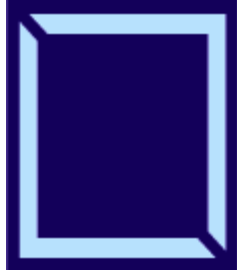


The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 6.1

Religion

Progressive Revelation



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Religion

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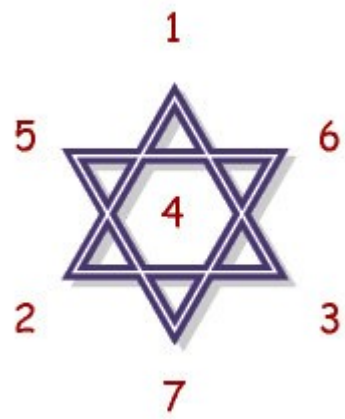
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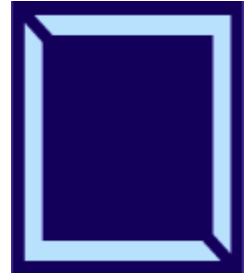
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Chapter 6.1

Religion



Progressive Revelation

- Religion is in the lower sense a matter of service and worship of God, commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance. In the higher sense, it is the relationship of the human being to God, and manifests through the means of progressive revelation. While outer appearances of the various religions may vary widely, the (inner) mystical core or essence of all of the world's (God-centered) religions is the same, providing a means for direct understanding of the relationship of the human being to God. This need not be confused with the superficial aspects of formal religion (e.g., assumed authority, dogma, doctrine, outer teachings) which are merely distant reflections of the inner teachings, constrained by popular human limitations.
- Various organized religions serve their purpose, of progressive encouragement, and within the various organized religions are found many who transcend the appearances and "connect" with the inner teachings. But religion in the more general and higher sense is a matter of focusing on what is truly important (the place and role of the human being in the context of God's field of manifestation and underlying purpose) without any constraint of particular interpretations. Each (proper) religion has a common underlying basis yet contributes something in its time to the popular "sense" of religious tradition.

God

Throughout the history (and pre-history) of humanity, man has perceived and defined his God according to his consciousness. In Lemurian days when most of mankind first achieved self-consciousness, man could perceive the superphysical realms, though without any conscious control. Man was aware of the host of great angelic beings who were the messengers of God and the teachers and guides of men. Man was aware of the angelic nature spirits and forces that are manifestations of God (as all things are). Quite naturally, early man developed a pantheistic appreciation of a God who lived through a host of beings, many of which were more highly evolved than man, and therefore (to him) were gods.

One of the early leaders of man was Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament religion. Jehovah was a great angelic being who served as the tribal or racial god or spirit of the Jewish people. Jehovah was originally a very visible and credible god (to his people). In later days, and especially toward the end of the Atlantean era, man began to lose the inner vision as humanity descended further into materialism, and as the realities of ancient days became legends and myths. As the inner vision began to be dimmed by the necessary pilgrimage into matter, man was forced to respect a God whom he could not see, as first-hand knowledge was replaced by faith.

As man evolves there is always a progressive revelation, exoterically and esoterically, according to his needs and capacity to understand. The New Testament teaching was, in part, designed to release man from his tribal and racial consciousness and to bring in an era of identification with humanity. The God of the New Testament religion is the planetary logos, the being who ensouls the planet and sustains and vitalizes all lives and forms within that domain. Even today, the transcendent God of religious students corresponds to the planetary logos. The God of the esoteric teachings is a still greater being, the solar logos which is the ensouling life of the solar system. This being is the greatest life for which the most advanced of humanity can glimpse any real understanding. There will always be greater lives that come before the ken of the evolving human adept (there is a cosmic logos and even an absolute being),

but even the most advanced of humanity have difficulty in even beginning to understand the manifestation of those greater lives.

Of course the term "God" means different things to different people, for God manifests on many levels and in many different ways, objectively and subjectively. There will always be a personal God, the immanent God within, the divine and noble essence or spirit within every human life. And there will always be an impersonal God, the transcendent God that is the cause behind manifestation. On the highest conceivable level, God is the totality of the objective and subjective universe. But neither God immanent nor God transcendent are in any way anthropomorphic. But man is still a reflection (image) of divinity in the sense of life force and potentiality.

The monotheistic and pantheistic doctrines are merely two perspectives on the one reality, just as the trinity is an essential unity with three aspects. God works through and is simultaneously countless greater and lesser beings. There is a unity of all life and yet there is also a multiplicity and a diversity of lives within that one life. Students of the ancient and ageless wisdom often used the physical sun as a life-giving symbol of that inherent unity of all life. The further a student proceeds along the spiral of evolution, the greater is the realization and appreciation of that oneness that is God. There remains one God, regardless of differentiation.

† Commentary No. 39

Religion 1

The nature of religion is progressive revelation, primarily for the masses. Throughout history and pre-history there have been revelations or new exoteric religious teachings for the multitudes. As man has evolved, so have the outer teachings of each revelation been consistent with man's consciousness and his capacity for understanding. Man does not create a (true) religion. A religion is evoked by (given to) man according to his needs, and man then objectifies and interprets (or misinterprets) the teachings. The older religions (and even a few of the newer ones) were often custom-fitted to particular races or cultures, leading the people onward and upward one step at a time.

Such is the work of religion, to lead and to guide the larger groups of people (in terms of consciousness) and to slowly prepare them for the spiritual path. The deepest esoteric teachings of all religions are essentially the same. Only the outer teachings of the various religions differ, and then only according to the needs (and responsiveness) of the people. Even so, there are many common elements in the outer teachings. By degrees, the inner teachings reflect a measure (and perspective) of the ancient and timeless wisdom that constitutes the foundation and basis for all of the lesser and greater mysteries, and with those inner teachings can the spiritual students of the world find some guidance and encouragement.

Wherever there is consciousness significantly below that of the masses (or consciousness unresponsive to religious teaching), there are man-made religions (superstitions) and greatly misunderstood older teachings. Even with the consciousness of the majority, there are many man-made elements to the orthodox religions (and considerable but inevitable misunderstanding). But wherever there is consciousness significantly higher than that of the masses, there is a higher (progressive) revelation from the soul. Wherever there is a higher consciousness (in some degree), there is an availability of certain of the esoteric teachings. As a man is capable of understanding, so shall he receive.

Religions are normally founded by certain individuals who achieve (either partially or completely) union with the soul (and the greater wisdom) and are used as instruments of revelation, often by earlier design. Among the many historical revelations are those of Abraham, Akhenaten, Confucius, Gautama (Buddha), Hermes, Jesus (Christ), Krishna, Lao-tse, Melchizedek, Mohammed, Moses, Orpheus, Padmasambhava, Plato, Pythagoras, Quetzalcoatl, and Zoroaster. Although the personalities are relatively unimportant, the teachings that pass through them are important. Among the major (orthodox) scriptures are the Old and New Testaments, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Qabalah, and the Tao Te Ching. Each of the religions (revelations) (teachings) has many lessons to teach regardless of the consciousness of the student. Most of the real scriptures are very symbolic, with several layers of meaning. However, some have been manipulated to a certain extent through ignorance and selfish design, and therefore require even greater intuition (realization) for the discernment of their essence.

The organized religions of the world offer even the most advanced students opportunities to serve humanity (though such students must be careful not to become absorbed by a religion or its atmosphere). Through religion should be imparted the encouragement of the ethical, moral, social, legal, and spiritual welfare of humanity. Through religion humanity is exposed to the orthodox and objective manifestation of truth. But in the final analysis, there can be no religion higher than truth itself.

† Commentary No. 1097

Religion 2

Religion is the relationship of the human being to God. Yet God is conceived in various ways by some, perceived in various ways by others. The various religions of the world serve to bridge the gap in consciousness, to some extent, by offering relevant testimony and encouragement. While great distinctions can be made in the details of the various religions (e.g., through dogma and particularization of beliefs), the heart or inner essence of every God-centered religion is essentially the same.

Diversity of religion (religious experience and expression) is important (of value) because people are conditioned in diverse ways and people are "at" various levels or phases of the human experience and therefore have different conditioning, different needs, different propensities for believing (or perceiving) and different propensities for understanding. Thus most religions emerge from within a particular race or culture and spread according to the needs of the people encountered. Most religions begin with some noble experience (inspiration) and grow according to the character and quality of the people thus embraced. As religions grow they tend to lose their noble bearings to some extent, as the essential teachings (revelation) (inspiration) gets moderated (manipulated) by the sincere (and insincere) intentions of those deemed responsible (e.g., priesthood).

Religious beliefs tend to become crystallized (lose their connection to the original inspiration). Religious practice tends to become superficial, as the underlying message gets lost in cultural trends and interpretations. Many rituals become ends-in-themselves instead of remaining legitimate expressions

of insight and understanding. The various teachings (beliefs) also tend to crystallize through reliance on authority, through attachment, instead of being allowed to be perceived through the inner senses. These are all very natural consequences, and a matter of human and cultural limitations. And yet there is (potentially) considerable encouragement conveyed even so, through each of the world's legitimate (God-centered) religions.

Two of the problems of organized religion are presumed authority and exclusivity, the sense of there being some authority or that specific beliefs (membership) (or actions) are necessary for salvation. In fact, all proper religions offer salvation (spiritual encouragement) (means for growth in consciousness), though such (salvation) is not exclusively the realm of organized religion. The key to proper religious experience, and the way in which all proper religions are connected, is the underlying mystical tradition which is common to all proper religious and spiritual practice. If one delves deeply enough and properly, into each religion, one finds the inspiration and encouragement of the God within (by whatever name is convenient, God-Self, Christ, Allah, etc.). The inner practices and methods of each religion are essentially the same because they have the same basis, the same source. Only their application for broader participation will exhibit substantial variations as the inner practices are adapted for the particular culture or context.

But within each religion, at the core of religious spirituality, is the God-Self or soul that is one with God and one every other soul (eventually to the point of transcending other-ness). Within each person, once the ego is transcended, is the true authority. Within each person is the inclusiveness that banishes every semblance of external authority and exclusiveness and separateness. Within each person is the relationship of the human being to God.

Progressive Revelation

One of the many dimensions of religion is that of progressive revelation, (1) in the sense of the process through which the bulk of humanity are exposed to deeper and broader truths and (2) in the sense of the process through which individual seekers realize deeper and broader truths.

Progressive revelation is essentially a matter of progressive self-realization, as the student (seeker) searches for truth and finds the truth that he or she is able to realize and embrace. For most people, truth is a matter of what is taught rather than what is realized. For some people it is a matter of experience and reasoning. And for some (rather few) it is a matter of intuitive insight (mystical experience) (true revelation). As the student grows in the capacity for realization, so does the understanding grow. But this process is limited substantially by conditioning, by what the student has been taught, i.e., by whatever the conventional beliefs and cultural-religious conditioning may be. In addition to conditioning, the process of revelation is limited by the illusions of material existence and the various unconscious assumptions that are made with regard to life in the lower worlds.

Progressive revelation in the sense of the bulk of humanity generally follows far behind that which is realized and embraced by the spiritual students of the world. Most people are comfortable in their materialism and egoism and therefore are not really responsive to insight that is not consistent with what they want to believe. So the masses move slowly in consciousness as the various revelatory thought-forms grow, from individual insights, to broader and broader acceptance by the masses. In the early stages of religion there are religious leaders who "authoritatively" proclaim the truth and impose that truth upon any (most) who are susceptible. This is not bad, for it is what most people generally need and what most people can generally comprehend. But as the race as a whole evolves in consciousness, as people are able to think more clearly for themselves, it becomes more a matter of individual thinking conditioned by mass consciousness rather than being merely externalized imposed upon. But eventually one breaks free from the mass thought-form and begins to listen to the inner voice rather than relying on the mind (reasoning). And it is this inner

voice that actually provides revelation, however effectively it may be sensed and interpreted (or misinterpreted).

But people tend to evolve in consciousness in different ways and at different rates. Consequently, there is a relative diversity of religious teaching, according to the needs of the people and their capacities for understanding. Thus religion (and progressive revelation) tends to have richness in diversity, and each contributes ultimately to the progress of the race as a whole. And the contrast between various religious expressions, e.g., between various conservative (narrow) (unbalanced), fundamental (narrow) (reactive), moderate (balanced), and liberal (unfocused) (unbalanced) expressions, between external (artificial) and internal (real) authorities, and between eastern and western notions of religion (equally valid, but contributing in substantially different ways), provides depth and breadth to the process.

There is also an ebb and flow of progressive revelation in the sense that there are cycles, times in which people are more receptive and responsive to insight and times in which people are relatively more absorbed in materialism (egoism) and therefore less receptive and responsive. The seven rays cycle through the world, conditioning according to their respective natures, with the sixth ray (religion, idealism) ebbing and flowing in various ways.

† Commentary No. 1265

Inner and Outer Religion 1

Religion is properly God-centered and not personality-centered, and is actually a matter of religious and spiritual principles (which relate the human being to God and to living a spiritual life). But there are two extensions of religion, one in the outer dimension, one in the inner dimension, that greatly expand the scope and import of those religious and spiritual principles and which also pose some not immodest difficulties.

The outer dimension is the one most people are familiar with. It begins with some fundamental or basic religious and/or spiritual context, clothed in some sort of cultural and social framework. It is potentially quite “evolutionary” in the sense that the religious-spiritual principles, teachings, and values are placed

in a more worldly, more practical context. But the problem is that much of the “outer” framework is cultural and social rather than genuinely or actually religious or spiritual. When spiritual principles are tailored to some (necessarily artificial) cultural or social context, there is an inevitable lessening of value (clarity, quality). Thus “going to church” is not the same as embracing the (actual) values of the religion (indeed one can embrace the actual pertinent principles and values without submitting to the cultural and social “demands” although the cultural and social context (e.g., participating in services) can be nonetheless encouraging). The outer context tends to be conditioned and superficial (as people tend to be conditioned and superficial), a matter more of personal-social convenience than spiritual import.

Another problem of the outer context is that people tend to be concerned about the cultural contextual details rather than the actual spiritual principles, and it is (unfortunately) only human nature to seek to impose “understanding” on others. Religions provide a suite of behavioral ethics, principles, and values to guide life-in-this-world. But those are for each to embrace to the extent that they are understood and appreciated. What is important is living an ethical, principled life. And developing (and sustaining) a genuine (heart-felt and conscious) relationship with God. The various rituals of a religion are not important in themselves, but have value primarily to the extent that they encourage and facilitate that heart-felt and conscious relationship.

Yet another problem is exclusivity. Religions that exclude or belittle “non-believers” in any way are not (truly) God-centered religions but are simply personality-centered (ego-based) derivatives-of-religion. There is no exclusive path to God or to salvation. All truly spiritual paths inherently lead the student toward God and toward salvation (graduation from this worldly experience). The heathen is no less a creature of God. The truly religious adherent ((spiritual) student) embraces all lives as lives-of-God. And respects and appreciates that each person sees things differently and that there is great value in every avenue or approach to God.

There are no favored (or unfavored) people, not as individuals, not as groups, races, or nations. Individuals, groups, races, and nations all have some karmic context, but over time there is always-ultimately balance and equity in the process. In order to graduate from this world each person must do essentially

the same “work” and obtain the same relative place in consciousness. There are no special means available to anyone or to any group. There are no shortcuts. Each person is afforded the opportunities consistent with his or her current relative place in consciousness.

† Commentary No. 1266

Inner and Outer Religion 2

There are unfortunately many glammers and illusions associated with conventional (outer) religion. But as one deepens in consciousness, as one gathers experience and begins to consciously assimilate that experience, then one begins, progressively, to see through the various glammers and illusions. Of course (many) people see only what they want to see, and think that there are shortcuts or favored status. But there are no such paths-of-shortness. And all are equally favored.

The inner dimension is one of which relatively few people are aware. It is the mystical dimension that links all of the various religions and spiritual approaches together. As one approaches God in consciousness, the various paths coalesce and become one and the same path. Each outer religion is simply a portal or gateway through which one can progressively and gradually approach the divine source. The outer religion is necessarily personality-centered and worldly. The inner religion is necessarily centered in the higher self and decidedly non-worldly. Thus the real process involves simply moving toward the center of consciousness.

The spiritual path is a path of hastened evolution in consciousness. Not a shortcut, but an investment in doing the “work” in some hastened sense, through greater intensity of “work” in consciousness over a relatively shorter period of time. But if one takes the “long and winding road” one ends up doing the same amount of “work” and achieves the same place in consciousness as one who moves forward more intently-quickly. But the hastened path is not a matter of simply choosing. It is rather a calling, from the soul, which then encourages the personality-ego to reorient itself toward the (hastened) path. But those who take the “shorter” path are no more favored or unfavored than those who take the more gradual, more normal path.

But the realm of the hastened (spiritual) path is the same as the inner dimension of religion, although it needs not the framework of any particular religion (or any religion at all). The religious framework is simply helpful in placing a person in the circumstances that allow the hastened path to be embraced. One is simply drawn to the inner teachings, to prayer and meditation, to progressive communion, with the soul, with Christ (or whatever one calls the principle of divine consciousness), and with God. As one progresses in this inner sense, the outer life and consciousness is naturally transformed, as one embraces the quality and energy of the inner life, it is reflected in the life and circumstances (demeanor) of the outer person.

In order to do this, the religious context is merely helpful, but not necessary. One does not need, necessarily, to be of certain lineage, for lineage is simply not important (lineage only pertains to the body, and not to the indwelling consciousness). Nor does one need to have a spiritual teacher, for all are teachers and all are students (though some teachers can be quite helpful and insightful, in providing encouragement (but the student must ever exercise discretion, and it is the student who is responsible for the outcome, not the teacher)). Similarly, one does not need, necessarily, a particular religion, for all (God-centered religions) lead to the same place (if only one is predisposed to look in the right ways (as one progresses, one simply senses where and how to look (the insight (intuition) is simply-naturally evoked))). But what one does need, necessarily, is a refined nature, e.g., a healthy body, clear emotions, and a quiet mind. And (necessarily) a suitably tempered personality (ego).

Spiritual Frameworks

In addition to the complementary distinctions between psychological and metaphysical frameworks, there is a matter of depth and breadth and inclusivity of various religious or spiritual frameworks.

In the religious and spiritual context, a person is generally found in a place of relative psychological comfort. The religion or spiritual philosophy that one embraces is generally consistent with one's experience, with one's intelligence and consciousness, and with one's religious and spiritual needs. In such a (comfortable) place, the framework is broad enough and deep enough to be spiritually and psychologically satisfying. All of one's life's experiences, ethics, principles, understanding, values, etc., can fit nicely enough within that spiritual framework. Thus, for example, to a fundamentalist Baptist-Christian there is great comfort in one's faith and one's faith is broad enough and deep enough to be all-inclusive, there being no need for anything beyond that framework. Indeed that framework provides a considerable opportunity for growth and deepening and service.

But eventually the student grows beyond the boundaries of that basic framework. With experience, with deepening, come new realizations, and one becomes dissatisfied with the "old" framework (which has nonetheless served its purpose). One then looks for and generally finds a new framework that is simply more comfortable, more comforting, more satisfying, more amenable to the growth and deepening that is needed. This does not in any real sense invalidate the truth and value of the previous framework. The new framework is not "better" in any absolute sense, but it is "better" in the sense of being what the person needs, for the time being. The new framework is then naturally seen (consciously or unconsciously) as broader, deeper, more inclusive than the previous framework. Someone who embraces the framework of the "Unity Church" for example, may see the former, more conventional faith as a small part of some much larger, much broader, much deeper, much more meaningful framework (at least for now, and at least for that person).

The principles of the earlier faith can then be seen in a broader, deeper sense, even though this could not be apprehended at the time one was embracing the former framework. The “old” can be interpreted in a “new” light. And progress (experience, broadening, deepening, spiritual growth) is facilitated. Thus spiritual growth really involves a continual broadening and deepening of perspective or framework. For example, one who is a Christian may undergo a number of periods of reframing, perhaps even over the course of several lifetimes, until Christianity is seen as a small part of some even broader framework. Because of the limitations and constraints inherent in “religion” many people move beyond religion in their quest for truth, sometimes losing something in the process. While others simply embrace a more spiritual (less religious) perspective while remaining within a comfortable religious-spiritual framework. Yet the tendency remains to see one’s framework (Baptist, Unity, whatever) as all-inclusive, even while it is actually just a small part of something yet-to-be-apprehended.

In any event, as one progresses in this matter, as the framework gets broader and deeper, one begins to realize that all God-centered religions and spiritual philosophies are leading pretty much to the same place in consciousness. The barriers between various religions and spiritual philosophies are recognized as artificial, and the deeper essence of one is seen, undiminished, in all.

† Commentary No. 1459

Religion and Spirituality

Many people confuse religiousness with spirituality. Religion and religiousness are expressions of the Sixth Ray and include the process and cultivation of aspiration, devotion, and friendship. Religion provides a means and process for preliminary relationship between a human being and the indwelling God, based primarily on faith or reasoning. Spirituality is an expression of the Second Ray and is primarily a matter of love-wisdom, of developing and actually achieving a proper relationship with God, one that is based in conscious realization (buddhi) rather than one based on faith or reasoning.

Religion in its highest sense includes genuine spirituality. Spirituality however does not necessarily or generally include any conventional or orthodox religious expression. The organized (conventional, doctrinal) churches serve a purpose and help to prepare many people for spiritual growth, but religion per se is not a prerequisite for spiritual growth. And spirituality is, in its proper sense, not a matter of embracing the senses but a matter of embracing one's deeper nature. The word "spirituality" is often used in its lowest sense of embracing one's senses or feeling, when, in contrast with materialism and sensualism and egoism, spirituality more properly means embracing higher principles.

In religion there is a tendency to confuse the symbols with truth and reality. It is the role of religion to encourage spiritual growth, to encourage a more personal relationship with God. But it is not the (proper) role of religion to engage in practices related to conversion. The beliefs of a particular religion or denomination are not true to the extent of the numbers of adherents. There are no such correlations. Religious beliefs are only true to the extent that they are (actually) true. Regardless of the number of adherents or the prominence (or even efficacy) of a faith in a given cultural context. And "conversion" based on intensity of emotional experience or extent of conviction derived from reasoning (or emotional-intellectual coercion) is simply artificial, however meaningful it may be on a personal level. Such a conversion may indeed have some benefit, but it is neither the truth nor the reality of a genuine spiritual experience. Genuine spiritual experience is based on self-reformation and (ultimately) on self-realization. Conversion is a characteristic of narrow-minded Sixth Ray idealism, while reformation (more properly, self-reformation) is a characteristic of broader-deeper-minded Second Ray wisdom.

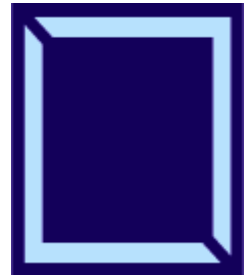
The Sixth Ray is the reflection of the Second Ray into matter. As such, the Sixth Ray does not contain the Second Ray, although there are links between the two rays. The Second Ray, however, does contain the Sixth Ray. Ultimately, (Sixth Ray) religion is limited by its personality-centeredness, while (Second Ray) spirituality is an embracing of the higher consciousness (the soul) and not so limited. The Second Ray tends toward and ultimately embraces inclusiveness, while the Sixth Ray tends toward exclusiveness.

Many who have witnessed or suffered the abuses of religion (blindness, narrow-mindedness, imposition, separativeness) feel repelled by religion and religious

adherent. But the spiritual student is urged and encouraged to work within the framework of (organized) religion, to foster harmony among the various peoples and religions, to foster moderation and broader-mindedness, and to foster more genuine spiritual growth. Quietly, gently, and with the inner sense of the higher self (the God-Christ).



Section 6.11



Aspects of Religion

- There are many and various aspects of religion, with the most essential ideas being held more or less in common. Differences tend to be in emphasis or focus or (superficial) interpretation.

The Trinity

Before each great day of manifestation, God exists as the undifferentiated or absolute universe. As the manifestation of the cosmos proceeds, God experiences on cosmic levels the first differentiation into the three persons or aspects of the trinity. The first aspect or person is called (variously) the first logos, the first ray, the father, or Shiva. The second aspect is called the second logos, the second ray, the son (the cosmic Christ), or Vishnu. The third aspect is called the third logos, the third ray, the holy ghost (the holy spirit), or Brahma.

From these three aspects proceed further differentiation until the universe has achieved manifestation in the broadest sense. The trinity constitutes the highest level of manifestation, and corresponds directly to the three major rays (streams of energy) of aspect. Everything on any differentiated level of manifestation or experience can be related through correspondence to one or another of the three rays of aspect.

The first ray is characterized as the will of God or the plan of God, on the highest level. This first aspect is pure spirit and does not descend into the lesser worlds. It is the father or power aspect that overshadows the manifested universe. The father (Shiva) aspect is the transcendent God that remains in the highest heaven world, just short of manifestation. The second ray is characterized as love-wisdom on the highest level. This second aspect is consciousness in all of its variations and is the product of the interaction of the father (spirit) and the mother (matter). Thus the son is born and consciousness evolves through manifestation, eventually to be absorbed into the realm of pure spirit. The cosmic Christ (the second ray) descends into the lesser worlds carrying with it all the sparks of divine life (consciousness) that constitute the spiritual essence of all lives. The second ray is the cosmic Christ (Vishnu) whose consciousness pervades all life throughout the worlds of manifestation, the God immanent in all of life and consciousness. The third ray is characterized as intelligent activity, as manifestation itself (matter or form in all worlds or levels). The third ray is the great breath of God that is God

immanent in matter. All things (spirit, consciousness, or form) are merely a part of God in manifestation.

Analogously many lesser lives within God also express themselves as trinities as the higher trinity is reflected into them (as above, so below). Man, for example, exists on three levels: the father aspect is the human monad. The Christ aspect is the human soul (the seat of human spiritual consciousness), the incarnation of the monad on causal levels. The third aspect is the human personality that is the incarnation of the soul into mental, emotional, and physical matter. As a person evolves, he purifies the personality-instrument, reaches up, and finally touches the soul and slowly becomes that soul, the Christ-aspect or God within. Later still, that soul finds union with the transcendent aspect, the monad on its own level.

As the lesser aspects of manifestation are gradually perfected, the fruits of experience are absorbed by the higher aspects. Experience (knowledge) is transmuted into love (wisdom). Thus the higher life, containing the myriad of lesser lives, evolves also. As the great day of manifestation approaches its conclusion, the myriad of differentiated lives and forms are gradually reabsorbed into the trinity on that level, and the three logoi are reabsorbed into the absolute or unmanifest, to await another great day of experience and evolution through manifestation.

† Commentary No. 37

Grace

In the sense of unmerited or personal divine assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification, there is no grace. God transcendent is impersonal, having a polarization of consciousness threshold far above even the souls of men. God immanent, though personal (actually super-personal), works totally with the consequences implied in the merited energies of karma. All divine activities are guided by a spiritual motive that concerns the welfare of a greater cause than that of man. Special favors, privileges, or reprieves outside of merit and purpose simply do not exist.

However, the grace of God does exist as ordered purpose through cosmic law; and in this greater sense, grace is very real. Grace is actually an inherent property of all manifested lives. The purpose of God is evolution on cosmic levels. And therefore, the affairs of men are subject to the encouragement and conditions of cosmic law, so that man will contribute his efforts toward that greater purpose. Karma is the primary agent of this law as it concerns individual and group lives. The grace of God is very much interrelated with the law of karma. The grace of God is also very much inherent in the concept of greater and lesser needs.

In the stricter sense, the existence of need is impossible due to the divine virtue that manifests as grace. Cosmic law (grace) dictates that every need be fulfilled. Therefore, a need cannot exist, by definition; for cosmic law anticipates (impersonally and automatically) every possible need and achieves fulfillment in a continuous fashion (while necessarily functioning outside of the realm of time and space). However, needs do not necessarily equate to specific hopes or desires or wishes (that the individual might think to be his needs). Every (hypothetical) need is meaningful and necessary to the ordered purpose of manifestation, no matter upon what level of consciousness, microscopic, human, or macrocosmic. If anything is a need, it is fulfilled. Specific desires may or may not be fulfilled, according to the intensities of feeling, the consciousness involved, and whether or not such desires have their place, purpose, lesson, or function in a greater scheme.

The sanctification or unmerited removal or forgiveness of sins is also quite impossible. The concept of the forgiveness of sins is a blind, and a misunderstanding of the concept of karmic fulfillment through experience and progressive consciousness. Sins (ignorance and error) generate karmic energies which encourage (and eventually force) progress through enlightenment (higher consciousness). Sins are forgiven only in the sense that ultimately, cosmic law is fulfilled, and through divine grace (karma), man achieves perfection. It is for man to learn to continually radiate an energy of love and understanding for the experience and expression of every other human being; to learn to forgive (in the human sense) the sins or weaknesses of others; and to realize that through divine grace (and karma) there exists absolute justice (which automatically eliminates any need or justification for retribution).

The subject of divine grace leads to the subject of thanksgiving. For though a human being may be a trivial and microscopic form of life within the universe, the human being is wholly dependent upon the greater life that (impersonally) provides every necessary sustenance. Through divine grace and through the simple existence of a far greater life, the human being is granted life (and consciousness) and the nobility of God within the form. Thus, thanksgiving is always an appropriate state of mind, especially for beginning and ending each day, and as a qualification for every meditation period.

† Commentary No. 275

Magic and Religion

The domain of religion is qualified primarily by the sixth ray, though other ray elements are usually present. The ceremonial element (via the seventh ray) plays a major supporting role, but it is the sixth ray energy proper (and its analog in the second ray) that provides the basis of any religion. The type of religion is determined primarily by the particular ray through which it is developed and qualified. A seventh ray religion, for example, will normally emphasize the ceremonial aspects, while a first ray religion will normally emphasize first ray elements.

Where the seventh ray influence provides the ceremonial aspects and associated magical forces, the sixth ray influence (basic qualification) provides magical forces of a different order. Seventh ray magic is largely ceremonial and deals primarily with physical (etheric) forces; sixth ray magic is largely personality-centered and deals primarily with emotional (astral) forces. Magic along sixth ray lines is particularly potent due to the coincidence of magnetic (astral) (personal) forces. Those magnetic forces are particularly useful in any religious movement from the standpoint of impelling influence. There are, of course, advantages (merit) and disadvantages (defects) to magnetic methods. The primary advantage is the ease with which the religious movement can become influential, particularly as the movement grows in scope and potency, and as adherents are attracted and influenced (hopefully) along positive (constructive) lines. The primary disadvantages are the tendency toward the extreme (including imposition), and the undermining of free will.

Sixth ray magic is probably most obvious in the religious leaders who have cultivated a strong personal magnetism and who are usually quite potent along magical (magnetic) (emotional) lines, particularly with those who do not really think for themselves (and who are therefore easily influenced). This is a natural and almost necessary step at some point in the evolution of human consciousness; but, the hypnotic element of any movement that draws upon the emotions and the mind can be easily misused as beliefs or values are imposed rather than presented for consideration. As humanity evolves, so does religion evolve, so that a wide spectrum of influential religions exists, including some which have a mature character and cultivate the intelligence of adherents, and others which are less mature and merely imposes values.

The cultivated image of the founder or central figure can easily exceed the potency of the individual, as magical forces are used to sustain or enhance a powerful thought-form (on concrete mental and astral levels). As more adherents are attracted, the central image is strengthened (unconsciously) even to the extent that the psychic image can interact directly and actively with anyone who visualizes the image or calls upon its influence by name or ceremony. A particularly potent religious movement can be sustained for thousands of years, but the character and temperament is likely to change (gradually) (continuously) according to the mass consciousness of the adherents.

The practical basis of any religion is usually centered in its idealism. Through magical forces, that idealism can be a potent and constructive influence for human progress (culturally, morally, and spiritually), particularly where the individual consciously and intelligently chooses to cooperate. But the dangers of extreme idealism should be tempered or discouraged by moderation and balance. Spiritual students of all faiths are encouraged to work within the domain of popular religion wherever they are comfortable, as the (broader-minded) spiritual students actually serve as a moderating evolutionary force.

Reverence

Reverence is defined conventionally as deferential respect felt or demonstrated. A proper sense of reverence, felt and demonstrated, is one of the many crucial ingredients for human completion. In this (more spiritual) sense, reverence refers to the deferential respect and devotion (adoration) of the human being (spiritual student) toward (1) God, (2) all of the intermediate (hierarchical) lives and forces (nature), and (3) all of life and its manifestation. It is not (in this sense and should not be) a reverence toward other particular human beings (as human beings or as anything supposed otherwise), but it is a reverence toward the life that lives in and through all beings and all forms, without discrimination.

One should then respect all particulars but revere (only) the one life in all (and its manifold of expressions and intermediaries). The importance (significance) of respect and reverence lies in the need of the spiritual student (and humanity) to overcome the existing prevalent separative forces and embrace the unifying forces of the one life. Without a profound reverence for life in all of its manifested forms, it is not possible for the student to achieve the necessary rapport with the soul (for the soul is not separated from the one life (of course neither is the separative (individualistic) (coarse) personality (ego), but the sense of separation (on that level) is sufficient to preclude conscious rapport)). In this relatively impersonal sense, reverence is an important heart-centered catalyst, for reverence (love) evokes the development of the heart-center (along relatively mature lines) and as long as it remains impersonal serves (tends) to balance the head-centered and heart-centered natures.

Another important aspect of reverence is its tempering effect on the ego. If properly cultivated, respect for others and reverence for the one in all will moderate the development of the ego and allow its qualification (transformation) (deliverance) (salvation) by the soul. Without some sense of reverence, the ego can develop beyond bounds manageable, precipitating a crisis for domination of the personality. If the ego is sufficiently strong (resolute), then it will be destroyed rather than tempered (a properly tempered ego is a

positive attribute while an unconstrained or untempered ego is spiritually intolerable).

Respect for all is an aspect of reverence for the one, and helps the student to achieve a rapport with lives in manifestation even where some (many) of those lives may be expressing themselves through coarse instruments. Without respect for others (notwithstanding relative coarseness), the spiritual student is necessarily separative and preclusive. With proper respect for others, the student can be an effective inductive influence within the manifested lifewave (which is inherently more effective in this sense than the working of the soul on its level). Respect (reverence) for the greater lives allows a responsive rapport to be achieved (albeit not necessarily conscious), which in turn affords the student a place (role) in the manifestation of evolutionary forces and their qualification.

Although the human being is a god-in-the-making, the human being is nonetheless merely one of countless manifestations of the one God, and one of the essential ingredients of a perfected human being is humility, which is self-reverence or a religious deference of the mind (ego) (personality) to the soul (God) (Christ) within. The true self is the one within all, and without reverence and humility the one without (the human (individual) personality) cannot live in peace.

† Commentary No. 728

Heaven and Hell 1

Most religions, both ancient and modern, contain teachings anent the post-mortem state of the human "soul." These teachings generally describe two possible conditions or localities wherein the soul, after death, may exist. The first locality (state or set of states) being accessible only to those who have lead virtuous, moral, or otherwise "righteous" lives, is called heaven. The second locality (state or set or states), being the unfortunate default position for all who were basically "evil," "sinful," or in some cases simply unaccepting of a particular religious doctrine, is called hell. Various religions have their own terms to represent what the Western terms "heaven" and "hell" used here imply.

Typically, the heaven experience is portrayed by religion as being a blissful fulfillment of the individual's desires or thought life. Descriptions of "roads paved in gold" and "pearly gates" indicate the extreme emphasis on materiality (maya) that some religious groups project into their vision of heaven. Hell, on the other hand, is portrayed as a place or state of torment, suffering, and pain. For orthodox Christianity (and the later Islamic religion), one's assignment to heaven or hell is based on but one lifetime, and the remainder of eternity is then spent either reaping rewards in heaven or enduring punishment in hell. There is one major difference between the heaven and hell of orthodox Christianity and those of Brahmanism, Buddhism, and most relatively unaltered ancient religions and philosophical systems. The heaven and hell of orthodox Christianity are eternal; those of the others are recognized as being transient states experienced between life cycle transitions (reincarnations). As the causes that result in either the bliss of heaven or torment of hell are exhausted, the individual moves on to new experience.

Heaven and hell, from the theosophical (metaphysical) (ancient wisdom) perspective may be considered in several ways. First, the period spent in the lower sub-planes of kamaloka (on the astral plane) is a period of purgation, wherein all matter within the emotional body that is coarse must be shed before the individual may move onward. Most of humanity has, at this time, evolved beyond the extreme coarseness that requires an extensive purgatory experience. There are those few, however, who have yet to become sufficiently free of coarse lower astral matter (analogous to "evil"). The period spent on the lower sub-planes of kamaloka is, for them, a seeming hell. No longer possessing a physical body to dull the impact of lower emotions, they suffer emotionally with more intensity than we can understand from the physical plane perspective.

The individual may perceive his suffering to be eternal, but it is merely transient (though intense). When the individual passes from the lower sub-planes of kamaloka to the higher, he has entered into a state of consciousness sometimes called first heaven. When he further passes into the lower devachic states on concrete mental levels (second heaven), he experiences more truly bliss and light. If he is sufficiently evolved to experience the devachic states on the abstract mental sub-planes, he may exist or bathe in the presence of his soul (the Christ within), and thus realize his oneness with God.

This theosophical perspective then, does include states analogous to heaven and hell, but they are viewed as merely states through which the individual passes according to the degree of evolution attained. They are purposeful states that assist the individual in further evolving, and are governed (as is all else) by the law of karma. They are not mere states of retributive reward or punishment.

† Commentary No. 729

Heaven and Hell 2

There is a similarity between the transition states of kamaloka and devachan (a theosophical perspective) on the one hand, and the concepts of heaven and hell taught by most world religions (except orthodox Christianity and Islam).

There are universal truths or laws which theosophy seeks to embrace. These same truths form the basis of the teaching of all genuine world teachers (initiates), upon which religions later emerge. The problem with religion is that there is a tendency for truths to become diluted (misrepresented) as they are presented by the uninitiated in terms that the masses can understand.

The symbolic nature of a teaching is often misconstrued (or taken literally), and, over time, basic truths may degenerate greatly. These degenerations become crystallized into dogma that may retain only a "hint" of original truth. There is a further tendency for ideas that are not necessarily consistent with truth to be added on to some original truth, thus converting it into what is basically a superstition (from the Latin "superstitio," meaning to add upon). This is the case for the orthodox Christian teachings regarding heaven and hell in specific, and life and death, in general.

It is a positive sign that many thinking people within mainstream (but not fundamentalist) Christianity reject the orthodox dogma of heaven and hell. It seems impossible to sensibly reconcile the concept that "God is love" with the atrocities and torture of the eternal hell that He supposedly maintains for those who displease or "sin against" Him. Further, how could a sincere individual who endeavors to lead a Christ-like life qualified by love and brotherhood be truly content languishing (selfishly) in heavenly bliss while some of his brothers (errant though they may be) suffer through eternity? A static heaven for the

selfishly unaware is a concept that can be seen as equally repulsive as the tortures of hell. While it is a positive sign that these doctrines are being questioned or rejected, an even greater step forward will come as more thinking people consider the basic cyclicity of life (reincarnation) and begin to understand the law of karma and qualifying evolutionary purpose.

From another theosophical perspective, life in physical incarnation on earth can be considered as hell. As man descends (falls) into the material world, he becomes further and further removed from his spiritual source on the higher planes. Union with the soul (the Christ-within) (the monad) is a state of pure bliss. This state of union may be considered as heaven (nirvana). The repeated sojourns of the individual through the (spiritual) darkness of the material world are the just rewards of all who are not as yet sufficiently pure, of all who have not as yet learned all of the lessons that earthly experience (suffering) encourages, and of all for whom there remains the pull of earthly desire. For ages, the individual struggles through lifetimes of darkness and suffering (hell).

Then, as he gradually becomes more self-conscious and begins to consciously tread the spiritual path, he becomes aware that he is able, by his own thinking and responses, to determine his own situation. He may make it a continual hell by persisting in identification with the material world and refusing (or failing) to learn the lessons of life, or he may consciously endeavor to realize the heaven that lies within. He may consciously align his lower self with his soul and thereby radiate that heavenly light into the darkness around him. This alignment (at-one-ment) is essentially participation in heaven, while yet on earth. It is the symbolic bringing forth of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Anthropomorphization

Anthropomorphization is the process or phenomenon of perceiving or interpreting “what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics.” While anthropomorphizing may be convenient, it nonetheless contributes to the self-centeredness of the human perspective and tends to sustain various illusions concerning existence, manifestation, God, etc. The fundamental problem (conflict) of anthropomorphization is its lack of truth. By perceiving something that is not human or personal in human or personal terms, one deceives oneself into believing that perception or interpretation, i.e., of confusing what is real or true with what is not.

A fairly common practice is perceiving God and/or nature in anthropomorphic or anthropopathic terms, i.e., perceiving (imagining) God either in human terms (form and/or attributes) or having human or somewhat human-like feelings (respectively). The problem is that God (at whatever level) is simply not human and therefore does not in general have any human characteristics. God is so far beyond the form and character (temperament) (quality) (consciousness) of the human being that any attempt to anthropomorphize or anthropopathize God tends to inhibit the realization of what God really is. Anthropomorphic religions have served their purpose and were tailored to the conceptual limitations of the humanity of the time. They were (should have been) merely stepping stones to a more universal, less personal realization.

The problem is compounded in the sense that humanity is evolving toward reunion in consciousness with God (more correctly, evolving toward realization that one is God (already) (but not in the sense of one’s humanness)). In order to achieve that reunion or (realization), one needs to become more Godlike. If one has a false perception of God (e.g., untempered power, being above the law), then one is greatly self-hindered. If one perceives God (the soul) (whatever) anthropomorphically, then one can only evolve according to that extremely limited view. On the other hand, if one realizes the non-anthropomorphic nature of God, recognizing the impersonal nature of the soul (and what lies beyond the soul), then one is more easily able to adapt to the current of evolution in consciousness unhindered (or less hindered) by human limitations.

The problem is further compounded by man's tendency to anthropomorphize lesser, greater, or different species. Animals are not human. They do not "think" or even "feel" in the same way that humans think and feel. Their experience is not comparable to some subhuman or less human analog. They "do" things, but not for "reasons" or for "feelings" as if they were human. Likewise the devas are not human, do not "think" or "feel" at all as humans do (in fact, their consciousness is so markedly different than "human" that any such attribution of human characteristics is quite misleading (and potentially dangerous)).

The real problem is man's tendency toward self-centeredness, i.e., interpreting others' behavior, etc., (human or otherwise) in one's own terms, according to one's own nature (character, temperament, values). Man's self-centered perspective is the greatest limitation that he (she) has in this evolutionary context. Man lives four-dimensionally (three spatial dimensions plus a temporal dimension) and has "human" characteristics (thoughts, feelings, etc.). Reality is vastly greater than this. The soul is not constrained to four dimensions and cannot be described (in truth) according to human (personal) attributes and characteristics. In order to reach that truth, one must overcome all of one's self-centered (and anthropomorphic) conditioning.

† Commentary No. 1147

The Golden Rule

The golden rule is a guiding principle common to virtually all cultures and religions, namely that one treat others as one would have others treat oneself. The rule is pragmatic (it tends to promote goodwill) but it is based very much on underlying metaphysical principles, namely karma and creative returns.

In the karmic sense, there is a definite consequence of every action, feeling, and thought. If one behaves and feels and thinks constructively, then one will naturally evoke constructive consequences. If one behaves and feels and thinks destructively (separatively) (independently), then one will naturally evoke destructive consequences (yet nonetheless constructive in the longer view, as all

experience engenders learning). Thus if one treats others with compassion, then one is creating the karma of compassionate treatment. Of course, if one is treating others with superficial compassion in order to create karma (consequences) of compassionate treatment then one actually creates the karma of contrived compassionate treatment, which is necessarily different. One has to be genuine (sincere) in order to evoke genuine response. Motive is as much a part of karma if not more so a part of karma than the action itself, for motive is action.

But karma is only part of the dynamic of the golden rule. Another dimension of the golden rule is that of creative returns or attraction in kind. If one treats others with a certain energy or quality (behavior), then one is thereby attracting the same energy or quality. It may not come directly from those to whom the energy (behavior) is directed (those to whom the energy (behavior) is directed may not resonate with that energy and therefore may not be responsive), but the energy will return nonetheless, and in the same flavor, only more so. If one is loving and charitable, then one will attract similar energies. For karma (and creative returns) is (are) always in effect. Where there are other karmic factors, the consequences may not be readily apparent (indeed, may not be as timely as one might expect), but there are consequences, and consequences are always (necessarily) warranted and appropriate to the circumstances.

There is yet another dimension to the golden rule, that of evolutionary encouragement. Every constructive endeavor (every endeavor sincerely embraced) constitutes an encouragement to others, to the extent that others are responsive and able to engage the particular energy. And even if they are not, yet, able to embrace it, the presence of that energy acts as encouragement. Thus spiritual students tend to pray and meditate for the whole. Spiritual students tend to serve humanity, without contrivance or expectation, wherever and however there are worthwhile opportunities, according to their abilities and calling. And how people treat other people is a very substantial factor in collective progress (in consciousness). Where people are kind and considerate, polite, forgiving, non-judging, etc., there is very definite encouragement. As people embrace spiritual qualities, that embracing encourages the collective consciousness. It matters not that humanity as a whole cannot respond quickly. What matters is that the effort is made and the encouragement works through the lifewave as it needs to.

Spiritual students need no reasons for embracing spiritual principles (doing the right thing naturally is a higher order action than doing the same thing for reasons) and so naturally embrace the golden rule. It matters not whether others (appear to) respond in kind. It only matters that one is living in accordance with one's principles.

† Commentary No. 1151

Miracles

Miracles are defined conventionally as (apparently) extraordinary events manifesting (apparently) supernatural works of God. More correctly (metaphysically), however, nothing is extraordinary and the works of God are not supernatural. God is natural. Since God is not anthropomorphic, there is nothing contrived about the works of God, and therefore there is nothing contrived about miracles.

Miracles happen. They do not contravene the laws of nature or the laws of the physical world, but they may appear to contravene such laws to the extent that such laws are not fully understood (natural laws are understood (generally) by most people (and the scientific community) only superficially). Miracles are closely related to karma and grace but neither grace nor miracles can ever be inconsistent with karma. In a sense, miracles are a form or part of grace, as they may (appear to) transcend the "normal" working of karma. In this sense, karma is relatively broad and grace (miracles) works (work) within the framework of karma, but in such a way as to extend karma. In other words, miracles may not be compelling in the process of fulfillment of karma and miracles may in themselves be causes for subsequent karmic consequences. What this really means is that a miracle may convey some invitation, and subsequent manifestation may likely relate to the extent to which that invitation is properly perceived or embraced.

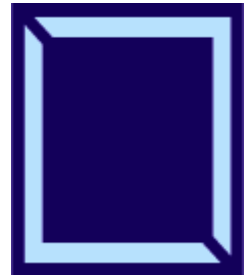
In another sense, miracles are merely the outer manifestations (indications) of natural processes, but which most people would consider extraordinary because most people do not understand the underlying laws (cause and effect) (grace) (miracles) and therefore these events appear miraculous (or not in accordance

with “normal” expectations). Extraordinary “appearances” imply that one is not perceiving the depth and breadth of the context. If one properly perceives the overall context, then miracles are very natural. To say that there is no order of difficulty in miracles is to say that they transcend our conditioned expectations based on our limited understanding of these processes. All things are interrelated and interconnected, causally and otherwise. One’s sense of scale is simply an artifact of conditioned thinking (conditioned apprehension of the physical world as an end in itself (artificial reality)). The experienced spiritual student is not surprised by miracles, for he (she) is familiar with the underlying processes and has observed their working out in various ways. The experienced spiritual student is not misled by an artificial sense of scale.

Miracles do not happen merely as a consequence of prayer. They happen as a consequence of the need for restoration of balance and may be evoked through prayer (but prayer does not necessarily evoke miracles). The key is balance or equilibrium. A miracle occurs because something is out of balance and the miracle restores the balance (or at least moves things closer toward balance). The conventional sense of temporal flow inhibits understanding of miracles because most people perceive time as sequential (past to present to future) instead of taking a broader view (simultaneity) which allows “future” events to evoke present circumstances (all perspective of current circumstances is necessarily substantially limited).

Miracles occur. And every miracle is a blessing. But too much can be made of what appear to be miracles. For every aspect of life is a blessing in some way or another. Life itself is a miracle and a matter of God’s grace. Every event is a resonance (grace).

Section 6.111



Purity

- One of the central features of (proper) religion is an emphasis on purity, of thinking and feeling and expression. And one of the unfortunate (separative) (ignoble) features of some applied religions is a related concept of pollution.

Purity 1

Virtually every religious and spiritual path emphasizes or encourages a process of purification and refinement. In some cases this process is seen as essential and necessary to liberation (salvation), in other cases it is merely a matter of duty. But the concept of purity is nonetheless important, both in its value to the progress in consciousness of the spiritual student, and in its potential abuse.

In this metaphysical and theosophical context, purity refers to the relative refinement or vibration of the constituent atoms of the physical, etheric, astral, and mental bodies, i.e., of the human form or personality. It is a matter of clarity and cleanliness of vibration, the relative absence of coarseness. Spiritualized matter, matter that is qualified and conditioned by higher consciousness is relatively (much) more refined than ordinary matter. Ordinary matter tends to regress to the lowest and coarsest level. Coarse matter is more responsive to external, worldly, material and egoistic impressions. Refined matter is more responsive to higher impressions. Coarse matter makes one's bodies unsuited to higher work in consciousness. There is nothing wrong with coarseness, or with having coarse bodies, but the spiritual student needs more refined vehicles in order to progress and in order to serve more effectively.

Pollution refers, unfortunately somewhat pejoratively, to coarse matter and coarse influences, whatever impedes or inhibits higher consciousness. In some cases the concept of pollution has been abused in the sense that people who are perceived to be relatively more coarse are shunned or excluded from healthy (meaningful) (comfortable) social contact (whether or not they are indeed relatively more coarse (sometimes they are merely different ethnically and culturally or in terms of religious preferences)). In extreme instances this can lead (wrongly) to adversity and hostility, through discrimination and even violence. But in fact, people who are "different" (whether relatively more or less refined) are not, in any sense, pollution. Moreover, any judgment regarding the relative purity or coarseness of other human beings is necessarily ego-based and a crime (separative) in itself.

Great crimes have been committed in the name of religion (and misplaced sense of purity), e.g., the stereotypical Christian attitude toward heathens and pagans, the stereotypical Muslim attitude toward unbelievers, the stereotypical Hindu caste system, the Hitlerian attitude towards Jewish peoples, and ethnic cleansing (of course stereotypes are not fair and are misleading, but there are abuses, in some instances and by some peoples). Where in fact, if one is refined in consciousness there is no sense of separation or adversity. All peoples are (properly) seen as children of God, regardless of religion, ethnic and cultural background, nationality, etc., and regardless of actual or perceived purity. Oftentimes the actual motives for these abuses are more personal and political, and religion is just an excuse.

But no God-centered religion or spiritual philosophy, in its proper sense, countenances or facilitates any of these abuses. It is only religion corrupted by ego (misplaced (illusional) human self-interest) that allows such things to be done in the name of religion or in the name of God. Religion properly encourages refinement, but it does not, properly, discriminate against those who are perceived as less refined. But much of religion in the lower sense is separative, and separativeness leads to various abuses of otherwise sound principles.

† Commentary No. 1308

Purity 2

There are several dimensions or aspects of purity. First and foremost it is a matter of individual consciousness and what facilitates growth and progress in consciousness. Secondly it is a matter of collective consciousness, as individuals contribute (less directly) to the evolution in consciousness of the whole. And finally it is a matter of potential abuse in some sense of racial or religious purity.

Each person enters this world as a consequence of previous experience and expression (achievements in consciousness leading to character, temperament, and values). The circumstances of one's birth (place, culture, family, abilities, tendencies, opportunities) are consequences as well as opportunities. The purpose of life is largely a matter of learning and growing (and subsequently

serving in some broader context), and as the student learns and grows there is a natural (gradual, progressive) evolutionary change in consciousness. One who consciously and intelligently embraces a constructive moral and ethical code is thereby enhanced. One who actively meditates and embraces spiritual practices (as well) even more so. But no matter the birth circumstances, there are still opportunities. Thus one is not really limited by circumstances as much as innate abilities. And those innate abilities are improved with experience and growth in consciousness.

In this context, purity and purification refer to the state of relative clarity (purity) (refinement) in consciousness and the process of improving that state. Counter to this evolutionary process is the inertia and coarseness of materialism and egoism. The concept of pollution (in this context) is not really a healthy one, but refers to whatever tends to discourage purity and purification. Such as receptive association with coarser peoples, in which a person is influenced (negatively). This can lead to judgments and to (unhealthy) aversions where people separate themselves (unnaturally) from others. It is more healthy to learn to work (grow) within the community, even if the preponderance of fellow human beings are not living enlightened lives. The consequences of aversion or separateness would seem to be quite substantially more negative than the consequences of non-receptive association. But in some cultures (faiths) (races) there are embodied aversions and (potentially very) separative elements.

Withdrawal from a community (from the world) may facilitate the spiritual focus, but eventually one must necessarily conquer oneself (achieve self-mastery) in the midst of adversity, worldly and sensual temptations, etc. And ultimately, long-term withdrawal or aversion to others is counter-productive, as it is a person's relationship to others (in the context of family, community, culture, race, religion) that affords opportunity to contribute to the progress of the (collective consciousness and human race as a) whole.

The fact is that it is not the association with other peoples (less refined or more so) that determines one's propensity to regress or to progress, but how (effectively (gently) and intelligently (sensibly)) one relates to others. If one is enamoured with or (passively) receptive to people or practices that are relatively more coarse then one will naturally regress. But if one remains

committed to the path (and to one's higher nature and principles) then these associations are not counter-productive at all. Indeed, the spiritual student who is well-established in spiritual principles has no need of fear in walking about the world and associating constructively with the various peoples of the world. After all, every (other) person is simply another reflection of God.

† Commentary No. 1309

Purity 3

Indeed, healthy (non-destructive) association with others is necessary for the collective consciousness to move forward. Those who would individually or collectively separate themselves from others, on almost any basis, are performing a disservice to the God within all.

In this sense, there is an important distinction to be made, between pollution per se and people who simply may not be very refined. People are simply who they are, living at whatever level and nature of consciousness they can. Some are relatively more coarse than others, some relatively less so. Pollution is simply matter on some level that is relatively more coarse than refined. If one is receptive to pollution then one simply attracts that energy (matter) that is coarser, regardless of associations (even while those associations may prove to be vectors). And if one is not receptive to pollution then one is relatively free from being affected by associations. But other people and other peoples (of other cultures, races, religions, etc.) do not (and never) constitute pollution. And there are invariably gentle (enlightened) souls within every culture and ethnic group, within every race, within every religion, etc.

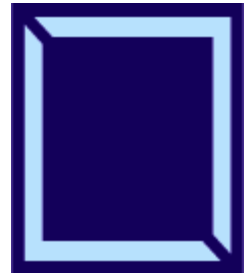
Many times aversion is not a matter of (necessarily wrongly) perceived "pollution" but is simply a matter of insecurity with one's own beliefs, fears that one might be influenced by association (because one's own self-security is threatened). Many times hostile intent (aversion) (separativeness) is entirely personal, even on a collective scale, and not a matter of the purported "reasons." In some cases it is a matter of arrogance or false sense of superiority (all such senses are necessarily false), that somehow one's race or culture or religion or birth circumstances makes one superior. In every case it is a matter of ignorance

(which is another name for evil). In not understanding that we are all related in spirit and in consciousness. That we are all of God. That God lives through all of us, regardless of our caste, regardless of our circumstances.

Thus on one level there may be (necessarily unhealthy) personal aversions, at the other extreme there is (unconscionable) genocidal ethnic cleansing. And in between all manner of discriminations and persecutions and separative behaviors. None of which is inherently healthy or contributive to healing or progressing the whole. For what is not realized by those who engage in these practices (at any level) is that every life (and every human life) has value to the whole, that in hurting any part of life (human or otherwise) one is necessarily hurting oneself. And that it is collective evolution that matters much more so than individual advancement.

And it is not merely the common man (woman) who may have a problem with separateness (exclusivity) (prejudice) (judgment), but it is also a problem for many spiritual students, who by virtue of their perceived "spirituality" tend to separate themselves from others, in consciousness and in practice. But the student who truly embraces purity and the process of purification, gently, intelligently, sensibly, is one who thereby forms closer, healthier, more meaningful relationships with others, without fear of being polluted, indeed there is (properly) not even the slightest thought or feeling of aversion, and without any impositional sense either, for one must properly not be adversely influenced by others and one must properly not actively seek to influence others either. Thus the spiritual student who embraces the (never-ending) process of purification contributes incidentally and not deliberately to the whole.

Section 6.112



Religious Orders

- Within and beyond the scope of organized religion there are various religious and holy orders. Some are exclusive to some particular religion or denomination, others are not and serve to bridge between the various religions and/or denominations. Some are rather withdrawn from humanity, and some are well within the mainstream of humanity.

Holy Orders

In principle, each particular religion contains a meaningful spectrum of expression of religious and spiritual insight and practice, with various religious-spiritual (holy) orders (some in the form of metaphysical-occult schools) emerging within each religion to serve various needs (e.g., the advanced training of spiritual students within the context of particular religion, and with some particular emphasis or focus). Holy orders in turn provide subjective leadership within their respective religions, encouraging the deepening in consciousness and progressive realization of adherents and in some broader sense of non-members (depending on the place of the holy order within the religion). In this sense, a holy order is an order of religious-spiritual adherents, typically ordained in some formal manner, devoted to service to God (and humanity).

Holy orders within a religion tend to work relatively more openly, teaching and encouraging objectively (through activities (service)) as well as subjectively (through prayer and meditation). Holy orders in this sense (of being sanctioned within some religion) are limited only to the extent of the religious context (boundaries of the respective religion) and to the extent of the wisdom (quality (consciousness) (integrity)) of the leaders of the order). Members of holy orders tend to be more properly connected to the source of energy and inspiration, although individual self-realization is not precluded (indeed, the whole (human race) is moving more toward individual self-realization (which of course is not really individual but in some higher group context rather than in some outer group context).

Holy orders are "holy" in the sense that their leaders are ordained (sanctioned) in some higher sense, not holy in any sense of perfection or Godliness. Thus in this sense, holy means sincerely and devotedly religious and spiritual, with consideration for the various limitations of being human. The religious adherent strives toward holiness (religious and/or spiritual perfection) as it is understood, but generally never actually becomes holy. The value (growth, deepening, realization) is in the process rather than in achievement (one is never actually really finished with evolution).

Holy orders generally emphasize the religious-spiritual dimension (context), but there are analogous “orders” in other areas of human endeavor, e.g., theosophical orders which are not religious (sixth ray) per se but are nonetheless spiritual (inspired and subjectively inspiring) (in principle). Thus “religion” in the higher sense is very much broader than its formal (worldly) boundaries, and simply devoted to God, truth, self-realization, and service to God and humanity.

There are also various more subtle, non-denominational (holy) orders, schools of spiritual students where some (many) (most) (all) religions are represented, where the common mystical core of truth is realized and embraced by all adherents, to the extent to which they are capable. While most religious orders are specific to some particular religion and are manifested objectively as well as subjectively, the various (relatively few) non-denominational orders tend to be manifested predominantly subjectively, linking effectively between the various races and nations and religions and cultures, in consciousness, rather than openly. In other words, the objective orders (tend to) function at the personality level, with some measure of devotion and inspiration, while the subjective orders (tend to) function at the soul level, with some quite substantial measure of devotion and inspiration.

† Commentary No. 1300

The Order of Bels

The Order of Bels (the Order) is the parent group that sanctions the (outer) organization and work of the Upper Triad Association. The Order consists of approximately one hundred second ray souls who individualized together as a karmic (soul) group during the moon chain and who have in the meantime evolved to the point where virtually all karmic members are either on the path or approaching the path. Over the years a few of these souls have transferred to other orders, and a few from other orders have transferred to the Order, but the bulk of constituents consists of the original members. There are also several specialized deva orders closely associated with the Order.

The Order of Bels does not exist or manifest itself in the objective world, i.e., on the dense physical, etheric, emotional (astral), or concrete mental planes. It only

exists on the level(s) of the soul (atma-buddhi-manas), and, indirectly, through its members and representatives in the world. One cannot simply join the Order. Either a person (human being) is already part of the Order at the soul level, or the soul is magnetically drawn to the Order by virtue of its gradually changing character through magnetic attraction at the soul level. Thus membership in the Order is never a matter of seeking or striving but a matter of simply being.

The Order is a holy order in the sense that the group is devoted to the service of God (evolution) and in the sense that virtually the entire group (as souls) has largely transcended the need for worldly experience and expression. There are several categories of (informal, subjective) membership, namely (1) karmic members (who are karmically part of the group but who are not functioning at the level of the group (i.e., who remain bound by karma to reincarnate for further experience and expression (resolution))), (2) conscious initiates and disciples of the group who are actively sanctioned by the group and are able to incarnate as representatives of the group (i.e., representing and conveying the energy and qualification of the group), and (3) transcendents who are no longer able to incarnate. There are also a few people (souls) loosely associated or affiliated with the group in various ways, namely those who are approaching the group magnetically and those who have transcended the group altogether.

The Order is an esoteric group and a peripheral ashram affiliated with the Spiritual Hierarchy of the planet, but is not central to the current evolutionary work of the planet. The group is a second ray group but rather specialized by virtue of its nature and experience (history) and the group performs certain relatively long-term tasks and works in support of present and future humanity (and other lifewaves). The group also serves a bridging function at logoc levels. In contrast with most esoteric (soul) groups, the Order is also a monadic group, where all of its members at the soul level collectively constitute an expression of a monad of a particular nature (first ray). This means that the Order as a whole is much more coherent than most. It also means that the Order is somewhat less dynamic than most.

Historically the Order has rarely incarnated as a whole, but whenever the group has incarnated substantially it has formed an esoteric school and/or has played a (subjectively) qualifying role in some particular civilization or root race.

Schools historically associated with the Order have been rather difficult, and challenging (not being appealing to the casual aspirant), almost inhospitable. Although there is some hierarchical flavor, the group operates predominantly collectively and cohesively, but at the soul level. Thus no personality presence can enter the group at its level.

† Commentary No. 1301

Religious Orders

Religious orders are particular formal or informal organizations of religious adherents, usually within the framework of a particular religion or denomination, but sometimes bridging between religions and/or denominations. Religious orders are usually formed to encourage and facilitate holiness, advanced religious training, and/or service. Some are substantially reclusive, primarily contemplative orders, while some are very much an active part of some larger community and engaged in one or more service endeavors.

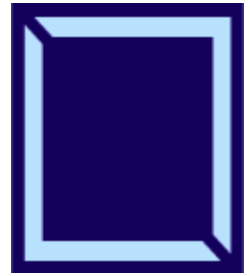
The members of some religious orders live together (indefinitely) in a religious community, while others live together for training and then serve elsewhere while retaining their ties to the order. The advantage of a religious order for advanced training is quite substantial, as a cloistered or semi-cloistered community affords the adherent the opportunity to focus on the immediate task (becoming more holy) without substantial worldly distractions. Typically the members of a particular religious order are all male or all female, though some admit candidates of either sex. The segregation of the sexes is simply additional opportunity to focus on the religious and spiritual objectives. On the other hand, achieving self-mastery in a cloistered environment (e.g., a monastery or convent) is a limited self-mastery, because it is attained without the stress of living in the world. One who achieves this (first level of self-mastery) must then, eventually, go out into the world and be tested (by the worldly experience, by worldly temptations) before attaining true self-mastery. But the cloistered experience offers a fertile ground for the preparatory work. In principle, the (properly prepared) student then goes forth into the world much stronger spiritually to face the world without succumbing to worldliness or egoism.

Adherents of the various religious orders are called brothers, sisters, monks, nuns, etc., according to their religious tradition. Some religious orders consist only (or mainly) of priests or ministers, people (clergy) who are ordained in some manner consistent with their faith and tradition. Other religious orders consist mostly of lay people who are nonetheless devoted to their faith and their order and the principles thereof. But each order typically has criteria for admission for training and additional criteria for ordination or formal acceptance for membership in the order. In some cases the criteria are formal and objective. In other cases it is primarily subjective and qualitative.

Legitimate (sanctioned, truly spiritual) religious orders respect the dignity of their members, and respect the members of the larger geographical community. While there are typically rules for admission and rules for continuance, the students and adherents are not abused in any way. They voluntarily sacrifice certain freedoms for the advantages of belonging to the religious community and receiving the advanced training. But they are not imposed upon beyond the scope of the rules of the order, and those rules are understood and agreed upon before admittance. In a genuine religious or spiritual order there is minimal personality-centeredness. In the advanced orders there is no personality-centeredness at all.

Some orders are sanctioned by religious authorities, while others function according to some higher calling. While most religious orders operate within the framework of some particular religion, some admit members of all religions and facilitate harmony and respect. In the final analysis, the particular religion is not important, what is important is one's relationship to God.

Section 6.113



Religious Practices 1

- The intended and actual religious practices are also aspects of religion, the most important being religious tolerance and non-imposition of beliefs.

Proselytism

Proselytism is the act or process of proselyting, of encouraging the conversion of encountered people, selected (discriminated) or otherwise (non-discriminated), from whatever their beliefs may be to one's own. Proselytism is a form of imposition.

The basic, lowest level of proselytism is simply sharing one's beliefs (knowledge) (insight) (understanding) with those who may (or may not) be interested. A second level of proselytism involves "making other people walk in the ways of righteousness and truth by means of gentle persuasion" while a third, highest level of proselytism involves more direct use of force or coercion. Perhaps the rationale for proselytism is that "one is right" and that "encouraging or forcing others to embrace one's belief system is for their own good." Perhaps the truth is nearer to one being insecure, that one feels more secure in one's belief system if others share it. "If a majority of people believe something, surely it must be true." Unfortunately for those who believe that, truth is not a democratic process. Was the world indeed flat, until the majority of people decided that it was not so?

No doubt most people who proselytize are sincere in their beliefs that they are right and that proselytizing is also right. One problem with proselytism is that a person may not be "right" about the beliefs being promoted. Another problem with proselytism is that one cannot effectively impose beliefs on other people. For a person to effectively (actually) embrace a belief system (or truth realized), a person must necessarily come to the place in consciousness where he or she actually recognizes, realizes, and understands the truth being "embraced." Unless a truth is self-realized, it is at best only temporarily and partially (ineffectively) embraced. Anyone who "accepts" truth based on others' testimony or authority (or imposition) is not self-realizing that truth. A third problem with proselyting is a matter of ethics (of course those who proselytize believe it is ethical to do so, while those who understand underlying cause and effect relationships (karma) realize that it is generally unethical to impose beliefs or practices (though there are some pragmatic exceptions, e.g., the convention of driving on one (particular) side of the road). The issue (ethics) is a

matter of what is harmful (in the context of evolution in consciousness). And it is generally harmful to impose beliefs or practices on others.

While some religious and spiritual teachers (leaders) encourage proselytism, a more mature (and more effective) approach is simply to encourage people to self-realize the truth. This is accomplished through sharing of "insight" (knowledge, experience, understanding) without imposition, without being persuasive, without proselyting, without offering incentives. Which means sharing only with those who are actually interested, and only to the extent that that interest is demonstrated, and only in the ways that a person is amenable to. Without any claim of authority. Without any claim of rightness. There is, perhaps, a fine line between sharing-encouraging and promoting-proselyting.

Growth occurs through changes in consciousness. And growth occurs most effectively where a person realizes the truth for himself (herself). There is no crisis. There is no urgency. This is a world (school) of experience, a training ground in consciousness. All crises and all urgencies are a matter of limited perception. The (true) spiritual student (teacher) (leader) teaches through consciousness, through living in accordance with spiritual principles, not through promoting one's ideas or imposing on others.

† Commentary No. 1253

Ordination

Ordination (ordainment) is defined as the process of being ordained, or invested with ministerial or priestly or sacerdotal or spiritual authority. In principle, one can only be ordained by one who is ordained, and consequently (in principle) there is a continuity (of authoritative presence) from the ancient of times to the present. Many religious traditions, both eastern and western, embrace and to some extent rely upon ordination. But there is also a matter of natural ordination.

In principle ordination conveys spiritual authority in some religious or spiritual context. The basis of ordination rests with the overshadowing (indwelling) divine presence that is contacted (in principle) during the (ceremonial (and

inner)) process of ordination, and which then remains to qualify or sanction the activities (rites) conducted by one who is (so) ordained. Thus one who is (properly) ordained can consciously (and even unconsciously) draw upon that overshadowing (indwelling) energy to qualify whatever noble activities (ceremonies) (sanctions) are undertaken. If one who is ordained is actually conscious of the process, and is actually consciously embracing that (higher) energy, then considerable (noble) energies can be evoked. But even if one is not fully conscious, and even if one is not consciously embracing the higher energy, if one is ordained, then there will still be some evocation of higher energy. Being conscious, being enlightened, simply makes the process much more effective.

But the formal process of ordination, under (within) some auspices, should only be conducted where the candidate is indeed well-qualified, meaning somewhat (substantially) refined, somewhat more-fully conscious, sincerely motivated, properly trained, etc. A religion that allows unqualified ordination risks considerable reduction in the potency and effectiveness of the (ordained) priesthood. In short, it leads to promulgation of lack of qualification. It leads to higher power and truth being replaced by personal (ego-based) power and lack of truth. But where ordination is fully qualified, there remains a core of enlightened leadership and expression.

But formal ordination is not actually required for the spiritual student or lay mystic. In seeking (and in finding) the mystical core within himself (herself) the spiritual student is able to achieve effective self-ordination. In touching the soul and evoking the energy of the soul, one is engulfed in higher energy and that naturally qualifies all of the activities of the student. But this cannot occur if the student is not properly qualified and trained, if the consciousness is not sufficiently refined, if the personality (ego) (intellect) is not sufficiently tempered and transcended. Thus self-ordination (natural ordination) is necessarily qualified, while formal ordination may or may not be qualified.

Self-ordination is actually not a matter of the student seeking ordination, for it is not the lower self (personality) that evokes natural ordination, but it is rather the soul itself that determines (finds) the quality of the lower self to be sufficiently refined and receptive. The same is true for commitment to the spiritual path; it is not a matter of the student seeking, but rather a matter of the soul evoking a response on the part of the (qualified) student. Self-

ordination generally follows that commitment, as the student matures and progresses toward self-realization. The more refined the student, the more qualified the student, the more power (energy) (spiritual force) is naturally evoked and expressed (shared).

† Commentary No. 1256

Religious Tolerance

One of the common characteristics of a relatively primitive (ego-based) (personality-centered) (exclusive) (separative) religion is intolerance of other religions or belief systems or practices by other people that are inconsistent with that (primitive) religion. And, conversely, one of the characteristics of an “advanced” religion is its encouragement of expression of respect and appreciation (more than tolerance) for other religions.

Religious intolerance (and intolerance in general) is often based in fear and insecurity. Some people feel threatened by beliefs and practices that they do not understand, and/or which appear to be in conflict with their own, and/or which cause them to wonder about the validity of their own beliefs. Intolerance is a form of closed-mindedness to truth. It does not mean necessarily that others’ beliefs are more true or valid, just that with open-mindedness there is consideration for the possibility of learning from others, of growing or deepening in one’s own beliefs and understanding. Some people (unconsciously) believe that their beliefs are validated by numbers of people who share those beliefs. But truth is not a democratic principle. Something is not true because a majority of people believe it. Or false because only a few believe it. But with maturity (growth in consciousness) people become more reasonable, less insecure in their beliefs (without being self-righteous), and more open to learning from others.

Religious intolerance is also sometimes based in personality-centeredness (personal power (personal insecurity)) (national or ethnic pride (national or ethnic insecurity)). Sometimes a religious context is used (deliberately or otherwise) to express personal power. It is usually ego-based and the (egoistic) person lacks awareness of that. Thus personal power, egoism, and religious intolerance often go together along with sincerity. Also there is sometimes

historical conditioning, e.g., unconscious memory of (past) religious oppression leading to (present) over-eager demonstration of one's religious freedom (e.g., attempting to impose one's beliefs on others)).

Religious tolerance usually comes with personal maturity and that leads to being more open-minded and therefore being more amenable to learning. With experience, one begins to understand that each religion (each perspective, each point of view, each belief system) contributes something worthwhile to the whole. Some (usually considerable) truth can be found in each religion and in each sect or denomination. There is a common core of truth, and a diversity of ways of embracing and expressing that truth. What appears to be in conflict, what appears contradictory, is either not really important or simply a matter of not seeing the whole (context) in which there is consistency. Often the conflicts arise in adapting to some cultural context, in details that are imposed for some particular purpose, which are not generally applicable. Arguing over such details is futile. Focusing on differences likewise.

But where one focuses on similarities, e.g., higher principles and values, then one begins to touch the inner core and one then begins to more fully appreciate that even the (apparent) differences contribute to the whole. In the higher sense, being a religious student is not a matter of belonging to one religion or another. It is a matter of becoming attuned to God's presence in whatever ways one is able. In the higher sense, one can "belong" to more than one religion. And one can be eclectic, drawing whatever truth and comfort one can from one or more religions. As more people mature, then "religions" tend to respect one another and work together constructively for the common good.

Shrines

A shrine is defined as “a place in which devotion is paid to a saint or deity” and a “place or object hallowed by its associations.” Most of the world’s major religions allow or encourage the establishment and utilization of shrines, of some form or another, either formally or informally or in both regards. In the broadest sense, any room or building used for religious prayer or meditation is a shrine. Thus churches, synagogues, and temples are all shrines in this sense. In most religions these buildings for worship and devotion (prayer, meditation) play a fairly central role. In some religions, each adherent is (also) encouraged to establish a shrine in his or her home, to facilitate daily (frequent) devotional and spiritual practices.

There are two keys to the effective establishment and utilization of a shrine. The first is that the shrine must be qualified or consecrated in some manner, or in other words, imbued with (energy) association. The second is that adherents must continue to qualify the sanctity or effectiveness of the shrine (church) (temple) through frequent if not ritualized devotions. Consecration can take place either through some process of investiture, in which the priest or minister (or qualified lay person) transfers some essence from a shrine already established to a new one (without in any way diminishing the qualification of the source). Or it can take place simply by devotional association with some qualified source.

The whole actual purpose of a shrine is to facilitate the inner connection between God and the adherent (spiritual student). In this sense, a shrine is not absolutely necessary, but it is both convenient and potentially much more effective than not utilizing a shrine. Wherever there is a properly consecrated shrine, and wherever there is a pattern of meaningful prayer, meditation, and/or devotion, then that inner connection is enriched and expanded in quality and energy. The benefit is that the student (adherent) becomes increasingly more responsive to the inner quality (energy). It is simply easier (less resistive) to pray and meditate in a sanctuary or shrine than it is in any worldly-encumbered place.

Of course the student must be both sincere and conscientious, or the benefits and contributions will be substantially limited. If the ritual or spiritual practice is allowed to become superficial, i.e., simply going through the motions without one actually being consciously devout, then there is little benefit or contribution. The most effective practice would seem to be where there is a combination of daily, personal devotion (prayer) (meditation), reinforced by frequent, periodic services or practices in the context of some religious (and hopefully spiritual) community (e.g., weekly church services, group meditation). And the least effective practice would seem to be where the focus of one's devotions is upon (presumed, desired) personal benefit rather than strengthening and deepening one's inner (divine) connection.

In addition to the symbolic associative value of a shrine (and objects within a shrine), there is additional value by virtue of objective magnetization, e.g., of some statue or artistic-symbolic object having substantial mineral content. Certain mineral objects can store and reveal very substantial power for encouragement, spiritual stimulation, and/or self-transformation. Thus, in a very real sense, even (many) modern religious institutions engage in the work of magic, either deliberately-consciously or otherwise, simply by virtue of the various ceremonial and consecrative activities.

† Commentary No. 1267

Religious Abuse

Like most areas of human endeavour, the practical realm of religion is not without some potential for abuse. All God-centered religions are fundamentally sound, if not perfect, but wherever human personalities are involved, there is likely to be some matters of interpretation and some matters of practice which may not be entirely (if at all) consistent with the basic teachings of the religion, despite what the practicants may believe in justifying their actions. Thus one should not blame any (proper, God-centered) religion itself, but realize that abuses are just a matter of human nature.

There are a number of areas of potential abuse, including disagreements in interpretation (which are (all) really (and necessarily) not important), imposing one's individual or collective views upon others (proselytizing, criticizing,

judging) (instead of encouraging others to think for themselves and reach their own conclusions), presuming authority in religious matters, behaving separatively (as if one's religion and (presumed) associated values is superior in some sense to another), and (ultimately) fostering violent confrontations based on (necessarily superficial) interpretive or value differences (it doesn't matter what the "reasons" are, there is never any legitimate excuse for religious strife). Religions are not abusive, but people can be.

For example, all God-centered religions in principle engender respect for others, harmlessness (peace) (harmony), etc., yet in historical practice, there have been wars, conflicts, violence, etc., in the name of religion, when in fact none of this has to do with religion, *per se*, it has to do with personalities (egos) (and self-justified and self-serving rationalizations) and not living in accordance with the principles and practices of the religion. Conflicts between peoples of different religions, between peoples of various Christian denominations, between Catholics and Protestants, between Christians and Jews and Muslims, between peoples of various Buddhist or Muslim sects, etc., are really not ideological conflicts, and certainly not noble conflicts, but are conflicts between personalities and attachments to interpretations, or a matter of more personal conditioning, and involve failures to honor the basic teachings. It seems so easy to focus on differences, and not respect people who are different, much harder to appreciate the similarities (inherent goodness of all peoples). And most "religious" despots are nonetheless sincere (although often deluded). Genuine charlatans are relatively rare.

Many abuses draw upon (wrong) interpretations of scripture. While religious scriptures are generally "inspired" texts, they are still subject to the human mind in how the "inspiration" is translated into words, and words can be changed through human intervention (sincerely or otherwise), and words are always subject to interpretation (sincerely or otherwise, rightly or not so rightly). But most abuses (and most interpretations) are more a matter of self-serving beliefs and imposing those beliefs on others. Many people are insecure in their faith, and need others to believe as they do. Some people use "religion" as a means to bring about or sustain self-serving societal or cultural conditions. Many people presume to "speak for God" (sincerely or otherwise, when in fact no one speaks for God. God speaks to all, if only a person would care to listen.

All of these abuses, potential and real, constitute a disservice to humanity, serving to discourage many people from embracing religion, from learning associated ethics and principles and values, from the supportive fellowship that most God-centered religions engender. Yet religions remain a valuable source and means of spiritual encouragement to many.

† Commentary No. 1268

Religious Differences

The differences between the various (God-centered) religions are not really important. They are convenient in the sense of facilitating the religious-spiritual principles being tailored to some cultural context, but they are not important as ends-in-themselves.

The basic (inherently valuable) teachings of all religions are more or less similar. The basic teachings encourage and facilitate evolution in consciousness by encouraging and facilitating the adherent's developing and deepening relationship to God. The outer aspects of religion, where all of the (necessarily non-essential) differences occur, are simply not important. The concept of Christ-consciousness is relatively important. But Christ-consciousness is not exclusive to the Christian faith, and it is known by various other names. The "name" of God, the "name" of the principle of higher consciousness (e.g., Christ), are simply not important except that one needs some name to facilitate the association and relationship. Thus conceptually and practically, Christ and Buddha and Krishna (and others) are all important, but none is particularly important, and all relate in some meaningful way to the same principles (to God and higher consciousness). In most instances, these are simply different ways of saying (teaching) the same underlying principles.

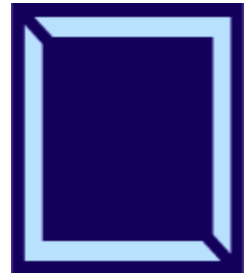
Too often what seem to be essential differences are simply non-essential differences in interpretation and understanding. To many Christians "being saved" is important, but the common interpretation of this phenomenon is really quite far afield from its true import. The actual import of "being saved" is simply waking up to a higher reality (and embracing higher values), which is common to all God-centered religions (of course most people who are "saved" in this sense are not actually saved, because they simply don't understand the

process, they embrace the outer circumstances rather than the inner meaning, but even a limited (superficial) understanding can be of value).

The Holy Bible is a valuable, indeed substantially inspired resource (scripture), as is the Koran and the various scriptures of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. But none are infallible, as no human being is infallible. And each has a cultural context. And each has been interpreted by (necessarily fallible) human beings (sincerely or otherwise). The underlying divine inspiration is there, in each scripture, but one must feel it in the heart and not worry so much about (head-centered, cultural) details. In fact, the differences are actually merely superficial. If one looks beyond (within) the words, to the energy and content of the words, rather than “at” the words-as-words, then the differences fade away and the underlying content (value) emerges.

Many Christians have problems appreciating in other religions what appears-to-them to be polytheism, but this is based on presumption and misunderstanding. There is but one God, and even the Christian God is a trinity. The Gods of other religions are not fundamentally different. One God living through many forms and in various ways is no less monotheistic. But when a person is “taught” various religious principles without a broader, deeper context, there is bound to be misunderstanding. But many people are insecure in their faith, they fear the teachings of others, which they imagine to be counter to their own, instead of learning of the value of other religions and realizing that they are inherently complementary (radical-fundamentalistic interpretations notwithstanding). Thus the student is encouraged to study each of the various religions, and appreciate that each has value.

Section 6.114



Religious Practices 2

- There is a very big difference between rightness and righteousness and self-righteousness. The single greatest weakness of organized religion is the tendency toward self-righteousness, being judgmental, and imposing beliefs.

Infallibility

Infallibility refers in the absolute sense to the state of being incapable of error, and in the more applied sense to the state of being incapable of error in the (limited) context of defining faith and morals. The distinction between these two is really quite significant.

Human beings are simply not infallible. No one is infallible. Religious dignitaries and spiritual “authorities” are not infallible, no matter how noble they may appear to be (and indeed, no matter how noble they may be actually). The Pope is not infallible. Not in any absolute sense. But a truly spiritual person, regardless of religious affiliation and regardless of religious credentials, is more likely to be able to be unerring in matters of faith and morals. It is a matter of actually being able to listen to the voice of the silence, the conscience, the soul or higher Self, and understand that conveyance or sense, and act in conformity to that sense. Which means perceiving without the impediment of ego or worldliness, without the impediment of being entangled (in matter, in the senses, in the ego). Thus infallibility is possible in this necessarily contextual and relative sense, but only to the extent and times that one is true to the inner self. Thus it is unlikely that one can be infallible in any continuous sense (and for most people unlikely that one can ever be infallible in any meaningful sense).

Moreover, even super-human beings are not infallible, not in any absolute sense. Even God is not infallible at the God level. But God is infallible, in some very subjective and relative sense, within the God domain (affecting and influencing all component or constituent lives). In this sense it is God who defines what is true and what is real. But these definitions are conveyed subjectively, through various layers of consciousness. And it is simply not possible for the human being, at any level or extent of consciousness, to apprehend truth at a higher level than his or her experience to date. And while it is possible for (extraordinary) people to apprehend truth and reality at some extraordinary level, it is not generally possible to convey that understanding or apprehension to anyone who is not also capable of functioning at that level. And as the realization is clothed in concepts and words it is thereby limited in its “quality” and simply not perfectly clear. Whenever the mind is involved, whenever the

“person” is involved, there is distortion due to the person being immersed in the world (matter and ego).

Religious dignitaries and truly spiritual “leaders” are not substantively different from ordinary people (and many are not really different at all). They are simply (in principle, and not necessarily in practice) a little farther along the way than most, perhaps a bit more experienced, a bit more refined, a bit more responsive to the inner, higher calling (the soul), but still decidedly human. Thus none are infallible. This does not mean that they have no value or import, just that one must ultimately and necessarily rely on one’s own conscience, especially in matters of faith and morals. One can listen to others, and appreciate and even glean much from their experience and (relative) insight, but in the final analysis, one is (entirely) responsible for one’s own beliefs and one’s own actions (and one’s own consequences).

But many people need to believe in religious or spiritual authorities, because they cannot (yet) see and feel and (even) think effectively for themselves. And so the proclamations of such authorities (e.g., the Pope) generally have some underlying merit and value, and generally, usually serve to encourage people in the right (evolutionary) direction.

† Commentary No. 1356

Lineage

Lineage refers to “descent in a line from a common progenitor” or a “group of persons tracing descent from a common ancestor regarded as its founder.” In some (outer) religions, especially in some elements of Buddhism and Islam, there is emphasis or perceived significance to the lineage of its leadership.

There are actually two kinds of lineage, which may in some instances coincide. One kind is based on physical (genetic) lineage. The other is based in the process of reincarnation, as some are (or are perceived to be) reincarnated (spiritual) descendants of themselves, with or without there also being a physical or genetic lineage. But there is a problem of validation, as physical lineage is not so easy to demonstrate and historical records may be missing or inaccurate (one should never actually take on faith anything of an historical or

second-hand nature (and of course nothing of an historical nature is actually very significant)). And in the final analysis, all peoples are genetically related to all other peoples (which is actually much more significant than the genetics of direct descent). And even psychic senses may not be entirely clear or accurate, and truth is not a democratic process, so even if an overwhelming majority of adherents believe in some lineage it may not actually be a true lineage.

But the actual lineage (of either kind) is not really important. One is not a spiritual master or a true spiritual leader or authority based on lineage. One is a spiritual master or a true spiritual leader (but never an authority) by virtue of quality of consciousness, and that quality of consciousness is generally expressed through the spiritual quality of one's life and teachings. Not through claiming lineage or being acclaimed a successor. Not through self-profession nor through the profession of others. Indeed those who engage in self-profession (claims-making) are invariably either insincere or self-deluded (englamoured) (or both). Yet it is indeed possible for a truly spiritual person to be inspired by the higher Self and to express teachings from a higher place than the mind. But it does not really matter whether or not someone has lineage, whether or not someone is actually inspired. What matters is truth. If the words, the teachings, the writings have value, if they embrace some truth, that it what matters.

But truth is necessarily relative, and so the truth of one spiritual source may be true and meaningful for some, but not necessarily for others. This does not invalidate or nominalize the truth. It just means that actual truth is larger, more whole than the human mind can apprehend, and so people tend to see and hear and feel and know truth only in some limited, partial ways, according to their capacities for (recognizing or discerning) (apprehending) truth (and according to their conditioning (biases)). But there is another dimension to truth, and one that relates significantly to lineage.

And that is the lineage of the teachings or of truth itself. Not in the sense that a particular scripture is inspired, but in the sense that one can place one's (refined) consciousness in touch with the source of some truth, and discern its relative truthfulness and its relative import. And in being in touch with some truth, one is also in touch with related truths. There is a multi-dimensional chain, or lineage, or web, or matrix, such that if one is properly attuned, then one

can follow the various paths or threads and evoke whatever is needed, especially (actually necessarily) to the extent that one is not trying to do this. This is how people are actually “inspired” (consciously or otherwise).

† Commentary No. 1393

Scripture and Rightness

A scripture is an inspired or sacred writing. Inspired in the sense that the author was in touch with something greater than himself (herself) and that the resulting writing is not based entirely on the intellectual capacity of the author. And sacred in the sense of there being some higher, divine qualification of the process. A scripture is not a scripture by virtue of some democratic or authoritative process or sanction, but by virtue of its quality and value. Which means that a writing may be a scripture to some but not necessarily to others. And that a writing that is a scripture to vast numbers of people is not thereby or necessarily any more or less inspired or meaningful than one that is a scripture to only a few.

Anyone who approaches God, that which is divine, in consciousness, through prayer and meditation, deliberately or otherwise, may be inspired or meaningfully stimulated by the connection. What is thereby evoked, which may or may not be formulated into words, is based in part on the qualification of the source, in part on the qualification of the process, and in part on the qualification of the vehicle. If the source is divine, through the soul or higher Self and not merely psychical, if the process is unimpeded by ego or intellect, if the vehicle is somewhat spiritually-attuned and not overly coarse or intellectual or self-serving, then the resulting work or product may have some measure of added value. It is not really important for one to determine what is or what is not inspired, sacred, or scriptural. What is important is the quality and value of what is conveyed.

Unfortunately, scripture is often considered authoritative and is utilized in the futile attempt to settle questions of import. Scripture is indeed authoritative, but only in the qualitative sense. The words are limited by the intellect of the vehicle, and the words are limited by the relative capacity for comprehension

and the relative inclinations of the reader or listener. And yet, wonderfully, scripture has the facility to provide “answers” to the seeker according to the needs of the seeker. Thus a reading of scripture may be interpreted in many different ways and means, by different people, all with potentially good (meaningful) result. If there are differences in understanding, then the “truth” is simply otherwise broader and deeper.

Questions are not settled properly by democratic process, nor by appeal to some artificial authority, nor through interpretation or logic or intellectual process or rationalization. Indeed, questions are only properly settled through conscience and understanding and appeal to wisdom, according to the quality of consciousness and associated capacity of the seeker. What is a rightful interpretation or understanding for one may not suffice for another, and yet both may be “right” in some sense or another. Those who seek definitive or authoritative or absolute “answers” are simply deceiving themselves and are not likely to find enduring satisfaction. But those who embrace the wisdom qualitatively, who are able to learn and grow and adapt to what is learned, are simply closer to the truth.

In the final analysis (which is not an analysis), what is right and true is simply that which feels right and true, for the time being, according to one’s conscience and consciousness. This may be compounded by what one wants to be right and true (self-serving self-deception), but if the seeker is earnest then the resulting sense of what is right and true will be meaningful. And the student and seeker will be able to grow, and as the student grows, to move on to broader, greater, deeper, higher truths.

Persecution

Persecution is defined as the act or practice of persecuting or harassing or otherwise causing to suffer those whose origins, actions, beliefs, social outlooks, and/or values are substantially different than or otherwise threatening to those of the majority or controlling authorities. At best persecution is annoying and character-building, at worst it is grievous and afflicting and obstructive.

A considerable distinction exists between persecution and prosecution. While proper (reasonable and warranted) prosecution, under law (and hopefully as a matter of justice), may not be wrong, persecution is always wrong for the persecutor, if not also for those being persecuted. Usually, the persecution of people involves the collateral suppression of ideas that are somehow threatening to the status quo. Through persecution there is the implied but futile hope that in focusing on the person or persons being persecuted the ideas or principles that they represent will somehow be suppressed or otherwise banished from further consideration.

Instead of respecting the diversity of perspectives and values that enrich humanity, many people are so insecure in their own principles and values and outlooks that they feel threatened, consciously or unconsciously, by those whose principles and values and outlooks inadvertently (or otherwise) call their own into question. In other cases persecution is about maintaining power or control. But in any event persecution is generally harmful, wrong, and impositional. One might think that if someone or some group is being persecuted then that means that they are deserving, that that persecution is consistent with their karma. But that is not necessarily true. Persecution may not be inconsistent with one's karma, but it may not necessarily be consistent either. Karma is a broader-than-merely-personal phenomenon, with a number of dimensions, both in terms of time (cause and effect) and collective (people being units of a greater life). Many who suffer do so not necessarily by virtue of their own (personal) karma, but by virtue of the karma of humanity.

Usually, new (evolutionary) ideas emerge according to need, both in terms of the individual's need and in terms of humanity's need, and the persecution that

sometimes follows is the natural resistance to change, the inertia of matter at the personal (egoistic, personality) level. That does not justify persecution, but simply places it into some broader perspective for understanding. New religions emerge to gradually replace those which fail to continue to meet the needs of developing and evolving peoples. New mores likewise. An open-minded, civilized culture allows ideas to emerge that are different, to allow people to consider them, consciously or otherwise, and to freely embrace whatever ideas feel comfortable (subject to considerations of harmfulness (except that while some "new" ideas may be potentially harmful, people should be allowed to determine for themselves the relative propriety and truth and value of new ideas)). And while some "new" ideas are atavistic and self-serving, most people should be able to move beyond these temptations.

Sometimes it requires great courage to live according to one's understanding, to suffer persecution while not attempting to impose on others one's understanding of things. Sometimes there are great lessons conveyed through persecution, for those being persecuted and for those committing persecution. But one should learn to respect all peoples, and to treat all peoples with consideration and compassion, even if there seem to be substantive and contrasting differences in perspective or understanding.

† Commentary No. 1395

The Church and Rightness

Which religion is right? Which church is right? Which faith is right? For many these are important questions and there is an effort to determine the answers. But the problem is not a simple matter of one being right and the others being wrong, but a matter of all (or at least most) being right in some regards and for some peoples (and for some times).

Many people embrace religion in a separative and exclusionary manner, in terms of perceived or believed rightness (and in terms of perceived or believed righteousness). Each religion has its own basis, of beliefs and principles and values. Each church or denomination or sect, likewise. The actual differences (and the actual significance of those differences) between the various faiths are

relatively superficial, yet to adherents those differences can seem to be very (very) important. Usually these relatively superficial differences are important because they provide a basis (rationalization) for one's beliefs. Many people rely on these rationalizations instead of recognizing intuitively the underlying truth and the significance of that underlying truth. In basing one's religious commitment on superficial factors, however important they may seem, the adherent is able to avoid the real issues and associated dharma.

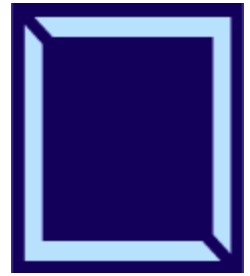
Those who sincerely argue or promote the belief that their church or faith is right and that other churches and faiths are either not right or are lesser, are simply self-deceived. No religion, no church, has a monopoly or "exclusive" on God, or on divine presence, or divine blessing, or salvation. Scriptures that are interpreted in absolute or separative or exclusionary terms may very well be valid scriptures, but these interpretations are simply lacking broader wisdom and insight. It is relatively easy for the mind to find fault with any belief system, because human beings and their belief systems are necessarily partial and imperfect. But these belief systems may nonetheless have not inconsiderable value to their adherents. But a faith does not actually have value because of these superficial factors, but by virtue of underlying principles, and the principles which underlie God-centered religions and churches and faiths are all essentially the same.

Some would ask a seeker to accept as true the outer teachings of a faith based on the historical validity of some prophet or visionary and the "authority" that is presumed to ensue. For example, some Christian faiths rely on the historical crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as a basis for their faith, when in fact, it does not matter whether or not Jesus was actually crucified, nor that he was actually resurrected, because the actual teachings are conveyed through the symbolism of these events. Others rely on the historical validity of a prophet, e.g., if he was truly inspired then everything he said or wrote must be (absolutely and infallibly) true. The problem is that no human being, inspired or otherwise, has perfect understanding nor is infallible. Every "teaching" is true only to the extent that the truth can be intuitively realized within oneself. If one statement is true for someone or in some way, another statement by the same prophet may not necessarily be true.

But for some it is easier not to think about these things but simply to accept as true that which is prescribed by some presumed authority. For many the mind is either too weak or too strong to enable the intuition to enlighten. For some there is value and goodness in authoritative religion because that is the only spiritual stimulation that they can embrace. But the spiritual student must go beyond the superficial dimensions (exclusiveness) and embrace the underlying principles (inclusiveness).



Section 6.12



Religions

- There are many and various God-Centered religions, each tailored to a particular culture and particular needs for a particular period of time, each contributing to the whole.

Religions

There are many and varied God-centered religions, each tailored to a particular culture and particular needs for a particular period of time, and each contributing to the whole.

Conventional religions are those which are organized to some extent and which appeal to a relatively large following or geographical extent. Among the eastern religions are several traditional-conventional religions of India, namely Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and several traditional-conventional religions of China and the far east, namely Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Taoism, and Zen. Among the traditional-conventional western religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism. Of course there are many divisions or dimensions and extensions (denominations, sects) of these religions, and others, but the conventional religions are all relatively well-known and “accepted” as traditional-conventional religions by substantial numbers of people. That “acceptance” or popularity is not what makes them legitimate religions, but it does make them conventional.

Most if not all of the conventional religions have emerged or evolved from within some more primitive context, often with the assistance of a prophet or catalyst (e.g., Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster). Thus there are elements of earlier and/or more primitive religions within each of the emerging and continuing religions, even if some (most) of the modern adherents do not wish to acknowledge this heritage. The “primitive” religions were well-suited to their times and cultures, but much of the content and practices of these religions continues to be of value. And these more primitive forms of religion have also continued to some extent in their own right, and have emerged or evolved into what are now considered by the majority of people to be relatively unconventional religions. Included in these relatively more natural, unconventional religions are animism, paganism, neo-paganism, shamanism, and Wicca or witchcraft.

There are also relatively modern religions which simply do not fit comfortably in the mainstream nor directly with the more nature-oriented religions, such as

spiritualism and universalism in its various forms, and spiritual movements which are not really religions by any popular definition yet acknowledge (the one) God and offer much in the way of knowledge and understanding, such as theosophy. There are also somewhat unconventional (more popularly metaphysical) religions which bridge between the conventional and unconventional, such as Religious Science and Unity and other “new age” religions, some of which are simply on the fringe of more conventional religions.

Some might suggest that the distinction between conventional and unconventional religions is that of monotheism and pantheism or polytheism, at least for “western” religions, but in fact each of these religions is both monotheistic and pantheistic or polytheistic, even Christianity. It is simply a matter of perspective and emphasis. There is one God in several aspects and many facets. At one extreme the emphasis is upon the one God; at the other extreme the emphasis (focus) is upon divine (natural) manifestation through many “spirits” ... Some choose to worship God as one. Others choose to worship or acknowledge one or more aspects or facets of that one God (even if the whole is not “called” God). The real challenge is to learn enough about each religion to be able to respect and appreciate its value, even if it is not comfortable to embrace all of its teachings and practices.

† Commentary No. 1352

Irreligion

Many religious devotees unfortunately label “other” religions as unfounded or without merit or value, or with diminished value. This arrogance or sense of superiority of one’s religion is never sanctioned by one’s actual religious principles, but is an unseemly manifestation of ego and separateness.

Thus while pagans and heathens (and others not within the perceived mainstream of some (arguably) “respectable” religion) are speciously labeled as godless or irreligious, in fact, most pagans and adherents of natural (nature-based) religions are just as spiritual if not more so than most conventional adherents (spirituality being defined as being in touch with the God within to some extent and on some level, however that God or facet is consciously

acknowledged). Thus while many religions are outwardly exclusive and separate and while many conventional adherents look down at those of other faiths, the peoples of religion (of God) are really quite diverse. The particular faith or religion or beliefs do not really matter, provided there is appreciation for spirituality (God-ness) (the good within). The measures of spirituality are rather subjective and to some extent diverse, but generally embrace relatively common principles of living a spiritual life, being helpful and constructive, adhering to a sense of ethics and morals that promotes harmony and justice, and reverence or respect for God, however God is perceived.

Thus there are religious adherents and spiritual students of all faiths, some belonging to "organized" religions, some not, some of conventional faith, others of unconventional faith. But all, to some extent and in some meaningful ways, religious and/or spiritual. But there are also the irreligious, more or less by degrees, namely agnostics, agnostic humanists, atheists, and (for lack of a more suitable term) satanists. A humanist is simply one who emphasizes the place of humanity in the world, in contrast with one who focuses more on God (indeed many so-called religious adherents are better "humanists" than they are religious or spiritual (humanism and spirituality are not mutually exclusive or even necessarily in conflict, they are simply each a matter of emphasis or focus)).

A true agnostic is simply one who does not "know" that there is a God, and an agnostic may have nonetheless a strong sense of ethics, may even have an active spiritual dimension (tempered perhaps by his or her agnostic beliefs (non-beliefs)). But agnostics are not necessarily "bad" people (even as religious adherents are not necessarily "good" people). Similarly there are (good and bad) atheists, though most atheists tends to have stronger beliefs or convictions (active denial of the existence of God) than agnostics. Agnostics and humanists and atheists, whether or not they are also materialists and/or egoists, form a sort of middle ground between those who are focused on God and those who are substantially godless.

The truly godless are those who are so self-absorbed that they have become seriously and dangerously entangled in materialism and/or sensualism and/or egoism, such that they are no longer (if they were ever) responsive to conscience. Satanists are simply one such group of wholly self-absorbed, self-centered people. Other groups include black magicians and black occultists, any of those

who serve (destructively) the forces of matter (involution) rather than (constructively) the forces of spirit (life) (evolution in consciousness) (e.g., white magicians and white occultists). Thus the principle of saving of souls refers not properly to which of the various religions one belongs, but to (saving) the godless, to those who have renounced their true nature.

† Commentary No. 1353

The World Religion

The world religion is a concept or principle that refers not to any organized religion but to the (informal) collective world religion that embraces and works through all of the various God-centered religions. Spiritual students of the world religion simply acknowledge the merit and value and extent of viability of each of the various conventional and unconventional religions. Spiritual students of the world religion may embrace one or another or none (or several) (in whole or in aspect) of the various religions of the world. Indeed, most spiritual students embrace meaningful elements of all of the various (proper) religions.

The world religion is also a component or dimension of the Bermuda Protocol in the sense that provisions are made for the (noble) (non-harmful) (non-separative) religious practices of each of the world's religions, indeed citizens are encouraged to embrace one or another of the world's religions and to work in harmony with those of other faiths. There is even provision for agnostics and humanists and atheists (who are also human and potentially contributive), but the only group actually excluded are the truly evil (ignorant) who serve the dark side (who are not therefore contributing (constructive) members of society).

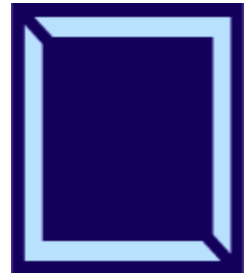
The basis of the world religion is simple. Each of the religions of the world has a common underlying mystical core. Thus each religion is perceived as a facet of the world religion. And each contributes to improving the relationship of the individual to God. It matters not which religion one belongs to (or not). It matters not "how" religious or spiritual one may be. What matters is the extent to which one is evolving in consciousness and the nature of that process (i.e., the relationship of the individual to the process of evolution in consciousness (which

is equivalent to the relationship of the individual to God (within))). Religion is simply one means of addressing the balance and facilitating progress in that relationship.

The world religion has always existed and will always exist in some form or another. The world religion "evolves" as each of the religions of the world contributes to that evolution. One of the ways in which this occurs is the tendency of human beings to incarnate progressively through each of the various major religions, experiencing the culture and context and faith and principles of each, eventually apprehending the commonality and value of all (similarly one tends to incarnate alternatively male and female, and progressively through various cultures and nations and races). But there is no outer organization associated with the world religion.

There is, however, an inner organization (and a number of subordinate and contributing holy orders), in which all of the various religions contribute. This is the spiritual hierarchy of the planet, whose necessarily spiritually mature members (who have graduated from the human sphere) have lived through all manner of incarnational contexts and who at some point "represent" a particular facet of human life (race, religion, etc.). But representation at this level is not exclusive nor is it promotional. Hierarchical "members" each embrace the world (and humanity (and the world religion (and all of the religions of the world))), and place the common cause ahead of individual (necessarily minor) preferences or inclinations. Thus it is a naturally harmonious and selfless body, ruled by collective wisdom (higher consciousness) and not in any way by the lower selves (which really no longer exist, indeed, at that level, cannot exist).

Section 6.121



Unconventional Religions

- There are a number of traditional and noble but relatively unconventional (non-mainstream) religions, including paganism, shamanism, spiritualism, and wicca or witchcraft.

Paganism

Paganism is a rather general term referring in some sense to the beliefs and practices of those who do not embrace any of the more conventional or more established, more formal religions. Many Christians refer (separatively) to non-Christians as pagans or heathens, while many Muslims refer to non-Islamists similarly as infidel. Yet some pagans are also Christian, and some are Muslims (and some belong to other religions), without being any less a pagan and without being any less a Christian or Islamist. Religion is not properly about belonging to one or another of the religions, but about one's relationship to God. And in this sense, ordinary pagans perhaps enjoy a more direct experiential sense of that relationship than most people (except perhaps for the genuine mystics within each of the various religions).

But while some of these inferences to pagans are impolite, and while in the conventional lexicon a pagan is a heathen or country dweller or irreligious person, in fact pagans are simply adherents of any of the various pagan religions, generally including various earth religions, shamanism, witchcraft, etc. But there is a rather wide variety in these religions, some relatively more formal than others, some with informal practices, others with more formal practices and well-developed rituals. In this sense pagans can be just as religious and/or spiritual as non-pagans. And while many conventional adherents refer to pagans as godless, because they do not seem to embrace "God" in the same sense as their own, more conventional religion, most pagans are God-centered; it is just that pagans tend to see God in a broader, less exclusive, more subjective, more natural sense, than the conventional (more anthropomorphic) sense.

So pagans (and neo-pagans) tend simply to worship God in different (traditional, but unconventional) ways. Paganism tends to be much more nature-oriented, though by no means limited to the earth and the forces of the earth. In principle, and largely in practice, paganism embraces both nature and the underlying divine force. The "God" or "Goddess" is a natural being, to be experienced, to be felt and embraced, not in some remote or intellectual sense of comfort. There tends to be a great respect for the earth and nature, and nature

is not something to be exploited, but something to be appreciated, to be part of. Paganism can be perceived a polytheistic, because there tends to be acknowledgement of many facets of nature, but these are also facets of the one God, and so the (pantheistic) deities are simply instruments of nature (nature forces), and components of something greater, something divine. In some sense the various pagan deities “represent archetypes of the collective unconsciousness” and symbolize some very meaningful aspects of human nature and nature as a whole.

Paganism is, in principle and largely in practice, inherently constructive and evolutionary, valuable and noble even, as compared with satanism (which is not a God-centered religion). But there is a tendency to associate more with the lower manifestations of divine force (the earth and the nature spirits) rather than finding the God within in some higher sense. There is a tendency to look outwardly, experientially, rather than inwardly. So while there is a mystical element to paganism, it is not strictly speaking a proper form of mysticism, because the threads of paganism lead not directly to the God within.

And while strictly speaking paganism includes all manner of natural religions, it is perhaps more closely related to (perhaps even properly synonymous with) Wicca or witchcraft rather than shamanism.

† Commentary No. 1358

Shamanism

Shamanism is a relatively broad collection of many different (enduring) tribal or indigenous or natural religions. Shamanism refers to the role of the shaman or priest, who is generally engaged in various magical and healing practices and who may or may not be a controlling (religious) factor. Shamanism is similar in a number of ways to paganism, but the biggest differences are the tribal context and the role of the shaman.

Among the features of (some) shamanistic faiths are the recognition of the existence of an unseen world of gods, demons, and/or ancestral spirits and the existence of various natural or developable abilities for divination and healing. In more enlightened shamanistic cultures the shaman is a healer and spiritual

leader, in the less enlightened shamanistic cultures the shaman is more imposing and controlling, e.g., where only the shaman is allowed to contact and/or control the spirit guides. Virtually all of the original (ancient) religions began as tribal (shamanistic) religions or developed through various shamanistic forms. In more modern times shamanism has continued but with less of a tribal nature or import (context) and more a matter of principles. There is also, in these more modern expressions, an issue of glamourization as non-tribal peoples attempt to (superficially) embrace shamanism.

Among the basic principles of shamanism are a deep sense of the sacredness of life and the earth (nature) and living in harmony with nature. In this sense there is an actual communion with the spirit of the earth and of natural forces. There is also, usually, a communion with ancestral spirits or spirit guides. There is of course a strong underlying metaphysical and theosophical basis (truth and reality) for these principles and related practices. When people die they sometimes are unable to transcend straight away to the next level and linger near the earth, being attached to their earthly existence, and available as spirit guides to those to whom they are or were close emotionally and psychically, or to those who are particularly sensitive. In tribal cultures there tends to be a greater (but relatively coarse, atavistic) sensitivity to the etheric and astral realms. This includes not only "departed" or transitional human beings but also a wide variety of nature spirits.

So shamanism tends also to place some emphasis on contacting or working with these (non-human) nature spirits, some of which are relatively highly evolved and some of which are rather sub-human. But in the natural sensitivity of native peoples to their physical and etheric environment, people can generally sense the working of natural forces and the existence and influence of various magical (and therefore sacred) places. But shamanism is generally a pre-materialistic religion. As peoples become more materialistic and more rational, they tend to lose their sensitivities to natural forces. And as shamans effectively lose their powers and abilities due to entanglement in materialism or sensualism or egoism, there is a tendency to maintain control and influence through less natural means and practices (i.e., a true shaman is one who is true to his or her own spirit and living in harmony with natural forces, while a charlatan is one who wears merely the facade of shamanistic abilities).

There is a great deal of truth and validity in shamanism. But shamanistic powers tend to be involuntary and atavistic in these ancient practices, and what is needed (in human evolution) is to evolve through (and beyond) materialism and egoism and then embrace something more natural (spirituality) on a higher turn of the spiral. Thus the spiritual student develops a much more conscious sensitivity than is generally available through traditional shamanistic methods.

† Commentary No. 1359

Spiritualism 1

Spiritualism is a relatively unconventional religion in many regards, but somewhat more closely related to Christianity and orthodoxy than paganism or shamanism. It is unorthodox mainly in the sense that spiritualism embraces a number of occult practices (e.g., white magic), but in a relatively more conventional format (of church).

In spiritualism there is no substantial emphasis on the earth or upon the (seen or unseen) forces of nature. Instead the emphasis is upon healing, and evolution in consciousness, often in the context of contact with departed loved ones and others who are contacted psychically. There is an element of this in shamanism, particularly with regard to ancestral and tribal spirits (and their wisdom), whereas in spiritualism there is an emphasis on psychic development and psychic experience and psychic contacts. At one time theosophy was (almost properly) perceived as decidedly spiritualistic, and there are certainly historic relationships between spiritualism and theosophy, but spiritualism is properly a religion and affords religious experience, and theosophy is properly a metaphysical philosophy that embraces the spiritual (but not religious) essence of all the world's religions.

In some sense spiritualism is a science, a philosophy, and a religion. It is a science in the sense that (many) spiritualists investigate psychic phenomenon, particularly through mediumship and establishing a factual basis for non-physical existence. The problem is that while there is a non-physical reality, indeed more so than the physical, it is simply not possible to "prove" to other people. Observations and testimony and reasoning are simply not sufficient.

One can only really “prove” something to oneself. But spiritualism certainly contributes to conventional apprehension of the non-physical. Spiritualism is a philosophy in the sense that understanding to some extent the laws of nature on both physical and metaphysical levels leads to apprehension of principles. This is where spiritualism truly contributes to the world religion. And spiritualism is a religion in the sense that it has a strong focus on God and the (natural) laws of God and in the sense that it is organized and implemented through a religious format.

In principle, a spiritualist is one who believes “in the communication between this and the spirit world by means of mediumship and who endeavors to mold his or her character and conduct in accordance with the highest teaching derived from such communication.” The problem is that people who find spiritualism appealing tend to be relatively gullible. And “mediums” tend to be involuntarily psychic, do not necessarily understand the phenomena they are engaged in, and are often unable to discern the relative quality of the “spirits” they are in communication with. There are many ordinary (merely human) “spirits” and many sub-human and pseudo-human entities. And many gullible mediums. People tend to be more impressed with the phenomena than with the quality of content. People tend to believe what they hear, without really sensing its truth or import.

At its best, spiritualism is meaningful, insightful, inspiring, and can facilitate healing. At its worst it is personal and petty. The spirit world is real, but not necessarily properly discerned. The phenomena are real, but not necessarily significant. Some of the insights are real (valid); others are misleading. But where there is a proper spiritual basis (qualified and refined mediums, not merely sincere) the process and results are likely to be more meaningful.

Spiritualism 2

There are traditionally nine principles or guidelines of spiritualism. (1) There is an infinite intelligence or God or spirit. (2) God is expressed through all lives and all forms in nature, both physical and non-physical. All are the children of God. (3) True religion is living in harmony with God's (natural) laws. This evokes progress (evolution in consciousness). (4) There is continuity or life after death. One never really dies. The personal identity of the individual continues (but spiritualists do not seem to realize that while the personality or ego may linger after death, the personality is eventually dissolved and the soul is what goes on to the next higher level). And that identity (soul) reincarnates periodically for additional needed experience and expression (although some spiritualists do not embrace the concept of reincarnation).

(5) It is possible to communicate with people who have died. Indeed, for as long as the departed "linger" they can be contacted and they can communicate with those who are sensitive (susceptible) (vulnerable). None of this is "proven" in any legitimate scientific sense, but it is true nonetheless. The problem is that the departed are not enlightened simply by virtue of being dead. They have no more to offer by virtue of being in the spirit realm than they had when they were alive in this (lower) world. And those who linger are generally those who are relatively less enlightened, who simply do not know (yet) how to move on to the next level, i.e., who are still attached to the world (worldly ways) or to people in the world. But while there is generally some truth (and some illusion) in these communications, it is not a supernatural process but a natural one, albeit somewhat atavistic.

(6) The golden rule. Common in some form or another to all religions. Goodness and kindness to others evokes like qualities and consequences. (7) People have a moral responsibility to live in accordance with nature's (God's) laws. If we live in harmony with these laws then "goodness" and "happiness" result. The emphasis should be on learning and growing rather than being happy, but certainly one's happiness is of one's own making. But we are each responsible for our circumstances. (8) Every person is afforded the opportunity for learning and growing. The door is never closed. Every day offers new

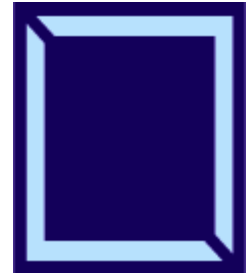
opportunities. (g) Prophecy and healing are divine attributes, demonstrated through mediumship. The problems here are with both prophecy and healing. Healing is a divine process, and healing is possible. But true healing is evoked only through learning and adjusting in consciousness. "Healers" can relieve symptoms. They can encourage and facilitate healing, but they cannot evoke true healing.

Prophecy is a bit more complicated. Some things can be prophesized, especially in general terms. But karma is rather dynamic, and with new causes and with consequences emerging, it is always changing. Thus when a "seer" has a vision (or a medium embraces some spirit-guidance), there is a question of validity both with regard to the caliber and truthfulness of the source and the quality and competence of the medium, and with the stability of what is seen. So while prophecy is possible, it is not necessarily significant. And those who focus on gleaning prophecies for the most part are therefore and thereby not really focused on learning and growing.

The symbol of spiritualism is the sunflower. And the traditional motto is "As the sunflower turns its face to the light of the sun, so spiritualism turns the face of humanity to the light of the truth."



Section 6.122



Wicca

- The Wiccan religion or witchcraft is a relatively diverse collection of various pagan and neo-pagan faiths and traditions. Wicca is an expression of respect or reverence for nature. It acknowledges God in both male and female aspects, and generally embraces reincarnation and various forms and practices of ritual magic.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft is defined (in the conventional or popular sense) as the use of sorcery or magic, where sorcery implies “the use of power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits” and where magic implies “the use of means believed to have supernatural power over natural forces.” Unfortunately, these notions (witchcraft, sorcery, magic) do not effectively characterize (proper) witchcraft and much misunderstanding and superstition has resulted from the conventional fear-of-the-unknown (and popularization of the dark side).

Thus in the popular vernacular, witchcraft is generally associated with occultism, with the feminine practice of magic, and with evil or selfish intent. Yet, in practice, witchcraft is not limited to feminine practice (though women tend to have more affinity for and sensitivity toward the natural forces) nor with the dark side of occultism. That which is occult may be “good” (beneficent) (constructive) (selfless) (based in wisdom) or “evil” (maleficent) (destructive) (selfish or self-centered) (based in ignorance), depending on the motives, methods (practices), and relative understanding of the practitioner. More properly that which is occult is generally somewhere in between. Witchcraft, likewise. If one knows what one is doing (i.e., through proper training, understanding, etc.) and if the motives and practices are relatively pure, then witchcraft is a “positive” experience and expression.

The real basis (relative goodness) depends on the associated morals and ethics. If witchcraft is utilized properly (constructively), without any taint of selfishness or imposition (i.e., with sound moral and ethical consideration), then the whole process is qualified by the (more) noble aspect of human nature. Conversely, if witchcraft is utilized improperly (destructively), with selfish intent or with imposition (i.e., without sound moral and ethical consideration), then the process is tainted by the lower human (animal) nature. This is a very important aspect, for the relative quality of “involved” consciousness determines the quality and nature of the spirits or forces attracted and utilized. The human animal nature (being lower or coarse) will naturally attract relatively coarse spirits (elementals, etc.) and draw the practitioner into or toward the dangers inherent in the lower astral and the left-hand path (of black

magic). Conversely, the higher or more noble human nature will naturally attract relatively refined spirits and generally avoid the pitfalls associated with the lower manifestations.

Even when properly practiced, witchcraft is not without its temptations (e.g., sincere but misguided imposition), for with “power” come to the surface the lesser aspects of the human nature, and so the opportunity to face up to them and transform those weaknesses into strengths. There are, however, two aspects of witchcraft that must be transcended: (1) reliance on external forces (control of the elementals and lesser devas) rather than internal forces (collaboration with the higher devas) and (2) reliance on or focus on the earth-water-air-fire (mother) (nature) (material) elements (form) rather than reliance on the non-material elements (life and consciousness). These two aspects are of course the same, from different perspectives, but the student does need to transform the craft into inner union rather than outer absorption, however natural that outer absorption may be (for the personality nature).

In the final analysis, there is a dark side and a light side to witchcraft, a male side and a female side, a lower (external) aspect (personality-centered) and a higher (internal) aspect (soul-centered). If the light side is embraced, then the lower aspect will eventually be drawn into (unto) the higher.

† Commentary No. 1364

Wicca 1

The Wiccan religion or witchcraft is a relatively diverse collection of various pagan and neo-pagan faiths and traditions. Wicca is an expression of respect or reverence for nature. It acknowledges God in both male and female aspects, and generally embraces reincarnation and various forms and practices of ritual magic.

Wicca is relatively individualistic, both in the sense that Wiccans are free to interpret their faith and make it what they will, and in the sense that Wicca tends to attract people who are individualistic, i.e., who have strong (separative), independently-minded personalities. The basic principles of Wicca

are quite sound, but given the diversity of personalities involved and the dynamic range of beliefs and practices, there is therefore, as is the case for most religions, a spectrum of spiritual qualities, ranging from very noble to relatively coarse and self-centered. There are many and various Wiccan groups, and a number of relatively well-defined traditions or collections of practices (methods) that appeal to one group or another.

The God and Goddess of Wicca are not anthropomorphic. There is one supreme creative force encompassing all forms and all lives and all levels of existence and expression. Natural laws (and natural forces) are expressions of that one supreme creative force. The God and Goddess of Wicca are simply the masculine and feminine aspects of that supreme creative force. The focus of Wicca is upon living in harmony with the earth and the forces of nature, and utilizing those forces for good. In principle, and largely in practice, Wicca or witchcraft is a noble craft. But like most things good-in-principle, the quality and nobility of the particular craftwork depends on the quality and nobility and motives of the individuals involved. Thus Wicca properly does not embrace satanism or any obviously self-centered, self-serving practices. But satanism does embrace many of the practices and methods of witchcraft.

The fundamental problems of Wicca or witchcraft (or the practice of magic) are the source of energy and the motives of the people engaging its methods and practices. Natural (divine) forces can be embraced in two ways, through the lower self and through the higher Self. In Wicca, much of the embrace is through the lower self, and consequently there tends to be a strengthening of the ego or personality and its role in Wicca. Where the embrace is through the higher Self there is a weakening of the ego or personality, with much more noble emphasis and more noble results. But because natural forces are more easily encountered through the lower self and lower practices, there is an inherent vulnerability in these practices. There seems to be little emphasis in Wicca upon personal refinement, but there is a not inconsiderable appreciation for the dangers of magic evoked in the wrong ways or for the wrong reasons. In some sense Wiccans have pioneered popular appreciation for occult safeguards, for psychic self-defense practices. Which is necessary due to the overall (popular) appeal of witchcraft. But if the emphasis were to include personal refinement (self-discipline, purification, etc.) then the protections would be more natural and more effective (coarse energies are attractive and competitive, refined

energies are attractive and non-competitive) (coarse energies and refined energies are not (mutually) attractive).

Wicca is really quite experiential. Wiccans tend to feel the energies they are working with, to feel the connections with the earth and with nature and natural forces, much like true mystics feel their inner, higher communion with God. And in the higher sense, Wicca is also a mystical path.

† Commentary No. 1365

Wicca 2

Thus like most religions there is an outer, popular tradition in Wicca, that appeals to a diversity of peoples (and perhaps especially to those who are disaffected by the rigidity and “failures” of more orthodox practices), and an inner, less popular (less realizable), more mystical tradition to Wicca. There is ordinary, outer-nature-based magic. And there is a higher, deeper soul-based magic. Thus a common theme in Wicca is apprehension and expression of magic, particularly in its ritualistic form.

Magic comes from within, but it can be evoked in the lower sense through the ego (personality), drawing from the lower forces of nature (which is more properly perceived as external), or it can be evoked in the higher sense through the soul. Most Wiccans (like most people) are not able to touch the soul, and must rely on the lower magic. With proper training and proper (relatively selfless (self-less)) motive, these (lower) Wiccan practices can be quite effective (for good). It is a matter of being fit, being strong, being properly trained, understanding what one is doing, etc. But this is an active magical practice. One must properly actively and consciously control the evoked energies and forces. If one is passive in these regards, then one is easily engulfed by the forces and associated (unfortunate) entities. The higher magic is much more natural, requires not active control but simply intelligent and competent allowing of the energies and forces to flow as they need to. But the higher magic can only be evoked through higher (personal) qualification (refinement) (attunement to the soul). While the lower magic can seem (and be) quite natural, it is natural in a lower sense. Living in harmony with nature, in the

lower sense, is to be entangled in nature. Living in harmony with nature, in the higher sense, is something else entirely.

Wicca has in some sense been greatly and badly misunderstood by the masses, and a few abuses here and there have been allowed to misrepresent the entirety of this religious tradition. Sometimes people attack that which they do not understand or apprehend, that which in ignorance they fear. But there is nothing in Wicca that should be feared, indeed there is much there to be appreciated. The potentials for abuse are there, but this is true also for other religions. Wicca is really quite honest in its approach to magic, while most religions embrace magical practices without admitting it (and usually without apprehending it). The differences between Wicca and Christianity, for example, are primarily in perceptions (perspective) and emphasis (focus), but these are not fundamentally mutually exclusive. Indeed, the higher principles and practices are actually quite similar.

Some think of Wicca and witchcraft as different and evil, but in fact they are similar if not synonymous, and there is no more (or less) evil in witchcraft than there is in Christianity. Wiccans tend to be tolerant of other faiths but also tend to react badly (humanly) to impositions. No faith has exclusive insights or an exclusive relationship with God. And no faith has the right to impose on others. Each contributes to the whole. And Wicca contributes nonetheless. The focus and domain of Wicca provide its contributions, namely appreciation for nature (to live in harmony with nature, without exploitation), and appreciation for magic as a legitimate means of experience and expression.

Some religions emphasize submission to the (perceived) will of God, while Wicca tends to emphasize individual will (tempered by the golden rule). Thus the challenge for Wiccans is to gradually cultivate the inner, higher senses, so that the needs (will) of the soul can emerge into the daily life.

Wicca 3

There are a number of terms utilized to some extent in Wicca, in some cases differently than in other practices. An amulet is a magically, magnetically charged object for protection. The aura is the energy field that enfolds the human being (and all lives). Bane refers to that which is counter to life and consciousness. To banish is to magically exclude the influence of some entity or force. To bind is to magically constrain some entity or force. A Book of Shadows is a personal diary relating to magical experience (lore) and insight.

Calling refers to the invocation of divine or natural forces. The chakras are the energy centers within the human vital body, which are utilized in some magical practices. Charging refers to the deliberate qualification of some object or practice with personal energy or intention. Charms are simply amulets or talismans, infused with personal (magical) energy for some purpose. Circles are magical (sacred) spaces for working magic and ritual. They are means of containing and intensifying energy prior to its release or sending forth. Circles also provide protection. Cleansing refers to the purification of some object or place, removing unwanted influences. A coven or grove is simply a group of witches (usually thirteen or fewer) who practice magic together or who engage together in religious ceremonies.

Divination is (properly) a practice of obtaining insights. Earth magic refers to the natural magic (magical power) derived from natural objects. The natural elements are earth, air, fire, water, and the ether or akasha. Elementals are relatively primitive creatures associated with the elements. Fascination or mind-bending is an unethical practice of attempting to influencing others. Folk magic refers to personal magic, often utilizing herbs and crystals. Grounding is a practice of maintaining stability in magical work and relieving excess energies.

Hand-fasting refers to a pagan wedding. Incense refers to the utilization of aromatic practices for attunement and facility. The left-hand path is the path of black magic, or magical practice that is selfish or self-serving, or which seeks to influence others (the right-hand path is the path of white magic, or magical practice that is more noble and selfless). Magical systems are specific systems

or traditions of magic, each with their own set of practices and principles. Occultism refers to head-centered magical practices, for good (white magic) or ill (black magic). That which is occult is simply that which is hidden or not apparent to the mass consciousness. Paganism and neo-paganism are more general terms than Wicca or witchcraft. The pentacle is an encircled upright pentagram (five-pointed star), a symbol of Wicca and the five natural elements, while an inverted pentacle is a symbol of satanism (much like the swastika is a genuine religious symbol and the inverted swastika is a misappropriation or blasphemy).

Projective hand refers to the hand as a point through which magical force (personal energy) is conveyed. Receptive hand refers to the use of the hand(s) to receive energy. Rede is the Wiccan formulation of the golden rule, "An it harm none, do what thou will." Runes are sets of symbols used in magical work, sometimes also in divination. Sabbats are the eight seasonal festivals (Samhain or November eve, Yule or the winter solstice, Imbolc or February eve, Ostara or the vernal equinox, Beltaine or May eve, Litha or the summer solstice, Lammas or August eve, and Mabron or the autumnal equinox). A solitary is a pagan or Wiccan who works alone. Spells are magical rituals to address (or redress) some need. Sympathetic magic involves the principle of attraction.

