good or advantage. We might add that the Bible denounces idolatry most vehemently, and idolatry, of course, is, after all, the worship or love of a thing or things.¹⁸²

e. One doesn’t need to Love God, rather one should see one’s own self or another person as highest authority and good.

¹⁸² In his essay, *The Essence of Religion*, Bertrand Russell remarks: “The ideal good forms an essential part of the religious life, since it supplies the motive to action by giving the content to the desire for universal good, which forms a part of universal love. Without the knowledge and worship of the ideal good, the love of man is blind, not knowing in what direction to seek the welfare of those whom it loves. Every embodiment of good in the actual world is imperfect, if only by its brevity. Only the ideal good can satisfy fully our hunger for perfection.” Yet this seeking of ideal good alone (also contemplation of it), Russell goes on to say, does not suffice, because we still inevitably have problems in this world, despite hope for a next.

Advantages:

We are arguably more real to ourselves as individuals than to any other person. Being most real to ourselves, we as an individual are therefore justified and claiming ourselves to be God, and hence we should love ourselves most.

Disadvantages:

It's obvious that if one person can say they are God, then anyone can say they are God; which, aside from the obvious absurdity of attributing ultimate divinity or goodness to any given person, would mean there is more than one God, or highest good. Further, to accept such a view would seem to be confusing to well-meaning people, as well as the insincere, immoral, impious, and untruthful.

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If God as the embodiment of Love and Truth is not loved in one or the other of the above considered forms, does this mean our capacity for higher truth will be less than it is otherwise? For one thing, it should be remarked that a good case can be made that we have little choice, and will one way or another love someone or something as God, as the highest good; *whether or not* we actually refer to or describe them as God. We will thus, it seems, have our "God" (in general or at given times in our life); whether or not we view them or it as "God" as such. True, there may be multiple other persons and things who we may come to think of as God in various times in our lives; as when we devote too much attention or affection to someone or something more than anyone and anything else. This is very common. Yet is it not possible to in some way subsume and measure what it is we have and do value most, with respect to the present moment and our lives in a long term sense? While such close scrutiny of ourselves one would expect would probably take not a little effort, it certainly does not seem impossible, at least if our approach was to be both honest and rational with ourselves. Granted such assessment could not pretend to be overly precise, yet we could still, I think it is fair to say, get a useful general idea from such introspection. Assuming this, we can at least tentatively speak of our possessing *some* means of ascertaining what (or who) we most value.

Our intellects and our capacity to love are the most puissant powers we humans possess. Both are necessary and complementary to the other. Of love, of course, there are many different kinds and meanings. In its most rudimentary sense, I take love to mean or be to some extent synonymous with desire, and when someone or something is loved they are in some way desired. In this sense, there are different ways of loving, and insofar as there are, potentially, virtually no end of people, animals, plants, or things we might love.

Heretofore, I have otherwise spoken of love in perhaps a too general sense. But by love I usually mean, will have meant, or will mean altruistic, compassionate, empathetic, high-minded love; that is, love that seeks the well being of another before oneself (as such.) Other forms of love, such as Fleshly love, Familial love, Romantic love, Civil and cultural love (as in patriotism), etc. can be subsumed in some way or other under

“altruistic” love in importance (or, at least, altruistically disposed people will agree with me of such being the case.) At any rate, here I assume such to be the case. Though this is merely practical short hand, and a more detailed and refined description, ordering and analyzing of what love is both possible and desirable, this rough characterization and outline will suffice for the present purpose.

In the New Testament we find three words used to express the notion of love:

*Agapē*: dutiful love, primarily a matter of mind and will; also Godly and unconditional love.

*Philia*: to cherish, or love that cherishes; familial and or brotherly love.

*Storgē*: paternal love and affection.

The term *erōs*, that is intimate, sexual or erotic love, is not used in the New Testament; though it is said by some to have been later redeemed by Christian mysticism; as a term to describe a close relationship with God; that is, through meditation and certain kinds of spiritual revelation or introspection.

It is by means of Love that good things get done. Love is an important power in learning, and without a higher sense of devotion in people their efforts lack the vitality, energy, creativity and steadfastness that are among the hallmarks or necessary concomitants of lasting and worthwhile success. While I do not pretend to prove so here, I think many will agree with the conclusion that more compassionate people often, if not always, make for better thinkers; since such (by definition) are more empathic, and thus more open to and capable of benefiting from the different ideas of others.

If our role model of love, or example of love we aspire to, is a strong and compelling one, (and to the degree we are influenced by this role model), then our love of God and others will conceivably be greater, and hence our capacity for knowledge and understanding will be greater as well. If the role model for our love is the most courageous, the most compassionate, the most caring, the most wise, the most divine, what better or more superior role model could we ask for? As stated earlier, morals are taught better by example than by verbal or written instruction. The same of course can be said for love.

Now if God is, or can be seen as, the greatest model of love, then how much easier will it be for us to love him by aspiring to his example! This, on the face of it, appears a both persuasive and tenable argument.

But to return to the previous point raised, is greater love then needed for greater wisdom? Wisdom and higher knowledge stem from love; a person does not attain these without loving them (or else loving someone or something else first, and then using wisdom and higher knowledge at least as means of enhancing and strengthening our love for them.) If we can increase our power of love through loving a person, do or can we, in certain instances, effectively increase our power of loving wisdom and higher knowledge at the same time? Off hand, and if the object of our affection is a truthful, courageous,

compassionate, and moral person, it seems reasonable to say so. Yet it might be objected, why must this person be Christ? To this might be responded Christ, *by definition* (whether or not he be Jesus of Nazareth), is the example of highest love. In this way, it is possible for our love to partake of the divine, and if there is divine wisdom or divine higher knowledge, from which all other wisdom and knowledge stems, then it only makes sense we should love and, at the same time and in some measure, attempt to emulate the person who is most divine. Doing so will simultaneously validate and empower our own capacity to love.

Of course, it is still open to question whether improving our power to love (i.e., by means of loving a person or otherwise) and morals will, by themselves, improve our power to love wisdom and higher knowledge, and, if so, how much so. Offhand, I would think that if a culture or society is more loving and empathetic than not, it would seem they would be more tolerant, more easy to get along with, and therefore more capable and competent when it comes to attaining higher knowledge and understanding.

Yet there is no true (higher) love without the moral law (for the present let's think of the Golden Rule and its negatively expressed corollary, "*do not do unto others,*" as such); otherwise hypocrisy, treachery, jealousy, cruelty, meanness will quench or sully our love. For the same reasons there is no (higher) truth without the moral law. Yet the moral law itself requires (benevolent) love and, at least, some sense of higher truth, e.g., that there is a higher truth and wisdom for us to aspire to; as when a morally minded person conscientiously asks "how do we know what the higher good is, and how is it attained?" In this sense, there exists a symbiotic or mutually supporting relationship between love and morals, truth and morals, and love and truth. It seems reasonable then to conclude that bettering any one of these in ourselves will improve one or both of the other two in us; all the more so as they are aided and made firm in place by means of sound and careful reasoning.

It can be difficult for many to love the moral law as an abstraction, but it would seem easier to love the moral law as a person, or a person's example. "Christ" according to one of the ways we are using the term here, can be defined as such a person. Christ gives a personality to the law, not merely in his wise judgment, but in his all noble example as well.

People have (I agree with Mengzi<sup>183</sup> and others here) a natural aptitude for love and benevolence. Yet if that aptitude isn't nurtured and developed, it will become weak or absent. And if the only people a person knows are cold, callous, hypocritical, and irrational, then to such a person affectionate and truly devoted love for another person might seem unthinkable or an experience alien to them. Christ as a role model of and for love, morals, and truth solves, or helps to solve, this crucial problem. Whether "Christ" must be Jesus of Nazareth as such this, for now, we need not assume. Be this as it may, John Locke argued that morality needs Jesus, and only Christ could be the lawgiver for

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<sup>183</sup> Or as he is known also "Mencius," the Confucian, (c. 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) Hunzi, or Hun Tzu (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) in opposition to Mengzi said that goodness comes not from human nature but from ritual, and following ritual. The similarity between philosophical rivals Mengzi and Hunzi, and rivals Pelagius and Augustine makes for an interesting comparison.

all mankind. Such as Confucius, Socrates, or Zeno of Citium<sup>184</sup> could only speak to the learned. Yet all mankind, not just the learned, needs a moral teacher for all and everyone. That teacher, Locke concludes, is and can only be Jesus Christ.

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<sup>184</sup> Locke apparently did not know about the Buddha.

## 10. Christian Belief

“What are you, Negro, Lebanese or Jew,  
Flemish, Italian, Indian and Greek?  
I know within my heart exactly what you are –  
What we would like to be, but never are.”  
~~ Abioseh Nicol, “African Easter”

As has been suggested elsewhere, religion (in contrast to short-sighted, irrational superstition which should properly be seen in a category of its own) in its true sense simply refers to our love of what we see as the highest form of goodness, or else the highest good (Love, Truth, Innocence, Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, Moral Virtue, for example), or that Goodness in which all other “goodnesses” coalesce and have their unity. A temple, church, or mosque then is properly a place where we celebrate and make sacred the importance of Goodness, or whatever else we consider to be among the most pure and Highest good or goods, “God” typically being the supreme embodiment and purest essence and source of all those highest “goods.” For this reason, it perhaps can be said the foundation of the Church is the hearts (and minds) of its people, rather than its formal public institution, its scriptures, or its leaders. These latter are of value to a church only insofar as its people’s hearts are morally sound and sincere in what they (i.e., the church’s membership) love, respect and desire.

Among its humane advantages, a *morally* based religion offers a viable family to those who have none. This is no small benefit considering the amount of detachment, alienation and isolation there is in this too frequently sad world. God as Father, among the other roles for him we might name, acts as unifier of that family; especially a family for those alienated and without a family. Of course, with some religions it is “Mother,” rather than Father, or else with yet others in some sense both Father and Mother: as some kinds of Christianity tend to; for example, in the instances of or making reference to mother Church and or mother Mary. The church and its members then are a kind of royal family, but a heavenly, *necessarily moral* royal family.

What is often (it seems to me) fatally disregarded when it comes to appreciating the value and importance of morally based religion is that Loving God and Loving our Neighbor is something we would *very much* want to do *if we did have everything else we desired*. If we were truly happy, we would (most of us) be truly grateful. We seek God’s approval in order to make concrete and confirm our felicity. Despite perhaps some common preconceptions, in hard times it is often more difficult (rather than less difficult) to love God, or our Neighbor. So for some people, and in some circumstances and situations, adversity is not at all always encouraging of faith in and love of God. For others, of course and on the other hand, it is well known that adversity far from dampening religious ardor and fervor, and indeed may foster them.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> A person might be a Christian, not for their own sake but for someone else’s sake, saying, for example, “Christ I believe in you if you will save and protect these I love, and even though I myself am perhaps not worthy,” etc. Similarly, we might pray for martyrs and victims of gross injustice as being far and above more deserving God’s blessing and mercy than ourselves (otherwise), and, by doing so, be adopting a sincere, selfless, and genuinely Christian attitude (whether we specifically intend this or not.)

For some people, genuine (as opposed to apparent) prosperity will not only make religion more desirable, but more necessary; that is as added security and insurance added to their lives if nothing else. Yet other persons who are prosperous, will, nevertheless, cultivate and pursue religious practices and endeavors, but for more genuinely high minded and spiritual reasons. A problem can arise then when people become focused on worldly wealth and things of this world; with the result that they lack that wisdom and purpose that will sufficiently unite and bring peace to these riches, and all other goods, and which a truth and morally based religious faith provides, indeed make necessary to persons possessed of anything like real intelligence and understanding.

Christianity, like all loves, is a faith, and not an objective science. Yet, as I maintain in *Peithology*, is not *any* truth we know of, after all, in some way or other (at least potentially) a faith or based on faith? If there is a true/false distinction between the validity of one person's claim of faith versus that of another's, what decides such disputes is *the arbiter(s)*, and the criteria the arbiter uses. But unless we posit an ultimate arbiter (as discussed earlier), all our "knowledges" are opinion, and thus all our knowledge is faith anyway; whether our faith be religious, rational, empirical, metaphysical, worldly or some other character. If we say, for example, empirical faith is more valid and reliable than religious faith, we might legitimately maintain this. Yet to do so still does not remove the unavoidable aspect of faith from the empiricist outlook and conclusions (i.e., empirical faith in place of another kind of faith.) So ultimately we all operate on the basis of faith -- even the complete skeptic (because he also, after all, has faith that his standards of what is true or not true are somehow valid.) While faith is evidently something less than knowledge, there is no knowledge (we know of) without it. Faith then is not something extraneous to our knowledge and understanding, it is an indispensable and ineluctable part, and which we cannot think, decide, or act without.

Although Christianity can be reconciled with reason, it is not dependant on reason for its validity. Besides, as we earlier observed, who can validate Reason? As a Christian, what one in effect says is that if there is such a *someone* who will validate Reason, (he calls himself and) we will call Him Christ. *He* (insofar as he does and reflects the will of the Father, as Jesus himself attested) is the Judge. This is the ultimate arbiter we spoke of previously. While it is generally accepted that Christians do (or at least ought to) respect reason, they ought also to concede their subjectivity as individual thinkers as well, not so dissimilarly to how we admit and confess our sins. But to say our mortal knowledge is ultimately subjective, does not mean we cannot have reasonable and plausible grounds for believing that our faith will ultimately lead to and make possible knowledge that is truly objective. This, at any rate, is a thinking Christian's hope.

We learn soon after we look into the history of the church, or see the church as it is around us, perspectives of Christianity may differ widely in the emphasis they place, or don't place, on certain aspects of Christian belief. By means of Christianity a minister, clergyman, priest, preacher, scholar, author, poet, artist may recreate the world into a harmonious new whole; using Gospel examples and teaching in a manner to suit themselves and their viewpoint, biases, and more immediate interests. This is, in part a



result of the somewhat free, perhaps we could say poetical, arranging of Christian teaching as presented in the Gospels and Epistles. It is not unusual in the Gospels and Epistles, to find the apostles disagreeing with each other, or adopting different interpretations or emphases of Christ's injunctions and intentions. Again and as stated elsewhere, people naturally tend to differ in the terms of the priorities or emphases they assign to what should be valued. Christianity then because of this, not surprisingly, is in practice known by many different names, and often the particular name one uses will very much affect what being a "Christian" means, even within a single denomination. One favorite illustration of this for me personally is *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a non-canonical work from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. offers a visionary and poetical view of Christian faith that is quite touching and unique. Likewise, the poems of the early Christian poet Prudentius (348-413) are appealing for their fresh and somewhat different perspective (that is, different from what most of us are accustomed to.)

Christ himself, of course, had quite various kinds of followers of quite diverse background and outlook. This pattern, in a sense, continued into the subsequent history of the church. Difference of opinion and perspective is often good for variety and competition, and in this way the greater church could be said to benefit from their being various denominations; though what the degree of their separation should be is well deserving of amicable discussion. To see what richness and riches one denomination offers over another recommends the wisdom of some amount of difference. Churches disagree just like people disagree, just as the apostles disagreed. And why should this alarm or surprise us? And just as one doesn't need to worship or idolize an apostle, it does not seem necessary or desirable for a Christian to worship or idolize a church or denomination; though, and on the other hand, we might well and very reasonably have our *most hallowed* or most favorite or preferred church; and, as some will quite understandably insist, that such church teaches and acts consistently with traditional and family based morality, as well as with honesty and right reason, as reflected in Christ's own teachings and those of the earliest church fathers.

"Essential" Christian belief might (for our purposes here) be said to be this:<sup>186</sup>

\* Christ is the Son of God, most innocent, and the most suffering and innocent victim there ever was or will be, supreme of wisdom (or is governed and empowered by it),

\* He died for the remission of our sins, died, rose again, believe and accept him and you will be saved.

\* Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.

\* The Beatitudes.

\* Forgiveness of your own sins depends on your forgiveness of other's sins.

\* Have Faith in God, and bear and reach out for your cross if you are able.

Now leaving aside such matter as Baptism and the Eucharist from these starting points, the tendency has been to add what you like. Based on the writings and record left

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<sup>186</sup> And no doubt one or more other points of belief which I am perhaps overlooking at the moment, or some others would insist on including, or which I assume are implied by the above.

of James the Righteous,<sup>187</sup> Paul, the Synoptic gospels, John the Apostle, they all (given their varying emphasis or lack of emphasis on certain teachings) seem to have their own way of thinking, but with the understanding that there are certain core accepted truths such as those above we listed. This might perhaps suggest that, *allowing for core doctrine as the common standard and if we adhere sincerely to family based moral principles and respect the dignity and God given rights of all before God*, we can constructor tailor Christianity in a way that suits us personally. And if some object to this idea, as might be expected, it is nonetheless true that in practice this is what many people, regardless of denomination, in point of fact do; nor, speaking for myself, do I per se see any serious difficulty with adapting Christianity to ourselves in a manner that best suits us, as long as we are constant in our adherence to both (the aforesaid) core doctrine and an honest, just, selfless, and compassionate morality.

Yet the matter of core accepted truths is not so easily resolved as my list of essential beliefs might seem to imply. From the time of the earliest church up unto our own era there have been hundreds of denominations and sects which have denoted themselves as Christian, and much of the Church's history is taken up with accounts of passionate disputes about doctrine or a given sect's authenticity.<sup>188</sup>

In more recent eras, *some* of the more generally recognized or visible churches and denominations most of us are familiar with are (in no particular order): Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Jewish-Christians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Anabaptists, Moravians, Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Quakers, 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Trinitarians, Christian Deists, Reformed Church (Christians), Jehovah's Witness, Mormons, Egyptian Copts, Swedenborgians, Evangelicals, Methodists, and others.

In addition we have the too numerous to name creative Christian interpreters like: Charlemagne, the Medieval Mystery Plays, Giotto, Petrarch, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Monteverdi, Tasso, Shakespeare, Donne, George Herbert, El Greco, Rembrandt, Milton, Henry Vaughn, Handel, Pergolesi, Bach, Swedenborg, Edward Young, Blake, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Kierkegaard, Dickens, Gounod, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Marc Chagall etc. Often times the criticism is leveled at Christianity for it being unimaginative, unthinking, and dogmatic. Yet such criticism ignores the immeasurable wealth of heart and thought as found in the Church Fathers, in many of its saints, and gifted laity; its refinements and nuances, and its varied and deep interpretations of timeless and meaningful questions and issues. Sincere Christianity, as we find it in this world, could be said to be many songs expressive of and or emanating from the one Song.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> In addition to John the Baptist, James, the brother of the Lord, in addition to being among the first Christian martyrs recorded, was a vegetarian.

<sup>188</sup> For a list of some of the sects and controversial views of the early church see the Appendix.

<sup>189</sup> While recognizing and appreciating then wide variety of Christian organization and perspective, in what follows we will, nevertheless, continue to use the word Christianity in a generic sense for convenience; while respectfully acknowledging the obvious possibility that my given interpretation or focus is, in a given instance, not one necessarily everyone will find acceptable.

A song, by its truest nature, is not something objective, but rather subjective; due to its inherently emotional character. Christianity is, in a not insignificant sense, a song, in which we see God through love, poetry, and the heart. Jesus Christ (“whoever, after all, he really is”) is the song of songs, the poem of poems, the joy of joys, the hero of heroes, the love of loves. He must be. Yet it is our sin, the world, the works of the devil that prevents us from properly experiencing this music, this most beautiful of all visions and experience; such that he becomes trivial to worldly sense and notions. It is realizing this true vision of him, reaching that beatific vision, that is an essential part of Christian striving, realized both through the active and contemplative Christian life. To the extent one is of his truth, courage, selfless love, and innocence, then it is granted us to see and know him better. As it is, the world is so fallen short of the glory of God that often the best any of us can truly see of Him; even the most sincere believer or greatest artist, is often little better than a faint impression of the true realization, whether rationally, morally, emotionally, aesthetically and or spiritually.

Islam is easy for people to understand, and in this sense it lends itself to the belief of the purer of heart, humble, and simple -- that is to say some of the most lovable people.<sup>190</sup> Further, in its basic tenets, it is easily amendable to rational plausibility (not to mention wisdom.) If the stories of Mohammed at times seem ridiculous, there is no denying his humanness. We know he is just like us (or people we know.) Jesus, on some levels, and as known from the written gospels, must by comparison sometimes strikes one as more strange and enigmatical.

It seems a very good idea then (and in our minds) to make and conceive Christ anew, only he must be the one most worthy of love, and possessing (or capable of possessing) all or most of the best qualities and virtue a person might possess. If Christ is not like this, by definition, he could not be Christ. Now we Christians see Jesus of Nazareth as Christ as a basic matter of faith. Yet who Jesus of Nazareth is seen to be will not surprisingly differ among us given what relatively little we know (as say compared to many other people in history.) For this reason, and again I personally have no major problem with this approach and as long as we respect core doctrine and are duly moral and consistent in respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals, some will create or fashion their conception of Christ to suit their ideal of who or what the highest and most spiritual, truth filled, and soulful man could possibly be.

As has been frequently observed, Christianity offers hope and redemption for both the educated and uneducated. Jesus said he came to save the fallen. In saying so, did he mean that there are virtuous/righteous, who could (somehow) be saved otherwise than through him as such? Could the philosophers, if honest, sincere and morally consistent, still somehow be saved through right reason, honest philosophy, or civic heroism as many had taught? Exactly what a given Christian’s answer to this, naturally, may not be readily clear and decided; though some will doubtless have their pronounced view on the subject. After all, things are impossible with man, but that are not so with God.

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<sup>190</sup> As those who actually know or have known some can attest.

In making salvation available to the uneducated as well as the educated, Christianity seems to say that the honest, humble, sincere of faith and the innocent tears of countless people down through history will not have come to naught. In addition to rendering God more accessible, it is partly to remind of us of this message of compassion that Christ is sometimes seen and adored in the form of an infant or child; though such portrayals of the divine are by no means unique or exclusively limited to Christianity.

These same approaches, of accessibility and diversity, naturally, should be seen as true for most other religions. It only seems reasonable that we keep in mind that God has revealed himself to all the world's peoples in various ways, and people have had to choose, in one form or other, between God and evil. For myself, Christ is the supreme revelation, and I know this by faith; so I cannot ask you to accept it except on faith as well. Christians who do or might say that all other revelation other than their own is false, it seems to me are much mistaken to think God has not reached out to or provided Himself to others peoples throughout history. For example, God communicates to all of us in logic, in beauty, harmony, moral excellence, compassion, courage, self-sacrifice, and martyrdom. Had or has God completely deprived the non Judeo-Christian world of these? And if all people don't potentially possess these as their inherent right and dignity as human beings, then how else could Christ be accepted and agreed upon by peoples with otherwise opposite or divergent values, traditional customs, languages, and outlooks?

Christ is not, cannot be, a despot. He rules first and foremost by Love, and he cannot force his love or force others to love him, for such goes against the very nature of love. For this reason, it seems only the more wise that followers of Christ should celebrate and share similarities with the beliefs of non-Christians, before insisting on the differences. With ourselves or with fellow believers, we may well have certain priorities as to what is sacred (in our attitude toward God) that we normally would or might not want to casually share with or necessarily insist upon with others. Such expression of fervent or very personal devotion need not, however, detract from an open-mindedness and empathy towards other heartfelt and *morally based* faiths.

Early nineteenth-century Irish poet Thomas Moore wrote:

“Shall I ask the brave soldier, who fights by my side  
In the cause of mankind, if our creeds agree?  
Shall I give up the friend I have valued and tried  
If he kneel not before the same altar with me?  
From the heretic girl of my soul should I fly,  
To seek somewhere else a more orthodox kiss?  
No, perish the hearts, and the laws that try  
Truth, valor, or love, by a standard like this!”

If Christians expect to be consistent with Christ's teachings, they ought not judge or be hostile toward non-Christians who are otherwise disposed to believe and act morally. They may attempt to civilly persuade or lead others to Christ. But it is not for

anyone to judge another (beyond forming an ordinary and admitted opinion) or force their views on him. Another, had he heard “the Word,” might have been a Christian. And though a Buddhist might justifiably take exception to the suggestion, it is not unreasonable to consider the implications of such a possibility. Would we think that all those who went through some unspeakable disaster or tragedy, or who otherwise lived simple, humble, moral and pious lives, should be ever without hope simply because they were not formally Christian? From what we can learn of him otherwise, we have to think God has infinitely more sense and heart than that. And if people can’t agree on everything, it only makes more sense that they should try all the more to find more common ground, and the common ground of most commonly accepted religions is right reason, respect for long standing tradition, and the moral law tempered with mercy and compassion.

Again, love by its nature must be a free choice, so that it seems contemptible for a person of one faith to denounce or disparage a non-believer for not loving the way they themselves love. Rather, if Love is to receive its due respect and dignity, one clearly must respect the others free choice to love who and what they will. It is no coincidence either, that one cannot by means of legislation, reason, or brainwashing force people into faith. Faith is something they can only accept of their own free choice; else it is not faith. This was one of the key rationales underlying the establishment of religious freedom in America, as espoused, for instance in Virginia, by such as George Mason, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. We must be able to freely choose to pursue that which is good, and who or what should be loved if we are to stand humbly, honestly, and uprightly before God. Without that freedom, love and faith lose their meaning. And if nothing else, a believer of one faith can mutually respect celebrate with a non-believer that most paramount of any powers and blessings God bestows on us, and that gives all love meaning, namely choice.

## 11. Christ as God

1.

“Is it deceit, a lie.  
That my lord is laid  
On the high cliffs?”

2.

“On Furu Hill above  
The shrine of sacred stone,  
The cedars cluster;  
But my heart will never cede  
Its yearnings for my lord.”

~ From *On the death of Prince Iwatam*, by Princess Niu, Japanese poetess (late 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)<sup>191</sup>

It is all important to Christian belief that Christ be God, and or the son of God. To say he was merely a holy man or prophet, as say the Arians did, takes away the essence and power of Christian faith. Moreover, to accept the idea that Jesus is actually God, or Son of God as part of the Trinity, obliges us to think that Christ must be seen in the most positive light possible, and indeed be greater than *human* perfection. If anything less than that in his true person (as opposed to how he ‘appears’ or might appear to people), we should not believe him, or else hold an unworthy opinion of God. In this way, believers are protected; have insurance of a sort; inasmuch that if they believed in Christ and it somehow turned out he is not God, they are not then obligated to believe him or be a follower; since it was on the basis of that understanding that they became a Christian to begin with. In other words, if Christ (for the sake of argument) turned out to be a fraud, whether because he misrepresented himself or others misrepresented him, those who mistakenly believed in him are not answerable to him. Similarly, if the devil posed as Christ and the person were deceived on that basis, Christianity could not be said to blame for the person’s being deceived; since it assures him Christ is God; which by definition, the devil cannot be.

Yet observe: this does not necessarily mean that the Bible or the Gospels (as printed) must be seen as infallible or possessed of complete and ineluctable purity. We could still conceivably believe, with justification, in the divinity of Christ without insisting on the inerrancy of the Bible. For those who might have a problem relating to or understanding God outside a literal acceptance of all scripture, they might consider thinking of God, and or Christ as the source, summit, embodiment and realization (incarnation) of wisdom, innocence, love, courage, moral excellence, compassion; for whom Jesus Christ becomes the visible face and embodiment. In support of this view is Kant’s contention in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that if Christ was not validated (to those who witnessed him) by the moral law already within them, he would not have been (rightly) recognized for who he was. More simply, if Christ was not honest Truth and

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<sup>191</sup> Geoffrey Bownas, translator.

Goodness then he wasn't or isn't Christ. As part of his Divinity, Christ must be honest, moral, just and fair -- indeed the *most* honest, the *most* moral, the *most* just, the *most* fair. If this were not so, why would any serious thinking or deeply feeling person have believed him to be God in the first place?

As taken from one of his from his (posthumously published) "Sermons on Several Subjects," Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) likewise insists that God *must* be good.

"Power," he states, "may be affirmed to be the foundation of justice as setting the person who possessed it far above all temptation of doing wrong. But in any other sense, to make power the measure of justice, and to imagine that justice in God is not the same thing as justice among men, but something transcendent and we know not what, is in reality subverting the nature of things, taking away the intrinsic difference between good and evil, and overturning the ground of all religion. For though the essence of God, which it is not our business to understand, is really incomprehensible, as indeed are the essences of all other things, yet the notion of his moral attributes must be easy and familiar, and if we could not understand these, the whole doctrine of the Gospel would be insignificant to us. For all revelation from God supposes us to know beforehand what is meant by justice, goodness, and the like, so that no man can reasonably entertain any notion of God contradictory to these upon any pretense whatsoever. And it is very absurd for anyone to pretend that we cannot understand what justice in God is; for if we understand not this, it is all one to us whether God be just or not. Neither would it be possible for us to imitate his justice, for he who imitates endeavors to be like something that he knows, and must of necessity understand what it is he aims to be like. So that if we had no certain and settled notion of the justice and other moral attributes of God, religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be altogether unintelligible to our minds and impossible to practice."

In *Lord Jim* Joseph Conrad wrote: "In our hearts we trust for our salvation in the men that surround us, in the sights that fill our eyes, in the sounds that fill our ears, and in the air that fills our lungs." Conrad, of course, means to say we do this in error. What God by his incarnation in effect does is unite what is physical (without us) and what is spiritual (within us) in his person. He takes the error Conrad speaks of and by his person turns it into a path and conduit to Truth: the moral law within us, the desire for good, and their verification, otherwise transcendental notions, brought about, realized, and validated through the material person and medium of God incarnate; including in this incarnation, certainly for many, the eucharist.

In the divine-human synthesis referred to as the Incarnation, we might say justice, love, truth, beauty, became man. In Christ then we come to learn that there is Someone who is the Wisdom of all wisdom, the Love of all love, the Truth of all truth, the Reason of all reason, the Justice of all justice, the Mercy of all mercy, the Beauty of all beauty, the Fairest of all those who are Fair. These are, as it turns out, not abstractions, but a Person; which is to say they are more real and have more authority in this *person* than in any *thing* (including representations, concepts and ideas.) And we consider Christ to be these things by his teachings, the example of his cross, the exemplary testimony of

martyrs, and perhaps because, as Pascal said “No man can do what Jesus did.”<sup>192</sup> Nor, might we add, could a mere god or angel.

Considering the matter from a Biblical perspective: “Was anyone ever truly unique and irreplaceable in a given role they played except Christ?” Well, Adam and Eve, certainly. Some might argue Mary, Abraham, Moses. Yet leaving these last aside, it would seem that no one was ever truly indispensable such that Life would have come to a halt or been thwarted but for them. Either someone else could have done what they did, or else their contribution, never having been manifested, would never have been missed. After Adam, only Christ in that sense was truly indispensable. Everyone else could be replaced by another; so that is why we who are dispensable find our lasting value in him who is indispensable. This is not to say that any life is dispensable, but merely that, with respect to a given role the person in their life plays, they are not absolutely indispensable.<sup>193</sup> Yes, we might be inexpressibly poorer for not having a particular person present or perform a particular role. Yet this does not mean that Life could not go on without them in that role. Such a thing could only be said of Christ; for no other person is indicated when reference is made to such a one by whom only all others may be forgiven (as need be) and saved. There, certainly, have been or may be (so to speak) emanations, embodiments, and exemplars of him, but there can only be one *true* Christ.

As to exactly in what the incarnation consisted, interpretations, not surprisingly, have differed. Indeed it is such differences of viewpoints that have been the source of ongoing contention in the early church (see Appendix.)

Here, briefly, are some of the possible interpretations or explanations that at various times have been offered:

- \* Christ is a saintly man, who is later chosen to be God’s Son
- \* Christ is literally God taking on the reality of a man, while still retaining his Godhood.
- \* Christ is literally God taking on the reality of a man, while temporarily relinquishing his Godhood for the period of his incarnation.<sup>194</sup>
- \* Christ as incarnated was one half human, and the other divine, which aspects were separate, but which accompanied the other.
- \* Christ as incarnated was one half human, and the other half divine, which aspects were united in the Spirit.
- \* Christ was and is divine, but merely appeared to be human.

St. John Cassian (c.360-c.435 A.D.) is emphatic that: “The Apostles took every possible precaution to avoid the appearance of any kind of division in Christ, or that by any kind of erratic interpretation the Son of God united in the Son of Man should begin to have two persons, and He that is in Himself but one person should, through perverse and

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<sup>192</sup> *Pensées*, I.XXIII.321.

<sup>193</sup> By indispensable, I mean indispensable to the collective. In personal love, there are individuals, after all, who are indispensable to us of course; nor do I wish or need to somehow assert otherwise, in making the above point.

<sup>194</sup> This, as I understand it, is the orthodox view.



impious opinions, be made into two persons by us.”<sup>195</sup> St. John of Chrysostom (c.350-407 A.D.) taught the doctrine of condescension; that is, God condescended to become a man, and took on all the attributes of man, including also many an individual person’s limitations and what might be considered weaknesses (for example, losing one’s temper, becoming weary, or sad.)

Now granted in theory we might say that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was not necessarily “Jesus Christ;” that Christ was actually someone else, though traditionally (and mistakenly) spoken of as Jesus of Nazareth. Yet even if the real “Jesus Christ” were for some reason somehow anonymous to history with respect to his parochial name and or identity, and he who is known as or ascribed to be Christ was merely an after the fact imposter or misguided person, nevertheless the true Christ, by his example and basic teaching, will still be said to be real to us in essential Christian teachings such as salvation by the cross.

Thus, for example, *even if* the devil ingeniously absconded with real-Christ’s image in people’s minds, replaced or heavily modified it with a phony substitute (perhaps having been able to tamper with scripture in order to bring this deception about), this would not necessarily make Christ any less significant and real. It would mean merely that we had passed on to us, like a deliberately poisoned dish, a distorted idea of him. How then is the real Christ to be found?

One answer is to say we can know Christ by means of the Spirit of Love and Truth, that is, according to Logos; which according to John’s gospel is what Christ is. The Spirit of Love and Truth ostensibly have subsumed under them reason, faith, charity, moral virtue, justice, beauty, imagination; so that by knowing these in some sort of combination we can (arguably) better know and recognize him. There are then (at least plausibly) what might be seen as innate or else traditional criteria for divinity and goodness which can be used to better establish who and what Christ is. In fact, it only makes sense that we insist upon these standards; since there are none better we know of. And that when we lose sight of God, we should seek him in what is morally Good, rational, just, wise, charitable, courageous, innocent and beautiful first; rather than seeking him directly, say in a religious thought, imaginative idea or image that may have become corrupted. Once we have found the Good as known by faith, charity, right reason, moral virtue, justice or mercy can we discover a path to re-finding him. At the same time, a person who reads the Gospels, yet who doesn’t understand the basics of right reason, moral virtue, and true beauty, obviously risks being misled into thinking that God is merely raw gargantuan power or cosmic bully.

We are not of ourselves good; rather we are part of and lovers of the Good; and the more we love the Good by holding dear and respecting truth, compassion, wisdom and justice, the more good we do and can become.

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<sup>195</sup> *Incarnation of Christ*, V.7.

We can, indeed must, therefore see Christ in compassion, courage, innocence, wisdom, moral virtue, as much as we see him in the Gospels, and, in addition, see him in the many who by their word or deed in some appreciable or distinguished way have emulated him (including such as at least formally speaking are considered non-Christians.) These in a sense are God. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do...” (John 14:12.) At the same time for similar reasons, one ought to avoid conceiving Christ as cruel, dishonest, duplicitous, covetous, and unduly concerned about worldly power and worldly resolution of problems. In sum, those who look for Jesus in the Gospels, but who cannot also see him by means of right reason, moral virtue, and truest beauty, arguably, do not really see Jesus at all.

States St. Ambrose (c.340-397 A.D.): “Can men be loved by the Father as the Son is, in whom the Father was well pleased? He is well-pleasing in Himself, we through Him. Those in whom the Father sees His own Son according to His own likeness, he admits through His Son to the a favor of His sons, so that inasmuch as we are conformed by likeness, we may be called to adoption through the generation of the Son.”<sup>196</sup> And he adds, “The eternal love that is of God’s nature in one thing, while that which is of grace is another.” And what would we understand His Son to be but compassionate, caring, truthful, just, wise, noble, forgiving, humble, innocent, courageous, etc? And if we didn’t see him in ideals and moral virtues, what other way could or do we conceive him, but in potentially misleading and confusing images and representations? Again, to see God merely as greatest “power” obviously lends itself to abuse, fraud, misunderstanding, and all kinds of possible errors of definition and identification.<sup>197</sup>

For the same reason, if the concept of God being made man is clumsy to accept conceptually, or we icon-ify God too much, e.g., if we get stuck in viewing Christ in terms of a church organ, a fresco or a movie, then it is in love and truth *as process* he should be seen, and not a dimensional image, sound or representation. Jesus is greater than the Bible, but not Love, Truth, and Reason (and their dynamic as one); because these are (as Logos) himself. In this way, through the harmony and dynamic of Love and Truth, manifested in the cross, the barriers of finitude are broken, and it becomes possible to see true God in Christ, as Christians must; since, as per earlier, if Christ is not true God, and, as some will add, one of the Holy Trinity, we are not only under no obligation to believe him, but indeed we shouldn’t.

So even *if* much about Christ, as known historically, is a myth or great distortion, the idea is a perfect one and there can be no doubt that there has been, and arguably still is, Christ: that is the ultimate innocent and victim of injustice who is and most represents

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<sup>196</sup> *The Faith*, V.7.90. Also, if God were not made flesh he could only, to us, remain spirit. If God could not be made flesh then man could not have God’s spirit in his own (man’s) flesh. So in order that man in the flesh could be of one spirit with God, God had to become flesh first. Otherwise, man would be automatically predisposed to become one with God in the spirit, while still in the flesh. The two-fold state, of spirit and flesh, is perfectly realized in Jesus as God and man. God the Father loves us inasmuch as we are like, and live though his Son.

<sup>197</sup> How did God manifest himself in this world? As innocence itself victimized. I have always felt therefore that deep down our purpose in life, as much as anything else, was to care for and protect the helpless and innocent. For who else is there to do so? Yet, quite absurdly indeed madly, there are people who will willfully exploit and murder these in order to secure for themselves what they see as supposedly greater happiness or well-being.

all who are rightfully entitled to the highest vindication and greatest recompense. Now does this person possess supreme judgment as well? At worst, at least if we accept God (who, of course, is the source of all wisdom), we can easily see that He would grant it them or else adjudicate and decide on their behalf.

I think in sum one can't blame a Christian for doubting purported history or, perhaps in a given instance, some of the finer points of dogma or theology. Yet one *can* blame them for ignoring or rejecting the fundamental teaching and example of God's Love in Christ, including that of the martyrs as well, and or else their too casual timidity and indifference to gross irresponsibility, cruelty, mendacity, duplicity, and injustice in our own time.



## Part III

### On the Trinity

“Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms.”

~ 1 Corinthians 2:11-16.

Despite the numerous arguments on points of theology that beset the church within the first five centuries of its founding, no other controversy went on for so long, or reached such depths of bitter acrimony and even open violence<sup>198</sup> than that betwixt Arianism and orthodox Trinitarianism. Indeed, so volatile has this dispute been that Islam itself may arguably and in part have arisen and come about as a result and in reaction to it. Further, what was at one time Arianism came back to life in the 17<sup>th</sup> and later centuries in the form of Deism, Socinianism, and Unitarianism.

So complex is the debate and its history, with numerous shades and subtle distinctions sometimes introduced as appendages, whether welcome or unwelcome, to each of the two opposing sides’ point of view that an adequate survey and discussion of it can and easily has filled many volumes. For this reason, it exceeds my purpose to contemplate anything nearly so ambitious as even a survey of the same. Yet it is at least worthwhile to make *some* general observations and remarks, if ever so terse and frankly casual, on this knotty yet vital topic.

As we had discussed earlier, the central question addressed in the Catholic orthodox versus Arian controversy is whether Christ is equal in eternal status and stature with God the Father and Creator, and which the orthodox view maintains. In addition the orthodox view posits the Godhead as a Trinity that includes the Holy Spirit, that is, in addition to the Father and the Son.

I will start by stating bluntly that I myself subscribe to the orthodox view, yet at the same time would, once more, make it emphatically plain that that any final conclusion we arrive at in the debate is bound, at last, to be a matter of subjective faith. So that while others and myself might feel very strongly on the subject, one, as always, is free to believe what they like; with only God to answer to -- unless what point of view they tend to conflicts with the denomination they might see themselves as being a member of; in which case they will or possibly have to answer to that denomination as well.

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<sup>198</sup> See, for *one* instructive and telling instance of such, Gibbon’s account of the Vandals’, as Arians, savage and prolonged persecution of the Catholic orthodox in western North Africa and the western Mediterranean; in the latter part of the 5th century. *Decline and Fall*, ch. 37: Conversion Of The Barbarians To Christianity, part III. Of course, the long, drawn out central struggle within the orthodox Church itself between Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria and the followers of Arius (who himself died earlier on in 336 A.D.) in the mid to late 4<sup>th</sup> century is another of prominent note and, as well, decisive significance.

In fairness, the advantage of Arius' view is to say that his is arguably (or some might think so) a more pure and consistent monotheism (i.e., against orthodox Christianity and ostensible self-contradictions in some neo-Platonists, like Plotinus); because it refrains from ascribing the quality of Logos to God who, it is argued, is without qualities (at least, "qualities" in the sense such as we are capable of knowing.) But beyond this, his position is problematical; since, although mayhap more logically cogent, it implies we have no ties to an understanding of God beyond mere faith, that oneness itself is a quality and therefore a limiting predicate, and furthermore and otherwise we have no way of knowing what God is like or what he wants. In effect, Arius' theology could, as applied, equally be made to suit a Christian or a Satanist. If, as according to the orthodox view, God allows us to possess *some* and or else a practical knowledge of Himself through Logos or Christ, it is arguably as an act of grace and mercy

Likewise, if Christ is only created, it can be maintained that such as Satan are equal to or little less lower than himself; thus diminishing Christ's dignity and importance; while augmenting that of persons who we quite rightly take to be our adversaries. It will not do, for example, to maintain that morality and immorality, righteousness and unrighteousness, honesty truth and dissembling truth are not all that different and not very far apart from each other in essence; since both it would seem are equally products of God's created beings -- God himself being apparently indifferent to both and either because we can attach to him no attributes -- including whether Christ is in any way his representatives in any decisive and meaningful way.

If the Son is not co-equal with the Father, then we no better know the Father from him than anyone else we might select for intercessor; other perhaps than to say we merely like or prefer Christ better in that role than someone else. But even granting all this, who then is Christ? How do we recognize him? Our answer is the Holy Spirit -- and thus in order for fallen, imperfect mortals *to begin* having a preliminary and adequate conception of the Divine *One* we require a Trinity for that purpose. And after all, God is not just *any* old "one" (and which is what Trinitarian nay-sayers take to be a given; i.e., that intellectually he is or must be any old "one"); how indeed silly and absurd then to assume and see Him as if he were! Yet granted were we not so fallen, we would or might have the capability of knowing God as one. As it is, we know of *the* One only by means of the Trinity and faith in the same. This at least is the orthodox Christian view. Reason may indicate to us that God is one, but what is Reason outside of God? Orthodoxy tells us that that right Reason, as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and as part of the Holy Trinity, is, in a manner of speaking God or a means and measure of *our* knowing God.

It has been a canard common in much (relatively) modern thought, say, in early American thinkers (e.g., in the writings of Thomas Jefferson and some New England Unitarians and literati) and in some quarters of Anglicanism that the idea of the holy Trinity is somehow patently absurd and necessarily incomprehensible. Is it any more absurd to say the three point of a triangle or the harmony produced by a common musical

chord *are* one?<sup>199</sup> True, the “points” or “notes,” as it were, of the holy Trinity are marks of reference to some inevitably and to some degree mysterious someone or something that requires divine wisdom to begin to properly know or understand. Yet the paradigm or entelechy, nevertheless, serves as a prudent, duly humbling, circumspect and (when viewed soberly and correctly) grace-full and aesthetic reminder that One in the sense of Godhead is not like one in the merely practical or mathematical sense (i.e., what we earlier referred to any as old “one”) -- which last perspective a number of our founding fathers, as heirs of the Enlightenment, erroneously held to. As stated earlier, pure one does not exist in experience, but is rather a noetic construct with practical application. The only true one, therefore, by definition and if there any such thing, is God. And yet how can we conceive concretely of true and pure one when it doesn’t exist in empirical experience? The fact is we simply cannot, and so we adopt the path to Godhead or Oneness that is the Trinity. Is this, even so, an irrefragable and established *objective* fact? No, and given mortal limitations, absolutely not. It is in effect, and as best as we are in a position to surmise, a theory admittedly and one that requires faith. And like faith itself, it might be construed as an in some-wise discomfiting intellectual cross to bear. Yet and even so it is a theory and faith with lasting practical benefits and that surpass an overly simplified and dangerously deceptive monism.

If we think of God, or anyone or anything for that matter, as exclusively and monolithically one, we risk the danger of a narrow mindedness and constricting myopia that may impede and hamper our better understandings. We ought not, as we are often lazily prone to do, think of A (i.e., any “A”) as only being A, because A is and might also be characterized as B, and or C, or D, or E, or F, etc.: ad infinitum. We should not then construe God as merely being A (God is “A”), when, at Christian minimum, we know he is also B, and or C and or, as the Trinity, D. The notion of the Trinity therefore furnishes us with a practical and rational caveat and reminder that no single thing, in our range of experience, is or needs to be viewed as strictly one thing always. And again, if we would think of the Godhead of as a single pure unity, this only possible on a level of comprehension that we can prudently assume eludes the conception of mere mortals.

There are unexamined and or subconscious pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions, related to and like Gestalt, that tend to color our concept of a things, and how we form such conceptions (and which, in turn, effect our judgments based on such conceptions.) This, I would suggest (and in my opinion), is one more reason why the Trinitarian view has an advantage over an unqualified Arian one; because the Arian view fosters a tendency to view things (or persons, etc.) in a monolithic and hence more restricted manner, and that increases the likelihood of error in the formation of our conceptions. For any given “one” in our epistemological and empirical level of things, is invariably and demonstrably actually a multiple, and that “one” in empirical experience is only a

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<sup>199</sup>Also in music, we have the fundamental triad of pitch, rhythm, and duration. Rhett Allain, in an article for Wired magazine, 20 Dec. 2018, asserts that much of the science of modern physics heavily relies upon and is beholden to trigonometry. Of course, a syllogism of course has three interrelated parts; an atom consist of three core parts; constitutional government in the West is demarcated into Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. From more common experience, we also know that it takes at least three legs for a table or chair to stand, and there are other instances where three is found to be essential to the fundamental and harmonious order of things.

practical abstraction, not an absolute or indivisible thing.<sup>200</sup> This said, while it is permissible to speak of the Trinity or Godhead as one, we do so as a matter of faith or, if you prefer, theory; since, again on our level of understanding, “one” does not exist except as an abstraction or heuristic and practical principle that aids the understanding.

Further and as a practical matter, mere mono (i.e., only A) or dual (i.e., only A or B) perspectives tend to strife. Ordinarily, we tend to think of terms of this side, of an argument, is right or correct, its opposite therefore must be wrong. So that it is rashly concluded that one side or the other must be dismissed or even destroyed entirely. But if the same dispute is viewed from a *triple perspective*, it becomes possible for there to be a third way (and or fourth way as well, etc.) and that may allow for and lead to a more just and peaceable settlement between two contending sides, and avoid that kind of problem solving where certain kinds of tunnel vision psychologically narrow our alternatives; and unnecessarily restrict the solutions or answers possible.<sup>201</sup>

Not long ago, I happened to encounter a preacher giving a sermon on tv, and he was making the point that Jesus didn’t do simply what he (Jesus) wanted to do, but only that which was the will of the Father. While without finding any fault in the least with this interpretation, one point doubtless lost on many listeners, not least of which how Jesus’ example applies to themselves, is the question -- how does Jesus know who or whatever it is actually is the Father? Why, after all and this applies more readily to us than to Jesus, could it not be the devil in disguise pretending to be the Father? The answer, and speaking with respect to ourselves (since Jesus, it could be argued, knows the Father as much and familiarly as he knows himself), the answer is we could only know Christ and hence the Father by means of the Holy Spirit -- that is, the spirit of love and truth, and to which would imply self-honesty, a courageous and compassionate heart, and consistently and properly rationality on our part. If we are not honest, if we are not courageous, if we are not compassionate, if we are not rightly rational, whoever it is being listened to might just as well be the devil as the Father for all we know.

Christianity, properly speaking, then is not “Jesus;” as is mistakenly implied, and often deliberately so. Rather, it is God the Father the Creator whom you only know and come to through Jesus, and you only know and come to Jesus through and by the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of honest love and rational truth. Christ is needed to unify the two. This is major stumbling block for someone people; since the Holy Spirit is not only a help in seeing and recognizing Christ, but an *absolute necessity*. Imagine owning a car but not ever having the keys to enter, start and drive it. This, in a manner of speaking, is what happens to people who reject Christ and or the Holy Spirit. What good is the car without the keys? What good are the keys without the car? What good is Christ (if he is posited as God) without the Holy Spirit? What good is the Holy Spirit without Christ?

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<sup>200</sup> Is not, however, an individual person or personality “one”: As in, for example, there is only one William Shakespeare or only one Beethoven? In a common sense and practical way of thinking, of course, “yes;” and yet in a no less relevant and significant respect “no” also, since “no man is an island” (among other points that might be made in explication of how an individual is not merely or only one person in an absolute sense.)

<sup>201</sup> For example: “Is pagan art and literature good or bad?” Or when Wordsworth writes ‘I’d rather be A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,’ was he renouncing Christianity?” Obviously for more intelligent people, like Dante, Milton or Wordsworth, their answers to such questions need not strictly or necessarily be yes or no; as it is possible for them to intelligently qualify a yes or no while in the process produce a 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, etc. choices or alternatives.



In sum, you can't get to or reach the Father but through the Son. What that means, among other things, is that if you think you met God or had God speak to you and you weren't already in the company of Jesus, not to mention the Holy Spirit, who or what it was wasn't and could not have been God. Invisible God became visible through Christ, and yet one can only know Christ is God by way of the Holy Spirit -- else how would we correctly identify Christ? Further, if we reject the Trinity, do we not in effect reject or trivialize the Holy Spirit? And yet is not this, according to the gospels, among *the gravest* of offenses? If there is mistrust, tension, or conflict of egos, between allies for the Good, should they not seek unity and healing for such in the Holy Spirit, perhaps seen as the Song *of all songs*, which; incidentally, is known in some way or other to most all the major faiths? In this way, we look to Holy Spirit as a third party or witness present that makes possible a foundational solidity, musical harmony, and stand-ability that such triadic relation provides.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> There are, we can at least note in passing, interesting suggestions, parallels or foreshadowings of the notion of the Trinity contained in the Old Testament; for example, the demarcation of Yaweh versus Eloheim; the use of plurals to refer to God; the three strangers as God who visit Abraham; and other specific passages such as in Genesis (chs. 1-3), Psalms (e.g., 110:1), and Isaiah (48:16); just to mention several.



## APPENDIX

### Question for and Arguments against Christianity

It goes without saying that what is known as Christianity is not, nor has it ever been, without its critics and opponents. In giving these something like their due, the following are some queries and objections which deserve and for which I will *attempt* to furnish (what seem to me at any rate) reasonable and satisfactory answers.

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* *Christianity is just a myth, why should this myth be preferred over another?*

Myth is often used to mean a belief that has a practical or didactic value,²⁰³ but a belief based on facts whose truthfulness is mostly or largely questionable. If Christianity is essentially or mostly sound in fact, then it is not accurate to call it a myth to begin with (though granted there are or might still be aspects of it which can be considered mythical.) If nothing else then, it is at least not unreasonable to be open minded to the possibility that Christianity is, or is *mostly*, after all based on fact; hence (so it can be argued) it is not fair to call it a myth.

Another, yet quite different, response to such objection is this. Unless perhaps we are loyal and dogged skeptics, we cannot escape believing in some great myth or other to begin with; for the simple reason that we will speak about life and the great world around us as a known whole despite our being far from omniscient. Now if Christianity is merely a myth (that is, the historical facts on which it is based are largely false), it is arguably as better or as good as any other myth. So if we like, a Christian person might choose to say, “yes, even if it is a myth, still it is the best myth.” And what claim of someone or something as being of greatest value may not be challenged objectively by another as ultimately subjective, and therefore a myth? If we feel challenged in our faith by its being a myth, we can modify what we believe about it in order to make it better consistent with facts, sound reasoning and morals; while retaining our devotion to what is already known to be true, and worthy about it. If important particulars about Christianity are, for the sake of argument, somehow wrong, nevertheless, we still might believe in a One supreme beneficent, wise and fair God who will recognize just and reasonable Christian claims, even if (hypothetically or formally speaking) He is not Christian as some, assume him to be. Though a person might not be Christian for their own selves’ sake, perhaps they might become one for the sake of rescuing, helping, inspiring, or encouraging others, and what better way to do this by way of a role model who gives up his life to save others whom he otherwise was in no way personally obliged to?

²⁰³ For this reason, the myths of such as Greece and Rome, and when shorn of their literal and religious character, are still and can be of legitimate value when applied morally, and as artistic and teaching tools; as, for instance, we see in the use made of them by Christian writers such as Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Milton. In sum and otherwise, one can like a story and the characters in a story very much, even profoundly and deeply; without necessarily making that story and its characters their religion or the basis of their own religion.

Someone could say why not Zarathustra, Krishna, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, or Mohammed as the ultimate spokesperson and representative of God, or, if you prefer, Divinity? Of course, those who do so and with sincerity are perfectly right to express their faith, joy and goodness as they see fit. A Christian, as a great lover of what is Good themselves, certainly ought not to resent it; all the less so as the “unbeliever” is otherwise fundamentally honest, moral, and benevolent in his or her views. Indeed, we should not only respect others’ right to their beliefs, but if those beliefs are centered in *honest* morals and a love of truth, we should admire and love those beliefs also. This of course can be done without denying Christ his ultimate role and importance. Valuing the affinities between other’s moral religion and our own only enhances our own wonder and appreciation of the breadth and scope of God’s beauty and goodness in what is small, great, and middling. Further, common experience shows that a Christian who casually denies the value of other well-established moral and spiritual teachers invariably reveals them to be in some measure an ignoramus or a rascal. Granted there are or might be important grounds of difference in theological outlook which possibly offend our sensibilities. Yet when otherwise the representatives of a given faith respect freedom of conscience, esteem highly the dignity of life, love, peace, basic justice, mercy, and are fundamentally honest, then serious differences can be easily overcome.

Some have urged that Jesus was merely a political radical of his time, and perhaps something of a deluded lunatic as well. If so, how remarkable that such a person should have made such an enormous and widespread impact on countless lives over many, many centuries. Remember there were scoffers from the beginning, and there always have been; such is by no means a modern phenomenon. Back in the 5th century, for example, Emperor Julian was convinced that Jesus could be put in his proper less distinguished place. And yet remarkably, here we are in the 21st century and there are now more Christians now than ever the world has known.

But if that is true, some might ask cannot the same be said of Mohammed? As before, we must be prepared to respect and honor those of other faiths and their beliefs as long as they are of a fundamentally moral cast, and yes a like argument can be made. And yet there is this significant difference; namely, for one, that Mohammed never claimed he was God; nor that he could forgive sins.

** Why should Jesus of Nazareth have been Christ, why couldn’t it have been someone else?*

I think it can at least be agreed that if there was a Christ, it had to be someone. So, once again, if someone other than Jesus of Nazareth was the true “Jesus Christ” (say, for example in reality, it had been, all the while and unknown to subsequent ages, a certain Jesus of Jericho; the record of him having been made truncated and spurious with this one we have about a Jesus of Nazareth); we would still find ourselves asking why now *this* person? The same sort of answer could be given to a question like, why did he appear in (what we know as) the first century A.D.? Why didn’t he come in the 3rd or 9th century B.C.? There is therefore no *inherent* bias, unfairness or implausibility that Christ should be such and such a person; who was born around such and such a date, and lived in such

and such a location, under such and such circumstances. If he did not fulfill such essential conditions he could not possibly be a man. Why he should particularly be this person, or have been born at such time, etc. might well be speculated on, and be seen as having special significance. But whether or not such speculation and estimation is worthwhile or not, there is obviously nothing in and of itself objectionable in saying that Christ should be such and such an individual, come from such and such a time and vicinity, etc. A person might not like our saying this is Christ or that Christ lived at such a time, or at such a place, but Christ had to be someone. He had to be sometime. He had to be somewhere. The same reasoning can be applied to the question of “Why Noah?” “Why Abraham?” “Why Israel?” “Why Moses?” “Why Elijah?” “Why Judah?” For which the answer is the same. Though Christ’s identity, or say the time he lived, might seem peculiar *to us* as God’s choices, their mere peculiarity is not of or by itself compelling grounds for rejecting viable reality or the viability of their truthfulness.²⁰⁴

** How can Christianity be seen as a rational and scientifically consistent faith if the Bible and Christian historical tradition are fraught with misunderstanding, contradictions, questionable records and teachings?*

Such errors of “Christian” teaching and Biblical interpretation can be seen according to the following possible ways.

- a.) What is seen as a factual error is not in fact an error at all, but simply a reported fact which has been misunderstood or misinterpreted; while allowing for the possibility that the source material or text left something(s) or other to be desired.
- b.) The record (whether the Bible or other source) in question was written by someone who unintentionally or accidentally misreported what is said to have been spoken or said to have taken place.
- c.) The record in question was written by someone who *deliberately* misreported what is said to have been spoken or said to have taken place.
- d.) The record may have been accidentally or deliberately tampered with by a person not the author, either after it was written and or after it was accepted into the canon.

Allowing for and taking into account these possibilities, we can suggest that the questionable source or person reporting (what was said or done) should simply be thoughtfully and with great caution rejected, corrected or qualified; while still maintaining Christianity’s essential facts and principles; that is, what we have earlier spoken of as core doctrine. In other words, what is or might be wrong in the Bible or in Christian teaching if it offends us pluck it out. But even if we reject one fact or argument, and even do so wrongly, it does not necessarily follow that we need reject Christianity

²⁰⁴ Some have argued, and it seems to me persuasively, that the time Jesus appeared was indeed an excellent occasion in history to appear given the by then high development of the philosophy, and the culturally unifying role of the Alexandrian and Roman empires, including well developed avenues of land communications, through and by means of which the Gospel could be more widely disseminated and more easily received and understood.

mostly let alone entirely; all the less so if we approach factual or doctrinal difficulties in a constructive unpresuming manner, and creatively and philosophically. And if misunderstandings or conflicts still remain we can persuade others to the truth by examples of patience and while exercising the power of respect toward others -- as inconvenient and painful in doing so these sorts of things might at times be.

There is this misunderstanding in some circles that Christianity is fundamentally a religion of secret mysteries. I think this approach that tends to the arcane, at best, largely false. Leaving aside personal or private religion of the individual, as say in the case of mysticism, religious truth as known socially is mostly (if not always and at all times and with all people), candid, straight forward, open, and without cunning artifice. Christ spoke in parables, yet he also explained that they were insufficient because people of that time could not be told the straight truth. While truth may use parable and other such rhetorical contrivances on occasion, the end, nevertheless, is something that is open and available for all to see and hear who desire to see and hear it. We put the lamp nit under a chair, but out in the open where it can shed and beam *light*. If what is proffered as "Christian" refuses us this, then we should reject it as, at best, mistaken, or, at worst, a lie antithetical to truth.

** Is not the history replete with accounts of injustices and atrocities committed by Christians? And do these not discredit the faith?*

It is very easy to see that not all who claimed to be Christians were actually so. Nor is it surprising that Christianity should historically have been used by insincere, misguided, and duped persons for unwise or even criminal purposes; since the same could be said of any doctrine, creed, nations, or peoples to some extent. Christianity being so popular, it was bound to find that many more infiltrators, imposters, or other persons who sought to use it for short-sighted, unjust and ulterior motives.

Although the Buddhists may be considered better pacifists as Russell avers, the fault ascribed to Christians lies more in the nature and character of certain peoples, and other cultural and traditional circumstances, and not necessarily their religious faith per se. Immediately located in or influencing as wide a geographical area as it did, Christianity simply was present where there was or otherwise would have been troubled or as troubled anyway. So at least it could be reasonably maintained; while taking other factors into account, as, for example, the relative newness of *European* civilization. So-called "Christian" wars, it could be argued were not especially Christian in their origin as such, but the result of forces which were bound to surface in such societies regardless. Indeed, but for Christianity, the destruction they engendered and needless suffering and loss of life they caused might have been significantly (or even catastrophically) worse.

Last, but not least, religion is a good deal like music; that is, it is only effective when done well. And often times what we dislike about religion is not really religion itself, but religion conducted or practiced ineptly. Therefore, just as we don't blame music for a poor or inept musician's bad performance; so religion should not be faulted for the misjudgments or incompetence of its or would-be practitioners. Christianity, as

much as anything else, is like and much the demanding art, and if we want quality Christianity, it necessarily requires persons who are adept and *good at it* -- just as with any art form or endeavor that requires skill and intelligence. As it is, so often what we reject about religion is not religion itself properly speaking, but ours or someone else's *false* idea of it and or else their startling ineptness at living up to, or even betrayal of, what it enjoins.

** Is not Christianity pro-obscurantism and anti-science?*

This is, in certain ways, a question of no little significance because some insist on seeing science as an exploration of merely what is outward and physical to us while ignoring or brushing aside as esoteric and irrelevant what is deeply emotional, epistemological, and spiritual within. If that is what science is then Christianity could be said to be against it.

There has been a certain avoidance of traditional religion and rational spirituality in much of modern philosophy and science, a stigmatization and often a hypocritical prejudice, of belief in God which itself amounts to a kind of dogmatism. The fact is, one can't avoid religion. It's that simple. If we value anything greatly, we are religious. No, the real question then for religious and non-religious alike to be asking is: *what* is it we most and or so highly value?

Before the advent of printing, books and written texts were hard to come by unless you were extremely wealthy. The Bible encouraged literacy and devotion to writing, and viewed writing, and hence thought, as something sacred. In its widespread appeal it possessed an importance few if any other books could match. In this way the Bible was not only desirable but requisite for higher literacy, and hence the subsequent higher level of culture, quality of life, and standard of living.²⁰⁵ Moreover, and as well as preserving ancient texts otherwise lost, monasticism furnished the necessary peaceful working environment where close scholarship, thoroughness of study, and ultimately methodical scientific inquiry could at last come into their own.

Now though it is fair and relevant to note the many great scientists who were Christians, and the fact that so much scientific progress and advancement took place in Christian nations, these, by themselves, are no clear argument to say Christian belief has helped or not helped science as such (or at least any more so than anything else.) This admitted, it may and ought to be borne in mind, many truly great scientists and thinkers, such as Copernicus, Columbus, Huygens, Francis Bacon, Newton, Locke and Faraday and others have attested the importance of their Christian faith, and it would be negligent to see this as insignificant. As well, moral injunctions that Christianity, if availed of, can be seen as having facilitated honesty and truthfulness, and which can only help science; at least that science that is worthy of the name.

²⁰⁵ Gibbon, in effect, states quite plainly that it was Christianity that single-handedly succeeded in making barbarian, and hence subsequent, Europe at large, literate. *Decline and Fall*, vol. 3, ch. 37, Conversion of The Barbarians To Christianity-part 3.

At the same time, there are after all cases where Christianity is cited as having interfered with scientific progress, or worse been its inveterate enemy. The persecution or deaths of Hypatia (the female mathematician) of Alexandria,²⁰⁶ Galileo, Giordano Bruno, to name just some are sometimes cited as rebukes to Christianity. But rather what such cases illustrate is how historically Christianity could be *used* by some to thwart scientific inquiry and an expanded understanding of our world. Yet the obvious response to such charges is to say that those engaged in such oppression were acting not as Christians to begin with; even though in name they claimed themselves to be.

If Christianity as a social force has in some way acted against the better interest of science, then the simple explanation is to say the fault lies in the error of the would-be Christians, and their misunderstanding of Christian true teaching, not Christianity itself. This might seem rather too casual dispensing of the issue. But I believe that if we look into specific instances where the church has stood brazenly in the way of what seemed ostensibly to be scientific progress, the problem was either the science in question was dishonest or shamelessly immoral (to give the church the benefit of the doubt) or else the church (or church in question) applied Christian doctrine or beliefs in an erroneous and needlessly irrational way (to give the benefit of the doubt to church opponents), and was prompted to act as it did more out of blind conventional and secular prejudices than too excessive a concern for Christian needs. Whether the given circumstance can be described as one of science spurred on by a concealed need to promote some form of immorality, or a herd mentality standing in the way of a thoughtful examination of nature by no means implies blame to Christianity itself. For in what was the action? Censorship of scholarly, literary, and academic letters and papers? Pre-meditated character or other kind of assassination? The machinations of spies and inquisitors? Arrests and executions? What, I ask you honestly, is Christian or Christian based about any of these actions or behaviors? That Christianity was or is hijacked or commandeered by stubbornly irrational demagogues and mere crowd/mob pleasers should come as no surprise to anyone in the least acquainted with human nature.

The origins of scientific thought, as much as anything else, are in rationality, and by the medium way of right reasoning learned Christianity (like the learned of other major religions, certainly) has much in common with empirical science. It addresses questions very relevant to any kind of scientific epistemology or philosophy of science; such as questions concerning the nature of reality, the basis of the notions of truth and falsehood, of determination of what make for valid and what invalid claims, to name just a few crucial points requiring necessary consideration.

On the other hand, Christianity is often seen as preaching a more spiritual and unmaterialistic viewpoint, when it *seems* like so much of scientific, including technological, progress was brought about by wars, greed, and very decidedly materialistic minded people. Are not the true Christians, as a practical matter, therefore at best laggards in scientific advancement (even granting the alleged benefits rational

²⁰⁶ Christian writer, Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople (c. 380-?), writing as far back as the early 5th century, emphatically denounced the murder of Hypatia as inexcusable, and as a matter of course disassociates the true and legitimate church from it. *Church History*, Book VIII, ch. 15.

theology offers scientific epistemology) compared to more materialistic minded people? If we say the investments of wealthy capitalists in the nineteenth century were materialistic in a way unbecoming a proper Christian, and these investments increased scientific advancement, does not this suggest at least that certain kinds of scientific advancement are unchristian?

The problem with this objection is what we mean by materialistic. It could be argued that most of these capitalists were essentially sound Christians and therefore not materialistic in that sense. While this might initially sound strange, we have to admit after all that there have been wealthy philanthropists whom most would accept as good and sincere Christians in their way.

Another answer is to say not all scientific advancement is uniformly good or beneficial; particularly if we lose sight of greater values, concerns, and other complementary or rival scientific outlooks. If we say this or that is scientific advancement, we owe it to ourselves to specify, categorize, explain and justify it as being such. What was invested in one study or endeavor might have been invested in another rival study and endeavor; so tell me why this one so markedly to be preferred over this other. Unfortunately, such questions are not as frequently considered as they ought to be. When we speak of advancement we are making a value judgment, and at the last and least we owe it to ourselves to be specific about exactly what it is we are valuing, and how well such valuing stacks up against other values.

This all having been said, while Christianity forbids material avarice, it has been argued, rightly or wrongly, by some that it does not forbid the seeking of material profit if such is done honestly and with a real mind toward charity and helping others. If this is allowed, it can be said that Christianity need not conflict with scientific or industrial enterprise. Yet as always, others will feel that to permit this view Christian belief is lessened, if not compromised. Ultimately, such matters in specific instances are ones which can only be resolved between God and a given individual's conscience.

Christianity, properly speaking (and that is to say honest Christianity), is and champions the truth, and often times what people have against Christianity is the same as what they have against truth generally. And just as the truth provides real solutions, lies and prolonged fantasy tend toward or bring harm and evil. Yet in our day-to-day lives, who and how many can bear honest truth? Indeed and as practical matter, is it not in fact the case that those who sincerely insist on genuine, fair, impartial, and honest truth actually take up the cross in and by their doing so?²⁰⁷ And are all scientists or would-be scientists sufficiently objective, impartial, and honest when it comes to getting at the truth?

²⁰⁷ There are some Christians who attempt to define the truth as merely the acceptance of and faith in Jesus as God. But if honesty and right reason are not included also in the definition truth, such, it seems to me, and howsoever well intentioned, is little better than rhetoric, cant, or perhaps dissembling. Since if we think we are free to discard or play fast and loose with honesty and right reason, what kind of idea of Jesus will we end up promoting or embracing? St. Paul writes: "And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth. Wherefore putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another." Eph. 4:24-25.

** Is not Christianity a slave-like way of thinking, antagonistic to progress, social activism and the promotion of individual freedom?*

When Christ tells us to bear our cross or put down our sword, it is an enjoining of us to seek the higher way of doing things. We are not merely asked to suffer the cross, but to take it up. The difference is crucial, and while acceptance of the cross might suggest docility, taking it up rather bespeaks or reflects the most noble and powerful kind of character possible or imaginable; all the more so as the “cross” and question is more rather than less difficult.

At the same time, there is a just point to be made that notions of Christian moral virtue could be misunderstood, or deliberately distorted in people’s minds, and as a result used *not* to ennoble, but to unnecessarily degrade them. For example, that one must necessarily say nothing, not object, and *do* go along quietly with what everyone else is being told to do. I think it is fair to say that the measure of whether practicing certain virtues is worth a Christian’s pursuing is decided on the basis of proper service to God and one’s neighbor. And if the glorifying of God or the benefit of our neighbor does not in a significant or meaningful way follow from our pursuing a certain virtue or practicing a certain austerity, then certainly, we will want question its value and usefulness. Needless to add, this must be done thoughtfully and with a mind to using both good moral and good practical, judgment, and not as selfish or childish excuse to get out of what, if we stop and think about it, we *should* be doing.

Otherwise, whether a moral virtue, such as self-sacrifice and humility, is practiced in accordance with proper and sensible Christian wisdom, or whether it reflects the irrationality of the moment and unnecessary self-debasement will depend much on the person in question and their circumstances. Paul claiming his Roman citizenship as a defense is a good example of where discretion might be seen as a better way to serve God than immediate embracing of the cross and martyrdom. For one thing, by his action it could be argued that Paul, in effect, was asserting that a person could legally be Roman and Christian, and that there was a common workable relationship between the two peoples; which assertion, in its way, helped to pave the way for the acceptance of Christian beliefs among Romans. Also, the same Christ who tells us to take up our cross also tells us “Be ye as meek as doves and shrew as serpents,” which, after all, is simply one way of saying use your head.²⁰⁸

For some resisting or deferring the cross, and taking up the sword or civil protesting, is not, in all cases, necessarily the wrong thing to do. On occasion, such attitudes may be just and appropriate under the circumstances. At the same time, it goes without saying, that what is supposedly Christian meekness and humility have on not a few occasions been used as a mask for apathy and cowardice, and this should not be made to light of. In the early church some people claimed to be Christians, but when they were challenged with martyrdom, succumbed to fear, and reneged on their faith.

²⁰⁸ Duns Scotus (and perhaps someone before him as well) makes the interesting assertion that Christ would have become incarnate even without man’s fall, and without, presumably, having to be crucified.

When some of these later sought entry back into the church, the Novatianists, in North Africa, would not accept them, and as interpreted by others, would not therefore forgive them either. For this reason the Novatianist were classed as heretics. Yet while we might agree that the Novatianist were being inconsistent in not forgiving, one does see in their point of view a very commendable interest in remembering and appreciating the value of those *who did not* succumb or renege, and their example which should be treated as sacred and of *utmost* importance to us.

In most, if not all instances, the sword and civil protesting are far less divine, effective and honorable modes compared to truly following the cross. Such at least lies at the heart of Christian belief. But basic also to Christian belief is the hope that, with God's grace, we can foster, nurture, build and maintain a world where suffering the cross is no longer necessary; so that things may be made to "on earth as it is in Heaven," and not just for mankind, but *for all life*. Nor let us forget also that the more successful, in lasting terms, revolutions (if flawed in their short term), were led by Christian people, such as that the Cromwellian or the American Revolutions. The less successful revolutions, on the other hand, as the 20th century has shown, have not infrequently been *decidedly* anti-Christian.

No one cares to be crucified. But if the choice is between being crucified and doing the crucifying (as it sometimes is and as others would force it to be), it goes without saying, if paradoxically, the former is noble and to be preferred, and the latter to be seen as truly debased and most deserving of rightful contempt.

While it may be correct to say that Christianity in its earliest historical form did not seek social progress in this world, the idea was not to say that social progress in this world didn't matter or wasn't desirable. Rather, the point was one of saying if you can't and don't change and clean men's hearts, you cannot hope to change their thinking and way of living; and without such revolutionary change of heart there can be no real and meaningful societal reform -- the truth of which I think any sensible and level headed person, if they intelligently consider the question, can readily discern and recognize for themselves.

We receive and bear with the church as she is, but at the same time living toward the hope of what, in a better sense, she may and is supposed to be -- even if that hope, perhaps, has been abandoned by or tricked away from some of the church's mislead, albeit well-intentioned, members.

** How can Christianity be representative of God; given (on the global scale) its often narrow cultural perspective and presentation?*

Another way of putting this objection is: Christian aesthetic sensibility and customs do not always reflect universality (culturally speaking); nor are the ideas and images it commonly uses ubiquitously pleasing. If Christianity is, in its ideas of beauty relative to the international cultures, rather provincial, how then can we ascribe universality to its principles? Christian art and culture has, for the most part, been western

or middle eastern in character, and is the result of historical and regional trends. There is no reason in theory, for example, why culturally and artistically, Christianity might have taken on an oriental look had it spread largely to the east, rather than westward as it did. Does the fact Christianity didn't exert a greater influence to the east suggest God is pro-western? On the surface, the traditional disparity between Christian influence westward and eastward, does clearly suggest a bias toward western culture. The why and wherefore of this could be explained differently. That the gospels were written in Greek was obviously one major factor. But it must be admitted, in any case, the problem raised by this objection is an interesting one. Though the natural evolution of historical demographics, as well as divine favoritism, offer themselves as possibilities, any answer to this question will turn decisively on the assumptions one starts out with. Here then we will simply conclude that while speculation might prove profitable, there is no readily apparent or obvious answer to the objection that Christianity, culturally and artistically, could be said to suffer from a pronounced western bias. This conceded, it must be understood that most all religions have a specific location of origin accompanied by a cultural distinctiveness that is regional; so that in this regard Christianity is no different than other religions. In addition, it is well to recognize that although Christianity is commonly taken as western in cultural character, there have, nevertheless, been striking and eloquent expressions of Christianity in Native American, African, Indian, East Asian, Chinese and other cultures, which do more than show the rich, indeed infinite, possibilities of a non-occidental interpretation.

It is curious to observe that when some Christians hear a George Harrison or John Lennon, song where "Krishna," "Dalai Lama," is sung in the same lyrics as "Hallelujah," they might take exception to the song writer's lumping together and leveling of faiths. Not that such Christians necessarily resent Hinduism or Buddhism, it's just the juxtaposition of faith concepts in these songs, might be taking as grating to their aesthetic, if not religious, sensibility. Yet if we believe that, in the true spirit of Christ, that a Christian should be generous and loving not only to non-Christians, but to out and out enemies, then such songs can and should be easily taken in an amicable way, and the artist's worthy intentions respected, if not necessarily his theological judgment. If then non-orthodox Christians depict or express Christian ideas or notions in a way that we might in some way disagree with, Christians, as a general rule, should, more than usual, be open-minded, empathetic, and friendly to such expressions; at least as long as the non-orthodox Christian is otherwise a sincere and well-meaning person, acting without overt malice, nor advocating (some form of) immorality or unnatural conduct.

** Isn't Christianity, after all, really a trick to get people to not enjoy life so that more shrewd and clever people can, and at the Christians' expense?*

Though the idea did not occur to me otherwise, I have actually heard people characterize both Judaism and Christianity this way. While this objection could be said to be true, it is only true of Judaism and Christianity practiced wrongly; either by those who too foolishly and needlessly allow themselves to be taken advantage of, and by people who think they can serve both God and Mammon. By definition, a genuine person of faith knows better than an unbeliever; because they know better who and what are of

most value. True moral and religious devotion shows that a person cares more, and that their love endures and lasts longer. And what is of greater value than a higher love based in a morally consistent conscience; that can be trusted and relied upon?²⁰⁹

The truth is the devil will, in the end, (and if he is given the opportunity), attempt to ruin *everyone's* happiness in this life one way or another, regardless of your affiliation, and all the more so if you have the potential to be extremely happy. It is for this reason, and or a reckless lack of judgment and sense of responsibility, that most people suffer beyond normal, or else do not prosper as they else ought or deserve to.

Outside Judaism, and the practice of wealthy Romans routinely bestowing alms and favors to clientele among the lower classes, Christianity founded the first public charities, hospitals, orphanages, and brought about the end of animal sacrifices (the faith's founder born himself in a manger.) In this we see the effort of people to rid themselves of cruelty and indifference to others' suffering. These, and other kinds and acts of mercy and non-private benevolence, I think all would agree have contributed *enormously* to the improvement of the quality of *all* our lives, yet which it is all too easy to forget or take for granted.

As well of note, it is not among the least of comforts (for some necessities) of Christianity that in instances where *our own love*, for whatever reason, *is unworthy*, we invoke the truly divine as a go-between; and can pray or otherwise appeal to God to love, in our behalf, the object of our esteem or affection. That is to say, one needs God and the concept of holiness in order to face, show love and pay due respect to men and women who are truly worthy and honorable; because *by and of ourselves alone* we cannot begin to do such persons right and proper justice. In other words, if we love someone deeply, we sometimes and necessarily need and require God to help love that someone also. Our own love by itself and by comparison, if we are honest with ourselves, is simply too feeble and inadequate.

[Likewise, we might need God to help us love someone one, say a relative, whom we have a hard time loving.]

** We sometimes finds ourselves, dissatisfied, indeed disgusted by a given church's coldness, artificiality, hypocrisy and indifference, what should a good Christian's attitude be in such an environment?*

Unless we intend to avoid the congregation (or certain of its persons) altogether, our local church can be a most wonderful place to practice Christian virtues: humility, long suffering, patience, kindness, and charity; all the more so because we suffer real or perceived rude treatment at the hands, not of unbelievers, but of our fellows.

²⁰⁹ People who are not themselves and or who don't know the advantage of regular church going, at least when it comes to attending a sincere and quality church, can have little or no idea of what a dismal, enervating void they suffer in their lives. Most of those who have had a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque upbringing, again at least an upbringing of a wise and intelligent sort and which confers dignity on life, know what irreplaceable life riches and a treasure to the heart, mind, and soul such an experience is. How infinitely poorer we are or would be without it!

* *How should or might the Book of Revelation be seen?*

For about three centuries after it was written and appeared, the Book of Revelation (or the Apocalypse) was not admitted by the church to the Bible canon, and rejected by some very respectable Church Fathers as not being authentic. One is at a great loss as to how one can begin to understand and take this work except as a sort of poetical Christian science fiction with a hopeful theme and conclusion. It has the truth of poetry, drama, and some excellent moral teaching. Else and otherwise, particularly with regard to its symbolizing of persons and events, it is sometimes hard to take it seriously owing to its incomprehensibility and the overly wide latitude of interpretation it too easily lends itself to. In short, I *personally*, am inclined to think it is genuine in its way and containing some superbly inspired passages, but is better thought of as well-meaning apocrypha than scripture proper, or if taken as scripture, mostly on the grounds of the genuinely greatest Christian charity and indulgence toward certain kinds of incorrigibly irrational people. This might sound harsh, but when one thinks of the many times people have been confused by this book, or else used it to create confusion, it will, I think, appear less so. Such, at any rate, is my present opinion.²¹⁰

* *Christ, in the gospels, makes some heavy demands of his followers; for example, give up all you have; abandon friends and family; take up the cross and follow me, etc. How then is it even possible for anyone to be a Christian?*

It is not hard to see that what Christ asks of us that is demanding would be too strenuous, even impossible, for many if not most people. For some, it is well such teachings be taken literally. But yet for others, they can be seen as a way of getting us to set higher goals of behaviors for ourselves than obviously we otherwise and ordinarily would.

One major problem one encounters in a given church, thinking especially in my own experience with the Catholic church, is a preoccupation with holiness accompanied by a short-shrifting of basic morals, including frank honesty, and reasonableness. And yet why should there be such a disparity and drifting apart between a concern for holiness versus basic morals, honesty and reasonableness? In such separation or alienating due morals from holiness one can readily see what is or appears to be a potentially fatal weakness for many in the church.

The Roman jurist and Christian Lactantius (c. 240?-c. 325? A.D.), in his *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, writes: "Let virtue alone please us, whose reward is immortal when it has conquered pleasure. But when the passions have been overcome and pleasures subdued labour in suppressing other things is easy to him who is a follower of God and of truth: he will never revile, who shall hope for a blessing from God; he will not commit perjury, lest he should mock God; but he will not even swear, lest at any time, either by necessity or through habit, he should fall into perjury. He will speak nothing deceitfully, nothing with dissimulation; he will not refuse that which he has

²¹⁰ And if portions of Revelation strike one as mad, one might also have a look at the religious writings of Isaac Newton (himself an Arian.)

promised, nor will he promise that which he is unable to perform; he will envy no one, since he is content with himself and with his own possessions; nor will he take away from, or wish ill to another, upon whom, perhaps, the benefits of God are more plenteously bestowed. He will not steal, nor will he covet anything at all belonging to another. He will not give his money to usury, for that is to seek after gain from the evils of others; nor, however, will he refuse to lend, if necessity shall compel any one to borrow. He must not be harsh towards a son, nor towards a slave: he must remember that he himself has a Father and a Master. He will so act towards these as he will wish that others should act towards him. He will not receive excessive gifts from those who have less resources than himself; for it is not just that the estates of the wealthy should be increased by the losses of the wretched..." [ch. 64.]

"But it is true all these things are difficult to man, nor does the condition of his frailty permit that any one should be without blemish. Therefore the last remedy is this, that we have recourse to repentance, which has not the least place among the virtues, because it is a correction of oneself; +that when we have happened to fail either in deed or in word, we may immediately come to a better mind, and confess that we have offended, and entreat pardon from God, which according to His mercy He will not deny, except to those who persist in their error..." [ch. 67]

The gospels, and here Lactantius, in holding us to high standards and exhorting us to stricter demands on ourselves, are not unlike someone enjoining us to go run the marathon; while we (most of us anyway) might think it too much to just go and do any such a thing. And yet we can seriously contemplate the proposal, and if we fail of proceeding no further than this, we can at the very least admonish ourselves and ask humble pardon for our failure from those who can so proceed, including, of course, God himself. Meantime, those who can better live up to Christ's standards of conduct, or those who come closest to doing so, should be all the more revered, respected and, generally speaking, differed to as authority in social, legal and moral questions; at least when such deference does not fly in the face of otherwise just reasoning and undeniable common sense. So, for instance, while a putative saint might inform or advise me on a matter of morals, it will not do for me to appeal to his expertise as a mechanic or structural engineer; unless he happens to be an expert in those fields also.

Even if, and for some reason, one sees oneself as beyond saving, certainly the church will be saved. And to the degree one supports and helps to empower the church and its members *sincerely* and with loving and unselfish motives (while not in the process, of course, be engaging in willful fraud or reckless self-deception), then perhaps they will, in the end, at least be able to find a holy place or berth for themselves, even if only a very humble one. For a humble berth in heaven (or per chance its "outskirts") far and infinitely outweighs a palace in Hell.

"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," said John F. Kennedy. And yet it seems more than likely that the thought first occurred to him with respect to the church rather than the country; since I would think that out of hand and ordinarily we are much more easily disappointed or dissatisfied with the former than the latter.

** You speak so much and often in philosophic terms. Can we not simply reduce Christian to a practical philosophy?*

As a practical matter, most philosophers, unless they be like Zeno of Elea, Socrates, or Epictetus, or perhaps Plotinus can and could not deal with gross or diabolical evil. Certainly such models are far from the minds of common people. Christ, on the other hand and by comparison, in taking up the cross is an example people more readily understand and are acquainted with

That he could and would face and suffer the cross could be said to be Jesus' glory. But perhaps it might be said the cross itself and otherwise was not Jesus' glory *as such*. More so and rather, it was someone else's great shame and embarrassment. Such a cruelty as crucifixion and its related and barbarous like could (outside of horrible diseases and similarly grievous medical ailments) easily be deemed among the very worst things in existence or experience. Why then have ever done them, and (perhaps more to the point) have persisted (to this day no less) in doing them -- to anyone? Why was this "someone" (or "someones") ever interested in tortures and subjecting others to such inhuman things in the first place? Was it envy and self-pity, or fear of God's power; what ever was it that prompted such bizarre behavior? Will we ever even know?

And yet, ironically, for *some* people this "someone," say "Satan," is their greatest person, and to whom, they feel, all must answer. I, for one, fail to see why, and would instead prefer to fight such a person and get rid of him. But before it is possible to do that much, it obviously is necessary to first persuade people that he exists. Yet what in turn prevents this happening is not lack of proof or evidence of the grand malefactor's (and his ilk's) existence, but rather the deluded and mistaken idea that he is inherently superior to us and, as well, a benevolent force for good! Perhaps the explanation is that torture is a means to induce fear, and, further, that fear is, arguably, the most effective tool by means of which to gain worldly power and wealth. If this is true, is it possible and could we then surmise that those with the largest and most prodigious amount of worldly wealth and power are the most relentless, proficient and skilled torturers? Is it by chance fear, rather than communal consent and a social contract that holds the greater sway over us?

The example of Christ, and the martyrs also, then are role models by which people can stand up to great evil and brutal tyranny. Similar can be found in other religions also, such as Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, and which we are free to turn to as inspirations as well.

If you can't, for some particular reason or other, think of the traditional Jesus of Nazareth as the person to emulate, then just think of some one who would so take up their cross. For while we will often or sometimes find misguided or deceived Christianity deserving of criticism or censure, there is and can never be anything possibly wrong with the true faith. Granted we not unusually are sorry if we find ourselves having to bear a (serious) cross. Yet sometimes there is simply no way for upright or would-be upright people to avoid it -- this thanks to the mad, yet time honored, criminal tendencies of

certain types of individuals who seek wealth, power or some other benefit by utilizing evil. And if others don't have to bear a (serious) cross, that's all the better by me certainly, as I would just as soon see no one have to do so, and would not wish it on anyone.

Many become less sentimental as they grow older because they think that if love or innocent were ever going to be rescued or redeemed it would already have happened -- and long ago no less. And this one of the reasons why I am a Christian; namely because it is not practical to assume or expect such rescue or redemption in this life. And if we ask was love or innocence ever redeemed, we may say it was in and through Christ. And even if I have doubts or ignorance as to who Christ was historically, I can never doubt in him of himself as God's most beloved; anymore than I could doubt or be indifferent to the reality that someone, somewhere was innocent and was made to die very cruelly and unjustly. In this way, Christ is real, and heart and spirit know him as such; even if historical and intellectual ideas about him are perhaps or in a given instance misguided or in error.

** In what light should modern Judaism be interpreted with respect to Christianity?*

Over the years hearing rabbis and other intelligent Jewish thought, I've come to think that the Jesus which Jews reject as Messiah is a fake one, and in this they are justified in their rejection. But if Jesus is true, that is, if there is a true Jesus, and he is the truth, no credible and sincere Jew can or will deny him. Or put differently, if a Jew is of and seeks honest truth he or she shows by this that, as a practical matter, they believe in the true Jesus, and suffer no blame by rejecting what they understandably perceive as false versions of him. The test then becomes for them one of how deeply their heart and motives lie in a sincere search and love for honest and moral truth. The gospels make clear that Jesus first mission was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; in view of which truly devout Jews are perhaps granted a certain latitude when it comes to skepticism that few or no others are allowed, and taking into account impostures over the age have been made using Jesus of Nazareth's identity, not least of which at the expense, not infrequently brutal and unjust, of the Jewish people generally. That at any rate, I myself am inclined to think, or so would guess, is how God views such Jews.

** What church, as in denomination, would you recommend a would-be Christian have preference for?*

Inasmuch as I was born, baptized and raised within in its sacraments, liturgy, teachings, and disciplines, I myself am given to (Roman) Catholicism, and if asked would recommend *it*. But naturally and as could reasonably be expected, others will go with what denomination they feel best suits them, and I think it is only fair to respect their choice, at least and to the extent the given denomination respects right reason and traditional morality. Such, at any rate, is my own feeling on the subject.

Yet some Catholics don't hesitate in being scornful toward non-Catholic Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity; seeing, as they do, the Reformation as

the ruin or near ruin of the church. While I understand such reaction, it seems to me that the Reformation was in some ways both inevitable and, in addition, had its very good and positive side, as well as its regrettable aspects and obvious failings. "Inevitable," that is, in light of the introduction of gunpowder, the printing press, the rise of merchants and the middle class, and the discovery of new lands in the Americas and Asia; with church -- while struggling to suppress and contain corrupt practices (such as the sale of indulgences), and in some instances hamstrung if not paralyzed by short-sighted and out-dated intellectual and scientific views -- being understandably overwhelmed in the process. Such an explosion of change was bound to radically affect the church and its peoples. One is reminded of the split between Judah and Israel following the death of Solomon, and such schism given the vicissitudes of historical time, is, well (and we might say), only human.

This stated, I agree with those who say there can ultimately be only one church. And yet one of the problems with Catholicism has been to mistakenly view the church itself as God. And it has been one of the flaws and foibles of some well-meaning and some not so well-meaning Catholics to treat the church as if it was God; and or else seem to imply that *God has to answer to the church!* While not all things are possible with the church, all things *are* possible with God; which should at least give us to humbly pause before assuming what God, in his most just and better moral judgment, can or cannot do.

The church is our Mother bringing us to God, and God himself is the Father. Yet even mothers are and can be assisted by grand-parents, relatives, and friends who are morally conscientious. And let's face it, the church in this very complicated modern world we live in today cannot act as a substitute for secular society, and which latter has its advantages and some ways necessary role in helping us get through this life. Many, though brought up in it, for a time, especially in later youth and adolescence, go astray from or even reject the church. It is just as well then that secular society, *morally grounded*, act as a safe haven where they can cool off and have a neutral space where they can think things through for themselves. And while we should indeed, and adamantly, insist the secular realm adhere to (at least) basic morals, it can, on the other hand, be permitted a certain looseness and freedom impractical if not impossible for the church to condone.

Such an approach has its obvious dangers and risks, but the without the secular safety or (if you will) *de-pressure valve* things would be much worse. As stated elsewhere, love cannot be forced, and it will not work to have the church being forced on people. When this was done in France under Louis XIV, the result was, to put it mildly, counter-productive, and only added fuel to the later excesses and intolerance of the French Revolution.

Yet even the Enlightenment and French Revolution were by no means uniformly bad in their results. And what, moreover, could or is to be said about the Industrial Revolution? The church, as it happens, and in its dealings with the world, some times and in some places simply breaks down, so to speak. On such occasions, it has a poor idea of what is going on, is at a loss how best to deal with what is taking place, and perhaps

mislaces its priorities in the process. Meantime, and in some quarters you might get better morality and a better idea of what needs doing from secular society; at least that part of it which is honest, moral and rational. Not everything needs to be done under the social auspices of the church, and the church cannot be expected to do or oversee everything that needs to be done. This reminds me of the difference between regulars and militia, say in the American Revolutionary War. While ordinarily, the regulars are more reliable and can be expected to deserve and receive the higher honors, every now and then. Yet if the regulars are badly led, they can be rendered less effective than incompetent militia. Meanwhile, though granted more rarely, certain militia, properly led, can perform as well as regulars.

St. Francis de Sales wrote: “Aurelius used to draw all the faces in the pictures he painted with the expressions and appearance of the women he loved. (So, each one represents devotion according to his liking and imagination. He who is in the habit of fasting will think that because he fasts he is very devout, even though his heart is filled with hatred. He will not take a sip of wine, or even of water, anxious about sobriety but he has no scruples to sip the blood of his neighbour by speaking ill or by false statements. Another considers himself devout because of the very great number of prayers he recites every day, even though soon after this he speaks words that are annoying, full of pride and hurtful to those in his house and to his neighbours. Another very gladly opens his purse to give alms to the poor but cannot take any gentleness from his heart to forgive his enemies. Yet another will forgive his enemies but will not pay what he owes unless he is legally forced to do so. All such persons are generally looked upon as devout whereas in fact they are not...”²¹¹

So it is, that when (as might happen) the church is badly led, it can even become a detriment and liability to morals and the improvement and correction of society, say, by succumbing to worldly pressures, ideologies and mind control (including other-worldly mind control.) When that happens, one does or might need recourse to moral minded secular society.

Then there are cases where a person puts on the mantle of Christianity (say, for instance, as a Catholic) to promote their own personal and or false agenda, so that people then mistakenly blame the faith for the demagoguery, be it well meaning or otherwise, of such individual. Often, meanwhile, we find some of the best secular expositors of morality are found in the humanities, as in, for instances, literature, music, and the arts. And the enemies of the church and mankind are quite in keeping with their own interests when they seek to “cancel culture.” Even enthusiasms like nationalism can be a helpful expedient for holding a society morally together; as a secondary adjunct to the church or if (some of) the church is perhaps and in some ways foundering for a time.

Times change, including whole eras, in no small part because people’s values inevitably change or go through changes. So that there *may* be occasions when perhaps it is well for the church to take a back seat and permit secular culture, conducted in a

²¹¹ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, I, ch. 1, Introduction to True Devotion.

morally responsible way, to serve as a temporary stand in. Far from lessening the church in people's eyes, when the church acts humbly on the great stage of social events in this way, it acts like the guest who initially takes a lower seat at the table; so that it might even be all the more respected for doing so. So that when all is said and done and when the moment of truth comes, that guest is called by the master to sit at the head of the table. Of course, there are no hard and fast rules as to what, how, and when things are to be handled; only the essential point I would make is that there are or may be times when the church should yield to the secular realm when it comes to best promoting morals and right reason; even if only for a season. All this, of course, assumes the said secular realm is itself acting in an fundamentally honest, morally responsible and duly rational way; since if it does not, it goes without saying that it would make no sense to defer to it.

** What might be said on the subject of those, particularly thinking of young people raised as Christians, who come to reject or stray from the church?*

Speaking as one to whom this has sort of thing happened in the earlier course of my life, the topic is one I personally feel deserves further addressing (i.e., more than what has already been said), and which going astray, again given my own experience, I readily empathize with and understand.

As many are already acquainted with, it is not uncommon for young people raised in the church to gradually drift away from the same; for some, perhaps even harboring hostility toward it as well. Given all the excitement and variety modern life holds before them to be had elsewhere, this, for many adolescents and person in their twenties, is not in the least surprising. Indeed it is a sociological phenomenon, as likely as not, to be routinely expected. Even the venerable St. John the Apostle in the later part of his life, as Eusebius recounts, was distressed at trying to rescue an otherwise promising yet wayward youth.²¹²

As I noted elsewhere, some come to think Christianity is a trick, and perhaps that the morals it teaches are hypocritical and not sufficiently honest or sincere. For others, it's unrealistic, naive or delusional, and keeps one from success in this life. As a practical matter and for many, all fame, notoriety, significance (thinking particularly of social and societal significance), and esteem comes and goes with fashion and what's "trending," even (as strange as it might sound) God's.

Sometimes such separation can ultimately work out to be a good thing, as it gives the young person the opportunity (as might be needed or desirable for an individual, given their particular circumstances) to see life from a different perspective, clear their thoughts, and or to sort out and think things over. Perhaps it was necessary for the prodigal son to go through what he did. Of course, we do or might regret the decision the he initially makes, but and after all such occurrence or flight is simply something that can and does happen to many young people, and, given life's often challenging and numerous complications, they understandably feel the need to work things out for themselves.

²¹² *History of the Church*, Book III, ch. 23.

One thing that typically happens in such cases is that we are unable or fail to see things from the long term view, and that as the years get on, as we get older, life turns out to be actually and even more complicated than we, as teenagers, took it to be. The older one gets, the more one comes to realize that our life is not as much our own, to do just as *we* please, as we earlier thought or assumed it to be.

Likewise it is not unusual to overlook the invaluable benefits and blessings the church makes or has made possible, whether presently or over the span of centuries; even if only viewed from a worldly level or perspective: including its being a port in a storm for sanity and moral healing (whether for an individual or society at large) when the secular world has gone mad. For some, this includes failing to appreciate the fact that they themselves a cultural and biological product of generations of Christian ancestors that came before and helped make what is good in the present life possible. One of the biggest traps fallen into is being overly preoccupied with how the church does or doesn't benefit *us* in the transitory here and now, while blindingly losing sight of its benefits to others; including how it affects the quality of life of society at large, particularly as seen from the long term view, as well as how it will or might impact our own future, not to mention after life.

And yet there are some problems religion and religious devotion (in its various forms) simply cannot help. Such are not a cure-all panacea, and there are times we lose faith because religion is not a ready answer for every pressing or serious (real or seeming) problem that might arise. We cannot expect that prayer will either fix a flat tire or speed up the likelihood of our being rescued from the Black Hole of Calcutta (were we so unfortunate to find ourselves in that or like ostensibly hopeless predicament.) And yet for those who have (by God's grace) raised, enhanced, and empowered their capacity for patience and faith, religion can do wonders the non-religious simply can and do not grasp or comprehend.

In this way, religious faith, devotion and church observance is not unlike physical exercise; it is not something many are always quick to take up. Some *do* value the importance of exercise; some *do not*. And even among those who do value exercise, for some a light regimen is enough, while for others they require of themselves an intensive work out. Like so much else in life, *one gets out of it what one puts into it*.

Now who wants to get up and go out presently and exercise?

Granted, such who read this may not at this just particular moment be so inclined. Yet at least you can see why, sooner or later, such disposition is both desirable and even necessary.

In the course of this book, we have already furnished several arguments both for Christianity and against its detractors. Yet some additional or supplementary points in this regard deserving of like consideration, especially, it won't hurt to mention or repeat just here.

* A Judge must decide all questions and settle all matters of dispute. Who then is to be the *final* judge?

* If there is final and ultimate peace, who will it come from and have the power and authority to enforce it?

* Who is in a position to forgive sins?

* Could it be that someone, although well-meaning, have their own construction and or interpretation of God and or the church that is perhaps flawed, false and or unnecessary? And if it is flawed or mistaken, then why should you be bothered by it?

* One might not like doctors, and true not all doctors are competent or can be trusted. Yet when is health, nevertheless, not all important?

* The devil routinely will mock, including disguising himself as and or parodying, what is truly good. Those who cannot mentally and emotionally keep him at a goodly distance will risk seeing what as good as less or much less than what it is, including life itself. Similarly, there are ever persons and forces that actively and doggedly seek to corrupt and destroy souls, and bring you down to their abject and thinly-camouflaged bitterness and “miserable-ness.” Looking at things from life’s long haul, what safeguards have you in place to protect yourself and loved ones from such kinds of persons?

* Even if, *for the sake of argument*, religion is only wishful thinking or a myth, just getting people to behave themselves is an unmatched blessing one would be a fool to dismiss or disdain. Marx derided religion as the opiate of the people, and yet when does a new revolution or political scene-changing ever bring about real and lasting peace and justice?

* In practice, Christianity is to a large degree what people make it to be. Depending on the individual, some things are *more*, some things are *less* emphasized. Some focus rightly on some questions, while some emphasize what is less or not true, and there are degrees of truthfulness and falseness; appropriateness and inappropriateness. It is only common sense to be “wise as serpents, and meek as doves,” and avoid what does or might offend us and empower and encourage that which we come to see as truly good and worthwhile. For oftentimes, and if we are *moral at heart*, something can be changed into something quite different than what is just by changing how we approach or how we think about it.

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## Some Additional Thoughts <sup>213</sup>

Though we take it to be outdated and false to speak of the earth as being at the center of the solar system, let alone the galaxy, let alone the universe, yet the soul and the spirit as we know them may be rightly said at the center of all; inasmuch as it is *only* possible (at least insofar as we are aware) to know *all*, and the all of the merely physical world, by means of the mind and in turn the soul. To illustrate, we are overwhelmed by the notion of a cosmos; the expanse of which, outside of mathematics, is fairly incomprehensible. Its size would seem to indicate that we are sheer nothing by comparison to it. Physically, yes, this is true; we are. But let us posit that there is no mind outside of our own (or, granted, some hitherto unknown space aliens as well and in addition if you like.) Then what is all that vast expanse of matter and energy by comparison to our mind but so much shell, dross, dress or excrescence, albeit gleaming and colorful?<sup>214</sup> If this is so, we, or at least those of us with mind, and aside of course from God, *are* at the center of the universe. For if this is not so, and again outside of God, where and what else is of greater significance?

The materialists meanwhile who argue that mind is nothing more than merely brain, and therefore matter, contend something that is irrational and incapable of substantiation; because by definition they reject reason; since reason itself has no demonstrable material embodiment and yet is the assumed standard and measure of what is true and false.

True, it may be fairly said that mind and reason require matter. Yet how can correct and mature judgments be formed outside of reason and logic -- which are immaterial and incorporeal?

Observe as well in passing that despite the colossal power of quasars, pulsars, nebulae, and black holes, these mean far less to us and are far less frequent topics of our thoughts and mediations and dialogues than persons and personalities. And a humble lamb led to slaughter moves us more and more deeply than even the mighty sun; whether as matter of sorrow or of glee.

So often the main thrust or trend of modernism is a materialism that intentionally or by implication views and transforms people into insects or mere machines pursuing the fulfillment of carnal appetite. These insects, in turn, we come to have it later and here in our own time explained to us, must be ruled by an entrenched billionaire technocracy, backed by mindless masses who watch the low-grade movies and television programs they produce. Not uncharacteristically, despite all appeals to putative science, criminal spirit people, no small players in the great game of things, are consciously or unconsciously ignored altogether. Conventional and traditional religion, on the other hand, while it does not usually address the question of criminal spirit persons all that

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<sup>213</sup> Mention of "spirit persons" or "criminal spirit persons" in the foregoing alludes to topics addressed in my *A New Treatise on Hell*, available at: <https://archive.org/details/ANewTreatiseOnHell>, and also in the follow-up volume *Reason, Morality and the would-be gods* found at amazon.com.

<sup>214</sup> "The stars are not clean in Thy sight." Job 25:5.

intelligently or rationally, at least as the advantage of acknowledging their real or possible existence.

Both cognitive materialism versus the heart and spirit perspectives begin somewhere: each has its genesis and its God (of one sort or another) -- that is, they have their source and authority. All life, as materialism typically sees it, begins from a quantum energy, atom, or particle string. But why assume this? What was before the quantum energy, atom, or particle string? Since then the energy, the atom, or particle string, has no traceable authority, it might as well be assumed to possess consciousness, and as such is a scientific expert, perhaps even superior to all others.

Spirituality says that creation (that is, the materialist's world of matter and energy) has an authority that is a person, and that person brought us into the world by way of fathers and mothers; part of whose purpose is to create and nurture a loving and happy family of some kind. By happiness I mean trust, comradery, tradition, a love of peace and justice, compassion for the innocent and helpless, some sense of humor, a morally upright character, and sportsman-like disposition for endeavor and fair competition. According to this view, happiness and morals do not come from atoms, cells, micro-organisms, neurological synapses but from already and fully developed minds and personalities. Those who insist on atoms and cells, etc. before personhood, by contrast, necessarily degrade happiness. For as materialism tells us, people and animals are after all only things -- for who has the authority to assert they are anything more than this?

Now if you believe there is no God, after life or judgment, then *what*, in effect, is it that you are believing? *That the moral law is of little or no lasting consequence or purpose.* That all the most heinous and their crimes of evil down through the ages will go unpunished, and that the innocent, or else essentially innocent, victims of the same will just have to stuff it. If this then is what you believe, is it not more or less implied that you think that there is a God but that he is the Devil?

True happiness means and implies everyone is made happy that resides in the realm ruled by God, and who is understood by way of truth, compassionate morals, and right reason. Such happiness must encompass all who are part of the community else it is not true happiness. This conception (or something like it) of course is what the idea of paradise and morally based heaven stems from. Such conception has absolutely no place in modernism -- which instead argues that the world as we know it exists ultimately and exclusively for the greater empowerment of the greatest liars, slavers and murderers; which is to say the fittest or most fit to live by means of deception, crime and terror.

*“The morals [of the colony] decayed as religion obtained its false directions. Self-righteousness, the inseparable companion of the quarrels of sects, took the place of humility, and thus became prevalent that most dangerous condition of the soul of man, when he imagines that he sanctifies what he does; a frame of mind, by the way, that is by no means strange to very many who ought to be conscious of their unworthiness. With the morals of the colony, its prosperity, even in worldly interests, began to lose ground.”*



~ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Crater* (1847), ch. XXX.

The embracing of religion does not guarantee that a person will necessarily have or be of a good moral character. And yet experience shows that a person of good moral character more likely than not tends to adopt a religious outlook. What is important to bear in mind is that religion, like science, can be misunderstood, misused and be adopted and invoked for all the wrong motives. The means therefore by which we tell sincere religion -- or sincere science -- from that which is false is honesty, right (or more correct and consistent) reason, and a willingness to suspend judgment; with careful distinctions being made being that which is subjective versus objective knowledge (or belief), and possible and likely truth versus more possible and more likely versus, and in turn, all these versus necessary truth, such as can be claimed of or found in analytic judgments. In view of which, we can as a practical matter conclude that those who are incapable of grasping and making these kinds of straightforward epistemic distinctions are either frauds, liars, delusional, and or else intellectual incompetents, and whose opinion on higher matters is not to be taken all that seriously.

The only Christianity or Christian faith then that fails is a Christianity that appeases childishness and too casually accommodates popular or conventional irrationality; that tends to secrecy and is reluctant to be honest; that hedges at being fully rational; that, out of cowardice and unthinking credulity, surrenders to the authority of spirit person wonders and occultic, albeit divine seeming, marvels, and, in short, too often seeks to side-step honest, rational truth. That, and notwithstanding all good intention, is the Christianity that inevitably disappoints, fails, and is tragically mistaken for the real thing.

## **An Overview of Sects, Schisms, and Heresies of the Early Church**

This summary is actually very brief and the actual number of these sects, etc. is quite enormous. But if nothing else, what is given here provides an introductory look at some of the various ways, rightly or wrongly, Christianity has been interpreted and taught, and or what contemporary belief systems it had to compete against socially and politically.

Worth noting is that sometimes a doctrine espoused by one sect might disappear only to turn up under another name later, though perhaps possessing some little (or perhaps significance) difference or emphasis in its revived form. Other sects were similar and contemporary with each other but were separated culturally or geographically, for example the Ebionites and Artemonites. Arianism, by comparison, might, in certain respects, be considered a later version of one or both of these.

These entries, as one can see, are again very short, and those interested in knowing or learning more are encouraged to do so, though with the caution, that the number of versions and variants of these sects, schisms and heresies, and the distinctions to be made between them, can make the task quite daunting.

\* Alogi: Rejected the Fourth Gospel and Revelation, were thought of as irrationalists by their opponents.

\* Anthropomorphism: Of these there were different sorts, but they usually embraced the idea that God was corporeal, and should be seen as a literal person with a body. According to some, this meant he could not be in more than one place at once.

\* Apollinarianism: Envisioned Christ possessing as possessing a human body and soul, but a divine spirit (logos) rather than a merely rational spirit which human's possess. In this way Christ in his incarnation is seen as more than human. Apollinarianism is said to have been like and anticipated monophysitism.

\* Arianism: Christ is not God, but merely a creation. But as a creation he is God, as is the Holy Spirit, which is a creation as well also.

\* Artemonitism: Taught that Christ was merely a person, but a person with divine power.

\* Cerdoism: Cerdo, a Gnostic, held beliefs similar and preceding those of Marcion. they separated the God of the Old Testament from the Father in the New Testament. While the God of the Old Testament is known, and is just, the Father is unknown and good.

\* Cerinthianism: Cerinthus, its founder, is said by some to have been the real source of Christian gnosticism, not Simon Magus, who, at least in his teachings, was never really a Christian. A God separated and second from the true God created the material world, and Christ was merely human. The Kingdom of Christ will be on earth, and that humanity

will dwell in Jerusalem living on the ordinary pleasures of this world during the wedding feast which lasts for a thousand years.

\* Chiliasm: Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years, and was reportedly accepted by most orthodox (or non Gnostic) Christians in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

\* Docetism: The Docetists denied Christ's humanity, and saw him as entirely divine.

\* Ebionitism: A very early Jewish-Christian sect which saw Christ as merely a man. They rejected Paul and his epistles, and used only the Gospels to the Hebrews.

\* Enchratism or Encratism: Founded by Tatian, they preached celibacy, vegetarianism, and denied the salvation of Adam.

\* Eunomianism: Rejected Christ's divinity and that he was God.

\* Eutychianism: Similar to Apollinarianism, Christ's Logos dominated and absorbed his human nature (therefore he was more than human.)

\* Gnosticism: There were various forms of gnosticism, some claiming to be Christian in some way, while others of them didn't, but all held the belief in secret knowledge, and looked for authority from a hierarchy of spirit beings. Typically, they held a dualistic view, with the world divided between good and evil, and that matter was evil.

\* Macedonianism: Denied the Godhood of the Holy Spirit.

\* Manicheism: A Gnostic sect which combined Zoroastrian, Christian and other teachings and who emphasized the dualistic (good-evil) character of the world. At one time Augustine was a Manichean.

\* Marcionitism: Viewed the God of the Old Testament negatively, rejected him, and viewed him as being different from the Father.

\* Modalism: Christ and the Holy Spirit are modes or emanations of the Father, and are distinct and separate persons as such, and therefore denied the three persons of the Trinity, preferring instead the notion of God as one essence.

\* Momianism: Attempted a compromise between Arian and orthodox views, and is also referred to as semi-Arianism.

\* Monarchianism: At his baptism, Jesus became Christ, and became the Son of God only at and after the crucifixion.

\* Monophysitism: Christ's nature was one and wholly divine, and therefore at no time was he human except in appearance.

- \* Monothelitism: A form of monophysitism that taught that Christ had no human will, but only one single divine will.
- \* Montanism: Believed Christianity received its continued message and authority from divinely inspired prophets rather than the church clergy.
- \* Nestorianism: Denied the virgin birth, and saw Christ as born from the (human) line of David, but still accepted the Trinity. Mary was to be seen as the Mother of Christ, not the Mother of God. Christ in his incarnation was closely connected, but not in actual union with the divine. For these reasons, Nestorianism was seen by some as bordering on Arianism.
- \* Noeticism: Believed that the Father was crucified on the cross, rather than Christ.
- \* Novatianism: Would not receive back into the church those who denied their faith under persecution. Donatists, another sect, held similar views.
- \* Patripassianism: Held that both the Father and Christ were crucified.
- \* Pelagianism: Held that man acquired salvation through seeking God. God assists man, but it is man ultimately who must demonstrate his worthiness. They denied the necessity of grace as being in conflict with man's free will.
- \* Sabellianism: Similar to Modalism, and insisted on God's single essence.
- \* Saturninianism: A Gnostic sect, similar to Cerinthianism.

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An Overview of Early Church Councils

1. Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D.

The council of Nicaea, which the Emperor Constantine attended along with 318 bishops, proclaimed Christ as God in opposition to the Arians (or followers of Arius) who viewed Christ as simply a holy man who became God. It also established the official date for Easter, which had been a point of some controversy in the early church.

2. First Council of Constantinople, 381 A.D.

In reaction to the Macedonianists, the first council of Constantinople formally declared the Holy Spirit to be God, and one of the Trinity.

3. Council of Ephesus, 431 A.D.

Provided a definition of Christ's unified (i.e. non-separated) nature as man and God, while outlawing the heresies of Nestor and Pelagius.

4. Council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D.

Asserted Christ's human will and nature against the Eutychianists, who said Christ's will had been exclusively divine.

5. Second Council of Constantinople, 553 A.D.

Reaffirmed the decrees of the previous church councils, that of Chalcedon in particular.

6. Third Council of Constantinople, 680-681 A.D.

Declared that Christ had both a human and divine will in reaction to Monothelism.