

15 MINUTE LEARNING SERIES

15 Minute Religion

A Survey of Religious and Judeo-Christian
Thinking and Practice

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15 Minute Theology
A Survey of Religious History and Thought
Focusing on Judeo-Christian Theology and Practice

Edited, Compiled, and Written 2010-2011 by Stephen Kirsch

This work is a reflection solely of its author and as such reflects no great scholarship or pride of ownership. As a whole, the parts belonging to the author are probably best kept by him and as a matter of fact are probably not fit for reproduction. Still, like any children, I must claim them as my own. Any inaccuracies, similarity to other works, or downright lies should be considered par for the course. For truly, and this work provides some proof of it, there are few original thoughts in the world¹, except perhaps, wrong ones and even those have been tried already.

As for that, those parts which may be considered new or as not belonging to the author and appropriated from others, belong to them as should be noted by citation (*mea culpa* if not) and should not be considered a part of this work except by guilt through association.

¹ Or in the words of Qoheleth “*There is nothing new under the sun.*” (*Ecclesiastes 1:9*)

Contents

Figures	i
Introduction.....	ii
PART I	i
Chapter 1.....	1
Religion.....	1
God.....	1
Atheism and Agnosticism.....	1
The Sacred.....	2
<i>Mysterion</i>	3
<i>Religionem</i>	4
<i>Theologia</i>	4
Dogma and Doctrine.....	5
<i>Philosophos</i>	5
Putting It All Together.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Telling The Truth: <i>Myth</i>	8
Physics and Metaphysics.....	8
<i>What Time Is It?</i>	9
<i>Say What?</i>	9
<i>Tell Me a Story</i>	10
<i>Revelation</i>	11
<i>Mythos</i>	11
Eliade.....	12
Campbell.....	14
Putting It All Together.....	15
Chapter 3.....	17
Hope And Other Four Letter Words.....	17
Modern Thinking.....	17
Faith versus Belief.....	17
Superstition.....	18
<i>Liturgia</i>	19
Common Ground, Holy Ground.....	20
Here, There, Everywhere....	21
<i>Something Wicked This Way Comes</i>	21
Ethics.....	22
Now That I Think About It....	22
Putting It All Together.....	23
Chapter 4.....	24
Aspects Of Faith.....	24
<i>I Am The Vine</i>	24
<i>You Are The Branches</i>	24
You Are What You Are, or <i>Mommy, Where Did I Come From?</i>	25
<i>The End Of The World As We Know It</i>	26
Where Y'at?.....	26
Wha'Cha Doing?.....	28

How Y'a Doing?	29
Putting It All Together	29
Chapter 4a	30
Basic Map of Majority Religious Distribution	30
Chapter 5	31
Genesis	31
In The Beginning	31
Group Hug	31
Truth.....	31
Nature.....	32
Animals And Rocks	32
Tribe.....	33
Shaman.....	34
Putting It All Together	35
<i>PART II</i>	36
Chapter 6.....	37
Johnny Come Lately	37
<i>Like Water for Chaos</i>	37
<i>Git Yer Program!</i>	37
Sumeria	37
Egypt.....	40
Putting It All Together	42
Chapter 7.....	44
Eastern.....	44
Near East and Far East.....	44
Shinto	44
Taoism.....	45
Hinduism.....	46
Buddhism	47
Putting It All Together	48
Chapter 8.....	50
Middle Eastern	50
<i>Leitmotif</i>	50
Zoroastrianism	50
<i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i>	50
<i>The Force is strong in this one</i>	51
Judaism	52
Torah and Talmud.....	52
<i>Pentateuchos</i>	53
Prophets.....	54
The Writings or Wisdom	55
<i>Leaving Las Vegas</i>	55
Entering The Desert	56
Putting It All Together	58
Chapter 8a	59
PART I: A Sampling Of The Prayers of Zoroastrianism.....	59

PART II: Exodus and Egypt	60
Chapter 9.....	62
Jews And Greeks.....	62
Judaism	62
It's Greek To Me.....	63
Ruling The World: The Early Years	64
Continuing Influence	64
All The Gods And Goddesses.....	65
So What?.....	66
Revolution!	67
Resolution!.....	68
Revision!.....	68
Putting It All Together	68
Chapter 10.....	70
Rome.....	70
But First A Word From Our Sponsors.....	70
Roman Stuff.....	70
To The Max.....	71
Judaism Stuff	73
All The World.....	74
<i>Messiah</i>	75
Jesus.....	76
The End Of The Road	77
Putting It All Together	77
<i>PART III</i>	79
Chapter 11.....	80
The Rise Of Christianity	80
Judaism At The Time Of Jesus	80
Jewish Political And Religious Structure	83
The Way.....	84
The Guardrails	85
More Roman Stuff or <i>Welcome To The Circus</i>	86
Welcome To The Circus: <i>the bad news is that you are the main attraction.</i>	86
The Christian Scriptures	88
Putting It All Together	88
Chapter 12.....	90
My Apologies.....	90
The Christian Scriptures	90
Creed.....	90
Paul	91
Pauline Themes.....	92
Peter, Paul, And Roma.....	93
Trinity	93
Martyrs.....	94
Justin Martyr	95
<i>Stay Close To The Candles...</i>	96

Heresy	97
Ecumenical Councils	98
Putting It All Together	98
Chapter 12a	100
A Sampler of Heresies	100
Chapter 13	101
The Early Middle	101
Church Economy	101
Church History	101
Church Fathers	102
The Man In The Middle	103
The Middle In Man	104
Grace Period	106
East And West	107
Liturgy	108
Monasticism	108
Putting It All Together	109
Chapter 14	111
The Middle Middle: The High Middle Ages	111
Is There A Doctor In The House?	111
Orders	111
Pilgrims	111
Humanism	111
Anselm	112
Proof	113
Islam	114
Aquinas	114
Bonaventure	116
Augustine Versus Aquinas	117
Putting It All Together	117
Chapter 15	119
Schism and Renewal	119
The Not-So-Great Great Schism	119
Poisoning The Well	120
Divining Rod	121
Re-Form	121
The Late Middle	122
A Laugh A Minute	122
<i>A Plague On Both Your Houses</i>	123
Marco...Polo	123
Jean D'Arc	123
Thomas a'Becket	124
Papal Decline	124
Putting It All Together	125
<i>PART IV</i>	127
Chapter 16	128

Renaissance.....	128
Urban (the VI th) Renewal.....	128
Have You Read The Latest?	129
Isn't That Yesterday's News?	129
<i>What'chu Talking 'Bout Willis?</i>	130
Desiderius Erasmus.....	130
Julius II.....	132
Putting It All Together	132
Chapter 17.....	134
Modern.....	134
Modern Thought	134
And Your Question Is...?	135
<i>Transubstantiation</i>	136
Free Willie	137
Bound And Determined	139
Humble Pie.....	140
Putting It All Together	141
Chapter 18.....	143
Reform	143
<i>Where's The Beef?</i>	143
<i>Day Tripper</i>	143
Luther.....	145
<i>Here I Stand (Someone Said To Stand Here?)</i>	146
<i>Once More Into The Breach Dear Friends</i>	147
A Diet Of Worms.....	147
That's Revolting.....	148
Calvin And Hobbes.....	149
Theresa of Avila.....	150
Ignatius Loyola	150
Trent Warfare.....	151
<i>Henry VIII I Am</i>	152
Putting It All Together	153
Chapter 19.....	154
Faith And Reason.....	154
Mysticism.....	154
Breaking With The Past	154
Freedom And Religion.....	155
Freedom Of Religion	155
Freedom From Religion.....	156
American Religious Culture	157
The French	158
Putting It All Together	158
Chapter 20.....	160
Modern Reason	160
Evil Is As Evil Does.....	160
Will You Get That For Me?.....	160

Modernism	161
Closing The Door On The Sacred.....	162
Biology.....	164
Cosmology	165
Framing The Question	165
Putting It All Together	166
Appendix A.....	168
Faith And History	168
Appendix B	173
Sacred Texts.....	173
Appendix C	177
Persons of Interest.....	177
Appendix D.....	181
Terms	181
Bibliography	184

Figure 1: Hebrew Cosmological Layout.....	27
Figure 2: Greek Cosmological Layout.....	27
Figure 3: Distribution of Major World Religions	30
Figure 4: Nut on Cool Tomb Roof.....	41
Figure 5: Sacred Lake at Karnack.....	42
Figure 6: The Torah Scroll.....	53
Figure 7: The World as Alexander Saw It	64
Figure 8: Pantheon Interior	72
Figure 9: Herodian Stone in the Wailing Wall	73
Figure 10: Herodium.....	74
Figure 11: Arch of Titus - the sacking of the Temple.....	77
Figure 12: The Roman Empire	84
Figure 13: The Spread of Christianity pre-325	93
Figure 14: Pope Nicholas V	128
Figure 15: Erasmus	131
Figure 16: John Colet.....	131
Figure 17: Thomas More	131
Figure 18: Julius II.....	132
Figure 19: Martin Luther	145
Figure 20: John Calvin.....	149
Figure 21: Theresa of Avila	150
Figure 22: Ignatius	150
Figure 23: The Council of Trent	151
Figure 24: Henry VIII	152
Figure 25: Robespierre.....	158

Thanks

This series relies on the impetus of two people and a series of philosophical lunchtime ‘lectures’, but it is founded in the gift of so many. So first to Julien and Allison, thanks for the *Food For Thought* challenge. To my parents and everyone else, thanks for showing and giving me the love God and later of art, critical thinking and philosophy. Thanks especially to my wife, Alice, who married me even though I had a degree in philosophy and a minor in religious studies. Finally, as always, an apology to my kids, as they had no choice in the matter.²

As for theology itself, I also owe a debt of gratitude to the saints, priests, nuns, sisters, preachers, Monks of St. Joseph Abbey and the Jesuits of The Pontifical Gregorian University and to the many others who spent their time giving us such a rich history of Faith; what more can I say?

By Way of Introduction...

If one agrees with Hegel on this matter³, then this preface will be short.

So why write another book about religious thought?

Despite the moniker, as with any work in this series, there is no promise that it will only take 15 minutes to understand all of the myriad theologies out there! The idea of the original lectures was to take about 15 minutes of reading and a lifetime of understanding. Not too much to ask or expect? I have tried to translate the spirit of those weekly lunch-time lectures into this printed format.

As for this work, it will pretend to be at first no more than an historical survey of religion and religious thought but may end up with some survey of overall concepts through time. The religious thought and theology presented here is in fact much deeper and wider than we discuss, and to a much deeper degree than is shown in the book. The pericopes included in this work show the limited nature of the limited nature of this discussion.

As for myself, I hold but a mere undergraduate minor in this field. Why do I feel qualified to produce such a work? Well, I hold a mere undergraduate minor in this field.

As for the subject matter, this first work follows the maxim of ‘write what you know’, or at least what you think you know. Later works will attempt to follow more of a world religions survey. This work is more focused on the rise of religious thought which culminates in Judeo-Christian theology.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to everyone who has struggled with the idea of belief, and especially to those who struggled to teach me the fine art of theology.

² “*THE appearance of this volume demands more than the usual amount of apology.*” Introduction to *Humanism*, by F.C.S. Schiller

³ And one should; c.f. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1, Georg Hegel

PART I

Introduction thru Prehistory

(Chapters 1 - 5)



Religion

If one was to take the time to think about it⁴, though our goal coming into this is most likely to understand religious practices and thinking as they are found in Judeo-Christian worship, religion in that sense is probably not the place to start. That may sound like a strange statement, but the point of it is that what we think of as ‘religion’, the structured, organization, dogma, doctrine, and practices of a belief system is not where we want to start. We want to begin by examining the human drive which creates these organizations, doctrines, dogmas and practices and thereby give meaning and context to them.

God

Okay, let us go for that 800 pound gorilla in the room. If it were not for God, we would not even be here right?⁵ The reason that spirituality, religions, even atheism exists is because some sense (or sense of absence) informs us that there is something else out there, something beyond us, or at least that we must deal with the sensation that there is.

In a way, God is a difficult notion. In fact we could probably spend most of our time just discussing the different manifestations of the speculation on the idea of God alone, much less discussing all of the human incarnations of the idea. Yet ‘God’ notion is a basic⁶ concept. That is to say, that while there are fringe groups associated with the concept, the concept itself is not a fringe idea. The history of human development is a history bound up with the discussion of some sense of *the other*.

God then, for our purposes will start out as a *concept*. What is the *notion* of God? From there we can move into the different manifestations of God. First we must understand what we mean by the term ‘God’. This makes sense when we begin exploring the manifestations, because for most of us the term ‘God’ denotes the present, monotheistic, Judeo-Christian-Muslim understanding of the term, as opposed to terms like ‘gods’ which is mainly associated with ancient or polytheistic religions. We will start by using it in a much broader way, denoting the concept rather than the manifestation. ‘God’ then, is not initially to be equated with the J-C-M denotation. The use of the term is strictly for ease and allows us to rely on a single term.

That said no attempt will be made to accommodate specific religious beliefs with the use of this term. This is not meant to be disrespectful or blasphemous, but again is for consistency in the discussion. It will be capitalized, because it is a proper name or subject.

Atheism and Agnosticism

Why talk about these in a course of study about God? Like the notion of ‘God’, we need to just get them out of the way. First we tackle *agnosticism*, which comes from a Greek word root (which we will see again later) *gnosis* or ‘knowing’. The ‘a’ at the beginning means the negation

⁴ With the assumption that because you are here you are....

⁵ Ha, ha. I’m just getting started.

⁶ The use of the word ‘basic’ in all its forms early in the work should be seen as an indication of the depth of this work.

of the word following it so *agnosis* means ‘not knowing’, or in this sense, not knowing if there is a God or not. In the given category, more people would probably categorize themselves as agnostics rather than atheists. *Atheism* is made up of the Greek root *theos*, or ‘God’, and the already familiar ‘a’, meaning ‘no God’.

Agnosticism can embody a two-fold ‘absent god’ way of thinking. We might think of the American founding fathers and their *Deism*, especially as expressed by Jefferson, where God is merely a watchmaker who winds up the universe and walks away from it. It may also take on the role of a ‘no-proof-there-is-yet-no-proof-there-is-not’ uncertainty principle. Many who profess this second sense often speak of a longing for something else and an envy of those who possess certitude.

Next, at the risk of trivializing the arguments, let us say that there are also two philosophical approaches to atheism. The first, and probably oldest, is the thinking that experience tells us there is nothing except this life, so live life to the fullest. We can think of the Greek philosopher Epicurus when we hear this approach. Most likely we associate atheism with the philosophies of Karl Marx and especially of Friedrich Nietzsche (whether we know it or not) and his oft-misquoted ‘God is dead’ statement. This second approach is more of an attack on the ‘idea’ of God. It differs from the Epicurean approach in that it is focused more on the institutions which promote God than on the need for intellectual and empirical ‘proofs’ of God. That is to say, Nietzsche felt (for various and sundry reasons) that there was no need for God, and that the institutions which promoted God merely wish to weaken and enslave others to their own weakened and enslaved lives.

We do not want to spend too much time on these ideas at this time except to put them into their theological context. The thinking which informs them also informs theological thinking. We will keep them in the back of our minds and see how they influence the theological discussion.

The Sacred

So if we *know* there is a God, there must be something which *informs* us of that God. We know that the sun gives light because we can see that the sun gives light. Something tells us about something else. Without delving into epistemology (the study of *how we know*), we can say that we come to know things by two methods: experience and teaching. Experience has taught me that fire is hot. I know this (though I learned it the hard way⁷). I was taught similarly that $x = (-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac})/2a$ and though it is purely an intellectual concept, I *know* it. Experience and innate acceptance are the two modes of learning or as we might think of them experiential and mental, or by their philosophical names: *empirical* and *rational*. The point being that there is then some foundational notion which is the basis for our knowledge.

The foundational theological notion is called ‘the sacred’, from the Latin with a root similar in meaning to that of the root for ‘religion’. The Latin noun is *sacer* or ‘holy’ and the verb *sacrare*, from which we get our word *sacrament*, which speaks of ‘dedication’, as in something ‘dedicated to’ or ‘to set apart as holy’, from which we get the word *consecrate*, which means to ‘set apart or dedicate to the service of the deity’. You get the idea.

⁷ As they say, ‘Experience is the harshest of teachers; it exacts the payment first and teaches the lesson afterwards.’

The sacred may be less about knowledge as we think of it and more about *understanding*, both empirical and rational. We 'sense' the sacred and we also 'intuit' the sacred. Whatever the source, we understand at multiple levels of experience and thought that there is something else out there. This idea of 'sacred' really comes down to a sense of 'the other', and not just that there is something other than me, like my family or friends, but that that 'other' is *apart* from me and most likely greater than me, worthy of respect and perhaps even deference. Possibly it starts (or at least can be paralleled) with the recognition of others around me. Conceivably it extends to the animals and natural phenomena which surround me. It definitely applies to things which I see as beyond my control and I perceive as being of greater power than I.⁸

Whatever the source, we assign a sense of 'holy' to that 'other' and we practice deference to it. Holy is the reaction to the sacred. We can see this on so many levels in human behavior, starting from recognition of hierarchical authority to respect for that authority (think matriarchs, kings or warriors).⁹ On its own, *sacred*, for our purposes will apply not only to that which we call God but things we associate with God.

Mysterion

As implied above, this sense of *sacred* can be caused by or at least often can contain another element, that of the 'unknown' or the 'unknowable'. The word we use to express that comes to us from the Greek word *mysterion*. It does not mean *mystery* as we might think like a puzzle to be solved or something which cannot be explained, but rather something that is *mystical*, i.e. associated with the sacred. In our discussion, the term refers to something that is outside of our experience, natural reason, or understanding and therefore *requires* some type of extra-human (divine) revelation in order to have meaning, or at least be understandable. The word we might be more familiar with is its Latin translation: *sacrament*, hence the relationship between *sacer* and *mysterion*.

When we think about this we want to think of it in active terms. Mystery or sacrament speaks to the *encounter* with the sacred, the *active* seeking and the act of a perceived response of the sacred. Since it is the *sacred*, then that encounter takes place outside of 'normal' or 'secular' or 'profane' space, i.e. those places where we do not directly encounter the sacred. And like the sacred, there is a type of knowledge which accompanies mystery. We *know* that it is there. We *know* that it is different than the normal world. We *know* some of the attributes (positively or negatively) of the sacred. Mystery is not something which is unobtainable or can be dismissed because it is not directly knowable, but is the word we use to describe something we know which is beyond the directly knowable.

Once again, 'Knowledge' in this sense is understood as perhaps more of a perception than a scientific proof or certainty, an understanding rather than a certainty. The understanding that this kind of knowledge exists is somewhat based in speculation. This is not to say there is not a

⁸ It is not the purpose of this work, nor is it in its scope to address all of the arguments for or against this notion of God and of the sacred. If you want that, write your own book.

⁹ As with the above, to keep the record straight, this work is not an attempt at an anthropological, psychological, or sociological exploration of human behavior. There will be on occasion a note of certain behaviors which can be seen in or associated with religious belief and practice. To that point, as with everything else in this work, the author in no way purports to be an expert or trained professional in the arts of human observation.

degree of certainty, but that it is not a certainty in a secular, scientific sense. Mystery implies a connection to something that we do not fully understand yet which we acknowledge and seek, and can have a type of knowledge of. We might think of it as we think of the scientific theories of relativity or black holes. We did not have, for many years, certain 'proof' of black holes, except speculative, logical, or rational mathematical 'proof'.

Mystery and proof may seem at odds, and are often put there, but mystery is the very human trait of accepting things we cannot grasp, see, smell or touch.

Religionem

Okay, now that we have a few terms and basics under our belt, let us take on some preliminary ideas. We need to make some distinctions and we will start with the word 'religion' which comes from the Latin for 'respect for what is sacred' or the equivalent statement 'reverence for the gods', and is derived from the verb *religare* which means 'to bind fast', and by that, not the rodeo calf-roping fast, but fast as in 'stuck fast' (though, I suppose, one could argue a similarity). As indicated above, there is a connection between the idea of the sacred and the acknowledgement of the sacred. The sacred demands some sort of response and that response is first, the recognition and acknowledgement of the sacred and second, is the active seeking and binding of oneself to the sacred.

Religion therefore is both a noun and a verb. It also implies something physical and spiritual in that via it we pass through the profane to reach the sacred (symbols) and yet by means of it also have a direct connection with the sacred (signs). This two road system of signs (things which contain their meaning) and symbols (thing which point to a meaning beyond themselves) fully engages us, using both the physical and the rational.

So religion, in this sense, is the attitude with which one approaches the sacred. It is the *sign* of the decision to bind *and* the action of binding oneself to the sacred, manifested in symbolic practices and rituals. The broader understanding of religion in its organizational sense springs from this meaning but is different. We need to keep this distinction in mind during our early discussions. This meaning will eventually succumb to the later, broader understanding to which we are more familiar.

Theologia

From the 'practical' we turn to the 'rational'. Ultimately, we are studying God and studying our reaction to not just the *concept* of God but to the *reality* of God. So what is theology? Well, theology is, as the Greek word implies, the study of the *Theos*, of God. Okay, got that out of the way – we can all go home now right? If only it were that simple.

In these early stages it is the relationship between God, theology and religion into which we delve, in hopes of coming to a greater understanding of the nature of worship and religious practices. But as with all of the other ideas we will cover we are going to start with the *idea* of theology. Theology does require intellectual disciplines but in the end, theology itself is a *lived experience*, not merely an intellectual exercise. The free exploration of the notions and ramifications of God are not without consequence, meaning that this thinking must inform our lives and in the end affect our behaviors in one way or another.

That said, theology, as a discipline, does require a certain intellectual framework and understanding of boundaries. This is where the idea of 'Faith' (*NB* the *capital F*) comes in, that is, there is a direct correlation between Faith and theology. There must be a set of understood and agreed upon truths from which speculation can arise; without an agreed upon set of meaningful truths, then theology is mere speculation and applies to nothing or at least has no bearing due to the disconnected and flighty nature of its conclusions. For that reason, while Theology relies upon this basic foundation it is not merely an exercise in justification, that is, coming up with reasons for why something is contained within the repository of Faith (the cart before the horse syndrome). It is a search for an understanding of the mysteries, the divine revelation which makes known to us the inner workings and meaning of the universe. The Faith, the Mysteries, the Revealed Truths, these then are the foundation of theological inquiry and of practice. This is where theology works, in between the Faith and the practice of that Faith, in making sense of mystery through intellectual pursuits but strictly for the enhancement of the practice of that Faith.

Dogma and Doctrine

Okay so then if theology interacts with Faith then we need to take a moment and describe that repository of truths, its intermediaries and dependents. Theology, dogma, and doctrine then are not the same things though the three are certainly dependent on one another. Theology can help to refine both dogma and doctrine and dogma and doctrine provide the framework within which theology operates.

So what are they?

Dogma: the principles or tenets upon which a belief system is built.

Doctrine: the body of or particular teachings of a belief system.

Table 1 – My Karma Ran Over My Dogma

Simply, dogmas are the ideas behind doctrine. Dogma is the basic 'truths' which a belief system translates into thought and action. These truths are based in a variety of experiences, stories, traditions and reason. They are arrived at in various ways, but are understood as 'revealed' and so they are the foundational truths which guides and informs any discussion of said truths.

Doctrines are the teachings and ramifications of dogma. Doctrine has the distinction of being rather strict, but as it is the definitions by which one explains and hands on dogma, you can understand how there might be a strict control on both dogma and doctrine. Doctrine requires a caste of authority by which dogma are preserved, interpreted, and passed on.

Philosophos

One might ask, as with atheism and agnosticism, where philosophy fits into all this. Then again, one may not. Either way, I am going to broach the subject. Philosophy terms and influences permeate theology (and *vice versa*), so you have to get used to the idea that it will come up in polite conversation. Philosophy is as old as the questions that it and theology seek to answer. Philosophy for us is the disciplined pursuit of wisdom and should not be confused with *ideology*, to which it often is.

What we are discussing in this chapter is the *language* of the sacred. The common vocabulary we use will allow us to discuss complex ideas within fixed boundaries. We are going to introduce and use words like *a priori* and *a posteriori* and that is where philosophy comes to bear. These are specific terms of philosophical rhetoric, and there will be a very brief definition and, if necessary, background, to any philosophical terms we use.¹⁰ They are important because they are often the language used to explain theological concepts, meaning that the language of philosophy is used as readily as sacred language in order to use words familiar to the listening audience. When Paul speaks to the Greeks on the Areopagus, he uses language that they understand, terms like ‘wisdom’ and concepts like ‘rebirth’. When the Christian apologists of the first and second century wrote to their fellow Romans, they introduce philosophic terms like ‘Logos’.

There is and has been a struggle within theology of the place and usefulness of philosophy. Some feel it is the introduction of philosophical thinking which damages or confuses theological thinking; some think that theology is best served by taking profane thinking and bringing it to perfection within theology. This work will not pretend to answer that argument, merely show the place philosophy has played or how theology has influence philosophy. Though, as a personal note, most people come to theological issues through philosophical discussion and that is all I will say about that.

Putting It All Together

Religion and theology are two different things, and yet one cannot really exist without the other. The existence of both speaks to the constant effort of humans to reach out and touch the sacred, to give meaning and purpose not just to their own lives but to the world around them.

Theology takes many different forms, as we shall discuss, but in the end it speaks to the reality of the idea of ‘God’. It is a lived experience not merely an intellectual exercise. The truths discussed in theology are *ontological* and *teleological* in nature, bound into the very fabric of our being, or else what is the purpose in discussing them?

As with any exploration or discussion, one must keep in mind not one’s own bias and background but the context and situation of the people involved. Our sensibilities, our morals, and our prejudices cannot come into play here. We must leave behind biases and intellectual hubris in order to get down to the level, the gut level if you will, of the concepts we are approaching. Many will seem foreign or strange; many terms may be used differently than we are used to hearing them. The utilization of theology, as with its purpose – though not necessarily for us surveyors perhaps but for the people who construct it – is not merely as an intellectual exercise. It is, as Anselm says, ‘*faith seeking understanding*’ and we must keep that in mind.

The extent of this work will be to skim some very basic ideas and does not reflect the large amount of research and history which has already been assembled on this subject. The various and sundry methods which have been employed over the years have produced an impressive bibliography and anything lacking in this work may certainly be found there. If this is sufficient

¹⁰ For a more in-depth look at philosophy and philosophical notions see our sister-work *15 Minute Philosophy*.

for you then be prepared to bemoan the fact that many juicy bits have been left out and that whole points of view have been ignored. If that is still sufficient then we have an understanding.

“The problem with writing about religion is that you run the risk of offending sincerely religious people, and then they come after you with machetes. So I am going to be very sensitive here, which is not easy, because the thing about religion is that everybody else’s appears stupid.”

Dave Barry, *He Knows What He Writes*

Telling The Truth: *Myth*

Myth is a word you do not see very often, at least not in polite company.

The position of experience, of *a posteriori* understanding, is not to be discounted in understanding the motivations for belief. Myth often reflects learned behaviors, lessons learned from different types of behavior as well as sacred mysteries (i.e. revelation).

Physics and Metaphysics

First let us start with something perhaps a bit more solid, i.e. sneak in some more basic terms we must come to terms with. These two words of this section title come to us through the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) from way back in the Golden Age of Greece. Before we jump right in, a word about another word whose meaning (for us) comes to us through Aristotle: *substance*. The world, according to Aristotle, is made up of *substances*. Substance is the word he uses to describe 'what a thing is'; its *essence*, its *being* would be similar translations. Humans have the substance of a 'human', as dogs have the substance of a 'dog'. In other words, all the things that make a human a human or a dog a dog are *its* substance. This means that if you remove anything from its substance, then it ceases to be that thing. Substance is fairly static because if it were in flux then nothing would be anything.

But what about those things which are in flux? These are a thing's *accidents*. These are not mistakes or anything worthy of an insurance claim (minus the deductible¹¹) but attributes which are *accidental* to a thing's *substance*. The fact that you have red hair is not part of your substance, but an *accident* to it. That is to say, if you had blond hair instead of red hair you would still *be* you. You are a person regardless of hair color (though perhaps not as stylish).

Alright, that said let us get to the subject at hand.

Physics: physics is the Greek word for 'Nature' and is therefore more than the modern study of motion and matter (though the science does derive its name from this Aristotelian sense). For our purposes it implies all things 'physical' and everything in the physical world. Very basically, Physics deals with the *physical substances* of the universe, those things which we perceive through our senses or *empirically*.

Metaphysics: metaphysics are the substances that are *beyond the physical*. There are things which we seem to know about which do not fall into the category of things which are the physical world. Metaphysics is the study of those substances. These are often things which are known not through empirical perception but by the mind or *rationally*.

We can over-simplify this by thinking that physics talks about the *what* and metaphysics talks about the *why*, or that physics deals with Nature and metaphysics with the nature of Nature, but we have over-simplified this enough. For Aristotle, metaphysics was the 'first philosophy' in that understanding *being* and non-physical substances gave foundation for understanding the world, i.e. understanding metaphysics made the physical world understandable.

¹¹ Ha, ha...a logic joke.

So what does all that have to do with the understanding which leads one to be able to price tea in China? Physics speaks to the experience of *wonder and awe* about the world around us, as Aristotle would put it. Myth speaks not just to those aspects of our life which are ethereal, but to our very nature, in the depths of our being. Physics and Metaphysics are both the realm of myth. So it is more than just the physical beauty around us which inspires to reach for the sacred. Metaphysics deals with the intangibles which we confront in life, the things which give basis for and make sense of the empirical world around us.

As a final note, Aristotle placed the body within physics and the soul within metaphysics. You can probably guess that that will doubtless have some effect later on.

Philosophical Aside: Initially meta-physics was most probably just a term pertaining to the fact that the book of Aristotle's notes on the subject came *after* his book on physics, but it fits the idea for which we use it now.

What Time Is It?

Time may seem like an odd thing to bring up at this moment, but it is essential to understanding religious thinking. If we want to put it in terms of the previous section, we can see that there is a *physical* and *metaphysical* notion to time. We experience a physical world of linear time, of cause and effect but also a metaphysical world of 'memory', of time which is not linear. The Greeks had a handle on this, and they distinguished between the types of time, as they did between the types of love. The two words they used were *chronos* and *kairos*.

Chronos: watch time. This is the time we operate within and are most familiar with. It includes not just hours and minutes but also seasons and other notable cycles. It is completely linear in its nature.

Kairos: *God's* time. This is the time which surrounds *chronos*. It is time outside of time if you will. It does not play by the same rules as chronological time, nor is it bounded by the same restrictions. This is the time of memory, of creation, of time before time. It is non-linear, it crosses over and doubles-back, it can jump from one point to another.

Kairos is the time of myth, though certainly chronological time can enter into it. In the end, the stories recounted in myth, while they happened at 'some time' in the past, are real in the past, the present, and will continue to be real in the future. They are *timeless*.

Say What?

One of the offshoots of this sense of time is the idea of universals, of things which transcend the moment and any relativity that brings. Universals may be arrived at *a posteriori* or may be innate *a priori* things. Whatever the source they are recognized as something that applies without question and across the board. Generally, we can point to things like 'it is bad to kill each other' as a generally recognized universal. It transcends space and time and applies to all humans and seems to be an innate understanding within most humans and even translates into most societies. Myth is a form of preserving and teaching these universals.

With that in mind, our word for definition here is 'Tradition'. This is the proper noun tradition with a big 'T' not a small one. Tradition is part of Faith, one of the sources for those things which are considered true, and are not open to change or broad interpretation. They differ from the small 't' traditions, which should be more associated with the word 'practices'

and are in fact flexible and changing. We will further this definition by saying that there are two types of Tradition, *oral* and *written*, but as we shall see, the way we will most often use it refers more to the oral than written. Since so many cultures did not quickly develop written languages, oral Tradition develops first and for that reason always holds equal sway with the later written Tradition. For future reference, we will refer to oral Tradition simply as 'Tradition' and written Tradition simply as 'Scripture' to allow us to easily distinguish between the two.

Oral Tradition (*Tradition*): When it comes to belief systems, the primary mode for collecting, expanding, and handing-on of the dogma (tenets) of that system is initially done *orally*. This means that stories *verbalized* are the primary means of teaching *and* preserving. Whether they are spoken, sung, or chanted versions of the stories, they are understood as not written down but recounted orally and retained within memory.

It is the shared memory which the oral tradition highlights. It implies a certain amount of dynamic, living knowledge. Not so much that it changes or is in flux (by its definition) but that it is contained within *living* beings. It moves with the people as they migrate; it is mixed up with the skill of the story-teller. It is not dependent upon the experience of the individuals. The knowledge is connected to the group through the living individuals. The destruction of a pre-literate culture usually means the death of its myths and vice versa. The encountering of other cultures may also result in the mixing of myths and oral traditions as well as the loss of meaning and context for some myths.

Written Tradition (*Scripture*): Eventually, over time, a more permanent system of retaining and passing on of dogma develops. With the rise of stability (agriculture, cities, etc.) written languages take over from the oral Tradition, though the art of storytelling does not die out. Myth moves from a dynamic living thing to a static thing. In some ways this is good; it is no longer dependent upon individual transmittal in order to be retained and is not subject to the same loss as with the loss of culture, as long as the language can be read. Not every culture rises to the level of written language, and so they retain their Tradition but for those who do, the same problems of consistent transmission exists. A case in point would be Hebrew. The original written language did not record vowel sounds. Some of those pronunciations were lost over time (specifically the ***Tetragrammaton***, or the four letter Hebrew name for God), and the marks made later reflect a 'best guess' at the pronunciation. Konia Greek, the Greek of the Christian Scriptures, or 'New Testament', produces a similar quandary. Like most written languages until then, there were no punctuation marks, and one had to know how best to copy or translate a given sentence. Customs also change and words loose meaning, which also presents a challenge to later reading of a particular passage.

Written stories require a standardized form of study called *hermeneutics*, explicitly because they are written down. Comparative studies serve to highlight and explain meanings sometime hidden by time and practice.

Tell Me a Story

Oral Tradition speaks to a basic human trait: story-telling. I am not talking about lying (though many might argue that it too is a basic human trait) but the 'art' of storytelling. Often when we want to express ourselves or reveal something about ourselves we do not just spout the fact 'I was born' but more in the form of 'did I tell you the story about the day I was born?'

There is a richness of communication which is missing from facts. I can tell you that Edison invented his filament for his light bulb on October 22, 1879, or I could make history come alive and tell you the story of how he came up with that filament, the hours of work, experimentation and failure which resulted in that success. I could throw in the "I didn't fail 3,000 times. I found 3,000 ways how not to create a light bulb," quote and add dimensions and depth to the fact.

That is storytelling. Storytelling is not about facts but speaks to the human hunger for *understanding*. We tell stories to explain, to reveal, and to pass on. Another person or event comes to life in a story; ancestors shed light on the present day when we hear their story. Stories hold not just the facts but the explanation as well: they tell us where we came from and who we are.

Revelation

Before we move on, a quick re-cap and summary of an idea we have touched on. Revelation is the word for the transfer of divine knowledge to humans. It is bound up with the idea of mystery, truths which are unknowable through any human experience and are only available through divine gift. It is important to understand that this is not human knowledge nor is it fathomable through human means.

There might be some confusion, in that many things seem *innate* to us, but that is the result of the gift of this divine knowledge, the way we are made, so to speak and not through any ability or action done by humans. This is knowledge which is different than the distance of the sun from the earth or how to create a microchip. In a sense it is empirical but only because we have been given the means to sense it and the mental capacity to connect the dots.

Mythos

Alright, down to the nitty-gritty. *Mythos* is a Greek word meaning 'story', 'legend', or 'plot'. Our use of the word is toward the 'story' meaning, but that does not fully capture how we mean the word. Myth is the connector of a fact to an explanation. That is to say, the story is more than just a tale told to entertain or amuse. It is the use of a story to connect two things together with meaning, an understood, observed or lived fact and the explanation of that fact. The sun moves through the sky...but why/how? Apollo pulls it along with his chariot sort of thing.

The meaning of the word 'myth' moved from what we might call its original meaning of 'religious story' containing truth to 'legend', 'folktale', or 'untrue rumor' or even 'irrational' or 'implausible' through the dissolution or the dismissal of the connection which created and gave purpose to the myth by the initial teller. This can be a process that often happens over time but may be more immediate. We can see this in what the Judeo-Christian worldview has done with the Greek and Roman stories and as atheists have done with the Judeo-Christian stories.

About the mid-1800's myth begins to take on its present negative connotation. By way of idle speculation we can point to several cultural factors that play into this: the rise of Neo-Classicism and the insertion of these myths against a Christian framework, the rise of Marxism, Existentialism and the burgeoning sciences and the dismissal of all non-empirical thinking. The demands for 'proof', and by that meaning 'empirical proof', meant that stories or

understandings which could not produce or stand up under the 'rigorous scientific scrutiny' were dismissed as superstitious and false. The word 'primitive' also starts to take on a more negative connotation.

This began to change after 100 years or so. "*Studied alive, myth . . . is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. . . . These stories . . . are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, facts and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.*" (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*)

The study of myth in a 'scientific' anthropological forum began to transform the understanding 'myth' into a metaphysical truth-story. This re-established meaning happened in the last 70 years or so, thanks in part to our first guests.

Eliade

Mircea Eliade is perhaps a somewhat controversial figure to start with but he wrote several very influential books, specifically *Myth and Reality* and *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade, who was among other things a religious historian, took up the growing fascination with indigenous cultures and what they would be able to tell us about ourselves, seeing them as a sort of comparative *Dead Sea Scrolls* source for cultural beliefs. This was probably also due to thinkers from the *Structuralism* school, like Michel Foucault who advocated a method of study known as 'archeology', which is basically¹² 'digging' into the past to understand the present, or to put it another way, an objective 'how did we get here' approach to things.

From his research Eliade concluded that 'primitive' humans really only see the world through two lenses: the *sacred* (pertaining to God) and the *profane* (pertaining to the World). "*All the definitions given up till now of the religious phenomenon have one thing in common: each has its own way of showing that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and secular life.*" (*Patterns in Comparative Religion*) What he is getting at is basically that when we look at the world we used to 'see' things that are strictly sacred in nature and things which are strictly profane. But, he concedes, defining the sacred is a difficult task "*almost everywhere the religious phenomena are seen as complex, suggesting a long historical evolution.*" (*ibid*) He explores this history in *The Sacred and the Profane*, and we will focus on three ideas he presents therein.

RELIGIOUS MAN

The sense of humans as 'religious beings', that is, people who exercise practices and beliefs associated with the sacred, goes beyond just recognizing that there is a sacred and a profane, it

¹² There's that word again.

is the actions of the humans who *realize* this duality. So at the heart of everything is the notion of 'religious man'. This is a fundamental notion, a 'primitive' if you will, independent of culture yet is understood best as people "*of all pre-modern societies*", for whom anything in nature could be the subject of *religious experience*: stones, trees, weather, whatever. Basically, it is the explanation of pre-modern cultural influence and the assignment of sacred. For religious man the sacred equals power.

Religious man recognizes not just that there is a sacred but tries to connect with that sacred because of a desire to be part of its nature as ultimate reality and to its power, as well as what he called the "*enduringness and efficacy*"¹³ that is the nature of the sacred. Eliade sees this level, religion itself, a formalization of Faith, as a 'higher order', if you will, not just acting or believing out of ignorance but actively seeking a relationship with the sacred. So, for simplicity's sake, you might think of cave dwelling ancestors who huddle against the lightening from fear and ignorance, assigning it some external as 'pre-religious man', and folks who design myths and rituals to honor and abate the lightening as being 'religious man', and we, with our TVs and I-pods being 'non-religious man' or separated from the sense of the sacred.

Religious man is the one who lives in relationship to the sacred. "*All of the great Mediterranean and Asiatic religions have mythologies. But it is better not to begin the study of myth from the starting point of, say, Greek or Egyptian or Indian mythology.... it is better to begin by studying myth in traditional and archaic societies, reserving for later consideration the mythologies of people who have played an important role in history.... the foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities*" (Myth and Reality)

SACRED SPACE

Religious man understands the two worlds of the sacred and the profane and is able to identify sacred and profane spots as well as set aside (*consecrate*) physical space in which to connect to it. Eliade claims that, whereas for us today (i.e. *non-religious man*), the world is seen as neutral, that is, every space is like every other space, even if we recognize the 'getting away from it all' aspect, it is merely 'special', but not as *sacred*.¹⁴ We do not assign a sense of getting in touch with God to any space. For *religious man* as we have said, the world is experienced as partly sacred and partly profane. Religious man does not 'get away from it all'; he goes to a specific spot in order to *find* and interact with the sacred, that is, 'get to it all'. *Religious man* understands the world as having two opposite sides, containing both sacred and profane and given the choice opts to find the sacred and dwell there. In developed religious systems, there are three levels to the cosmos; not just the things we normally think of as sacred (heaven) and profane (earth) but an *underworld* (not just hell) as well. We can see sacred mountains, sacred wells, sacred 'connecting points' if you will between the sacred and the profane, between the here and the there. There is a before, a now, and a later (recall the time thing from above) which also applies to space.

¹³ The meaning of enduringness is obvious, but efficacy means having an effect and not just any effect but the effect for which it exists.

¹⁴ A recent exploration of this can be seen in the 2010 book *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* by Sean Kelly and Hubert Dreyfus.

The sacred is the sense of order in the chaos of the profane; it is the aim and center for *religious man*; he seeks it out in order to dwell in peace and harmony. Sacred Space reflects that sense of order and therefore comfort and peace.

ETERNAL RETURN

There is one last idea to take in, but one which arises often. Eliade talks about a concept he calls 'eternal return' or "*return to origins*" an idea that is often tied to ritual actions but it is also a part of myth itself. It means the ability to always return to the time of the myth, that is, to go to the time of the events described in one's myths and participate in that moment. It is a somewhat different view from the philosophical concept of *eternal return* as espoused by the likes of Nietzsche which is that everything repeats itself. Eliade's form invokes a sense of memory. This sense of 'memory' is not a 'remember when we went to the movie and it was nice' but a going back and reliving that 'going to the movie'; experiencing the emotions, the thoughts, the power, the actual event itself as if you are participating in it or *had* participated in it; and not just you, but someone who did not directly experience it can do so as well. We are able, through some means, to return to the very moment of the event being recounted. Myths therefore are not static, dead history but dynamic and alive events as real to us as to those who first experienced them. "...it is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid, *not its successive epiphanies.... On the occasion of the re-presentation of the myths, the entire community is renewed; it rediscovers its 'sources', relives its 'origins.'*" (*Myth and Reality*)

The rote repetition of an event is not the purpose of myth, but its ability to transport us back to that original 'manifestation' and allow us all to relive it.

Campbell

Joseph Campbell is probably best known for his influence on George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga and for his collaboration on *The Power of Myth* with Bill Moyers. But he is a major player in the modern view of myth. His approach is different than Eliade's and yet they complement one another in terms of the modern understanding (at least academically) of myth. Whereas Eliade was looking to understand the origins and uses of myth, Campbell was looking at it from the point of view that there is a shared, basic, core 'truth' which permeates myths and which exists not just in 'religious man' but in all humanity, even 'non-religious man'. Spirituality, in all its forms is the reason for myth and ritual. Spirituality is a search for that intangible force from which all comes and to which all returns.

Campbell championed this notion of a common 'end' for the spiritual journey, that all spirituality is basically a search for the same primal, unknown force from which everything came, within which everything exists, and to which everything will return. In his thinking, the evidence for its existence is in the sheer number of stories about it. Although they each highlight different things, or use different characters, he saw that not as a detriment to myth (making it untrustworthy or of little value) but its power; that at the center of every myth was the sacred, that primal, elemental force which because it is not truly 'knowable' forces a myriad of words for what has no words. It is the thing which exists before words, below words, beyond words.

It can however, be touched, and the knowledge of it expressed through ritual actions and stories, though at best, because there are no exact words for it, through "*metaphors*"

(*Transformations of Myth Through Time*). This means that for example, the two Genesis ‘myths’ of Creation in the Bible (or any creation myth) ought not be taken as conflicting or as a literal description of actual events, but rather studied for their poetic, *metaphorical* meaning, looking for clues concerning the fundamental truths they presents to us about the actual world and our existence. Because we do not have actual words to describe the sacred, we use words metaphorically to express the inexpressible and through correct study we can come to have the inexpressible understood. Ultimately, the thing to be understood is that just as all the myths express the same primal reality all religions touch on the same fundamental, transcendent, and universal truths.

The focus of religion (no matter which one) is to raise the consciousness up to these fundamental truths and beyond the dualistic world. Each religion “*masks*” the same truth...that is, it’s all in the packaging. At the core is the truth about reality, regardless of the questions which the world poses or the way in which a religion chooses to answer it. The world wants us to think in “*pairs of opposites*,” (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) like Birth/Death, Right/Wrong, Yin/Yang, Being/Non-Being, when in truth the truth lies between them and myth provides the answers. In Campbell this results in a sense of wasted time, of time spent trying to define the questions rather than seeking the answers, when instead we should be seeking the answers which lie within.

Putting It All Together

Myth is the language we use to express ideas which are inexpressible in profane language. It is metaphysical in nature, meaning that it is ‘real’ to us but perhaps are not ‘real’ in a physical sense. Myths are expressions of understanding, of concepts which inform our lives at their very roots; ideas and answers which lie beyond words and experience.

We are not talking fables here, but stories which *explain* and not merely teach. They reach into the very bowels of our being and express longings, certainties, fears, desires, and hopes which we *know* but cannot articulate. If the aim of religion is to teach us ‘how to live’ then myth is the vehicle. And a vehicle in many ways, by not just transporting shared cultural memory to us but actually transporting us to the spot where we can participate in that memory, live and experience it for ourselves and therefore learn the truths it holds as everyone does who has or will ever participate in it.

Myth is not about speculation. Myth is about truth. Not just truth which is the answer to a question but truth which eliminates questions. What is it that we really learn from the Genesis Creation myths? The truth that God physically created the world in seven days or the truth that God created everything? That it is the reason we have seven days in the week or that we do not have to worry about why we are here or where we came from?

The most important thing is that of how we live in the world; do we mold the sacred to fit the world or do we mold the world to fit the sacred?

“These common thoughts are expressed in a shared public language, consisting of shared signs...a sign has a ‘sense’ that fixes the reference and is ‘grasped by everybody’ who knows the language...”

Noam Chomsky, *Language and Thought*

"And Colin thought: Because like say I tell someone about my feral hog hunt. Even if it's a dumb story, telling changes other people just the slightest little bit, just as living the story changes me. An infinitesimal change. And that infinitesimal change ripples outward – ever smaller but everlasting. I will get forgotten, but the stories will last. And so we all matter – maybe less than a lot, but always more than none.

And it wasn't only the remembered stories that mattered...but that there's a place in the brain for knowing what cannot be remembered."

John Green, *An Abundance of Katherines*

"There is not a time to pray and a time not to pray...you hold the hand of God. Sometimes you talk and sometimes you don't but you are with God all the time."

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Soul of My Soul*

Hope And Other Four Letter Words

It is the nature of our discussion which calls not only for the discussion of terms but also of foundational ideas. Before we jump in, let us look at a few of these notions and lay down the groundwork and framework for our further discussions.

Modern Thinking

As has been alluded to, one of the things we have to contend with is ‘modern’¹⁵ thinking on the subject of belief. This is the idea that *faith/belief* precludes or excludes *rational* thought (either philosophic or scientific) or that it relies upon a type of certainty which removes (or denies) *any* level of doubt. We can see this in that many of the modern philosophical systems which even allow for metaphysics produce a stunted metaphysics, such as Phenomenology, and that as specifically taught by Martin Heidegger or Ayn Rand’s Existentialism.¹⁶

Faith versus Belief

As always, something to get out of the way is not just the meaning of terms but of some of the basic concepts as well, so in this chapter (it being no different) we will try to start tackling the next level of definitions.

If we wanted to, we could simplify human behavior down to two functions: *Thought* and *Action*. Okay, we want to, so let us start there to break it down (rap beat please). We can let *thought* represent all of the experience and understanding we have gathered over time as well as any rational musings and universals. Then we can classify everything else, the act of perceiving, of physical operations, and pragmatic task accomplishment as *action*. There are things we think and there are things we do, and certainly one should inform the other.

Once we do that, we can begin to think about the way we ‘know’ something. But as we have already touched on, ‘*Knowing*’ is a broad term. In itself it implies many forms of understood truth, of levels of certainty of modes of grasping and perception. In this sense *Action* is acting upon thought. For the moment then, let us set action aside.

When it comes to thinking (as I warned you) we can start with two terms: *a priori* and *a posteriori*. These are rather technical Latin philosophical and theological terms, but they apply to *how* we know something, its source or the modes by which we identify the source of something we know. The simplest way to think about them is that *a priori* speaks to those things which we ‘just know’ or can *induce*¹⁷, like $1 + 1 = 2$. It applies officially to those things which we know *before* (*a priori*) we have any experience of them. *A posteriori* speaks to those things which we can *deduce*, like gravity or that the Speckled Band is a snake. It applies officially to those things which we know *after* (*a posteriori*) all of the evidence is before us, that is, in light of experience.

¹⁵ As a note, the word ‘modern’ does not mean ‘contemporary’ but is a moniker for the time period which began in the 16th century and lasted about 200 years; hence the quotes.

¹⁶ This is because the other systems which do not allow for metaphysics dismiss any such discussion outright.

¹⁷ We may argue the nature of *a priori* at some other stage in the discussion.

You can see how this has bearing. Belief in God or the divinely revealed truths (the Faith) which speak about God, as well as the practice of ritual and myth-telling, may seem to involve only one or the other, but that is an incorrect assumption. The world of Faith involves both, in a situation where one often feeds the other. This is the thinking that is often brought under fire. We may see God all around us in nature, but for some that is not an *a posteriori* truth but an irrational sentiment because for them there is no empirical evidence that God exists just because Nature exists. All we can conclude is that Nature exists. [The truth is that this is something we do all of the time regardless of it being scientifically or empirically based knowledge or rational insight.] The idea being, in response to that, that because Nature is the way it is, I just *know* that God exists.

Anselm, in the 11th century, posited the 'non-Faith' based answer as "God is that thing of which nothing greater can be imagined." God then, is the greatest thing we can know.

I am sure that you have noticed that even though this section has both the words Faith and Belief in it I have not really addressed that but instead focused on *knowing*. We often want to juxtapose Faith and knowing, implying that one is rational and the other is not. In this case we really want to say that knowing is knowing, and has both an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* element and therefore a built-in level of certainty. After that the '*versus*' makes sense. Faith and belief are not the same things. Faith is the collection of truths which are divinely revealed, both *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Belief is the *action* of certainty associated with the validity of the truths of Faith. These truths, like the idea of myth¹⁸, speak to an objective source of truth which is accessible to everyone within the correct context and shared in terms of a universal experience. There is therefore, a foundational idea which one must take on if the idea of belief is to be a valid one, i.e. that it is not simply human-based but is *objective*. What that means is that the person is not the sole judge of the validity of a belief and that empirical evidence in and of itself is not sufficient to explain belief.

Superstition

As Stevie Wonder says "*when you believe in things that you don't understand, then you suffer...superstition ain't the way*" (*Superstition* off of *Innervisions*). Belief is often saddled with the 'superstition' label because it is only understood as 'un-provable' or 'incomprehensible' and therefore by its nature suspect. Superstition by definition¹⁹ dictates lifestyle choices which make no rational sense, i.e. it is *irrational*, outside of any reason. A black cat running across your path does not carry with it empirical evidence of 'luck' or 'no luck'. There is no 'proof' that the number 13 carries within it an intrinsic evil or fateful outcome. To operate as if they 'do', rather than that they 'might', is superstitious, i.e. beyond both reason and experience. On that note, and perhaps separate from superstition, the ideas of luck, fate, and happenstance, which may be relied upon as a counter to religious belief are of the same nature as religious belief, that is, they contain a certain amount of empirical and rational knowledge, but could just as easily be accused of being superstitious – they can be considered the 'Faith' by which one acts.

¹⁸ And like myth, these truths are not specific to one religion or another, but are foundational to all humanity.

¹⁹ "A *belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge, in or of the ominous significance of a particular thing, circumstance, occurrence, proceeding, or the like.*" to be exact.

The application of 'Irrational' to Faith and belief is incorrect, especially if all of knowledge is merely empirically based, but I digress. Faith and belief, as a knowledge is both an *a priori* and a *posteriori* thing, ergo involves both reason and experience and so by either definition is *not* irrational. Yet the words 'faith' and 'belief' hold within them a double sense. On the one hand is the sense of 'knowledge' or more correctly 'thinking' as in "I believe [think] it might rain today", and it implies an *imperfect* form of perception. It is imperfect because this meaning carries with it a level of uncertainty and speculation. My empirical perceptions of the world inform me (over time) that certain conditions *often* lead to rain but that does not mean it will rain.²⁰ 'Belief' in this form carries a certain amount of *future dependency* with it, a certain amount of uncertainty and unsettledness – it is a specific unknown value based in statistics.

Often this understanding of belief is applied to religious belief, that is, the statement of belief in God is thought to carry with it a certain amount of unknown or is only provable sometime in the future, therefore it is something open to question and doubt because belief is by its nature 'uncertain'. But the statement of belief in God invokes a second sense of the word, one which *entails certainty*. Perhaps it is better said as involving a particular type of certainty, one which does not speak of some future resolution to be 'known', but contains both a *present certainty* and yet has room for *better understanding* later.

Certainty is a hard word. Even scientific certainty is open to revision at a later time, and to believe otherwise, well that would just be superstitious. So, all that said, there apparently is an element of superstition in any human system.

Liturgia

Faith practices which border superstition do not necessarily mean that all practices are suspect or that even those which seem to border on superstition are suspect. We talk of 'Voodoo Economics' or 'Quackery' meaning that the practices are suspect and therefore the underlying system is suspect. At the same time, suspect does not mean false or untrue because these accusations are often made from positions outside of the understanding of the practice and utilizing a specific bias. We must admit though, that some practices are suspect, and are identifiable as such by any objective observer from the inside or the outside. All that is to say that if you do not believe in God then the practice of prayer may *appear* to be suspect; on the contrary, if you say you believe in God and yet practice an insincere or disingenuous prayer then that practice *would be* suspect.

Social commentary aside, the last chapter if you recall, discussed the idea of myth, the purpose and place of myth, and specifically Myth as the vehicle of teaching and preservation of Faith as well as placing one in direct touch with sacred events. In this section we will look at its compliment: *Rite* or *Ritual*. Ritual performs a similar function as myth but is the formal expression of the truths revealed in myth, or to put it another way, the expression of Faith. The word comes to us from the Latin *ritus*: a religious observance or ceremony, custom, usage,

²⁰ On the other hand, the form of belief my Grandmother employed when carrying an umbrella to keep it from raining, whether she believed there was a probability of rain or not, is something *entirely* different and not within the scope of this work...or its author.

possibly from the word for ‘number’²¹ and is related to the Greek word *leitourgia* which is a composite word meaning, originally, a public duty, a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. Its root is *leitōs* (from *leōs*, *people*) meaning *public*, and *ergo*, meaning *to do*. Both imply action, as in this is something you do. It is the proper and commonly understood response required of every individual. Liturgy comes up here because it is one of the last concepts we need to discuss, specifically because it is tied to the idea of *worship* and it is tied to the *Religionem* section in Chapter 1. Ritual is the means of accomplishing the functions of religion, the binding of oneself to the sacred for both the purpose of subjecting oneself to it and to receive some portion of its power. Ritual is the expression of Faith.

A rite or ritual is an element of Liturgy. If we want we can argue the source of ritual as we argued the source of Faith. Okay, so we do, well, at least we are going to. The sense of the sacred, that non-verbal, pre-cognizant, *a priori* and *a posteriori* understanding that there is *something else*, creates an equal and similarly internal, gut-level, *a priori* and *a posteriori* response, as when shouting for joy when extremely happy – it is not a rational decision but almost an instinctual one, and in that sense there is only one appropriate response (tears of joy must be explained, a shout does not).

Worship, from the Old English, is a single word which we use to cover a multitude of sins. Keeping in mind all that we have spoken of in terms of *sacred*, there are two ‘levels’ of reverence that are connected with the sacred, only one of which applies to the word *worship* as most people think of the word. Like the understanding of love and time, this first level is signified by the Greek word *Latria*, which speaks to the relationship of a servant to a master, with Plato using it to correspond more to our usage, that of the idea of *divine service* or the action of reverence and worship which is reserved *for God alone*. The second is *Dulia*, the idea of reverence and honor reserved for all other sacred people (i.e. consecrated things). We might think of it in Native American terms such as *worshipping* the Great Spirit and *honoring* the buffalo.²²

Worship then is the response to God, *honor* is the response to consecrated or sacred related things. Liturgy is the rites and rituals which are performed for *worship*. Liturgy contains references or utilizes things which are honored (consecrated objects and people), but it is directed to the sacred, not to the consecrated things (articles, signs, symbols, words). Worship then is larger than passive, feel-good kumbaya moments or items, but is the active, liturgical actions which bring one in contact with and are a reaction to the sacred; it is literally the service *due* the sacred, the ‘work of the people’.

Common Ground, Holy Ground

That takes care of the majority of early terms, so now let us examine some of the root aspects of beliefs. There is what we might call ‘grounding concepts’ which are shared across a wide variety of belief systems about the sacred. We bathe ourselves in the concept of ‘the other’; Mother Earth, Gaia, Mother Nature however you want to designate it, as well as a sense of common responses to the concept, offerings, prayer, behaviors. This pervasive notion is

²¹ Which may on the outset seem strange, but the Romans were big on numbers...and the word describes much of their ‘ordered’ thinking. More on that later.

²² If you want you can use this to answer the question of ‘how can someone eat what they worship?’

based on the sense of the sacred, but what is the nature of the sacred? Our foundational idea is manifested in many ways and that colors the way in which we think of our relationship vis-à-vis the sacred.

Here, There, Everywhere....

Let us not hold back and examine that statement. In this discussion it goes without saying that something must be sacred (we can at least imagine it), but just what is the *nature* of the sacred? Is it *Transcendent*, apart from us, or *Intimate*, somewhere around or within us? We assign many positive superlatives to God, like omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (everywhere), and omnipotent (all-powerful), what is known as *cataphatic* (from the Greek for 'go along with' or 'to affirm') thinking. This is also known, in Latin, as *via positiva* (the positive route or way). For all those half-empty glass people out there we also use what is called *apophatic* or 'negative' (from the Greek with the negative 'a' meaning 'go against' or 'to deny') thinking to define God, as in we cannot say what God is, but we *can* say what God *is not*. This is where words like ineffable, mystery, and *not* human are used. This negative form is actually seen in a positive light, as an attempt to avoid *limiting* God, as when saying that 'God is omniscient', we limit God to human understanding of knowledge. Therefore, instead, we say that God is *unknowable*, and we make no statement about what God knows. This is known, for obvious reasons, as *via negativa*.

Ultimately, cataphatic thinking is all about what we *can* say of God, that is, what words are appropriate, especially in light of what has been revealed. Apophatic thinking is all about the limitations of language, that is, the inability of language to describe God, who is totally other and utterly beyond human comprehension.

That said, or unsaid as the case may be, one of the foundational characteristics of God is that of *Creator*. Creator implies the nature of our being and our relationship. If we are not God (the sacred being totally other) then we must be the non-God; the *creature*. Further, if God is Creator then God is the definition of *Be-ing* in that God had to exist before creation such that God could create it. But what is the *nature* of that *Be-ing*? Is God many (Polytheism) or is God one (Monotheism)?

Once the creation aspect is settled (*Being* being a given), there comes the discussion of the nature of the *presence* of God, that is, how is God manifested to creation? Is God everything (Pantheism) or just *in* everything (Pan-en-theism)?

There is a basic need to 'define' God. Starting with the notion of the sacred, the sense of sacred and profane within the world, and the understanding of a need to respond to that sacred, what God *is* becomes important to the conversation. For the most part, the sacred is understood in terms of 'Good', that is it is benevolent or at least neutral. This is because of the nature of our observations and reasoning about the world around us. We benefit from creation as well as being subject to its whims. For the most part, day in and day out, life is 'good', and we live in relative comfort and ease in terms of the Creator.

Something Wicked This Way Comes....

If the sacred explains the good aspects of the world then it goes without saying that there must be 'evil' to explain all of the bad aspects, right? Evil in some form is pervasive throughout

human religious thought. And yet, what is the nature of evil? How is it manifested to us? The question of evil usually comes down to one of *personification* (like the Devil), *force* (like Karma), or *consequence* (of human action).

This dichotomy, these two designations of *good* and *evil*, are not necessarily shared across all religious thinking. For some, there is neither *good* nor *evil*, there just *is*. For some, they are seen as two halves of a whole and are therefore not in opposition in the usual sense.

Ethics

With an understanding of ‘good and evil’, come the requisite rules for living, warnings and instruction dealing with ‘right’ actions and ‘wrong’ actions, and its source is the sacred. Moral behavior is an integral part of most sacred systems, recounted in Tradition, and forms the basis for expectations of individuals within the collective. Many times this subsystem is based in the notion of the sacred, and reflects understandings about the nature of the sacred as well as way the sacred is connected to the world. You might think of it as how we relate to the sacred is the way we relate to one another.

Now That I Think About It....

Okay, so many things influence our thinking, but the one we do not always think about is the influence of profane thinking. Profane/secular thought also is a consideration for us when approaching these subjects. Regardless of religious thought, certain aspects of ‘the nature of things’ and ‘moral living’ are constant within human thought and it often provides insight into as well as impetus for religious thought.

The Greeks, of the likes of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (to whom we were introduced earlier, though not really formally), provide much of the foundations for our understanding of the nature of the sacred and being, as well as morality. Just the political influence of Greece alone permeates the Western World, and extends as far as India in the East, Egypt south and later into Rome. It goes without saying that religious thought eventually had to deal with Greek thought.²³

After that, Christian scholars provide a religious nature to secular thought. Thomas Aquinas wrote that “*Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the known*” (*Summa Theologica*, II/II, Q. 1, art 2), that is, the thing known is relative to the way in which the knower can know it, or how it is presented to him. This is a fundamental epistemological (the study of how do we know things) idea and it speaks to the *way we know* something. Aquinas is seeking to understand thinking such that he can talk about how we can think about God. For the record, he thought that although God is *simple* (basically because he is the ultimate and most complete Being), God can only be known by human beings through *complex* propositions. We can think of this in terms of *cataphatic* and *apophatic* – we can understand that God *is* but our ability to *express* God requires complex thinking. He was basing in Aristotle but it is strictly Theo-centric.

From there we are influenced by the ‘modern’ thinkers like Descartes, Locke, and Kant. These guys are looking to avoid Aquinas’ Theo-centric reasoning and look for the answer within. For Immanuel Kant, the mind interprets perceptions in terms of innate categories, interacting in

²³ Aristotle himself was the tutor of Alexander the Great.

time and space, that is, there are internal ideas which help us to understand all of the sensory data we take in. Kant distinguished between the world in itself, or *noumena*, and the world as we perceive it, which he called *phenomena*. The knowledge of things “*depend upon the mode of intuition of the subject, this object as appearance is to be distinguished from itself as object in itself.*” (*Critique of Pure Reason*) this sounds similar to Thomas but has the subtle difference of creating a gulf between the knower and the known.

Our ability to know God is colored by many factors. Whether we approach it from a position of belief or an epistemological one, many other questions arise as to the nature of God and the nature of the sacred, and how we interact with it.

Putting It All Together

Terms and foundations help us to place our discussion within a common boundary as well as help us to sort out our own understandings as we undertake this effort. Keeping in mind the biases and pre-conceived notions we bring to the table will help us to overcome them, or at least apply them critically. Many of the things we have discussed may not be familiar to us in the framework of our own faith (or lack of faith) experiences but they are anthropologically foundational. An open mind is essential for understanding the progress and end of theological thinking, no matter what the source.

And we have many sources from which we draw our sense of religion. The problem with all of these systems is the fact that each of these diverse sources expresses different and sometimes incompatible notions about the nature of reality, the sacred, liturgy, the modes and routes of divine action, and about the nature and end of humanity. Often the measure for an adherent to a particular religion must be the notion that every other system be flawed or incomplete, and for that reason is not to be followed.

Realizing that there are common understandings and practices can take us a long way on the road to exploring the meaning held within all systems. In the end, each system must be evaluated in its ability to sufficiently answer the questions which one poses to it.

“The purpose of a book of meditations is to teach you how to think and not to do your thinking for you. Consequently if you pick up such a book and simply read it through, you are wasting your time. As soon as any thought stimulates your mind or your heart you can put the book down because your meditation has begun. To think that you are somehow obliged to follow the author of the book to his own particular conclusion would be a great mistake.”

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

“Religion consists of a set of things which the average man thinks he believes and wishes he was certain.”

Attributed to Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)

Aspects Of Faith

As we might do with any system we now look at what branches or disciplines arise within that system. Looking at this list will also give us a sense of what the concerns and focus of this study will be.

I Am The Vine

So, theology is our root. Theology informs and enlivens. While its ultimate focus is the study of God, there are branches which bear fruit in our conversation. As said, some of these branches overlap with secular thinking, and much back and forth takes place. Still, theology is what we are looking at, and whether theology is a branch of philosophy or that philosophy is the 'handmaiden' of theology is not the question we are looking to answer here.

Theology is, at one and the same time, both a exploration of and a definer of sacred things, that is to say, at one moment is seeks to clarify and pin-down meaning and understanding and in the next seeks to push the boundaries of that definition, adapting and applying meaning to sacred things. In the end, it is about dialog, a give and take with the sacred, an attempt to better approach and enter into the sacred. In the end, we are studying the relationship of ourselves to the sacred.

You Are The Branches

As said, many of the branches of theology are similar in nature to the branches of philosophy. Anyone who has studied philosophy in a serious fashion (and you know who you are) are more than just geeks, but will be able to easily recognize most of the following disciplines.

<i>Ontology:</i>	The study of creation and be-ing
<i>Eschatology:</i>	The study of ends and end-times
<i>Cosmology:</i>	The study of the nature of creation
<i>Soteriology:</i>	The study of the doctrines of salvation
<i>Ethics:</i>	The study of right conduct per the precepts of the sacred

Table 2 – The Main Branches of Theology

These branches rely solely on theology, in a way different than the branches of philosophy do. There is no single central idea in philosophy from which springs distinct ontological or epistemological philosophies; that is to say, the specific nature of those branches are not directed solely at God. Theology on the other hand relies completely on the idea of God, and all discussions rise from and report back to that central idea. Discussing ontology in theology only has purpose if there is a God, some type of *being*, and that *being* is part of or responsible for individual *being*.

Simply put, in theological terms, these are the journeys of exploration. Each starts with a basic concept and then develops outward from that concept investigating its ramifications. In that sense all roads emanate from God and return back to God, but along the way new insights

and connections are made which add clarity to our understanding of God. In a sense you might argue that these journeys lead to God, but only because they emanate from God.

You Are What You Are, or Mommy, Where Did I Come From?

As a quick illustrative story²⁴, I was telling my four-year-old the four-year-old-level facts-of-life in response to the age-old question but at the end of each statement, she would ask “yeah, but how did it *get* there?” This really does speak to the nature of ontology. Not just looking at the fact that we are here, but the how, the why, the *implications* of being. Officially, *Ontology* is the study of *be-ing*, from the Greek *ontos* or “that which is”, but it deals with *all* the questions of be-ing. How is it we are? What is our nature? What is being? How did we get here?

Being is the subject of metaphysics (in a way, for Aristotle, it *was* metaphysics), and so it therefore also deals with many of the other intangible things that we also think about when we think about being. In a sense, then, being is what *everything* is about. If God is not, if we are not, if the universe is not, then what *is*?

Warning: there are some more big words coming up but they are the language for discussing the concerns of ontology:

1. **First and foremost then, obviously, is a definition of *Being*:** as with any discussion you need to lay down the ground rules. This is the objective concept of being in its widest possible meaning and use. It explores ‘modes’ of being, *actual* and *potential* (actual being and being-to-be) and the problems concerned with *essence* (a thing’s ‘nature’) and *existence* (being alive, or an instance of essence). Words like ‘act’ and ‘potency’ are discussed, and the *primary* principles — meaning, identity, etc. — are shown to *emerge* from the concept of entity (being a being).
2. **Which brings up things corresponding to or analogous with being:** you might think of these subjects as the markers of being, that is, things which only have meaning because of being; they are also things which could be considered as giving meaning to being, things like unity, truth, and goodness, and associated concepts like order and beauty. This level of the conversation helps to orient and focus the concepts of being, that is, things which really have no physical manifestation (beauty is different in different cultures and time even though it relies on physical attributes).
3. **And for the more pragmatic, who or what have being:** this is a fundamental question because it is part and parcel of the definition of being. Do all things have being? Do rocks have being? It is focused in *how* do things have being, meaning that it speculates on the fundamental divisions of being, or *finite* (having an end) and the *infinite* (having no end), the *contingent* (based on) and the *necessary* (must be), etc. As you might guess, we fall into the finite and God into the infinite. As said though talking about God’s being is hard, so as they say ‘write what you know’ so there is a lot of concentration on the finite. It subdivides the finite into the categories (as initially described by Aristotle, but re-characterized throughout time) *substance* and its *accidents* (quantity, quality, etc.). The objective — the reality of substance, the meaning of personality, the relation of accidents to substance are the most prominent topics at this level.

²⁴ A myth in one sense but not in the other.

4. **The final portion of ontology is devoted to the concept of *cause*:** another term or translation, if you will, of cause might be 'change' but we will try to not confuse the two. While you may be inclined to think of this subject as a 'scientific' idea and odd in relation to being, it gets down to the 'something or nothing' question, one which may have 'scientific' bearing but also goes to the heart of the more speculative aspects of being. Cause is the linear logic of being; something had to cause everything, that is, things have to come about somehow. So we look at its four primary divisions *efficient* (what gets it going) and *final* (the end of the chain), *material* (what it is made of) and *formal* (how it is put together) – with the objectivity and analytical character of the principle of *causality* receiving most attention. We will deal more with this one later.

To break it down simply, ontology helps us to get the ground rules out of the way. We create a definition of being, the boundaries and realm of being, the assignment and ramifications of being, and finally place being within our everyday activities. It deals with the foundational questions of life, and does involve epistemology, in that we have to define how or why we even think about these things. Once all of that is done, the final question is 'where are we going?'

The End Of The World As We Know It

Eschatology, from the Greek for 'last' or 'last things', could also technically be part of ontology but it is separate because what we are thinking about here really is the study of merely 'ends'. Ontology and eschatology are not the opposite studies of 'life' and 'death', that is, eschatology is not the opposite study of *be-ing* but is instead the thinking about *ends* almost aside from being. Life and death are plain before us; *finite* things begin and then they eventually end. This naturally flows into the study of the overall end. Will everything end? When? How? Why?

Eschatology nowadays brings with it a sufficient load of baggage, particularly as viewed in religious contexts over the last 150+ years. What we are focusing on here is the movement through, that is, not the *cause* of the thing but its *end*. If I move my arm through the air, there is a point at which it starts, moves, and then stops moving. To what end did I move my arm? We might argue that eschatology is about *purpose*. For what reason did I move my arm? Notice how this is different than why my arm moved.

Within Eschatology there is a notion called *teleology*, or the study of the ends of things, and in a sense it informs eschatology, but it is not eschatology. As a side wandering, this word, while based in the Greek word *teleos* for 'perfect' or 'complete' (from *telos* which means 'end goal'), is a fairly modern construct, having been coined in the mid-1700's. The idea is used in several complex ways but for our purposes we will dumb it down to roughly mean 'the end to which something is created', though I reserve the right to mess with that limitation later.

Teleology will also come up in ethics, but what we are thinking about here are more *final* ends.

Where Y'at?

Cosmology is the looking at being in *situ*, at the context of being if you will. When we think about creation, we think about all that *is*, all that has essence, existence, purpose, ends. Cosmology is the study of the nature of Nature. As an example we will talk about the Hebrew

cosmology, the one which we glean from Scripture. There is no stated official cosmology, but we are able to extrapolate and understand how the Jews saw the universe, and then develop meaning and put together a cosmology, or context of existence.

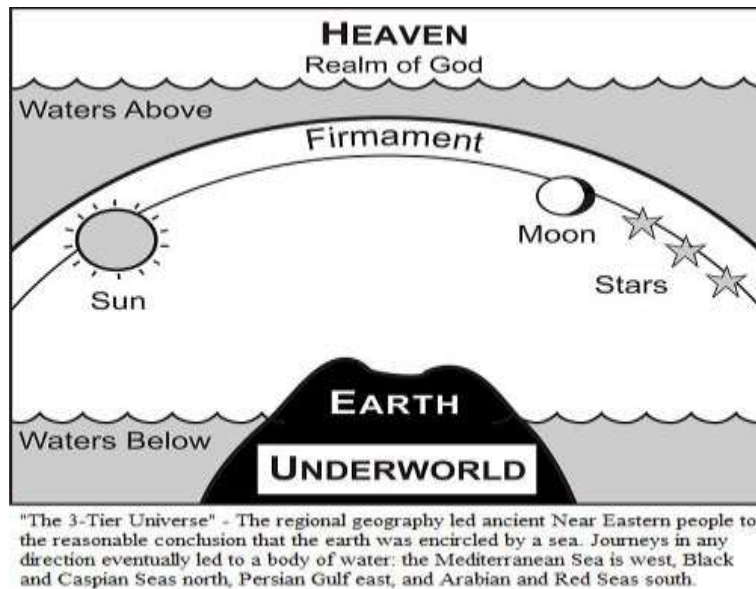
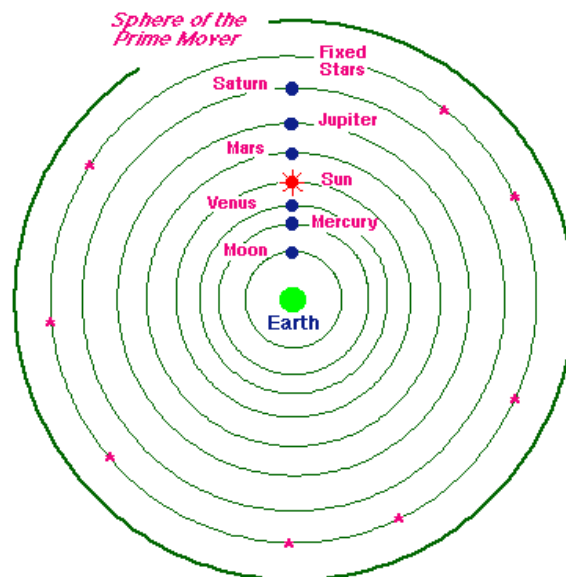


Figure 1: Hebrew Cosmological Layout

This is different than the Greek conception of the universe, where things like motion and atoms and space which are not part of the Hebrew cosmology abound. Aristotle's cosmology has the planets and the stars being carried round the heavens on a clock-like mechanism of nested solid crystalline spheres that function through a sort of friction drive with the mainspring outermost sphere being moved by the unmoved mover (the *prime cause*).



Aristotle's Universe

Figure 2: Greek Cosmological Layout

Ancient cosmologies are more about the meaning, purpose, and function of the cosmos than about their empirical factual configuration. Recall that we are still in the realm of religious-man, that their ways of thinking of the universe saw it as 'enchanted' and *meaning-full*. Ergo cosmology in our sense is not 'provable' at a scientific level but has its 'truth' at the level of *meaning*.

Early cultures saw the earth as literally at the centre of the cosmos. Scientifically this view is simply mistaken or what scientists call 'absurd' yet when we think about it, they are perfectly sensible descriptions of the world as we actually experience it without the aid of telescopes and delicate sensors. However, the mythic cosmology may still be held to be correct in affirming the centrality of earth in the divine purposes – we are here and still we have found no evidence of others. Primitive cosmology cannot be discarded because it stands aside or science, but needs to be seen as a means by which God can reshape the way that we see the cosmos. Much of the truth we know about ourselves is contained within these early cosmologies. It is the reason one can read those myths with the same resulting insight today as those who read them millennia ago.

Wha'Cha Doing?

Ethics technically also flows from ontology, but we pull it out on its own because, after ontology, it is probably the thing which most concerns us because it is all about right and proper behavior. Belief in the sacred carries with it a sense of responsibility, not just between persons, but between persons and the sacred. And you might notice that I state that the focus is *'all about right and proper behavior'* and *not* about right and wrong. That is because it is really about correct behavior and not about the rules for what is right and what is wrong. That may not seem like a difference but it is really not subtle. While there may be discussion about right and wrong, right behavior is about participation in the sacred, which by its definition is not about evil or wrong.

In a philosophic sense it is all about systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. In our theological sense, where God centers all, it is about cooperation in and with the sacred. Ethics starts from the teleological idea of 'happiness' (as in what makes us 'happy': basic pain and pleasure things), and moves to the idea of 'excellence' or 'true' happiness (becoming the self for which one was created). Ethics then is bound not to just instinctual behavior and avoidance but is attached to our 'higher' functions, ones beyond what Aristotle might call the 'vegetable' and 'animal' functions. He saw ethics as part a parcel of the realization of the potential person, that is to say, through ethics, one became one's self.

In early cultures, 'Wisdom' is the idea of right behavior and understanding, one which is in concert with the sacred. So for the likes of Socrates and Aristotle practical wisdom is not something which is learned by rote memorization or acquired solely by learning general rules or through the old carrot and stick approach. Practice makes perfect. We learn, through practice of the 'rules', the judgment, emotional, and social skills that translate our general, objective understanding of happiness and well-being into ways that are suitable to the situation. We can similarly translate that into theological terms. Starting from Revelation, we understand the

Good, and through practice of that good, we come into contact with and receive from the sacred satisfaction and final reward.

Ethics is bound to the concept of the 'soul', in that the soul and its 'end' are dependent upon one's behavior.

How Y'a Doing?

That sense of a soul, and of a soul which has an 'end', leads us to our final subject. *Soteriology* comes from the Greek word *soter*, for 'savior' or 'preserver', and refers to the study of the concepts and doctrines dealing with salvation or what are known as the 'economy of salvation', meaning the plan and means by which God operates.

Soteriology ultimately deals with the healing of separation between the created and the creator. While not every cosmology entails such a break, it is a common explanation for evil, and therefore often enters into most systems. In some it is a constant struggle, in others it is a one-time event. In some it has yet to happen and in others it happened early on and others eventually. Ultimately it is bound up with behavior in that something brings about the fall and only through the correct ritual or action can it be undone, or at least held at bay.

Salvation per se is not an across the board concept, as it does require some sort of fall and need for redemption, but since many belief systems follow that paradigm, especially the Judeo-Christian one, we will throw it in here.

Putting It All Together

Okay, okay; it really is all about being. We give these disciplines different names but they all come down to being. Still, the purpose of disciplines is the ability to concentrate on one aspect and that is very useful in building the overall picture of being. The hub of any system goes far in determining the way we think within that system. That means that the way theology approaches and thinks about being is completely dependent upon the existence of a God, and in this way differs from philosophical approaches which by their very nature are more relativistic – but are so only because each approaches the question of being from a different starting point.

While we will not study each of these disciplines explicitly, we will rely on what those who have studied them have to say.

"No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means."

George Bernard Shaw

"The mistake about Revelation is that because it can be humanly interpreted in a variety of subjective ways it is merely a subjective human construct. The failure of the human subject to grasp the Sacred is not proof of its inexistence any more than failure to understand the motor of a car from the exterior is proof that it does not exist."

Anonymous

Basic Map of Majority Religious Distribution

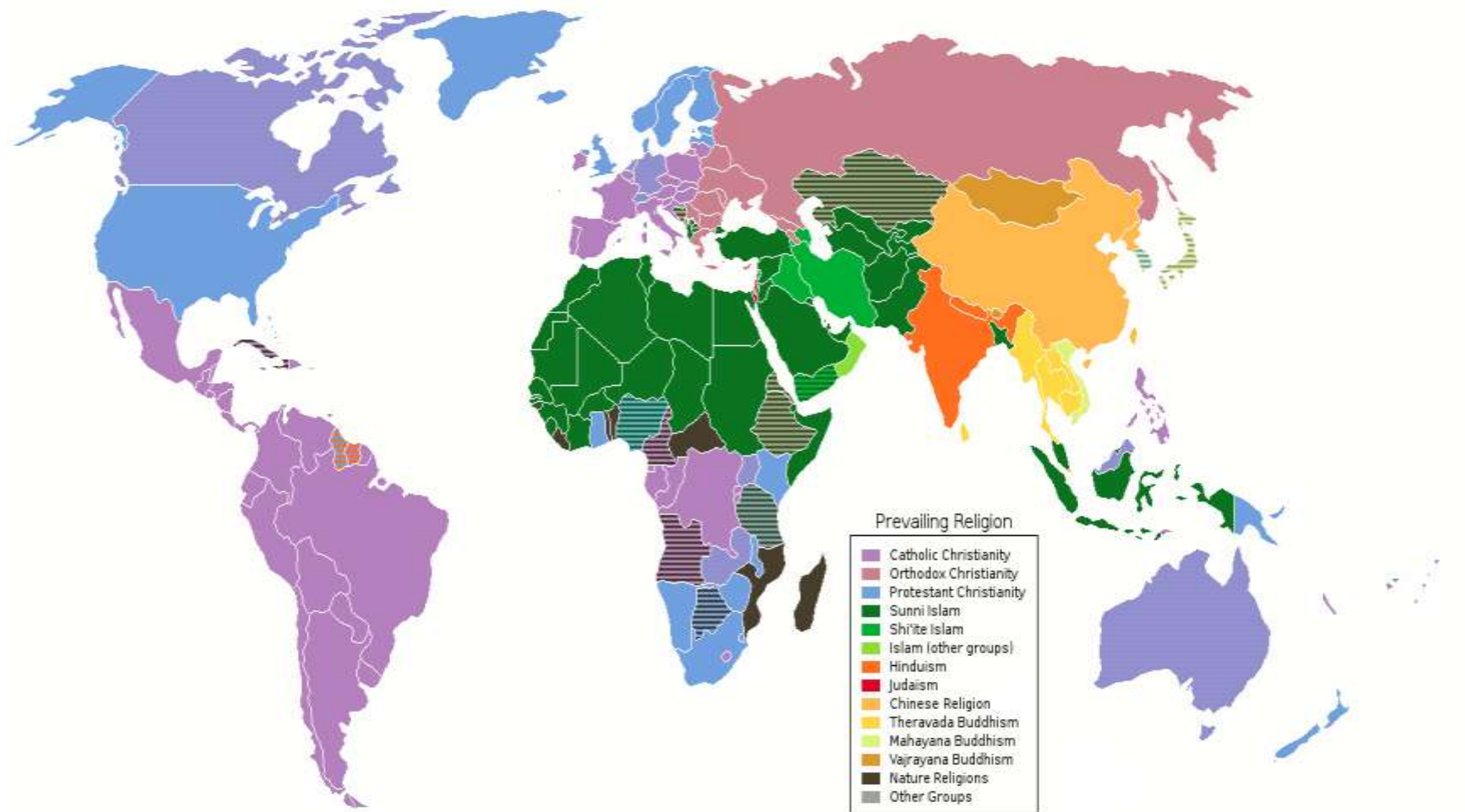


Figure 3: Distribution of Major World Religions

Genesis

Where to start?

The understanding of God is a progressive one, but at all times, we are bound to and aware of the overall idea of the sacred as we have discussed it; we must keep in mind that at the core is the sacred and the drive to identify the sacred. Not just as individuals but as communities, societies; in this effort we are people of common purpose.

In The Beginning

We will take a trip back to Anselm and his ontological argument for the existence of God. *God is that thing for which we can think nothing greater.* God for Anselm is the Prime Mover. In earlier cultures, ideas of movement, and cause are much more localized, that is to say, they just ain't that big a deal. One is seeking connection with the sacred. One is looking for the sacred. So that is where we begin; where is God?

Group Hug

It is the coming together of people which allows for the stability that is the hallmark of many people working for the common good. One person spends more time just trying to eat than the day has. Very little external speculation takes place in solitary hunter/gatherer situations. It is the distribution of roles that allows for leisure and the larger questions to be addressed. So it is the community which allows for exploration, not just physical but mental as well. But it is also the nature of the community to seek stability, and things which disrupt stability are often frowned upon. This goes to the physical world, where weather or large many-toothed animals can put a dent in the community's regularity. It also goes to the spiritual and mental worlds. Conformity and innovation must work hand in hand, but in most cases, conformity dictates stability.

People who did not agree with this or live it were considered not contained within the group nor did they share in the benefit of the group. This communal understanding can be seen throughout time. There is no direct requirement to participate, but the one who separates oneself from the fold, becomes vulnerable. It is seen as *abnormal* behavior. The Greeks had a specific word for those who separated themselves from the community, *idios*, the root of our word *idiot*. I am not making a judgment here, merely an observation that deep down even we think that complete individualism is not a good idea.

Point in case might be the idea of America, filled with 'rugged individuals', yet even that myth does not fit the idea of being an American, i.e. part of the group. The community gains from the talents and individual skills of each member and gives the benefit of leisure to its members.

Truth

The ability of the individual to experience, seek out, and employ the sacred is based in the stability the group offers as well, as the nature of the community. The experience of the group's

individuals shapes the nature of the group's relationship to the sacred at the same time the group memory informs the individual. The Myths and Rituals employed by the community are directly related to that community. Not to say that Truth is relative, but that the core truths which allow for stability and fullness of life (leisure) are made evident within the context of the experience of the group. We may therefore rightly ask about the nature of the Truth which these early manifestations of religious activity portray, and what they tell us about Faith in general.

Once again, we go back to the basic ideas of Faith, Myth, and Ritual and their place within religious thinking and action (theology and liturgy). What we want to explore here is the meaning of these aspects of religious thinking within praxis, i.e. how they come about.

Nature

If the sacred is an observable fact, then Nature seems the perfect place to start looking for it. At some time in our development we humans made the transition to self-awareness. I have no clue when, but at some point we realized that we were separate from the world around us, that it was different than we were. Nature then is the primary Other.

About the same time, *personification*, or the action of assigning personality to a thing develops.²⁵ This is a natural offshoot of this 'other' thinking and many natural things were worshipped – earth, sun, moon, sea, wind, wolves, eagles, etc. as 'persons'. This led later to more complete 'personification' into 'personhood', that is, the sun or earth as a divinity or spirit essentially separated from the sun or earth themselves, like Apollo or Mother Nature, but still closely aligned or associated with the object. Here we also place the development of things like the 'elf', 'sylvan', 'wood sprite' or such things which are spirit, yet bound to the natural object with which they are associated.

So the core and essence of nature-worship is that nature is 'animated' or 'spirited'. Early societies see the world with what may seem to us a childlike wonder; awe and delight possess them (we think once again of Aristotle). The succession of the seasons, night and day, storm and cloud, wind and rain, the growth of living things, show us nature (i.e. the world), in constant flux and varied change. Natural phenomena are the effects of causes which are *other*, beyond comprehension and control, i.e. mysteries. Within consciousness of self, though not so much of a soul apart of the body, there is a type of understood equality with everything else, as in they must be like me. Ultimately, humans need the cooperation of these nature 'persons' to accomplish things using the power one associates with them.

Animals And Rocks

The form this belief takes is called *animism*, from the Latin word for *soul* or *spirit*, and it is this practice of rituals that appease and/or befriend the spirits within natural objects in order to control or share in their power. In early cultures there is no real distinction between the animate and the inanimate. All Nature changes and is therefore 'alive' and the means of this is the 'in spiriting' of everything, that is, like me, every object is controlled by its own independent spirit. Spirits possess or are part of the rivers, lakes, fountains, woods, mountains, trees,

²⁵ This is more than mere *anthropomorphism*, which simply assigns human qualities to a thing.

animals, flowers, wind, grass, and the birds. There is also the semi-independent spirits who are good, benevolent, mischievous, or even evil like elves, gnomes, ghosts, manes, demons, etc. which inhabit almost every part of the world. The end result being that almost everything qualifies as an object of worship, with both myths and rituals associated with it.

We see the examples in many cultures. For the Inuit, the Milky Way is the path of the souls leading to the spirit-land and the Northern Lights are a vision of the dancing of dead warriors and wise ones in the heavens. The Aborigines say that the sounds of the wind in the trees are the voices of the dead communing with one another or warning the living of approaching events. Yet there is a subtle difference in this. It is not a superstition but recognition, not a fear that everywhere spirits, ghosts, and evil surround us but the understanding of the connection of all spirits, as we have said, it is the recognition of the sacred and spiritual nature of the world around us. The focus is usually an animal species, more rarely a plant, and even more rarely an inanimate object (the sun, wind, or rock).

Some cultures translate this into the idea of *totem*. The original signification is from Ojibway meaning a person's family or tribe, and in a narrower sense one's belongings, that is, it is a *signifier*, something which is both identified with and identifies someone. The idea has expanded and *Totemism* is the name for the custom of using *totems* for spiritual purposes. Think of it as the intimate relation that exists between an individual or a group of individuals and some object in nature by which they (and also in a sense their belongings) are identified in a *mystical* way. The result of that association is expressed by bearing the name of the *totem* and the practicing of certain rituals and customs associated with a particular totem and its attributes.

There is still the two-fold aspect of the sacred and the profane here, but as always the sacred informs the profane. The sacro-religious understanding of the intimate relationship between totem and human produces actions and customs which result in profane, sociological behaviors. This is the idea of connection which the word *totem* has; one has the eyes of an eagle, the heart of a lion, or is named 'Dances-with-wolves'; one 'owns' and is guided by the strengths of one's *totem*.

Tribe

With the deeper understanding of *Self* and *Other*, came also the understanding of 'us'. As intimated above, the community becomes the foundation of living. Individuals perform roles and have personality within a larger social order. In terms of the sacred, it is the binding force of the community. We are together not just for protection and efficiency but because we are literally created to be together in community, that is, the structure of society is the structure of humanity by virtue of its creation. In this thinking, the idea of *ideos* makes more sense.

So the 'tribe' becomes the structure within which wisdom is gathered and from which it is preserved and dispensed. Myth is a *shared* experience; Ritual is a *communal* expression. These are therefore related to the community. So hunter-gatherers are likely to have myths and rituals involving the animals they hunt. Pastoral groups who are also more mobile will tend to be linked with herd animal. Farmers, who tend to be more tied to a specific area, focus on the fruit of the land. As an example, in the book of *Genesis*, we read of Abel offering the first-born of his flock (herder) and Cain offering his crops (farmer) as a sacrifice to God.

The tribe has many needs: Fertility; Burial rites; threshold experiences; atonement; appeasement; sacrifice. The profane actions of the tribe are mirrors of, guided by, or are the result of some sacred reality. The roles which develop within a tribe define the purpose of the individual in the order of things. Order and stability are what society are all about, or if you want to put it another way, *repeatability*. Knowing where to graze, who is to plant, when to plant, when to reap, when or who is to do anything which necessitates consistency requires a plan, a program, and a means of consistently carrying out that important task. Just as those whose strength and leadership keep the community safe, those who control and distribute that information become important, not just as rulers or consultants but as servants to the tribe, because they are literally the difference between life and death in the stable situation, as the king may be in times of peril. Security comes from knowing that someone has your back or someone has the correct understanding to practice a particular role. This co-dependency, if you will, is a natural product of the *inter-dependence* of the members of the community.

Shaman

So there develops the role or caste if you prefer, of an individual or persons who fulfill the need of the many for the security which comes from knowledge. Often it starts with someone who seems to have a special connection to the sacred.²⁶ Other times it is almost a culling, a test of many individuals to see who has the power. It can eventually become genetic in nature, passed from father to son, mother to daughter. Whatever the nexus, the function is that of the Go-Between. Not because individuals are incapable of connecting. This arises ultimately for very practical reasons: because myths require people to tell them and rituals require people to carry them out. Not just someone to participate in them but someone to remember and lead them. This is a necessity, not an option, because ritual connects a society to the sacred at a level beyond the profane, in the realm of mystery and unspoken truth. Everyone is not capable of fulfilling the role because of the nature of the role. As we spoke of earlier, an important aspect of myth and ritual is repeatability; you need someone who has done the routine before, experts who have been taught the secrets, someone with a link to the spirit world who can also hand it on. There can hardly be religion without some sort of priestly caste.

In 'primitive' tribes the priests are generally known by the title 'medicine men', 'priest', or *shamans*. They have an ability to communicate with the *spirits*, the *totems* achieved by some means like a trance or by drugs (like peyote) but always within a ritual. Ritual actions (like Myths) produce *real* effects. The contact with the sacred is not without effect or meaning. The truths which are touched or the advice and counsel which are produced, have real meaning in the world. The shaman's advice, after contact with the sacred, has real bearing. For this reason, priesthood and politics, in any deeply religious society, are never far apart. Beside the actual political ruler stands the shaman, and sometimes in a position of greater power.

This is also because of the nature of Myth and Ritual. Both require some sort of explanation or interpretation, and explanation involves one of the most basic human talents, that of storytelling. The shaman are special people who have a special connection with the sacred, or have gone through sacred rituals which set them aside, consecrate them, to allow them access to the sacred. They have been subjected to great stress and testing with the ritual often

²⁶ Within this there is often the deference to the mentally ill, but that is not the only situation.

involving 'death' and 'rebirth'; rituals that reveal or create the individual, who is now beyond the veil, who has left behind the mundane world and life and entered into the sacred. They stand on the threshold between the sacred and the profane. They are able to open doors into the sacred which normal mortals cannot; they have visions because of their proximity to the sacred all because they have undergone this transformative ritual. This is an indelible mark, a complete spiritual transformation and only ends with death.

Putting It All Together

The earliest expressions of the sense of 'other' are not shrouded in mystery in that we still see them practiced. Our role in society may seem more individually based than in the time we are talking about, but essentially that is *not* true. Altruism may seem subservient to self-serving but society still operates on a service-to-the-society basis. People are often judged by their participation or 'usefulness' to society. The decision to allow individuals to operate within society is a controversial one, whether we see that or not.

Society is the basis of human interaction. That is to say, it is the framework and the rules by which we interact. Even those who are 'off the grid' rely upon the nature of society. The purpose of roles in society is not to restrict but to maintain the nature of the society. We can argue, of course, that it is the other way around: that myth and ritual *force* us to perform functions within the society. That priesthoods, rather than serving, repress. We have today a luxury that many of these societies did not have – consistency and stability. We might rely on our wits more than our myths and scoff at those who still live by them. But without our myths and our rituals and our wits, how do we truly adapt?

If the world is a sacred place, if the profane is actually not the normal world, then the roles we take on have special significance, because they are not directed towards ourselves or the world but to the sacred. I plant within the circle of the sacred; my planting provides not just the food I and others eat, but recalls the sacred cycle of life. I work by means of myth and ritual action; I perform and fulfill my role within society. My role may entail profane actions but those actions are ritualized and consecrated, giving more import to them, making them more important – they become part of my response to the sacred.

It is our connection to the sacred which gives life its significance. In a world connected to the sacred I am unable to cast aside my obligations. Those who do, who seek individualism at the expense of the tribe are relegated to the edges of the society, by their own choice.

"...in societies where myth is still alive the natives carefully distinguish myths – 'true stories' – from fables or tales, which they call 'false stories.'...Whereas 'false stories' can be told anywhere and at any time, myths must not be recited except *during a period of sacred time* (usually in autumn or winter, and only at night)"

Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*

PART II

Early Religions thru Rome

(Chapters 6 - 10)



Johnny Come Lately

Certainly the basics of religion are based in the earliest understandings of humanity, and they still continue in cultures to this day. The early religions, those which we associate with cultures we recognize, are relatively late developments. Still, the foundational ideas we have discussed are the foundational ideas within these systems.

Like Water for Chaos

Water is a constant mythological symbol for chaos or probably more correctly, *not-creation*. Water both gives life and takes it away – the ultimate idea for creation, for not-being to being. The containment of water gives life – the anticipated annual flooding river or the rain from the sky give life; the uncontrolled deluge and the flood take life away. In many myths we see idea of the ‘separating of the waters’, the placing of the waters in their proper place – where they can be life sustaining. Before they are separated there is chaos and not-life afterwards creation can continue.

For the ancients, all land eventually led to water, some fresh some salty, and to water where you could see no end, except where the sky met it in the distance. All land therefore must end in water, even if they had never been to the edge of the land. Water surrounds everything, and it comes from the sky as well, reinforcing the idea that it somehow surrounds *everything*.

Git Yer Program!

We can reduce all of sacred history down to a basic timeline, and so we will. This is the basic religious heritage of the West, roughly in order.

DATE	RELIGIONS
3000 BC	Sumerian, Egyptian
1000 BC	Greek, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Hinduism
600 BC	Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism
100 AD	Christianity
600 AD	Islam

Table 3: Timeline of Religious Development

And so we begin. Every culture brings some measure of Revelation, some aspect to a deeper understanding of the sacred. This is not to say that all Faith is the same, but that Faith, the foundational and single revealed truths, can be found throughout human culture.

For the most part, these are the religions which rotate about the Middle East, especially if we broaden it as cultures develop and come into contact.

Sumeria

For our purposes, the first major players in the region are the *Sumerians*, born in that cradle of civilization, southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) between the Tigris and Euphrates and present during the area’s Chalcolithic (ca. 4300–3300 BC) and Early Bronze Age (ca. 3300–2200

BC). They establish agriculture, cities and city-states, religious building (*ziggurats*) and the first major written language (*cuneiform*). They become the dominant culture in the region for a millennium. As with any developing culture, it does not appear out of nowhere, and we can see from their myths that the Sumerian religion has the usual roots in animism (the worship of nature if you recall) or such things as the wind and water. The development of what we might begin to call religion is based in the need we have spoken of: that of bringing order to the world, to the mysteries they did not understand. As the notions developed they came to the natural conclusion that a greater force was present and in charge of everyday operations. The forces of nature were originally worshipped as themselves, i.e. as *wind*, as *water*. Over time began the process of *personification* and finally the arrival at a human form associated with those forces. With the Sumerians we really see the idea that gods, in human form, are seen as having *control over nature*, i.e. they are not just the thing itself.

This is a long process and as we look at this overall development we see that the Sumerian myths were mainly passed down through oral Tradition until the invention of writing. Not surprising in itself except that early Sumerian Cuneiform was used primarily as a record-keeping tool (literally census, rolls and inventories); it was not until the late Early Dynastic period (somewhere about 2600 BC) that religious writings first became prevalent in the form of temple praise hymns and incantations, meaning that Tradition and not Scripture was seen as the primary vehicle for Faith for most of their history.

The early temple complexes were small, elevated, one-room structures with a forecourt and a central pond for purification but as the culture stabilized and grew, more elaborate structures were developed. In the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2900 BC), the small one-room structures developed raised terraces and expanded to include multiple rooms. By the end of the Sumerian civilization, ziggurats were the standard structure for Mesopotamian religious centers, with their elevated central structures, multiple rooms and familiar long staircases. Through all of this, the temples served as cultural, religious and political headquarters until around 2500 BC, and the rise of military kings, after which point the political and military leadership was often moved to a separate (but nearby) palace complex.

Cosmology: In a system which might sound familiar to us, the Sumerian cosmology has the universe as a dome surrounded by a primordial *saltwater* sea and based upon the earth. Underneath this earthen base of the dome, is the underworld and a *freshwater* ocean called the *Apsu*. There was a god of the dome-shaped firmament (*An*) and (his consort) of the underground world (*Ki*) (which was first believed to be an extension of the earth, but which later developed into the separate concept of the *underworld*). Basically the Sumerians thought of the universe as consisting of the two parts: heaven and earth (with the water being the stuff from which the universe springs). Between earth and heavens was a substance known as *lil*, which means 'air' or 'breath'. The moon, sun, stars, and planets were also made of *lil*, but they were luminescent. The sea gave birth to the *an-ki*, which eventually gave rise to life.

From this primal event, the Sumerian pantheon rises out of the union of *An* (heaven) and *Ki* (earth) which produces various gods like Enlil (god of *lil* – air, breath, wind, weather) the leader of the Sumerian pantheon who in turn create other gods who are in charge of their various personification aspects. For instance, Enlil rapes Ninlil (resulting in his banishment to the underworld) and Ninlil has a child from the union named Nanna (god of the moon) and Nanna eventually gives birth to Utu (god of the sun).

As said, these gods are more than mere personifications of physical objects; they are in charge of those physical objects. So eventually for the Sumerians, every intricacy of the cosmos is controlled by a divine and immortal being according to established rules. Each god adheres to the rules of divine authority ensuring that the cosmos keeps functioning according to the plans handed down to them by Enlil. The world below earth was known as the nether world, the place of the dead souls who descend there from within their graves, though in a statement of the development of the culture there were also special entrances in cities. There is a sense of separation between living and dead, an acknowledgement of some difference, but at the same time, there is the understanding that just as the living live on earth, the dead 'live' in the underworld. A person could enter the nether world from one of these special city entrances, but could not leave unless a substitute was found to stay behind and take their place there. There is therefore an understanding of balance, earth/sky, upper world/underworld, life/death.

Ontology: Water is the base element if you will and the waters of chaos give birth to the gods but is not their 'creator'. Water is the representation of being in the sense that things just 'are' (*potentiality* the Greeks would tell us), that is, there is no sense of ex-nihilo creation, but at some point the gods come into *being* (*actuality*) and the world around becomes their personification. As for us, the gods originally created humans as servants for themselves but in an understandable move freed them when they became too much to handle. Still, Sumerians believed that their role in the universe was to continue to serve the gods who had cut them loose (i.e. it is our 'nature' to serve the gods).

The gods of Sumer were human in form and maintained human traits. They ate, drank, married, and fought amongst each other. Even though the gods were immortal and all-powerful, apparently they could be hurt and even killed. From the initial generation of An, Ki, and two other 'high' or 'creator' gods, hundreds of deities were recognized in the Sumerian pantheon. Many were wives, children, and servants of the more powerful deities. The gods were organized into a caste system with initially An, and eventually Enlil at the head of the system as the king of the gods. Enlil developed the broad designs and the rules for the universe and Ninhursag is the mother of all living beings. Under the four creator deities were the seven gods who 'decree the fates'.

Eschatology: There is no real developed eschatology, and pretty much any idea of final judgment is really played out during life.

Soteriology and Liturgy: Created as we were to serve the gods (our sacred purpose), Sumerians devoted much of their time to ensuring favor with the gods through worship, prayer, and sacrifice. The high gods, however, were believed to have more important things to do than to attend to the common man's every day prayers, and so personal gods were devised as intermediaries between man and the high gods. The personal gods listened to the prayers and relayed them to the high gods.

The temple is the center of worship. Each city usually had a large temple dedicated to their patron god with small shrines dedicated to other gods. The sacred world is a place of cycles. Daily sacrifices were made consisting of animals and foods, such as wine, beer, milk, and meats. Sacred time demands daily action but the world shows us special events, and they are treated as *feasts*. These special occasions called for spectacular festivities that would sometimes last for days. The Sumerian calendar was lunar based and so special feasts took place on the day of the

new moon and on the day of each phase as well as last day of the month with the most important day New Years. These are all centered on the temple.

The head of the temple was called the *sanga*. The *sanga* was in charge of the temple's day-to-day operation (what we might think of as a deacon today). The *en* was the spiritual leader of the temple and could be a man or woman depending upon the gender of deity. Under the *en* were various priest classes. The role of all of these classes is not known, though there were specific, delineated roles and functions for each class. The city's main temple was usually dedicated to their patron deity. Patron deities often assumed the powers of other deities, which tended to result in confusion and contradiction in the literature of ancient Sumer.

The Babylonians and the Hittites owe much of their own religious beliefs to the Sumerians. We also owe our sense of law to Hammurabi.

Egypt

The other major player is Egypt. As with all cultures, Egypt had its collection of myths which were passed down through the millennia by oral tradition. Most of us have a pretty good understanding of the Egyptian mythos and culture, so we do not want to dwell here too long, except to look at the powerhouse and the effect it has as the longest lasting empire in the region.

Let us start with time. The Sumerians used a lunar calendar, but in the end of the year the 28 day lunar cycle never really cuts the mustard. The Egyptians created the 365 day year which they managed by using Sirius and the Sun, but it was really a 360 day year with a 5 day religious celebration tacked on. We hear the echoes of our earlier discussion about *kiaros*, and I was very cavalier using the term 'tacked on'. It was not important that it was noon on Thursday in April but that the triptych of the Nile flood cycle had meaning. These five days became time outside of time so to speak.

The Nile even more than the Tigris and the Euphrates captures our sacred sensibilities. The Nile, with its narrow but long band of influence creates a less nomadic culture, that is, a more stable and larger, more connected people. With the combining of the North and South Kingdoms it creates one of the largest contiguous people in the ancient world.²⁷

Cosmology: Because it is such a large empire, there were several creation myths which developed in various locations in Egypt. For the most part they are all explanations of how light and order was formed in the unordered, unstructured chaos of darkness and timelessness. The various creation myths differ in detail but there is a common concept of 'primeval waters', so we will start there.

Once again and similar to the Sumerians, before the structured cosmos was created there was only darkness which held limitless water known as *Nun*, also called *the Father of Gods*. Out of Nun rose the *creator* of the world *Atum* or the "lord to the limit of the sky", who self-developed into a being standing on a raised mound which became the *Benben*, or the 'creation mound', a pyramid shaped stone. Hence the pyramid-shape being regarded as the dwelling place of the sun god. Atum created the universe (as opposed to Nun, who just...*is*) and is therefore the master of the forces and elements of the universe. Atum created Shu and

²⁷ What I am talking about is unconquered people, i.e. pretty much the same race/culture; the Egyptians conquered plenty of other cultures and expanded their empire over a large area.

Tefnut and the other gods, well frankly, in some very strange to us ways²⁸. Shu and Tefnut produced Geb (the earth god) and Nut (the sky goddess) who are married. Shu, who represents air, lifts up Nut on his arms, separating her from her spouse Geb and acts like a barrier between them. Her body forms the sky and is strewn with the stars. She swallows the sun god at the end of every day and during the twelve hours of night he passes through her body until dawn

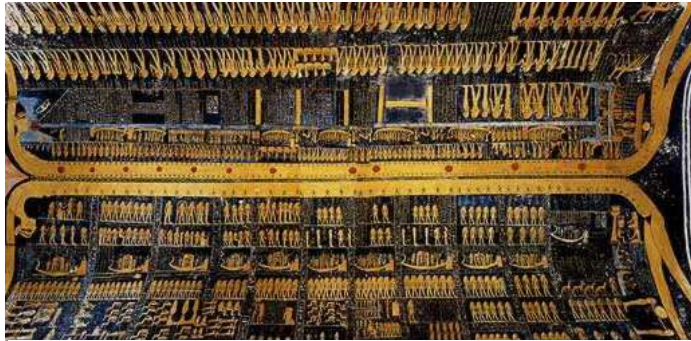


Figure 4: Nut on Cool Tomb Roof

when she gives birth to him on the eastern horizon.

Atum set his daughter Maat (truth, justice, balance) in place of Isfet (chaos). She is the spirit of *applied justice* rather than the detailed legalistic rules. For the Egyptians the universe is first and foremost an ordered and rational place. It functions with predictability and regularity; the cycles of the universe always remain constant, per Maat. Both morally and physically, the universe was in perfect balance. Maat was reality in the sense that she is the solid grounding of reality that makes the Sun rise, the stars shine, the river flood and mankind think (what the Greeks would later call *Divine Wisdom*).

Most of the gods which we recognize, like Isis and Osiris, come later and are linked to the older myths through their mother Nut. There is also the later discussion of whether Amun or Aten is *Re*, the sun god. For the most part, the gods live invisibly within our world, present yet unseen.

Ontology: Atum, not Nun, is the Supreme Being. Atum, for lack of a better word, *develops* out of Nun, becomes conscious, and manifests himself separate from Nun. Nun is pre-existent; always existing yet is not be-ing. Atum auto generates and is being. Atum relates is it as having existence but having no place to stand; there is a certain sense of inertness, of potential but not actuality. Atum is actuality and with him everything comes into be-ing. Atum is not created *ex-nihilio* (from nothing) and creation itself rises out of Nun.

As to the creation of humanity, several myths developed in the New Kingdom. One claimed that Amun (Amen-Re) was the creator of man. Another one has Khnum the ram headed god creating man on his pottery wheel.

Eschatology: While Atum orders the universe, Maat is the practical day-to-day following of that order. In that sense there is not clear eschatology, no defined end of the universe. Still, without Maat, Nun would reclaim the universe. Finding a consistent view of the fate of the soul is difficult, but as we will take the easy road and talk about the idea of the after-life. The soul, after leaving the body gets a new, suited to the after-life body. It is a long and arduous journey full of pitfalls and tests. In the end, the dead is not fully limited to the underworld, and may move freely back and forth, often appearing as a animal. We may hear a bit of the nature of the gods in this understanding.

Ethics: because of the nature of balance as personified by Maat, in the moral sphere as in the physical one, purity was rewarded and sin was punished. In death, one's spirit must be as

²⁸ References available upon request.

light as a feather in order to rise up. As an instance of the idea of the balance of justice the heart is actually weighed against a feather on a scale. Any heaviness of heart keeps you from your final reward.

Soteriology and Liturgy: Nun is not directly worshiped and there were no temples built to Nun, who is instead *present* in many shrines as the sacred lake or pool symbolic of the non-existence before creation. Eventually the cult of gods grew with the pantheon, and Egyptians worshipped these gods with animal sacrifices and with incense and many processions where people carried the image of the god from one place to another. We have an extensive set of religious songs, or psalms which run the gamut of religious expression and emotional content.

When the Greeks conquered Egypt, they introduced their own gods and the Egyptians did begin to worship them, although they kept on worshipping the old Egyptian gods as well. Of note in the exchange was the Greek (and eventual Roman) adaptation of Isis.

As a whole the belief system embraced totemism, polytheism, and ancestor worship. As said there is an immanent nature to the relationship between the gods and the world, though it is different than we usually think of it. The temple



Figure 5: Sacred Lake at Karnak

often provides the threshold point between the sacred and the profane but it is not the only place. The gods do not live in one specific place like a temple or in a transcendent place like a mountain or in heaven, but act through sacred sites, items, animals, or chosen people. Furthermore, the spirits of the deceased, if remembered and honored, could aid and guide the living from the Afterlife. In death they came to guide the spirit to its final place.

Putting It All Together

With agriculture and urbanization the strictly nomadic lifestyle begins to become the exception rather than the norm. With the development of cities and urban centers, government and bureaucracy develop. With these come standardization of language and with that comes writing.

We also begin to see in cities the devotion of precious effort, resources and design to the building of religious sites, and in even within the urban space, as with the ziggurats. This is a very important point, because we know that there was an increase in violence throughout this time and cities needed walls and armies to protect them showing that the redirection of resource for other purposes was just as important.

Some may want to put these efforts in a different light and see this as the beginning of astronomy, and other such profane purposes, but as with all of these things in the mind of these people it is the other way around. The sacred is still the most important thing; being in touch with the sacred, developing rituals to compliment the myths and devoting precious resources to it tell us the nature and importance of these things. Astronomy has great import for us today and for these people it is about knowledge as well; not the knowledge of science but the knowledge of the sacred, and via that knowledge right belief and action.

While at this time, most temples are not centers of the town (as they will be in medieval times), they are set upon the highest hill, with the palace close by. There is also a sense of the *consecration*, of being set apart that the sacred informs and guides us, but as with the Sumerians, it also gets to the purpose of life: service to the sacred. The world is still a simple place, but it is a place run by the product of heaven and earth, governed by rules and following those rules, even for the minor gods has grave consequences. For the Egyptians, the sacred moves all about us. The gods, who control all of the functions of nature as well as make judgments about human actions invisibly exist not in heaven but amongst us.

"Your ways, O God, are holy: what god is as great as our God?"

Psalm 77

Eastern

In this case our understanding of 'Eastern' is limited to those cultures which come into contact or provide some influence on Western religious culture, or hold some interesting insight into the nature of religious belief. These, unlike the earlier Egyptian and Sumerian systems, are still being practiced. There is not a sense of similarity in nature for these religions, but we can see both a looking back to the more 'primitive' religions and forward to more modern structures.

Near East and Far East

For simplicity's sake we can divide our chapter by location. We can also split them by nature or maturity or whatever you want to call the foundation and practice contained within these religions. However, the ability of this author to speak for these still existing faiths and systems is limited and should, as with everything else, be taken with a grain of salt.

Along with the taste of that salt we hear the beginnings of moral codes. 'Right' thinking and 'right' action become more than just legal actions and they have more to do with day-to-day living than merely the larger ritualistic context of day-to-day survival.

Shinto

We will start in the Far East. This one is not really a Judeo-Christian influence, at least not in the time frame we are talking about. What it does have are some common features which we have touched on but not really covered, so I will cleverly couch it here and use this as a way to make my point.

Shinto is a Japanese based religion, in that it developed and really is focused there. The essence of Shinto is the deep, ritual devotion and worship of invisible spiritual beings, ancestors, and powers, called *kami*. There is an element of Totemism which we might recognize here. Shinto has writings but no 'canonical' scriptures.

Cosmology: Shinto creation stories tell of the history and lives of the *Kami*. Among them was a divine couple, *Izanagi-no-mikoto* and *Izanami-no-mikoto*, who gave birth to the Japanese islands and their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans. The chief deity is the Sun goddess *Amaterasu Omikami*, one of their daughters, who is the ancestress of the Imperial Family (making her the source of the imperials' claim to being deities). Her descendants unified the country.

Shinto does not split the universe into a natural physical world and a supernatural transcendent world. It regards everything as part of a single unified creation with a visible, phenomenological world and an invisible world with the invisible world regarded as an *extension* of the everyday world and not a separate realm.

Everything Else: Shinto also does have the division between body and spirit, so much a part of Western thought, nor that of separate 'planes' like earth and heaven or world and underworld. Spirit beings exist in the same world as human beings. Consequentially, while religious texts discuss the "*High Plain of Heaven*" and the "*Dark Land*" (an unclean land of the

dead), there is no extensive development of the afterlife concept. Still there is some thinking about behavior, summed up in the "*Four Affirmations*":

1. *Tradition and the family*: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
2. *Love of nature*: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.
3. *Physical cleanliness*: take baths, wash hands, and rinse out mouth often.
4. "*Matsuri*": The worship and honor given to the *Kami* and ancestral spirits.

Taoism

As with Shinto this is really not a player in early Judeo-Christian development. Taoism is Chinese in origin and dates from the same time-frame as Confucianism. The two systems are often in conflict with Taoism takes a more nature-based path and Confucianism a more social one.

Cosmology: Everything started from a state of *total emptiness* in which nothing stirred. Time does not exist in this primordial state, because there was nothing to measure it against. Essentially, all was a void. Stirred through some unknown impulse, creation began. This first impulse was manifested in the 'primordial polarity' of *Yin* and *Yang*, negative and positive. The interplay of *Yin* and *Yang* is the essential expression Of *Wu Chi* (primal life-force). This interplay is called *Tai Chi* or "Supreme Ultimate Life-force", from the ordering principle that makes cosmic harmony possible. Everything found in the universe, visible or invisible, is the results of the primordial interaction of the *yin* and *yang*. *Yin*, is dark, heavy, and feminine; *yang*, is light, airy, and masculine. *Yin* energy sank to form the earth, *yang* energy rose to form the heavens. Both *yin* and *yang* split further into the *Five Phases*, which can be understood through their associations with things in the physical world: the elements, seasons, and directions.

Everything Else: The *yin* and *yang* energies harmonized to form human beings. Consequently, the human body holds within it the energies of both the earth and the heavens, making us a microcosm/reflection of the order of the universe. The balance of energies is very important, and is the key to happiness. The balance then is with Nature. Whereas Confucianism promotes individual happiness through conformance to ideal social standards, Taoism ties individual happiness to conformance with the underlying pattern of the universe regardless of social structure. This is the 'way' (*Tao*), which can neither be described in words nor conceived in thought. To be in balance, one has to 'do nothing' (*Wu Wei*): nothing strained, artificial, that is, *un-natural*. One must empty oneself and flow with the energies, not fight, 'know', or try to control them but understand that action is spontaneous compliance with the impulses of one's own essential nature (*yin* and *yang*, heaven and earth, etc.).

By emptying oneself of all doctrines, knowledge, and ambition, one achieves unity with the *Tao* and derives from it a mystical power. This power enables one to transcend all mundane distinctions, even the distinction of life and death. Right action is that which keeps oneself and the universe in balance. This may seem foreign to our Western ears, but it is also a tenet of Judeo-Christian mysticism, one we might characterize by the word 'surrender'. One ignores one's own desires and moves to a more balanced relationship, one of self-knowledge and knowledge of the nature of the universe, submitted to the will of God.

Hinduism

Another of the ancient religions, developing sometime around the 10th century BC, Hinduism's name comes from the Persian word *hindu*, or 'river' and can mean "of the Indus Valley" or simply "Indian" as in a geographical designation. While we designate the system as *Hinduism*, Hindus call their religion *sanatama dharma*, 'eternal religion' or 'eternal truth'. Once more we see a religion with a long development over a large area, leading to a variety of practices and beliefs. For brevity's sake we will say that the beliefs eventually coalesced into four basic tenets: *Karma* (deeds, cause and effect), Reincarnation (the constant cycle of re-birth), an idea of an All-pervasive Divinity (God manifested in infinite forms), and *Dharma* (divine law, order).

Cosmology: We have seen so far that for these early systems the universe is not *anthropocentric*, that is, it does not exist for humanity and humanity is not at the center. Hinduism is no exception. Also similarly to other early systems, something exists before creation and so in all the various Hindu traditions the Universe exists before both humanity and the gods. As a note, the Hindu concepts of time and space rely on the fact that the external world is a product of the 'creative play' of *maya* (*illusion*). This means that the world as we know it is not so much physical as *illusionary*, and ergo so is 'time'. It is not bound by the physical rules as much as we might think. There are multiple levels of reality and the universe is in constant flux. This understanding of the universe as constantly changing comes from the simple pattern of creation and destruction which in itself pretty much precludes anything static. Yet this understanding also includes a 'growth' aspect, that there can also be development, all of which takes place within the larger universe.²⁹

God has three tasks: creation, preservation, dissolution and recreation. As said, the universe itself is 'timeless', that is, it does not function through time. By the nature of God, the nature of the universe is one of *eternal* return, renewal, and repetition. Everything that happens has already happened and has happened many times before, though in different guises. "*After a cycle of universal dissolution, the Supreme Being decides to recreate the cosmos so that we souls can experience worlds of shape and solidity. Very subtle atoms begin to combine, eventually generating a cosmic wind that blows heavier and heavier atoms together. Souls depending on their karma earned in previous world systems, spontaneously draw to themselves atoms that coalesce into an appropriate body.*" (*The Prashasta Pada*) We see this thinking brought forward into the West by such thinkers as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche during the 1800's.

Everything Else: There are four aspects to life's meaning: *Dharma* - fulfilling one's purpose, *Artha* - prosperity, *Kama* - desire, sexuality, enjoyment, and *Moksha* - enlightenment. The task of humans is find release from the bonds of time and space, to move through the illusion and beyond the rebirth cycle of both themselves and the universe through proper practice of these four aspects. The gods are *manifestations* of things. Living beings are not apart from God, who lives in each and every one of them. There are as many gods as there are believers, that is, they

²⁹ The Vedic understanding of the universe is considered 'scientific', that is, it is built from observations, albeit of a mystical nature.

suit the moods, feelings, emotions, and social background of the believers; similarly there are as many spiritual paths as there are spiritual followers.

Tenets	Meaning
Three paths:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • path of works and action • path of knowledge or philosophy • path of devotion to God
Three debts:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • debt to God • debt to sages and saints • debt to ancestors
Four stages of life:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school years - grow and learn • marriage, family and career • turn attention to spiritual things • abandon world to seek spiritual things
Four purposes of life:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fulfill moral, social and religious duties • attain financial and worldly success • satisfy desires and drives in moderation • attain freedom from reincarnation
Ten commitments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do no harm 2. Do not lie 3. Do not steal 4. Do not overindulge 5. Do not be greedy 6. Be clean

Table 4: A Quick Summary of Hindu Simplicity

Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced to the West, as were so many other things, through conquest – Alexander the Great to be specific. He ranged into the Indian subcontinent, and left a Greek influence in his wake. But unlike the conquering, the cultural exchange was a two way street.

Cosmology: Similar to Hinduism, the universe is also an illusion of many different planes. Its origins are well laid out but are hard to grasp. The beginning of the universe as we perceive it is not so much unknown as incalculable, that is, it has no *perceptible* beginning. The phenomenological universe, the one we perceive, consists of an infinity of world systems scattered through boundless space, each coming into existence and passing away within beginning-less and endless time. That is to say, that while time may exist within each existence, it is not related to the universe, which is time-less. In all these realms, beings still go through the cycle of birth and rebirth, subject to the three aspects of existence - *impermanence*, *suffering*, and *nothingness*.

Everything Else: In Buddhism, one of the realities of life is *suffering*, if not the main reality. But it is a reality related to an illusion. To break from this cycle of suffering, we have to purify the spirit from all desire and illusion, then we will achieve the state of blissfulness (*Nirvana*) where we no longer come into being, never die, and are not subject to time (we become one with the universe). The ultimate objective of humans is enlightenment which basically means that we have broken free from the ‘continuously flowing’ journey and the illusion of the world. The spirit, which exists in abstract and in an energy-like form, has no beginning and no end (just like the universe) and comes into being, holds on to its status before passing away, only to

repeat the cycle again and again, until reaching enlightenment. The universe never leaves this cycle – only humans can transcend this cycle of rebirth and death through the process of enlightenment.

Tenets	Meaning
Three practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtue, good conduct, morality • Concentration, meditation, mental development • Discernment, insight, wisdom, enlightenment
Four noble truths:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Suffering exists</i> • <i>There is a cause for suffering</i> • <i>There is an end to suffering</i> • <i>In order to end suffering, you must follow the Eightfold Path</i>
Eightfold path:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wisdom, Discernment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Right Understanding of the Four Noble Truths ◦ Right thinking; following the right path in life • <i>Virtue, Morality</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Right speech: no lying, criticism, condemning, gossip, harsh language ◦ Right conduct by following the Five Precepts ◦ Right livelihood; support yourself without harming others • <i>Concentration, Meditation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Right Effort: promote good thoughts; conquer evil thoughts ◦ Right Mindfulness: Become aware of your body, mind and feelings ◦ Right Concentration: Meditate to achieve a higher state of consciousness
Five precepts:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do not kill 2. Do not steal 3. Do not lie 4. Do not misuse sex (celibacy for monks, monogamy for others) 5. Do not consume alcohol or other drugs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>There are more for monks</i>

Table 5: A Quick Summary of Buddhist Simplicity

Putting It All Together

One of the things we often think about in relationship to religion is the idea of eternity. These systems present a vision of eternity which we can both get our heads around and at the same time is allusive. There is the usual there never was a time when, yet there is not a sense of eschatology, not an end in sight. But there is a difference. In the Far East, there is an understanding of ‘beginning’ and ‘end’, and a sense that the world is real, both the physical and the spiritual. In Near East (alright, let us be honest here, India), time is meaningless and the world is illusory. Yet at the same time,³⁰ there is a similar thread which runs through them. In these Eastern systems there is less of the idea of God and gods and more of the idea of the interaction of forces; that is to say, less personification or the identifying of specific physical aspects of the universe with specific personalities. Even when they are personified, as in Hinduism, there is not a sense of a fixed designation; merely one where we place labels on different aspects of God and call them gods.

³⁰ No pun intended...at least as far as you know.

The East reflects many of the cultural understandings of right thinking and actions that also develop in the West. As we saw in the last chapter, these were born and gelled in the same timeframe as Judaism, some around the same time, others slightly later. We might be able to, or at least want to be able to, draw some conclusions from this fact, and the similarities of moral thought. There is, at least, obviously the development of a stability which allows for this thinking. Perhaps it is the general safety and cultural development which draws upon the same sacred sense and produces similarity in systems and thought.

In the end, of interest to us, Christianity was able to make in-roads into many of these cultures; Christians, as late as Thomas Merton drew legitimate insight and inspiration from them.

"Prayer is not controlled. We are the ones controlled, called upon to submit to a mysterious inward process, to be carried beyond ourselves without ever knowing clearly what carries us or where we are going"

Michael Casey, *Toward God*

Middle Eastern

These early religions are those which we more readily associate with the Judeo-Christian cultures. They rise up and still continue in the great cradle of world religions between the Tigris/Euphrates to the North/East and the Nile to the South/West.

Leitmotif

I know this is not a musical but the *idée fixe* is an appropriate one here. Usually it refers to a recurring theme, associated with a particular person, place, or idea, from the German *Leitmotiv*, literally ‘leading motif’, or, perhaps more accurately in English, “*guiding motif*”. I like that last one. For us it can refer to repeated overall themes like light/dark, good/evil, and sin/salvation.

We are going to start on a different tact with many of the next explorations. Rather than piece-parting through the different branches of theology, we will begin to examine overall melody of themes and dogmas, trying to get a sense of the development and understanding of revealed truths through the various cultures. Hopefully you will continue to see the branches for the leaves. Through it all runs the light little theme of the sacred, of a world focused not on the profane or the human but the sacred and the divine. These are not nice stories about meaning they *are* meaning.

Zoroastrianism

This ancient religion may not be familiar to most people but its adherents are still practicing their beliefs. It is probably the world's first occurrence of what we would think of as a truly *monotheistic* belief system;³¹ at least it appears to be the first recorded one. While its roots may stretch back an additional 1000 years, officially this religion was founded by Zarathustra³² (or in Greek, *Zoroaster*) in Persia (modern-day Iran) sometime around the 6th century BC. It certainly was once one of the largest religions though it has been in decline since the 3rd century after that whole Alexander the Great invading Persia thing. On the surface, and possibly a bit deeper, it appears that many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theological concepts concerning the nature of God, the idea of Satan, and other things like the soul, heaven and hell, free will, the virgin birth of the savior, the slaughter of the innocents, resurrection, the final judgment, etc. in part find some part of their origin in Zoroastrianism.

Thus Spake Zarathustra

While there are no truly existent canonical Scriptures (a significant portion of the writings having been lost, showing once again the resilience of oral Tradition), the most important remaining texts of the religion are called the *Avesta*, containing mostly liturgical rites, from

³¹ If you want to argue for the Egyptian Akhenaten, then you would not be arguing for the whole Egyptian system, but you can argue for it.

³² Of much later Nietzsche and Strauss fame....

which (along with Tradition) we can glean some dogma. In Zoroastrianism, God ('the Creator' aka *Ahura Mazda*) is *one* and is *all good* (no evil is within or originates from God). Thus, good and evil have *distinct* sources, with evil (*druj*) trying to destroy creation, and good (*mazda*) trying to sustain it. God, while the Creator, is transcendent (not *immanent*) to the world – not part of creation. A series of two-way intermediaries (what we probably would call *angels* or use the term *gods*) exist through whom the works of the one God are evident to humanity, and through whom worship of God is ultimately returned. We can see several differences from many of the religions we have discussed so far, as well as several ideas familiar to us.

But, as with all of the other long-time systems we have examined, there are developments of theology which are not part of the 'initial' offering. There is the familiar early sense of water as a primary element, and a 'world river' that encircles the earth. The difference from what we have seen so far being that the waters are created *second*, after the initial creation of the sky. They called the waters *Apas*, ('the waters'), but it goes farther, more along the idea of the essence or substance of the waters not so much the waters themselves. The Avestan and Vedic word are both derived from the same stem *ap* (water) hence the idea that they are a shared experience with the Indus culture. In both Avestan and Vedic texts, the waters in all the various forms are represented by the group of divinities bearing that same name. In the later days, the name *Mithra* appears and becomes the focus of several cults. It too seems to develop within the cross culture of the Avestan and Vedic (Persian and Hindi). *Mithra* is the Zoroastrian divinity of covenants and oaths. This puts him into many roles, usually judicial in nature (think legal when you think of contracts and oaths) and he is thought of as an all-seeing protector of Truth, *and* as the guardian of *Apas*. When most superficial discussions on this system take place, *Mithra* (later known as *Mithras*) is usually the identified deity being talked about.

The Force is strong in this one....

Zoroastrianism works not so much from a sense of balance of opposing forces, as might Hinduism or Buddhism, but it does recognize dualities (though they are not necessarily equal forces). God is good, and evil is an *inferior* but *constant* force. This may not seem significant but think about it in terms of the systems we have discussed so far. This is the separation of God from nature, that is, less of a personification and direct identification of God with an object and more of a conceptual God. What we are seeing is the ramifications, not so much of God on farming or fertility, but on metaphysical *meaning*. How do the observations that the world seems like a pretty good place overall affect the view of God? What are the ramifications of an omni-good God? How do you explain evil if everything is basically good? These are subtle changes, which we can explore by looking at some of the dogma.

Let us think about it in overall terms. Good and evil battle on two fronts: *cosmically*, and *morally*. On the cosmic scale this struggle is represented by *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu* (*druj*), which are as said not two equally opposed forces, but more along the line of God and a chaotic destructive force. God (*Mazda*) created a pristine and pure world, which *Angra Mainyu* continues to attack, which is the road by which 'pure' creation has 'impurity' enter it. Any form of suffering: aging, sickness, famine, natural disasters, death, etc. are the *result* of this attack. This idea of a dualism, even if it is not an equal yin/yang dualism, starts here and informs all of the dualisms we see in other aspects of Zoroastrianism (light/dark, life/death, etc).

The second front (*morally*) refers to the opposition of good and evil *in the human mind* (a microcosmic scale if you will). Just as God created the universe pure, he created a pure mind as well. Symbolically that purity is represented by *fire*, probably from the process of smelting, which removes impurities (purifies) from metals. This fire signifies God's light or wisdom. Light is therefore identified as wisdom, 'illumination', and ultimately as God; darkness is seen as ignorance, evil and chaos. God gives humans free will and this gives us the ability to choose to follow the light (the Good Path) or the darkness (the Evil Path). There are familiar results to this choice. The path of Light and Good leads to peace and ultimately to everlasting happiness in Heaven; the path of Darkness and Evil leads to misery and ultimately to everlasting unhappiness in Hell.

This fire, this light, is truth *revealed*; wisdom and understanding are from God who ultimately revealed the truth through the Prophet, Zoroaster. Much of this revelation is lost as said. The *Avesta* contains seventeen hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself, and the rest are commentaries on these hymns, written later. It also contains myths, stories and details of ritual observances. It emphasizes the pattern of prayer several times a day, and of the day seen as sacred.

As said, we can see several of these traits in the other main Middle Eastern religion: Judaism.

Judaism

This is really just a brief introduction to some aspects of Judaism and we will return to it in greater detail later. For now, we will examine the basic facets some of which come into play in early Judaism and its interaction with the previously discussed conquering cultures about it. Judaism as we know it is a later development but the terms (Hebrew and Jew) are used interchangeably now. Judaism, like Zoroastrianism is a 'revealed' religion, in that it is believed to be divinely revealed to humanity.

Bruce Feiler has a great book called *Walking the Bible* and early on he describes the Middle East as a large mall, with two anchor stores at either end and a bunch of little stores all in between. It is a great image, because it really does give you a sense of the area. The really big store at the south end of the mall is Egypt, and the anchor store at the north end changes owners frequently but there are always two large empires at either side. Little old kiosk Israel sits smack in the middle and often pays the price of those two empire's aspirations, and similarly her fortunes rise and fall with the rise and fall of each anchor store. So while it can suffer from this arrangement, it also benefits from it; when Egypt expanded into the Negev, it moved the inhabitants from caves to cities practically overnight. When no strong powerhouse exists on either side, then Israel is able to assert herself.

Each empire brought culture and religion to the region, one which was mainly inhabited by nomads, herders and subsistence farmers. Actually the origin of the Hebrew people is unclear. As nomadic Bedouins they have little early material culture or continuity which can inform us. What we do know is that eventually they became established in the area south of the Tigris and Euphrates and north of the Sinai desert. There, in that tiny plot of land, they lived and produced an understanding of God which still affects us today.

Torah and Talmud

We mainly know them through what we know as the 'Bible', from the Greek word *biblios* which means book but not in the form as we understand it. This original written divine revelation of these 'wandering Armenians' is one of the things we most associate with and most benefit from, that is, the Hebrew Scriptures, known variably as the *Torah*, the *Pentateuch*, the *Septuagint*, or the *Old Testament*. The Hebrew word 'torah' (תּוֹרָה) means 'direction' or 'instruction', as, for instance, the instruction of parents (*Proverbs 1:8*), or of the wise (*Proverbs 3:1*). In this sense, with a capital 'T', it means Divine instruction, primarily as given through 'The Law' (as revealed to Moses), and secondarily through the teaching of the Prophets (as individually revealed to them) and the general 'Wisdom' literature. In this sense *Torah* signifies, first and foremost, the *totality* of Jewish doctrine, whether taken as a basis for religious knowledge and conduct, or as a basis for study (this may sound like a later *sola Scriptura* statement but it is not, as we shall see). The word *Torah* then has two uses – one general, meaning *the whole of the Scriptures*, the other special, signifying *specifically* the Pentateuch. This may be confusing but trust me it will work out in the end.



Figure 6: The Torah Scroll

If I recall correctly, it is written on 64 velum pages that are wide enough to fit three columns of text each of which are then stitched together for a seamless appearance. It is written entirely in Hebrew, it contains 304,805 letters, in 5845 verses, in 248 columns all of which must be duplicated *precisely* by a trained scribe. Each column in every copy of the Torah begins and ends with the same word (that is, if column 4 starts with an 'A' and ends with a 'the' then you can

guarantee that every copy does as well). Then the scrolls are sewn onto wooden rollers called *Eitzei Chayim* (trees of life). All of which tells us two things, aside from all of the obvious allusions: that the Scriptures are *very* important and that there is tight control over their production and transfer because they are so important.

In addition to the 'written' Torah (*Tanakh*), there is also 'oral' Torah consisting of the commentaries and the ordinances which are the *practical* implementation of the laws (i.e. *Tradition*). This oral Torah consists of the *Mishna* (the codification of Jewish religious and legal norms), and the *Gemara* (the collection of discussions, commentary, and explanations concerning the *Mishna*). Hence the base sense of 'Torah' (*Divine instruction*), contains both Tradition *and* Scripture. There is a further term *Talmud*, which means 'learning', consists of the *written* oral rabbinic discussions and commentaries on the *Mishna*.

One aspect that this written Scripture culture created was the fact that the Jews were eventually one of the most literate races in the world, at least in their own language. This propensity and education also led to their ability to be adaptive to most other languages, allowing them great access and mobility. Eventually, though sometimes for really bad reasons, there are Jews dispersed in large pockets all around the known world. And when they go they carry with them their sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Pentateuchos

This is the Greek name for the first five books, comprised of the written versions of the oral Tradition of the Hebrews up to the establishment of *Israel*. To restate it, 'Torah' as overall Scripture consists of three parts:

1. *Torah* or *Pentateuch* (ascribed to Moses), the first five books – what we know as *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Leviticus*, and *Deuteronomy* (hence the Greek) – which contain *The Law*. In the hierarchy of Hebrew Scriptures these books of the Law come first and are foremost.
2. The Prophets (ascribed to individual prophets)
3. The ‘Writings’ or ‘Wisdom’ literature (or *Hagiographa*, Greek for ‘wisdom writings’ – many ascribed to Solomon)

So what we are talking about here is only the first part. In the Talmud the Pentateuch is known as *sefer torath Yahwe Elohim* (or simply *sefer [ha] tora*), meaning ‘*the instruction of Lord God*’ or as we might say it ‘*the Word of God*’. This is a significant signifier, stating both the understood *revealed* nature of the book and importance of these first five books for understanding God and Israel. Just as we use the Greek word *biblios* (books) the word *Torah* is always used as if the whole work were written as a single scroll for use in ritual, that is to say there was a liturgical/ritual understanding of the purpose of the Scriptures. The reading of ‘lessons’ in communal worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath (a practice referred to in *Acts 15:21* as being ‘ancient’ though it is ‘late’) is a very important aspect of these Scriptures for us to understand. Recall back to our discussion of Myth, Ritual, and Liturgy; divine instruction comes in the *hearing*. Living the myth comes in the *hearing*. The common practice of a three-year cycle of Torah readings within liturgy means that the worshipers *heard* all these Scriptures (*the Law*) *proclaimed*. They therefore had to be able to *read* their Torah for study purposes and as a rite of passage.

We will speak more about this aspect of Law being tied closely to the conception of God.

Prophets

The other books, those which recall the message of specific prophets comprise a large portion of the Hebrew Scripture. Prophecy, as we will discuss is not about prognostication, but about relaying the will/words of God to the people of Israel. Some of these words may have future import, but they are about the present and not so much about the future except in relation to present actions. While the gift of prophecy certainly includes the ability to see the future, a prophet is far more than just a person with that ability.

Not that there was not a sense of prophet which recalls our popular view. Many surrounding cultures practiced clairvoyance. But in *Tanakh*, a prophet is basically a spokesman for God, a person chosen by God to speak to the people and convey a message or teaching. Prophets were also role models, showing how to be holy, the importance for scholarship, and the effects of closeness to God. They set the standards for the entire community standards that were delivered directly by God. This may seem like an odd role and one counter to the usual vision of prophet (and certainly it did not always go well for the prophet), but we must keep in mind what we have spoken about. Prophets are people who have a special connection to the sacred. They instruct and live that relationship.

So while there are angels, as in Zoroastrianism, there are also human go-betweens who are not just priests or shamans but are actually mouthpieces who speak God’s message to their fellow community.

There are specific prophetic writings but many figures are known as prophets, again based on the teaching that a prophet is not just a seer but one who knows and acts upon the will of God. Therefore, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua are prophets as much as are the more familiar ones like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Some of the prophets are known as 'minor' or 'major' but that has nothing to do with caste or status, and merely refers to the length of the book; i.e. a major prophet is long and a minor prophet is short.

The Writings or Wisdom

Wisdom is a broader term than we think of it; this is not a purely intellectual or rational exercise but one which involves the whole person, mainly because of the nature of humans and their relationship with God. The purpose of Wisdom literature was to enable man live amid all of the questions of life, that is, to give meaning to everyday situations which would allow one to get through them. This 'coping skill' style Wisdom is closely linked to right action, that is, action in concert with the nature of God. This means the emphasis on God-like qualities like discipline, truthfulness, faithfulness, kindness, and honesty. God has provided a fundamental order in the creation of the world, which humans are able to discern through experience; peace and happiness come from compliance with this order.

Hebrew Wisdom literature speaks of the lived experience, that the answers are 'out there' and so encouraged people to go out and discover God's order and plan for themselves through experience of that plan, rather than merely assuming that the plan has a Fate type aspect where one is just carried along. Sometimes that source is within Nature, often it is found within the wisdom of others. Either way it is something to be sought, not waited for.

So, Wisdom literature is not as concerned with the Law as much as with, shall we say common sense or Practical Wisdom. Jewish practical Wisdom knows no separation between faith, experience, or knowledge. Yet, this Wisdom tells us, there is one guiding principle. Although man is sanctioned and encouraged to go out and use his heart and mind to understand, he should never forget his roots. God is the center of everything, and God's revelation, His Law, is the foundation of every avenue of that exploration. Without this anchor, that is, all on our own, we would arrive at incomplete or incorrect links and conclusions. We must always refer back to the Law for true Wisdom, to guide and supply the missing pieces that limited human reason cannot acquire on its own. That is true Wisdom.

Leaving Las Vegas

We will take a moment now and revisit Egypt. According to Hebrew Scripture, they spent some time there, and in a way it is the defining moment for them. On the other side, there is no hard external evidence that they did, but then, they may have been one of many groups hanging out in Egypt and lumped together by the Egyptians. No matter what the case, we have a myth which puts God squarely in the midst of his people, not completely immanent, but not completely transcendent either.

We are told of Moses, Hebrew by birth but raised Egyptian, meaning that he would have a sense of Egyptian religion, law, and politics.³³ This background provides him with a unique perspective. He has knowledge of both the Hebrew God *and* of the gods of Egypt. The struggle to release the children of Israel (*nee* Jacob) from bondage is an interesting one, starting with a simple request: let us go for three days and worship our God as we are accustomed. Pharaoh, who really has a schedule to keep, is unwilling to let them go, mainly because they add a simple little caveat to their request – we must take our animals with us to sacrifice. Pharaoh knows a bit about diplomacy and turns down the request, for another simple reason: if you can take your stuff with you, you might not come back. ‘Little ol’ us?’ stutters Moses, ‘why would we do that? Simply grant our request and we will not bother you again!’

Moses knows something that Pharaoh does not. Egyptian gods, while powerful are no match for God so he continues to press his case. Pharaoh, for his part continues to refuse. God then takes on each major Egyptian god, through the plagues, until they are all ‘defeated’ and the god pharaoh himself is therefore defeated, and he sends them on their way. Throughout the process God states repeatedly that *He will be their God and they shall be his people*.

This may seem like a strange statement but the Hebrews had a long history of cultural influence and exposure to multiple religious systems. As we have seen most of these systems are polytheistic, with various and sundry means of accessing the sacred. A major method is through what are known as ‘house gods’, that is, they are based in the spirits physicalized in small, usually pottery, idols which can grant boons. They are totem-like and ultimately represent control, that is, by owning the statue you *control* that god (we might also think of talismans). The God of Israel is no such contained God, but he may be a conglomeration God. We see two main ‘names’ for God in the Hebrew Scriptures, *Elohim* and *Yahweh*, translated ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ respectively. Elohim seems to be a god of farmers, herders. He is responsible for Creation and for the rain which sustains it. Yahweh is a warrior god, who leads his people into battle, who defeats the Egyptians and various other cultures in the area. After the Exodus we see the melding of these two gods into God, and often see the term ‘Lord God’ or ‘the Lord your God’ or ultimately, in the prophet Elijah’s name, both together in the statement El-i-jah, literally El(ohim) *is* Yah(weh).

Entering The Desert

This brings us to a quick note about *names* in Semitic culture. Names have power. Words have power. We say that to our children, but we are talking just about feelings. What we are talking about here are sacred words. We have to continue to focus ourselves into the idea of myth and sacred which pervades these people (and us for that matter of fact if we are to give theology life). God gives his name to Moses (*Exodus 3:13-14*): ‘*I AM*’. Israel can now ‘call on the name of the Lord’, and he is bound, through this gift of name, to respond. When He says ‘I will

³³ Scholars bicker about whether he was a real person or merely a composite, hobbled together to give meaning to the Egyptian thought which had entered Hebraic culture. But we have never no mind, because we are looking at this as *myth*, and therefore *true*, no matter how you want to slice it.

be their God' it is tied to this idea – he gives no other nation this gift. God's anti-idol position shows that the Name is sufficient, and bespeaks a two way relationship.³⁴

So Moses, who has been entrusted with this Name, plays a significant role. God puts Moses 'as a god' to pharaoh. Aaron, his brother is his *prophet*. What Moses says (well at least what he tells Aaron to say) is what God says, and holds the same weight and authority. This apparently works well, and Israel is released, *with* their herds, and pharaoh is thwarted and his power to control is diminished. The Israelites however, are not as easily mollified. But it is a telling moment; God has given his name, even before he requires anything of the Hebrews. They cry out and he responds, requiring nothing from them. He leads them to Mount Sinai, and *there* he binds them; *He their God, they His people*, sealed with ritual actions and words. The Law is the gift of the Sinai Covenant. It is both the sign and the action of the Covenant.

Covenant is an important idea in the Judeo-Christian system. The Sinai Covenant, while couched within the ancient legal contract system, is different than we might view it today. Legal contracts were caught up in the myth, ritual, theology, and overall religious thinking prevalent at that time. Recall that the world is not a profane place but a sacred place. I know that I keep saying this but we must keep that *always* in mind. That dead horse beaten, covenants have several sections:

- Preamble:** Identifying the Lordship (one who has the power of life and death) of the Great King (in this case God), stressing his greatness, dominance, and eminence.
- Historical Prologue:** Recounting the Great King's *previous* relationship to his vassal (with special emphasis on the benefits or blessing received from that relationship).
- Ethical Stipulations:** Enumerating the vassal's obligations to the Great King (a guide to maintaining the relationship).
- Sanctions:** A list of the blessings for obedience *and* the curses that will fall on the vassal if the covenant is broken.
- Succession Arrangements:** Arrangements and provisions for the *continuation* of the covenant relationship over future generations.

Table 6: Covenant Treaty Structure

Everyone agrees to the terms of the covenant and it is sealed, in this case with sprinkled blood from a sacrificed bull, on the people and on an altar (symbol of God), tying them together in the same blood (blood was considered where the 'life' was). This is very serious stuff, or as William Goldman comments in S. Morgenstern's classic *The Princess Bride*, "*This isn't* Curious George Uses the Potty." The Sacred is real. God is real. The Covenant is real. The Covenant is an umbrella, stay under it, God says, and you will have benefit of our relationship (especially as I am God and Creator of all things); step out and you are on your own. We are free to choose, even if He is not.³⁵

³⁴ Think about it. You only give your name to friends, for more reason than that they will not have to shout 'hey you' across a crowded room.

³⁵ Technically, He is, but we must see it as a simple choice, one which really does not have to be made it is so simple. True freedom, which God possesses completely, is actually freedom to do the right thing; doing the wrong thing is slavery. This is the promised freedom of the Sinai Covenant.

The Law actually contains 615 statutes, though it does contain the *Ten Words*, or the *Decalogue*, what we call the *Ten Commandments*. Technically these are not ‘commandments’ as we think of the word, nor is there only one version – there are actually two, one in *Exodus* and the other in *Deuteronomy*. That aside, the truer translation of them would be not ‘thou shall not...’ but more in the context of the Covenant and so along the lines of ‘since I am your God and you are my people, it would be *simply impossible for you to even conceive* of doing or not doing these things’. The Law is more about *how we think* than about a strict moral code (though it certainly is that as well).

Putting It All Together

Okay, this was sort of a long one, though there is still more to go. From Egypt and Persia Israel learned many things about God, or to put it better, through their experience with Egypt and Persia God revealed many things to the Hebrews. Ultimately, in the Law, He reveals all, and *Torah* informs everything. The book of Genesis reflects the revelation of the Law, and the myths it relates are pre-ambles to the Law. The other four books are all about the Law and how it orders not only the daily lives of the Hebrews but also their overall culture and structure, from the priesthood to the Temple.

The Law is about the relationship of God and His people; it informs the cosmology, the ethics, the soteriology, and the eschatology of Judaism. This understanding is contained within both an oral *and* a written Tradition. The Law is not a memory but a *living* entity. The myths and the rituals keep the moment of their giving in front of the Jews and they live in the constant salvation of the Law.

The Hebrew Scriptures are therefore not a modern historical document but are the inspired reflections on the relationship of their God and His people. Certainly historical facts are contained within the pages of Scripture but these are the myths by which the Jews live. They are true descriptions of the relationship of God to His people and that people’s response to God. The Law (Torah) and the teachings on the Law (Mishna/Midrash) go hand in hand in helping the Jews to understand and live the Law.

“Unless of course, as is just possible, Judaism itself partly came of it. It is conceivable that ideas derived from Akhenaten’s system formed part of that Egyptian ‘Wisdom’ in which Moses was bred [Acts 7:22]. There is nothing to disquiet us in such a possibility. Whatever was true in Akhenaten’s creed came to him, in some mode or other, as all truth comes to all men, from God. There is no reason why traditions descending from Akhenaten should not have been among the instruments which God used in making Himself known to Moses. But we have no evidence that this is what actually happened. Nor do we know how fit Akhenaten would really have been to serve as an instrument for this purpose.”

C. S. Lewis, (Psalm 104) *Reflections on the Psalms*

“Let me tell you something that we Israelis have against Moses. He took us 40 years through the desert in order to bring us to the one spot in the Middle East that has no oil!”

Golda Meir, quoted in *The New York Times*

PART I: A Sampling Of The Prayers of Zoroastrianism

PRAYER	TEXT
<i>Ashem Vohu</i> (invocation of Asha)	Holiness (<i>Asha</i>) is the best of all good: it is also happiness. Happy the man who is holy with perfect holiness!
<i>Ahunwar</i> (most sacred manthra of Zoroastrianism)	The will of the Lord is the law of righteousness. The gifts of Vohu-mano to the deeds done in this world for Mazda. He who relieves the poor makes Ahura king.
<i>Kem Na Mazda</i> (exorcism)	What protector have you given to me, O Mazda! While the hate of the wicked encompasses me? Whom but your Atar and Vohu-mano, through whose work I keep on the world of righteousness? Reveal therefore to me your Religion as your rule! Who is the victorious who will protect thy teaching? Make it clear that I am the guide for both worlds. May Sraosha come with Vohu-mano and help whomsoever you please, O Mazda! Keep us from our hater, oh Mazda and Armaiti Spenta! Perish, oh fiendish Druj! Perish, oh brood of the fiend! Perish, oh creation of the fiend! Perish, oh world of the fiend! Perish away, oh Druj! Rush away, oh Druj! Perish away, oh Druj! Perish away to the regions of the north, never more to give unto death the living world of Righteousness!" Homage, with which (are combined) devotion and milk offerings.
<i>The Gah Dedications</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawan Gah – sunrise to midday To Hawan, Ashavan, the master of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. To Savanghi and Visya, Ashavan, the master(s) of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. • Rapithwin Gah – midday to midafternoon To Rapithwin, Ashavan, the master of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. To Fradat-Fshu and Zangtuma, Ashavan, the master(s) of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. • (Uzerin Gah – midafternoon to sunset To Uzerin, Ashavan, the master of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. To Fradat-Vira and Dakhyuma, Ashavan, the master(s) of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. • Aiwisruthrem Gah – sunset to midnight To Aiwisruthrem that furthers life, Ashavan, the master of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. To Fradat-vispam-hujyaiti and Zarathushtrotema, Ashavan, the master(s) of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. • Ushahin Gah – midnight to dawn

	To Ushahin that furthers life, Ashavan, the master of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. To Berejya and Nmanya, Ashavan, the master(s) of Asha, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise.
<i>Doa Tan-Dorostri</i> (blessing)	In the name of God, the bestower, the giver, the benevolent! May there be health and long life, complete Glory giving righteousness! May the visible yazads and the invisible yazads and the seven Amashaspands come to this fair offering. May this household be happy, may there be blessing! May there be happiness among the people of the religion of Zartosht! We beseech you, Lord, to grant to the present ruler, to all the community, and to all those of the Good Religion, health and fair repute. May so-and-so, [and his wife (or, her husband), and children] live for a thousand years! Keep them long happy, long healthy, and long just! Keep them thus, keep them caring for the deserving! Keep them living and abiding for many years and countless hours! A hundred thousand thousand blessings upon them! May the year be auspicious, the day fortunate, the month propitious in all these years and days and months! For many years keep them worthy to perform worship and utter prayers, to give charity and offerings, being just. May they have health to fulfill all their duties! May they be liberal, kind and good! May it be so, may it be more so, may it be according to the wish of the Yazads and the Ameshaspands!

PART II: Exodus and Egypt

This view of the story requires an understanding of Egyptian mythology as well as that of Israel. The God of Israel is not only in conflict with Pharaoh, who is seen as a god, but also with the Egyptian pantheon. God has heard Israel's cry and is going to set them free. Two passages point us in this direction (recall that the *Torah* is all five of the first books):

1. **Exodus 12:12** – “For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every first-born of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt - I, the Lord!”
2. **Numbers 33:4** – “On the Passover morrow the Israelites went forth in triumph, in view of all Egypt, while the Egyptians buried their first born all of whom the Lord had struck down; on their gods, too, the Lord executed judgments.”

What they tell us is important. God is establishing himself as the top God, and that he is establishing a complex and powerful relationship with Israel. This next table gives a possible scenario of this showdown.

God	Domain	Plague
Hapi	god of the Nile	First plague (<i>Ex 7:14-24</i>): The Nile turns into blood, or "bleeds."
Heket	goddess of childbirth, represented as a frog	Second plague (<i>Ex 7:25-29</i>): a swarm of frogs
Hathor	sky-goddess, represented as a cow	Fifth plague (<i>Ex 9:1-7</i>): A pestilence kills Egypt's livestock
Seth	god of wind and storm	Seventh plague (<i>Ex 9:13-35</i>): a hail storm, killing everything in the open, including crops
Min	god of fertility and protector of crops	Eighth plague (<i>Ex 10:1-20</i>): a plague of locusts to devour the remaining crop
Amon-Re	the sun-god, who symbolizes new life every day when he rose in the east, and death when he set in the evening in the west	Ninth plague (<i>Ex 10:21-29</i>): God controls the sun, causing darkness for three days

God	Domain	Plague
	swallowed by Nut.	
Osiris	judge of the dead (Pharaoh is considered as his son and therefore a god himself)	Tenth plague (<i>Ex 12:29-30</i>): death of all of the first-born of Egypt

Two more references:

- The serpent was the symbol of Pharaoh's power (recall the crown of Upper Egypt with its gold serpent).
- Aaron, Moses' brother, turns his staff into a snake. When Pharaoh's magicians do the same thing, Aaron's snake devours their snakes (*Exodus 7:13*).

Finally, in Egyptian mythology, when a person died, Osiris would judge how good a person he had been by weighing his heart on a scale against a feather.

- If your heart weighed less than the feather, you were innocent and were allowed to live forever.
- If your heart weighed more than the feather, then you were judged guilty and condemned to oblivion (no afterlife).
- The Pharaohs were perfect and were therefore always judged innocent and allowed to live forever.
- So God 'hardens Pharaoh's heart'; God is not making him obstinate, that is not taking away his free will, but making his heart heavy, or judging him as guilty or sinful and demonstrating his power over the Egyptian gods as their judge.

Jews And Greeks

The Greeks are the pivot point between East and West. There is a certain ‘BG’ and ‘AG’ (*before the Greeks* and *after the Greeks*) nature to our Western history as well as our philosophical, political, and religious thought. Even as it will be ultimately shaped by a small ethnic culture from the Middle East, the West owes its very foundation to the Greeks.

The Jews are the other half of that equation, and we mark ourselves religiously with a similar before and after. The Jews run into the Greeks when the latter take over the world; at the same time the Western world meets the Jews.

Judaism

So they were there before the Greeks arrived and, as one might point out, long afterwards as well. Still, it is a big jump between the Exodus and the Alexander. Before we examine the effects of the Greeks let us examine some of the early characteristics of Judaism.

Monotheism: First and foremost, Judaism is a *monotheistic* belief system, meaning that God is a single personification, that all of the objects and forces of the universe are caused by or found within Him. While the Jews did not always hold to that one God, after the Sinai Covenant, Israel as a nation continued to be the people of the one God, ‘the God of your fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [Israel]’ (Acts 7:32). Abraham, the proto-patriarch, comes from Persian culture, out of Ur in Mesopotamia, on the Euphrates. The Zoroastrian idea of one God with many servants was known to him, but he clings to the one God concept and rejects the idol/personal god subsystem. For this decision, God enters into *covenant* with Abram, promising his benefice down through Abraham’s progeny. No matter how they act toward Him, God is established as the one God, and Israel is beholden to that one God.

Creation: God, as one, is then the *God of everything*, not just the sun or the sky. Cosmologically, we have seen earlier instances of the ‘formless wasteland’, the ‘waters’, the separation of earth, the sky, and the waters; the separation of light and dark; the creation of life. The Hebrew Scriptures give us something else as well; they give us a *second* account of Creation. In the first, humans are created as *part of* Creation; he creates them male and female, just like the rest of Creation, but endowed with the spark of God not given to the rest of Creation (“in our image, after our likeness”, *Genesis 1:26*). In the second account, life is created *for* humans; Adam (literally ‘dirt’) is created from the earth, and receives the spirit of God through God’s breath into his nostrils. God then creates to *please* Adam – finally creating Eve to *complete* him. Humans are the crowning achievement of Creation, the last thing created in the first account and the first living thing created in the second account. In both accounts Creation is at the disposal of humanity. People are created not to be servants to God, but to be in relationship with Him – not as equals but having stature with Him, containing within them the ‘Divine Spark’.

Covenant: Covenant is the key to understanding everything about Judaism. It is not about the *Ten Words* carved into the rock by God, but about the long-term relationship the Law

indicates. Think of the whole spirit of the law versus the letter of the law adage. God creates a series of covenants, each with deeper commitment involving larger numbers of people. They are all about the relationship; those who cling to God have a reciprocal relationship with Him. Technically, after a point, the Covenants all belong to the children of Noah, through the line of Shem to Abraham and then specifically to Isaac, to his second son Jacob (*nee* Israel), then to his 12 sons, whose tribes all end up in Egypt because of their youngest brother Joseph. The Sinai Covenant is given to these 12 tribes (not just the eldest or chosen son as were the earlier ones), and to them is given both the freedom from slavery and the land promised to Abraham in his covenant. Each of the covenants then hold true within the next covenant, and each speaks to that 'Divine Spark' placed within humans by God at Creation. From this time comes the ritual feast of Passover, the re-living of the moment of salvation, when the myths are told and the understanding of 'memory'.

Kingdom: In a stated anomaly, the Hebrews call for a king, an earthly king, whom God warns will take (tithe) their land and their animals. In a profane sense the king will hold the same power as God. As well as require sacrifice from them, this king will 'rule us and...lead us into warfare and fight our battles' (*1 Samuel 8:20*). The kingdom gives legitimacy to the nation of Israel³⁶ among the nations, and even seems to go okay for a while, except for the civil wars, military coups, bad treaties and general collapse of the tribes and the loss of 10 of them, the split into a Northern Kingdom (Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (Judah) and the eventual dispersal of the Jews from Palestine. Other than that it was great and we get some cool history. Jerusalem is established (at least moved in to) by David and the Temple is built by Solomon. At this point in Scripture we are outside of the original *Torah* (*Pentateuch*). Temple worship becomes paramount and ritual sacrifice centers there and by association Jerusalem becomes the center of the universe (much to the chagrin of folks like the Samaritans). For a taste, see Psalm 87.

Exile: If the Sinai Covenant is a defining moment for the Hebrews, then the Babylonian Exile and Captivity is a crystallizing moment, one which establishes the basis for the Judaism we understand today. This is the time of the prophets with which we are most familiar. Babylon, in need of land and short of attacking Egypt, decides that the fragmented, weak, and insignificant remnants of Israel (well just Judah really) needs to be removed from play and does so quite handily. This period, from about ~580 to 535 BC, radically changes Judaism. The people, driven from the Land and no longer attached to the Temple develop a style of living which does not rely upon the Temple, or the priestly caste for that matter. The development of the rabbinical (*teacher*) system, of the *Mishna* and *Gemara*, and the Synagogue spring from this period, as well as the primary gathering of the canon of Hebrew Scripture. Myths and Wisdom are gathered and redacted; court histories are added, as well as the preaching of the prophets. All of this returns to Israel with the exiles when they are released from captivity and allowed to return through the benevolence of that thorn to the Greeks and victors over the Babylonians, the Persians.

It's Greek To Me

³⁶ Again, Jacob's name and therefore the collective name of the 12 tribes, the *children of Israel*.

By the time the Greeks arrive on the scene Judaism (from the last remaining kingdom: *Judah*, the one banished to Babylon) has undergone some serious development and a major transition. Released from bondage by Cyrus, they bring back with them a major portion of the canon of Scripture we recognize today, the fledgling Synagogue system and along with a renewed sense of relationship with God a mission to rekindle the sacred connection through standardization, codification and rebuilding, especially the Temple.

The Temple is a fascinating construction, with a courtyard containing the *Altar of Sacrifice*, an inner court, a large interior space and in the back what was called the '*Holy of Holies*', hidden behind a large veil. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year. In the first Temple, that was the residence of the Ark of the Covenant, literally the place where God dwelt among His people. The tablets of the Law were stored within the Ark. You get the sense of the sacred bond this alludes to. The Law is God's Will. God remains with His people through the Law – and they with Him, making this the holiest place on Earth; Mount Zion is the place where Heaven and Earth meet. This is different yet similar to the Greek style of temple, with a large colonnade, and the inner temple housing a large statue of the patron god.

Ruling The World: The Early Years

The Greeks eventually defeated the Persians and for the first time the anchor store to the north originates in Europe and not in the Middle East, specifically the Mesopotamian watershed. Eventually Alexander captured the Avestan (Hindi) and the Egyptian worlds, meaning that not just to the north but to the south as well was 'one culture', and that culture 'Hellenism' touched multiple religious cultures as well.



Figure 7: The World as Alexander Saw It

Alexander's father, Phillip of Macedonia, solidified and unified the Greek peninsula. He also introduced Alexander to Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher when he made him the young Alexander's tutor. By age 20 Alexander had all of the solid foundation you could use to become a powerful and wise ruler, that and the death of his father by the hand of a guard. He certainly had the power, as the empire he conquered shows, and he was curious enough to embrace the cultures he swallowed up, almost to the point of distraction. Unfortunately his short life does not give us the data to bear out the conclusion of long-term success, though the short-term indicators were not good. At his death the operation of the empire fell to his four main generals each dividing it up to more culturally based areas of control. Their success is measurable.

Continuing Influence

The effects of the Greek rule of the known Western World extend even beyond the hey-day of the height of Greek culture. Through the control of the Italian peninsula that influence became the foundation of the later Roman culture as well, long after the point that Greece herself was just a backwater province of the Empire.

Even today we feel the effects of this time. The ability of the West to claim these cultures as we do comes from our common shared Greek beginnings. We cannot take too lightly our basic notion of reality and geographical, political, social, and religious structure which is the legacy of Greece.

All The Gods And Goddesses

So just what is the nature of Greek religious thought? We can start with the statement that is true of many of these later, longer lived cultures: that there was a development of thought and a combining of ideas along the way. At its basis are the usual myths and rituals which we see played out but there is also a 'new' idea, one which may spring from the earlier 'waters' ideas: Fate. Fate is a two edged-belief in Greek culture. There is the sense of the over-arching 'no one, not even the gods, can escape his appointed fate'³⁷ *Fate* which is a force beyond the control of any figure; there is also the sense of the direct fate of humans, which the gods seem to control, often arbitrarily. The *Fates*, personifications of the ideas of Fate, have independence and yet are bound to the actions of the gods. The fate of someone seems set, while at the same time it seems to be part of the fate of the individual that the god should intervene.

Eventually this religious concept of Fate will tie into the philosophical concept of *Logos* or divine will, or what we might call the order in the universe. This connection between philosophic and religious thought is a hallmark of Greek thinking. The two seem to eventually diverge, but they often continue to inform one another. The ancient Greeks viewed the earth as a flat disk floating on the river of *Ocean*. In philosophic work *Timaeus* by Plato, the world is treated as a living thing, with body and soul.

Aside from the cosmologies of philosopher-scientists like Aristotle, the earliest and primary source for the Greek creation myth is Hesiod's 8th century poem *Theogony*. According to this account, out of the cross between an indeterminate material and a god (Chaos and the Abyss) other divine beings came into existence: *Gaea* (Earth), *Eros* (Love), *Tartaros* (the cave-like space under the earth), and *Erebus* (darkness, fear). The world came into existence when *Gaea* was forcibly separated from her consort *Uranus* (Heaven) for a time during which she gave birth. Unlike the Egyptian myth this separation was accomplished when Uranus' genitals were severed by his son Khronus (or Cronus, the father of the gods – specifically Zeus who defeats Cronos) and thrown into the sea, from which rose Aphrodite.

Well, that is probably enough of that. Progeny is perhaps a weird grab-bag for the Greeks. Like the Egyptians the sense of the god's 'birth' is not as tied to human reproduction as might be the case in other cultures, and therefore has perhaps a more symbolic meaning – at least we can only hope so. Anyway, *Erebus'* sister *Nyx* (Night) draws mists across the heavens to bring night to the world, while their daughter *Hemera* scatters them to bring the day. We can see a certain amount of the dualism here, with one goddess blocking out the *Aither* (shining, blue heaven) and the other revealing it. In this case the bright upper air was regarded as the source of day rather than the sun, which merely moved through it drawn by a chariot.

The Titans like Khronus become the parents to the gods we would recognize like Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. The thing is that really the entities which are considered gods are those which have a closer relationship with humans. In the myths, the gods create humans for

³⁷ As the Delphic Oracle told Lyidan inquirers.

entertainment value, beings like them, but that were mortal. Prometheus, who liked the human race and seeing the situation as somewhat lop-sided, distributed gifts to humanity. He stole reason from Athena and fire from the gates of Hephaestus to keep them warm. Prometheus then became the protector of the human race, and shared with it all the knowledge he had. This provided a certain independence from the gods, to whom humanity was beholden really only to keep Fate at bay. Good for us, not so good for Prometheus.

So What?

Where does all of this fit in? In the end it is less about the Greek religious thought and more about her philosophical and political thought. The Greeks began to move past a strictly sacred/profane view of the world. While it continued to heavily inform their thought, there was a more ‘intellectual’ aspect to the exploration. Gods and religious ritual were still seen as vital to the daily operation of democracy, but there began a philosophical exploration of the world which also began to inform the religious thought. The idea of gods becomes the concept of powers or forces in the universe. Ultimately, what we want to look at is the influence of Greek thought on Judaism. What concepts were accepted and which were rejected. By no means exhaustive or even correct, let us take a moment and consider some concepts.

The timeframe of the conquest of Israel by Alexander puts us squarely into the golden age of Greek philosophy, with its two main players Plato and Aristotle. We will arbitrarily start with Plato, mainly because he has an even greater influence later on. That said one of the things Plato emphasized was the existence of a soul that is *separate and distinct* from the body, a specific *dichotomy*. The soul for Plato was less about its spiritual ramifications and more about its moral and intellectual one. The soul was the seat of wisdom, which implied knowledge and action. He also insisted on its immortality. This immortality implies an afterlife, and in fact for the Greeks, burial rituals were required, in order to allow the soul to have rest and not wander the Earth. The obligation for a moral life was not as tied directly to this afterlife but rested mainly on believing in the gods and the performance of the proper sacrifices and rituals, that is, *living well*. Acting in this manner would avoid reprisals both from gods and other humans and encourage boons from the gods, and presumably, other humans as well. What this means is that Greek religion, while it contained a concept of an afterlife was not other-world oriented but this-world oriented; any benefits of religious beliefs and actions for the after-life were only peripherally considered, if at all; this attitude would eventually inform the philosopher Epicurus, who pooh-poohed the gods and pointed everything to this life, but that is another book.

So while there is a sense of ‘after-life’, an active permanence of the soul, the eternal recurrence or reincarnation idea that we saw in Hinduism, is a strange concept to Greek religious thought but does come articulated to us (once again) through philosophers like Plato, who articulates a concept called the *Transmigration of the Soul*. Plato intimates that while eternal, souls do not remember their previous experiences. The soul, once separated from the body, spends an indeterminate amount of time in the ‘realm of the Forms’ and then assumes another body³⁸. This idea of Forms takes a small amount of explanation. Plato taught a type of

³⁸ The soul, because it is informed by the Forms, has built-in knowledge which must be drawn back out. This is somewhat different than the Hindu thinking where you carry the past lives with you which inform the present.

monotheism; that there was one supreme god-like thing (again, more of philosophic concept than religious belief) called the *Form of the Good* which is the 'form' or basis for perfection in everything in the universe. Aristotle, as Plato's disciple, also disagreed with the Greek notion of polytheism because he could not find enough empirical evidence for it. But he also disagreed with Plato as to its nature, stating that the observable universe is sufficient, and instead promoted the concept of a *Prime Mover*, a being which had first set creation into motion, but was not connected to or interested in the universe. Anyway those ideas are for another time; suffice it to say that an idea of renewal of the soul, while not a strictly religious concept, is a part of the cultural consciousness.

Alternately, the Hebrew concept of humanity saw the person as a whole, part *head* and part *heart*, but these were not *separate* from the body. Early Judaism speaks of the netherworld as a place of the dead, but not a place so much of eternal life but just being dead as, for example, in this passage from Isaiah 38:18-19, "*For it is not the nether world that gives you thanks, nor death that praises you; Neither do those who go down into the pit await your kindness. The living, the living give you thanks, as I do today*" or from Psalm 6 "*For who among the dead remembers you? Who praises you in Sheol?*" Basically, when you died you died and any eternal life you had came through your children. A 'barren' wife was a catastrophe and spoke of the displeasure of God. A good life meant many children and many generations of children afterwards. A bad life brought dishonor to all subsequent generations. You 'lived forever' genealogically, and it was best to live well and be remembered well (remember: words have power – the name is everything!). Similar to the Greek notion of Hades³⁹, this *Sheol* mentioned above is the biblical term for the underworld where the insubstantial souls of dead dwell. Somewhere about the second century BC, Hebrew Scriptures begin to speak about the possibility of something more, of life *with God after death* (c.f. *Daniel 12:1-3* and *Wisdom 3&4*).

Revolution!

What happened when these two cultures met? At first, not too much. In fact many Jews became 'Hellenized', meaning that they took on Greek thought and practices. Alexander had conquered the region by 333 BC and after his death in about 315 BC the Ptolemaic rulers controlled a chunk of the Middle East (Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, and Peterea) with the Seleucid rulers controlling the rest. While they installed themselves into power in the region, they generally allowed the Jews to run their own affairs. As a result, the Jews were allowed to maintain their religious beliefs and practices until around 175 BC when the region fell to the Seleucid rulers and Antiochus IV decided to make Israel the staging ground for his attacks on Ptolemaic Egypt. He changed the *laissez-faire* policy toward the locals and entered the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to Zeus. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, he issued orders that everyone was to worship the Greek gods, outlawed Jewish customs and crucified anyone who resisted (a nice little trick he had learned from the Persians). He also stole a great deal of valuable Temple ritual artifacts, an act which the still practicing Jews looked upon darkly. When they resisted he eventually tore down the city walls, slaughtered many, ordered Hebrew

³⁹ Eventually, *Tartaros* became known as the place where the damned were thought to go, a place of torment. A third realm, *Elysium*, was a pleasant place where the virtuous dead and initiates in the mystery cults were said to dwell.

Scriptures to be destroyed, and he and his soldiers brought prostitutes into the Temple for illicit purposes in order to defile it. He mandated the death penalty for anyone who practiced circumcision, or observed the Sabbath or any of the Jewish religious feasts and ritual sacrifices.

When Antiochus sacked the Temple he erected an altar there to Zeus. Then, on what has approximately been calculated as December 25, 168 BC, Antiochus offered a pig to Zeus on the altar. This triggered a large-scale rebellion of the Jews against the Seleucids. This famous rebellion is known as the *Maccabean Revolt*, and the results of this event are celebrated in the feast we know as *Hanukah*, and chronicled in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. Never really stable, Greek power in the region eventually collapsed under the weight of constant infighting, civil wars, and foreign invasions. The Jews overthrew the Greeks in Judea about 143 BC and remained independent for approximately the next one hundred years.

Resolution!

The Book of Maccabees records another interesting thing: *prayer for the dead*. 2 Maccabees 12:38-46 relates the story of one battle in the revolution where many Jews are killed, and afterwards, when they went to bury the bodies they found amulets to other gods in their tunics, proof that the reason they had died was that they had not fully relied on God. Verses 43-46 are especially important here. *“He then took up a collection among all his soldiers...which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.”* We can see then, after some centuries of Greek rule, a sense of an afterlife beyond Sheol, and not just beyond Sheol but one in which the living may effect change for the dead and looking even further, forward to the day of *resurrection*.

Revision!

The two books of Maccabees are ones some readers may not be familiar with. As said, at first when Palestine was within the Egyptian sector under the Ptolemaic rulers, Jews had a reasonably peaceful existence. Greek becomes the *lingua franca* during this time, and according to the story, sometime around the 2nd century BC, in the recently built city of Alexandria in Egypt a group of about seventy Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Because of this the translation is known as the *Septuagint* (meaning ‘seventy’ and ironically is usually abbreviated using the Latin ‘LXX’). This translation becomes the standard *popular* translation and by the New Testament times both Jews (and therefore eventually Christians) used the Septuagint as well as the Hebrew Old Testament. When the Greek-speaking New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament, they usually used a direct quote from the Septuagint rather than a translation from the Hebrew.

It is only later, about 300 years for the Jews and about 1800 years later for Christians that this changes.

Putting It All Together

The Greeks put the West on the map...well, they drew maps which had stuff on them. Heck let us be honest and say that the Greeks created the map of the Western World. They consolidated many cultures which though they had contact and trade, were kept pretty much separate on political boundaries. With these conquests, the two-way street of cultural exchange became a much broader avenue, a veritable information superhighway. As stability brought larger trade routes and easier mobility within the empire more and more cultures exchanged ideas.

For Israel, who had experienced multiple cultural invasions, the effect was to create two camps: 'Hellenized Jews' and what I will call here 'strict Jews'. The Hellenized Jews tended to be educated (not just in Hebrew but in Greek) and richer, having garnished favor through compromise with the Greek rulers. The Jews who held on to their beliefs tended to be poorer or lower-class. From these groups we see the eventual development of two main politico-religious sects: the *Sadducees* and the *Pharisees*. The Sadducees were eventually made up of those who were pro-political wealthy and powerful. Pharisees were the poor and powerless anti-political traditionalists.

Religion and ruling become a more tightly entwined mess. Religion is seen not as the be-all and end-all of ruling but as a means of standardization *in* ruling. Antiochus is standardizing belief and practices within his political realm for order and control. It is easier to control the minds and hearts of your subjects when you control the teachings and practices of those minds and hearts. Israel had been under Greek rule for more than a hundred years, and Greek customs and ideas were having an influence on the Jews' religion and way of life. Divisions began to appear among the Jewish people. Some Jews not only tolerated this Greek influence but actively encouraged it. In doing so they won favors from the Greek rulers and had themselves appointed to important positions in the Jewish system. Others firmly opposed all Greek influence, particularly the influence of Greek rulers in Jewish religious affairs and did not share in the political bounty.

"King Ptolemy once gathered 72 Elders. He placed them in 72 chambers, each of them in a separate one, without revealing to them why they were summoned. He entered each one's room and said: 'Write for me the Torah of Moses, your teacher.' God put it in the heart of each one to translate identically as all the others did."

The Talmud

"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."

Alfred North Whitehead

Rome

Okay, so technically the Romans stole everything from the Greeks.⁴⁰ But they also are the milieu of modern Judaism and Christianity, so we will give them their due, if not more.

But First A Word From Our Sponsors

The Etruscans were the civilization upon which the Romans rose. Much of what the ancient Romans believed has its impetus with them. At the risk of being repetitive, we will just focus on Roman beliefs and not take on the Etruscans. Let us just say the Romans already did that and that is why we know more about the Romans.

Roman Stuff

Rome has a storied history, one that we are or think we are pretty familiar with. Rome herself went through many phases and states which will not be taken into account here. Still, many of the things we associate with Rome are actually innovations of the beliefs and practices of other cultures. If we really want to give them their due then we should look at the Romans as some of the greatest innovators the world has known. Not that there were not new ideas, but the lion's share of Rome's success is due to their ability to truly integrate (or crush) other cultures, much more effectively than any previous empire.

This is probably due in part to the fact that Rome, unlike Alexander's empire, had a center. Like the Greeks before them people built Roman cities everywhere, but there was only one Rome. On the other hand the Greeks were segmented; even their empire was divided as soon as Alexander achieved it and ruled from within the separate provinces. When the Roman Republic rolled into town and conquered the Greek city-states in 146 BC, it moved the Greek world to Rome. It took on the Greek language and practices including Greek religious beliefs (along with many other aspects of Greek culture such as literary and architectural styles) as its own and took them back home to Rome. Through earlier contact, some of the gods, such as Apollo and Bacchus, had already been adopted by the Romans. It is around this time that the ancient Roman deities 'officially' become equated with the Greek gods. Without much fanfare, Jupiter became associated with Zeus, Juno with Hera, Neptune with Poseidon, Venus with Aphrodite, Mars with Ares, Diana with Artemis, and so on. This is not to say that the Romans had nothing original. There was continued belief in deities that existed before its interaction with Greece and weren't similarly associated, like Janus the two-faced and Quirinus patron of the Roman state.

All of this may sound a bit trite, so to appreciate this process we must back up and take a moment to appreciate the Roman's religious sensibility. The first thing is that the Romans were in general less about epics and balance and more about laws and legal contracts. A telling principle they had was "*do ut des*" (known as the 'principle of reciprocity' roughly meaning "I give that you may give"). What it means is that if I do something you do something in return

⁴⁰ And the Etruscans.

and specifically that if people sacrifice to the gods, in a tit-for-tat, the gods would help them in return. This idea was held true at every level of life, and as the sacred and the profane are reflected in one another the concept is a strong one both religiously and socially.⁴¹ We talked a bit about this concept when we introduced the term *sacrament* way back in Chapter 1. What we see in this is that the Roman religion was more practical and less poetical than the Greek religion. The other thing to know is that early Roman religion was very *totem-based*, built less around mighty gods and their exploits and more around a reliance on spirits who exert good or evil influence in daily life which helps to explain why it did not develop great mythologies like the Greeks and was so slow to adopt them.

What that means is that there is a deep-seated sense of *patronage*, that is, Romans saw the gods more as 'patrons', with every Roman god watching over a particular part of life. They each had a job to do, some useful office to perform. The sense of 'household gods', as we discussed previously, means that they were a part of everyday life. There were divinities who presided over events like the birth and nursing of an infant, and at the proper time of birth or infant care they were worshipped, in hope for the reciprocal benefits which they would bestow. Every vocation, every household transaction, every action of daily life had its patron Roman god. This is the thinking which in part lent itself to their 'borrowing' other gods from the cultures they 'encountered'. If there was an established patron god of something then that god could be adopted. So really it is more about the covenant-style relationship than about the Greek sense of Fate.

To The Max

The Romans system of reciprocation meant that they kept the gods happy through ritual worship and sacrifice, and this was pervasive in daily life and on a huge scale at the state level. At their roots, the proper performance of rituals and sacrifices assured the gods would be happy and provide aid. Pure and simple. This is the connection between the Romans and their gods. Whereas the Greeks had the Oracle as the main link between Wisdom and humanity (religiously; philosophically it was different), the Romans practiced this more relational religion. Perhaps as an off-shoot of this, the Romans rites appear more superstitious and broader in nature than those of the Greeks. Along with the intercessory practices and ritual there also developed augurs based on the entrails of different animals which were used to discover good or bad omens, or the will of the gods. Similar to the Oracle sacrificial practices of the Greeks, the practice of auguries was extremely important to the Romans and they were consulted prior to any major undertaking, both public and private, including matters relating to war, commerce, and religion. The understood nature of the universe allowed the gods to take any means to communicate with humanity and so great attention and import was given to dreams and these rites of divination.

Okay, so what this means is that the Roman religion was heavily based on rituals and sacred rites, not that this should be surprising to us. And just as unremarkable, these rituals had become very complex over the years and needed special people to perform them *correctly* especially the larger and grander public ones. And of course, since Roman religion and politics

⁴¹ This, perhaps, but not necessarily, may be the foundation of some of the scenes in *The Godfather*....

were intermeshed, the major priesthood's were usually filled by distinguished statesmen or generals. But because of the nature of Roman religion, the priesthood developed two forms:

- priests for the general regulation and practice of myths, rites, and rituals
- priests tied to a particular deity

The first makes sense because of the developing intricacy and importance of rituals. To handle this expansion the Romans established a 'college' of *pontiffs* (religious leaders) to regulate worship and perform the larger, more important ceremonies and rites. The *pontiffs* were presided over by one head or high priest called *Pontifex Maximus* (a title eventually and shrewdly assumed by Julius Caesar in order to control worship and therefore within him to consolidate all power). The second for a similar reason and probably as an adaptation of cultures like the Egyptians and Greeks who had priests and temples dedicated to specific gods. This also makes more sense when we look at the fact that the Romans celebrated more feasts than the Greeks. Perhaps close to 20% of their year was spent in feasts and festivals. Again this speaks to the importance and centrality of sacred activities to the day-to-day operation of both individuals and the Empire as a whole. The daily reciprocity of exchange between humans and gods underscores the importance of gift-giving as a *mutual obligation* of Roman society and points to the contractual nature of Roman life and religion.



Figure 8: Pantheon Interior

So Romans worshipped the gods everywhere, in temples and at home. Temples, except for the Pantheon, were dedicated to a particular god and, like the Greeks', contained a statue of that god. Priests looked after the temple and aided the people who went there to make sacrifices or offerings of food, flowers or money. For larger rituals the *pontiffs* often killed an animal, such as a bull, as part of the sacrifice ceremony. Eventually the Emperors said they were gods too, so everyone had to make sacrifices to the Emperor as well. At

home, they worshipped the household spirits that protected the family often in miniature temples, or shrines, within their homes. As at the larger temples, the family would make offerings of food and drink to the household gods, and pray for good luck and protection. There was also a practice of offering food and drink to the dead. Tombs often contained holes in the roof for offerings, as well as patios and internal spaces for ritual meal celebrations. There was a range of views concerning the existence of an afterlife, as well as what it was like; while there was no one generally accepted view, many felt that the dead continued living in their tombs and could therefore, like the gods and other spirits, influence the fortunes of the living in similar vague and undefined ways which were basically a conglomeration of several of the cultures they had met.

On a short cultural/philosophical aside, the Romans highlighted four main philosophical schools, as eventually laid out by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the 1st century: *Platonic*, *Aristotelian*, *Epicurean* and *Stoic*. Of the four, Stoicism is the only one we have not touched upon. Stoicism, like all the others, comes to us from Greece. Its name is from the *stoa* or columns in the Agora around which Zeno, the founder of Stoicism taught. Plato took an idealist view of the world, Aristotle a rational one. Where Epicurus' epistemological view embraced

feeling and emotion as the foundation of knowledge (we 'know' what we 'sense') and therefore of happiness or virtue as he would call it, the Stoics took the opposite view: emotion was the flaw which produced all suffering. Destructive emotions, such as anger or jealousy kept us from happiness and therefore had to be kept in check. Logic and reason rule the day. Self-control and fortitude are the means of overcoming these destructive emotions. Stoicism is not just a lack of emotions but is a system based in rationality and action. When thinking about it, associate the character Spock from *Star Trek*.

Judaism Stuff

All of that said we now pick up the story where we left it off. After four and a half centuries of foreign rule under Babylon, Persia, and Greece, the Jews were now under self-rule starting in the latter half of the second century BC. This period, controlled by the Hasmoneans (as the Maccabees became known), lasted for about 100 years. The 'radical', or as some might say 'fundamentalist' nature and thinking behind the Maccabean revolt created a power structure where political, religious and military control were joined at the same time within the ruler, making them king, general, and high priest (very traditionally defined roles in Judaism). This is different from their original tribe-based roles, filtered as that had become through the kingship and the Exile. Even with the concentrated power structure, as with the previous kingdom, this freedom was never really stable; in this case on the one side were the pro-political priests and leaders (the later Sadducees) who were wealthy, powerful and favored by most of the Hasmonean rulers and on the other side were the educated anti-political traditionalists (the later Pharisees), who were poor, powerless and favored by the common people. The differences between the two parties continued to increase as each concentrated on particular aspects of the Law and developed separate beliefs and practices.

As all good things must come to an end, fighting eventually broke out between two sons, one of whom favored the Pharisees, the other the Sadducees. At that time Rome's power was spreading towards Palestine, and as General Pompey and his army had recently arrived in nearby in Syria, both sides appealed to him for help. Pompey brilliantly settled the dispute around 65 BC by leading his army into Jerusalem and taking control of it himself. Still, one of the brothers was given Rome's support and appointed governor and High Priest. He proved to be susceptible to stronger powers and was supplanted by one of his advisors, not of the house, named Antipater. One of Antipater's sons, Herod, proved to be the stronger of two brothers, and by 37 BC, using various means, succeeded in removing any opposition in his path to power.

Though not well liked (for some reason), in his 33 year reign he carried out impressive building program of the like not seen since Solomon, including the rebuilding of Samaria, the



Figure 9: Herodian Stone in the Wailing Wall

construction of the port city of Caesarea (dedicated to his patron the emperor). In Jerusalem he built a massive complex including a military fortress, government buildings, a palace for himself and most importantly a magnificent temple, the stone of which (called *Herodian*) is still visible in the bottom seven courses of the Temple Mount retaining

wall, especially what is now called the *Wailing Wall*. Mainly he built strongholds for himself scattered about the region like *Herodium* and *Masada*, to protect his interests (which, given the political situation, was mainly staying alive).

Herod divided his kingdom between three of his sons, though they, like their father, only ruled at the pleasure of Rome. The southern and central parts of Palestine (Judea and Samaria) went to Archelaus, whose cruelty prompted the people of Judea and Samaria, in about 6 BC, to ask Rome to remove him and govern them directly. From that time on, that area was ruled by Roman governors, or *procurators*, headquartered some distance from Jerusalem at the somewhat more modern and closer to the cool waters and hot beaches of the Mediterranean, Caesarea. Not that it really mattered as once the Roman army entered Jerusalem they continued to steadily increase their control over Judea.



Figure 10: Herodium

Now though, with a governor from Rome in charge, the Jews had for the first time to pay taxes directly to the Romans instead of through the Herodian ruler. Rome, a bit more precise about this civil duty, conducted a census to assess this tax, a story you might recognize. As a note here, it is important to note that while one may be a part of the Roman Empire and therefore taxable, one was not necessarily a *Roman citizen*. This particular distinction meant that the protection of Roman law may not extend to individuals or cultures, a right preserved for citizens alone. So this two-edged sword of Roman administration meant that if you were a citizen you had recourse under Roman law if you caused trouble; if you were not a citizen, then you were prone to much more expedient means of discipline.

All The World

There were many Jewish communities scattered about the empire, and had been since ancient Greek times.⁴² These groups were not directly associated with those in Judea, and were less focused on the Temple cult, though it remained the desire of every Jew to participate in festivals in Jerusalem. Still, they developed individual characters, often due to the culture in which they found themselves. Above all they continued to be steeped in the regulated traditions of Judaism. This won them converts in cultures which had an increasing desire for a different religious expression. These so-called ‘God-fearers’ had one distinct disadvantage – as for the most parts Jews were not citizens, these convert were not genetically of the tribes of Israel, so some means was necessary to allow them to practice Judaism. Conversion to Judaism was *relatively* common, at least common enough to have a ritual, and involved a baptism of initiation called *mikveh* (Hebrew for ‘the gathering of waters’). *Mikveh* is a particular understanding of water, its destructive/cleansing and restorative powers. *Mikveh* is part of the creation story. The idea of *baptism* (Greek for ‘immersion’) grew from the ritual washings of the Law. The ritual washings and cleansings commanded in Torah and the other writings eventually formed the basis for the rabbinical *mikveh* laws. The purpose of the *mikveh/baptism* was *spiritual* rather than just a *physical* cleansing. *Mikveh* cleanses the unclean, as God cleanses Israel. This means that the term *baptiso* implies not merely a physical immersion but is aimed more at the spiritual one; one is *immersed* into the Law *through* water, not just *in* water.

⁴² There are even references to Aristotle meeting a Jew who he considered ‘a Greek not only in language, but in soul’. Josephus, the Jewish historian, attributes Aristotle’s teachings about God to his encounters with Jews (*Contra Apionem*). The Jewish philosopher Maimonides is credited with the integration of Aristotle into Jewish philosophical thought in the 1100’s.

This immersion or baptism is not the original means but eventually becomes the means for Gentiles to convert to Judaism. The only scriptural requirement we have comes from Abraham's somewhat more painful covenant circumcision which had no requisite of baptism. Debates on the subject of baptism versus circumcision are recorded in the century spanning the BC-AD transition between two contemporary rabbinic schools: *Shammai* and *Hillel*. Whereas the school of Shammai stressed circumcision alone as the sacrament of initiation, the school of Hillel considered baptism the most important part because it portrayed the *spiritual* cleansing and the beginning of a new life. Within the first decade after the birth of Jesus the Hillelite view was prevalent, as reflected in the Talmudic writings.

On the immersion into Greek thought, we have less to say here, but there is more to come!

Messiah

Throughout it all, the Romans like the Greeks before them had allowed the Jews to continue to practice their own religion and did not force them to adopt the religious-political practices of the Romans. The basic Roman policy was that any culture, whose religion was 'recognized' (read 'older than Roman occupation' or 'national'), was not obligated to adopt Roman practices. This meant that sacrifice to the gods (or the Emperor) was not necessary to stay alive. In addition, Julius Caesar granted Jews freedom of worship *in the city of Rome* after they had helped him at Alexandria. This did not mean they were generally accepted, but it did give them the freedom to legally practice their religion *outside* of Judea. But like many non-Roman cultures, they were eyed with suspicion for not towing the political line.

The spread of Judaism beyond the borders of Israel sets the stage for the spread of Christianity later. By the time Christianity arrives in these far-flung places, Judaism is well established, if not begrudgingly accepted. So, within communities, especially those outside of Israel, there is a mix of citizens and non-citizens as well as a different sense of identity. Tied to Israel but not bound to it, these groups adapted better to Roman rule, and had less of a messianic aspect and more about living the Law. Within Israel, starting with the direct Roman rule, there strengthened the desire for a messiah (from the Greek for 'anointed') to free them from occupation. During this time there arose a group of rebels to that taxation, somewhat based in their Maccabean past, where any offerings to Rome were considered wrong and against the Law. This group, known as the *Zealots* (from Greek meaning 'admirer' or 'emulator', or even 'jealousy') became yet another political force within Israel. Within this framework develops a greater interest and devotion to the prophetic ideas of a *messiah* or an 'anointed one', meaning someone(s) selected by God to carry out his will. The concept of *messiah* had many forms, from the Zealots' individual, warrior or king-like savior in the vein of David, to the Pharisaic or Essenes' post-Exilic sense of a 'remnant' or a group of individuals who would be left to 'save' Israel.⁴³ This political sense of savior mirrored the religious one, and it is sometimes hard to separate the two, and often, as in the case of the Zealots, the religious understanding drove the political action.

⁴³ The name *Pharisees* literally means 'the separated ones'. Most were convinced they alone were God's *true* people and so they kept themselves apart from others while remaining within the society. The Essenes on the other hand literally separated themselves and moved out into the desert, a move for which we thank them because, while doomed, it did give us the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Jesus

Into the mix of these parties and Roman occupation comes an itinerant rabbi. Born into the less erudite North and close to a Roman city, Jesus manages to win converts, even among the different groups⁴⁴, with a message less aimed at observance of the Law per se and more aimed at the personal immersion in the Law, the relationship with God.

Armed with a prophetic/messianic message (catch-phrase: 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'), Jesus moves through Israel performing miracles and teaching. He challenges Jewish thinking in all of the groups. Against the Pharisees he says '*the Sabbath is for man, not man for the Sabbath*' and '*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites....*' Against the Sadducees, he preaches resurrection and preference for the poor. Against the Zealots he preaches that '*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force*' and '*turn the other cheek*' and '*render unto Caesar....*' Against the Essenes he preaches a single, individual messiah and salvation for the whole of Creation.

Jesus seems like a radical but he teaches nothing new. He works within the framework of Judaism, synagogue, Temple, Law. There are many opinions about Jesus, some from triumphalist Christians, some from dismissive Jews. It is the contention of this author that the more moderate view is, at least, more historically and religiously desirable. Jesus was obviously a Jew within the framework of early 1st century Judaism, both observant and deeply committed. While he challenges them, he takes no pains to destroy the structures or the beliefs of that time period. He calls for conversion, an age old message of the prophets. He observes the festivals and the Law.

The Law is not limited to the Decalogue, as has been said, but is a way of thinking. When God says "If I am your God and you are my people" he frames the meaning of the words to come. When Jesus says "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.*"⁴⁵ He is only saying what Jews already understood: that the Law can be reduced to the relationships which the Law implies and of which the prophets remind. Everything depends upon that. Perhaps the radical-ness of his message depends more upon the expectations of the people of the messiah rather than the message he bore.

Still, for some reason Jesus is seen as a religious threat and is arrested for sedition, tried by the religious authorities for blasphemy, transferred to the Roman-Jewish authority, Herod, and eventually sent to the Roman authority, Pontius Pilate – the only authority possessing the death penalty. There, for yet more unknown reasons, in the Temple complex built by Herod's father, according to the Christian scriptures, he is scourged, humiliated and then crucified. Some days later his followers begin to claim that he has been raised and that he is the long-expected messiah of Israel. They preach this message to first to Jews, within synagogues and in the street then they take it on the road, to other Jewish communities around the Holy Land and then around the 'world'.

⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, two of Jesus' main named followers were a tax collector and a Zealot (Matthew and Simon); must have made for some interesting campfire discussions.

⁴⁵ This is further reinforced by Paul in *Romans 13:8-10*;

The End Of The Road

So Judaism and the early 'messianic' Jews (what we would consider 'the early Church') continued on parallel paths in a somewhat uneasy truce, until at some point the Jewish leaders decided to expel the sect from the synagogues, setting them on a dependent yet totally separate development. The Jews were back to practicing a more traditional form of Judaism; the Christians continued to practice Jewish worship but with a decidedly Christian understanding of those practices, expanding it beyond those communities into a purely Gentile world.

For the Jews, this all came to a crashing halt about 40 years later. As effective as Rome was at adapting to local customs, she was just as effective at crushing local customs and customers.



Figure 11: Arch of Titus - the sacking of the Temple

[The year 66 saw the beginning of an uprising in Judaea which was brutal in the extreme. The future emperor Vespasian was appointed to crush the rebels, which he and his son Titus were able to accomplish. Four legions were assigned to Judaea; the neighboring province of Syria, also possessed four. This was a mighty military muster in a relatively small part of

the empire.] The Zealots, unwilling to work with any non-Jewish authority ran into the

problem many small cultures encountered with Rome: extreme world-wide organization and communication, as well as a massive, well-trained fighting force. Though they put up a fairly effective resistance it was no match for the long-term resources and procedures of the Romans. Finally trapped at Masada (one of Herod's mountain-top fortresses), they chose to die rather than surrender. For their part, Rome, being unsatisfied with that outcome could not let it go and began the systematic leveling of things Jewish, especially Jerusalem. Their salted/scorched-earth policy meant the leveling of Jerusalem and the Temple as well as the dispersal of the Jews from Israel in an event known as the *Diaspora* (Greek for 'scattering'). With its Temple's destruction in 70 AD, Judaism as we know it was born.⁴⁶

Putting It All Together

The Romans really put us on the map. They basically designed the Western world we understand today. Geographical names, roads, cities, law – you name it they established the precedent for the Western world. That said, what the Romans really brought to the table was stability. A strong central government which was at peace with itself (most of the time) and even when it was not, had a bureaucracy which outlasted them all.

Israel manages through the transition from Greek to Roman occupation, with the Jewish leadership relatively intact. Under the Romans, the practice of Judaism, while not necessarily flourishing is not suppressed, at least not for the first 100 years or so. In fact Jewish

⁴⁶ For a small insight into the understanding of the character see *Daniel 3:26-45*.

communities are expanding all around the empire, and taking on converts. Within this milieu develops the Judaism most people are familiar with from the Christian Scriptures, that is, the Judaism of the last 20 or so years of the ancient times and the first 70 or so of the new era. There is a mix of rabbinic and priestly worship, with an understanding of a sacred and a practical aspect to the Law.

That is not to say that this Judaism does not bear the marks of all of the last 5 centuries. Concepts, deeper understandings if you will, have developed as to the nature of life, death, and the Law. These concepts have created divisions within Judaism which have given rise to sects which co-exist under a relative truce. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots all make a claim to understanding and living out of the Law. Some see freedom of worship as more important than civil freedom; others see the two equated while others see both as a moot point, because the sacred is completely above of the profane political world. Some see cooperation as the best route; others, revolution.

Into this fray comes an itinerate rabbi, pointing out the best and the worst of these groups. He gathers followers from all groups and all socio-economic levels. He speaks a message most familiar to his audience and he challenges them to re-find their connection with the sacred, and to return back to the true Faith in God. He comes not to un-do the old ways but to 'fulfill' them, give them back the fullness of their meaning. He is a prophet like the prophets of old, speaking of a future based on the present approach to God, speaking of destruction and hope. He is not alone in this, there have been many before and would be many after him, but his becomes a lasting message. He is exchanged for a Zealot who led an assault on a Roman outpost; he is crucified between two other rebels. He is proclaimed 'alive' and his followers begin a journey which will take them from a small back-water province into the very heart of Rome herself.

"Nautius Maximus his name was. Mmm. Promised me the known world he did. I was to be taken to Rome, housed by the Forum. Slaves, asses milk, as much gold as I could eat. Then he, having his way with me he had...VOOM! Like a rat out of an aqueduct."

Mrs. Cohen, *Life of Brian* (1979)

"All right, but apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?"

Reg, *Life of Brian* (1979)

"Be wise, Judah. It's a Roman world. If you want to live in it, you must become part of it...I tell you, Judah, it's no accident that one small village on the Tiber was chosen to rule the world...It wasn't just our legions...No, it was fate that chose us to civilize the world - and we have. Our roads and our ships connect every corner of the earth, Roman law, architecture, literature and the glory of the human race."

Messala, *Ben Hur* (1959)

"You have the spirit to fight back but the good sense to control it. Your eyes are full of hate, Forty-One. That's good. Hate keeps a man alive. It gives him strength. Now listen to me, all of you. You are all condemned men. We keep you alive to serve this ship. So row well, and live."

Qunitus Arrius, *Ben Hur* (1959)

PART III

Christianity thru the Middle Ages *(Chapters 11 - 15)*



The Rise Of Christianity

If there were some meat to this work, then we might say that we have reached the meat of this subject. As it is, we must settle for appetizer ahead. But as is always the case, before we get to any meat let us chew on the bone. When one looks at the nature of Christianity, one must understand its bones.

Judaism At The Time Of Jesus

While there are some who would argue the depth or even the correctness or application of the connection, it is impossible to deny that Judaism is the root and trunk of Christianity. Basic understandings are underpinned with traditional Hebrew ideas and scripture, at least as it stood in the 1st century. Judaism is a religion of richness and depth which unfortunately will not be plumbed here. Our ultimate goal is to understand Christianity and so much here may be left to be desired. As we have somewhat discussed, the practice of Judaism in and around the first century was broad based and dynamic, and cannot be easily categorized. But in an attempt, let us look at it a bit more closely.

Just as we can see in Christianity today, where there are many people trying to interpret the sacred meaning of the revelation which has been supplied, the same dynamics are at work even in modern Judaism. Many cultural and historical influences have been exercised in the last 2000+ years and several groups have arisen, from the ultra-orthodox to the secular Zionists. We can therefore expect little else from any other period of history. We must first remove ourselves from our own time and prejudices as well as our reliance on Scripture's snapshot to paint not just a picture of Faith, but a somewhat more historical record. All that said, let us be reminded of some of those groups and take a high level glance at them.

Pharisees and Sadducees: As we began, we can over-simply state that the Pharisees were the party of the poor and educated, like the scribes who were important to the society but not always socially connected, and that the Sadducees were the party of the priests, the more socially connected religious power-holders. We might want to think of the Pharisees as a 'theological school' and the Sadducees as a 'political party'.

The Pharisees' desire was to purify and strengthen Judaism by explanation. By ridged adherence and practice they would be able to understand the ramifications of the Law as well as the Law itself in everyday life and thereby the faithful could extract themselves from the profane fray and deliver Israel back into God's care. Their aim was to keep the Law in all its details both the *letter and the spirit* of the Law; not so much just the Sinai Covenant 'Law of Moses' with its Decalogue and its 600+ statutes but also the countless laws developed and taught by the teachers of the law, the scribes, the rabbinic tradition. You can see how this would fit more into the lives of everyday Jews, the poor and socially stymied – who would spend more time at work and Synagogue than Temple. The Pharisees, contrary to Christian scripture indications were still 'out of favor' at the time of Jesus. By the time the Christian Gospels were written, however, this situation had changed.

The Sadducees concentrated on their priestly heritage, a strategy that used the religious and political structures to gain and retain power. Since they controlled the priesthood (a long-time

channel of power and the means of the restoration of Israel after the Exile) they emphasized the Temple and Temple rituals and sacrifices which relied on that priesthood. With this base they had little interest in or need for the developed traditions of the scribes and therefore only acknowledged the written Law of Moses and not the rabbinic traditions. Their power came from the Temple and their willingness to interact with the ruling bodies, whether those were seen as legitimate by everyday Jews or not. The Sadducees had a more direct understanding of Revelation, which pointed mainly to life issues and those only within the context of the Law. That said they did not believe in the resurrection of the body or that God took an active hand in life's daily events and, following from that, the existence of some sort of angelic beings, all of which were important beliefs to the Pharisees.

The School of Hillel: As mentioned before there were also two main 'schools' of thinking about the Law both developing just before the birth of Jesus. The scholar Shammai (50 BC-30 AD) was concerned that if Jews had too much contact with the Romans, the Jewish community would be weakened, and for this reason he called for a strict interpretation of Jewish law. The scholar Hillel (110 BC-10 AD) did not share Shammai's concerns and therefore had a more liberal view of the Law and its practice. He is most associated with the development of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* and his influence in molding Judaism continued until roughly the fifth century AD. Hillel was recognized as the highest authority among the Pharisees. This means that the rabbis of the Talmud generally favored the rulings of the School of Hillel, though this was not the case in the more conservative early first century with the Temple cult at its height. Because he looked to a broader interpretation of the Law, Hillel's rulings were often based on concern for the day-to-day welfare of individuals which made him very popular with the people. As always, getting a proper judgment was difficult for the poor and powerless and Hillel's attitudes produced fair and desirous results.

So what? Well, Jesus seems to be very attached to Hillel's teachings on the Law, and several aspects of his message seem to be traceable to Hillel's writings. For instance, Hillel considered 'love of man' the kernel of Jewish teaching, if that sounds familiar at all.

Zealots: Some mention has already been made about these anti-Roman rebels who were active for more than sixty years and instigated the 'Great Revolt' about 66 AD which eventually resulted in the destruction of the Temple. Their most basic belief was that the ends justified the means meaning that all means were justified to attain what was in their opinion political and religious liberty. Naturally, this sort of behavior did not endear them to the Jewish leadership, who pretty much gave them no support, hoping that Israel would be spared if they distanced themselves from the rebels. Naturally this lack of support did not endear the leadership to the Zealots but they took a decidedly different route, often assassinating anyone they felt associated with or collaborated with Rome, i.e. who opposed them. In their theology, the Zealots were relatively close to the Pharisees, but their doctrines had a strong focus on the necessity of violent actions against any 'enemies' of Judaism because foreign rule or domination of Judah was wrong. Judah could only be ruled according to the principles and the authority of God and God alone.

Samaritans: Samaritan origin is shrouded in the past and is, as is to be expected, viewed differently by Jews and Samaritans. Jewish-ish, they prefer to be called 'Israelites' rather than 'Jews' as they claim descent not from *Judah* (the southern kingdom) but from *Israel* (the northern kingdom) specifically the tribes of Joseph and Levi (the 'priestly' tribe) who did not

leave in the Babylonian Exile (Israel was already long gone). As the Samaritan Torah tells it, theirs is the true religion of the ancient Israelites, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel. Mount Gerizim, located in west-central Israel, was the original Holy Place of the Israelites from the time that Joshua conquered Canaan after the Exodus and the twelve tribes of Israel settled the Promised Land.⁴⁷ Judaism, they assert, is related but has distorted practices and beliefs brought back by those *returning from exile*. As the Jews tell it, at best Samaritans are Jews who intermarried with cultures which were transplanted into northern Israel from a mixture of the people forced there by the Assyrians and in a similar vein adopted customs which were incompatible with true Judaism and are merely centered about the God of Israel.

Whatever the tradition, the split appears to have occurred at some point after the Assyrian conquest of the Israelite Kingdom of Israel in approximately 721 BC. Archaeological excavations at Gerizim indicate that a Samaritan temple was built there in the first half of the 5th century BC showing that there was a definite differentiation by that point. The temple cult was led by a high priesthood which they claim descended directly from Aaron, Moses' brother and which appears to have lasted into the 17th century AD. That there is a long-standing feud is borne out by stories of tensions between north and south described in the narratives of Genesis about the rivalries among the twelve sons of Jacob. While briefly united under the kingships of David and Solomon, after the split of the northern and southern kingdoms we see a definitive end to any unity with the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judea with its capital Jerusalem.

By the time of Christ, Samaria had become a back-water, only recently restored by the building campaign of Herod. We catch a glimpse into the interaction and sentiments of the Jews and the Samaritans in the pages of the Christian Scriptures:

- When instructing his disciples as to how they should spread the word, Jesus tells them not to visit any Gentile or Samaritan city. (*Matthew 10:5-6*)
- A Samaritan village rejects Jesus' request for hospitality because the villagers did not want to be a part of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a practice which they saw as a violation of the Law of Moses. (*Luke 9:51-53*)
- Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water from Jacob's Well in Sychar. After some banter about the contentions between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus convinces her about his message. On her testimony many of the Samaritans there become followers of Jesus. (*John 4:7-42*)
- The *Parable of the Good Samaritan* where a Samaritan helps a Jew even when other Jews will not. (*Luke 10:30-37*)
- Jesus healed ten lepers, of whom only one returned to praise God, the Samaritan. (*Luke 17:11-19, esp. 17:16*)
- Jesus is dismissed as having any authority because he is from Galilee (Galilee being just north of Samaria). (*John 8:48*)

As a final note, as with everything in history, most of the people involved are just simple, plain, everyday folks. They were Jews who observed the Sabbath, who observed the holidays and the festivals, who made the pilgrimage to Temple, who observed the Jewish food laws, the Jewish rituals, believed in the one God, adhered to the ways to the holy life, and followed the

⁴⁷ See *Deuteronomy 27:4-13*.

dictates of the Torah in a simple, plain way. Most depended upon tradition and rabbis to guide them and they live out their lives without the drama played out within the other groups, even though they often suffer the consequences of those struggles.

Jewish Political And Religious Structure

We are in the timeframe known as the Second Temple era, due to the fact that the Temple in the time of Jesus was the post exilic rebuilding of Solomon's original Temple by Herod. It is also known as the *Intertestamental Period*, because the end of the Hebrew Scriptures does not immediately flow into the Christian Scriptures (and in fact is a period of about 500 years). In this time period, specific structures have been mandated and put into place that resulted in the structure which we see in the 1st century.

High Priest, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites: At the top of the religious hierarchy are the members of the tribe of Levi, the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people who were responsible for the temple, its day-to-day operation, and most importantly, the sacrifices. Priests were men who descended from Moses' brother Aaron. They had to be men from the tribe of Levi according to specific designation from God and consequentially the religious hierarchy was not open to the other eleven tribes. Levites (members of the tribe of Levi who were not priests) assisted in the practical operation of the temple as guards, musicians, or other ministries required by Temple worship. The office of High Priest was annually rotated from the pool of priests, but in the 1st century, due to their association with political rulers, members of the family of Annas and Caiaphas were often reappointed. According to the Gospels, it is the high priest/chief priests (often with the scribes and elders, i.e. the Jewish leadership) who are identified as the authorities who opposed Jesus, seek to arrest and kill him, and eventually facilitate his condemnation to death by an appeal to the Roman governor Pilate.⁴⁸

Scribes: Outside of the tribe of Levi, some men were specially trained in writing and thus influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law, and agents of the rulers. The term 'scribes' is sometimes translated as 'lawyers', but only by Luke; the similar passages in Mark and Matthew have 'scribe'. Since law as the Jews understood it was *The Law*, scribes specialized in the interpretation of the Jewish Law (Torah). Accordingly most of their duties involved writing, e.g. producing legal documents, recording deeds, copying scriptures, teaching people, and other such activities in relation to the Law. So technically, the scribes were not a formal division like the Pharisees or the Sadducees, but often belonged to one group or the other (e.g. "*some scribes who were Pharisees*" in *Mark 2:16*; *Acts 23:9a*). And while the *Acts of the Apostles* also portrays them as opponents of the early Christians (c.f. *Acts 4:5*; *6:12*) there are a few exceptions: some scribes are neutral to Jesus (*Matt 13:52*), some are even praised by Jesus (*Mark 12:28-34*), still others rise to defend Paul (*Acts 23:9*).

Elders: With the centrality of the Temple cult also Jews rely on the tribal/Mosaic practice of selecting a local group of men to support the leader in judicial matters. These 'older men' (*presbyteros*) of a community formed the members of official 'councils' for deciding and mediating in the local community. This Greek term is also used to designate those men who are

⁴⁸ c.f. *Num 3:6-13*; *Mark 1:44*; *Matt 12:4-5*; *Luke 1:5-23*; *Luke 10:32*; *John 1:19*; *Acts 4:36*; *Matt 26:3, 57*; *Luke 3:2*; *John 11:49*; *18:12-28*; *Acts 4:6*

merely respected by others as wise or as role models. The Christian Scriptures usually portray the Jewish elders in agreement with the scribes and priests in opposition to Jesus.

Within Judaism what we see at this time is a combination of rabbinical (local) and priesthood (national) leadership. As the political connections of the priesthood wane, and eventually are destroyed, it is the more pharisaic/rabbinic style of Judaism which remains, with a distinction between the two forms of spiritual leadership, that of teaching and that of ritual and sacrifice.

The Way

Christianity as we know it today is very different than the community of the 1st century. While many aspects would seem familiar, even those of the Book of Acts, and the Epistles, are filtered through the context of the community of that time. Initially, it flourished in the midst of the existing structure of Judaism, as the initial message was to the Jews of the Roman Empire. We can glimpse the nature of the Jewish community which had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts by Luke: *“Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, ‘Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and*



Figure 12: The Roman Empire *Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”*

This is obviously a broad based group, comprised of people who are from what is basically the known world. It speaks to the diversity of the world-wide Jewish population of that day, most likely in thought and practice as well as language, yet they are still Jewish – they still are gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. This fact speaks to the highly controlled nature of Judaism, bound together by the Torah, Tradition, and centered on the Temple. The early Church then also reflects that diversity and wide-spread nature as well as focus. This similarity aids in the spread of its message. We must keep in mind that actually there is no such thing as ‘Christianity’ at this time; the Christian Scriptures refer to the followers of Jesus as ‘disciples’ and the first use of any official term is in Acts 11:26 (from around 70 AD), which states *“it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians”* (Antioch is in what is now modern Turkey), and then only as a reference not an official moniker. So this urges us to look for the earliest secular references, as a source for such statements. Josephus (37 – 100 AD) refers to *“the tribe of Christians, so named from him”* in his history. Tacitus writing near the end of the 1st century (96 or so), identifies ‘Christians’ as the ones blamed by Nero for the Great Fire of Rome though he notes this is not their official name: *“by vulgar appellation [they were]*

commonly called Christians" (*Annals*), and in a correspondence of Pliny the Younger with Trajan dated about 112.

The early practitioners were decidedly Jewish, but in time begin to morph. We might think of the connection between say Anglicanism and Methodism. Eventually the message spreads beyond the confines of Judaism and converts to Judaism. Christianity, in a pattern of thinking similar to Taoism, was instead referred to as '*The Way*'. The *Didache*, an early 2nd century document, refers to the "*two ways*," "*one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways*", with the practices described as obviously the '*way of life*'. [*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous by faith will live."* (Romans 1:16-17)]

[*"We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with you. But with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; As though it were burnt offerings of rams and bulls, or tens of thousands of fat lambs, so let our sacrifice be in your presence today and find favor before you.... And now we follow you with our whole heart, we fear you and we seek your face...."* (Daniel 3:38-41)]

The Guardrails

There is therefore a context and a structure for these teachings. And because of the link, Christianity too, develops a structure reminiscent of the structures within Judaism. Jesus' follower Matthew appears to be the only possible Levite in the group (c.f. *Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-29*), but Jesus has spoken of a general priesthood (as had God in the later Hebrew Scriptures) and so the early community develops a more synagogue like structure, where the idea of the '*people of God*' becomes '*the Body of Christ*'.

Ekklesia: What we might think of as the word '*Church*', also known as '*The Body*'. This is the community of believers, in relationship to Jesus, a messianic remnant if you will, bound by a single Faith and practices. "*They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes."*

Koinonia: There is an interesting word translated into the '*community*' words in the above passage: in Greek *koinonia*. [The essential meaning of the *koinonia* speaks to the English terms *community, communion, joint participation, sharing*, and even *intimacy*] and is used when speaking about both community and communion. It speaks similarly to the Roman idea of *du et des*, an interior and an exterior aspect with an [inner goodness toward virtue, and an outer goodness toward social relationships]. We get a glimpse of the continued fluid nature of the term even as late as St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century: "*the Eucharist [Communion] is the sacrament of the unity of the Church, which results from the fact that many are one in Christ.*" (*Summa Theologica*)

Apostolos: Greek for '*one who is sent*', '*a messenger*', from the sense where Jesus sends the disciples out to preach the message. The word has two meanings, the broader meaning of '*a*

messenger' and the narrow meaning of an 'apostle' linked directly to that intimate group surrounding Jesus. The former meaning of the word is translated in Latin as *missio*, the root for our word 'missionary.' So initially it is applied to the '72' missionaries in Luke, but becomes specifically applied to the Apostles, after the Resurrection, especially in the later Epistles and Book of Revelation where they are viewed as the foundation of the Faith. It implies teaching authority, the same authority Jesus claimed, derived from God and given to them, which also carried with it the power to forgive sin (also bound up in baptism). In terms of leadership, *episkopos* (bishop) is the term we hear more often and means 'overseer' or 'supervisor'. They are focused more on the spiritual needs of the community.

Diakonos: Greek for 'servant' these individuals are empowered to serve and to preach. They have limited sacramental powers and are more for the service of the physical needs of the community.

Presbyteros and hiereus: the first word carries much of the same meaning of 'elder' that it had in Judaism, as does the second one, which is oriented more toward the idea of sacrifice. The late 1st century *Epistle of Clement* uses the terms *bishop* and *presbyter* interchangeably for the clergy above the rank of deacon. For Ignatius of Antioch, (late 1st to early 2nd century), bishops and presbyters were distinct offices. The use of the word 'priest' for bishops appears to have risen toward the end of the 2nd century, and speaks to the growing and developing understanding of the nature of leadership in the early community. By the time of Saint Cyprian (3rd century) it was applied to presbyters also.

More Roman Stuff or Welcome To The Circus

The Roman Law which protected the Jews initially protected the Christians. Eventually it came to be used against them. Roman law is very impressive, and in fact is the basis for English and American law (only Louisiana uses Napoleonic law). Laws were not easily overturned or forgotten and unlike many ordinances which now-a-days languish on the books, the Romans kept track of most of these laws. Christians fought hard to retain their ties to Judaism. *"In this way will the antiquity and divinity of Christianity be shown to those who suppose it of recent and foreign origin, and imagine that it appeared only yesterday."* (Eusebius, *Church History*, 2 – 4th century) This statement goes to one of the principal objections raised against Christianity: *novelty*. As said before, antiquity was considered a prime requisite in a religion which claimed to be true, and no criticism was greater than that charge. Hence the Christian apologists laid great stress upon the antiquity of Christianity, probably one reason why they later maintained the appropriateness of the Hebrew Scriptures as part and parcel of the Christian Scriptures even against stiff internal opposition.

Welcome To The Circus: *the bad news is that you are the main attraction.*

While Jews within Israel floundered, Jews in the greater Empire flourished in a somewhat protective shell. Jewish persecution for most fell more into the realm of the destruction of the Temple and the denial of travel and access to the Temple and other sites (though Claudius does expel the Jews from Rome in 49 AD). Once the Christians had lost their coveted status as a protected religion, they fell under the full suspicion of the State. Requirements to sacrifice and

to participate in the other Roman state rituals were coupled with severe penalties for not participating. Again, this is a testament to the quick spread of Christianity within the empire, that the group could be seen as large enough to be a ‘threat’ so soon after it was established. There are 10 ‘official’ persecutions of the Christians by Rome as laid out about 500 AD:

1. **Nero** (64-68). From the burning of Rome and the traditional time for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.
2. **Domitian** (81-96).
3. **Trajan** (112-117) Christianity is outlawed but Christians are not sought out; if brought before the courts, legal proof of their guilt had to be supplied.
4. **Marcus Aurelius** (161-180) local action of the provincial governors seem to have spurred more severe punishment, rather than imperial decree.
5. **Septimius Severus** (202-210).
6. **Decius** (250-251). Christians are actively exposed by ordinances requiring public sacrifice though one could buy certificates instead of sacrificing. Martyrdoms of the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.
7. **Valerian** (257-59).
8. **Maximinus the Thracian** (235-38).
9. **Aurelian** (270–275).
10. **Diocletian/Galerius** (303-324).

Table 7: The Roman Persecutions of Christians

The first major recognized persecution was instigated by Nero and his advisers. Rome caught fire somewhere around the Circus Maximus and after valiant attempts to quell it, the fire began to grow as if re-set. It finally burned out, after about a week, but not without having consumed ten of the fourteen regions into which the city was divided. The response, which was pretty much localized to Rome, was swift and brutal. After that, the level of oppression and brutality varied. As is obvious from the time frames of this list, the persecutions, while fairly frequent were not continuous, nor were they always brutal. Several emperors and principates seemed to have been more concerned with staying alive themselves and even the bureaucracy seems to have let Christians slip through the cracks. This period of oppressive laws and/or brutal persecution saw the development of several familiar Christian practices – most notably the cult of martyrs as well as several other liturgical and ritual practices, many of which are recorded in documents and letters of that time. It also saw the expansion of Christianity, where, like Judaism, it often was in protected pockets free from the general fracas.

As a note, Christian persecution by the Romans was possibly seen as an extension of the Jewish expulsion and therefore loss of protection through the claim of ‘novelty’. Whether there is any truth to that, and certainly at an individual level there may have been, there is little evidence that ‘the Jews’ instigated or ran the subsequent Roman persecutions, even if individual Jews may have had a hand in them (there are independent reports of hostilities between Christians and Jews). Still, this bad blood probably continued until the legalization of Christianity by Constantine and likely became part and parcel of the feelings of Christians toward Jews. All early indications though, aside from any similar individual Christian sentiments, point to a tolerance of Jews within the legal system of Rome and the early Christian Emperors. Roman law was still Roman law, and statutes from the time of Julius Caesar still stood. Still, the fact that any official and active persecution of Christians by Jews as a whole was over with by sometime in the 2nd century was likely lost to time and legend.

The Christian Scriptures

This is a mention of the sacred texts, but only for context. The final nature of these scriptures is somewhat in the future and should be considered there. Suffice it to say that around the 50's Paul begins writing and the communities are probably already circulating letters which lay out Christian beliefs and practices; by the 60's life stories of Jesus, called 'gospels' (for 'good news') are also being circulated around the empire. Unlike Judaism and the Torah, there are no 'foundational' books per se, so in a sense the gospels and letters share an almost equal footing. The production of the main Christian writings continues until the end of the 1st century and into the early 2nd century, with the final *canon* or list of books not finalized for centuries. Justifiably then, the main Scriptures for the early Church are the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially those as laid out in the *Septuagint*, though there also appear to be about 132 passages that are references to non-canonical books, both secular and sacred. As Paul says *"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"* (2 Timothy 3:16) and *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit; ...Let us then pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another."* (Romans 14:17-19)

Putting It All Together

So how connected is Christianity to Judaism? Sectarianism had destroyed Judaism in Israel, and wiped out the Temple. It is understandable therefore that Jews and Jewish leaders everywhere might be skittish about any new sects which arise. Christianity, claiming to be a sect of Judaism, is viewed with suspicion. The Christian Scriptures speak to this later time, and the animosity which had developed between the two groups which may not have been as true in Jesus' time and has colored many later interpretations. Suffice it to say there came a time when the Jews disavowed the sect and a separate development began. The early community was made up of Jews, converts, and Gentiles, and the Book of Acts refers to the conflicts which arose within and between these different communities, as well as problems with Jewish communities. When Saint Peter agreed to abandon the dietary laws as well as any requirement for circumcision he most probably created a crack which could not be repaired. Any disciples who were Sadducees would defiantly had problems with the latter and any Pharisees with the former.

At the same time, this unity with Hebrew history and scripture provides the early community with continuity, as well as a solid theological, liturgical, and ritualistic foundation. The Hebrew God is the one God, and His Revelation is complete in the Jewish Jesus. This also continues the nature of Revelation and informs much of the early Christian thinking about Jesus and the nature of Revelation, which is basically the relationship of humans to Creation and to God. The nature of Tradition, both oral and written is inherited from the Jews. This means that there is only one source of truth, and it is conveyed through two channels; one is physical/practical, or *natural*, and the other as metaphysical, or *supernatural*. Through personal effort one can become partially known, and the other is mystical, given as a gift. God is the giver and the human being is the receiver. Divinity and humanity are in constant interaction. God is "present in all places and filling all things;" and humanity *lives, moves, and has its being* in God, as Paul of Tarsus reemphasized (Acts 17:28). Jesus reflects these Jewish ideas.

Where do the Romans fit in? They provide a fertile ground for the quick growth of Christianity. Relative peace over a large area encourages travel, trade, and settlements. Whereas Judaism at its base is a rural religion, with urban focus and eventually transplanted to more urban areas, Christianity begins as an urban religion focused in the great cities of the Roman Empire.

"The 'search for the historical Jesus' came to an end when the great scholar Albert Schweitzer demonstrated that the biographers of Jesus were not really describing a first century Jew, but a nineteenth century German liberal philosopher."

Stephen Wyles, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus: An Introduction*

"The Sadducees did not believe in the bodily resurrection; that's why they were sad, you see..."

Anon, *Bad Pun*

My Apologies

These sections are slim at best and I give my apologies for that but that is not what we are talking about in this chapter. Apologetics is not the art of debasement but of explanation. The transition of Christianity away from Judaism into an accepted religion required a lot of fast talking and while not overly effective it is really the hallmark of the faith. The ability of the disciples to convince others through word as well as deed depended upon their ability to couch the message within understood language – mainly the language of Greek philosophy.

The Christian Scriptures

But the language they start with is also Greek, and starts with the Septuagint. What is now known as the ‘New Testament’ (to show its connection to the Covenants of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the ‘Old Testament’) like the Hebrew Scriptures before it, is comprised of several different types of writings: Gospels (~60s – 90), Epistles (~50s – 110s), and Apocalyptic Literature (~90s). Again, at this time the understanding of the canon of the Christian Scriptures is not set. Oral Tradition is combined with letters from the Apostles to give the earliest basis for Christian Faith. The earliest existent letters are those of Paul, and those are close to 20 years after the life of Jesus. Oral stories, statements, and proclamations comprise the largest foundation for about the first 50 years of Christianity; it is mainly in the 2nd century that discussions of canonicity develop which are not settled until the 4th–5th centuries (367-405). Hence statements known as ‘creeds’, from the Latin *credo*, meaning ‘I believe’, based in apostolic teachings known as *kerygma*, contain much of the core Faith from that period and were used (and are still used) with the same intention which many apply to scripture today. This Tradition is gathered into the Gospels, of which four were officially accepted as canonical. As with Judaism, the Tradition and the Scripture go hand-in-hand. It was understood that Scripture cannot stand without the Tradition beneath it nor can Tradition stand without the Scripture to back it up and both require an orthodox teaching body.

Several of the books in the Christian Scriptures are of ‘questionable’ authorship, mainly meaning that only Tradition associates them with a specific author. This in no way lessens their authority (forgive the possible pun) because they fall under the norms of authorship of that day. When Fritz Chrysler was finally exposed as the composer of several master works which were assigned to classical Masters, it in no way reduced their brilliance, and in fact illustrates the other aspect of what we are speaking about here: one writes in the ‘vein of’ another but with the same authority – sort of ‘this is what they would have said had they said it’. Faith is the Truth and only those writings which closely follow the Truth can be accepted; had his compositions had no merit they would have been dismissed outright.

Creed

Okay, so I brought it up, so I have to deal with it. We can make these claims because of the power of Tradition. The development of the final canon (Latin for *list*) of the books of the Christian Scriptures did not take place until the legitimization of Christianity by Constantine but

spans the first four centuries of Christianity, and was a long continuous process. It involved the tasks of collecting, of sifting and of rejecting. That is not to say that scriptures of all sorts did not exist during that time (logically, an impossibility, as there is a canon which, as said, did not appear out of thin air in King James English) and as are so often touted today, but that they were not universal in acceptance or in its distribution. Until then, 'songs, psalms, and inspired hymns', homilies and oral teachings as well as any circulated writings of the Apostles, Paul and the evangelists formed the reciprocal basis for the Truths. Those Truths are articulated in creeds. Those Creeds were as essential to the construction, articulation and spread of the Faith as was scripture, and as such warranted as much attention as did the canon of Scripture. As oral statements they also held much authority in a time when written books or scrolls were scarce. And some possibly pre-date any written material.

Paul

This may seem like a strange place to put Paul but not when you think about what Paul did: he preached the message to non-Jewish cultures as well as the Jewish communities spread throughout the Roman world as well as produced the earliest accepted writings of Christianity. Paul is a Jewish Roman citizen.⁴⁹ Most people might not think of him as an apologist, but his adaptation of Hellenistic thought to Judeo-Christianity and vice versa was significant. From the *Acts of the Apostles* (*Acts 17:16-34*) we know that he engaged in philosophical debate. Spurred on by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (two major philosophies at the time), Paul mounted the Areopagus in Athens (a large flat hill above the agora and just beneath the Acropolis: the soapbox of its day) and was challenged to a discussion of ideas. The outcome was mixed, and while some derided his thought (most probably the Epicureans because he discussed the soul) some did follow his teachings which means he had some rhetorical ability and had to have some knowledge of their thought.

There is a difference between this cosmopolitan Roman and his provincial counterparts, especially Peter. We can see it in his writings; the *Pauline Epistles* (literally *letters*, and distinguished from the other Christian Scripture's letters). For example while he discounts Greek thinking in light of mystery, Paul's discussion of body and soul is a direct appeal to the Greek mind. As discussed, in Hebraic thought there was no dichotomy of body and soul, they were, as the Greeks would say, of one *substance*. If there was any division it would be between heart and mind, not between the physical and the metaphysical. There was an understanding of an afterlife, with Jesus himself speaking about preparing places in his Father's house for faithful disciples. Paul would have kept to his guns on an afterlife and probably used the Greek concept of the immortal soul to talk about it. Paul is developing the Christian theological vocabulary, using terms which have their roots in Judaism *and* Greek secular thought.

On a small note, many contend that the nature of Christianity is *Pauline*, that is, it is more about Paul's ideas than Jesus'. If we asked Paul, I think he would be appalled at that thought – it is always more about Jesus than about him; it is he who must diminish such that Christ may increase. Often the message is confused with the messenger, and Paul realizing that, fought hard against it.

⁴⁹ Examples of Paul as a Pharisee: *Acts 23:6-9, 26:5-9; Philipians 3:5-9* and Paul as Roman: *Acts 22:22-29; Acts 23:23-30*

Pauline Themes

Who was Jesus and what significance did that hold for humanity? For Paul the first question is only important in light of the second. While the Gospels seek to make the message of Jesus available using his own words and actions, Paul is seeking to use them to define 'Church' and put those words into practical application within the Church. He wants to emphasize the urgent nature of returning fully to God using the grace of Jesus' death and resurrection. In a way, though deep and complex, Paul's teaching is fairly simple in its themes and really could be reduced to three main themes: the Cross, the Resurrection and the Return (*Parousia*) and often the three are intermixed (c.f. *1 Thessalonians 4:14-15; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Romans 8:34; 14:9*). But let us break them down just a bit.

Christology: Jesus is of God – he is legitimately *the* Christ; in Jesus, God has fully entered into human history, even more so than the Sinai Covenant, thereby perfecting and in a sense superseding it. His nature is human and divine; he is the conduit of God's grace and only by knowing Jesus can you know the Father. Paul quotes two obviously existent songs to reinforce his teachings (*Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:15-20*).

The Cross: Jesus died, because he lived. His death was sacrifice for our sins – the normal ritual sacrifice for the expiation of sin: an unblemished lamb. That death was necessary and efficacious; our own deaths are joined to Jesus' as is our suffering. The suffering of the world is made perfect within the suffering of Jesus (*1 Cor 1:17-18; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Gal 6:14; Phil 2:8; Rom 5:6-11; 6:1-14*).

Salvation in Jesus: through that death and that death alone do we receive our salvation. The Law no longer suffices or is necessary for the removal of sin – Jesus died *once and for all*; Gentiles as well as Jews now have access to the Covenant and salvation. The Law, by itself is not sufficient to the task; only Christ's life and death bring it to fruition. Our whole purpose in life is to get to heaven. (*2 Cor 5:1-10*).

Forgiveness: the glue which holds us together and is the whole purpose of Jesus' death. Without the death of the living Jesus, there is only death. The community must live that death, that is be bonded to the forgiving nature of Jesus and forgive one another.

Unity: we are all one Body because we now belong to Jesus; this oneness gives us all a share in the divinity of Jesus. We are bound by his sacrifice both of the Cross and of the Eucharist (*1 Cor 11:23-25*).

Resurrection: just as the death of Jesus was real, so was his resurrection. This reality means that we who share in the unity of the Body, i.e. are within Christ will also enjoy that same new life (*1 Cor 15:1-58*).

Orthodoxy: keep in line with leaders and hold to the one Faith. Our unity with and within Christ compels us to keep to that unity and to avoid and deny any contrary teachers or teachings; to do otherwise is to be outside of the community (*Rom 1:1-6;*).

Eschatology: early: Christ is coming soon; later: I may not make it with you. In reflection of some of Jesus' eschatological teachings, it is going to get worse before it gets better. We should live our lives by the teachings (*1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 1 Thess 4:13--5:11; 2 Thess 2:1-15; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Cor 16:22*).

As a note about the Epistles in the Christian Scriptures, their arrangement in the canon is by size not by date, largest to smallest.

Peter, Paul, And Roma

The community in Rome predates the arrival of both Peter and Paul. Paul's letter to the Romans, easily one of the most important in early Christianity, is in fact a letter of introduction to an existing community. That Rome is important is spoken to by the fact that both Peter and Paul are there at the same time. The only other references to them together in the same place at the same time are once in Antioch and once in Jerusalem, during the ecumenical council to decide the requirements of entry into the Church.



It is the death of Peter and Paul in Rome and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem three or four years later which draws the focus of Christianity to Rome. Rome, Antioch (in Turkey), and Alexandria (in Egypt) are the intellectual centers of the Empire and therefore of Christianity. The Empire is beginning to fragment, with leader after

leader taking charge, with little or no continuity, save that wonderful bureaucracy which survives through it all. Rome, then, as the singular city of the Empire, becomes an anchor point for the young Church. This is not to say that it is the only point. Eventually five cities will be established as centers, known as *Patriarchies*, Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and finally after the split of Constantine's empire, Constantinople. Suffice it to say that for some reasons we will hopefully discuss, Rome, as the 'death/birth' place of Peter and Paul holds a special place within these administrative zones.

Trinity

One of the reasons they died was the distinction of Jesus as the Christ. It is the very nature of Jesus which calls for the contemplation of another central tenet of Christianity: the Trinity. The Christian God is one as is the Jewish God, though one develops three 'understandings' if you will, within what is best called 'the Godhead'. For the Church, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of the one God. That God is one is attested to by the Jews and spoken of throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and confirmed by Jesus. That there is a 'Father' is attested by Jesus. That there is the Son follows from that, in Jesus. That there is a Spirit, an active force which, like the Son, flows from the Father is also attested to by Jesus, and also by Jesus within his Body, the Church.

Since Jesus reveals the three persons, the Church begins to see the three natures within the one God throughout Scripture (remember this is Hebrew Scripture). They confess it as they come to understand the nature of Jesus the Son. Still the term the 'Trinity' was first used by the Tertullian in the late 2nd century, to provide a succinct term for the tri-unity of the persons that existed in the Godhead. The singular nature of the plural term articulates there is one God, who exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each is fully God and

each is equally God. There is no room here to expound upon the mystery of the Trinity; suffice it to say that it is *the central mystery* of Christianity.⁵⁰

Martyrs

Peter and Paul are not the first to die in Nero's persecution, nor were they the last. With the persecutions come many deaths. To modern sensibilities many of these deaths (if we are to believe the legends) seem senseless at best and suicides at worst. Even Paul preaches moderation on beliefs – if they do not cause 'scandal', that is something which might cause another to lose their faith (1 *Corinthians* 8). But martyrdom was not seen as extreme. These inauspicious deaths fitted in nicely with the death of Jesus and the understanding of martyrdom fitted in nicely with the understanding of life and death which the Church professed. To die for the faith was to die to self and to die for others. As with Jesus, it was a free choice because certainly one could easily denounce one's beliefs and be spared, and certainly there were those who did, but history does not record them, only the ones who freely choose to die rather than give up on the Kingdom.

The 'cult of martyrs' as it is known is not a zombie-like state but is the honoring of those who made the ultimate sacrifice – often to protect others – for which they have been 'washed in blood'. If we think back to the Sinai Covenant and the sprinkling of blood to seal the Covenant we can begin to understand the belief. This tradition involves the veneration of not just the action but of the person, where others gather about the body and seek to receive from its glow of holiness some inspiration and courage. It is tied into what is known as the 'Communion of Saints'. Paul calls the Body 'the Saints in light'. Those of the Body are saints. This means that living or dead, as Christ who died and was raised is tied to the Body, we are tied together. This also speaks back the Maccabean tradition where the dead and the living are connected. So to celebrate liturgy over the body of the martyr or holy one is to celebrate *with them*. Again, remember that this is not an intellectual exercise. God is present, Jesus is real and really present; the sacred is here and now, and not just for us but outside of time. It is mystery, revealed but beyond comprehension. People are willing to die for something which they feel is *here and now*; the Kingdom of God is at hand, and through Jesus' death and Resurrection, we the living and the dead participate in that Kingdom (albeit imperfectly), as the Body of Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father and alive here on earth.

Those who die therefore are actually 'born' – to new life. They transcend space and time and belong to all places and all times. The activities of prayer, teaching, and service they performed on earth continue in their new life.⁵¹ Therefore they are never far from us nor we from them. Similar to their baptism, where they move from death (in sin) to life (in Jesus the raised), in martyrdom, they move from life to 'fullness of life'. When Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome they are born to new life in the Kingdom. The performance of rituals over the bodies of the martyrs is a statement of the connection between the living and the dead, as is the agape meal ritual celebrated. This practice spoke directly to the Roman sense of *do ut des* and patronage.

⁵⁰ "If you deny the trinity you lose your soul, if you try to explain the trinity you may lose your mind" – an old adage attributed to St. Augustine

⁵¹ c.f. *Wisdom* 3:1-11, *Hebrews* 12:1-2, *Romans* 8:35-39.

Justin Martyr

Of specific note along the lines of that (this chapter that is⁵²) and as an example of the Church at the time was Justin Martyr who lived in the second century. He converted to Christianity in Ephesus after flirtations with several philosophical schools, and died about 100 years after the events he is defending, during the reign (and therefore subsequent persecution) of the philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius. Justin had opened a Christian school in Rome, training many students in apologetics and theology as well as philosophy. His main works are apologetic aimed not at students but at leaders, a wide audience from the Emperor and the Senate, to Greeks, Roman officials, or to whoever he thought might have influence and might be influenced by his arguments in hopes of keeping Christianity and his fellow Christians safe.

Justin was intent on showing how Christianity brought 'completeness' to the pagan philosophies. One of the ways he does this is to use of the idea of the *Logos*, a Greek word meaning *word*, but meaning much more, basically the rational force and design at work in the universe. By now the idea of the *Logos* was widely familiar to most, and the designation of the Son of God as the *Logos* was not new to Christian theology by the end of the 1st century, as we see from the prologue to the Gospel of John. The manner in which Justin identifies the historical Christ with the rational force operative in the universe leads up to a claim of all truth and virtue being contained within Christianity and that the adoration of Christ alone (which aroused so much opposition) is the only reasonable attitude, that is, it is the only *reasonable* way to think.

It is not so much that Justin depends upon understood philosophical concepts to explain Christology or Trinitarian doctrine or other Christian beliefs but that he wants his audience to see that what they already believe is *contained within* and perfected by belief in Christ. This Christianity is not a mumbo-jumbo, non-intelligent superstition of peasants but is from the very fabric of the universe. According to his writings, after disputing with a friend who was a Cynic (not a naysayer but a philosophy which is something of a basis for Stoicism where one lived in harmony with Nature and eschewed vain pursuits like fame and fortune) he was turned in to the authorities. Justin was tried together with six companions and was, like Paul, beheaded. Perhaps one of the most fascinating things about the whole affair is the contemporary writings of a student that preserve some of the court record from the trial which gives us great insight into both the demands and arguments surrounding Christianity at the time (about 165).

Justin also fits into another niche. As a prolific writer, he defines or tells us of many of the ideas and understandings of his time, on a whole range of theological subjects. While many of these have had foundational effect of the language and understanding of the subject, some have been open to broader interpretation over time. Some time after his death he was denounced for what may be considered incorrect teachings. Not so much for his discussion of them but how they were used centuries later. His use of philosophical words and themes caused some to question his conclusions. Many thinkers share a similar fate of back and forth acceptance and denouncement. Some, like Justin remain saints...others like Origen, while no longer denounced, are not considered saints or Fathers.

⁵² "My point is...and I do have one..." *Ellen DeGeneres*

Stay Close To The Candles...

Many want to mark the transition from 'Early Christianity' to be 325 AD, the point when Constantine legalized Christianity⁵³. But if we look, the first major transition takes place with the death of the Apostles and any early witnesses, about the end of the 1st century. Most of the major writings have been made during this period. We probably can make another in about the mid 2nd century, with the 'Apostolic Fathers' or second generation witnesses (those who knew some the earliest witnesses). Yet another comes with the Patristic era at which point anyone who knew anyone directly is gone. However we choose to mark it, there is not a sudden pre-Constantine/post-Constantine split. The Church spread and grew, regardless of the persecutions, and probably in spite of them. All the time it gets farther and farther away in time from its origins.

When we spoke earlier of the progression of religions in the area, it may have seemed as if some of them faded away. But the entire world is not Jewish or Christian. On a personal observation (**warning: personal observations ahead**), in a world struggling with the decline of belief in the sacred, people develop systems which fill in the voids. Many are bastardizations or hodge-podges of beliefs systems cobbled together to make something 'new' as all earlier systems must be failures, having not already saved the world. Often there is an element of control, personal decisions made which wrest the sacred from God and place it in the hands of believers. So it is also with Judaism and Christianity as well. For example, one early (and persistent) group was the Gnostics, from the Greek 'to know'. They were secret groups with 'secret knowledge', available only to the select few, something which flies in the face of Christianity. For example the followers of Valentinus believed in reincarnation. Other followers, in the 2nd century drew upon Chaldean astrology, to which was later added Greek ideas including a variation of Plato's transmigration of the soul. Tenants like the Cross became less of signs and more of symbols, with hidden meanings and 'power'. Manichaeism spread both east and west from Babylonia, where its founder Mani had lived in the early to mid 3rd century such that Manichaean monasteries existed in Rome in 312 AD. Manichaeism's form of Christianity shows a real Buddhist influence, including that of reincarnation. In yet another circular revelation, the great Saint Augustine was initially influenced by Manichaeism.

The farther the Church gets away from Jesus the harder it is to maintain the message in its pure form. In order to grow, many routes were explored to spread the message. Some of these routes led to places which misshaped the message. From the beginning, even Jesus warned against being led astray from the Faith and his true message. Paul, Peter, John, among others all wrote extensively about avoiding error, following good leaders and testing the message of any who claimed to know the Truth. The adherence to orthodoxy was a reoccurring undercurrent to any foundation to the Church. Yet at the same time the struggle to be relevant and dynamic in order to spread the message led to sincere struggles, some of which still continue today.

There is a thin line here. Take, for example this short exchange I lifted from <http://aggreen.net/heterodox/heterodox.html> (do not worry about the concepts here, more about the timbre of the arguments):

Scott Hahn, a vocal Presbyterian minister who with his wife Kimberley converted to Roman Catholicism, said in his book Rome Sweet Rome: Our Journey to

⁵³ And for a variety of reasons which will not be discussed at this time.

Catholicism: *"Further study led me to conclude that Orthodoxy was wonderful for its liturgy and tradition but stagnant in theology." Clark Carlton, a well-known Baptist who converted to Orthodoxy, counters in his book The Truth: What Every Roman Catholic Should Know About the Orthodox Church: "If the alternative to being 'stagnant' means changing the Creed (the Filioque), worrying about going to a non-existent place (purgatory), paying money to stay out of said non-existent place (indulgences), turning the Virgin Mary into some sort of super-human (an immaculately conceived co-redemptrix) and making the bishop of one city into an infallible, universal potentate with both spiritual and political sovereignty, then the Orthodox will gladly stay stagnant."*

While both of these statements contain a level of truth they also show (in my opinion) an appalling lack of understanding of either side, as well as illustrate the struggle which brings us to the discussion of two terms: *Orthodoxy* and *Heterodoxy*.

Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy

The word *Orthodoxy* (Greek meaning *right-teaching*) conjures up a sense of the straight and narrow. It speaks to holding on to Tradition and Scripture with a tight rein and within a set of boundaries and having a traceable authentic tradition. Another term we might use is *accepted belief*.

Heterodoxy (Greek meaning *other-teaching*) is a tougher term. For some it strictly means 'unorthodox' as in *anti-orthodox* or *heresy*; for most others it falls more into the realm of 'disagreement' or more of a lower level difference of opinion, but not outside of the accepted norms of orthodoxy. Another word we might use is *diversity*.

The strength of orthodoxy is stability and stability counts for a lot. It has helped the Jews hold their message together for thousands of years and through hundreds of cleansings and hard times. It speaks to the fidelity of God who does not change and to the message which remains unchanged. Heterodoxy speaks to the human condition, one of mysteries which are not fully penetrated. Orthodoxy would say that the mystery is the mystery – let it go. Heterodoxy says that there may be something more we can understand of/from that mystery. So what is the balance? For its first thousand years the Church tolerated much diversity as long as it remained within the boundaries. Heterodox beliefs are usually beliefs on subjects which are not fully defined, or are possible understandings of existing loosely defined teachings. Ultimately heterodoxy describes beliefs that differ from strictly orthodox views but that fall short of our next topic: heresy.

Heresy

So, while the thinkers and writers of this period were mainly focused on secular powers and thinkers, there was also developing an internal strife between thinkers within Christianity. The early attempts at apologetics also produced lines of thinking based within the Greco-Roman mindset which fell into direct conflict with *orthodox* teachings. As time goes by and less and less effort was needed to convince the populous, the writings and argumentation turned more toward Christian ideas and the discussion of whether or not the ideas had merit within the Christian ethos. Both of these situations produced what has become known as *heresy*. Heresy comes from the Greek for *to choose*, as in choosing what you want to believe, and in a no-

brainer, the conflict of that belief with orthodoxy. Some disputes were in terms of orthodoxy to lunatic fringe kind of issues, like the *Gnostics* and other mystery cults but others were the product of sincere and intellectually honest efforts to reach understanding using the philosophical concepts of the day.

Most of the earliest heresies deal with the nature of Christ as both human and divine, or what is called the *hypostatic union*. This idea is central to the Christo-centric Christians, and informs not only many doctrines but many future theologians and philosophers. Because of this, the ideas of nature, substance, accidents, the soul, the divine and many other Greek philosophical subjects all come into play. At the same time the meaning of a term, the way in which it is used and its use to describe a single aspect of Christology could often be misconstrued and/or over-developed, resulting in conflict. Heresy, different than heterodoxy, is in complete opposition to the Faith and is officially condemned. The concept of Body, of unity, of oneness is called into question when the tenets of the Faith are in question. To interpret a tenet in a new way is very different from denying it, as Arius did when he denied the divinity of Jesus.

Ecumenical Councils

In line with this and especially with the legitimization of Christianity, the cosmopolitan nature of the believers lent itself to the solving of global problems and standardization of doctrinal issues. The means of accomplishing this was the *council*, specifically an *ecumenical* (meaning non-regional, or including everybody) *council* and the theological discussions were informed by philosophical and scriptural language. The conflict over the nature of Christ took many forms and the arguments from both philosophical and scriptural sources raged over centuries.

The idea of an ecumenical council was not new to 4th century Christianity with the first actually recorded in Scripture in Acts, called the Council of Jerusalem which helped to settle the question of who could be Christian and what the requirements for entry would be. So in fact it has a long history within Christianity and Judaism (the Jews used a council in the 2nd century to determine their final canon for the Hebrew Scriptures). The development of the council allowed Judaism and Christianity after it, to finalized the means of establishing authority and uniformity (orthodoxy). The norms fall under three titles: Scripture (both Hebrew and Christian), Tradition (both Jewish and Apostolic) and Magisterium (which is just a big Latin word for teachers – Rabbis and Bishops respectfully); Scripture as the written word, Tradition is the spoken words and sanctioned actions practiced but not ‘written down’ and Magisterium is the teaching/conserving body. Appeals to reason will often refer to one of these bodies.

Theology is not necessarily limited to these authorities, because it is the exploration of God using human intellect (both *a priori* reason and *a posteriori* experience), and as such is often brought into conflict with the established authority. In the end, any appeal, either theological or doctrinal must be made to these authorities.

Putting It All Together

Okay another huge one which really does not seem to cover the topic it professed to start with. Well, I can only say, get used to it. The concern here is that the Early Christian community

sought to integrate and protect itself within the larger Roman culture. It also sought to stabilize itself internally, creating a structure of leaders, based in the Faith, who were capable of and charged with determining the Faith *and* protecting that Faith.

So really this chapter is more about the settling of the Faith than it is about the Faith itself. The theological Truths about Christ, God and the sacred nature of the universe are being explored and shared, but while that sharing is leading to good things, more Christians, deeper understanding and development of the mysteries among others, it is also leading to bad things, schisms and strife within the faithful. Paul and the Apostles seek to herd and spread, calling the faithful to courage and steadfastness, cajoling them to right behavior and warning them of wrong thinking. But even after they have died, they live on. They continue to guide the Church with prayers and actions because they continue to have Jesus' ear and to hear direction from Jesus.

"It is my purpose also to give the names and number and times of those who through love of innovation have run into the greatest errors, and, proclaiming themselves discoverers of knowledge falsely so-called have like fierce wolves unmercifully devastated the flock of Christ."

Eusebius (~260-341), *Church History*

"The world was very old indeed when you and I were young."

G. K. Chesterton, *To Edmund Clerihew Bentley*

A Sampler of Heresies

Time	Name	Really Rough Soundbyte	Type	Proponents			
Late 1 st century	Docetists	Denied Humanity of Jesus	Christological	Basilides Valentinus Patripassians Sabellians			
	Gnostics	Diverse grouping of a movement which combined various ideas; Rejection of material world, among other things	Central Core Beliefs				
2 nd century	Ebionites	Denied Divinity of Jesus					
4 th century	Arians	Jesus was Created		Arius, Origen			
	Appollinarians	Divine Controlled the Human		Apollinarius			
	Monarchists	Jesus was Adopted					
	Modalism	No Trinity, 3 'modes' of God					
5 th century	Nestorians	Human Controlled the Divine		Nestorius			
	Eutychians	Both Natures Combined into a New Third					
	Monophysits	Only One Nature not two					
	Monothelitism	Compromise: Only one Will					
	Pelagianism	No Original Sin					

Table 8

The Early Middle

With the legitimatizing of Christianity within the Empire, a shift begins to take place in the nature of the theological exploration. And, in the vein of all good things must come to an end, so it is with the purely Roman Empire.

Church Economy

The word 'economy' does not sound like one you would use in reference to religious belief but at its root, it merely means 'the orderly interplay between the parts of a system or structure'⁵⁴ (*Collins English Dictionary*), meaning how a system fits together and works or in our case, what we might also refer to as 'Salvation History'. This is a history which speaks not to the modern understanding of history but back to our earlier understanding and what is most commonly referred to as "God's Plan". As Christianity becomes the 'world'⁵⁵, understanding this becomes a paramount concern for all involved.

Church History

The history of the Church at this time is probably over-simply reduced to *Christology*. And the name is significant. We do not have '*Jesusology*', but instead have a focus on the messianic (Greek: *christos*) or salvific aspects of Jesus, which asks the questions about the nature of Jesus' messiahship, and therefore about his very nature, and by final extrapolation, our own. Many of the Church's major problems and triumphs center about this issue. The Trinity, the Marian doctrines, the nature of the Church, salvation, Scripture, sacraments – everything orbits about Christ's nature. The earlier Apologists were brilliant thinkers and they laid a solid, philosophical groundwork for the theology to come. But this also brings us to the two camps on that subject: philosophy good for helping us to explain and expound – the 'handmaiden' of theology camp and philosophy bad – the all errors introduced through philosophical language camp.

In 313, after seizing control of Rome, Constantine and Licinius (in the East – who married Constantine's sister) sign the *Edict of Milan*, granting religious freedom *throughout* the empire. Most likely for the reason that by this time a large portion of the bureaucracy was Christian, and it is easier to run a government if you do not kill everyone running it. It also gave Christians legal rights and protections under Roman law. All this meant that Christians were not to be persecuted and that they had recourse under the law if they were. It also gave them the right of assembly, which brought the Church out of the underground (literally in some cases) into the assembly houses or *basilicas*.

In 323 Constantine defeated Licinius for control of the whole empire. At this same time the Church, now 'free' for 10 years, is being torn asunder internally by the Arian controversy (a denial of Christ's divinity), which in turn could sever the tenuous unity of the empire. In 325 Constantine calls the Ecumenical Council of Nicea (in the north of present day Turkey close to

⁵⁴ via Latin *nemein* to manage, from Greek *oikonomia* 'domestic management', from *oikos* house + *-nomia*.

⁵⁵ i.e. the Roman world.

the site of Constantinople) to finally settle the matter and bring full peace to the empire. From it arises (but not in finalized form) a creedal statement, known as the *Nicaean Creed*, which once again reminds us of the importance of Tradition, even at this late date.

The death of Constantine in 337 once again signals the beginning of the end for a singular, cohesive empire. If its strength as an empire was because of the single focus point of Rome, then its final split and division between Rome and Constantinople evokes the situation which Alexander's empire ended up – scattered and at odds with itself.

Church Fathers

As said, to retain that initial tenuous unity, Constantine called the Nicaean council to rely upon the many great theological minds at that period of time to solve the problem once and for all. This is certainly a political move, as much as the Edict of Milan was, but it is also more. If we can see Christology is the pivot of theology, then we might also see historical events as the pivots of Christianity. The world is still surrounded by the sacred; many people still rely upon the gods. At this point these issues are not intellectual issues (though they may be to some); they are becoming the fabric of ritual and Faith and therefore life. Normal people fight in the street over this; that is how important it is to everyday life.

These thinkers are called the *Church Fathers*. In this situation the word *Father* is used to mean a teacher of spiritual things. Patrology, from the Latin for *father* also known as *patristics*, is the study of these men. The tradition of the Fathers goes back to the 2nd century, and early on, bishops were considered 'Fathers in Christ'. In our case this term specifically applies those 'fathers' whose teachings (by now usually preserved in their own writings) were of particular import for determining doctrine. They follow on the heels of the Apostolic Fathers of the 1st and early 2nd centuries and their dogma. So technically, appeals to the Fathers are an appeal to Tradition; they are appeals stepping back through earlier Magisterium to Apostolic Teachings, which are held on to and passed on through the 'Fathers' to the 'present' time, whenever that might be.

As an example of the importance and impact of these thinkers, let us consider one such bishop, Irenaeus (130-202). Whenever we take up a Bible we touch his work. He wrote extensively on the subject and so played a decisive role in helping to fix the idea of a canon for the Christian Scriptures early on. It is easy for us, now, to think of Scripture – and the New Testament in particular – not only as the basis of the Church, but as something that fell from the sky in its present form – in English no less – and harder to remember that it was the Church that had to decide, early on, using Tradition, especially in the form of creeds, and its authority as passed on to the Magisterium, on what was scriptural and what was not.

Until Irenaeus, there was a vaguely discussed but unwritten, general agreement on which books were 'scriptural'. This operating mode based in common consent, was as you might imagine extremely weak. As noted, when philosophical thought began to be used for doctrinal purposes, dissensions and heresies inevitably arose. Making reference to a fixed and understood canon of Scripture was the only way of trying to settle what the actual Truth. But in the absence of a strong, agreed upon fixed canon it was all too easy to attack one's opponent by saying that his texts were 'corrupt' or 'unscriptural' (meaning non-canonical); and easy, without fixed *versions* of the Scriptures as well, to do a little fine-tuning of texts to bolster one's

own arguments. So Irenaeus, in the face of much opposition and some heresy, took it upon himself and went through all the available books that were generally considered 'scriptural', and all the possible candidates (such as the Gnostic, magical pseudo-Gospels, and the novel *Shepherd of Hermas*). His aim was not to simply declare each book as accepted or rejected under his own authority, because then his opponents could say that he merely trying to justify his own theology. Instead he started the tradition of biblical scholarship, giving reasons based on much research, for and against the canonicity of each book. Except for three of the short universal epistles, Irenaeus' canon is very nearly the final canon as accepted by the Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419 (under Augustine) and recertified at the Council of Trent in the 1500's.

As has been true since the beginning of time, it is this balance of Scripture and Creed (Tradition) under the understood authority granted by Christ which these 'Fathers' worked within and produced many of the basic understandings and proofs, as well as the very Scriptures upon which the Faith relies. This SOP reflects Paul's ideas of unity, dependence upon the teachings of the Apostles, as well as the adherence to the leaders appointed by those apostles to keep the Faith alive as well as pure.

The Man In The Middle

Speaking of Augustine (354-430), when we think of Fathers of this time, great minds like Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Athanasius or Jerome come to the forefront. But in the interest of time, we will concentrate the great theological mind of Augustine.

Augustine was the child of a mixed marriage – his mother, Monica, was Christian and his father was not – something still quite common even as late as the 5th century. Consequentially, while his mother prayed fervently for his conversion, he wandered through dissolute living, philosophies and belief systems. He settled, in his thirties, on the Greek philosopher Plato, especially as envisioned in what was known as Neo-Platonism and then finally Christianity, especially as proposed by St. Paul. He was eventually forced into becoming a priest and then the bishop of Hippo (in North Africa). Even in that path he wandered through at least one heresy (recall that doctrine is still somewhat unsettled at this time and many 'accepted' ideas are still floating about, only to later be considered incorrect) in spite of which he is considered one of the major Fathers of the Church. His genius comes through in his refiguring the thoughts of many earlier and contemporary theologians and in his adaptation of Plato's ideas and thinking to develop profound explanations for Christian beliefs and the development of several major Christian doctrines.

While the earlier apologists utilized philosophical thought to explain Christianity, Augustine as they say 'baptized' it, transforming it from secular, 'pagan' thought into 'Christian' thought. His musings moved reason and wisdom away from the indifferent fatalism they embodied at the time to be aspects of God, as Scripture indicates. He found within the Faith, congruent ideas, ones which gave deeper meaning and direction to Plato's more vague religious thinking. This is not a mere adaptation of Christianity to Platonism but a completion of Platonic thought within Christianity. Due to our creation in the image of God and sharing in the Body per the Incarnation of Jesus, the gifts of reason and God's wisdom have been given to humans in order to understand how to live correctly and make sense of the rational and emotional conflicts

within the world. Augustine wants to understand how God (and especially as revealed in Jesus) put things together, in other words, how to make sense of them in terms of God's gift of reason (of which Jesus is the archetype – the *Logos*). He wants to put the God given tools of the intellect to use. Like Jewish thinkers before him, Augustine is *practical*, more concerned with the solution of religious, ethical and moral problems than with those of pure speculation.

So what are 'practical' things to think about? Before his conversion Augustine started a club, if you will, for discussing ideas. The favorite topics at their gatherings were *truth, certainty, what was true happiness in philosophy, the problem of evil in a rational world* and finally *God and the soul*. From this we can see his attraction of Christianity with its dogmatic truths and fairly well understood Faith, its specific understanding of God and the relationship of human freedom and happiness (as well as suffering) tied directly into this specific Faith. So things like what is evil (sin), how are we spared evil (grace), and our own participation in them (human will) become the focus of many of his writings.

Augustine personifies the changing of the playing field from earlier apologists (realizing that he is a transitional figure between the apologists – he is still explaining Christianity to a world which is not Christian – and theologians – those explaining Christianity to a world which is mainly Christian). Whereas apologists strictly used Greek philosophy to help their pagan hearers understand Christian concepts and dogmas within concepts they knew, Augustine is using it to *produce* and refine Christian doctrine. He also stands as another one of those thresholds in religious thought. He dwells in that hinterland between the late Roman World (and all that implies) and the early Medieval World (and all that implies). He pulls the wisdom of the past forward into the time to come. In a way then, we can consider him as the last 'Roman', yet setting the ground work for Christendom to come.

Without Augustine, much of classical philosophy might have been lost. At the same time, Augustine rejects Aristotle in favor of Plato leading to a decline of non-Platonic thought – slowing its transition into Medieval times. Many see this period as the beginning of a decline in intellectual progress but they fail to see the thinking of the time, injecting modern bias into the rational and motives of these thinkers. Face it; Plato was just not as important as God. As Christianity rises to become the dominant religion, there is no need to focus on secular thinking – theology becomes the language of the time. As Metaphysics was the first science for Aristotle so it is for these thinkers. All science, all knowledge, all human energy is focused on the sacred, and as we have discussed again and again, and any knowledge or meaning only has merit in light of the sacred. As it is, more energy is directed at understanding God as revealed in Jesus than in the circulatory system. The limits and boundaries of a thought are placed within the sacred and Augustine reflects this thinking. To understand God is to understand the Universe.

The Middle In Man

Just as for Judaism, God is the center of all things; the one in whom "*we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28).⁵⁶ Humanity is God's greatest creation. Without humans, and more specifically without human will, the purpose of creation as well as the nature of evil in creation would be a moot point. Augustine takes on the questions about these things specifically because he is seeking to understand God and God's plan especially the 'why are we here' and

⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, this passage is a reference to a Greek thinker, Epimenides of Knossos (6th century BC).

‘why would Jesus need to come and die’ ones. He is not seeking human answers to life’s persistent questions, but to understand the answers which God has already revealed to us, and only as they reside with the Faith. He was the first to synthesize the doctrines of the Fall, grace, and free will.

So we start with the nature of Jesus. Jesus is the *Logos*, according to Paul and especially the evangelist John. This means that the divine, rational design of the universe has a face, and not just a face but a *human* face, and that face *represents* The Will (*John 10*) on earth. For the Greeks, the nature of the universe was that it *was*, that is, everything *already* existed even before creation (think back to the discussion of the creation myths in earlier chapters). So bring it forward. For Augustine, God is all there is and the only thing that always was. At the risk of over-simplifying this whole argument⁵⁷, according to Genesis, God creates everything out of nothing (in Latin *ex nihilo*) and that argument is good enough for Augustine because God is more than just *The Will*. God is Trinity. God is not only the potter but the creator of the clay. He accomplishes this through his very nature, which is *triune* (divided into thirds). The Father is Creator, the Son/*Logos*/Will is the vehicle of that creation and the Spirit is action of creation. So the Son (the *Logos*) is the means, as for the Platonists, for the *structure* of the universe. But, as the person of the Father is not limited to just being the Son, He can be responsible for all substance (the thing which makes something what it is). What this means is that God, or the Godhead if you will, does not shift from one form to another. God does not start out as Father and then stop being the Father to be the Son, and then become the Spirit after the Son dies. He is all three, always. As said, for Augustine the triune God means that there is no necessary explanation needed beyond them to understand the nature of the universe, even of all substance – God is and always was so it is perfectly within reason that He, as Father, Son, and Spirit, created all things from nothing.

But there is a struggle. Does that mean he also ‘created’ Jesus the God/man? The Trinity proves that Jesus was always *one with the father* (*John 10:30*) and the nature of creation requires the three persons in that one God. Okay but why would Jesus need to become human then, could he not have remained divine and just ‘looked’ human? The answer to this, simply put, is once again in the Trinity, in relationship. The Law puts humanity in intimate relationship with God. The Incarnation (Latin for ‘in-fleshing’) of the person of Jesus falls right into line with the nature of both God and of humanity, creating the most intimate relationship possible.

So, our relationship with God is central to the sacred nature of life and is the key to understanding Christ’s nature. To avoid or turn away from that relationship, its covenants and responsibilities, is called *sin*. God makes it clear that the first choice in the Garden of Eden against the relationship leads one to less and less freedom and therefore into more sin – that is a cyclic deeper severing of the relationship. Based on *Romans 5:12* Augustine states “*the deliberate sin of the first man is the cause of original sin*”⁵⁸ (*De Nuptiis Et Concupiscentia*); it is a hereditary stain.⁵⁹ For Augustine, that ‘first sin’ of Adam and Eve is the first journey of humanity into sin and the basis for continued sin. Its result seals it as part of our nature – death. Before we did not die, now we do. What does that tell us about our nature and God’s? It is clear that

⁵⁷ A risk I am apparently often willing to take.

⁵⁸ We can also see this is Psalm 51 “*Behold, I was born in guilt, in sin my mother conceived me.*”

⁵⁹ Recall also the Jewish idea of ‘the sins of the father are visited upon the heads of the sons’.

the eternal problem of evil is our fault because, like the Platonist's understanding, all of God's work is good (*Genesis 1*) making the only source of moral evil the poor exercise of our freewill (*City of God*).

Human freewill is not so much the choice for good or evil but the limitless capacity for good or for evil. It is a capacity which was held in balance; this absolute equilibrium existed in Adam but was destroyed after original sin. After the fall *"the will has to struggle and react against an inclination to evil, but it remains mistress of its choice"* (*Opus Imperfectum Contra Julianum*). In other words, in God's perfect creation, freewill was truly free, because it stayed in balance through the internal steadfastness built into us, our God-given desire to please God, and not through any work on our part. Again, this perfect freedom lost is *not the liberty of choosing between good and evil* (because with it we would always choose good and without it we could not help but sin) but the true freedom of doing God's will which *was calm and without struggle*. We can see this reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures: *"Listen, my people, I give you warning! If only you will obey me, Israel! There must be no foreign god among you; you must not worship an alien god. I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth that I may fill it.' But my people did not listen to my words; Israel did not obey me. So I gave them over to hardness of heart; they followed their own designs. But even now if my people would listen, if Israel would walk in my paths, in a moment I would subdue their foes, against their enemies unleash my hand."* (*Psalms 81*)

It is this combining of natures in Jesus which makes the difference. Jesus has that perfect balance of freewill – he is the new Adam (*Romans 5:14*) – and we are part of him and of the new creation also rebalanced by Jesus. But while restored by Jesus' death, we are still humans, and our nature still leans to sin. It is not Jesus' life which saves us but his death. Paul says that *"God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* (*Romans 5:8*). The difference is that while we have not changed, that balance nature has been restored to us. We are free.

Grace Period

Our undoing of freewill brought Jesus into the world. If sin is the perversion of the Will and evil is its result, what makes it all better? Non Christians blamed the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 on Christians because they had caused so many to turn away from the old gods who, apparently due to some form of nostalgia or rose colored glasses on the part of their adherents, had kept Rome safe until then. Augustine saw it differently; the old Rome was being swept away in favor of the New Jerusalem. Like Plato's Republic based in laws and run with Wisdom by philosopher kings, Augustine saw the perfect city (*City of God*) based in love and run by Christ the King, who was the *Logos*, Wisdom personified.

Humans are unable by themselves to keep the balance. Grace is the gift of God to help us on our way. We are able to take it or leave it. But only by humble submission of the human will to the divine will do peace and happiness come. Augustine does not see this as weakness, as might Epicurus, but like the Stoics or Plato, as an adjustment of our thinking to the natural flow of the universe. But he takes it further than the Stoics or Plato, everything depends upon Grace. In *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* he says that even our first desires for salvation are due to the grace of God, which therefore absolutely controls our 'predestination'. This is not

predestination without freedom, but more of the predetermined outcome that Paul speaks of. If we live wisely and with love then we will go to heaven. God's grace is sufficient to that task. We live truly free, beyond the Law and within Jesus, where the balance of freewill is re-established. Without grace we would not be inclined to live beyond original sin; without grace, especially as found in Jesus (his Body, his Church) we would be unable to even desire it.

So how does Jesus accomplish this? Why is it important for Jesus to have both God's Will and a human will? What does it mean? Genesis tells us we are created in 'the image and likeness of God'; Paul tells us that we are part of the Body, meaning that we share in the nature of Jesus, and as long as we remain part of the Body, we have the ability to be the Will of God as well (c.f. also *1 John 4:14-15*). So humans have within themselves both the divine spark and the freedom to act upon it. Remember that the Law is not a series of dictates but a relationship with God. God has placed within us every necessary understanding and ability to follow His Law and has fully reveal. We also have the ability to, because we have within us the divine spark, to make decisions, free decisions. Recall that under the Law, the Law which Jesus fulfills, freedom is not the freedom to do whatever we want or to decide this or that but the ability to do God's will. True freedom comes from the free action of living the Law. There is a distinct difference between the ability of humans to reason (judgment) and the will of God (conscience). To not follow that Law pulls one away from God, slavery to sin, and ultimately is death. To not follow the fulfillment of that Law, Jesus, has the same effect.

East And West

Augustine literally died with the wolf at the door, just days before the fall of Hippo in 430, as the Vandals were besieging the gates of the city. His legacy and his teachings are a powerful witness to the strength and transition of the Church but Augustine was not without his setbacks. Several of his teachings were rejected by the Church (a big one being some of his conclusions on predestination) and it is not for another 1000 years that they are taken up by some of the reformers.

This brings up a sticky subject. With the collapse of Rome, the Church steps into the void in the Western Empire. This is not seen by those who are living it to be the 'end of the Roman Empire' as we might view it today. For them, it was just another day, albeit one in which foreigners came in and killed and maimed. The political strength of Constantinople stands in contrast to the chaos of Rome. The Church just happens to be the largest Roman institution left standing, with the same necessity for communication and exchange as the Empire it continued. But at the same time the Church is not an efficient army and protecting its interests and the interests of its flock is not as easy as it was for the previous incarnations of Rome (or Ravenna by this time). The Empire is sundered but it is not seen as gone. Constantinople in the East continues to aide Roman interests in the West. East and West exchange law, theology and spirituality for the next 500 years. But it is precisely Rome's wane which begins to cause the jurisdictional problems which will come to bear at that time.

When Rome was one Empire, with Rome as its center, then there was a certain amount of uniformity. With the separation, it reflects earlier empires which had no central focus; divergence, sometimes based on necessity, begins to creep into the mix. Within a 100 years or so of Augustine's death (Council of Toledo, 587) the idea of the *filioque*, the 'procession' of the

Spirit from the Father *and the Son*, is introduced to the Creed in order to combat the Arianism which was still a plague upon the Faith. Again, in a heterodox world, these differences are often tolerated for centuries. But that is not the only example. Augustine himself causes friction between East and West, just as he is the source for it later within the West. Along with that come the jurisdictional rivalries and contentions, further driving wedges between the faithful in both the East and the West. Eventually the West rises again, and the East begins to wane only furthering the distance within the unified, orthodox, and catholic Church.

Liturgy

It is during this period that many of the liturgical practices are codified, [enshrined] in such forms as the Divine Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom, still practiced today in the same form, 1500 years later.

We can understand this explosive development of liturgy from our earlier explorations. Liturgy is the expression of Faith. It contains within it many of the teachings of the Faith acted out in symbol and sign. It connects the past to the present and the present to the past. The Jewish idea of 'memory', the action of making present here and now, figures heavily in the liturgy of the Church. The two aspects are based in two Jewish practices: synagogue and the Seder or Passover meal. The proclamation (do not forget this is myth and ritual) of the story, the Truths through the Word and some amount of explanation comes to us from synagogue and usually comprises the first part of the liturgical service. This teaching authority requires a priesthood, which also sets up the second part of the liturgy, what is known as Eucharist. These practices also reflect what is known from the earliest practices of the Church, in which they would attend synagogue and then retire for the *agape* meal (the love feast if you will). It is understood as *agape*, the highest form of the Greek word for love, because it brings forward the very love sacrifice of Jesus. When Jesus says, 'do this in memory of me' he is not asking for a secular trip down memory lane but the fullness of the sacred Seder ritual – making the sacrifice *real*, here and now. It also calls us to 'thanksgiving' (*eucharistia*), an action of praise and worship.

This means that for the Church, as for any religion, liturgy is central; it is the expression of all she believes and professes and acts upon. The Church centers around liturgical actions, even in daily life, as did the Romans – looking to worship and patronage, that direct connection with heaven.

Monasticism

Aside from doctrinal and liturgical standards, and in part because of them, a major portion of the stability of the Western Empire has its genesis within the monastic system which developed there. Most Eastern monastic traditions were individual or hermit based (call *anchorite* or *eremitic*). With Benedict of Nursia (480-547) in the West, the communal (*cenobite*) tradition becomes the norm. The West is becoming a weak, segmented society. Infrastructure begins to fail, raiding tribes disrupt trade and communication as well as lifetimes. Intellectual and cultural exchange begins to suffer. Into the void steps monks. With their commitment to work, learning and prayer pockets of civilization manage to keep hold or be restored in such faraway places as Ireland. The Faith, given such fertile fields took root and grew. Monks preserved liturgical

practices, books, and a certain amount of sanity, providing the foundation for a renewed Western civilization.

The Benedictines (as the followers of Benedict's 'rule' or guidelines are called) are basically semi-autonomous communities in contrast to later orders which tend to be more centrally organized. Each is the result of a mission, called a 'daughter house', from another established single community, or 'mother house', which sustains it until it is deemed to be self-sufficient at which time it is 'chartered' and becomes independent. This structure, along with the power, simplicity, and ultimately the consistency of Benedict's 'rule', creates a solid and compact oasis of Christianity and Christian learning for 500 years all over the world. As the authority of the Roman Emperors collapsed, the Roman Church began to take over many of the functions of government. Of note here is Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). Gregory was very keen on the spiritual and political stability brought about by charity (as taught by Jesus) and focused on relief of refugees, feeding poor widows and orphans, and ransoming captives. He also fought to maintain some stability, both doctrinally and liturgically, sanctioning what we now call *Gregorian Chant* – the basis for western music. Also, and probably most important here, per the mandate of Christ at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, he sent missionaries to convert everyone, especially the 'Barbarians', a task at which he was amazingly successful. Goths, Vandals, Saxons, and even Vikings eventually converted. This meant that the 'barbarian' tribes, rather than totally destroying Europe, began to play some role in preserving the achievements of Rome.⁶⁰ One of the main ways he accomplished this was by spreading the Benedictines everywhere.

The final aspect of Benedictines is tied to the self-sufficiency and to the rule – the monks must work as well as pray in order to support themselves. One of the many ways priors and abbots kept their monks busy and raised income was by having them copy books. Per the centrality of liturgy, abbeys had an internal need for liturgical books, like breviaries, Sacramentaries, and lectionaries, so they were well suited to the copying of texts. They also preserved many texts from antiquity, secular as well as religious or theological. The Irish particularly, with their penchant for languages, voraciously consumed and preserved any texts they came upon – especially in their missionary journeys about Europe.

Putting It All Together

What is the problem? This seems to be the question of this period. After the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists paved the way for Christianity by introducing it to the larger world, it becomes the task of the Fathers and Doctors (another term we will get to) to define, explain, and clarify the faith for the world.

That the Fathers, and Augustine in particular, have the ability to be misinterpreted or misused is a given. To say that the Fathers, Augustine in particular, have the ability to be misinterpreted or misused would be an understatement. But this in itself is the first statement to be made about theology versus doctrine. Theology is not doctrine, but is at the service of doctrine. Often people confuse the two, seeking out theological opinions which validate their personal beliefs. The confusion of belief or theological exploration with Faith, dogma, or doctrine is part and parcel of the problem of theology, and this period is its first poster child.

⁶⁰ This is also seen in the East as the Vikings begin to settle places like Moscow and Kiev in order to establish trade.

Through theological explorations Augustine produced clearer understandings of specific doctrines, but that does not mean that everything he thought about is doctrine. At this time (and really at all times) doctrine is not the responsibility of one theologian, but of many, in concert with the full Magisterial body of the Church.

Finally, with the legalization of Christianity and its movement to the forefront, the thinking becomes that human history would reflect salvation history. All of the struggles of before would recede into the background. The political and religious leadership would spend great efforts in spreading and maintaining the Kingdom of God here on earth, giving a peace 'not as the world gives' but which only Christ can give. The desire to meld human thought to divine Wisdom is just as strong a desire, and in fact becomes the basis for building human history.

"The pregnant dictum of St. Augustine – '*Greater is the authority of Scripture than all human capacity*' – was steadily insisted upon....But unfortunately it was very difficult to find what the 'authority of Scripture' really was. To the greater number of Protestant ecclesiastics it meant the authority of any meaning in the text which they had the wit to invent and the power to enforce.

To increase this vast confusion....It was insisted by leading Catholic authorities that [the Vulgate] was as completely a product of divine inspiration as was the Hebrew original. Strong men arose to insist even that, where the Hebrew and the Latin differed, the Hebrew should be altered to fit Jerome's mistranslation...."

Andrew Dickson White, *New Chapters in the Warfare of Science*, *Popular Science Monthly*, June 1895

"I will listen for what God, the LORD, has to say; surely he will speak of peace to his people and to his faithful. May they not turn to foolishness! Near indeed is his salvation for those who fear him; glory will dwell in our land. Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss."

Psalms 85:9-11

The Middle Middle: The High Middle Ages

With the collapse of the Empire, the Church steps into the void. For the next 600 or so years it becomes the stabilizing influence in the West; technically its history is the history of the West, and that history is completely aimed at bringing about the Kingdom of God. All intellectual activity becomes focused on the sacred, and per Augustine's *City of God*, on the meaning and purpose of humanity in the Kingdom. This is probably the last time where the profane and the sacred are truly in balance.

Is There A Doctor In The House?

Like others before it, the term 'Doctor of the Church' is a title received by a theologian on account of the great insight the whole Church has derived from their doctrine. In the early medieval times the doctrinal fab-fours of St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome received the title in the West and St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Athanasius, and St. Gregory Nazianzen in the East. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Anselm, and St. Peter Chrysologus were added to the list between the 16th to the 18th centuries with the likes of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Therese of Lisieux added in the 20th century. All in all, a total of 33 people have been recognized in the West by this title, with Therese being the latest in 1997

Orders

Benedictines were the first major Western 'order' (from the Latin *ordo* meaning number, row, rank, or the regular arrangement of something) of monastics, but there have been many more to follow. For our purposes two of the other major orders were Franciscan (after St. Francis of Assisi – 1181-1226) and Dominican (after St. Dominic of Osma – 1170-1221, also known as the *Order of Preachers* or the *Blackfriars*), both of which, along with the Benedictines produced many of the great philosophical and theological minds of the Middle Ages.

Pilgrims

These are not the ones you are thinking of, though there is a rock involved, in a sense. With the transfer of the bones of St. James the Apostle to Spain, the cult of saints moves out of just local areas and into the world-wide Church. As a statement to the understanding of Church as universal, and in some sense to the stability brought about by the Church in the West, masses of people began to take pilgrimages to 'holy sites' (many over-seen by monasteries), with a road, port, and way-station infrastructure still visible today.

Humanism

With this rise of 'lesisure' time, a greater sense of humanity is explored in theology and in just general studies. The term for this, *humanism*, is a misunderstood word which must be understood. Initially it merely means a concentration on things *human*, that is, the study of things which humans do specifically, considered somewhat aside from theology. Later it will

come to mean a great many things, but for now it is the concentration on the non-metaphysical liberal arts.

Anselm

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) is the widest-ranged Christian thinker between Augustine (354-430) and our next guest, Thomas Aquinas. Like Aristotle, Saint Anselm thought about everything, but like Augustine, he did so through the eyes of Faith. While the world is still seen as a sacred space, vestiges of paganism still roam the 'empire' and people began to turn to the Church's temporal power rather than its spiritual guidance. The West was returning to ascendancy and squabbles with the East over jurisdiction were rising. Even the ranks of believers are starting to jade to the politics and the wars of the era. Anselm himself, at the age of fifteen, desired to enter a monastery but could not obtain the consent of his wealthy father, who had more worldly designs for his son. Anselm reacted with some sort of psychosomatic illness and after his 'recovery' gave up this pursuit and turned to a somewhat more carefree life. Eventually, his mother died and his father's severity increased so Anselm took off, repented, and sought out his true calling at the Benedictine abbey at Bec, France where he began to teach and write. Anselm defined theology as '*fides quaerens intellectum*' or *Faith seeking reason* (or *understanding* depending on how you choose to translate *intellectum*). This battle cry, picked up from Augustine, and that deeply sincere monastic desire, were the driving forces in his life.

His prowess and spirituality increased and eventually his teaching brought him to the notice of the papacy where he was reluctantly appointed to the archbishopric of Canterbury in England (though he was born in North Italy, and lived in France, which shows you the renewing breadth of societal structures of both the rising nations and the universal sense of the Church). A notoriously difficult assignment, Anselm managed with grace and wisdom to settle many contentious run-ins with the crown and his fellow bishops. As said, the times were such that the mixing of spiritual and temporal power grew. Kings could meddle in the affairs of Church and the Church, along with an understood dictate to guide the earthly Kingdom, was beginning to take on ambitious, politically motivated individuals, often at the politician's behest. Anselm stands in the midst of this struggle. His zeal for the spiritual Kingdom meant that he continued to push William II (1056-1100) on matters of reform and the interests of his see. Perhaps as a left over from his relationship with his father and a monastic desire for things beyond this world, he spent great effort in pedagogy, perchance trying to wrest control back to the spiritual. He rarely backed down, though the king was also fairly effective in stymieing many of his efforts. Eventually he brokered a deal which muddled many of the lines between Church and State for centuries to come.

While his political/religious acumen is legendary, his spiritual brilliance covered the widest range of theological concepts. Where Augustine pulled theology out of the apologetic phase, Anselm pulled it into the modern time. This he accomplished through any means at his disposal. Apparently he had quite the gift (and reputation) for reasonable argumentation and persuasion. Anselm was eventually challenged to argue all of his points with only appeals to reason (wisdom from God) without appeal to outside authority (i.e. Scripture and Tradition). "[I was challenged that] *nothing whatsoever in these matters should be made convincing by the*

authority of Scripture, but whatsoever the conclusion, through individual investigations, should assert...the necessity of reason would concisely prove, and the clarity of truth would evidently show that this is the case. They also wished that I not disdain to meet and address simpleminded and almost foolish objections that occurred to me.” (Monologion: Prologue) While this may sound similar to the earlier Apologists, he is writing for people who *already* believe or at least have had explicit exposure to the ideas he is confronting. So like the apologists he has to rely on language outside of the authority of scriptural texts and tradition, but unlike them he is not just explaining but is offering ‘proofs’ which end any argumentation on the subject, showing the completeness of the Faith and God’s plan, rationally, physically, and spiritually.

While he is most famous in this phase for having articulated the so-called “ontological argument” for the proof of God’s existence, he is venerated for his doctrines among which is that on atonement, where he transforms the understanding from ‘debt/ransom’ to ‘satisfaction/honor’ (c.f. *Cur Deus Homo*). Basically, in the current thinking, the ‘debt’ St. Paul speaks of was thought to need to be paid to Satan, but Anselm argued that sin is against God’s infinite *justice* (partially because what could God owe Satan?), a debt so great that humanity could not even begin to pay it back. Humanity must be completely released from sin (think back to Augustine’s re-balancing by Christ), and Christ’s death is infinitely greater than all of humanity’s past, present, and future sins combined. God owes us (Creation) nothing – all is gift; it is us who owe Him everything, and Christ who over-balances the scales in our favor.

Still it is the ‘proofs for God’ for which he is probably most remembered (a shame). These are not proofs in the *scientific* sense but in the *logical* sense. Basically he argues an end-of-the-road scenario, with the proof being that God is the thing of which nothing greater can be thought (*quo maius cogitari non potest*). Anselm first asks whether such a thing can exist, that is, is there an end of the line to human thinking. He takes as his clue the Fool of the *Psalms* ‘has said in his heart that there is no God’ (*Psalms 14*). So the opposite of foolishness, reason, must show that there *is* a God. We can tie this in with the above arguments, as nothing is greater than God, the Creator *ex nihilo*, of which even Satan is a part. God controls Creation – even Satan, as the Garden story tells us. Still free will is not diminished because it is part of God’s justice, the over-whelming gift of love which we call life.

Proof

Speaking of proof, now is probably as good as any to address that simple question. For the most part, Anselm does not inhabit a world which needed ‘proof’ of God; everything it understood was in terms of the existence of God. God was the Creator. In Christ “*we live and move and have our being*” (*Acts 17:28*). Jesus was God. The Church is the visible Body of Christ, both on earth and in heaven. Proof therefore is not a problem. The Mystical and miraculous are not questioned within the profane world because it is surrounded by the sacred – it is the Kingdom of God, and we participate in that Kingdom.

Still, the intellect seeks satisfaction. Anselm’s bow to humanism, with his ‘proofs’ can be seen as outside of this understanding – as it is today. Dun Scotus’ (1265-1308) later proof is not one-upmanship, but is a continuation of Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum*. Dun Scotus’ thinking (c.f. *Opus Oxoniense*) is merely more broadly based, being more based in the

philosophical concept of 'cause'. God, as the Creator, infinite against the finite Creation, is the Prime Cause. Simply put⁶¹, because there cannot be an infinite regression of causes there must be a 'first cause'; that first cause must be perfect, that is, without dependences (dependence being an imperfection) of any kind, once again proving that there must be a first cause because of the *possibility* of a first cause. Finally, all events in the universe follow a similar design, so the first cause is the pattern upon which all other causes rely. Basically it is a further and broader version of Anselm's arguments.

Islam

Part of the reason for this upswing in thought is that during this time the two-edged sword of Islam arrives. On the one edge, the physical and spiritual defense of the 'empire' is at stake, both of which spur deeper and broader demands upon theology. On the other, some of this expansion of thinking as manifested in Anselm and Dun Scotus is due to the re-arrival on the Western scene of copies of the works of earlier Greek thinkers. With Augustine, the West pretty much relied on the thinking of Plato to provide a language for doctrinal exploration. Aristotle begins to wane because there is no perceived need to keep him around, as no one was really able to reconcile some of his thinking with Christianity, as they could do with Plato. But with the deepening of thought through the Middle Ages, a different breed of theologians develops, what are known as 'Scholastics' from the Latin *schola*, basically meaning 'school'.

Aquinas

The greatest of the Scholastics, in fact the one almost exclusively associated with the term, is Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Thomas was born in central Italy in sight of the home base of the Benedictines, Monte Casino. At an early age he began studies and was a product of the newly developing system of university education. He studied with Albert Magnus among others, entered the Dominican order, and finally ended up in Paris. It is the perfect storm of learning. Theological and philosophical thought is being revisited. The (re)introduction of Aristotle meant that the questions which had seemed to be answered for so long were being re-examined in a new light, especially with the rise of 'science' (at least as Aristotle understood it as *causal knowledge*). Because he is driven by the same things which drove Augustine and the other Church Fathers and Councils before him – the idea that any re-questioning needed to be put to rest in light of new thinking – this is his motivation, not the need to debunk earlier thinking.

So while some of Thomas' thought may have been seen as 'radical' at the time, he was following closely in the footsteps of those before him, answering the same questions in a different way and was not about abandoning earlier thought. Think of it more as providing yet another nail into the coffin of doubt. But due to his reliance on Aristotelian thought he also explored questions which were of a nature that perhaps would never be asked under the Neo-Platonic/Augustinian schools. For Thomas, though he used new means, did not lose sight of the Church or the Faith: truth is known through reason (natural revelation) and Faith (supernatural revelation).

⁶¹ Once again: very simply put....

His great works *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* earned him both praise and ridicule but are without question, not just standards but rank among some of the most important and comprehensive theological works in history. Another work titled *Compendium of Theology*, unfinished with his death, is a concise and ‘popular’ retelling of his *Summa* work. It is somewhat amazing in light of the fact that the now four volume *Summa Theologica* was originally intended as *introductory* material before students took his class, making the *Compendium* an introduction to the introduction. With that in mind we get a sense of the mind of Aquinas.

The other major work *Summa Contra Gentiles* (where Gentiles really means ‘unbelievers’), was written as an apologetic work for the Jews and Moors in Spain. One of its important arguments is that no empirical truth (science) is opposed to revealed truth (Faith). This is perhaps the genius of Thomas. Aristotle’s empiricism (that knowledge comes through experience and the senses) is applicable to both empirical, human reason and Divine Reason. Thomas takes pains to explain the difference between the human and the divine, but at the same time acknowledges that, per revelation, both are present within humans. He does not lose Augustine’s and Anselm’s Platonic idealism (the fact that knowledge has a universal, external aspect aside from sensual experience), but he extends it into the empirical human realm. Plato, as an ‘idealist’ saw the world as a reflection of perfect ‘Forms’, which gave shape and form to ‘real’ things. Aristotle was more of a ‘realist’, that is, that the thing in itself gives definition to the overall idea. Thomas sees the two as complimentary, both necessary for human understanding.

We can see this in his introductory comments of the *Summa Theologica*, where he ‘proves’ that, alongside the knowledge which natural reason gives, Revelation also is *necessary* for salvation. Primarily, because, while we can grasp physical death, it there is no way to know the *supernatural end* to which voluntary acts are ordered and secondly, because, without Revelation, even the truths concerning God which could be proved by reason would be widely known “*only by a few, after a lot time, and with the admixture of many errors*” due to the aforementioned deficiency of judgment. Only after revealed truths have been accepted, can the mind then proceed to understand them and, from them, to draw conclusions. This means that theology is a science because has its ultimate basis in principles that are certain. Similar to Aristotle’s understanding of metaphysics, metaphysics/theology is the first science because the object of this science, the end for which we engage in theology, is God. All other things are considered only in so far as they relate to God. So, in keeping with those before him, he argues that reason is used in theology not to prove the truths of the Faith (which are completely without question on the authority of God), but to *defend*, explain, and deepen our understanding of those revealed doctrines.

Reason, will, Hope, and Faith all grind together. There is no separate categories, no point at which the human is separate from the divine. So the first aim of theology is to help us to know “*God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the Beginning of all things, and the End of all, especially of rational creatures*”. Only after that and only in light of that do we examine anything to do with humanity – and that only then in terms of “*the rational creature’s advance towards God*”. And of course all of this must be understood in terms of the progression of humanity ultimately to God through “Christ, Who, as Man, is the way by which we tend to God.” As we can see, while using human reason to explore these topics, he is not concerned

with the exercise which Anselm dallies in of using reason alone. Love is the ultimate, and really does not need to be explained; 'God is Love' John tells us and so really the only things we have to deeply understand are the other cardinal virtues of Faith and Hope. But these are not things to be called into question, merely understood, and then put into practice. "...*Faith has to do with things that are not seen and Hope with things that are not possessed.*" (all cites are from *Summa Theologica*)

Bonaventure

The Franciscan Giovanni di Fidanza, aka Bonaventure (1221- 1274), was a contemporary and friend of Aquinas. A scholar in Paris, like Thomas, he was appointed, in 1257, to Minister General of the Franciscans (something akin to 'pope' of the Franciscans). So, like Anselm before him, his efforts became divided between theology and secular concerns. Still, he produced works of magnitude, mysticism, and gentleness, not in a form like Thomas' *Summa* but mainly in spiritual works, lectures, and homilies. And whereas Thomas's understanding of Aristotle was very precise, Bonaventure's was much more general, working in broad strokes, much like this work. Bonaventure is probably best categorized as an Aristotelian in his philosophical principles, but Augustinian in his conclusions. The truths which it reveals, according to his view, are peculiarly adapted to influence the rational and emotional drives within us, and so he too regards theology as a *practical science*.

Aristotle distinguished *practical science* – concerned with human actions like politics and ethics – from *theoretical science* – concerned with knowledge like physics, mathematics and metaphysics. Bonaventure distinguishes Faith, by which God works through grace, from both philosophy and theology, which work through the human mind (though even there God is not absent). Theology is the perfection of the sciences because it addresses both sides, both the practical and the theoretical. In and of themselves neither theoretical knowledge nor practical deeds get to the center of the moral life, which is love – both the "affection" of love and the theological virtue of Charity (also called 'Love'). Within us, theology is active, that is, the pursuit of truth is part of divine worship. There is therefore a distinct relation to reason and Faith. Therefore, all the sciences are but the handmaids of theology.

Reason has the ability, completely on its own, to imperfectly discover some of the moral truths which form the groundwork of the Christian system; we can see this in statements made by other religions or by philosophers. Like all mysteries though, it requires divine revelation to come to complete understanding and to know all of the other doctrines. Logical reasoning must be supplemented by prayer and exercise of the virtues, that is, putting it right with God thereby disposing it to openness to the truth, and with any luck rendering it fit to even rise even to ecstatic union with God, and that is the key. The supreme end of life is to be one with God, and all we are should be directed there. It cannot be entirely reached in this life but remains as a hope for the future. So in this, the mind plays an important role and we have the ability though the grace and the nature of Creation to rise up from the imperfect and purely physical knowledge of God, through wonder and awe at the sensual world, through rational exploration and finally through joining to the mind of God, pure intellect to full understanding.

Bonaventure's writings manifest his profound respect for tradition. Still, to be sure, Bonaventure like all the Scholastics and as noted many theologians before him, occasionally put

forward opinions not strictly kosher in regard to questions not yet defined or clearly settled. Once again, this does not diminish their efforts or call into question all of their thought; it also, however, does not mean that everything they wrote can be used for argument against certain doctrines or as justification for those arguments. Arguments are always ultimately subject to Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, all of which are the true measure of the profundity or applicability of any thought.

Bonaventure was particularly noted in his day as a man with the rare ability to reconcile diverse traditions in theology and philosophy. He was able with gentleness and humility to unit different doctrines in a synthesis cemented with his personal notion of knowledge of the truth as the road to the love of God. Whether it was on subjects of theology, jurisdiction, mendicant orders versus secular clergy – you name it, he had influence and was respected. Speaking of respect, even in Islam, in a return of the favor St. Bonaventure was widely regarded by early Muslim thinkers as one of the greatest Christian theologians.

Augustine Versus Aquinas

No this is not the fight of the century, though perhaps there are those who wish to make it so century after century. Simply, Augustine points more toward Platonic and Aquinas toward Aristotle. But we saw that really there is no fight of idealism and realism in the minds of these men. While human judgment is lacking, it is perfected in Christ within conscience. [Bonaventure and St. Thomas, while in a sense the complement of the other, were of a different bent of mind; each had qualities in which he excelled; each supplied what the other lacked. Thomas was analytical (something being true by definition) in his approach, Bonaventure synthetical (something being true via construction of perceptions and observations); Thomas was 'rational', Bonaventure was more 'touchy-feely'; Thomas was the Christian Aristotle, Bonaventure a true Augustinian; Thomas was the teacher of the scholarly arts, Bonaventure of the practical life; Thomas enlightened the mind, Bonaventure inflamed the heart; Thomas extended the Kingdom of God by the love of theology, Bonaventure by the theology of love.

Putting It All Together

This time sees the stabilization of the West, and a movement away from the feudal system and into kingdom building. The kingdoms of England and France benefit from location and a great desire of the popes to settle Christianity into these areas. The German princes do not coalesce in the same manner and Italy remain torn asunder by wealthy principalities and struggle against outside forces intent upon outright control of the peninsula. Christian Spain, cut off from the support (and woes) of the rest of Europe, begins to have trouble of its own with the expansion into the West of Islam.

What we really see in these thinkers is the growing sense of humanity, manifesting itself in *humanism* and the offshoot of that, 'scientific' thinking produced by exposure to Aristotle's writings. The Rise of rationalism and a basis in *skepticism* (from Greek *skepsis* meaning 'enquiry'), the practice of starting as if one does not have any knowledge of something. So Anselm has 'proofs' for God, and Aquinas begins his exploration with the question of God.

"No matter how simple a man may be, the obvious cannot go on astonishing him forever."

Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

"The end of all my labors has come. All that I have written appears to me as much straw after the things that have been revealed to me."

Thomas Aquinas (from a letter)

Schism and Renewal

When one looks at the nature of Christianity, one must understand its roots, but it must also understand its branches. The world in which Anselm was born was different than the in which he and Aquinas lived, for the simple reason that by then the East and the West had finally sundered; there was no longer a fully universal Church.

The Not-So-Great Great Schism

There exists a liturgical phrase that goes “...that from East to West a perfect offering may be made”. The sense of the Church as universal (*catholic*) and as encompassing all loyal Christians (*orthodox*) is bound up in this idea of “from East to West”. From east to west is the direction and track of the sun through the sky and is therefore representative of ‘everywhere’, as Christ is the sun and he is everywhere and at all time. It is ironic that the split of East and West creates a situation where the Son has trouble ‘moving’ from East to West. This is known officially as the ‘Great Schism’ because it was a sundering of Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

The proper terms ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Catholic’ have already been somewhat explored, but here they have very specific meaning and taking a moment can really help to make the differences clear. *Orthodox* implies static, once-and-for-all understandings of things. It seeks stability over change, with the understanding that once a matter is settled it is not open for more discussion. This means that the Truth is the Truth and it presents itself as a solid foundation upon which to act. *Catholic* implies a far-ranging, dynamic, updatable understanding of solid truths. It seeks outreach and adaptability over static understanding, meaning not that the Truth is open to constant interpretation but that it presents itself as a living dynamic Truth to each generation and situation.

At the risk of great harm and trivialization⁶² we can reduce all of the reasons for the Great Schism down to two main factors: *Jurisdiction* and *Theology*. The two examples of them are Papal authority (pope being the bishop in Rome) and the ‘*filioque* clause’ added to the Latin translation of the Nicæan Creed. First, the idea of jurisdiction, some of which we have already covered (*Chapter 12*). Initially there were only a few ‘patriarchies’ Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria which had jurisdiction over the ‘metropolitans’ or the churches in all of the other cities surrounding them. Eventually Jerusalem (the sentimental favorite) and Constantinople (the capital of the Eastern Empire or *Byzantium*⁶³) were added to the list. Each of the original three had some ‘claim’ to jurisdiction in that they were major centers of learning and population; this all made sense in terms of the hierarchical nature of the episcopate. Rome had the additional claims of the death place for Peter *and* Paul as well as being the jurisdictional capital of the whole Empire, until it was split by Constantine.

With that split and the rise of Constantinople (established around 330) in opposition to Rome, squabbles naturally developed over the control of the Catholic Orthodox churches (i.e.

⁶² But when has that stopped us before?

⁶³ While we speak of East and West and Roman and Byzantine these distinctions are somewhat fluid; for example southern Italy remained part of the Byzantine Empire until it was conquered by the Lombards.

which bishops were over which diocese, etc.). Temporal jurisdictional concerns do not mix well with spiritual ones. As Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria fell to the Muslims starting in the 7th century these contentions became more prevalent. Sees and churches do not disappear just because the Muslims occupy the areas. Which patriarch had authority? There was some precedent for Rome, where at times over the years all had turned to her for settling doctrinal matters⁶⁴, but did doctrinal authority extend to jurisdictional authority? Even this precedent was called into question when Constantinople began to rise in offset to Rome's decline in power. An example was the unopposed establishment of courts which gave Constantinople a broad legal jurisdiction throughout the empire. The mixing of legal and spiritual lines and power, especially with the growing external pressures being exerted on the West, led to a decline in Roman influence outside (and to a degree inside) of the empire. Eventually claims of Ecumenical Patriarch were made by both parties which sat well with neither; Rome in decline was seen as grasping at a last vulgar bid for power and Constantinople in ascendancy was seen as the young upstart.⁶⁵

Poisoning The Well

But other than jurisdictional wrangling, what other impact did it have? The aforementioned jurisdictional structure meant that a certain amount of diversity existed in and was tolerated by the magisterial leaders. Heresy was fought and suppressed, but practices and some teachings, while were not universally held, were still 'tolerated' at some level. One such was the *filioque* (Latin meaning 'and the son') clause added to the Nicene Creed during the Council of Toledo in the 6th century. The Arian questioning of the divinity of Jesus and the translation of the word 'procession' in light of several passages in the Gospel of John lead to some 'confusion' or if you prefer 'disagreement' about the 'procession' of the Spirit.⁶⁶ The West decided to settle both issues by adding *filioque* to the *Latin translation* of the Nicene Creed (it is not part of the original Greek). This may not seem like much but understanding the importance of creeds is vital. Once again: the Creed, as the measure of orthodoxy, is seen as important as Scripture for profession, transmission, and regulation of the Truth. Though tolerated for centuries while theologians wrestled with the subtleties, it eventually became a poster child for the problems of the East and the West, but even then it was still not a deal breaker.

In due course, when all of the factors began coming to a head, demands for final answers on such things as jurisdiction and theological differences were made and were pressed until satisfaction was rendered. Briefly, and without a lot of explanation on my part, in 1054, excommunications were issued for individuals which became understood as extended to everyone and 'normal' communication ceased. While politico/religious cooperation continued on both sides before and after the schism, isolation drove a wedge between all of the parties. Eventually the Byzantine Empire became surrounded by Muslims and began to decline in power as control of trade routes shifted and Christians in the area became outnumbered by Muslims. The West, finally out of the throes of invasion and plague began to regain its intellectual legacy

⁶⁴ Recognized during the period of the first seven Ecumenical Councils from 325 to 787.

⁶⁵ One avoids the euphemism 'young Turk' for obvious reasons....

⁶⁶ Chapter 14 has Jesus seeming to ask the Father for the Spirit (John 14:16) and Chapter 15 has Jesus sending the Spirit from the Father (John 15:26) whereas Chapter 20 has Jesus breathing the Spirit out (John 20:22).

as well as some juicy trade routes and trade agreements with the Muslims (another slap at Constantinople). Feeling a sense of power again the West began asserting its jurisdictional rights once more, and felt empowered to save the world once again: a little travelogue we like to call *The Crusades*.

The Crusades that took place over the years were of mixed results, except perhaps for the Fourth which had the effect of sacking Constantinople in 1204. This had the effect of opening up Constantinople for the Muslims to be able to rename it Istanbul, which as you might imagine has left a bad taste in the mouth of the Orthodox for the last 800 years or so.

Left to their own devices for so many years, East and West developed many separate traditions and practices. As West began to coalesce into the Catholic Church we recognize today, the East remained segmented in the various national churches we see today. These would include Greek, Russian, Serbian, and Coptic in Egypt among others.

Divining Rod

The West, with its emphasis on developing 'intellectual' and theological concepts (over what we would consider now as 'scientific'), adaptability, and missionary zeal succeeded in spreading into areas all around the known world whereas the East had to hunker down and protect itself from what it perceived as a threat from a growing Muslim (and others) population, the same sort of things the West had contended with for centuries. The West focused on dynamic spreading of the Gospel, often 'adapting' local customs and beliefs, broadening the understanding of 'catholic'. The East focused on preserving the 'orthodoxy' of Christianity from all threats. The evangelical spread of the Catholic Church into the traditional Orthodox areas was seen as proselytizing and an invasion of the sovereignty of the Orthodox churches. And the farther that the Roman Church spread the larger the jurisdictional area became.

We can see the effects of these policies in the churches that exist today. Orthodoxy (like Greek and Russian) has shrunk down to small populations whereas Roman Catholicism has spread around the world. This is not a condemnation or commentary on Orthodoxy, as that expansion has a dark side, with many heresies and controversies rising out of such a dynamic, non-orthodox theological approach. Coupled with the intermixing of the spiritual and temporal power which both East and West practiced, power conflicts arose that continued on in the West long after the fall of the East, with Kings making bishops and Popes making kings. Monasteries, havens for those wishing to step back from the world became cities for wealthy children, with abbots wielding great temporal, economic, and spiritual power. The unity of the East and West was never really a question until the division of the empire by Constantine. There certainly were disagreements and refuge given to exiles of controversy, but there remained an understanding of unity. The unity rested in an understanding of authority and collegiality in the Church. While ecumenical councils point to the unity of the Church they also speak to the autonomy of churches within the Church.

Re-Form

Many things came from this split, and many attempts have been made over time to reconcile the differences and re-form the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Two endeavors of note are the Council of Lyons in 1274 brokered by Bonaventure (and on the way

to which Thomas Aquinas fell ill and died) at which the Greek and Latin churches were (briefly) reconciled, and the Council of Florence begun in 1431 which successfully negotiated reunification with several Eastern Churches (known now variously as the *Eastern Catholic* or *Byzantine Rite* Churches), mainly in exchange for what the Byzantine emperor could no longer provide: protection against the Turks. One final effect of this Council was the utter rejection by the Russian Orthodox Church of the West *and* the East, a division which also exists even to this day. Western military assistance to Byzantium never materialized, resulting in the final fall of Constantinople in 1453 and a truly final break with the West.⁶⁷

Out of all this we must pull the fact that for over 10 centuries the Church stood as one and that even for four centuries more is stood at least in solidarity and the six after that in an uneasy truce at best. It is a mistake to see the Church as a merely Western Invention, even though the character that most are familiar with is Western in nature. It is also a mistake to see it as an invention of Constantine, as the measures which he enforced were already in place. The line of the Church has not broken in 20 centuries even though it has been fragmented; East and West still share many Scriptural, Tradition, Magisterial, doctrinal, and spiritual commonalities.

The Late Middle

How does the Church fare after such a cataclysmic event, especially as a pre-cursor for the splintering to come? “Very well, thank you” is the most likely reply. On the upside, Europe is crawling out of feudalism; on the other hand it is caught in the throes of nation building, with the Western Church is beginning to take on a somewhat nationalistic character reminiscent of the Eastern Churches but mixed in with politics. Western architecture and art hits unfathomed heights, and yet the university system is pulling away from direct association with the Church.

Still, the everyday believer continued to be surrounded by the sense of the sacred. Music, drama, literature (like the universities) are beginning to be separated from the Church, but they still relied on sacred themes and motifs. Nonetheless behind this, with the rise in study of the liberal arts the rise of humanism as the idea that human reason and experience have merit and a bit of self-sufficiency begins to take hold. God reveals himself in works of nature and human reason. Nature as well as ritual leads one to God.

A Laugh A Minute

Several factors from this period give us this insight into the mind of the time. The first, literature, shows the growth of the vernacular (common tongue) as the medium for writing. The first major work in Italian, Dante’s (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy*, the massive poem narrating a journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, breaks onto the scene with its message of mastering one’s own nature by submitting to the commands of human reason and sacred Truth wrapped up in an epic tale which still influences thinking about heaven, purgatory, and hell to this day. It presents, in poetic form, a vision, a spiritual journey, a commentary on life, politics, and psychology, and a synthesis of the then still revolutionary theology of St Thomas Aquinas. Chaucer’s (1343-1400) *Canterbury Tales*, in English, with their tongue and cheek look at laity,

⁶⁷ Some hold this failure/success to the sole efforts of Mark of Ephesus, the lone Eastern bishop who in the defense of orthodoxy did not sign the decrees of Florence – he is considered a Saint in the East but not in the West.

clergy, and religious, as well as the whole pilgrimage trade shows us a growing sense of 'familiarity breeding contempt'. Petrarch with his notion of the continuity between classicism and Christianity, seal the ideas of humanism and individuality outside of a completely theological framework.

A Plague On Both Your Houses

About this time, the next factor hits Europe with a double whammy: starvation and plague. With the collapse of feudalism and the rise of cities, what little land management there was fell by the way-side. The growing populations of the cities, unable to feed themselves and dependent more and more on less and less farmers were further ravaged by a run of really bad weather, which worsened the already meager crop output. In a population weakened by starvation, the Black Plague (1348-1359) ran rampant through the wet, crowded, poorly designed cities and towns, decimating the population of Europe and bringing the final nail into the coffin of feudalism and re-solidifying the metropolitan nature of Europe.

Which brings up what until now was not a schism: the sacred and science. Religion seems unable to stem the tide of evil. Many practices which are nowadays labeled 'medieval' surprisingly got their start during this medieval period. Many of the actions now labeled as superstitious or ignorant began as appeals to the sacred. The 'science' of this period (per the Aristotelian and therefore Scholastic definition) depended upon metaphysical explanations and therefore metaphysical solutions. A deep devotion to the sufferings of Christ, an uptake in concern with eschatological things, especially the Book of Revelation, physical mortification for the sake of holiness, as well as an understandable concentration on unworthiness, sin and death among other things, increases setting a stage for later criticism.

Based in the ineffectiveness of human compassion, human rationality is seen as the solution.

Marco...Polo...

Probably in a bid to get out of town, this period also sees an explosion of exploration. Italian merchants, establishing dominance on both land and sea, open up the Far East not only to trade but to Christianity. The Continents and island of America come into sharp focus and become added to the map of the world, which also shift many of the classical ideas and notions about the earth.

Jean D'Arc

Back home, England and France are the two truly functional powerhouses in the West, albeit in a kind of incestuous kind of way. Still they are in internal turmoil by rival claims to jurisdiction by both the English and the French crowns. The Hundred Years war takes a toll on both countries just in case there would be too many people for the Black Death to kill later.

Which bring us to strange bedfellows: miracles and politics. If one examines the canon of saints from this period, one sees an interesting conglomeration. There are many levels of political and religious reformers, education and poverty driven ministries, but we will take a moment and look at two, not necessarily in historical order. One a young French girl the other a gallant who even gave the French pause; both of whom seems to blur those lines for some and cross those lines for others

At the age of 13, Joan of Arc after much understandable resistance, convinced the heir to the French throne Charles, that God and His saints had spoken to her in visions and sent her to specifically save France from England during that same Hundred Years' War. She led the French to several military victories over the English in 1429. Joan was eventually captured by the English, abandoned by the French and burned at the stake in 1431 as a witch, or in retaliation for all of the English losses she incurred – take your pick. Born into poverty, she never learned to read or write though she was skilled in sewing and spinning. Her ardent faith, simplicity, and honesty made a favorable impression on the learned churchmen who examined her initial claim. She is considered a mystic full of faith and vision, whose noted piety struck even her English judges and gained her a lot of sympathy. Eventually championed by the French, the universal Church 're-tried' her in a later more favorable time and all, including the English, now honor her as a saint.

Thomas a'Becket

England had a legacy created by Anselm. The compromise which allowed Anselm to return from exile and saved Henry from excommunication became the model for settling similar disputes in other countries. Basically it gave the Church power over the bestowal of the episcopal staff and ring, the symbols of *spiritual jurisdiction*, but left the king with practically undiminished control over the selection of bishops and the *temporal jurisdiction*. Thomas Becket (1118-1170) was the close personal friend and subject of the first Henry so much so that it was said that there was but one heart and one mind between them.

Thomas was brash and ambitious, and eventually resolved himself to a career in the Church. Thomas was appointed the archbishop of Canterbury by Henry who perhaps saw in this kindred spirit an easy ally in all of his 'reform' desires. It is possible that Becket's influence was responsible, in part, for the admirable reforms which Henry enacted, namely, his measures to put in place more equitable dealing for all his subjects by establishing a uniform and efficient system of law. But it was not so for many other attempts by Henry which affected Becket directly. Thomas seems to have 'gotten religion' suddenly, and began, like Anselm before him, to take deep and abiding interest not so much in the king's favor as that of his see. Eventually he was murdered in his own cathedral by four knights who took a bit too seriously a passing statement by the king that he wished to be rid of him. It is accepted that Thomas was killed because he too often sided with the pope instead of the king. Unfortunately for Henry, Becket's murder enraged the common people who deemed him a martyr and they lashed out against the king which weakened him in his power struggle with Rome.

From this we can see the difference in the politico/ecclesial power structure between Anselm and Thomas. As much trouble as Anselm was, there would never have been an attempt to kill a cleric. But time shows the degradation of Church standing against the state. As an unforeseen effect of this weakening of Church by the State, even the king is challenged and that great capitulation of John in 1215, the *Magna Carta*, enshrined the idea of the separation of Church and State and additionally limited the Church's power.

Papal Decline

Caught in the fracas between much more powerful kings, the papacy and its jurisdictional concerns becomes embroiled in Italian, French, German, and some English political machinations. With kings controlling many of the bishoprics and abbeys and therefore much of the Church's properties, reform became more and more difficult, with most efforts centered mainly in local areas through local councils without ecumenical (universal) appeal or authority. Without the strong, central influence of the Pope, reform in the West became a patchwork quilt of the good and the bad, the seams of which were easily ripped. Eventually, the French king, Philip IV (1268-1314), backed by other external groups, and partially for 'protection of the papacy', forced the Pope to give up control of civil affairs and after the election of an inside man, move to Avignon, France. The following popes were Frenchmen. People began to think that the papacy was subordinate to the French king and therefore had no bearing or authority.

The earlier necessary uptake of authority by the papacy ended with the confusion of temporal authority with moral authority and weakened the papacy almost beyond repair. The glories of the art, music, architecture, theology, and literature that the Church had sustained and nourished, withered as humanism supplanted spiritual authority. The Church, which had become the world was now becoming subject to it. Eventually a further schism took place with the eventual election of a second pope, in opposition to the Avignon papacy, which caused a third pope to be elected, as an alternative to the other two. Eventually the schism was solved with the deposing of those three and the election of Martin V (1417), who restored the papacy to Rome.

As an interesting side note, this period of time became known as the *Babylonian Exile*.

Putting It All Together

East and West; the loss of unity is incalculable. The questioning of the legitimacy of authority begins a chain reaction. The World changes; the rigidity of ritual and creeds sometimes cannot overcome the ambitions of humanity which seeks to supplant God's will with their own. The limits of spiritual power in the world, the call for love and compassion can be twisted in the desire and disorder of temporal power. When the Church was small and only had to handle the affairs of the Church and not the affairs of State, the world's influence was slight. The expansion of human understanding and exploration brings the Church into direct confrontation with the profane and challenges the understanding of the Kingdom.

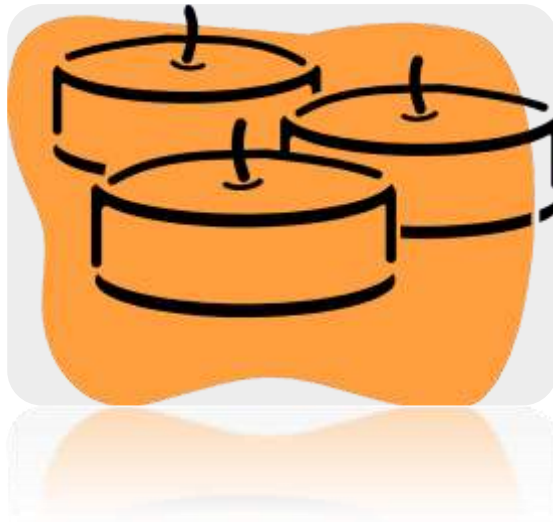
The schisms of this period help to define the growing disorder of the Church in the world, fragmenting and weakening its spiritual authority. With the questioning of authority comes the confusion of determining what the true anchor is. But still, we can see both sides: the positive effects of this period and the negative effects. Each advancement has a boon and a cost: universities; liberal arts; laws; the state system, and nationalism, as well as some attempt at separation of church and state; cities as commercial rather than political and religious centers; a history of ceaseless borrowing, adaptation, and change: whole peoples, once separate like the Romans, Franks, Normans, Anglo-Saxons, Celts, and Visigoths have mingled, fought and reappeared in new forms, many of which we still recognize half a millennia later.

"It's wrong to deprive someone else of a pleasure so that you can enjoy one yourself, but to deprive yourself of a pleasure so that you can add to someone else's enjoyment is an act of humanity by which you always gain more than you lose."

"It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world but for Wales?"

St. Thomas More

PART IV
Modern Religious Thought
(Chapters 16 - 20)



Renaissance

The movement of secular humanism, to a place beyond just a fascination with things human, can be corresponded to the period known as the Renaissance. Religiously, there is really nothing new going on, except with the coming to head of the structure which has developed; perhaps if we wanted to call a period 'Dark', then oddly enough perhaps this one might be the best choice. But even that is hard because of the lack of agreement as to when the Renaissance actually begins. If placed earlier it takes in events which some would argue as 'un-enlightened'; if later then it places several momentous events in that same time considered 'un-enlightened'. Either way you lose, as the saying goes.

Urban (the VIth) Renewal

For our purposes, we will look at this more in terms of attitude and development, because for us, time is not neatly divided up into historical segments. All religious, political, and social thinking has its roots someplace, and rarely do major events take place over-night – especially in the Church. What we might concentrate on is the period in which humanism becomes popularized, a general understanding within society as a whole, argued not just at an academic level but at the level of literature, architecture, art, and social activity, that is, as it begins to reach the general psyche.

If we take that route then we can point to Francesco Petrarch, whom we mentioned last class, and the rise of the Medici in Florence. Of course this places it square in the middle of a fractured Italy, before the return of the Papacy to Rome. Okay, this also seems to place most of the onus on art, which in a way makes sense. Rome is a ruin, and the renewed papacy under Pope Nicholas V (1397-1455) undertakes the great task of rebuilding it, physically



Figure 14: Pope Nicholas V

and intellectually (he created the Vatican Library; Julius II created the Vatican Museum about 50 years later), both as a response to the need for urban renewal and a restatement of the restored authority of the papacy. The liberal arts are the major vehicle for both the Papacy and the Medici. The renewed interest in the Classical world, spurred on by both the spirit embodied in Petrarch and the papal renewal of Rome, brings many classical ideas into the forefront, incarnate in the new humanism.

Brunelleschi, Bernini, Michelangelo, Leonardo – these names are part and parcel of the art we recognize. What we forget about that their nostalgic view of Classicism is that it produced the architecture which defined Rome, at least a restored vision of the empire, and the great religious art which defined the Renaissance. It is the intellectual renewal brought on by Scholastic skepticism and empiricism which spurs exploration and the rethinking of many things which were previously 'understood'. What starts out as intellectual exercises and curiosity for the likes of Anselm becomes the tools for later, sometimes nefarious undertakings. For example, in 1440, Lorenzo Valla used humanist philological Latin skills and the new art of textual criticism to legitimately prove the document known as *The Donation of Constantine* as a

later forgery⁶⁸. Though not accepted by all at the time, the document was loosely used as a basis for apostolic (and therefore papal) temporal power stemming from the fact that in it Constantine I 'donated' the whole of the Western Roman Empire to the Catholic Church as an act of gratitude for having been miraculously cured of leprosy by Pope Sylvester I. But far from being merely intellectual, the undertaking was spurred by political and economic forces and conflicting claims to the lands north of Rome.

Have You Read The Latest?

As you might have caught, many of these events take place in time around one other somewhat major event – Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press in 1450 which now allows for the relatively quick and inexpensive mass production of literature. What we are looking at is a period from about 1400 (the death of Petrarch and rise of the Medici) to about 1520 (the cusp of the Protestant schism) which does show a bit of compression, considering the time frames we have covered so far. Anyway, printing is square in the middle of it.

At this time 'translation of the Bible' meant for the most part, translations of Jerome's 4th century Latin Vulgate into vernaculars, among the first being in Spanish by Boniface Ferrer in 1405. The Renaissance sees the Vulgate's first printing (the very first book produced by Gutenberg is the beautiful '42-line' Vulgate known as the *Mazarin Bible*) as well as translations of it in most *European* languages (under approval from the Church, of course). In the West there are very few existent older Greek texts (still in Greek in the East), but the renewed humanistic sense of linguistics and linguistic disciplines means that these available texts are becoming the basis for renewed Scriptural scholarship. Hebrew and Greek texts of the Hebrew Scriptures are being printed as well, giving even more sources.

Isn't That Yesterday's News?

But the effect is initially slow in blossoming. Theology at this time is marked early on by many different groups vying for prominence. Differing schools becomes part of the struggle of temporal power, with the effect of muddling the waters and adding to the confusion of theology with Faith and Revelation. The idea of the 'spirit of renewal' that nowadays so often characterizes the Renaissance captured the dynamic nature of Catholicism, and therein called for an adaptation of traditional teachings, in light of humanistic thinking and a new appreciation of the historical context in the study of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. Additionally one of the growing movements is in some ways an 'anti-intellectual' movement, away from the heady Aristotelian intellectualism of Scholasticism (which is basically incomprehensible to most common folk), and per those common folks inspired by the likes Francis, Clare, and Dominic, toward an in-the-trenches application of the Gospel to the personal needs of the faithful.

In its defense, Scholasticism had sought to bridge the gap between Faith and reason by bringing reason to bear on theological matters. The art of theology soars, but in light of the death, pain, and suffering, it seemed to the burgeoning Renaissance mind as out of touch with

⁶⁸ Purported to be from the early 300's, it appears to be from as late as the 800's; the earliest existent Western copy is from around the ninth century, and though several exist in the East they may be from even later.

contemporary realities. The sometimes esoteric over-intellectualism of Scholasticism, while energizing universities, was perceived as the failure of the Faith to move individuals to a more genuine living out of their Christian commitment. Augustine's and Anselm's *Faith and reason* was becoming a struggle of *belief (faith) and reason*. This is a subtle fact. There is a limited movement back to the idealism of Plato and Augustine, but caught up in the new humanism, causing the empiricism of Scholasticism to be seen as idealistic and out of touch, and its transfer to the new sciences seems a better direction. Scholasticism's orientation toward abstract concepts puts it outside of what is now perceived to be the function and purpose of Christianity and draws the criticism of Petrarch (1304–1374) and Erasmus (1466–1536), who proposed replacing it with 'New Learning' based solely in humanism, thereby wresting theology from strictly being what they supposed as merely an intellectual exercise.

This new approach and its scripture scholarship beg the question: is there new revelation? That is to say, is there an understanding of Revelation which is outside of the traditional one taught and controlled by the Church hierarchy?

What'chu Talking 'Bout Willis?

So, the esoteric nature of Scholastic Theology and the growing sense of the centrality of humanity begins a disconnect in the understanding of the place and nature of theology in everyday life and in terms of the Faith. Unregulated (and thereby often non-standard) liturgical practices and growing worldliness of the clergy (also due to non-standard training) give no consistent place for the telling of the stories which are at the heart of the Faith. The indifference to the sacramental acts and nature of the priesthood move it farther and farther away from the everyday faithful.

Many different routes and communities grow up around this problem. One of the most important (for us) is the increasing tendency to emphasize *preaching over theology*. What I mean by that is the movement from the *homily* (literally 'breaking open' Scripture for understanding, it is a short scripture-based reflection to relate the challenges of living everyday in the world to the proclaimed Scripture message) to the *sermon* (a lecture or discourse given for the purpose of providing religious instruction or inspiring one to appropriate moral behavior). Preaching and teaching are not the same but are related, in that both are an important part of the Faith.

Liturgically, the faithful are becoming distance from the purpose and goal of ritual and sacred practices. Devotions become the norm of the day, and street-corner preachers (and preaching orders like the Dominicans) are drawing crowds with their sermons. Theology and practice are drifting further and further apart. Which brings us to a growing trend: the problem of faith versus Faith. The ultimate problem is that when Faith becomes reduced to belief (faith) then the 'truth' (Faith) becomes *only that which I can believe*.

Desiderius Erasmus

If we want to examine the height and the depths of the Western Church at this period, we can probably find no greater example than within the heart and mind of this man, Erasmus (1466-1536). A priest, he was indifferent to the ministry of the priesthood. A man of great

religious depth and protected by popes, he was probably the most brilliant of the humanists. To perhaps the chagrin of both sides who wish to claim him, he was a bit of a boat-rocker.

Illegitimate (not unheard of in any period, but quite common here), his father, according to his family's plan, eventually became a priest and his mother raised he and his elder brother. By thirteen both his parents were dead in a plague, and he was sent to a monastery school, a period he called his 'lost years'. Even so his quick wit, amazing powers of comprehension, probably photographic memory, command of languages, and a voracious desire to learn were jump-started and given wide latitude in these monastic schools. Eventually, he was chosen as a secretary for a bishop, who insisted upon his ordination.



Figure 15:
Erasmus

So we take a moment here and examine that fact. Erasmus' father was, according to Erasmus, basically forced into service of the Church by his family.⁶⁹ As for Erasmus, the second son, not poor but not noble and not really part of the middle class, his prospects were slim; like his father before him, his guardians aimed him for an ecclesial life. His propensity for quick learning served him well but less as a priest and more as a teacher, scribe or secretary but in order to fulfill that function he was required to be ordained. The priesthood was not so much a *vocation* (a 'calling') for him but an *avocation*, a job. With the line between politics and religion so vastly blurred, what might have been a rewarding career in politics and education was wrapped in the mystic role of the priest. This also points to the growing problem of authority, especially for priests like Erasmus. Canonically and traditionally, priests derive their authority to preach, teach, and perform sacramental duties from their bishop. They serve, as they say, at the bishop's pleasure. The traditional structure means that any authority a priest has comes from his bishop, not within himself, and it is given and taken away in terms of the priest's subservience to the bishop or abbot. At this time (as was also happening to nobles and other political endowments) with many sees being conferred 'honorarily' there are many 'absentee' bishops. The fight is often between an honest and sincere bishop and the clergy of the diocese he takes over and vice versa. Powerful kings, nobles, families can thwart the efforts of even the holiest of clerics. In a sense, the roles have become separate – bishops often no longer care about or control their sees, and priests are disconnected from the hierarchical authority as it becomes weaker and weaker.



Figure 17:
Thomas More

Okay, back to Erasmus. After he lost his job with the bishop, he traveled about France but renounced Paris because he so utterly rejected the Scholasticism championed there and any studies he engaged in went poorly. Still, this period proved to be most advantageous for him. After tutoring several Englishmen, he was introduced into the English Oxford circle which included reform-minded people the likes of Thomas More (1478-1535, future Prime Minister of Henry VIII – strongly attached to the Church) and John Colet (son



Figure 16: John
Colet

⁶⁹ In their defense, it was a noble desire that at least one of the nine brothers should serve God; in his defense they told him she had died.

of the Mayor of London – not as strongly attached), who showed him how to reconcile the Faith with humanism by abandoning the scholastic method and devoting himself to a thorough study of Scripture. For this reason he undertook the study of Greek, in order to more fully understand them. In this he also was inspired to undertake one of those first new translations of the Scriptures using the original Greek and not the Vulgate.

While not particularly effective as a cleric, his faith was strong and per his experience in the monastery and the clergy, his desire for reform great. He felt that he ordered his life around three things: love for and pursuit of truth, disdain for money and power (worldly things), and an extreme distaste for polemics (the art of proving one's point as superior to another's). For Erasmus, learning led to virtue, scholarship to God; theology would only be restored by wresting it from the cold dead hands of the Scholastics. This was to be the means toward the revival of a living and lived Christianity and the Church as a whole. But all of this had to be done within the boundaries of the Church. While he defended Luther's thinking, he admonished him for his actions, and then eventually opposed him. He kept a weathered eye on Christian morality and ethics, but desired less hierarchy which he saw in terms of the abusive practices. In the end his was part and parcel of the general growing vision of piety over orthodoxy.

Julius II

Pope Julius II (1443- 1513) represents another side of the Renaissance. Elected in 1503, he filled some interesting shoes. A soldier by heart, he had a vision of a united Italy (read Papal States) free from the foreign agents and control, especially by the French (do not forget that the Avignon Papacy only ended 50 years earlier). On the other hand he actually also has a pious side, and enacted some basic reforms dealing with *simony* ("a deliberate intention of buying or selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual or



Figure 18: Julius II

annexed unto spirituals" – basically any exchange of spiritual for temporal things is *simony*), set up several diocese in the newly discovered America, and finally convened the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) to eradicate specific abuses within the Church and especially within the Roman Curia (the bureaucracy of the Western Church) and schismatic cardinals seeking to extract themselves from papal control.

He accomplished this because he was free from the nepotism which had so plagued the hierarchy for so long. But along with that piety he also carried the humanist spirit which was rebuilding Rome. Per that he created the Vatican Museum as noted previously (saving the various pieces of stuff which were being churned up in the re-build), hired Michelangelo, Raphael, and Bramante, and laid the cornerstone of the gigantic restoration of the Basilica of St. Peter. His last accomplishment is Michelangelo's Moses which adorns his tomb, that and pissing off a large number of nobles.

Putting It All Together

With the increase in humanism, even the position of God will be questioned. The teachings of the Eastern and Western Church begin to fall to the questions of the new thinking. The new understanding of science will enhance the life of humanity, albeit imperfectly, but one questions whether it enhances the soul.

There are the two sides to the Renaissance: the advent of what is thought of as the modern 'spirit' in opposition to the 'spirit' which prevailed during the Middle Ages, and the revival of classic (especially of Greek) learning and the recovery of ancient art causing the rejuvenation of classical sculpture, painting, and architecture style. But, increasingly, humanism was being equated with the Renaissance, and the Renaissance with not just reform but Re-formation, an abandonment of the Church for the re-making of the Church in individual images.

John Colet wanted reform and like Thomas More and Erasmus, wanted that reform to take place within the Church. His admonitions to the clergy point to the problems which had developed and which continued to weaken the authority of the Magisterium: 'devilish pride', 'carnal concupiscence', 'worldly covetousness', and 'worldly occupations'. Still, there is not a loss of holiness among many faithful, despite the poor example of many of the clergy.

In 1493 Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull⁷⁰ *Inter Caetera*, which in light of the finding of people by Columbus, encourages the Catholic kings to "*enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with benefit of our apostolic favor*" "*to bring under your sway the said mainlands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith.*" While the partial resolutions of some of the problems of the Church are on the horizon, this brings up a whole new chapter in the struggle of the spiritual versus the temporal.

"Erasmus laid an egg and Luther hatched it."

Common Admonishment, ~1520

"I thought good to divert myself with drawing up a panegyric upon Folly. How! what maggot, says you, put this in your head? Why, the first hint, Sir, was your own surname of More, which in Greek, comes as near the literal sound of the word as you yourself are distant from the signification of it, and that in all men's judgments is vastly wide. In the next place, I supposed that this kind of sporting wit would be by you more especially accepted of. By you, Sir, that are wont with this sort of jocose raillery, such as, if I mistake not, is neither dull nor impertinent, to be mightily pleased, and in your ordinary converse to approve yourself a Democritus junior. For truly, as you do from a singular vein of wit very much dissent from the common herd of mankind, So, by an incredible affability and pliability of temper, you have the art of suiting your humour with all sorts of companies. I hope therefore you will not only readily accept of this rude essay as a token from your friend; but take it under your more immediate protection, as being dedicated to you, and by that title adopted for yours, rather than to be fathered as my own."

Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* (introductory note to St. Thomas More)

⁷⁰ From the Latin *bull*a, or bubble, it came to be applied to the leaden seals with which authenticated papal and royal documents in the early Middle Ages, and was eventually attached to the documents itself. So basically a bull is an official document, statement, letter, or what-not.

Modern

This is a word we must be careful with. In historical and philosophical terms it points to the period of time after the Renaissance and leading up to the 18th century ‘Enlightenment’. ‘Modern’ is one of those terms which is outdated the moment you apply it and for that reason I quote it. Anyway, we still consider ourselves in the post-modern period (see the problem?), that is, an era which is the direct result of the ‘modern’ period. Ultimately what we are talking about here is ‘Modern’ thought, which is distinguished from Classical and Scholastic thought and hence is based in the beginning of a total revolution in thinking.

Modern Thought

In the West, Modern thought begins with folks like Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704). It is thinking which starts in Scholastic skepticism (the questioning of all knowledge in order to logically and empirically define what is knowable) and like the subtle change in the meaning of humanism comes to mean thinking which relies completely on human observation, understanding, and rationality, coupled with the growing sense of individuality, where individualism becomes valued over community and Church. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is a slight offset to this, proposing that outside the iron-fisted community the individual is quite scurrilous, and prone to descend into chaos and darkness, but more on that to come.

Even with its basis in (and because of) the theological and scientific movements created by Scholasticism and the re-discovery of Aristotle, Western thought is shifting away from metaphysical explanations. The increase in population based in better farming methods, among other things, and ultimately cheap printing which can get books into more hands, means that more and more people are being educated. The expansion of literacy⁷¹ and the spread of the liberal arts mean that humanism is on the rise, and that the understanding of humanism has finally moved beyond just a scholastic interest in things human. The increase in reliance on reason rather than revelation is sparking what we think of as the ‘scientific’ revolution. The difference being that medieval skepticism and the loss of medieval piety is changing the notion of science from its metaphysical roots. For illustrative purposes, let us take a short trip through this thinking.

As we noted in Chapter 4, in Aristotle’s cosmology the planets and the stars are carried round the heavens on nested solid crystalline spheres that function clockwork-like through a sort of friction drive with the outermost sphere being moved by the Unmoved Mover. In the synthesis of Aristotle’s philosophy and Christian theology by Albert Magnus in the 13th century Aristotle’s unmoved mover is identified with God and so the crystalline spheres became a constituent part of mediaeval cosmology, but cosmology as the world until then understood that term. This is important, once again, because that view associates all of creation with God as its source; cosmology tells us much about the thinking of the people who hold it. Revelation rather than mere observation is the key to understanding. The thinking is that observation

⁷¹ Make no mistake, a majority of the population still retains a high level of illiteracy, but that is changing.

leads to Revelation, meaning that we can also come to know and understand a bit of the mystery of God through His works – i.e., Creation.

With the growth of humanism, epistemological thinking begins to come to the forefront. Observation becomes the child of and offset to skepticism (the means by which Scholastics came to approach and understand Revelation). So rather than the ‘facts’ of the Creation Story in Genesis being sufficient to explain the world (i.e. that sacred space called Creation, its origin, its purpose, and its end), the onus shifts to *observation* and Myth begins losing its hold. The effect of this is to call into question the older Aristotelian/Christian notion of the nature, purpose, and end of Creation. It is rapidly becomes clear in this environment that a Revelation-based cosmological view was something that is insufficient to the observations and had to be abandoned in favor of the empirical ‘facts’.

One of the reasons this debate could even take place was (like most other things of this period) based in the rediscovery of Stoic natural philosophy. The basics of Stoicism (a 3rd century fusion of the earlier philosophies of Plato and Aristotle) like the idea that life should be lived in accordance with nature and controlled by virtue, self-denial, asceticism, restraint and denial of worldly pleasures, and the like had been previously incorporated into Christianity centuries before but for the Fathers it was Jewish and Plato’s cosmology, not Stoic, which did more to inform earlier theology. Because of these integrations and the dominance of Aristotelian natural philosophy in the Late Middle Ages there is a tendency to forget that it was only one of four main competing philosophies in antiquity. In their time the natural philosophy of the Stoics was more dominant than that of Aristotle.

That said, the nail in the coffin, so to speak, was officially hammered in by Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) who is credited with proving that a large comet in 1577 was *above* the moon (above the moon and farther from earth and therefore outside of the crystalline sphere containing the earth) and not *below* it (below the moon closer to the earth and therefore within the sphere) as would have been true in Aristotle’s cosmology. The sum effect being if the separate spheres existed, the comet would have destroyed those different spheres as it passed through them on its flight. As is true not only in this work but in most of history the real story is much more complex and involved various differing factors, but this suffices. The impetus for the question of the origination place of comets came about with the onset of a spectacular series of comets in the 1530s. In order to settle the question the decision was made by Tycho and many other astronomers to measure the parallax (the apparent differences in position of an object when viewed from two different points) of that latest comet in 1577. The results of that experiment were at best contradictory and at worst inconclusive but adequate enough to lead to a consensus of several leading observers and in the end their supra-lunar/non-crystalline view became accepted.

And Your Question Is...?

So what? Unlike Aristotle, the Stoics did not differentiate between the ‘sub-lunar’ and the ‘supra-lunar’ spheres. The whole universe was a whole, all the same, and filled with *pneuma* (objects in and of themselves), like planets and comets, with no notion of see-through crystalline spheres. This naturally created a debate between two diametrically opposed cosmologies. This movement from the Judeo-Christian-Aristotelian-Revelation sense of the

universe being segmented into this new Stoic-Scientific-Epistemological idea of the universe as a whole draws into the light the differences in the theological understandings of nature, wisdom, reason, fact, and truth and the Modern period's scientific understandings. So the question is, was this movement powerful enough in itself or is there any parallel within the Church?

From Brahe's scientific argumentation we turn to the Jesuit St. Robert Bellarmine's (1542-1621) theological one. From his research he contended that the Scriptures and the Church Fathers only mention a possibility of *three* heavens and therefore the crystalline spheres which are eight in number could not be considered the nature of Creation as God created it. This means that within the hierarchy of the Church there were also arguments against the traditional cosmology. As a side note, the alternative he proposed that the heavens were liquid and that the planets and other objects like comets swam through them like fish. It is often forgotten, or at least begrudgingly accepted, that the Jesuits were among some of the most important and influential astronomers of their time, and that the Vatican boasts one of the original observatories (it is still in use today, by Jesuits among others). Bellarmine was also one of the most influential theologians of this time. So what? Well with both sides arguing the same point against Aristotle's clockwork-friction-drive-of-the-spheres thing to explain the apparent movements of the planets and stars, astronomers were forced to find an alternative explanation, one that would have far-reaching consequences.

In all of this (and in light of this), something for us to keep in mind is that even the scientific enquiry of this time has some basis in or at least is still a reaction to Revelation. That is to say, the framework for understanding continues to have Revelation as its starting point. In fact Kepler's work on planetary movement was driven by his theological convictions; Leibniz's work on relativity as opposed to absolute time and space, like Augustine's before him, was part a theological debate. So the theological, philosophical, and scientific discussions of this time share a basic, common thread. Scholastic skepticism has created a situation where everything is called into question (including Scholasticism). This is the basis for Rene Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") statement, where he is really talking about 'what can I know?', and ends up not with God as the Prime Mover but with 'me' and my ability to think which then lead me outward to the World (and by association, God). Humanity, not God is becoming the rational center of the universe.

Transubstantiation

So, in what must seem like a 160 degree turn, we will approach a term most associated with Thomas Aquinas and the Scholasticism of the previous period. It is actually another good discussion point for understanding the differences in the thinking not just of the time but of the reformers as well. In a homo-centric epistemological universe, what is the science of the sacred?

Transubstantiation is the word Thomas of Aquinas uses to describe the nature of the *Eucharist*, the mandate/gift of Body and Blood given to the Apostles at the Last Supper. In the East and the West the earliest Traditions and Scriptures of the Church state the importance of this mystery as a *sign* of Jesus' presence and its centrality to understanding both the Church

and Christology. Those merits or deficiencies will not be discussed here. In this context we will continue the discussion we are having about how people are thinking about things.

If the Church teaches that the bread and wine offered on the altar become the true Body and true Blood of Jesus, the scientific/skepticism question is, 'how?' For Aquinas, it is a question born of skepticism; for Martin Luther (1483-1546) it is a question of authority, (as in, by what authority does a corrupt hierarchy teach such a doctrine by relying on the wonky theology of an out-dated intellectualism?).

Thomas starts, as is to be expected, from his Scholastic/Aristotelian roots. The word 'substance', Aristotle tells us, means 'what makes a thing a thing', that is, the aspects of a thing which helps us identify it as that thing; how we know a person from a dog, and even how we know something is a person or a dog. The things which distinguish one person from another or one dog from another are known as its 'accidents'. The fact that one human has red hair and another has blond does not stop either one from being a human. So, actual instances of things are made up of *substance* and *accidents*.

Ergo the *substance* of bread or of wine is different from its *accidents*, just as their substances are different than Jesus' (hopefully we can easily distinguish a piece of matzo from Jesus). Now here is where the tricky part of trying to explain a mystery runs up against the mystery itself. When the Holy Spirit, through the actions of the priest, *consecrates* the bread and the wine, their substances change into Jesus' substance; their accidents – the characteristics which help us to identify them physically as bread and as wine – do not change, hence the *trans-substantiation*, and not trans-accidentiation.

Luther is ultimately unable to avoid or abandon this language in his discussion, but still the idea that the substance of something can disappear (what happened to it?) while its accidents remain is somewhat hard for the new mind to swallow. Luther counters the Scholastic argument with a new term '*consubstantiation*', which, if you have been following the premises of the argument means that Jesus' substance and the substances of the bread and the wine, co-habitate⁷², meaning that its accidents don't enter into it. Observable reality is satisfied.

Calvin thought they were both crazy and went the symbolic rather than the sign route.⁷³

Free Willie

Next, let us take on another of the main controversies as embodied in the discussion of freewill. Think back on Augustine (*Chapter 13*). For humans there is the time after Creation but before Adam ate of the Tree where things are in balance and this is in contrast to the period after this sin, the time of imbalance. That is, humans had been created in balance: able to sin or not to sin; that is, they originally truly had free will. But sin is slavery; it takes away freewill, so when Adam sinned, his sin threw off that balance, permanently disfiguring and corrupting human nature such that all of his descendants (us) inherit this corruption (Original Sin). We cannot do anything to earn release from this slavery; it is now part of our nature. This means that left to our own devices (which is what sin basically is, turning away from God), with only our broken and corrupt human judgment to guide us, we are unable *not to sin*, that is, we have

⁷² The moral admonishments and precepts against co-habitation outside of sacramental marriage do not enter into this argument.

⁷³ Recall our discussion of the difference in sign and symbol from Chapter 1.

a built-in *concupiscence* or *propensity* to sin. While through the divine spark we can recognize our brokenness and take steps to move away from sin, our will, by itself, cannot free us from *slavery* to sin no matter how hard we may personally try. Fortunately we are children of God and saved by the death of Jesus and the power of the Sacraments. So, through no merit of our own, God bestows Grace upon us. This is the means of overcoming our sinful natures, but leaves us still able to sin, i.e. restored to the original balance. Sin still exists and is still punishable, whether we take advantage of Grace or not.

Jump forward now. There has developed in this period a narrow focus on the idea of ‘free grace’ (grace without merit) and the idea of *sola fide* (by faith alone) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) is their poster child. The question of the nature of Grace and the effects of Grace are the driving force behind these arguments, so at its core this scuffle takes place within the *soteriological* realm (ends, remember?). The basic position of all sides is that God justifies the sinner because of their belief in Jesus Christ. The Free Grace thinking extends this and is basically that *nothing you do can win you Grace*, but once you get that ‘free gift of grace’ through *faith* (belief), you *always* have it; what we might know as being ‘born again’, that ‘accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior’ moment. So, by ‘faith alone’ (*sola fide* – believing in Jesus) we are saved. We can juxtapose this with the idea of ‘Faith alone’.

This is part and parcel of another of Luther’s thesis, the *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) position, or the idea that the Bible is the *only* inspired and authoritative word of God, and is therefore the only reliable source for Christian doctrine. From what we have seen, this is a major divergence from the idea of Scripture *and* Tradition together as the reliable source for doctrine in that the Judaic, Orthodox, Catholic and Coptic traditions hold that the Scriptures can and must be interpreted within Tradition, not just as they stand on their own. Under Luther’s view, individual revelation is part and parcel of interpretation of the Scripture, because the meaning of Scripture is open, plain and therefore available to the priesthood of all Christians and is not reserved to the Magisterium.

These and other ‘sola’ arguments were foundations for Luther and similar voices who saw the authority of Rome as having, first, lost that authority (if in fact it ever had any), and second, as twisted away from the Scriptures through human imposed interpretations. Consequentially it needed to be replaced or even further, that any vestige of it was part of the redirecting of the original Church (as it existed in what was being considered the apostolic period: any time before Constantine legalized Christianity) and need to be eradicated.

For the most part, Erasmus initially sought to stay above the fray but he felt that the reformers were diverging from teachings rather than trying to correct them and therefore looking to re-form the Church rather than reforming it, prompting him to start a campaign against them. Within that fracas, in 1524 he published the treatise *On the Freedom of the Will* and in 1525, *Luther* responded with what is commonly translated *The Bondage of the Will*. Nowadays Erasmus’ take is often considered more philosophical and Luther’s more theological, but I believe that is a misreading of Erasmus, or at least a misplaced desire to over-secularize of Erasmus’ thought, possibly influenced by Luther’s response. Still, Erasmus’ humanist Augustinianism and Luther’s narrow Augustinianism are at odds, but certainly both men sincerely defend positions which arise from the same source.

Bound And Determined

Erasmus starts humbly enough: *"I admit that many different views about free choice have been handed down from the ancients about which I have, as yet, no fixed conviction, except that I think there to be a certain power of free choice."* (*The Freedom of the Will*) He then less humbly undertakes a discussion of what he sees as the definition of 'freewill'. Recall our discussion of Augustine's ideas on freewill. For Augustine, freewill is the limitless capacity within us for good or for evil which is held in balance and Grace is the gift of God to help us keep the will in balance. God is the source of all things and the Prime Mover. By humble submission of the human will to the Divine Will we are able to find peace and happiness.

So Erasmus writes *"By freedom of the will we understand in this connection the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation."* (*ibid*) So, similarly to Augustine, freewill is that thing within us whereby we go towards God or turn away from Him. But it does not belong to the person alone, in a vacuum and outside of God as he further expounds: *"Two causes meet in the same work, the grace of God and the human will, grace being the principal cause and will a secondary, since it is impotent without the principal cause, while the latter has sufficient strength by itself. Thus, while the fire burns through its natural strength, the principal cause is still God, who acts through the fire. God alone would indeed suffice, and without Him fire could not burn. Due to this combination, man must ascribe his total salvation to divine grace, since it is very little that the free will can effect, and even that comes from divine grace which has at first created free will and then redeemed and healed it. Thus are placated, if they can be placated, those who will not tolerate that man has some good which he does not owe to God."* (*ibid*)

God's grace is certainly sufficient to the task of saving us, but that would lessen us as humans. *"God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us."* (Augustine, *Sermon 169*) Simply put, God's grace is primary, human will secondary, but human will must be considered as a human trait somewhat independent of grace because *it has to be free*; to argue otherwise would make God responsible for the good *and* the bad in the world because the will, as Augustine describes it, is the means of good and evil action within us. *"Those who deny any freedom of the will and affirm absolute necessity, admit that God works in man not only the good works, but also evil ones. It seems to follow that inasmuch as man can never be the author of good works, he can also never be called the author of evil ones. This opinion seems obviously to attribute cruelty and injustice to God, something religious ears abhor vehemently. (He would no longer be God if anything vicious and imperfect were met in him.)"* (*The Freedom of the Will*)

Luther fires back. In his response to Erasmus, Luther was vehement: *"These statements of yours are without Christ, without the Spirit, and more cold than ice: so that, the beauty of your eloquence is really deformed by them. Perhaps a fear of the Popes and those tyrants, extorted them from you their miserable vassal, lest you should appear to them a perfect atheist."* (*The Bondage of the Will*) Focusing on Augustine's idea of the slavery of sin, he maintained that sin completely incapacitates the human will, making it impossible for humans to work out their own salvation, meaning that they are absolutely incapable of bringing themselves to God. Ultimately humanity is so dominated by Satan per our sin, God is the only power great enough to save us because Satan would only bow to greater and stronger power, i.e. God.

This is where the idea of *sola fide* comes into play: when God redeems a person, he claims them completely, overpowering any hold which Satan may have over them. He redeems the entire person, including the will, which then and only then is liberated to serve God. “*God has promised certainly His grace to the humbled: that is, to the self-deploring and despairing. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled, until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsel, endeavors, will, and works, and absolutely depending on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another, that is, of God only.*” (*ibid*)

This sense of humility as object “*self-deploring and despairing*” is the hallmark of Luther’s thought.⁷⁴ To be humbled is to be brought low; to be truly humbled, one must give up all hope of personally managed ability to be saved – to do otherwise is not to be humble “”. It is the result of his interpretation of Romans. But the effect is that even the human will is nothing without God. Both assign the human will a secondary position; both give all acknowledgement to Grace; the difference being the place of the will in the whole operation. For Luther, God’s grace restores the balance, but only after utter surrender of the individual will to that grace. For Erasmus, the idea that the human will could become ‘unfree’ makes no sense because how can a will which is not free make a decision?

Keep in mind that both Luther and Erasmus were not merely debating the subject in esoteric or abstract terms. For each there is no disconnect from the only reality: God. In their world God is real, Satan is real, the good person goes to heaven the evil one to Hell, period. What is at stake is the *very real question* of whether or not all humans, born in a broken state because of the sin of Adam, are free and able to do good and thereby be saved. To be more precise, they were debating about the nature of humanity as it too is related to its soteriology.⁷⁵ The problem was not merely a *moral* one but a *spiritual* one. The question, in other words, is not just whether someone is good or bad; but the question is ‘how is humanity saved?’ Is salvation a work of one’s own efforts, or is it cooperation between the weakened human will and God, or is it a work of the sovereign God apart from any contributions of people? Why would any of this be a problem? Well, in order to rebuild St. Peter’s in Rome into that magnificent edifice we see today a lot of money was needed. Some of that money was raised by the selling of many things, like ecclesial offices, relics, and something else called indulgences (more on those later). If one could buy one’s way into things, then one could accomplish salvation on one’s own (one could point to the power of the ‘widow’s mite’: *Mark 12:38-44; Luke 20:45–21:4*). Can the good works one does, building churches, giving to the poor, even praying make any difference to one’s salvation, or is it only about *belief* in Jesus?

Calvin’s take involved the idea of *predestination*, but more on that later.

Humble Pie

These differing views of humility seem odd since both were produced by Augustinian monks. What we must keep in mind is that the difference really lies in Modern thought and the emphasis on humanism. Luther’s position shows repugnance for this thinking – humans are unable to do *anything*. For him the premise put forth by Erasmus, a proud and self-centered

⁷⁴ This sense is picked up by Calvin, and eventually produces Jonathon Edwards’ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).

⁷⁵ In this sense then, of how we come to be saved, it is dealing with *ends*, making it soteriological.

thinking puts one at least on par with God and at worst above God. Humans are not perfect; they are flawed and unable to produce anything resembling the perfection of what God can do. This goes back into some of the philosophical arguments we have not discussed, but we need not over-think that. Suffice it to say that Luther found Erasmus' position untenable, and therefore *"without Christ, without the Spirit, and more cold than ice"*. Erasmus, for his part, while reflecting humanist thinking, also relies on the idea of humans being the "image and likeness" of God, as having some part and parcel of the perfection of the will of God and that restored by Jesus. Humans must be completely free, of and on their own, or else God becomes a monster, a puppet master creating an untenable position in which humans are unable to act at all, and therefore cannot be held accountable for actions which they are unable to make. It is the thinking which made More respond with *"In your sense of fairness, honest reader, you will forgive me that the utterly filthy words of this scoundrel have forced me to answer such things, for which I should have begged your leave. Now I consider truer than truth that saying: 'He who touches pitch will be wholly defiled by it' (Sirach 13:1). For I am ashamed even of this necessity, that while I clean out the fellow's shit-filled mouth I see my own fingers covered with shit. But who can endure such a scoundrel who shows himself possessed by a thousand vices and tormented by a legion of demons, and yet stupidly boasts thus: 'The holy fathers have all erred. The whole church has often erred. My teaching cannot err, because I am most certain that my teaching is not my own but Christ's,' alluding of course to those words of Christ, 'My words are not my own but His who sent me, the Father's' (John 12:49)?" (Responsio ad Lutherum)*

Obviously all sides need to work on the whole humility thing.

Putting It All Together

'Modern' thought begins to develop in the late 16th century, and has been surpassed (perhaps) by other modes of thinking, but at its core, as Scholasticism informed the centuries before the Renaissance, we are still in the 'modern' era, influenced by many of the Enlightenment thinkers. But it is the movement away from Faith and toward belief, from sacred conscience to human judgment, from the miraculous to the scientific, from profane things in a sacred world to sacred things in a profane world which catches our eye during this period.

Initially, like the science of the day, there was not a sense so much of Catholic/Protestant as there was of 'camps', like the camp of 'Luther' or of 'Bellarmine'. When Bellarmine preached, both Catholics and Protestants showed up. In 1576 when Bellarmine returned to Italy to take on the *Chair of Controversies* recently founded at the Roman College he attempted to systematize the various controversies of the time, and made an immense impression throughout Europe, in all of the camps. He was so eloquent that in Germany and England special chairs were founded in order to provide counteract his works.

For us the task is a constant struggle to understand each thinker within themselves. Authority to make pronouncements on Revelation, especially Scripture, becomes the next big struggle, and will challenge us to be objective. Many groups and factions want to quote (and misquote) each thinker to prove or disprove a point, rather than keeping the quote within the context of the individual and their times.

"There are those who hate Christianity and call their hatred an all-embracing love for all religions."

G. K. Chesterton, N

*"The Atoms of Democritus And Newton's Particles of Light Are sands upon the Red Sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."*

William Blake, Mock On, Mock On, Voltaire, Rousseau

Reform

Now that we have set the historical and intellectual stage, let us take on the 800 pound gorilla. We can think of the Western Schism or Reformation in two ways, as a complete breaking with orthodoxy, or a relaxing of perceived error which had crept into the Church. The difference between reforming and re-forming is subtle, as is the question of fixing what is broken or replacing it.

Where's The Beef?

It may seem that we have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves in the last lesson, but do not worry, we are just leapfrogging again. There is an increasing rift developing between the hierarchy and the man in the street. As an offshoot of the ongoing struggle with the papal decline talked about in *Chapter 15*, the overall centralized authority of the Church came under question. This is nothing new, so we will take a quick jaunt backwards to the 14th century for an example. John Wycliffe (1328-1384) became discontented with scholasticism, clerics, the papacy, the Church and its teachings in general and just about everything else that involved humans I believe. As an alternative, he promoted the idea of salvation through study of the Bible as opposed to rituals officiated by priests, an idea we see lingering into the 16th century. For this reason he translated the Vulgate into English. His teaching on the "*invisible* church of the elect", a *symbolic* community made up of those *predestined* to be saved (which puts him in direct conflict with the Church's teaching that the Church was a '*visible* sign' in the world) also seems to have had some staying power. The ability of people to become disenchanted with the Church was nothing new, and the authoritarian nature of the hierarchy is certain to chafe even the most patient of saints at times.

The fight between Luther and the Catholic Church represents the fight of many.

Day Tripper

As we have discussed, Authority and Truth are closely related. Without authority, how can you be guaranteed that something is the Truth? With the loss of confidence in the authority within the Church and the growth of belief as the measure of Faith, the ready availability of Scripture through printing and rising literacy rates produces the perfect storm. It also begins a struggle *for* authority.

Case in point. In 1582, in a bid to stem the drift of Easter in the Julian calendar, Pope Gregory XIII sanctioned a new reckoning of the year. In order to accomplish it, he first ordered that everyone jump the calendar ahead by 10 days (effectively removing those days from that year forever) and second introduced a change to curb any further error by declaring that only century years (such as 1600 or 1700) divisible by 400 would be leap years. We count this a nothing today, but then, with the papacy's authority in question, and many groups in open rebellion, this was completely rejected in some areas.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ In fact it was not until the *British Calendar Act* of 1751 that the English added the now necessary 11 days and synced their calendar with Europe.

This move is seen by some as another example of humans messing where only God has power. On the one hand, it is just a calendar (a human invention to start with) but on the other it also represents the liturgical calendar and who are these men (i.e. by what authority do they act) that they can tell the stars and the planets to move ahead? This is just indicative that anything which the diminished hierarchy pronounces *or has ever pronounced* is of questionable origin.⁷⁷ But the fact is, as we have discussed previously, reform, even the reform of the calendar, is nothing new for the Church – reaching back to its earliest days. In the two centuries leading up to this time many of the modern orders of monks are the result of cries for reform of both Benedictines and Church practices. Most of this we have touched on before but if you think about it, the early 16th century was an especially bad time to enter the clergy if you were looking for peace and contemplation. The systemic crisis of the last few decades, especially in Northern Europe, has spread through all levels of the Church. The printing press has allowed for the wholesale production of pamphlets and tracts, distributed and supported by itinerant priests, self-proclaimed preachers, and indigent monks, giving voice to not only the grievances of the theologians but *of the faithful as well*. Local priests and monks were themselves separated from the upper levels of the hierarchy prompting them to also join in the call for action.

At the nucleus of the movement was the increased secularization of the Papacy, especially by Italian families and the German and French kings. The papacy had become just one of many monarchs participating in the diplomatic intrigues throughout the European courts as it strove for political supremacy in the divided Italy, fighting in the seemingly endless civil wars which caught the most vulnerable between competing loyalties for which they cared little. By this time the only interest most of the Popes showed in their universal flock was financial in nature. They ceased to be perceived as the spiritual or doctrinal authority and had become just another one of the ills thrust upon society. When the Popes began regarding themselves first as worldly princes and only secondly as head of a Church dedicated to Christ, they did not practice their calling and were neglecting their spiritual and ritual duties.

This is partially because the costs of protecting the interests of the Church in the form of Papal armies and the extensive rebuilding of Rome were enormous. The practice of financing these needs by various undertakings like simony, selling holy relics, and indulgences enraged men like Martin Luther and Erasmus since the deterioration of the Papacy had spread through the entire ecclesiastic hierarchy with the theology and the laity at the bottom suffering more than ever. In Germany particularly, the laity was squeezed from both the political and the religious side. When the hierarchy was not collecting money directly for the papacy, they did it at their own initiative as feudal princes all having the end effect that not only the papacy but clergy and the monasteries as well had lost their moral authority. Teaching and actions no longer meshed. Unable to connect with the established rituals the faithful and the local prelates turned to devotions, wandering preachers, and personal exploration as protection against such unstable times. Theologians wrestled with this change, unable to completely abandon the high Scholasticism yet sensing its failure. The complete detachment of spirituality from religion had not yet taken place but the pressures from both religious and scientific fronts were creating a

⁷⁷ It also points to a bit of nose-despite-your-face thinking, but that is nothing we need to comment on.

situation where religion is becoming the enemy of the people and not the source of comfort it proclaimed to be.

Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was one of major voices of those who railed against the intellectualism of Scholasticism in the face of the abuses of the hierarchy. Saints, they say, are made every day in the fires of daily life, and this period of time is no different. The struggle to maintain a balance between order and conscience is becoming a losing battle.

Born in Germany, his father was characterized as having a violent temper and his mother as being modest and prayerful, but brutality seems to have



Figure 19:
Martin Luther

been a staple of his home life as he claimed that both beat him severely and often enough that he eventually ran away and joined a monastery. Throughout his early school days he also appears to suffer from bullying there as well. He studied law and philosophy (in which he earned his degree) where he was influenced by at least one of his teachers who was an Augustinian friar.⁷⁸ In 1505, Luther himself entered the order, and much later he confessed that it was fear which made him take the vows. Whatever the reason, one can glean from his writings that he was extremely scrupulous and suffered from great fear and guilt, as well as an unhealthy view of suffering and condemnation. I hesitate to draw too many conclusions because most of the anecdotes about Luther's monastic life (like Erasmus') come from later recollections of which do not bear up even to his biographers who are rather frank in their assessments of them, saying that they are somewhat exaggerated and frequently contradictory and misleading. His claim that he was forced to change his baptismal name Martin to Augustine (which seems to have bothered him greatly) have no precedence or mention in the rule for the Augustinian Order. His further claim to never have seen a bible belies the Augustinian practice of having the novices "read the Scripture assiduously, hear it devoutly, and learn it fervently" (*Constitution for Order of St. Augustine*). All that aside, to the monks and masters within the monastery he seems to have been fairly happy as a young monk, and in 1507 he is ordained (something which probably would not have happened had he shown any major reserve or outright hostility).

He began teaching and continuing his studies at the new University of Wittenberg. For some reason he heads to Rome, where he meets up with the likes of Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534), a Dominican (like St. Thomas Aquinas) who while a brilliant theologian and acquaintance of Erasmus, was something of a humanist even in theological matters, stressing the freedom of education and the exploration of theological ideas. As a quick note here, to state it again, the problem with understanding the motivations and rational behind Luther's change of heart is that it is hard to extract his early feelings from his later writings on them. He does not come back from Rome and his many encounters there and begin his tirade against Rome and all things pope-ish. He continues to enjoy success in his teaching, is appointed sub-prior and then

⁷⁸ A term that has not been well explained. Technically, a monk is someone who belongs to a community, separate from the world (like the Benedictines) and a friar is someone who, while part of a monastic order, is more out in the world (like the Franciscans). The set of monks contains friars but not all monks are friars.

vicar, and looks as if to have a great strength of faith, even braving the plague of 1516 to serve the ill. Still he later says that while in Rome practicing an ascetic devotion which involved a certain amount of physical pain (climbing on his knees up the *Scala Sancta* – thought to be the actual staircase Jesus climbed in the Praetorium in Jerusalem) the passage from St. Paul in Romans suddenly flashed through his mind: “The just shall live by faith”, upon which he immediately abandoned the practice. Whatever, something aroused in him that could not be stilled by his studies or his responsibilities.

Here I Stand (Someone Said To Stand Here?)

The signs indicate that everything began to seem a burden. He begins to act against all that he lived, whether out of revulsion or an overwhelming sense of guilt and vocational confusion once again this writer cannot say. The evidence does suggest (to this writer) that he exhibited a great and unfounded anxiety and an obsessive fear that everything was a sin which, as it so happens at least according to Catholic doctrine, is not the case. He began a campaign of rule infractions, breaches of monastic discipline, distorted ascetic practices all of which invoked an increasing severity of reprovals, culminating in a hatred of his monastic life and even hating God ‘to the point of blasphemy’. Along with all of these run-ins with the authorities, he developed convulsive spasms, the consequence being his life became unbearable, especially, and forgive the crudeness here, serious gastronomical problems including severe constipation. He seems to have retreated and abandoned devotions in favor of study which also seems to have created a Catch-22 situation for him: the more things he abandoned the greater his sense of sin, mixed with the growing apprehension that the sin was to have these devotions but not *faith* (belief).

He saw nothing in himself but wickedness and corruption and his vision of God, probably a direct result of his family life, was wrath and vengeance. His release from the cycle comes from his complete and utter abandonment of the things he associates with this fear and loathing. Everything which the Church offered, devotions, sacraments, rituals paled with the idea of *faith*. Naturally enough, from the corruptions and abuses within himself those in the Church also became a focus. He became increasingly confident in his understanding and that begins to inform his arguments. Scripture becomes the only pure means of understanding.

The Dominican monk John Tetzel bears a mention at this point. History judges him as both a theologian and a snake oil salesman, and this writer refuses to comment for the reason that he has really not looked too deeply into it. Suffice it to say, Tetzel was preaching in an area adjacent to Luther in Wittenberg, and the effect he had on some of Luther’s flock led Luther to put his ‘open-letter’ of 95 Theses (issues) out to the university community in 1517.⁷⁹ Tetzel was an enthusiastic preacher and his description of indulgences was, perhaps even to him, a bit over the top, placing theology above the actual doctrine. He countered to Luther with 106 Theses, calling Luther’s Theses not just a discussion of the abuse of indulgences but an attack on the Church’s teachings about penance and atonement, at least as he understood them. Luther, rather than responding to Tetzel directly, continued to keep the debate public.

⁷⁹ As to whether he pinned them to the message board on the church’s door history is mixed on that opinion – but it does make for good press. In addition, the fastidious Luther posted a copy to the proper ecclesial agent as well who then passed it up the chain.

Once More Into The Breach Dear Friends

Luther was dealing not only with those within the Church establishment but those, who like him, also wanted reform. Luther's solid belief in his interpretation also meant that there was little room for any other interpretation (for fear of error). He was in a constant struggle to keep a balance between people from going too far and the corrupt doctrines he was seeking to redress. He was attacked from both sides, one for being too militant and the other for not going far enough, more than ever once he threw in with the political powers in Germany.

There are two ideas to quickly consider here. First is that of *conscience*. Some want to make the word (and therefore Luther's final speech) be the celebration of *humanist conscience* – that sense of the human spirit. In actuality Luther hated humanists and it makes no sense that he would take that moment to suddenly support them. It is to be understood more along the lines of 'revealed guidance from God' that we have already spoken of. Luther's reliance on the Scripture (the revealed word of God) means that he feels his conscience is formed by God Himself. When these folks (on both sides) are talking about conscience, they are talking about God's Wisdom, not their own – though the alternate accusation is hurled at both sides. There is a certain irony though that what he wanted was part and parcel of the movement he despised.

A second idea which was alluded to but skirted in our discussion on Erasmus is that of 'cleric' or 'clerical' or 'clergy'. Technically a cleric is someone who has been somehow received into the ranks of the clergy and by 'clergy' meaning the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy, of which there were several levels and responsibilities. Simply put then, a cleric is one who belongs in some sense to the hierarchy. In times to come it will strictly mean ordination and that they must wear a costume suited to their state, are forbidden to engage in trade and secular business, must observe celibacy, must avoid scandal or the partaking in of scandalous activities, and lastly that they are bound to obey their diocesan bishops or abbots, i.e. a form we would be familiar with today. At this point though, it is a bit looser. Itinerate preachers are now being offered posts in parishes by powerful patrons and by reform minded individuals, once again showing the separation which had developed from the canonical priesthood attached to a bishop and clergy. The sermon, the power of the speaker, becomes the focus within service rather than adherence to unsettled liturgy and ritual actions.

Luther's revolt against Papacy and Emperor had a deep impact on many of these itinerate preachers and clerics, especially in Germany, who saw up close and personally the plight of the everyday faithful. Many then enthusiastically took up his cause, helping to spread the message of the reformers, while just as many defied him. This growing movement also affected many strictly social reformers as well. Heavy taxation to support an unwieldy ecclesiastical and political structure as well as drought, floods, famine, plague and a small host of other problems was grinding the poor, clerical and lay alike, to rally against the powers which imposed such burdens. And when the going gets tough....well the Germans get more German.

A Diet Of Worms

In the end it is the copy of the Theses (along with a letter of explanation) that Luther scrupulously sent to the archbishop which really caused all of the problems. The archbishop forwarded them to a consulting body and to theologians at the larger and older university at

Mainz. Everyone was in agreement that they were heretical and the Theses, the letter of explanation, and the findings of those consulted were then sent on to the pope, Leo X (1475-1521), who being used to navigating the waters of dissent, took a moment to let everyone breathe and then sent word back to Luther that he needed to appear in Rome to defend his positions. What had started out as a possibly harmless debate at a small university, placed pressure on Luther and caused him to retreat, fearing that leaving Germany would make him lose his home court advantage and place him in the hands of his enemies.

In 1521 a compromise was finally reached and Luther was summoned to Worms (known as a 'diet', meaning a formal meeting, not a weight-loss plan) to renounce or affirm his views before fellow German Johann Eck (1486-1543) who acted as spokesman for the emperor. It ended with the renouncing of Luther's view as a heretical and calling for his eventual arrest but after coming immediately under the protection of the German princes the sentence was never carried out, though in other countries it was enforced against any followers. Leo's successor Adrian VI (1459-1523), a bookish non-Italian from the Low Countries, seemed ill equipped to continue the fight, concentrating his efforts more on overall reform, perhaps in a hope that the problem would solve itself through these efforts, especially as his major concern was the encroaching Turks. His representatives at the discussion were frank in their assessment of the abuses, noting the basic correctness of the complaints being made. He himself hints at the possibility that a pope may make mistakes. As you might guess none of this enamored him with the Curia and as a non-Italian he also lacked popular support for his efforts.

So at The Diet of Worms (which, again, sounds worse than it is – say it with a 'V' – it helps) Luther made his 'here I stand, I can do no other' pronouncement⁸⁰, which garnished him excommunication for his efforts⁸¹. He was immediately taken under the wing of the German Princes as leverage against the Emperor and the Pope and settled down with a 26 year-old nun. He died as the owner of the new movement but not its king. He lacked (nor desired) the power to control and shape the movement as did others, like Calvin.

In 1530, in a meeting in Augsburg to which Luther contributed but did not attend for fear of arrest, a new creed of sorts was developed by the German reformers to be given to the Emperor to explain their exact positions, which became known as the *Augsburg Confession* (not a penitential confession but a statement of belief). It laid out their exact stance on the ritual/liturgical side of the Church, the desired reforms of clergy, and finally doctrinal ideas. The result was rejected by the Emperor and the Pope (surprise!) as well as some of the other reformers and for our purposes will be considered the final nail in the coffin.

That's Revolting

In the light of what was seen as a new light shining in Europe mired in the 'Dark Ages', we turn to one of the dark shadows resulting from this period: the German Peasant Revolt (1524-1525). Inspired by the reforms and having thrown off many of the oppressive clergy, peasants in western and southern Germany invoked the same divine law to demand political as well as

⁸⁰ Though it appears to be a later addition which captures the spirit of the actual statement.

⁸¹ Attempts were made to broker a solution, but Luther, who had sent the Pope a copy of *On the Freedom of a Christian*, publicly set fire to the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* and decree which threatened his excommunication stating something poetically along the lines of 'papal decretals are the devil's excretals.'

religious reform. Demanding agrarian rights and freedom from oppression by nobles and landlords they formed an army. Although the revolt was supported by some of the princes and the likes of the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) its condemnation by Martin Luther sealed its fate. By the end some 100,000 peasants were butchered. Luther was deeply affected by the outcome, and the knowledge of his part in it, and it was his fear of such an outcome which caused him to condemn it in hopes of avoiding it. The resulting reprisals and increased restrictions discouraged any further non-violent or political attempts to improve the peasants' plight and Germany further fractured under the Princes.

It is important for us to remember that at this time, like the science of the time, theological not economic or political ideals drove calls for social change. God's justice and Christ's moral imperative is the rationale for individual equality and justice for the poor. Still this is having an increasing societal effect.

Calvin And Hobbes

While France, Spain, and Italy, through a series of on-going Inquisitions and extremely strong monarchies, held fairly steady against the onslaught of the reformers the style of reforms which commence in Germany begin to spread throughout northern Europe. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French cleric who went to Geneva, sought out there as a legal and political leader as well as a spiritual one, picks up Luther's banner – with a couple of differences.

Calvin, like Erasmus and Luther, was influenced by Augustine but Calvin's sense of ritual, liturgy, and spirituality is shaped differently than any of the others we have talked about so far. While he started in service to the Church, his father's desire that he be a lawyer rather than a priest (more money – another sign of the changing times) means that Calvin was not as shaped by monastery or ordination, but more by secular law. So I give an all too brief mention of him here. The flavor of Christianity represented by Calvinism is much less hierarchical, liturgical...well, frankly, *formal*. Calvin's main thrust is in the area of *justification*.



Figure 20: John Calvin

In brief, Calvinism professes five points which are closely interrelated:

1. **Total depravity:** by nature we are not inclined toward God but sin (evil by nature)
2. **Unconditional election:** God has chosen the saved from all eternity (what we would call the doctrine of *pre-destination*)
3. **Limited atonement:** through Jesus' death, all sin is already atoned for the elect – but for them only
4. **Irresistible or Efficacious grace:** God's grace is applied to those He saves – when God saves you, you are saved
5. **Perseverance of the saints:** the saved will always be saved – any who fall away were never saved.

So in thinking about justification (or 'how are we saved') we can see how Calvin's more grassroots approach comes into play. He is less about theology and more about piety. Calvin takes the doctrine of the priesthood of believers to a deeper level for the same reason. For Luther the sense that forgiveness lies in God alone, that is, in God's decision to grant it, there was no room for the granting of forgiveness outside of some sacramental form, so while

indulgences were wrong, so was the complete abandonment of the Sacrament. Consequentially Calvin's sense of pre-destination, that no matter what you did you were chosen or not chosen did not sit well with Luther.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is an English philosopher who is very influenced by Calvin's teachings. So what? Well that means that what was influencing religious thinking is becoming part of social and political thinking, but in what is perceived as a separate thing – i.e. a *secular* thing. Hobbes was exposed to European scientific and critical methods which contrasted with the scholastic philosophy which he had learned in his early education. His scholarly efforts became aimed at a careful study of classic Greek and Latin authors. While exiled in France he wrote *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* divided into two separate small volumes (*Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policie* and *the Elements of Law, Moral and Politick*) which were so secularist that they angered both English Anglicans and French Catholics equally. To that end, on his return to England, laws against blasphemy and atheism were passed with his works specifically called out by name. He was not prosecuted but he published no more works within England, though his works continued in brisk trade on the Continent.

Theresa of Avila

Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) a cloistered Carmelite nun and mystic from a family of converted Spanish Jews became one of the two female Doctors of the Church. All of these amazing things are in the back seat to our concerns, that of her role as a reformer. The Carmelite order is mendicant (like the Franciscans) and Theresa's call to return to abject poverty reflected the people in the streets but was fought by many.⁸² I mention her mainly because of her mysticism, that is, as a symbol of the changing nature of religious life, away from the cares of the world and toward the spiritual and to practical spirituality. She speaks in very basic terms about things like prayer, comparing it to a garden you have to care for in stages. Everyday piety, even within devotional practices and the Sacraments, brings one closer to God.



Figure 21:
Theresa of Avila

Ignatius Loyola

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556). Like Erasmus he somehow became a cleric at a young age and somehow managed to get released. Raised at court he became a bit of a fop and fancied himself a gallant. Captured by the French after having his legs severely injured by a cannon ball and subsequently poorly reset, he turned away from a frivolous life and began the earnest study of the Church and the Faith.



Figure 22:
Ignatius

"Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. From this it follows that

⁸² In defense of some of those opponents, the severity of the poverty she desired is seen as unhealthy. Theresa's motto "*Lord, either let me suffer or let me die*" would to some, on the surface, seem to be the desires of someone who is seeking self-harm rather than sanctification; most though, just wanted to keep their cushy lifestyles.

man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it. For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.” (Spiritual Exercises, First Week, Principle and Foundation)

He produced a reform movement for clergy dedicated to intense and deep spirituality, study, and knowledge capable of answering deep theological questions among even the most humble of clergy. It also produced an ‘army’ of soldiers for Christ, defenders of the Faith and all which that implies.

Trent Warfare

The Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563). Adrian VI’s earlier efforts were eventually taken up by his later successor Paul III (1468-1549), who while deft at promoting his family’s interest also showed a sincere desire for reform and reconciliation. In 1537, Paul issued the bull *Sublimus Dei* which forbade the enslavement of the indigenous

peoples in America. That year he also made his first call for a council to work through the issues but was rejected by the German reformers, in the form of their refusing to send any delegates.

The problem at this time is one of *MO*. How do you begin to address the problems within the Church? There are theological *and* clerical abuses, which are interrelated, but which do you tackle first? Which is the chicken and which is the egg? Do you improve the clergy through regulation and education and thereby improve the theology and the teaching or do you clarify the teachings and then force conformity within the clergy?

Like the Augsburg Confession we will glance over the defining ecumenical council of this period. At Trent it is officially stated, in opposition to Luther’s stance of *sola fide*, that faith alone, whether personal or dogmatic, cannot justify humanity; and that only such faith *as is active* in charity and good works can justify. (*Trent, Session 1*) In addition the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is also condemned. For the first time a comprehensive approach to Scripture and Tradition, Original Sin, Justification, Sacraments, the Eucharist in Holy Mass, the veneration of saints, clergy training, practice, and abuse, as well as marriage (both lay and clerical) were all spelled out. Trent lasted for almost 40 years for various and sundry reasons, the least of which was war on various fronts. Still, that is not really that much time in Church history but it is a lot in human terms.

The reforms of Trent were fairly comprehensive and so in this sense there is no ‘Counter-Reformation’⁸³. The doctrines clarified and the reforms put into place were long in the making and incorporated many of the reformers objections and reflected much of the reformer’s thinking (not just Luther and Calvin but of the likes of Erasmus and More as well); these



Figure 23: The Council of Trent

⁸³ Unless you look at it as the formal rejection of the Reformer’s positions, in which case it would be more of an ‘Anti-Reformation’.

changes are taking place within the time frame of the reformers, not afterwards. The fact that invited people like Calvin were not given individual voices does not mean that they were without influence. Still, without fully embracing the theological changes championed by many of the reformers, their only answer was to re-form and abandon the Catholic Church.

Henry VIII I Am

Lastly, and somewhat out of order, Henry the VIII (1491-1547) will represent for us a different type of reformer: all of those potentates who wanted to use Luther for their own ends. Henry was only the second monarch of the Tudor dynasty which had only recently been established not by natural succession but conquest in 1485, and there were already succession problems: he only had a daughter (Mary) and England had never had a ruling queen. Though he had been awarded the title 'Defender of the Faith' by the pope in 1521, he liked the idea of a national church, one in which the pope had no authority and he could make his own decisions about how to go about securing an heir. His original Chancellor Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530), had risen to power in Henry's court and, after being appointed Cardinal in 1515, eventually rivaled Henry himself in wealth and opulence but as he failed to gain an agreement to resolve Henry's annulment case from the Pope (who by this time is heavily indebted to the Spanish crown – Catherine of Aragorn was Spanish) he began to fall from power in the 1520s. By 1529, Wolsey had even gone so far as to make a 'gift' of Hampton Court Palace to Henry in order to continue to curry favor with the monarch. After his death he was replaced by Thomas More. More, a long-time friend and confidant of the young king, was at first a good match. Henry desired stability over all else and More, with a strong hand, keen legal mind, and quick wit provided it, but he did not follow the king on the matter of his anulment. The conflict was eventually turned over to Parliament to resolve, a move which More opposed on the grounds of authority.



Figure 24:
Henry VIII

As the king began to change his mind about the nature of the Church, More who had long aided and defended the king began to fall into conflict with him. More's desire for reform seemed to mesh with the king's until the king's intentions became clear, at which time More decided to conceal his. The series of Acts by Parliament cutting back papal power and influence in England, finally realized the compromise which Anselm had so delicately put into motion years before (*Chapter 14*) – Parliament (who had realized King John's compromise with the nobles) and the King now held all of the temporal and moral power of the Church, and bishops merely the spiritual power. Henry, as King of all England, was the sole authority (not just Scripture) there and therefore immune even from papal excommunications. But at the same time, as the sole Church in England, no other group could be allowed. Henry continued what we would consider brutal tactics to keep out not only Catholics but any other who would question the State religion.

In the end, there are two points. First being the historical timing with Luther's revolt which seems to have been quite advantageous to Henry. Second is that similar to Luther, Henry's reformation had produced dangerous Protestant/Catholic and Protestant/Protestant divisions in England which haunted it for centuries. Ultimately, the seized wealth of the monasteries spent on fruitless wars had instead increased the economic strength of the aristocracy and

other families in the counties, which in turn was to divide and weaken the Tudor factions. For the most part nothing of what Henry hoped to accomplish came about. It did have the side-effect of also producing split Catholic and a Protestant heirs and the establishment of Parliament as the major player in all religious and dynastic decisions, epitomized in Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658).

Putting It All Together

With so many voices it was sometimes hard to hear the true message.

It does not help that the competing voices were not always friendly to one another. As desirous the factions were of people like Erasmus to join them, they were truly unable to join even themselves. Catholic retaliation is similarly reflected in Henry who killed any he felt opposed him, and the Calvinists who killed Anabaptists like the Mennonites who in turn felt that the Calvinists and the Lutherans had failed when they joined forces with politicians, falling into the same trap as the Catholics. The bloody war was on.

The Western Schism is complete. Though not explicitly stated there is perhaps a bit of 'I told you so' to be garnished from the Great Schism – the West, with its propensity for intellectual elaboration, has created the environment and the means for its own sundering. At the same time, the act of re-forming rather than reforming created an environment which even Luther abhorred – the continued sundering of Christendom. The continued fracturing of Christians based on doctrine and practice falls directly on the doorstep of this movement from Faith to faith. How can anyone be right if everyone is wrong? Without a true central authority like the Magisterium, an appalling lack of knowledge of the original languages of Scripture and only translations to work from, how does one distinguish Revelation from interpretation?

Once when a terrible schism was rending the seamless garment of the Church, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria [died 412] addressed his sons and brethren with words of pastoral zeal. We take pleasure in addressing these same words to you: "Dearly beloved, we have all been invited to heaven. Let each, then, according to his abilities imitate Jesus, our model and the author of our salvation. Let us embrace that humility of soul which elevates us to great heights, that charity which unites us with God; let us have a genuine faith in revealed mysteries. Avoid division, shun discord....encourage charity toward one another. Heed the words of Christ: 'By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" (Homily in mysticam caenam)...But the common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.

John XXIII, Ad Petri Cathedram

"Let us love God our Lord; let us love His Church. Let us love Him as our father and her as our mother, Him as our master and her as His handmaid. For we are the children of His handmaid. This marriage is based on a deep love. No one can offend one of them and be a friend of the other... What difference does it make that you have not offended your father, if he punishes offenses against your mother?... Therefore, dearly beloved, be all of one mind and remain true to God your father and your mother the Church."

Augustine, Commentary on Ps. 82

"Whether they wish it or not, they are our brethren. They cease to be our brethren only when they stop saying 'Our Father.'"

Augustine, Commentary on Ps. 32

Faith And Reason

And so comes the time when Faith comes in contact with the fullness of the humanism of modern secular culture which produces the ideological landscape we are familiar with. The social, political, theological, and religious upheaval of the 16th – 17th centuries put the Catholic Church on the defensive in Europe and while it sought to re-open itself it also developed something of a siege mentality. But it is no picnic for the other side either. Protestant Europe is struggling to stabilize itself and the 'New World' is opening itself up to all manner of religious thought.

Mysticism

As a quick aside, there is within the response to modern thought, a growing mysticism. Remember that a mystery is an understanding revealed only by God, unreachable by human reason alone. Piety and devotional actions can make plain to the observer of such practices that there is a mystical framework for life, and allows access to that framework. But Mysticism can also lead to both a fanaticism and emotionalism. One can get lost amidst the religious fervor and end up concentrating on minute aspects of both the Faith and belief in general.

With the loss of a sense of the sacred and the concentration on the rational and empirical, an emotional desert can develop, resulting in a desire to experience the sacred which becomes bound up in the over-emotional. This over-emotional reaction may lead others to an even more stark and severe response, in an effort to avoid the cloud of emotions.

Breaking With The Past

The 17th century begins the period of what is traditionally thought of as the 'scientific revolution' and thus the formal break between science and religion. But it actually is not, as we have discussed, such a clear demarcation. We can see that fact in the earlier alluded to infamous case of Galileo. It really is based on a man, like Erasmus or More, who was a faithful Catholic and who wanted nothing more than for the Church to endorse his already obvious vision of the heavens, and who upon running into the question of authority bowed to it. Understanding that as merely a struggle with authority and not in terms of the understanding of Faith and the control of the Truth places it squarely in humanistic terms and misses the piety and sacred nature of belief. Certainly in terms of the advancement of human knowledge it seems like a setback, but the knowledge was never lost, never destroyed, in fact the transcripts have always been available to read. In fact, for some unknown reason an agreed upon compromise collapsed, setting in motion the perceived nature of the trial. The problem is that a single clearinghouse for knowledge was, especially one as slow as the Church, cramping the style of many thinkers. Universities and printing gradually becoming separate from the Church meant that you did not have to wait to publish or teach. So in one sense the trial is a turning point in the contentious relationship between religion and science, but it is more representative than substantive. Anyway, it is not truly until the 18th century and the complete collapse of a general acknowledgment of a central authority that we really begin to see a fundamental break

between science and religion, couched in the attitude we see so prevalent today, and a time at which Galileo is held up as both a humanist martyr and patron saint.

Even at the time this break was not appreciated by everyone. Tired of the growing bulldozer of reason and the Protestant response to it, the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) stated that in order to have religious faith one must accept paradoxes beyond reason — that reason alone was insufficient and contained no path to faith. We must, he says, put aside reason in order to believe, to take a ‘leap of faith’ or more properly perhaps, a ‘leap *to* faith.’ Science, on the other hand, is considered only the practice of reason but yet its belief is perhaps its hypothesis, and its Faith is its empirical fact.

Is there a third option? Is the Scholastic Age the happy medium?

Freedom And Religion

Starting in the 16th century Science and Religion are beginning to be framed as two separate worlds. By the 18th century, with folks like the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and social and political philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we see this as the accepted thinking. So the task for us is to follow the progression of this movement. How did it come about? How is it that men of such learning and high thought could go from associating knowledge with God to seeing them as separate and then from believing in the sacred to not believing in the sacred?

Religiously, politically, and socially the individual and individual rights are becoming the forefront and the very composition of thinking. Humanism has reached the meaning which we apply to it: the human is the center and agent of meaning. This sense of individual rights is pushing the sense of religious freedom, as odd as that might sound. But in the logic of humanism, if the individual is paramount and the individual is the agent of meaning then internal subjective personal choice trumps external pressures and norms. The right of the individual to worship as they see fit is greater than what king or Church dictate.

America was becoming a different kind of battleground. Folks like the Puritans, denied freedom of religion in England (do not forget – anyone who is not Anglican is against the Crown) and hustled out of just about every place they try to settle⁸⁴ head for American and the promise of light oversight in return for the very dangerous task of laying claim to and settling land for the Crown.

Freedom Of Religion

So America becomes the largest plot of land available to practice your beliefs freely – mainly because you are far enough away from the authorities who would normally be hounding you. Leaving England for Holland really does not protect you from others, both Church of England and Rome, who desire to arrest and try you. America offers the comfortable cushion of the Atlantic and a sense of self-rule which is unhampered and unencumbered by the strength of Crown or Church to back it up, that and large savage animals.

While profit may drive their sponsors, many groups come for religious reasons, the main one we think of is of course the Puritans but we can touch on the groups already there, mainly Spanish and French Catholics. Many groups arise in America as well, or come to fruition there.

⁸⁴ I don't know, is it me? Do you suppose it could just be me?

We can think of the Quakers and the Mennonites and the Amish, as well as John Wesley and his circuit riding Methodist preachers. We see this attitude culminating in the American Revolution and in places like Virginia, where Jefferson drafts the first meaningful freedom of religion act (1779) which eventually is embodied in the First Amendment of the Constitution (1791).

The founding fathers are probably concerned less with a particular practice of a particular faith and more with the interference of the practice of any faith with the operation of the government. So ironically, this right to free religious expression is not always so free. Orthodoxy parades about in many masks, both religious and political. Puritans often outlawed the practice of Anglicanism; many colonies adopted a state religion – usually Anglicanism – and forbade or limited the practice of other denominations and Judaism. With the strength of the Catholic French and Spanish to the North and South of the colonies⁸⁵, there is a strong sense of anti-popey which courses through the Protestant English Colonies. Still, places like Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, California, and all along the Mississippi river Catholic missionaries spread the Faith among the native tribes and settlers, which puts more pressure on the colonies to hold fast to their religious faiths. Maryland was founded on the premise of religion tolerance by Calvert Lord Baltimore in his desire to create a haven for English Catholics in the new world. Maryland was one of the places in the whole English Empire where Catholics could hold positions of political authority. Eventually, starting in about 1650 with a Puritan revolt in Maryland and ending with the ascendancy of William of Orange in 1688, the foundational principle of religious toleration failed and Catholicism was outlawed in the state ironically dedicated to the Virgin Mary until after the Revolution.

Freedom From Religion

Along with this growing personal pietism and stilted sense of orthodoxy, the emergent sense of secular humanism is also channeling religious thought, which we might call the ‘God as scientist’ trend. In the course of human events it seems more and more that it is human intellect and experimentation which brings those events to fruition – possibly guided, at least initially, by some being. This sentiment is called Deism.

Deism rises out of the growing understanding of the universe of laws, not just the rational laws of the Logos, but now that idea in light of empirical science – the law of gravity, the mathematical laws guiding the movement of the planets, etc.. Deism is the system in which God exists but as a fact known purely on rational grounds, without any reliance on revealed religion or religious authority or holy texts. The image of God as ‘clockmaker’, who wound up the universe at the beginning of time and then walked away from it, comes from this thinking. The universe does not need God to run it, does not need a God who is imminent, involved in the affairs of the world, and so also does not need any intermediaries – priests, myths, rituals, scriptures. The rejection of non-scriptural authority by the Protestant reformers, the denial of the need for intermediaries, finds its next logical step here. What authority, which in any way smacks of human intervention, can match the revelation which the rational/empirical universe presents us?

⁸⁵ One of the instigators for unrest in the colonies was the Parliamentary approval of Catholicism in Quebec in 1774. Colonists saw this as a threat to their religious freedom.

In a world of metaphysical uncertainty, Deism then offers a substitute for revealed truth; a truth which can be built solely by the unaided efforts of human reason. It also has the effect of finally the questioning of the authority of Scripture, the very basis for the rational of Protestantism. There is no objective measure of authority or truth – neither magisterial authority nor scriptural authority – the final and only authority is human reason and empirical observation. This is the thinking which leads Thomas Jefferson to cut out the parts of scripture he liked and combined them into his own bible.

It also opens the door to out and out atheism, the questioning of the very existence of the sacred, which cannot be proved empirically or rationally.

American Religious Culture

In the midst of this Samuel Adams (1722-1803) created nostalgia for the good old days of Puritanism in America. He was of Puritan descent and preached a kind of radical neo-Puritanism, and railed against those not of the ilk. At one moment he is calling everyone to the Liberty Tree with the rally cry of religious and political freedom and the next haranguing anyone who smacks in the least of popery, Roman or Anglican.

As said, America was not the bastion of religious freedom which we now envision it to be. There were only three colonies where Catholics could even vote, and in many areas Jews faced similar suppression. The American ideals of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” only partially translated to freedom of religion.

It is George Washington who articulates the fullness of the idea of American religious freedom applying it to all denominations and faiths in his letter to a Rhode Island Hebrew congregation in 1790. American Jews had been addressing letters to Washington since the year before, starting with the Hebrew Congregation of Savannah, Georgia. In that initial reply, Washington exhibits both his deistic beliefs and only a certain generic benevolence : *“May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.”* It is the letter of 1790 which spells out a more complete vision: *“The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens.”*

America remains a fiercely Protestant Christian culture, though ironically Catholics remain one of the largest voting blocs. Still, Washington’s notion of religious freedom continues to guide the overall culture, providing rich soil for many denominations, groups and belief systems, all the while maintaining some of Sam Adam’s radical intolerance.

The French

This leads us to the next echo of the American Revolution and the development of the secular French culture. Religion and faith still play a role in American political culture and so the movement from religious state to a purely secular one bears some examination here. Calvin was driven out of France by reprisals against the reformers, but even after the reforms of Trent the Church and the Crown still made for strange bedfellows.

France had known its share of back and forth throughout the 16th-17th with moments of tolerance and intolerance, but for the most part the state religion remained Catholicism. With the Revolution, the close ties of Church to State caused suspicion of all things religious. Thinkers like Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) against whom hero of the American Revolution and inciter of change Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) failed to control the violence of the Revolution, championed the idea of change through elimination and the violent death of those deemed responsible. He was equally vehement against atheism and he wanted to create a new spirituality, or at least a spiritual revival in France designed by and for the State based on his Deism. In 1794, Robespierre helped to establish an 'official religion' which he called the 'Cult of the Supreme Being', which really only lasted as long as he did, though the effects lingered on.



Figure 25:
Robespierre

After the Revolution of 1789 the French Government went on a Henry VIII like spree, confiscating Church property, sanctioning the destruction of Church property, and the outlawing of priests and any who would harbor them. Combined with the replacement of the state religion of Catholicism with a type of neo-paganism based in personifications of 'Reason', (changing churches into temples, even Notre Dame itself), France began down a road to secularism. Eventually in 1798, French forces, once the champions of the papacy, under the leadership of Napoleon marched into Rome itself and imprisoned the Pope, Pius VI (1717-1799), who died in that captivity.

Finally in 1801, the *Concordant* was signed which eased earlier draconian anti-religious measures until it was repealed in 1905 in which separation of church and state was spelled out. While the Concordant spread 'acknowledgement' and money around, the 1905 agreement sought a more complete severing, and prohibited the government from recognizing any religion or subsidizing religion in any way – like paying clergy (but still retained a bit of influence in the appointment of bishops).

While Catholicism still tends to be the faith of most of the people of France, starting in the mid-20th century with the likes of John Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, a general malaise toward organized religion and even a strong vein of atheism also runs within French culture. Sartre represents the logical conclusion to many of the trends we have discussed. Humanity, alone and isolated in our individualism, can neither connect to others or even any presence outside of oneself without creating a demeaning of the other. Ironically this is partially based on a common observation of human nature, the same situation which religion often tries to overcome.

Putting It All Together

The struggle of Faith and Reason is not new to religion; in fact it only becomes a struggle with the separation of Faith and Reason. The loss of metaphysics as a discussion of reality, and its relegation to mere moral discussions leads, like Scripture before it, to the logical discounting of relevance even in that area. Without external, objective universals save empirical or mathematically rational ones, discussion of God and the sacred become one-sided. The arguments which reduce love down to chemical reactions within the organic material of the brain seems to take something away from it, yet even the emotional aspects can be 'explained' at a molecular level.

Still it is the further separation of faith from religion which seems to really be the coffin nail. The expression of faith has gone from an active, ritual based participation in the sacred to a passive, intellectual exercise. The centrality of modern humanism and individuality remove both the public practice and the public responsibility which are such a primary element within religion. The individual is no longer beholden to the salvation of the world, and the sacred is reduced to a curiosity within the larger context of human achievement. What separates us in this matter today is not our divergent beliefs but our inability to see those beliefs in a context larger than ourselves.

"...the difference between the Ancient concept of the nature of the world and the New concept is, in the Ancient concept the world has a framework of Time, and in the New concept, a framework of Space."

John Crowley, *Little, Big*

"The waters have risen and severe storms are upon us, but we do not fear drowning, for we stand firmly upon a rock. Let the sea rage, it cannot break the rock. Let the waves rise, they cannot sink the boat of Jesus. What are we to fear? Death? *'Life to me means Christ, and death is gain.'* Exile? *'The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord.'* The confiscation of goods? *'We brought nothing into this world, and we shall surely take nothing from it.'* I have only contempt for the world's threats, I find its blessings laughable. I have no fear of poverty, no desire for wealth. I am not afraid of death nor do I long to live, except for your good. I concentrate therefore on the present situation, and I urge you, my friends, to have confidence.

Do you not hear the Lord saying: *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst?* Will he be absent, then, when so many people united in love are gathered together? I have his promise; I am surely not going to rely on my own strength! I have what he has written; that is my staff, my security, my peaceful harbor. Let the world be in upheaval. I hold to his promise and read his message; that is my protecting wall and garrison. What message? *Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!*

If Christ is with me, whom shall I fear? Though the waves and the sea and the anger of princes are roused against me, they are less to me than a spider's web. Indeed, unless you, my brothers, had detained me, I would have left this very day. For I always say "Lord, your will be done"; not what this fellow or that would have me do, but what you want me to do. That is my strong tower, my immovable rock, my staff that never gives way. If God wants something, let it be done! If he wants me to stay here, I am grateful. But wherever he wants me to be, I am no less grateful.

Yet where I am, there you are too, and where you are, I am. For we are a single body, and the body cannot be separated from the head nor the head from the body. Distance separates us, but love unites us, and death itself cannot divide us. For though my body die, my soul will live and be mindful of my people.

You are my fellow citizens, my fathers, my brothers, my sons, my limbs, my body. You are my light, sweeter to me than the visible light. For what can the rays of the sun bestow on me that is comparable to your love? The sun's light is useful in my earthly life, but your love is fashioning a crown for me in the life to come."

St. John Chrysostom, *Sermon*

Modern Reason

We arrive finally at not only the last chapter but a time in history and thought in which it can be said we still participate. It is not that human thought has ever lay dormant or stagnant but the last 100 to 150 years of human intellectual development has exponentially increased the scientific knowledge of humanity. It is a one-two combination of Biology and Cosmology which shake the pillars of Heaven.

Evil Is As Evil Does

But before we get there, let us examine a couple of concepts that lay mixed into the foundation of modern thought. For many, the modern view about the sacred is not a question of intellectual argument, inner spirituality, or even morality, but a question of *evil*. If there is a God, and He is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, etc, etc, then why do bad things happen? Not that this is not an age-old quandary, and in fact some religious systems are based around this fact (some for good, some for ill) but the center of attention has shifted; it is no longer in terms of God versus creation but Me versus creation.

So what it comes down to is who is responsible for evil: human will or a cold, uncaring universe? What had earlier been accepted as proper arguments about the problem are now questioned – they assume God and so all explanation must somehow involve Him – because experientially life clearly contains evil and that evil, natural or human created, is observable even without the positing of God. Modern based religious systems like Calvinism presents evil as part of Nature and that we must trust God against the evidence. In an atheistic (god-less) system evil is the result of social/environmental ills, like lack of education, poverty, and the broken cycle of reduced psychological preparation.

We can also ask “Is there even a problem with evil?” Is reality such that evil is just part of everything as opposed to something *abnormal* to the natural order? If that is true then, the metaphysical questions of ethics and morals are really moot – there is not even a need for ethics. We can see this in a system like Christian Science where matter does not exist and therefore neither does evil or at least only to the level we believe in either.

Evil, in a sense, is separate from morality, a separate problem.

Will You Get That For Me?

The Will is not something we have spoken of in some time, but as it comes into play again, here it is. If evil and good are not things which matters, then the will does not matter, right? So in one way of thinking freewill has several positive aspects like moral responsibility, personal acts, and personal relationships which outweigh the bad effects of freewill. It is better to have free will and the *possibility* of evil than no free will and the impossibility of evil or good (this reflects Augustine’s ideas but does not contain the balance aspect). The other option is to move the will out of the person and into the larger structure of the universe.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who inspired both Nietzsche and Freud, took this direction. Heavily influenced by eastern religious thought, he also took inspiration from

Christianity, with the thinking that any faith that had a man being tortured on a cross as its central emblem couldn't be entirely bad and its saints, who suffered self-denial and deprecation, had it all down pat and were an inspiration to us all. Life is pain, grief, sorrow and little else, where the will, an indifferent and objective force, drives all to ruin, if not controlled within each person. The will's striving, the constant urge for achievement of ever more ambitious goals causes human unhappiness. Human strife comes from striving; there is never a point where the will can be satisfied, because by its very nature it must keep developing, striving to reach the next goal. The only defense is to stop willing, what he called "the euthanasia of the will" (*The World as Will and Representation*). This never-ending cycle of willing and suffering can be broken only by stymieing the will through the cessation of the striving, i.e. a Buddhist-like resignation/contemplation.

But the removal of the will from humanity is nothing new. From a Calvinist point of view, with human nature being basically evil, it is logically impossible for God to give us any significant amount of moral freedom and still be able to guarantee our goodness.

Modernism

No, this is not an attempt to pad this chapter but the word given to a coming together of disciplines culminating in the idea of dogma as *evolutionary*. Modernism is the response to and a result of the growing empirical sciences as well as the existing religious environment. It may be said to arise out of the new scholarship of the 19th and 20th century which began to look at the idea of religion and faith in a historical-critical way, but its roots are in the new sense of authority and dogma. We see this trend finding a home in secular philosophy within the thought of the likes of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and *Structuralism* both of which comes to us out of mid-20th century France and maintain that aspects of a culture can be understood through the means of some sort of 'structure' (usually language) which is distinct from what is observable and what is within reason.

Before your head snaps off in a double-take, just think of it this way: outside of the Orthodox and Catholic Church authority has become personal interpretation – what God has revealed *to me* through His word. Add to that the growing number of scientific disciplines. As more scientific approaches appeared studies of things like history, a sense of things within the framework of time, became more important. To these thinkers this sense of historicism suggested that ideas and actions are intricately bound up in their history, that is, they are so much a part of the time-frame in which they happen or are expressed. As applied to religion, Modernism states that most of the Hebrew practices and later the dogmas of the Church were time and situational specific innovations that were developed because of specific historical necessity. As we have discussed, Rationalism and the new sciences of textual criticism downplayed the possible role of the miraculous and go to the logical conclusion of God not only as improvable but incapable of ever being known.

Theology as a science is dismissed, and its conclusions were relegated to the same dung heap as metaphysics. As Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) put it, "*Religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from the fact that it falls in with our instinctual desires.*" (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*) Religion, no longer considered rational or scientific, was seen as a function of human emotions, caused by and centered on the *feelings* of its believers or some similar

hormonal or chemical reaction. It could be argued that there is perhaps some veracity to this line of reasoning as modern theological thinking and religious practice with its disdain for dogma and with a lack of true objective measures concentrates more on individual interpretation, experience, and emotions. Scripture, while seen as the objective foundation, has no objective interpretation, and this leaves adherents short of an argument.

Closing The Door On The Sacred

Okay, I threw open the doors and mentioned Freud, so let us start in the mid-1800's. The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise of economic theory as well as political theory. Marx, Nietzsche, James, Darwin, Freud, Sartre; these are the intellectual milestones by which we mark our culture today. There are many others, but then this is a popular book on religious thought and not a tome, so we will concentrate for brevity's sake.

As a general note, a lot of modern systems see faith as belief in God against reason, as opposed to the medieval faith and reason idea.

Marx: best known as the father of modern Communism, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his collaborator Engels (1820-1895) are often misquoted as stating that religion, because it hid a person from their true self, was 'the opiate of the masses'. Religion was the expression, not of a deeper reality but an illusion, a projection of the actual suffering of individuals, masked in ritual and myth and called salvation. But it is not so much religion itself but the mistaking of religion as real which is the problem. *"Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man—state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. **It is the opium of the people.** The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo."*(Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right)

Nietzsche: best known for his ideas about the 'superman' (*ubermensch*) and the 'God is dead' quote, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) ushers in the complete rejection of the religious form. For Nietzsche there are no universals, no ultimate Truths in which to have faith and every religion is meaningless dribble, and he is opposed to the genetic strait-jacket of Darwin, where we are some sort of eugenic superhuman or next level of evolution, preferring instead a complete triumph of the *will*. These illusions, we created them – they do not exist on their own

and just because we believe them does not make them true. Only those brave few who realize this, and move beyond it (the *ubermensch*), are capable of *truly* living. We have basically *out-grown* God. *"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"* (*The Gay Science*) Only those of the strongest wills stand up and are counted, all others *"from motives of fear the contrasted type has been willed, trained, attained: man the domestic animal, the social animal, the sick animal — the Christian."* (*The Antichrist and Will to Power*)

James: less well known than his famous brother Henry, philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) championed the peculiarly American philosophy of Pragmatism (from the Greek *pragma*, which we might translate as '*practical*', through Kant, meaning something which is arrived at through or applied to experience rather than those that are *a priori*). For James, there are also no universals, no gold standard for behavior. He develops a type of relativism which based not on emotion or reason per se but on *what works*. To put it simply: *"Truth is what works."* (*Pragmatism, The Meaning of Truth, and The Will to Believe*) Pragmatism is all about behavior: values and morality and the purpose of philosophy is to help us to understand what has value to us and why. Consequentially ideas and beliefs have value to us only when they work. *"We have to live today by what truth we can get today and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood."* (*Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*) This is not meant to confuse the issue; James is not seeking Truth, but is explaining the rational for action. Religion therefore, has merit today, if it works. When it stops working, it has no merit. In James the idea of belief equaling faith is fully articulated. *"Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is the willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance. It is in fact the same moral quality which we call courage in practical affairs;"* (*The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*) That is to say, in a way we operate on Kierkegaard's *leap to faith* level, not a faith in something or in a collection of truths (Faith), per se, but belief in the truth that even if I am wrong, I have done something, and that something was worth doing. Notice also the idea that faith is connected to the possibility of doubt, placing it in human rational origin not in any revelation.

Freud: already mentioned above and to be mentioned below is best known as the father of modern psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) took the idea of religion as illusion into the depths of the mind and the motivation of individuals. He saw religion as 'Wish-Fulfillment', an illusion, in this case meaning a belief that is not true but that people want very much to be true, because religion was a response to the repressive nature of society – the rational for why we do not do what we want to do. It is therefore a neurosis, a delusion brought on by distress and guilt. [Freud was an avowed atheist but ironically finds his proof for this when he dabbles in biblical criticism, concluding that his points are true because Moses was not Jewish and that monotheism actually derived from the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten's religious beliefs.] [In *The Future of an Illusion*, he described belief in God as a collective neurosis based on "longing for a father." In his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, something new emerges. There Freud,

without abandoning his atheism, begins to see the Jewish faith that he was born into as a source of cultural progress in the past and of personal inspiration in the present. Close to his own death, Freud starts to recognize the poetry and promise in religion.]

Sartre: perhaps the best known for his “Hell is other people” line, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) articulates the logical end of secular humanism; his bold statement has more to do with the fact that we sacrifice our self-realization by binding ourselves to others. For Sartre, there is no such thing as a general ‘human nature’ because there is no God to conceive it. *“If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuses behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone with no excuses”* (*Existentialism Is a Humanism*). First we exist, then we choose, then we act, and there is no one to blame for those actions except our self. We are the self-contained vessels of our own conscience.

Biology

There are two sides to the biology explosion: exterior and interior. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) will represent the exterior and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the interior.

Darwin is almost a no brainer. The world, not of the cosmos (as with Copernicus) but of ourselves, turns upside down. His theory that biological things evolve as necessary due to external environmental forces stabs at the very heart of humanity. Relative local forces, not God or cosmic laws or the Will, blindly drove us to who we are. Darwin takes the argument completely out of philosophy and metaphysics and places it squarely only within physical adaptation. Adapt or die; a pretty simple message. The need for ethics or morals, souls, God, completely disappears, leaves the realm of the intellect and enters the realm of necessity. Evolution echoes Deism, William James, and Schopenhauer but it does it without the necessity of humanity. It posits a biological system totally determined by random chance and genetics. The best genetics and adapters live, creating a basis for the next level which survives because it is the best adaptation. But adaptation can also leave you hanging. If you adapt and survive into the Ice Age, you die if you cannot adapt to the next period of global warming. There is no teleology, no end to which anything comes into existence or any end to which it pursues; one only lives for reproduction and dies when one no longer produces.

Freud introduces a ‘human element’ back into the mix. No matter how we got here or where we are going, we are who we are, but similarly to Darwin there is a sexual basis for that. We do not need to rehash what was said earlier, but as with Darwin we need to examine the effect of his thought on the everyday thinking and action. Like Schopenhauer’s ‘will to life’ and Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ Freud posits the ‘will to pleasure’, that is, we actively seek pleasure and avoid pain in order to satisfy basic biological and psychological needs. The *id* is the impulsive, child-like portion of the psyche that operates purely at this level and only takes into account instinctive desire with a total disregard for all consequences. This is a driving principle but at some point we are able to learn to endure pain in order to receive pleasure. The *super-ego* represents this moral component of the psyche but like the *id*, is the unbridled moral sense where everything is black and white. Hence the denial of food or sex or something else, in order

to reach a more pleasurable thing is a sign of maturity but can also be (as in a religious context) a delusion of true pleasure. We often deny ourselves the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Moral and immoral actions are balanced in the *ego* and usually reflected most directly in a person's actions. We struggle between irrational desires and fears and an almost overwhelming sense of equally irrational moral rectitude. All of these problems are reflected in religious belief, which is the illusive attempt to make sense of it all.

Cosmology

The world is a place through which we barely muddle. Physically we are the result of random chance. Psychologically we are caught between the irrational and the over-rational, driven by responses to random actions made about us. Good thing we can rely on the universe around us to give some comfort and grounding, right? The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg writes that "the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." (*The First Three Minutes*) Guess not. The science of the universe highlights the sheer randomness and blind luck which produced everything we know. Weinberg is an example of the thinking which paints a picture of our universe as a vast purposeless place in which we can see no evidence of an origin or a point for ourselves as human beings much less the universe itself.

If the universe defines the edges of reality and knowledge, that is, it is the first item on the list of things which are, then God exists within it and all questions of metaphysics are moot, because they are not about the actual truth but as Marx and Nietzsche would have us believe are illusions, meaningless questions. You might as well ask questions about unicorns – certainly you can come up with answers but they are meaningless because unicorns do not exist.

Framing The Question

So what is the meaning of even humanity in the face of a universe based in science and scientific laws? What meaning can it have? If human emotions are chemical reactions to external or genetic stimuli and things like love, or compassion, or joy, or wonder and awe are mere calculable, measurable and meaningless things, then what are we? Modern Cosmology has pulled humanity out of the center of the question and replaced us with the universe itself, or as the case may be the dimensional realm in which ours and many other universes may exist.

The assumption of modern thinking is that we live in a world totally different from the world that was written about by the Jews and in which Jesus lived and died. Structuralism and the like argue that the Church was the answer for the historical situation of the world in the last days of the pagan Roman Empire, but that now we face a different situation; that for true spirituality one must have a new, up-to-date, twentieth century solution to the problems which assail us. Modern biology and cosmology push it away even from the question of history, which is still an anthropocentric approach, and place it billions of miles and years removed from us.

So if our first question was '*what is the nature of religion*' then the final question we pose in this exploration is '*what is the nature of science*?' Is science as was believed for so long, human exploration and questioning, life seeking answers or is it the more proper understanding of empirical observation and conclusions? What are facts? Does science give any better understanding of the universe than does the creation myth? Are we better off today than our ancestors in the knowledge department? Has the world become more closed in the last 200

years – more so than in all of the centuries before? That is to say, has our vision of humanity and life narrowed in its attempt to broaden our understanding?

In a sense then, all that can be said about the sacred already has been said. We do not need to seek new answers, as we might in medicine or physics, but take the answers we already have and apply them within our own situation, humanity as it exists today. For that reason, sacred thinking is often seen as backwards, superstitious, or ignorant, but at the same time all of our non-sacred thinking has not brought us peace or freedom from want either.

So where does it end? Is the Profane within Sacred or Sacred within Profane?

Science tells us, all elements, all combination of things, even all knowledge, are already contained within this universe, from its earliest moment to now in the same sense that all of the gold which will ever be produced on Earth already has been. If that is true, could it also be true about the human soul?

Putting It All Together

As always the irony to this author seems to be that the ideas which religion produces, universal laws, anthropocentric reality, and the notion of the worth and value of the individual also give religion ground to its greatest opponents. But it is the nature of the thinking that provides the answer to the irony. It is how you see the problem which dictates the answer. When you begin by postulating God, then science is ‘tainted’ by that fact. Things can or cannot happen in terms of the Faith, not merely in terms of the empirical evidence. The fact that something works is secondary to the why it works, that is to say that the answer may be obscured by either the reliance upon the deity or the confusion of application of two separate ends to the same cause, which is not physical in nature. This is the fullness of the argument against medieval thinking.

Yeah, well to that end, just like theology was probably not the best field to postulate a scientific cosmology, then perhaps science is not the best discipline for determining meaning and purpose. Unless we are looking to the idea of appropriateness; science cannot truly ‘answer’ questions of morality or origin any more than Faith can answer specific questions about the biological or cosmological origin and motion (the specific interaction and results of physical objects). But as we saw with myth, as well as the entire history of science, the answer that each provides can give meaning and insight into the other, providing a rich human experience. Religion, like science, only loses relevance when we refuse to hear what it tells us about ourselves and the universe around us.

Today, there seems to be two camps: those who believe in the sacred and those who do not. But it is much more complex than that. Even among those camps there are those who believe or do not believe and those who want to believe; those who see no paradox in science and religion and those who are unable to bridge the two. There are cultural Christians and Jews as well as devout scientists. Sometimes it is easier to explain the cosmos than plumb the depths of the human soul.

“Because there are laws such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself out of nothing. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the Universe going.”

Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design*

"Stephen Hawking to God: Your Services Are No Longer Needed; God to Hawking: You So Don't Get Who I Am"

Clay Ferris Naff, N

"It certainly may be easier to not believe in God, but is it necessarily better? I have seen no empirical or rational proof in anything else that has been produced in the mind of man."

Anon

Faith And History

This is a borrowed/enhanced timeline to give a sense of the movement toward Judeo-Christianity.

Prehistory (400th millennium BC to 32nd century BC)		
300th to 51st millennium BC		
223,000 - 100,000 BC	The earliest evidence of Hominids, such as Neanderthals, deliberately disposing of deceased individuals in funerary caches. The graves, located throughout Eurasia, are believed to represent the beginnings of ceremonial rites, although there is some debate about this. Neanderthals placed their deceased in simple graves with little or no concern for grave goods or markers; however, their graves occasionally appeared with limestone blocks in or on them, possibly an archaic form of grave marking. These practices were possibly the result of empathetic feelings towards fellow tribesmen, for example: an infant buried in the Dederiyeh Cave (in modern Syria) after its joints had disarticulated was placed with concern for the correct anatomical arrangement of its body parts.	
98,000 BC	In the area of present-day France and Belgium, Neanderthals begin de-fleshing their dead, possibly after a period of ex-carnation prior to burial.	
50th to 11th millennium BC		
40,000 BC	One of the earliest anatomically modern humans to be cremated is buried near Lake Mungo (in modern Australia).	
33,000 BC	All convincing evidence for Neanderthal burials ceases. Roughly coinciding with the time period of the Homo sapiens introduction to Europe and decline of the Neanderthals.	
25,000 - 21,000 BC	Individual skulls and/or long bones begin appearing heavily stained with red ochre and are separately buried. Examples of ritual burials in Iberia, Wales, and Eastern Europe all incorporating red ochre. Additionally, various objects are being included in the graves (i.e. periwinkle shells, weighted clothing, dolls, possible drumsticks, mammoth ivory beads, fox teeth pendants, panoply of ivory artifacts, antlers, flint blades, etc.). The oldest discovered "Venus figurines" appear in graves. Some are deliberately broken or repeatedly stabbed. Representing some unknown social dynamic.	
21,000 - 11,000 BC	Convincing evidence of mortuary activity ceases.	
13,000 - 8,000 BC	Increased burial activity resumes. Prior mortuary activity had either taken a less obvious form or contemporaries retained some of their burial knowledge in the absence of such activity; dozens of men, women and children were being buried in the same caves which were used for burials 10,000 years beforehand. All these graves are delineated by the cave walls and large limestone blocks. The burials are very similar to each other and share number of characteristics— ochre, shell and mammoth ivory jewelry—that go back thousands of years. Some burials are double, comprising an adult male with a juvenile male buried by his side. They are now appearing to take on the form of modern cemeteries. Old burials are commonly being re-dug and moved to make way for the new ones, with the older bones often being gathered together and cached together. Large stones may have acted as grave markers. Pairs of ochre colored antlers are sometimes poles within the cave; this is compared to the modern practice of leaving flowers at one's grave.	
10th millennium to 34th century BC		
9831	The Neolithic Revolution begins and results in a worldwide population explosion. The first cities, states, kingdoms, and organized religions begin to emerge. The early states were usually theocracies, in which the political power is justified by religious prestige.	
9130 - 7370 BC	The apparent lifespan of Göbekli Tepe (in modern Turkey), the oldest human-made place of worship yet discovered.	

8000 BC	Four to five pine posts are erected near the eventual site of Stonehenge.	
7500 - 5700 BC	The settlements of Catalhoyuk develop as a likely spiritual center of Anatolia (modern day Turkey and Syria). Possibly practicing worship in communal shrines, its inhabitants leave behind numerous clay figurines and impressions of phallic, feminine, and hunting scenes.	
3100 - 2900 BC	Newgrange (in Ireland), the passage tomb aligned to the winter solstice is built.	
Ancient history (33rd century BC to 3rd century CE)		
33rd to 12th century BC		
3100 BC	The initial form of Stonehenge is completed. The circular bank and ditch enclosure, about 110 meters (360 ft) across, with perhaps a timber circle.	
3000 BC	Sumerian city-states, ziggurats, and cuneiform emerges, allowing the codification of beliefs and creation of detailed historical religious records.	
	The second phase of Stonehenge is completed and appears to function as the first enclosed cremation cemetery in the British Isles.	
2635 - 2610 BC	The oldest surviving Egyptian Pyramid is commissioned by pharaoh Djoser (the 'Step' pyramid). It is surrounded by temples.	
2600 BC	Stonehenge begins to take on the form of its final phase. The wooden posts are replaced with bluestone. It begins taking on an increasingly complex setup—including altar, portal, station stones, etc.—and shows consideration of solar alignments.	
2560 BC	The approximate time accepted as the completion of the Great Pyramid of Giza, the oldest pyramid of the Giza Plateau.	
2494 - 2345 BC	The first of the oldest surviving religious texts, the Pyramid Texts, are composed in Ancient Egypt.	
2200 BC	Minoan Civilization in Crete develops. Citizens worship a variety of Goddesses. Art evidence of some possible religious practices.	
2150 - 2000 BC	The earliest surviving versions of the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (originally titled "He saw the deep").	
2000 - 1850 BC	The traditionally accepted lifetime of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic patriarchal figure Abraham. Likely born in Ur or Haran and buried in Hebron.	
1600 BC	The ancient development of Stonehenge comes to an end.	
13th to 9th century BC		
1350 - 1332 BC	Reign of Akhenaton in Ancient Egypt; ~17 year shift to monotheism.	
1334 BC	Egypt returns to polytheism.	
1300 - 1000 BC	The 'standard' version of the Epic of Gilgamesh edited	
1250 BC	Proposed time of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt.	
1200 BC	The Greek Dark Age begins.	
1200 BC	Olmecs build earliest pyramids and temples in Central America.	
1100 BC	Approximate time for birth of Zoroaster (a.k.a. Zarathushtra), founder of Zoroastrianism.	
950 BC	The oral Torah begins to be written, the core texts of Judaism and foundation of later Abrahamic religions.	
8th to 3rd century BC		
800 BC	Early Indian Brahmanas are composed.	
800 BC	The Greek Dark Age ends.	
600 - 500 BC	Timeframe of earliest Confucian writing	
	Babylonian exile Torah and other core texts codified	
563 BC	Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism is born.	
551 BC	Confucius, founder of Confucianism, is born.	
440 BC	Zoroastrianism enters recorded history.	
312 BC	Alexander the Great captures Palestine.	
245 BC	The Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is finished.	
2nd century BC to 4th century CE		
139 BC	The Maccabee revolt against the Greek Antiochus IV.	
63 BC	Pompey captures Jerusalem and annexes Judea as a Roman client kingdom.	
7 BC - 36 AD	The approximate time-frame for the life of Jesus of Nazareth.	

50-62	Council of Jerusalem is held.	
51-63	Pauline letters are written.	
60-100	The approximate time-frame for the writing of the four canonical Gospels.	
68	Peter and Paul die in Rome.	
70	Siege of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple.	
120	Core canonical writings of the New Testament are done.	
220	Manichaean Gnosticism is formed by prophet Mani	
250	Some of the oldest parts of the text of Mandaean Gnosticism, are written.	
250 - 900	Classic Mayan civilization, Stepped pyramids are constructed.	
300	The oldest known version of the Tao Te Ching is written on bamboo tablets.	
325	The first Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicea, is convened to attain a consensus on doctrine through an assembly representing all of Christendom. It establishes the original Nicene Creed, fixes Easter's date, recognizes the primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch and grants the See of Jerusalem a position of honor.	
380	Theodosius I declares Nicene Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire.	
381	The second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople, reaffirms/revises the Nicene Creed repudiating Arianism and Macedonianism.	
381 - 391	Theodosius proscribed Paganism within the Roman Empire.	
393	The Synod of Hippo, the first time a council of bishops of early Christianity listed and approved a Biblical canon.	
Middle Ages (5th to 15th century)		
5th to 9th century		
405	St. Jerome completes the Vulgate, the first Latin translation of the bible.	
410	The Western Roman Empire begins to decline, signaling the onset of the Middle Ages.	
424	The Assyrian Church of the East formally separates from the See of Antioch and the western Syrian Church	
431	The third Ecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus, is held as a result of the controversial teachings of Nestorius, of Constantinople. It repudiates Nestorianism, proclaims the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos ("Birth-giver to God", "God-bearer", "Mother of God"), repudiates Pelagianism, and again affirms the Nicene Creed.	
449	The Second Council of Ephesus declares support of Eutyches and attacked his opponents. Originally convened as an Ecumenical council, its ecumenicality is rejected and is denounced by the Chalcedonian Council of 451.	
451	The fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon rejects the Eutychian doctrine of monophysitism, adopts the Chalcedonian Creed, reinstated those deposed in 449 and deposed Dioscorus of Alexandria, and elevates of the bishoprics of Constantinople and Jerusalem to the status of patriarchates.	
451	The Oriental Orthodox Church rejects the christological view put forth by the Council of Chalcedon and is excommunicated.	
480 - 547	The Codex Gigas, <i>Devil's Bible</i> , is written by Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western Christian monasticism.	
553	The fifth Ecumenical Council, Second Council of Constantinople, repudiates the Three Chapters as Nestorian and condemns Origen of Alexandria.	
570 - 632	Life-time of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh, the founder of Islam.	
632-661	The Rashidun Caliphate brings Arab conquest of Persia, Egypt, Iraq, bringing Islam into those regions.	
650	The Qur'an is completed.	
661-750	The Umayyad Caliphate brings Arab conquest of North Africa, Spain, Central Asia. Marking the greatest extent of the Arab conquests bringing Islam into those regions.	
680 - 681	The sixth Ecumenical Council, the Third Council of Constantinople, rejects Monothelitism and Monoenergism.	
	Circa 680 the split between Sunni and Shiites starts to grow.	
692	The Council in Trullo, an amendment to the 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils, establishes the Pentarchy (Constantinople is added to make a fifth Patriarchy).	

754	The unrecognized Council of Hieria supports iconoclasm.	
787	The seventh Ecumenical Council, Second Council of Nicea, restores the veneration of icons and denounces iconoclasm.	
10th to 15th century		
1054	The Great Schism between the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches formally takes place.	
1095 - 1099	The first Crusade takes place.	
1107 - 1110	Sigurd I of Norway wages the Norwegian Crusade on Muslims in Spain, the Balears, and in Palestine.	
1147 - 1149	The Second Crusade is waged in response to the fall of the County of Edessa.	
1189 - 1192	The Third Crusade, European leaders attempt to re-conquer the Holy Land from Saladin.	
1191	Dehli Sulatanate is established.	
1199 - 1204	The Fourth Crusade takes place.	
1204	Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade sack the Christian Eastern Orthodox city of Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire.	
1209 - 1229	The Albigensian Crusade takes place in Occitania (mainly southern France).	
1217 - 1221	The Church attempts the Fifth Crusade.	
1228 - 1229	The Sixth Crusade occurs.	
1244	Jerusalem is sacked again, instigating the Seventh Crusade.	
1270	The Eighth Crusade is organized.	
1271 - 1272	The Ninth Crusade fails.	
1320	Pope John XXII in an attempt to quash superstitious practices lays the groundwork for future witch-hunts with the formalization of the persecution of witchcraft.	
1484	Pope Innocent VIII marks the beginning of the classical European witch-hunts with his papal bull <i>Summis desiderantes</i> .	
Early Modern and Modern era (16th to 20th century)		
16th to 18th century		
1500	African religious systems are introduced to the Americas, with the commencement of the trans-Atlantic forced migration. Many of these will meld with Christianity forming such systems as Voodoo but also producing new denominations.	
1517	Martin Luther posts the 95 theses.	
	In the Spanish Empire, Catholicism is spread and encouraged through such institutions as missions and the Inquisition. Catholicism is brought to America and the far East.	
1491 - 1547	Henry VIII.	
1545 - 1563	Council of Trent.	
16 th -18 th centuries	Constant struggle for political independence by various factions.	
1620	Pilgrims land in Plymouth.	
1789 - 1799	The de-Christianizing of France during the Revolution. The state confiscates Church properties, bans monastic vows, and with the passage of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy removes the Church from the Roman Pope and subordinates it as a department of the Government, replaces the traditional Gregorian Calendar, and abolishes Christian holidays.	
1791	1 st amendment to American Constitution guarantees freedom of religion.	
19th to 20th century		
1801	Following the French Revolution, France and Pope Pius VII entered into the <i>Concordat of 1801</i> . While Catholicism regains some powers and becomes recognized as "...the religion of the great majority of the French", it's not afforded the latitude it had enjoyed prior to the Revolution. The Church relinquishes all claims to estates seized after 1790 by the State. All clergy are state salaried and must swear allegiance to the State.	
1830	The Latter Day Saint movement (Mormonism) is founded by Joseph Smith, Jr.	
1905	In France the law on the Separation of the Churches and the State is passed, officially establishing it as a secular state and putting an end to the state funding of religious groups.	
1917	The October Revolution, in Russia, leads to the annexation of all church properties and	

	subsequent religious suppression.	
	The 1917 Constitution of Mexico is written making the Mexico a secular state.	
1938	The first event of the Holocaust, the Kristallnacht, takes place.	
1939 - 1945	Millions of Jews are relocated and killed by the Nazi government during Holocaust. Many Christians also fall under persecution and are killed.	
1948	Israel is created by UN action. Jews return to their ancient biblical homeland.	
1952	Scientology is created.	
1954	Wicca is publicized by Gerald Gardner.	
1960s	Various Neopagan and New Age movements gain momentum.	
1961	Unitarian Universalism formed from merger of Unitarianism and Universalism.	
1962 - 1965	The Second Vatican Council takes place.	
1966	Religious Satanism begins, with Anton Szandor LaVey's founding of the Church of Satan.	
1983	New code of canon law, catechism and liturgical texts are promulgated based on the teachings of Vatican II	
1989	The revolutions of 1989, the overthrow of many Soviet-style states, allows a resurgence in open religious practice in many Eastern European countries.	
1993	The European Council convened in Copenhagen, Denmark, agrees to criteria requiring religious freedom within any and all prospective members of the European Union.	
1997	New catechism and liturgical texts are promulgated based on the teachings of Vatican II	

Sacred Texts

This is a general and extremely approximate timeline which tries to put the Judeo-Christian Scriptures into some context.



Date	Bible	History/Other
5000 BC +		<p>4,000,000,000 Big Bang.</p> <hr/> <p>4004 (Sunday 23 October) Bishop Usshers' (1581-1656) date for Biblical creation of the world based on O.T. Chronology. According to Ussher, Adam and Eve were driven from Paradise on Monday 10 November 4004 BC. Ussher was Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland, and Vice-Chancellor of Trinity College in Dublin.</p> <hr/> <p>According to John Lightfoot (1602-1675), Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University and a contemporary of Ussher, man was created on "October 23, 4004 B.C., at nine o'clock in the morning".</p> <hr/> <p>3760 start of Jewish year count.</p>
4000 BC		3100 Pyramid Texts.
3000 BC		
2000 BC	<p>2000-1900 Abraham, b. in Ur.</p> <hr/> <p>2000-1500 possible range for Book of Job</p>	<p>1800 Babylonian Creation Myth.</p> <hr/> <p>1792 Code of Hammurabi, earliest legal codex.</p> <hr/> <p>1760 Gilgamesh Epic.</p> <hr/> <p>1730 Hyksos invasion of Egypt</p> <hr/> <p>1600 Orig. Egyptian Book of the Dead. (Book of Coming Forth by Day).</p>
1500 BC	<p>1500-1350 Origins of Judaism, Moses and the Exodus from Egypt.</p> <hr/> <p>1240 Judges</p>	<p>1500 Zoroaster/Zarathustra.</p> <hr/> <p>1194 Fall of Troy (events described in Iliad/Odyssey).</p> <hr/> <p>1100 Rise of Mayan culture.</p>
1000 - 990 BC	950 Torah/Pentateuch, Song of Songs.	<p>1050 King Saul.</p> <hr/> <p>1010 King David.</p>




Date	Bible	History/Other
		<hr/> 970 King Solomon. <hr/> 926 Israel and Judah split.
800 BC	740 Book of Isaiah.	800 or 700 Homer: Illiad and Odyssey. <hr/> 800: Hesiod: Works and Days, Theogony
700 BC	700 Books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Samuel.	721 Assyrian conquest. <hr/> 628-551 Zarathustra/Zoroaster
600 BC	520 Books of Zechariah, Isaiah.	610-570 Sappho. <hr/> 612 Babylon conquers Assyria. <hr/> 600 Babylonian Exile. <hr/> 664-525 Rev. Egyptian Book of the Dead
500 BC	Genesis, Exodus, Numbers myths written.	586 Babylonian conquest.
400 BC	Books of Proverbs, Job. <hr/> 350 w.v. Song of Songs.	330 Alexander conquers the East. <hr/> 360 Critias by Plato: contains story of Atlantis.
300 BC	Book of Jonah <hr/> 285 Septuagint, first Greek trans. of the O.T.	
200 BC	200-120 early Mishnah. <hr/> 164 Book of Daniel. <hr/> 160 O.T. Apocrypha: Tobit, 1 Esdras, Enoch, others. <hr/> 150 Early Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls source).	
100 BC	5-7 b. of Jesus	47 First burning of the Library of Alexandria by the Romans.
1 CE	1-33 Jesus. Events described in the first four N.T. books. <hr/> 33 either April 3, 30 CE or April 7, 33 CE: the Crucifixion. <hr/> 30-96 New Testament. <hr/> 50-63 Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians. <hr/> 60-80 Acts of the Apostles. <hr/> 68 Destruction of Qumran community. (Dead Sea Scrolls). <hr/> 65-70 Gospel of Mark. <hr/>	70 Destruction of Jerusalem & Temple by Romans.




Date	Bible	History/Other
	70-80 Gospel of Matthew. 70-80 Gospel of Luke. 90-100 Gospel of John. 81-96 Revelation of St. John.	
100 CE	Nag Hammadi Scriptures. 100 Synod of Jamnia, Canon of Hebrew Scriptures set Mishna.	
200 CE		
300 CE	(to 14th Cent.) comp. of Midrash. 300-400 Nag Hammadi Scriptures in Coptic. 382 Jerome commission for Latin Vulgate translation. 350 Jewish Talmud and Gemara. 325 Council of Nicea, Canon of Christian Scriptures set.	
400 CE	Babylonian Talmud. 405 promulgation of Vulgate (Latin Bible).	401 Confessions of St. Augustine.
1000 CE		1054 The Great Schism.
1400 CE	1456 First pub. Vulgate Bible by Gutenberg.	1466-1536 Desiderius Erasmus 1483-1546 Martin Luther
1500 CE	1514-22 pub. O.T. and N.T. Vulgate Translated into Greek by Erasmus. 1522 N.T. Translated into German by M. Luther off Erasmus. 1525 N.T. Translated into English by W. Tyndale (1494-1536) off Erasmus. 1534 pub. entire Bible in German by M. Luther. 1535 pub. Bible in English by Miles Coverdale (1488-1569). 1546 O.T. Apocrypha declared Canonical by Catholic Church. 1582 pub. O.T. of Douay–Rheims Bible in English.	1517 M. Luther's 95 Theses.
1600 CE	1609 pub. N.T. of Douay–Rheims Bible in English. 1629 O.T. 'Apocrypha' removed from Protestant Bible.	1618-9 Synod of Dordrecht 1677 Paradise Lost/Regained by John Milton. 1678 Pilgrim's Progress by J. Bunyan.
1700 CE		1789 Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. 1793 Thomas Paine's Age of



Date	Bible	History/Other
		Reason.
1800 CE		1859 Darwins' Origin of Species. <hr/> 1891 Baltimore Catechism. <hr/> 1890-1922 The Golden Bough by Frazer.
1900 CE	1945 Discovery of Nag Hammadi Scriptures. <hr/> 1947-56 Discovery of Qumran (Dead Sea) scrolls. <hr/> Translations of the Bible proliferate.	

Persons of Interest

Name	Date		Bio
Apostolic Age			
St. Peter	~5-68		<p>Jewish, he is born in the back-waters of Israel, in an area known as Galilee, along the lake. He is a fisherman by trade, but is called by Jesus along with his brother Andrew making Peter is one of the 12 closest insiders Jesus gathers around himself. Eventually he shows himself to be their spokesman, and along with James and John, one of Jesus' most trusted friends. He witnesses to the nature of Jesus as messiah, but falls short on supporting him on his arrest. After the Resurrection Peter seems to move into a roaming leadership position, eventually landing in Rome with Paul, where unlike Paul who enjoys Roman citizenship, Peter is summarily executed by crucifixion (upside-down, by tradition) in Nero's circus alongside the Vatican Hill and its necropolis, into which he is buried. Constantine lops off the top of the Vatican Hill to build the great Basilica of St. Peter's over the spot of his grave. Through time many struggle with the meaning of his presence in Rome and 11 centuries later this same Basilica will be the center of much controversy.</p>
St. Paul	~5-68		<p>Jewish, he was born a Roman citizen in Tarsus (in modern Turkey). A pharisaic student of the Law he witnessed to the blasphemy of Jewish Christians and eventually devoted himself to the eradication of the sect. At some point he is converted and devotes himself just as zealously to the spread of the new beliefs. In the process he becomes one of its greatest proponents, rivaling even Peter. After debating with Peter and the rest of the Apostles on the nature of inclusion into Christianity, it is decided that Jews as well as Gentile may have full membership, even without the observation of strict Jewish Law. He travels about the Empire spreading the message and writing the earliest existing Christian literature, what are known as <i>Epistles</i> (or letters). He eventually is taken to Rome where he is tried and executed by being beheaded. Paul's vision of Christianity and his writings become very important to the unity of the fledgling Church and 14 centuries later their interpretation become the center of division within that same Church.</p>
Church Fathers			

Name	Date		Bio
St. Irenaeus	~130-202		He was born in Smyrna (in modern Turkey) and became bishop of Lyon in the Roman province of Gaul (modern France). He survived the persecution of Marcus Aurelius and in the peace that followed became a great spokesman against Gnosticism, which contained the idea of 'secret' knowledge. He was a tireless missionary and preacher and his works <i>Against Heresies</i> mark him as one of the first great post-Apostolic theologians. He emphasized the traditional structure in the Church, especially the magisterium, Scripture, and Tradition. Irenaeus stressed unity and doctrinal authority as evidenced by the councils who decide doctrine in union with the bishop of Rome.
Tertullian	~160-220		He.
St. Benedict	480-547		He.
Theologians, Reformers, and Mystics			

Name	Date		Bio
Blessed Hildegard of Bingen	1098-1179		Born in Boeckelheim (near Frankfort, Germany), she was a mystic and visionary, as well as a poet, author, and a musician. She preached, communicated with popes, statesmen, and emperors and had the support of the likes of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It is hard to characterize her influence during her lifetime, but she had the ears of the great and the lowly, and her holiness was greatly venerated. She was in death one of the first persons to whom the newly established process of canonization was officially applied (it was never finalized, hence her title as 'blessed', but many modern churchmen refer to her as a full canonized saint).
St. Francis of Assisi	1181-1226		From the small hill town of Assisi in central Italy, he came to fame as a humble beggar. Not studious, he sought out <i>bon homme</i> and glory as a soldier but was taken prisoner where he fell ill, developing persistent health issues which would follow him through his life. In about 1205 he began to turn to a life of poverty and wandering, of rejecting his middle class father's life and ministering to the poor through alms and preaching. He heard a voice which called him to 'repair my Church' which he mistook to mean a small chapel in Assisi and used his father's trade goods to secure funds, much to his father's chagrin and ire. After a short period of uncertainty he began to seek in prayer and solitude the answer to his call to begin calling for reform from the larger Church and especially the clergy. He began the order of Friars Minor and inspired his cousin Clare to start the order of the Poor Ladies.
St. Dominic	1170-1221		He was born in Castile (part of modern Spain) and became a canon of the cathedral in Osma. Eventually he accompanied his bishop to southern France in a mission of preaching against the Albigensian heresy. Dominic turned to intense study and poverty as a means to continue preaching in the area hoping to have greater effect than the retinue with which he traveled who bedded in splendor. In 1216 he founded the Order of Preachers, dedicated to saving souls by preaching and persuasion. Like the Franciscans, founded a few years before, the Dominicans put great importance on poverty, both of the individual and of the community, and of the need to be involved directly in the world while still living some form of monastic life. At a time when the settled Benedictine monasteries had grown into great and rich institutions, this was a revolutionary and to some a subversive concept. The Friars made a

Name	Date		Bio
			lasting impact on the life of medieval Europe, and the Dominicans, producing such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, in particular altered the course of intellectual history by making a well-thought-out and rational response to the new learning that was appearing as long-forgotten thinkers such as Aristotle became known once more in the Christian West.
St. Thomas Aquinas			He.
The Church In Schism			
St. Ignatius Loyola	1491-1556		He. Between 1524 and 1537, Ignatius studied theology in Spain and then in Paris arriving during the period of anti-Protestant turmoil which forced John Calvin to flee to Switzerland. Ignatius, concerned for with both the abuses and opulence of the clergy as well as the growing schismatics, with a few followers bound themselves together by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In 1539, they formed the Society of Jesus and Ignatius composed the <i>Constitutions</i> for the new order and wrote his <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> . Ignatius' zeal for
St. Francis Xavier	1506-1552		Friend and n of Ignatius, Francis Xavier took on the task of spreading the word to the East, traveling from India to China, dying just off the coast while trying to understand how to get to the mainland. He is considered by many to be the greatest missionary since the time of the Apostles, because in the short space of ten years he visited so many countries, traversed so many seas, and preached the Gospel and converted so many in so many diverse nations.

Terms

A lively glossary of terms used in this work.

A

- **AD:** *Anno Domini* – the year of our Lord (Jesus). A means of demarking eras; *see CE*.
- **Apophatic:** the art of negative thinking.
- **A posteriori:** a) analytical reasoning based in experience. Thinking based on evidence and rational from a conclusion. b) something that is known from external sources
- **A priori:** something that is pre-known, is the basis for knowledge, or is a 'given'
- **Aristotelian:** of or applying to the philosophy of the Greek Aristotle.
- **Asceticism:** the doctrine that through renunciation of worldly pleasures it is possible to achieve a high spiritual or intellectual state.

B

- **BC:** *Before Christ* – a means of demarking eras.
- **BCE:** *Before Common Era* – a more politically correct means of demarking eras.

C

- **Cataphatic:** the power of positive thinking.
- **Cause:** action or thought which is the basis for another action or thought.
- **CE:** *Common Era* – a modern means of demarking eras; *see AD*.
- **Consciousness:** a debatable aspect of human existence or essence.
- **Copernican Revolution:** the radical rethinking of held beliefs and ideas,

especially as illustrated by Nicholas Copernicus' (1473 –1543) theory that the Earth orbited the Sun as opposed to the long held *a posteriori* belief of the opposite.

D

- **Doubt:** often the impetus of inquiry, but not of answers if you happen to be a Skeptic.

E

- **Eastern:** an arbitrary designation for division of philosophical thought and systems.
- **Empiricism:** the system by which all knowledge is sense based and there are no abstract universal.
- **Exegesis:** the *critical* discussion or interpretation of sacred texts.
- **Ex nihilo:** the idea of creation from or out of nothing, kind of like most of the author's discussions.
- **Evil:** a quality which for various groups has various manifestations. Suffice it to say that it is an absence of moral action.

F

- **Faith:** (*Noun*) the immutable sum and total of truths contained within a religious system; not to be confused with the action of 'having faith' or the act of believing.

G

- **Greeks:** a body of thinkers who owe their citizenship to various Greek powers, whether they be on the Greek homeland or scattered about the Greek empire; not to be

confused with campus student associations.

H

- **Hedonism:** from the Greek word meaning 'delight'; finding happiness through pure pleasure; often associated with Epicurus.
- **Hellenism:** the 'Greek-ifying' of thought. Mainly through the influence of Plato and Aristotle.

I

- **Imperative:** a thing which must be; for Kant, it also elicits a necessary response.
- **Idealism:** a system in which reality is dependent upon the mind rather than independent of it.

J

- **Justice:** the achievement of balanced results for the individual or the group.
- **Justification:** the rational used in and for an argument; in a salvific sense, the yardstick of righteousness.

K

- **Kantian:** of or applying to the philosophy of the German Immanuel Kant.

L

- **Legal:** something which follows the rules but may not be valid.
- **Licit:** something which is permissible but not necessarily fully following the rules.

M

- **Materialism:** a system in which reality is made up only of material things – empirically sensed.
- **Monastery:** a collection of individuals into a community bound together by a shared desire; for Christians, to live Gospel values in an

early Church community style; for Buddhists, .

N

- **Neo-Platonism:** the re-introduction of Platonic ideas into 'modern' systems.

O

- **Ontology:** the study of being, that is what is being what does it mean to be.
- **Orders:** the classification of a monastic group bound together by a rule: example – Benedictines and Franciscans.

P

- **Pericopes:** a fragment or section of a larger work.
- **Philosophy:** Come on...you're kidding, right?
- **Platonic:** of or applying to the philosophy of the Greek Plato.
- **Prime Mover:** designation of the beginning principle or cause.

Q

- **Query:** the asking of questions.

R

- **Rationalism:** knowledge is based in the mind and relies on innate, abstract universal ideas: see Descartes.
- **Rhetoric:** teaching method which is discourse conducted by a single person. Often confused with meaningless blather which has usurped the word.
- **Reality:** one of the myriad ways of organizing perceptions. For empiricists, reality is the sum of sensory perceptions; for rationalists it is the sum of the constructs of the mind.

S

- **Sign:** something which contains within itself its meaning; for example, an eight-sided figure on a street corner. Symbol would be its antonym.
- **Sin:** that thing which is probably best defined in non-religious/moralistic terms as that which if it feels *really* good while you feel *really* bad as you are doing it must be wrong.
- **Sine Qua Non:** *without which none.* A pretty basic (though fancy sounding) principle of existence.
- **Skepticism:** the idea that no truth can be determined, *believe it or not!*
- **Socratic:** of or applying to the philosophy of the Greek Socrates.
- **Socratic Method:** the activity of asking questions in order to teach by drawing out answers; used by the philosopher Socrates and many fine teachers after him. See dialectic.
- **Stoicism:** the system which extols the rational over the emotional as culturally expressed in the *Star Trek* character Spock.
- **Substance:** that which makes up a thing, which makes it what it is.
- **Symbol:** something which points to a meaning *beyond* itself; for example, an owl symbolizing *wisdom*. Sign would be its antonym.

T

- **Teleology:** understanding things by their 'end purpose'.
- **Truths:** basics by which other methods, systems or arguments may be measured ('humans think').

U

- **Übermensch:** German for the super- or over- man.

V

- **Validity:** the assertion that an argument has structural merit.

W

- **Western:** an arbitrary designation for division of philosophical thought and systems.
- **Will:** Various meanings depending upon the philosophy; Natural Law; the idea of human thought or action.
- **Word:** .

X

- **Xylophone:** because there always has to be an 'X' entry.

Y

- **Yo-Yo:** the perfect example of Aristotle understanding of *kinêsis*.

Z

- **ZZZZ:** what can happen while reading this work.

The Sacred, Myth, Ritual

- **The Sacred and the Profane**
 - Mircea Eliades
- **The Hero with 1000 Faces**
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- **Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE**
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 - Bruce Feiler
- **The Jews in the Time of Jesus: An Introduction**
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- **General Christianity**
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- **Christian Theology**
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- **Christian History**
 - **Behind the Scenes at Galileo's Trial**, Richard J. Blackwell University of Notre Dame Press

A

a posteriori · 6, **8**, 9, 17, 18, 19, 20, 98, 181
a priori · 6, 9, **17**, 18, 20, 98, 163
agnosticism · 1, 5
Anselm · 112
apologists · 113
Aristotelian · 72
atheism · 1, 2, 5, 150, 157, 158, 164
authority · 98

C

Campbell, Joseph · 14
Christian
 Christianity · 95, 98

D

Darwin, Charles · 162, **164**
Dead Sea Scrolls · 12
Deism · 2, 156, 157, 158, 164
dichotomy · 91
doctrine · 1, 5, 29, 53, 81, 95, 98, 102, 103, 104, 109, 111,
 137, 138, 146, 149, 151, 153, 170, 178, 181
dogma · 1, 5, 10, 51, 102, 109, 161, 162
dogma · **5**

E

Eliade, Mircea · 12
empirical · 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 18, 19, 28, 67, 115, 135, 154, 155,
 156, 157, 159, 161, 165, 166, 167
Epicurean · 72
Epicurus · 2, 72
Experience · *See* : empirical

F

faith · 112
Faith · ii, 5, 9, 13, 18, 19, 20, 32, 37, 38, 78, 80, 85, 86, 90,
 91, 92, 96, 98, 99, 102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109, 113,
 114, 115, 116, 129, 130, 132, 138, 141, 143, 150, 151,
 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 159, 163, 166, 181
 repository of · 5
Foucault, Michel · 12
Freud, Sigmund · 162, **163**, 164

G

gnostics · 98
God · 95, 98

H

holy · **2**, 3, 43, 54, 59, 68, 82, 88, 94, 111, 121, 141, 144,
 156
hypostatic union · 98

J

James, William · 162, **163**
Judaism · 91
Justin Martyr · 95

K

knowledge · 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 34, 42, 45, 47,
 53, 55, 56, 66, 73, 91, 96, 99, 104, 114, 115, 116, 117,
 134, 149, 151, 153, 154, 155, 160, 165, 166, 168, 178,
 181, 182

L

logic · 73
logos · 95
Logos · 6, 65, 95, 104, 105, 106, 156
Lucas, George · 14

M

Marcus Aurelius · 95
Marx, Karl · 2, 162, 165
Medieval · 104
mystery · **3**, 4, 5, 11, 21, 34, 35, 67, 91, 94, 97, 98, 135,
 136, 137, 154
myth · 8

N

nature · 135
Neo-Platonic · 103
Nietzsche, Friedrich · 2, 14, 46, 160, 162, 164, 165

O

orthodoxy · 97, 98

P

Paul of Tarsus · 91, 103

Paul, St. · 6, 76, 83, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99, 103, 105, 106, 107, 113, 119, 146, 151, 158, 170, 177

philosophy · 5, 6, 162, 163, 182

Plato · 103, 135

Platonic · 72

profane · 3, 4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21, 22, 33, 34, 35, 42, 50, 57, 63, 66, 71, 78, 80, 111, 113, 125, 141

proof · 2, 3, 4, 11, 18, 29, 68, 87, 113, 163, 167

Q

Quadratic Formula · 2

R

rational · 2, 3, 4, 17, 18, 20, 41, 55, 72, 95, 103, 104, 105, 115, 116, 117, 136, 145, 149, 154, 156, 157, 159, 161, 163, 165, 167, 179, 181, 182, 183

reason · 73, 98

religion · ii, 1, 2, 4, 7, 13, 15, 18, 20, 23, 34, 37, 38, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 56, 60, 66, 69, 71, 72, 75, 80, 82, 86, 89, 90,

104, 108, 124, 131, 144, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, 165, 166, 170, 171
revelation · 3, 5, 8, 52, 53, 55, 58, 80, 93, 96, 114, 115, 116, 130, 134, 138, 156, 163

S

sacrament · 2, 3, 71, 75, 85

sacred · 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59, 64, 66, 71, 72, 78, 80, 88, 94, 96, 99, 102, 104, 105, 108, 111, 112, 113, 122, 123, 130, 135, 136, 141, 154, 155, 157, 159, 160, 163, 166, 181

Sartre, Jean Paul · 162, **164**

Schopenhauer, Arthur · 46, **160**, 164

sign · 4, 15, 57, 101, 108, 122, 136, 137, 143, 149, 165

Stoicism · 72, 73

symbol · 4, 37, 57, 61, 108, 137, 150

T

theology · ii, 4, 5, 6, 24, 29, 32, 50, 51, 56, 57, 81, 95, 97, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107, 109, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 122, 125, 129, 130, 132, 134, 135, 137, 144, 146, 149, 151, 166, 180

V

virtue · 73