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COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

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In most universities two ideas about truth come across loud and clear:

It is relative - any truth is stated within the context of culture and is shaped by its culture and environment. Truth, it is claimed, is personal, not transcendent or absolute.

It is plural - because truth is relative, all claims to truth are equally valid. Judging between competing truth claims becomes meaningless by this definition, and is replaced by a pluralistic approach to belief.

Essentially, the ideology of pluralism holds to the equal validity of all religions. According to this point of view, no single religion can claim to be a unique or special revelation of God. No religious leader or founder can claim special significance

These ideas are becoming very popular today but they are really not new: they are essentially the popularisation of liberal 19th century theology which in turn is founded on 19th century philosophy, principally that of Hegel.

Ultimately it involves saying that the relativistic philosophy of Hegel is correct (and all others wrong) which is an exclusivistic claim which contradicts the basic tenet of pluralism to be open minded.

Pluralism is generally espoused by people who want a convenient alibi for their personal life-style. In other words, they are using it a tool to debunk religion in

general: if it is all relative, then I do not have to pay any attention to any of it, and I can be my own god. Others, especially religious people, have espoused pluralism because it does away with the embarrassing question of evangelism and proselytism, which has in the past led to strife and even wars. It is therefore an attempt to get oneself off the hook as far as evangelism is concerned, and also to defuse strife in a 'multi-faith' society. It also aims to draw the sting from criticism that Christianity is essentially divisive and has allegedly been responsible for the crusades and other blots on the landscape of the history of the Christian Church. Some will object that pluralism is only natural in our 'multi-faith society' where economic and democratic factors are seen to be uppermost. If by a multi-faith society you mean a society which tolerates all religions, that is no problem. But if by this you mean that all religions are either true or equally worthless, then this is something that the author of this book would dispute. This book has been written not only to familiarize us with other religions, but also to show that pluralism is not a valid option and that it fails to recognise the unique claims of Christianity.

THE ORIGINS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

It is clear from the biblical revelation that in the beginning was theism (the One God) and that pantheism was a later development (cf. Romans). All nations, as

they dispersed, must have retained some awareness of the true God of heaven even though he receded more and more from their consciousness as time went on. They retained their corrupted traditions of the Flood and, to a lesser extent of the Dispersion from Babel. Their vague recollections of God's promised Redeemer were distorted into various systems of animal and even human sacrifices, in order to gain favour with the spirit beings which seemed to govern their daily lives. Eventually, these spirits were more and more identified with the forces of nature in a closed-system universe. To this we must add the deification of heroes and the development of the Babylonian counterfeit system of organised paganism which was actively spread.

Thus, other religions (those outside the Judaeo-Christian revelation) are not only a distortion of the original revelation, but also witnesses to the outworking of sin: the darkening of the mind, of which the apostle Paul speaks in the opening chapters of Romans. In addition to this, there is strong evidence to suggest that paganism as a system, evolved under the direct supervision of Satan, who set out to establish an alternative system to the truth. Which one is true? If we look at the result of modern research into the origins of religion, we shall find that it is very different from the conclusions of 19th cent. sociologists who were merely guessing on the basis of their philosophical pre-suppositions. Engels was a case in point. With pluralism, therefore, we are dealing, at best with human distortion and at worst with a deliberate

ploy of Satan, who wishes to bring as many people as he can to join him in hell.

ANIMISM

The first thing to realise is that the religion of primitive societies is immensely varied: some are polytheistic as might be expected, but some are monotheistic. In vain do we look for a proto-polytheism: it is already a series of complex systems. The popular idea that polytheism evolved into montheism is just not born out by the facts. Animists account for between 2-3 hundred million people living in thousands of tribal groups.

Characteristics of this world view:

- 1) **No division between sacred and secular.** Man lives in close relation to his surroundings (nature) and to his tribe. In both spheres he is governed by a strict code of rules. This can be seen by the fact that he lives in an extended family, in which is included also the departed ancestors. The animist's life is a strange mixture of awe and dread, on the one hand and a sense of oneness and contentment on the other. Modern man suffers from the opposite: alienation. The animist suffers from an imbalance in the other direction.
- 2) **Life is dominated by the spirit world.** Every event is seen as having a spiritual cause, rather than a physical one. If illness has occurred, it is automatically assumed to

be the result of someone throwing a spell on them, or of having offended one of the ancestors. Unless the harmony of spiritual forces is re-established, death will ensue. Everyone lives in a world that is inhabited by an infinite variety of spirits. We claim to live in a mechanistic universe, but animists go to the other extreme, where they are obsessed by the spiritual. Those who manipulate these spiritual forces occupy the most important place in their society: the diviner, medecine-man, the shaman, the seer and the sacral king. They manipulate black and white magic. Black magic aims to harm someone, whereas white magic seeks to manipulate the spirits for the well-being of the community: rain-making, preparation of good-luck charms.

3. Life is dominated by fear: dread of the spirit-filled night: no one goes out alone at night: terror of the witch and his witchcraft, terror of death. Horror of offending an ancestor or some spirit which is capricious. cf. *Beauty and the Beast* which reflects this world view.

4. Importance of myth: every primitive society believes in a golden age: a time when everything was perfect, heaven was accessible to men and they walked with God. Myth is a reinactment of an event (creation, birth, relationship to God, death) which took place during this time, in a ritual (mime, song or dance), during which those participating are transported outside time into the eternal realm. Many of these rites we would say are barbaric, immoral or superstitious (e.g. ritual slaughters when a king dies, human sacrifice, cannibalism,

indiscriminate sex etc). These all point to a god or gods which are amoral. Compare a religion where its most important events take place in a time-space universe, where God is moral and predictable and you see there is an enormous difference.

5. The performance of rituals. These are connected with the landmarks in life: marriage, war, sickness, divorce, death etc, but also with what we would call trivial events like cooking, arrivals, departures etc. The aim is to maintain the harmony of existence. It is all to do with superstition (the placating of the spirits).

But the most important of these rituals are fertility rites which involve imitative magic. The gods and spirits, which are capricious beings, cannot be relied on to provide regular seasons and so have to be propitiated or bribed.

6. Time is cyclical and rhythmic: they have no concept of linear time. The seasonal clock is their time-piece, with the sun, moon and stars as reference points. Events take place regularly and rhythmically. What is significant is the right response to the ever reoccurring events on which the life of the tribe depends. There is no rush, there are no schedules to keep. They are caught in a vicious circle.

The frame of reference of the animist:

1. The invisible world:

a) **Mana:** this world is dominated by something called life-force (*mana*) or power. It may concentrate itself in

certain things such as stones, plants, trees, animals and people with varying degrees of intensity. Success depends on the amount you can accumulate or acquire. Its manipulation is the main function of the religious experts (cf. the concept of the sacraments controlled by the priesthood).

b) **Supreme Being**: he is portrayed as a disinterested observer. He is the creator, but he is not worshipped. He is only called upon to intervene when all else has failed, but he does not like being bothered, so one is taking a risk in disturbing him. It is usually much safer to appeal to dead ancestors, lesser divinities and manipulation of mana (cf. appeal to Virgin Mary and the Saints).

c) **Lesser gods**: these are usually spirits of earth, sun, moon, thunder, lightning, water, sea, mountains, streams etc. They must all be placated by various rituals. (cf. the New Age world view).

The bushmen of the Kalahari desert only have one divinity besides the Supreme God: a devil who opposes God and seeks to disrupt everything.

d) **Spirits**: these are both good spirits and evil spirits or trickster spirits of the dead. They live in all sorts of places such as trees, rocks, caves, mountain passes. As they are most unpredictable, they have to be placated with offerings of food etc. Then there are demons which take on various shapes in order to terrify people. Then there are the guardian spirits of the tribe.

e) **Ancestral spirits** or the living dead. As they are liable to come back and cause mischief, there are elaborate funeral ceremonies to ensure that they are effectively cut

off from their previous existence. No one who was associated with the deceased was allowed to remain: hence the slaughter of the man's wives, servants, burial of belongings etc. These would also be of use to the deceased in the land of the dead, which was variously conceived as a place like *sheol* or a happy hunting ground (Indians). cf. funeral practices in Serbia

2. **The visible world:** Man lives in a world in which he feels at home and into whose rhythm he fits. But it is also a world that brings terror and fear. In order that he may enjoy the good, long life: many children, much food and wealth, great respect and ward off evil (sickness, barren wives, locust plagues, disrespect from the young, witchcraft), man must know the secrets of power to be able to consult those who have special skill in its manipulation for good or for evil.

a) **Tabus:** he therefore has to learn to keep his distance from and respect the sacred world (sacred persons, the dead, birth, the reproductive process, war, sickness, sanctuaries). We must beware of interpreting much OT material in a pagan way. Others religious accounts are twisted versions of the real thing. This is the problem with many liberal theologians.

b. **Sacred places:** these are places where divine power is believed to be especially present and available. These can be groves (groups of trees) or unusual stones, water.

c. **Sacred things:** Some stones are thought to contain power. The earth is sacred, for it is part of Mother Earth. Where images do occur, the divinity is thought to

indwell the image, and it is thus accorded the respect and honour that would be granted to the divinity's physical presence.

d. **Sacred actions:** chief of these is worship: sacrifice of an animal, offering of praise and making of requests. To these were added sometimes ritual sacrifice and cannibalism. Human sacrifice was mainly used in agricultural communities to ensure the success of the harvest or in a time of national calamity.

The sighting of certain animals might cause a venture to be postponed (black cat!). Divination was also practised. The sky was observed for omens. The constellations were seen as a projections of the underworld where the gods lived.

e. **Sacred words:** oaths and cursings and blessings were most important: they were all charged with sacred power, especially if uttered by someone of importance. Such words were regarded as having a power of their own to achieve the wishes of the speaker (cf. OT blessings).

f. **Sacred persons:** these were mediators between the visible and invisible world, good and bad. First there were the diviners, medecine-men, prophets and priests. Second comes the sacral king. Third comes the shaman. Besides being a sort of priest and medecine man who cures sickness, he directs communal sacrifices and escorts the souls of the dead to the other world, and he is able to leave the body and observe events in distant places.

The sacral king, found in some African tribes, is the representative of God on earth and thought by some to be divine.

g. **Sin, morality and the after-life.** Sin is defined as that which harms the well-being of the community or threatens its members health. It is a very much a man-orientated view of sin (cf. I have never done anyone any wrong). A man's performance in this area does not affect the eternal destiny of a person. This depends very much on the care and respect shown by the dead man's relatives (cf. purgatory). However, if the person has disgraced the tribe, he can be struck off the tribal register of those diseased members. (once again people still living have power to determine the destiny of those already dead).

An example: PAGANISM IN ENGLAND

The first system of organised paganism originated in Babylon (more exactly, Sumer), and was deliberately spread by missionaries. It is they who were responsible for the neolithic monumemnts which were closely associated with the worship of the stars. Such monuments are found today in Scandinavia, Scotland, Ireland and England. Celtic legends affirm that the Tuatha De Danann (which means the people of the god Danu or Anu) founded this culture about 5,000 years ago and were said to have come from Achaia (more probably a distorted version of Akkad) of which we today see the monuments in such places as Stonehenge and Carnac in

Britanny. This people was divided into two classes, the scientists or intellectuals (considered by the ancient Britons to be 'gods') and the skilled craftsmen who helped them in their construction. This picture corresponds fairly well to the history of the Fertile Crescent: a people (probably the Tuatha) were expelled by Aramean incursions coming from the Syrian highlands into Akkad (the northern province of Sumer). These were reputed to have instructed the people of the Fertile Crescent in 'wisdom', an expression which no doubt refers to astrology and the worship of the stars. From there they no doubt emigrated further to Scandinavia, England and France. It was thus through the intermediary of these 'learned men' that the diabolical religion of Babylon the Great Prostitute, reached the northern peoples. This became the religion of the Druids who carried on the same tradition, with associated abominations, such as making people to pass through the fire in order to offer them as sacrifices to 'the host of heaven' (demonic powers).

Early farming communities seemed to have focussed their worship upon fertility and the life-creating forces expressed through a maternal figure in human form. Silbury Hill is an image of this great goddess, symbol of the fertility and central to Stone Age life. Silbury Hill itself represents the womb of a pregnant woman. The goddess is squatting in the neolithic birth position, as if to give birth. At Lammas, at full moon, the Stone Age farming people went to Silbury Hill to watch the goddess give birth. When the moon rises at a certain point and the

corn stands ready to be cut, the great goddess suffers a lunar parturition (birth).

Prostitution and adultery is always a picture of spiritual unfaithfulness to God. From Babylonia emerged the entire complex of human religion, promulgated via a system of astrology and idolatrous polytheism, empowered by occult spiritism and demonism.

According to the book of Revelation, it is this system that is to be revived with its full force just prior to the return of Christ, with particular emphasis on the demonic aspect.

SATANISM

Most people that claim to be involved in satanism today, do so as an act of rebellion against society. They are in it for personal gain: their supreme aim is to find self-fulfilment. Many of them even deny that God or Satan exists and espouse satanism as an act of bravado against society. Their motto is: "I am my own redeemer". Most of those involved are young people (13-30). It is largely an individual affair and certainly not part of a gigantic conspiracy.

Development: Real satanism came to represent the remnants of paganism in various countries as it occurred in various local pagan cults. The devil came to be described in terms that had characterised local pagan deities.

Paganism tended to live on in the guise of various customs, some even adopted and adapted by the church. It was found more in the countryside rather than in the towns (hence the name: pagan = pertaining to the countryside or rural). Such customs include: throwing salt over your shoulder for good luck; crossing your fingers; wishing a person "God Bless You" when he sneezes. This last custom arose because it was thought that the devil might get into the person through their open mouth! All of these were originally precautions against witchcraft. Precautions against witches were also taken in most churches. Grids outside the church gate were not only to keep out cattle. Iron, like salt and blood, was believed to keep witches away. Horseshoes are now just a good-luck symbol. Like metal font covers, they were originally placed on lintels in the belief that witches would not pass iron. Some country people still carry blacksmith's nails with them as lucky charms. Touching wood was also originally for protection against witchcraft. If people passed a reputed witch in pre-Reformation times, they would hurry home and touch the wooden cross that hung on the wall of most houses. When crosses disappeared at the time of the Reformation, people just touched wood. Probably the most ancient superstition with a witchcraft base is the turning-over of money to a new moon. The female companion of pre-Christian witchcraft's principal God-symbol was the Moon Goddess. To turn over money was to acknowledge her reappearance each month. Even after Christianity came to European countries, many of our

ancestors continued to carry out some of the rites of the old religion as a form of spiritual insurance policy.

The devil came to be described in terms that had characterised local pagan deities. The Church found it convenient to cast the horned god as the Biblical devil. The main symbol of ancient witchcraft was the half-man and half-goat figure variously known as Puck, Pan, Herne, Old Hornie or the Green Man. It is not known at what period the Two-Horned cult entered Britain. The climate was favourable in 1208, when the Pope laid England under an Interdict for ten years, and King John sent an embassy to Morocco with secret promises that he would turn Muslim. And again, 100 years later, when the entire Order of Knights Templar was accused of witchcraft and suppressed at the Pope's orders. The Green Man is commemorated on the signs of many old pubs today. Usually it means that witchcraft was an organised cult in the area.

The word witch derives from the Anglo-Saxon *wicca*, "a magician who weakens the power of evil", and it was held that these "powers of evil" could be identified and weakened only by a priest. Witches met secretly in wooded country. Women took as important a part in the dancing, singing, and feasting as men. Each "coven" consisted of six pairs, either husbands and wives, or engaged couples, and an officiating priestess. All went naked. Tests of fortitude under flagellation and horrific danger, the raising of spirits, cauldron stirrings, incense-

burning, love feasts, round-dances performed back to back, served one main purpose: that of reaching an ecstatic state in which the magnetic force of the whole coven was focused on some unanimously chosen object. Strange phenomena were then experienced among them, it was said, visions of past and future. To concentrate this force, the rites were formed in a magic circle cut in the turf.

Many thousands of witches were then hanged; most charges being prompted by fear, malice, revenge, hope of gain, or sheer fanaticism – just as in wartime, spies are seen everywhere.

King James I intervened personally at the trial of the North Berwick Witches, who confessed that they had attempted to wreck his ship by throwing a christened cat into the sea. This offended his common sense, and he shouted out that they were lying. But Agnes Sampson, a leader of the coven answered quietly that she did not wish him to think her a liar. Drawing James aside, she repeated word for word the conversation which had passed between him and his Danish queen in bed on their wedding night. Such manifest proof of second sight filled him with fear; and the witches were accordingly hanged.

Modern satanism. The foundation of modern satanism is to be found in the anti-religious reaction of the Enlightenment. Especially in aristocratic circles it became

popular to spit on the church and the morality which it stood for. Rabelais in France is the prototype of the Renaissance man who rejects religion in favour of a do-as-you-please philosophy. He even inspired a community called the Monks of Medmenham which was a 17th century association of European aristocrats who met for gambling, feasting, drinking and sexual games. Hell-fire clubs were founded in 18th and 19th cent. England.

Satanism is thus essentially the religion of hedonism or self-indulgence.

Three people in particular have been behind contemporary satanism:

1. Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), 2. Gerald Gardner, and 3. Anton Sándor LaVey, the last of whom founded the satanist church which he believed to be the ultimate in "counter-culture."

Anton LaVey wrote what he called the *Satanist Bible*. It has two characteristics:

- a. It is an open mockery of Christianity that draws many people who have rejected that religion.
- b. It is declaration of the supremacy of a group of individuals who regard themselves as being a bit above the rest of humanity.

Modern satanism is frequently confused with:

1. Witchcraft:
 - a) believes in the divinity of all; dualism or pluralism and relative morals.

b) each group is usually named after a god or goddess. The most popular one today is Raymond Buckland's *Wicca*.

c) Most contemporary witchcraft groups are matriarchal and emphasise the feminine aspect of reality. This contradicts ancient pagan systems in which there were many goddesses; it was not a religion of women but was the official religion of male-dominated societies.

d) Contemporary witchcraft is usually pacifistic, nature-worshipping and even vegetarian. The contemporary witch seeks to be one with the world, rather than like many satanists, to overcome the world and use it for self-gratification.

One reason for this confusion between satanism and witchcraft is that both are usually violently anti-Christian.

2. Paganism, polytheism and idol-worship. Satanism is not involved in any of these practices.

3. Psychic Phenomena, New Ageism and Mere Magic (i.e. conjuring).

Special study: SRA (Satanic ritual abuse). This is something that is very popular in America and has thrived on sensational stories. It is a method of counselling that traces emotional disturbance back to a satanic source or trauma which occurred in the past. Various therapies have been devised to enable the person to recover his "memory", so that the source of the

problem can be tracked down to parents' or grandparents' involvement in satanic ritual, murder, cannibalism, sexual torture, incest or bestiality. Usually the victim is a white women between 25-45, who is highly suggestible, intelligent, creative and well-educated.

Often the problem is said to come to light following request for therapy for a seemingly unrelated problem like: sleep or eating disorder, depression, marital problems. Therapy encourages the recovery of repressed memory. The victim is encouraged to relive a traumatic memory, in order to cured of the trauma.

Features of satanic ceremony folklore such as the Black Mass, human sacrifice, drinking of blood, and satanic symbols are common, although victims find it heard to remember these.

The problem with this therapy is over-generalisation. No doubt some cases can be traced to the above-mentioned origins, but to presume that all have the same source is dangerous.

Contemporary Christian psychology can be divided into the following schools:

Larry Crabb: Inside out/ Basis of biblical counselling. Attempts to combine Bible and psychology

Jay Adams: Christian Counsellor's Manual + Theology of Christian Counselling. Rejects any psychology

Kenneth McGrath: Healing the family tree. Bases his thesis on peculiar interpretation of heredity. SRA would seem to come in this category.

HINDUISM

HINDUISM: It has been said that Hinduism is more like a tree that has grown gradually, than like a building that has been erected by some great architect at some point in time. It is a living example of a great national paganism such as might have existed in Europe if Christianity had not become the state religion of the Empire, if there had remained an incongruous jumble of old local superstitions, Greek philosophy, and oriental cults such as the worship of Serapis or Mithras".

As its name implies, it is essentially the religion of India (the word *Hindu* is a corrupt form of *Sindhu*, a region watered by the river Indus).

Early Beginnings

India is about half the size of the USA but contains nearly one fifth of the human race. From the northern mountains great rivers flow down, and it is hardly surprising that the inhabitants of the well-watered plains should have looked with awe at the vast and distant

Himalayas and should have believed that they contained the celestial home of the great and terrible god Siva, as well as the centre of the world: while they held the huge stream of the Ganges, one of the four rivers flowing from the mythical Mount Kailas, to be most sacred and of supernatural origin. This may well be a very distorted memory of the four rivers flowing out of Eden, in Genesis 2.

The very earliest inhabitants are now thought to have been negritos of the Andaman Island type, which survives in the Kadras and Uralis of the forests of the extreme South.

The australoids came later, and even today the oldest surviving stratum of the population bears some resemblance to the Australian aborigine. Their religion is either almost pure pluralistic animism or an animism modified by contact with the deities and doctrines of orthodox Hinduism. Typical of such people are the Chenchus and Baigas of the Central Provinces, or the Oraons of Chota Nagpur.

Between 4,000 and 2,500 BC a superior brand of people entered India either by land or sea. The name of this colonising people which spread to Southern India is **Dravidian**. They appear to be physically akin to the people who created the first beginnings of the Sumerian civilisation in Mesopotamia. Their religion exhibited at an early stage some of the elements associated with 19th

century Hinduism (a horned figure seated in a cross-legged position, similar to the god Siva, sacred horned cattle, snake spirits – Nagas – and a tree cult, female vegetation deity, phallus). All of this is very close to baal worship as found in the OT, especially regarding fertility religion. Other aspects of institutionalized hinduism also have parallels elsewhere: megalithic culture similar to that of bronze-age Europe, snake-cult has parallels in Crete, bull-worshipping and bull-fighting practices in the mediterranean world, fire-walking ceremonies.

Traces of their civilisation have been found in Northern India, in the excavated towns of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. They tended to worship at rivers. Their religion majored on yoga, renunciation and purification rites.

In 1700 BC "**proto-Nordics**" began to cross over the North-West frontier passes into the Punjab. These were barbarians, supposed to have come from the area of South-East Russia. They spoke of themselves as Aryas, a word believed to be derived from a root connected with agriculture; but as they used it, it meant "nobles", "gentry", or "aristocracy". They spoke contemptuously of the australoids as being "apes", "squat-nosed". They made great efforts to keep their race pure, and the 3-fold division (primitive tribes, proto-Dravidians and proto-Nordics) gives the obvious explanation of much that is connected with the origin and early development of the caste system.

According to Robert Brow, the original religion of the Aryans consisted in the worship of one God – the Divine

Father (*Dyaus Pitar*, also known as the heavenly one (sansk. *varuna*) or the Friend (sansk. *mitra*) , the practice of animal sacrifice and a fascination with the fire (sansk. *agni*) that consumed the sacrifice. They were nomads who cremated their dead. Gradually story-tellers embellished their tales with love and jealousy and war and drunkenness, and so the mythologies appeared.

The Religion of the Vedic Age

Sanskrit is a word meaning "the cultured or aristocratic language", as opposed to Prakrit "the vulgar tongue". Sanskrit was probably a living language up to the first centuries of the Christian era, and is closely allied to ancient Persian since the Nordic invaders of India were a branch of the same people who, a little earlier, invaded Persia, and Iran and Arya are much the same words. Many people think they are a branch of the Hurrians or Mitanni. The characters in which Sanskrit came to be written are derived from an old Semitic alphabet, similar to that used in certain Phoenician and Moabit tablets. Long after writing was in common use, the literature which was called Vedic was still being handed down by word of mouth. Because it was sacred, it had to be kept secret, and was not allowed to be known or uttered by members of the lower castes, and it may not have been committed to writing until well after the time of Christ. Their worship centred around the fire into which they cast offerings and with which they burned their dead. They worshipped personified natural forces and

practised animal sacrifice. Their priests held a monopoly of magic incantations. Their main god was Indra, who overcomes the powers of evil and brings the world into being. Then there is Agni who is the personification of the sacrificial fire. Varunna is the chief of the gods because ceremonial rites (*rita*) and law (*dharma*) are administered by him

The word *veda* is derived from a root, *vid*, to know and is much the same as the Greek verb *oida* (cf. cognate word "gnosis" and Gnostic). It means in fact, knowledge or transmitted wisdom. The Veda proper is divided up into four books:

- 1 the Rig Veda or Royal Veda which is made up of 1,028 hymns in 10 sub-divisions.
- 2 The Sama-Veda, which consists of selections of the same hymns specially arranged for chanting during sacrifice.
- 3 The Yajur-Veda, which is liturgical prose.
- 4 The Atharva-Veda, which is a much more popular collection, consisting of charms and incantations (*mantras*)

The material of these books overlaps considerably, the basic material being the 4 Samhitas or collections of partly similar material with varying additions.

The Rig Veda is essentially a collection of priestly upper-class literature, whereas the Atharva Veda mainly concerns the religion of the common people. As a collection of hymns, the Rig-Veda seems to have closed as early as 800 BC.

In the course of time, the Dravidian and Aryan peoples intermarried, and their religions became syncretised to some degree. The result was the adoption of the Vedic literature as the sacred property of both peoples, but the conquerors treated it as too sacred to be imparted to persons of a lower caste, while their subjects regarded it as possessing positively magical properties. The Vedas are, in part at any rate, the sophisticated products of a highly developed priesthood, and not by any means folk-poetry. A later generation came to call these hymns "*sruti*" or revelation, "that which has been heard". Since however, most of them consist of lyrical address to the greater deities of the people concerned, it is difficult to see what, in a literal sense, they reveal. This, it seems, was soon realised, and in consequence, commentaries and allegorical interpretations had to be introduced. Two examples of Vedic hymns may be given here: the first, addressed to Agni, the god of fire, represents him as the priest-attendant of the other gods, but also as of great benefit to mankind, bringing light and warmth, enabling men to work metals and so grow rich, and doubtless also making it. The second hymn, entitled "to Indra" (God of the thundercloud) is actually a chieftain's drinking song,

and it is implied that Indra himself is the speaker, a super-warrior, arrogant and half-intoxicated.

The background to the Aryans explains much concerning the preoccupation of such hymns: at the time their composition, they were becoming an agricultural rather than an urbanised people. They know about barley, which they grow and use, presumably much as Tibetans do today. Their chief weapon is the bow and which was eventually regarded by them with supernatural awe. They are warlike and restless in disposition. They are heavy eaters and drinkers, and they are acquainted with a species of alcohol (Soma) which they hold sacred. They are at first grouped into five tribes and each tribe has its prince or chieftain. The ruling class are called Kshatriyas or warriors. Kingship is hereditary and so is priesthood, which, even at the time of entry into India, is fully developed. There were several sorts of priests, the chief or which is called the *hotar*, who composed and recited the sacred hymns. Each prince had a domestic chaplain or family priest, called a *purohita*, and *purohit* as a class survives to this day. The priest received a *dakshina* or fee for properly performing the sacrifice.

The divine powers believed in and worshipped by these early Nordic colonists are powers of nature in the first instance, and there is to begin with, no idea of a single supreme godhead. Indeed, the primary notion seems to be that of a plurality of powers, not even personal ones, but connected with the various objects, occurrences or

episodes of daily life. There are also demons who represent the grim and hostile forces of nature. Some of the minor divinities, such as Aranyi (She of the wild wood), look like loans from the pantheon of the people who were conquered. Aranyi means jungle and is therefore simply the spirit worshipped by the jungle tribes. Trees and plants, too, are worshipped in the Vedic period and later and may be the same as those venerated by the proto-Dravidians of the pre-Vedic period. Yet it has been inferred that the Aryas brought a good many of their gods with them, since the names of divinities found on inscriptions in Asia Minor are the same as those of divinities referred to in the Vedic hymns. Cremation is the common way of disposing of the dead, though ordinary earth-burial seems to have preceded it. Perhaps it was the Dravidians who practised the latter, and the Aryas who cremated, since if you are a nomad on trek, it is more natural to dispose of a body by burning it on a camp-fire and this also prevents any enemy from mishandling the corpse.

The Vedas prescribe four chief ends in life:

- a) the observance of *dharma* (duty of one's caste)
- b) the earning of one's living
- c) the enjoyment of the legitimate pleasures of life
- d) the re-absorption of the individual life into that of the Great Self.

The religion of the vedas seems in essence to have been an attempt to dominate the other inhabitants of the Indian peninsular by means of a system of secret formulas etc. The creation of the caste system seems to have been an attempt at a primitive form of apartheid. The old word for Hinduism contains the word *dharma* which means “doing that which is appropriate to one's place in society” (and not asking any questions) rather like the class system in 19th century industrial England, against which Marx railed.

With the gradual synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan religion, Vedic religion developed in a ritualistic direction. The worship of the Vedic gods developed into an elaborate sacrificial ritual, whose efficacy depended on its correct performance by the professional priests. Worship became an end in itself. The priest or Brahmin alone had the magic chant (*mantra*) which had power over the will of the gods. This is called the **Brahmanas** period. The simplicity of earlier polytheism was replaced by an emphasis on external forms of sacrificial ritual. The **Upanishad** period was a reaction against all these rites and sacrifices, which expressed itself in a preoccupation with philosophy. Forest schools began to flourish whose hermits sought for the internal and symbolic meaning of the sacrifices. People wanted to discover the unifying principle of the universe. The personalities of the various gods became little more than names for the one being. In the Upanishads, Vedic polytheism is merged with pantheistic monism. This is also seen in the creation hymns of the Rig-Veda. The human soul (*atman*) came to

be seen as consisting of the same essence as the ground of the universe (*brahman*). Thus, *jnana* (knowledge) took the place of *yajna* (sacrifice) as the way to God. *Karma* (law of cause and effect) is given a wider meaning than that of ritual, and the process of *samsara* (rebirth) developed from it. The non-Vedic idea of renunciation and ascetism opened the way for the classical understanding of *moksha* (deliverance), *upasana* (meditation) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Age of morality, renunciation, good works During the 6th cent BC there was a wave of revolt against priestly religion and intellectual speculation, throughout the ancient world. Zoroaster (628-551), Buddha (563-483), Mahavira (599-527), the founder of Jainism, and Confucius (551-497) were the great prophets of the period. Their reaction was ethical, centring on concern for morality, renunciation, good works and respect for all of life. In India, the period was marked by the appearance of Buddhism and Jainism.

These arose as reforming sects retaining the ethical ideas of Brahmanism, but repudiating the authority of the Vedas, and rejecting priestly religion and sacrifices.

Buddhism: Buddhism is an offspring of Hinduism. It is Hinduism shorn of its national characteristics and made into a technique for reaching an advanced stage of consciousness (*nirvana*). While Islam arose 600 years after Jesus Christ, Buddhism came into being almost 600 years before Christ. In time it was edged out of India and exported to many countries, to become the major religion

of the Far East. Today it covers a very wide spectrum of belief and practice.

Buddha's practical teaching on the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path avoided any discussion on metaphysical questions. Buddhism early developed its own distinctive doctrines of the soul and the world and Nirvana, the state of perfection in which the flame of desire is extinguished. The Buddhist emphasis on monastic life and religion without worship separated it from orthodox Hinduism.

Jainism stayed within the fold of Hinduism. The name comes from the last of their great teachers, the Jain (the victorious one) cf. Buddha, the enlightened one who gave his name to a movement of the same name. However, the founder of the movement, a contemporary and opponent of Buddha, was also a mystic who claimed to have achieved total enlightenment. He died of voluntary self-starvation which established a tradition of fasting unto death. It was older and more conservative than Buddhism, and in fact claims to belong to a tradition (salvation through atheism and asceticism) which is as old as that of the brahmins. It repudiated Vedic authority and belief in a personal God, and rejected the caste system. It observed the strict ethic of *Ahimsa* (non-killing) which was to profoundly influence Mahatma Ghandi. Because of the danger of killing animals, none of them went in for farming but concentrating on activities like banking. Other vows include an undertaking not to speak untruth, not to steal, continence and renunciation of world pleasures. It is well known for the severe

austerities of its ascetics. It was born in Bihar and to this day is concentrated on two states in Northern India: Gujarat and Rajasthan

There followed a period of **Hindu renaissance**, as a reaction against Buddhism. There was a growing synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures. Gods and goddesses worshipped by ordinary people were accepted into the Hindu pantheon and eventually personified as the Supreme God. The theistic movements of the *bakhti* cults had their origin in the non-Vedic cultures.

The key literary expression of this period of Hindu renaissance is the **Bagavad-Gita**. In it the concept of yoga is extended to the whole of spiritual life, and *yajna* (sacrifice) is interpreted in an ethical rather than ritual way. *Karma* is interpreted as selfless action. Salvation comes through *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion to your personal god) and *karma* (action). It is, in brief, an attempt to modernise Hinduism to suit a more sophisticated society. The emphasis is on morality (ethics) rather than on ritual.

Sikhism founded by Nanak (AD 1469-1538) represents an attempt to harmonise Islam (mostly sufism) and Hinduism (*bhakti*). It is centred geographically on the Punjab where there was already a tradition of mystical movements. After initial acceptance by Islam, it was later attacked by unfriendly islamic rulers and organised itself into a militaristic community.

Nanak organised his disciples (called *sikhs*) into a close-knit community with himself as the *guru* or teacher. His nine successors were also recognised as sources of divine

revelation. The last guru died at the beginning of the 18th century. The fifth guru built the golden temple at Amritsa. Since then the sacred book of the Sikhs (containing their poetry), the *Adi-Granth*, has become the sole authority of the movement. Salvation, which is seen in terms of mystical union with the Formless One, is primarily through the power of *bhakti*.

The Holy Name (on which they meditate) and the guru play a mediating role. It is the only *bhakti* sect to separate itself from Hinduism.

The **Radha-Krishna** cult is the second *bhakti* movement. It centers on the impassioned devotion of Krishna for Radha, the cowherd girl. In Bengal, Caitanya (1485-1533) turned the Krishna cult into a powerful religious movement. His intense emotional devotion to Krishna accompanied by *kirtan* (communal singing) has provided the inspiration for the Hare-Krishna cult.

Basic concepts of Hinduism:

There are two clear types of Hinduism, the spiritual and the popular, and between them there is an enormous gap in which you can find monotheists, polytheists and philosophers. Of all the countries of the world, India still contains the largest number of persons leading lives of asceticism. They take their religion seriously, and atheism is really something that is foreign to the Indian mind-set. What do they normally have in common?

1. **Brahman, God and creation:** The search for Brahman, Eternal Being or Reality is the preoccupation of the Hindu mind. For some schools, this means belief in a

personal God which is called ultimate Reality. According to the Upanishads all reality is an aspect of Brahman. The physical world, with its apparent diversity is neither real nor unreal; it is mere illusion (*maya*) i.e. of no importance. Only thought is real. Most Hindus, including those who believe in a variety of gods, accept the notion of an all-pervading God.

But God, however defined in Hinduism, is never Creator of the universe: he always creates out of something or out of himself, never out of what did not exist previously. In Christianity, **creation** is distinct from God and has a **moral** purpose.

Sankara philosophy, a minority view, believes that matter is eternal and evil, thus putting god and matter in eternal opposition (i.e. a dualism).

2. Karma, samsara and moksha: *karma* is action or doing, and is based on the idea of cause and effect. What a man sows, he shall also reap. Every separate deed determines the future life. No repentance is possible and no remission of sin by divine forgiveness is possible either. Bad actions reap suffering and bondage to human existence. According to the law of karma, a man may be reborn as a god, a member of a higher or lower caste, or as an animal. *Samsara* is rebirth or transmigration of the soul into a body. Man is in fact the sum of his past.

Karma determines the acts appropriate to each caste. What may be right for one, may be wrong for another. Thus the concepts of good and evil are determined by the structures of human society rather than by the moral attributes of a personal god. The aim of all Hindus is to

escape from the wheel of samsara and from karma itself. *Moksha* means escape from the wheel of successive reincarnations (birth, death, rebirth), from justice and injustice (i.e. morality) and from the universe of space and time (cf. Satan's offer to Eve).

3. Sin, soul and salvation: Hinduism is concerned with the eternal being of the soul, rather than with the soul's relationship to God or to other souls. The soul (what we would call the spirit) is imprisoned within the impurities of finite existence, but in itself it is detached from the personal experiences of the physical empirical self (soul + body). The soul (i.e. spirit) does not act, and so it is not the agent of sin. This is exactly what the gnostics believed. Personality belongs to the body.

Sin, for the Hindu, does not mean an offense against a personal God, but has a more metaphysical idea: it is ignorance of the truth, feeling of individuality. In the Bagavad Gita we find the idea of the disinterested action which is performed without attachment to its consequences or fruit (an idea reminiscent of existentialism). There is no idea of a consistent God: he may forgive or he may not, according to his whim. This is like Islam.

Since all is illusion, evil is unreal. The cause of human misery and suffering is ignorance, man thinking of himself as real and separate from Brahman. Sin and suffering in this life may be due to misdeeds in a past life. No one is morally responsible.

Salvation (*moksha*) is escape from the bondage of physical existence and absorption in the universal soul.

4. **Yoga:** comes from a word *yug*, meaning to unite or yoke. The aim of yoga is union with the deity. The physical side is only the preparatory stage and is devised in order to secure poise, bodily fitness and calm self-control. It is basically divided into two grades *hatha yoga* (physical training) and *raga yoga* (mental training). A further analysis gives: *krija yoga* (preparatory exercises), *bhakti yoga* (union by love), *karma yoga* (union by works), *jnana yoga* (union by knowledge), *hatha yoga* (union by physical exercises), *raja yoga* (union by will). There is also *mantra yoga* (the repetition of a sacred sentence), *laya yoga* (concentration). As a rule, whoever seeks to practise yoga will select a spiritual director or *guru*. The goal sought after is called *samadhi* (a specially exalted state of consciousness or trance).

The aim of yoga is to produce a radical alteration in the mode of human consciousness which transcends both space and time. The technique probably preceded the coming of the Aryans to India.

All these are basically ways of salvation (salvation meaning escape from the law of karma and the cycle of rebirth).

5. **Sacrifice** was intended *not* to atone for sin, but to strengthen the exhausted gods, and it was even considered a means of gaining power over the gods, entirely apart from moral considerations. In fact, knowledge is the way to salvation: it is not salvation from wickedness or wrong-doing, but salvation from ignorance (i.e. through enlightenment). The moment a man knows himself to be one with the Atman-Brahman,

he is released. But this has *no* sort of relation to moral regeneration. To be wise is more important than to be good, since good (and evil) seem to belong to the sphere of illusion from which wisdom sets one free, so that one can 'live above' good and evil.

6. The caste system: the word for caste in India is *varna* = colour (applies to four main castes), and *jati* = rank, birth, lineage (applies to the others). It is thus evident that the earliest phase of the caste system resulted from the conquest of one people by another of a different skin-colouring. The old divisions were into five grades: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (merchants, or earlier, agriculturalists), Sudras (artisans and later land-workers) and Pariahs (outsiders). The addition of vast numbers (sometimes over 2,000) of minor castes, either occupational or due to conquest, and the effects of colonisation, or the assimilation by Hinduism of some primitive non-Hindu people – all these have enormously complicated the system. Finally, the general belief in re-birth has meant that some religious teachers have encouraged the idea that transgression may involve being born in a lower caste, and that *merit* may lead, conversely, to promotion in the next state of reappearance on earth. Side by side with this, and inconsistent with it, is the doctrine that caste is a kind of predestined order, and which by no sort of device can one be changed from one caste into another while one lives. Caste, in this view, is hereditary, and all persons have to "keep their proper stations".

6. Reincarnation: It is also called the transmigration of souls or metempsychosis and means that human or animal souls pass through more than one bodily existence in this world. The law of reincarnation has been called the safety valve of hinduism: if you don't manage it first time, you can always go round for a second try. You can always have a second chance. This is all somewhat reminiscent of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory: everyone who goes there will get to heaven in the end. Reincarnation is thus seen as a judgement, whereas the aim of salvation is to escape from the body into a primeaval nothingness (*nirvana*). In this respect reincarnation is incompatible with the judaeo-christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body to either eternal life or to condemnation.

In Christian belief, the body is seen as an integral part of the personality, which at death (which is seen as an aberration, and result of sin) is only temporarily separated from the invisible part of man. Both are destined to be reunited at the resurrection, at which point the **body** becomes immortal (meaning no longer subject to the sin and death) thus enabling the believer, while no longer limited to time and space, to live in the time-space universe. Unbelievers are resurrected to be sentenced to hell, to which they go in their bodies. In Christian thought then, man is seen essentially as a psycho-somatic unity (not as a disembodied spirit) who has been created to live in a material environment.

Hindu Scriptures: These are divided into two classes:

Sruti (what is heard = eternal truth) which is the equivalent of our canonical Scriptures and **Smriti** (what is remembered = secondary authority). Sruti is the result of what the super-seers of antiquity (*rishis*) saw or heard, and is contained in the Vedas. Smriti is really an expansion of the principles found in the Vedas, and these are contained in all the other sacred books. These are:

Vedas: 1500-1000 BC (Joshua to Solomon)

Upanishads 1000-600 BC (Solomon to the Babylonian exile)

Gitas: Middle Ages: popular modern hinduism.

The **Vedas** (from a root meaning: to know = knowledge or transmitted wisdom) are collections of hymns, prayers and magical formulae. There are four of them: the Rig-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda. Each consists of three parts: the *mantras* (hymns in praise of the gods), the *Brahmanas* which are a guide for the performance of sacrificial rites for the pleasing of the gods and the Upanishads (a philosophical interpretation of the principles enshrined in the liturgy).

The Vedas are, in part at any rate, the sophisticated products of a highly developed priesthood, and not by any means folk-poetry. A later generation came to call these hymns "*sruti*" or revelation, "that which has been heard". Since however, most of them consist of lyrical address to the greater deities of the people concerned, it is difficult to see what, in a literal sense, they reveal. This, it seems, was soon realised, and in consequence,

commentaries and allegorical interpretations had to be introduced.

Then there are the **Upanishads** which are speculations in philosophy and mystical discourses on spiritual truths. The word Upanishad means 'to sit down beside someone and give him some secret teaching'. The teaching based on the Upanishads is called the **Vedanta**.

From these writings we glimpse a picture of the worship of a variety of gods by means of ritual sacrifices. Most of the gods are personifications of the powers of nature, such as the celestial bodies, fire, storm, air, water and rain.

Then there are the law codes, called **Manu**.

Then there are two great Hindu epics: the **Ramayana** and the **Mahavarata**, which expound the principles of the Vedas by interpreting the exploits of the great national heroes. Characters such as Rama and Sita depict the ideals of moral and social behaviour for the individual, the family and the nation. The Ramayana relates the story of Rama, the ideal man, and shows how an individual should behave towards all other men and how a community should live in peace and harmony.

The **Mahavarata** is the story of the conflict between two branches of the same family. Through parables and dialogues, the epic seeks to answer the moral, spiritual and metaphysical problems of the times. One such dialogue is the *Bagavad-Gita* (Song of the Lord) which consists of a conversation between Arjuna, the warrior prince, and his charioteer Krishna, who is the disguised incarnation of the god Vishnu. It calls for disinterested

action in doing one's duty according to one's status in society. It has been said that the *Bagavad-Gita* is the watershed that separates the pantheistic monism of the Upanishads from the fervent theism of the later popular cults.

Then there are the **Puranas**, which seek to evoke religious devotion among the masses, through myths, stories and legends, and events in national history, though they are more concerned with ideal truth than historical truth.

Stories about the several *avatars* (incarnations) of the god Vishnu belong to this category. These stories, in which heroes display virtues such as honesty, chastity and self-sacrifice, have played a significant part in the formation of the Hindu moral code.

Then there are the **Agamas** which are the theological treatises and manuals for worship of the 3 main branches of Hinduism: Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism. Their appeal is to the masses.

The **Darsanas** are philosophical in character and are meant for the scholar. Each of the six main schools of Hindu philosophy has sought to systematise the vedic literature and their own tenets in the form of short aphorisms, or sutras.]

The Modern period: The arrival of Christianity resulted in both a number of influential converts and the beginning of a self-reforming movement within Hinduism itself.

a) **The Bramo Samaj:** essentially tried to develop a syncretic form of Hinduism and Christianity.

Debendranath Tagore introduced the important principle that the teachings of the Hindu Scriptures were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonised with reason and the light within. This marks the beginning of Hindu *liberalism*.

b) **The Arja Samaj**, on the other hand, represents a *conservative reaction* to the liberalising influences of the day. The founder accepted the infallibility of the four Vedas, but attacked religious accretions such as image worship, the caste system, incarnations, pilgrimages and child marriages.. He campaigned for a monotheistic form of Hinduism, open to all, regardless of caste and nationality.

Mention should here be made of the **Theosophical Society**, founded by Mme Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, as an occult movement sympathetic to Hinduism and bitterly opposed to orthodox Christianity. In India, Mrs Annie Besant, an ardent theosophist, out-did the Hindu reformers in her zeal to defend everything Hindu. She, more than any other foreigner, helped forward the movement of Hindu renaissance. All these names are important in the development of the NEW AGE movement.

c) **The Ramakrishna Mission**: was founded by a man of that name. His main emphasis was on the mystic experience of complete union with God. For him, good and evil ceased to have any meaning once he had experienced deliverance through *samadhi* (trance). His successor, Datta, who actually founded the mission, tried to make Hinduisim into a universal world religion. It is

not surprising that he rejected the exclusive claims of Christianity.

d) **Tagore and Gandhi:** Tagore was a great poet who reinterpreted the Upanishads in the light of his own experience. He believed that evil is only relative and can overcome by perfection. He taught that contact with nature led to experience of the divine. Gandhi was a practical politician and a deeply religious ascetic. He believed that all religions are true, being a reflection of the universal religion.

e) **Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan:** Aurobindo was a typical gnostic who taught that the divine energy is at work everywhere, manifesting its presence in both an ascending and descending order. It descends through three orders of reality: a supreme plane of infinite consciousness, a middle plane of supermind or gnosis, and a lower plane of mind, life and matter. The process of transformation from matter to life, to consciousness, to supraconsciousness, ends in a complete identity with the Absolute, and is advanced through a process of yoga. He looked for the emergence of an élite of supermen who would initiate salvation for all.

Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, tried to synthesise liberal Christianity with Hinduism.

f) **Contemporary gurus:** have sought to give Hinduism popular appeal by relating it to the individual needs of modern man. Modern man, having come to a dead end through the mechanistic universe and naturalistic ideologies, is searching for an alternative. He has thus turned to various forms of mystical experience, through

yoga, drugs, the occult and sex. The modern Hindu gurus have capitalised on this vacuum. They can be divided into 4 categories:

- a) Those who offer their followers various psychic experiences.
- b) Those who offer their disciples the attainment of super-consciousness through nudity and sex experiences. This has been done through reviving certain old techniques of attaining super-consciousness.
- c) Those who offer the attainment of mental peace, rest and energy through Transcendental Meditation. The technique involves the silent recitation of a mantra (usually a monosyllabic word). During a 20-minute period of meditation, the meditator experiences a deep rest because he stops all physical and mental activity. All these people have basically marketed certain techniques taken from Hinduism, in order to pander to the modern man's desire for kicks. However, it is also a means of winning adepts to Hinduism. It is also interesting to reflect that certain Christian choruses bear a strange resemblance to mantras, which were current among hippy people who composed these choruses when they became Christians.

A more recent export version of Hindu ideas is called Virtual Worlds in which a person can establish an alternative world in cyberspace as an avatar – an incarnation of how they would like life to be, which often corresponds to a desired re-incarnation. It now has 1.5 million adepts.

THEOSOPHY

This movement, which has much more in common with hinduism and buddhism, was founded by a woman who had a profound hatred for Christianity. Her name was Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). She is an important figure because she was a populariser of Hindu ideas and one of the founder figures of the modern New Age movement. Her successor, Annie Besant, is also claimed by the New Age movement as one of its precursors. Mrs Blavatsky's basic contention is that there is truth in all religions and that *hinduism was the original religion*, of which the others are modifications or even distortions. She hated Christianity because of its exclusive claims and became more Hindu than the Hindus!

Beliefs of Theosophy:

1. **God:** She rejected the idea of a personal God (which is a similar idea to that of Brahman in hinduism). She said: "We believe in the universal, divine principle, the root of all, from which all proceeds, and within which all shall be absorbed at the end of the great cycle of being".
2. **Man;** Man consists of 7 parts (not two or three) which also represent several reincarnations through which a person must pass to attain nirvana: 1. The body, 2. vitality, 3. astral body, 4. animal soul, 5. human soul, 6. spiritual soul and 7. spirit. Salvation is achieved when the seventh state is reached. This is similar to the hindu doctrine of karma.

3. **Jesus:** Christ is "the divine principle in every human being." However, it is difficult to see how she can arrive at this conclusion (unless you rate him as a bodhisattva – one who delays reaching absolute perfection in order to help others to get there). The word Christ means Messiah which is a title, not a separate person from that of Jesus.

4. **Reincarnation** is fundamental to her system of thought: the idea that people must go through a series of lives to atone for their sins.

5. **Heaven and hell;** these are irrelevant to her system and so do not exist. The aim of life is the attainment of *nirvana*, that is, absorption into the divine spirit from where we originally came.

6. **The Bible,** is seen as being inferior to the hindu scriptures, being a pale reflection of the original, the Vedas.

The inevitable conclusion is that Theosophy has nothing whatever to do with the judeo- christian revelation.

HARE KRISHNA

Of all the countries of the world, India still contains the largest number of persons leading, or at any rate professing to lead, lives of asceticism.

According to Indian census returns, one in eighty of the population is registered as following the vocation of a professional ascetic. Many will either retire at the end of

their life to undergo this course or at other times go on a sort of spiritual retreat.

Religious Observances: Hinduism as a working system

There are two clear types of Hinduism, the spiritual and the popular and between them there is an enormous gap. Indians, however, distinguish three types of Hinduism: jnana yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga. Although a certain proportion of Hindus are monotheists, or even philosophers who practise an inward worship of the impersonal, a large percentage are still believers in gods many and lords many. Brahma is the equivalent of Zeus, Krishna of Apollo, Kmadeva of Eros, the various avatars of Vishnu (other than Krishna). Then there are all kinds of minor deities connected with heavenly bodies, or with local objects of importance such as trees and stones, deified heroes, a number of sacred rivers and five holy lakes.

Dharma plays a big part in Hinduism = performance of duties appropriate to one's caste, which may be ceremonial rather than moral and may involve keeping such taboos as not eating, drinking or smoking with other castes, not eating prohibited food, and not engaging in a forbidden occupation.

The Vedas prescribe four chief ends in life:

- a) the observance of dharma
- b) the earning of one's living
- c) the enjoyment of the legitimate pleasures of life

d) the re-absorption of the individual life into that of the Great Self.

There is really no such thing as congregational worship, except where *bhakti* devotees assemble for a *kirtan*, or *bhajan* (hymn singing). Hindu worship is of two kinds: a) domestic b) temple, but domestic means private, and temple worship is performed either by priests, with individuals merely acting as spectators, or by individuals who go through some private act of *puja* or devotion.

The **Radha-Krishna** cult is a *bhakti* movement, that is to say, a movement based on devotion to one particular God. It centers on the impassioned devotion of Krishna for Radha, the cowherd girl. In Bengal, Caitanya (1485-1533) turned the Krishna cult into a powerful religious movement. His intense emotional devotion to Krishna accompanied by *kirtan* (communal singing) has provided the inspiration for the Hare-Krishna cult.

This cult has become popular in the West and is therefore an export version of Hinduism, which is the religion of India.

Its full name is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON). As the name implies, its members claim to be the true followers of Krishna, one of the Hindu gods who, they feel, has been neglected in mainstream hinduism.

It belongs to the Hindu sect of Vishnuism, which believes that Vishnu, the supreme God, manifested himself at one

time as Krishna. Kaytanya turned this doctrine on its head by saying that Krishna was the chief God who had revealed himself at one time as Vishnu. It centers on the worship of Krishna who is promoted as the universal God. It is therefore an attempt to universalise hinduism. The Krishna version of Paul might say today: the unknown god which you worship in ignorance, we now proclaim to you: he has revealed himself (in an *avatar* = god in disguise) as Vishnu. It is therefore, in a sense, a counterfeit version of Christianity. But the resemblance to Christianity is very superficial, because the hinduistic and judaeo-christian world views are very different. It is therefore an export version of hinduism, geared to western tastes.

The doctrine of ISKON was brought to the USA by one particular guru who remained its leader until his death in 1977. Today the organisation is ruled by two different groups: a group of 11 men who rule over spiritual matters and a board of directors which is in charge of administrative matters.

Today the adherents of ISKON no longer go around dressed in saffron robes, and they disguise their baldness by wearing a wig. The only thing that really distinguishes them now is the flashy magazine which they sell.

It is a wealthy organisation with about 10,000 members in the USA and gets most of its money from either begging or selling their magazine.

Its teachings are basically as follows:

1. Krishna is the supreme God and Jesus is just one of his many manifestations. In this sense Jesus can be called Krishna's son, but as he is one of a number of manifestations, he is not unique and cannot have made exclusive claims. It is important to note that Jesus is not an incarnation of Krishna, because incarnation is seen as bad (as a punishment) because matter is seen as evil. They also believed that Jesus promoted the worship of Krishna. Therefore the message of ISKON is: "Abandon all varieties of religion and surrender to me".

2. The way of salvation according to ISKON is basically this: Love God (Krishna) enough and you will be saved. This reminds one of the medieaval teaching of such people as Bernard of Clairveaux and Abélard: love God enough and you will be saved.

How do you show your devotion to Krishna?

1. By chanting his name, which enables one to get through to the spiritual and divest oneself of the material. Fundamental to his idea is the thought that this world does not represent ultimate reality: it is really evil and clouds the senses of those who are entangled in it. By chanting this mantra, one produces an altered state of consciousness. Every follower of Krishna has a set of 108 beads. For each bead they must sing the Hare Krishna chants 16 times, making a total of 1,728 chants daily. The chant is: "*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare.*"

2. By meditating upon the divine play and deeds of Krishna.

3. By engaging in the rites and ceremonies of Krishna worship. This involves the sacrifice of water, rice and flowers to the god. By so doing, worshippers are cleansed of sinful reactions and get a taste of the eternal sphere.

4. At the end of one's life, one must have Krishna as the last thing on one's mind, for in that state one will spend eternity.

Underlying the Hindu idea of salvation is the idea of performance and merit. Good deeds can atone for bad ones. Besides, what they mean by salvation is: escape from *karma* (one's past sins) and from matter in general (or more exactly, the wheel of reincarnation or imprisonment in matter or *samsara*), which includes morality and the world of space and time, and a merging with the world spirit, Krishna (= brahma). If you love Krishna you can do it, break free from this world's gravitational pull and go sailing off into space.

What, then, are the fundamental differences between Hare Krishna (i.e. hinduism) and Christianity?

1. Hinduism is a pantheistic religion whereas Christianity is a monotheistic one. Hinduism claims that the life principle in creation (not lifeless matter) is a projection (or emanation) of God and so part of God. Therefore all life is divine. Christianity claims that God created the universe and that it is separate from him. This means that

physical life and also other spirit beings are not divine but have been created.

2. Hinduism claims that this world (matter, not spirit) is bad. Somehow the spiritual (the real world) has become entangled with matter (which is bad and causes illusion in man: it makes him think that he is not part of God, not divine). We get the full picture when we look at gnostic teaching about the creator: The Supreme Being generated (not created) a series of spirit beings, but subsequently one of these (the demiurge = craftsman or gnostic equivalent of the Logos), far removed from the supreme being, fell into error and created the material world. Creation was thus the result of sinful independence (an attempt to break away from the spiritual oneness of the universe). The serpent was seen by many gnostics as a symbol of opposition to the evil god of creation. So the devil is seen as essentially good: he is working for the salvation of mankind (a return to the pure spiritual state).

Christianity claims that the world is good (that is, matter) but that it has been marred by the effects of man's rebellion. Morality is not a result of the fall but a reflection of God's character. It claims that God is going to renew this present creation to make a new heavens and a new earth.

3. Hinduism claims that man's basic problem is that he is imprisoned in a body. Christianity claims that he is a rebel against God and therefore destined to be banished for ever from his presence.

4. Hinduism claims that the solution to man's dilemma is to escape from creation and realise his divine nature by being reabsorbed in God. Christianity claims that the answer is to accept God's solution (Jesus became a man in order to die for our sins and pay the price of our salvation) and to be remade in the image of his creator, in order that he may come back into this world (by means of resurrection) in a glorified body which will be for ever beyond the reach of sin and death, in order to live with God (in the person of Jesus) in a re-created universe.

In Christian belief, the body is seen as an integral part of the personality, which at death (which is seen as an aberration, and result of sin) is only temporarily separated from the invisible part of man. Both are destined to be reunited at the resurrection, at which point the **body** becomes immortal (meaning no longer subject to the sin and death) thus enabling the believer, while no longer limited to time and space, to live in the time-space universe. Unbelievers are resurrected to be sentenced to hell, to which they go in their bodies. In Christian thought then, man is seen essentially as a psycho-somatic unity (not as a disembodied spirit) who has been created to live in a material environment.

Hinduism can be seen to be very similar to the gnostic heresy encountered by the early church in the first century and condemned in many epistles. The apostle John condemns denial of the incarnation as being of the Antichrist. Gnostics claimed that Jesus was not a real

man: he only appeared to be one. The divine spirit came on Jesus at his baptism but left him before the cross.

Satan has been in the business of counterfeiting God's way of salvation, right from the beginning. Hare Krishna is just a modern export version of hinduism which is being offered by Satan, who still appears as an angel of light. When we hear the invitation: "Abandon all varieties of religion and surrender to me", we are reminded of what Satan once said to Jesus: "All this I will give you, if you kneel down and worship me". The Devil also said to Adam and Eve: "Join my rebellion (eat the fruit) and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil = you will be beyond good and evil." The Devil is of course a supreme liar who wants as many people to join him in hell as possible, and is quite prepared to use religion for this purpose.

BUDDHISM

BUDDHISM: The founder was Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakya clan. He is also referred to by such honorific titles as *buddha* (the enlightened one), or *tathagata* (he who conforms to a standard type), or simply *bhagava* (lord). He was born in 563 on the borders of Nepal. His early life was spent as a leisurely aristocrat, with almost no contact with the outside world. When he happened to come in contact with it (in the form of death and suffering) at the age of 29, he forsook his family and went off in search of enlightenment, as to the meaning of life. He studied

under two famous Brahmin hermits. He then took five companions and devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. But he soon realised that this concentration on physical asceticism was counter-productive and began to devote himself to a simple life of intense **mental** activity. Eventually, as the culmination of prolonged meditation, he sat beneath a fig-tree at Uruvela (known henceforth as the Bo, or Wisdom Tree) and there achieved his enlightenment which was the second major turning point in his life.

Buddhism starts from what it calls the **four basic truths**:

1) suffering is the essence of this life. 2) The cause of suffering is desire for possession and selfish enjoyment, but particularly the desire for separate, individual existence. 3) Suffering ceases when desire ceases, when this selfish craving for life has been renounced and destroyed. 4) A state of genuine peace can only be found when human passions are completely extinguished.

There is an 8-fold path that leads to the cessation of suffering and finally results in moral perfection. It is these *desires* that bind us to the wheel of endless reincarnation. We must therefore unhook or detach ourselves from these desires by a programme of rigid meditation which leads to the **liberation of the soul from the body** and absorption in *nirvana*, a state of non-creation. The path to this perfect detachment is known as the Middle Way, because it avoids the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, both of which Gautama had found to be of no avail.

The 8-fold path, which is virtually the buddhist way of salvation, is a kind of comprehensive course in disciplined self-improvement leading to the extinction of man's insatiable desires and resulting in moral perfection. These are 1) Right views (= accepting of 4 truths), 2) Right aspirations (desire to have done with desire), 3) Right speech, 4) Right conduct (abstention from killing any living thing, from stealing, from unlawful sexual intercourse, 5) Right mode of livelihood (no life of luxury, harm no living thing, work at a trade), 6) Right effort (we must always press on and never give up: avoid occasions of evil, overcome evil, develop detachment and meditation, achieve rapture, universal love, 7) Right awareness (contemplation of the transitoriness and loathsomeness of the body, complete mastery of mental processes), 8) Right concentration (concentration on one single object. This leads to a trance and enlightenment and highest possible stage of perfection).

To walk the eightfold path involves passing through four stages in which ten fetters are successfully broken. This is in fact a sort of brain-washing. In the first stage, three fetters are shattered: the delusive belief that the individual self is real, doubt regarding the truth of the teaching, and confidence in the efficacy of religious rites and ceremonies. Stages 2 and 3 involve shattering the fetters of sensuality and unkindness. The final stage involves the overcoming of the last 5 hindrances: desire for a separate life in this world and in the realms beyond the grave, spiritual pride, self-righteousness, and

ignorance. The whole course is so demanding that it may take several reincarnations to complete it. cf. Watchman Nee's *Release of the Spirit*.

Buddhism in its historical context: Buddha grew up as a Hindu just at the time when the Upanishadic movement had borne its fruits. Buddhism, as we have seen, is an offspring of Hinduism. While Islam arose 600 years after Jesus Christ, Buddhism came into being almost 600 years before Christ. In time it was edged out of India and exported to many countries, to become the major religion of the Far East.

Why, if the Buddha was a Hindu, did Buddhism become a separate international movement? From one aspect, Buddhism is Hinduism, enlarged and divested of its social and institutional framework (caste and sacrificial ritual), and so adapted for export purposes. Hinduism in its classic form never had a chance because it was dependent upon the accepted dominance of the Brahmin caste as a hereditary, spiritual aristocracy, and as such is tied to the country of its origin. Buddhism tended to use the laity less and withdraw (so it was not a popular movement, but an elitist one). Finally, the Muslim invasions destroyed the Buddhist monasteries in India and the massacre of their inmates left practically no one to carry on the dissemination of Buddhist teaching.

Differences in relation to Hinduism:

1) Its doctrine of reincarnation is slightly different from hinduism: what survives and is reincarnated is not the

personality, but the *karma* (the packet of good and bad deeds). Thus buddhism does not recognise the Hindu concept of *atman* (self)

2) *Dharma* means in Hinduism "duty" appropriate to one's caste, whereas in Buddhism which rejected the caste system, it means "teaching" or "the law governing birth and re-birth" or what the Hindus would call *samsara*.

3) *Nirvana* is essentially an altered state of consciousness (the eternal world) attainable in this life by meditation and in the next by release from reincarnation. Mahayana buddhism interprets it as "paradise". The central idea is not absorption into the deity (Brahman), but release from suffering. It is a more subjective idea.

4) The Hindu scriptures (Vedas) are rejected and so is the caste system.

5) Buddhism, even in its liberal form (southern or Mahayana) has no real sacrifice, only honorific offerings before the statue of the Buddha.

6) Buddha is considered more of a hero than a god

7) It has no priesthood, but only monks.

8) The idea of *bodhisattvas*, is unique to buddhism (but found only in the liberal Mahayana variety); holy men who have gained salvation delay entering into it in order to help others towards it.

This doctrine has enabled it to annex the pantheons of China and Japan, and to turn their members into respectable Buddhist saints.

Buddhism reacted against the caste system in India but in a sense produced a new caste system. Both it and Jainism tended to discredit the life of the agriculturalist, since the occupation involved to a considerable degree the destruction of organic life. Hence agriculture went down on the social scale, which led to poverty.

Buddha reacted against extremism by founding the "middle way".

Its preoccupation is not so much to escape moral evil as bodily pain.

Today it covers a very wide spectrum of belief and practice. However there are two basic types:

Theravada Buddhism (the strict teaching of the elders) is the earliest form. Its teachings are derived from a body of doctrine approved at an important conference soon after the founder's death. It is characterised by a conservative, legalistic teaching, involving a narrow austere path to spiritual enlightenment. Its holy book is the Tripitaka (3 baskets). It survives mainly in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and is called Southern Buddhism. This does not make up the majority of buddhists. They belong to the **Mahayana** school of buddhism which is found in China and Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, Vietnam and Nepal. This variant is known as Northern buddism.

Mahayana Buddhism (the broad way): As Buddhism developed, it was very open to absorbing ideas from other philosophies and popular superstition. Mahayana is an example of this, as it consists of an amalgum of

buddhism and foreign accretions that have produced something very different from the ideal of the original founder. Many of the practices originated in China, from where they were exported to Japan.

Apart from having their own scriptures, they have introduced certain innovations that bring it closer to classic hinduism:

- a) The idea of an Absolute or Supreme reality.
- b) pantheistic world view
- c) recognition of an individual soul which survives death and may pass through various states en route to the final beatitude.

Salvation is for all men. It need not depend on individual effort, but may be an unmerited benefaction, granted or attained suddenly, even in this present worldly existence. Reliance upon the power of Another often issues in prayers to the Divine.

Some worship Buddha as a deity. There are temples or household shrines in which Buddha is worshipped.

Conclusion: Classic Buddhism as originally taught is not really a religion, but a technique for escaping from this life: a moral philosophy. It is a non-theistic, ethical discipline, a system of self-training, anthropocentric, stressing ethics and mind culture to the exclusion of theology. Buddhism as taught by its founder is in no sense a system of faith and worship. Buddha offered neither redemption, forgiveness nor heaven. He warned of no judgement and no final hell. In theology, Buddha remained an agnostic.

Other variants of Buddhism are chiefly to be found in Japan:

1. **Tendai Buddhism:** belongs to the eclectic (comprehensive) school. It accepts all Buddhist scriptures but believes that they reach their culmination in the Lotus Scripture in which the teaching of the identity of the ultimate, metaphysical reality is affirmed along with the historic incarnate Buddha. The entire universe somehow participates in the all-pervading, cosmic Buddha. The ways to enlightenment include mystical initiation, silent meditation and simple faith. This simple faith can be in Buddha, other buddhas or even a non-buddhist deity. The believer is expected to live his life in the light of his recognition of his unity with the universe.
2. **Shingon buddhism:** the universe is identified with the body of the supreme buddha. Shinto deities are included in this Japanese variant. The union of man with the universe is taught by means of the mystical techniques: bodily postures, hand gestures, ritual utterances, methods of concentration
3. **Jodo buddhism:** teaches salvation by faith, by a simple recitation of the sacred formula which expresses faith in Amida Buddha. It is the easy way to enlightenment. A life of joy and gratitude, characterised by good works, is expected to follow.
4. **Zen Buddhism:** in some ways this goes back to primitive buddhism in that it is merely a mind-training technique. It has no written Scriptures or literature of any kind. There is no veneration of the Buddha. Man himself

is said to possess the Buddha nature and the momentous discovery to be made is that I am part of the Absolute. To arrive at this degree of enlightenment, one needs to follow a complicated system of exercises aimed at bringing body and mind into the right state. By overcoming the illusion of individual existence, gaining the intuitive breakthrough that all is one without distinction, that 'Buddha is all and I am Buddha', man sees through the false image of himself as incomplete and sinful, and awakens to the reality of his inherent purity and wholeness.

5. **Nichiren buddhism:** is exclusivistic and intolerant. It denounces all other variants of buddhism as perversions. The founder (Nichiren) was brought up in the Tendai school but rebelled against it. He maintained that only the Lotus Scriptures are inspired. They chant the Lotus sutra, worship before the Nichiren mandala scroll (consisting of the Chinese names of Indian and Japanese divinities) and repeat the sacred daimoku formula (Hail to the Lotus Sutra). This exercise is considered to unite the soul of man with the eternal buddha spirit. Some branches meet in small gatherings in homes where personal problems are shared. The religion, which has its headquarters on the slopes of Mt Fuji Yama, is aggressively evangelistic.

6. **Tibetan Buddhism:** Some would even classify this as the third major branch of Buddhism (Varyana Buddhism). The earliest accounts of buddhism in Tibet date back to the 7th cent. AD, after Songtsen Gampo unified Tibet into a single nation and became its first king

in 625. Prior to this time, Tibet was a land of separate tribes and the prevailing belief was the ancient Bon religion — a mixture of shamanism, magic, and primitive nature worship. The Tibetans initially did not welcome Buddhism. Only after Buddhism in Tibet had absorbed some of the occult features of Bon did the Tibetans accept the religion as their own. Thus the syncretism of the ancient religion of Bon, the doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism, and the Tantric practices of Padmasambhava developed into Tibetan buddhism (also known as Vajrayana or Tantric buddhism) as we know it today. In 1071 the Sakya order was founded in Shigatse, a town in SE Tibet, west of Lhasa. This school combined tantric mysticism with the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism. In this sect, monks were not required to be celibate. Thus a religious hierarchy was founded among certain families as the post of abbot was passed from father to son. Later, Tsong Khapa instituted an important reform prohibiting marriage in Tibetan buddhism. This policy terminated the transmitting of political and religious policy from father to son. It also struck at the blatant immorality among monks and nuns who had glorified sexual union as a tantric experience. After Gedun Truppa died, the distinctive Tibetan system of incarnations from lama (superior one) to lama was instituted. The Tibetans believed that since Gedun Truppa had attained Buddhahood and therefore was liberated from rebirth, he had chosen to transmigrate (by reincarnation) to another body to reassume leadership

over the Gelukpa order, the official sect of the Dalai Lamas.

Meditation and tantrism: a Tibetan master has said that Buddhist meditation differs from that of Christianity in that it does not involve the concept of some higher being, with which one tries to communicate.

Tibetan enlist special tantric techniques such as mantras (audio), yantras (visible) and mudras (gestures) to attain Enlightenment. The sacred syllables of mantras are thought to give the power to penetrate the absolute and communicate with divine spirits, or rather the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas*. These latter are beings who seek enlightenment but delay buddhahood (or extinction) in order to save others first with their own merits.

Another characteristic of Tibetan buddhism is Shaktism, a belief system that worships the divine power of the consort of a particular god.

Buddhism seeks to produce a philosophical version of Hinduism (which is paganism) and harness methods used in Hinduism to attain union with pagan gods and spirits, and use them as ends in themselves. However, it is questionable if this can be done without once again involving the idols that were originally the objects of such techniques.

This is seen in Tibetan buddhism. Shaktism attributed each Buddha and Bodhisattva with female counterparts. The Tibetan gods became the symbol of *upaya*. *Upaya* is love and compassion: it is the active, male principle. The Tibetan goddess becomes the symbol of *prajna*. *Prajna* is knowledge, it is the passive female principle. The union

of the two becomes the spiritual symbol of achieving nirvana. Some take this literally and maintain that sexual union between a man and a woman during sacred rituals will accelerate attainment of perfection.

Satan has convinced Tibetan people that they can control their own destiny through merit-earning prostrations and repetitive chanting, or that they can control spiritual forces and powers through magic and shamanism. Satan sometimes tries to lend credibility to his lies through supernatural phenomena. Satan's little magic tricks are designed to keep people in darkness. However, those who have been involved in idolatry or occult practice discover too late that they are not in control, but *being* controlled by the spirits of darkness.

NEW AGE PHILOSOPHY

Definition: The expression New Age comes from the astrological belief that approximately every 2000 years the spring equinox occurs in a new sign of the zodiac. This is due to a wobble in the earth's axis. It also presupposes the ancient belief that the stars (and so, constellations) are all pasted onto a sort of celestial sphere. In approximately the year 2000 the sun leaves the sign of Pisces and enters that of Aquarius, and thus a new age begins. The old age of Pisces was filled with tension, trouble and wars, but the new age will be one of peace, harmony and happiness. It is implied that the old age was that of Christianity and that this is being

superceded by a non-Christian one. In this age, the individual is going to be able to have direct access to cosmic energy which comes from the heart of the universe. Man is therefore encouraged to expand his consciousness in order to be able to link up with this energy source, by which man can become superman. This process is symbolised by the rainbow. In other words man can become his own god, thus echoing the promise of Satan made to Eve in the book of Genesis. But where do all these ideas come from and why are they becoming so popular now in the context of the New Age movement?

Roots of the movement: It is important for us to examine the roots of the New Age Movement to appreciate exactly what it is. It all begins with the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York 1875 by Mme Blavatsky. She was influenced by the Rosacrucians and elements from Indian, Egyptian and African religions. She claims that books she wrote were dictated to her by a Master, that is, a demon spirit. Her successor, Alice Bailey (1880-1949) marks a further stage in the development of the New Age philosophy. She was known as a spirit medium and claims to have received further 'teaching' relating to the establishment of a new (occult) world order. Both ladies were known for their hatred of traditional Christianity and their involvement in Eastern religions. Bailey claimed that Jesus would return (or has returned) as a guru to teach people how to redeem themselves.

Today, new Age beliefs are being promoted by the popularity of Eastern Religions, and prominent people in show-business. Shirley MacLaine, Tina Turner. Many attribute their success to "spirit guides". Some books have been written under the influence of such "spirit guides". cf. Richard Bach's "Jonathan Livingston Seagull (real name: Segal – a Jew, tragically)".

New Age beliefs: These can be summarised under five headings:

1. Pantheism: God is all and all is God. God is impersonal and man is part of God. But as he is ignorant of this, he must be brought to realise this, so that he may be "turned on" and realise his full potential.
2. Jesus is just a guru (master of spiritual enlightenment) and the true Christian Scriptures are the gnostic ones.
3. Importance of personal enlightenment, since man is ignorant of his divine nature.
4. This enlightenment can be attained by using various techniques such as: states of altered consciousness (meditation, drugs, music etc) and contact with spirits.
5. Social and political activism is necessary to help organise (network) people of like mind to produce a united world.

The moral consequences of this are far-reaching. Evil is seen as an illusion, and belief in absolute morality is seen as wrong. Morality is seen as degrading and inhuman (i.e. it reminds man of his dependence, creatureliness and accountability!).

Once a person realises that he is God, then by definition what he does is good, even if it is evil. No difference is

made between the demonic and the divine: good and evil are one and the same.

It is therefore characterised by lawlessness: a rejection of a personal God and his standards. It merges what the Bible separates: the creator and the creation, male and female. They claim that man can become god, and that the sexes originated from one bi-sexual being. Therefore to get back to the original, male and female are confused (homosexuality, lesbianism, bi-sexuality, His and Hers shops etc). Certain buzz-words are used like: networking, global village, holistic thinking, group therapy. New Age claims to be the model for the future and is characterised by the union of pseudo-science and gnosticism.

Another aspect of the New Age Movement is its music which is basically a rediscovery of the music of the ancient East. This music was originally cultic music, attached to the worship of idols, and aimed to switch off the intellect, so that the mind could be expanded – that is, tuned in to another wave-length, that of the demonic. Yoga belongs to the same system – it is a set of exercises designed to open the mind to the spirit world.

It is an active involvement in the demonic: To many people New Age is attractive and exciting, because it involves such things as: rejection of absolute morality, belief in reincarnation, spirit contact and channelling (some claim to have written entire books under the influence of a "spirit guide"), use of crystals, divination and psychic development. People who, in search of enlightenment and psychic power, experiment with

occult practices and discover that the spirits, in return for man's attention, grant "blessings" in the form of exciting revelations, blissful experiences, loving encounters, help and encouragement, protection from dangers and endless assurances about their own divinity (not to mention their lack of need of repentance and faith in the biblical Jesus, the Messiah).

The downside of all this is modern demon possession: frightening and unexpected psychic powers, hallucinations, abrupt possession by spirit entities, psychic attacks and often uncontrollable and painful sexual arousal, severe depression and suicidal tendencies. He or she will often not be left alone by demonic spirits.

Christians and others who are holding up the process leading to the unity of man, must be weeded out!

New Age is a rejection of Western materialism. Man has grown tired of science (and materialism) and is seeking something more exciting, which will bring him into a dimension which has hitherto been inaccessible to him. Already we are seeing an increasing emphasis in popular magazines on astrology (cf. horoscopes) and psychic phenomena. All this testifies to a reaction against rationalism.

Fritjof Capra is the European prophet of the New Age movement. He is a physicist who was born in Vienna in 1939. His initiation into the New Age philosophy came when he joined the Hippy Movement. During this time, he had a decisive vision in which he claims to have seen energy in motion, which he identified with the dance of

the Shiva, the Hindu god. Capra tries to combine modern physics and Eastern religions. He sees the tenets of Eastern religions being confirmed in modern physics. To this it can be countered that he takes what he wants from modern physics and conveniently ignores the rest, to make it fit in with his preconceived notions.

He represents a pantheistic viewpoint whereby the aim of man is to reabsorb himself in the universe from which he has been estranged. It is not a question of a relationship between two beings, God and man, but of losing ones identity in a cosmic process. He urges intuition instead of rationalism, synthesis instead of analysis, wholeness instead of reductionism. It is basically a syncretistic system. He blames Descartes and Newton for the creation of our present materialistic civilisation.

The true face of New Age: According to Marilyn Ferguson who wrote *The Gentle Conspiracy*, currents that were previously isolated are now coming together into one movement. The age of Pisces is now being succeeded by the age of Aquarius – the age of love and light when the spirit will be freed, and the advent of the 'Master' is eagerly anticipated. It is significant that the Bible speaks of the coming of the Anti-Christ who will deceive those who reject God by means of a satanic delusion. One of the names of the Anti-Christ is the Lawless one. The Bible tells us that the end times will see a growth of lawlessness – that is of an open flouting of God's authority. It is also significant that it was man's

involvement in occultism – that is in a direct alliance with God's enemy, Satan – that precipitated the coming of the Great Flood (cf. Genesis 6, 1-8). In the same way, an increasingly open involvement in occultism will probably precipitate the Day of the Lord, when God will punish the earth by means of fire.

A Critique: The proponents of New Age make the following claims:

1. Their system works (like alternative medicine), so it must be true. This is based on the premise that everything that is useful is true. But this is not necessarily the case: it can be useful for me to lie about my work in order to get a better job, but my statements are not true. Besides this, the source of the improvement may be Satan: not everything that is spiritual is from God.
2. The Gnostic Scriptures are the genuine Scriptures and that they were suppressed when the church became a state religion under Constantine. It is claimed that these pre-date the other Scriptures. But this can be disproved by Early Church documents that belong to the period before this. In any case Christianity did not become the state religion until the reign of Theodosius. New Agers seek evidence in gnostic and Essene scriptures of Nag Hammadi and Qumran to present a picture of Christianity which is different from the accepted views of church historians. They even claim that Christianity originated within gnosticism and then suppressed its gnostic roots. But the Jewishness of early Christianity gives the lie to this.

3. New Agers try to portray Jesus as a gnostic. We are told that there are manuscripts held in a monastery in the Himalayas which describe Jesus' journey through India and his studies in buddhism during the lost 18 years of his life. Attempts to find the manuscript or any Tibetan who knows of its existence have so far been unsuccessful.
4. They can live above good and evil. This is really an extension of the principles of existentialism (an egocentric universe in which there is no transcendent God to make sense of things here and to lay down principles of right and wrong).
5. New agers have revived the obsession with spirits and demons (whom they meet on their astral travels) who had previously been banished by a Christian culture.

The Challenge of New Age: the challenge of New Age is twofold:

1. It is shifting the way people think away from Judaeo-Christian values to the practices of the occult. This is done by a process of conditioning:
 1. People get sucked into New Age: i.e. an occult world view, by all sorts of subtle means. Involvement develops in certain stages:
 - a. A person has a problem, or is just plain curious or bored, so they try pendulum swinging, tarot cards or a course on meditation. The problem appears to disappear.
 - b. The person now wants to find out why and how the system works, so he starts to read books on the subject etc.

c. After this he becomes a convinced addict and regularly meditates, uses the pendulum, tarot cards and consults horoscopes.

d. He becomes a propagator of the system. He is well and truly hooked in an occult (i.e. satanic) system.

2. Biblical words begin to take on a different meaning:

a. God no longer means the God of the Bible, but the divine energy which is found in men (as a spark that needs to be liberated) and in the universe.

b. Christ is no longer the unique redeemer, but the founder of just one religion among many, each of which is valid, as far as it goes, but does not provide the total answer.

c. Redemption no longer means freedom from the condemnation and power of sin through the payment of a price, but self-redemption, i.e. the liberation of the soul from the body by a series of techniques (e.g. yoga) so that it can become combined with the divine.

d. Prayer is no longer speaking to a person, God, but speaking to oneself, i.e. meditation, with a view to inducing a certain degree of heightened consciousness.

e. Conversion no longer means conversion to God, but conversion to new age thinking.

f. Children in particular are being subtly targetted by being exposed to cartoons where the message is distinctly new age: you can have supernatural power and be good without Jesus. It appears to be fashionable and exciting, but in fact leads away from God. Children are left with the impression that Christianity is unnecessary and old-fashioned.

The Christian answer: The Bible teaches that man's basic problem is not that he is estranged from the cosmos (and his body), but that he is separated from God. Sin is rebellion against God – it is not just antisocial behaviour. He cannot save himself from the vortex of sin into which he is sucked. He must repent and be put right with God by faith in Christ Jesus as his substitute for sin. Only then can he receive the power by which he can become a new person and inherit all that God has for him. In other words, the solution to man's dilemma is to become a new man, not a superman (i.e. a super rebel). «He (man) must not be allowed to take fruit from the tree that gives life, eat it and live for ever.» (Genesis 3,22). That is why God expelled the first man from the garden: He did not want glorified rebels. This change of course has outworkings in every sphere of life.

Eastern Religions are totally different from the Bible – they represent the satanically inspired alternative way of salvation (spirituality, but without God) whereby man is told that he can become his own god. The serpent was seen by many gnostics as a symbol to the evil god of creation. So the devil is seen as essentially good: he is working for the salvation of mankind (a return to the pure spiritual state).

New Age fails to deal with the problem of evil and how this can be overcome. Moreover, Christianity aims to renew the mind, not to switch it off. It also becomes a slave to the spirit world of demons, as in animism.

If there is any new age around the corner, it is the millenium: the thousand-year reign of Christ with his church and centring on the Jewish nation and Israel. But before this occurs, a counterfeit Messiah will appear who will use occult power to deceive people and then judgment will occur.

In the light of this, the writings of the apostle John become very pertinent, because saw the dangers of gnosticism and combatted it without pity. All that John wrote against the gnostics especially in his first epistle, apply to adherents of the New Age philosophy. He calls it the spirit of antichrist, because it is a satanic counterfeit. Thus, any believer in NEW AGE will automatically find himself opposed by historic christianity.

It is perhaps significant that gnosticism was the first major heresy which the church had to face, it may well also be the last one, which means that we are nearing the end. It is almost as if we have come full circle and the apostle John is speaking to us again: *My children, the end is near! You were told that the antichrist would come: and now many antichrists have already appeared, and so we know that the end is near* (1 Jn 2,18). For John the end would be characterised by the manifestation of the Antichrist, and so the existence of those inspired by the same spirit, indicate that the countdown has begun. The anthroposophists who split from the theosophists said in 1910, we don't need an incarnate Messiah any more,

because we can have a direct vision of God. It is significant that John says that the mark of the spirit of antichrist is a denial of the incarnation (1 Jn 4,2).

THE CHALLENGE OF EASTERN RELIGIONS

The basic tenets of Eastern Religions are:

Monism: unity is more real than diversity. Unity (*brahma*) is ultimate reality. Plato says the same thing: this world is but the shadow of reality. What then is the "real" world? Only God is real and everything that one sees is a dream or even an illusion (*maya*). The dreamer is God and his dream is the world.

It is quite clear that such an attitude makes all kinds of scientific enquiry impossible. A person who has taken LSD is incapable of distinguishing the real world from the unreal world. For Hinduism, the real world hardly exists. Man is considered to be an extension of the essence of God in a world of diversity where God forgets himself provisionally. The true I = unity = God – I live in a world of illusion, of slavery and ignorance. So my true goal is Yoga (union with God) where I can find my lost balance or lost unity (i.e. the state of nothing or of non-creation).

Spirit is good but matter is evil. Human liberty is found when the individual loses himself in the all. The way to do this is through meditation (Plato uses the word "contemplation"). Through mediation we are liberated from the body which is evil because it has been created and is made of matter. It is the body (and thus, life in this world) that keeps us in a vicious circle of suffering and reincarnation (*samsara*).

Is morality true? The problem of man lies in what he is (made of matter) and not in what he does. Good and evil are only separate in this world of illusion (*maya*). In reality there are no absolute values – the initiate is above all this, because he has attained "knowledge". God consists of both good and evil, as he is above each of these. Behind the scenes, good and evil are the best of friends. For the Hindu, heaven and hell are just states in the journey into the ultimate. If you no longer have a conscience, you have "arrived" spiritually. It is interesting to reflect that Manson said that he was both God and the devil.

The result of this philosophy is:

- a) indifference to social action
- b) resignation to one's fate – suffering is the result of my works in a previous life (*karma*)

- c) compassion is a technique to enable a person to escape from himself and merge with nothing (*brahma*). This fact leads to the destruction of the personaility.
- d) conclusion: man does not count.

The Christian answer: There is both unity and diversity to be found in the Trinity – it is not a question of choosing one or the other, because both are to be found in God who is the Creator of the universe. In Christ we find God's original plan for us and liberation from sin (the root of the problem), not from matter.

As God is personal and so has moral character, this is the basis for social action.

Apologetic: It must first of all be realised that we are dealing with a satanic delusion. We must act as the Early Church did in combatting the heresy of gnosticism. We must bring people back to consider historic facts, as embodied in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroaster or Zarathustra was a reformer of mazdeism (zervanism) in Persia. This was a dualistic religion: the world is the theatre of a struggle between the principle of Evil (Ahriman or Angra-Mainyul) and the principle of Good (Ormuzd or Ahura-Mazda), but in the end Good will triumph. When this happens, the final judgement

will occur. This will involve the resurrection of the dead and the confinement of the wicked to the regions of torment.

The sacred book of mazdeism is the Avesta. It, like the Vedas, contains hymns, prayers and ritual instructions. This book became the basis for a cult that was administered by the Magi (from which we get our word "magic"). A major part of the worship was centred around the fire altar. In fact, they seem to have had an obsession with fire and this was to later influence much medieval thought.

Zoroastrianism gave rise to Mithraism and Manicheism, but it came to a sudden end at the time of the Muslim invasions. However about 100,000 members of the cult managed to escape to what is now Pakistan and India where they still survive today as the Parsee (meaning: Persian) community.

Zarathustra's reform consisted in the rejection of the gods of popular religion and the promotion of the worship of one God, the Spirit of Good, Ahura Mazda. His was an attempt to turn a national paganism into a universal religion.

According to tradition, Zoroaster was the son of a camel merchant and grew up during a time when his fellow Persians worshipped many gods. During his youth he showed a deep interest in religion and at the age of 30 claimed to have had a decisive revelation: He was on the banks of the river Daitya when a large figure appeared to him (cf. Ezekiel). This "angel" took him into the presence

of Ahura-Mazda who instructed Zoroaster in the true religion.

For the first ten years, the movement met with little success, but the turning point came when he managed to convert a local prince called Vishtaspa, who helped propagate the new faith. Thereafter, zoroastrianism spread rapidly and was the cause of two "holy" wars, during the second of which Zoroaster was killed.

Later he was made an object of veneration and worshipped along with Ahura-Mazda.

As zoroastrianism contains elements akin to those of Judaism and Christianity, it has been thought by some to be the ultimate source of both. This, however is unlikely, for two reasons:

1. Zoroaster was probably active around 600 BC (though some scholars posit a much earlier date of 1500) which was roughly the same time that the Jews were deported to Babylonia which was later taken over by the Persian Empire. He would then have borrowed these ideas about a resurrection of the good and the bad from the Jews, whom he encountered.
2. Some elements in his religion are quite incompatible with biblical revelation: dualism, salvation by good works, though not with rabbinic judaism.
3. The drinking of intoxicating drink (*haoma*) leading to hallucigenic experiences, as the central rite in Zoroastrian worship.

SHINTO

Shinto is the national religion of *Japan* and so it tends to be bound up with Japanese nationalism and allegiance to the emperor who is supposed to be divine – an offspring of the Sun god. According to it, the Japanese islands and people are of divine origin, and Japanese emperors who are descendants of the sun-goddess, rule with divine appointment and submission to higher authority is the path of virtue. It is thus not a personal faith but the perpetuation of a *communal* tradition. It is extremely vague and has no well-defined body of doctrine or codified rules of behaviour. There is no pantheon of gods or a supreme god, but any (natural) force or object that has acquired the status of „kami“ which means divine, mysterious or awe-inspiring. Examples of these manifestations of the divine spirit are: sun, wind, thunder,, mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, wolves, snakes, foxes, mirrors, beads, swords (these last three are kept in great national shrines), strange men, chief men and wise men, ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, evil spirits (i.e. anything from the animist world of the Japanese). We must remember that geographically they lie between the animist peoples of the Pacific islands and the animist people of Siberia. These objects are worshipped at local shrines. It is essentially a national paganism that has evolved over the centuries and many Japanese cannot explain why they do such and such a thing. In spite of such a broad definition, Shinto can be divided into the following categories:

1. Folk Shinto – practices associated with the outlying countryside. At the other extreme is...
2. Sect Shinto – this refers to organised groups, some of which have historical founders, canonised scriptures, organised membership, systematised doctrine and specific ritual. They are 13 in number and represent those sects that were officially recognised when state shinto took over in the middle of the 19th century. Many of them contain elements borrowed from other religions (even Christianity). When state shinto was disestablished, many groups split off claiming that they were never shinto anyway.
3. Shrine Shinto – this refers to practices associated with various shrines throughout Japan. This can be called typical Shinto. When people say „shinto“, this is mainly what people mean. A subsection of this could be called Domestic Shinto and refers to rituals performed in homes.
4. Imperial Household Shinto which refers to ritual practiced by the royal household and at shrines within the royal palace. Closely allied with this is State or National Shinto which means the State cult as it was practiced before and during WWII. This involved state control, chauvinistic teaching and enforced ritual observances.

The Japanese consider themselves to be a vast clan. However, before the cultural invasion from the Chinese mainland, shinto was not known as shinto but consisted of very varied pagan practices which differed widely

from clan to clan and area to area. Japan lends itself to the divinising of the forces of nature because it consists of very beautiful islands, an ever-changing climate, but also where the forces of nature can be very violent (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons etc).

However, when the Chinese „Way“ (i.e. buddhism or confucianism) was introduced from the mainland, this forced the Japanese to preserve their own national heritage, and this they did by trying to produce a more systematic version of their ancestral religious practices, which was then called „Shinto“ or „The Way of the Kami (Divine)“. It is a faith in „kami“ in its various manifestations, a communal way of life, with the Imperial Family at its head and as its focus.

As a result of the Chinese cultural invasion, the Japanese adopted the same alphabet. The first of the two letters from the Chinese alphabet chosen to represent the word „shinto“ imply that it expresses the „ultimate“ or the „universal“ (spirit). The second letter just means „Way“. Hence „shinto“ is practised by following the mind of *kami* (the divine) and living in accordance with the will of *kami*.

Shinto books: The first is the Kojiki or „Records of ancient matters“, and the second is the Nihon Shoki or „Chronicles of Japan“. There are various other books which are revered as the Annals of the Japanese nation but they are not canonical in the sense of underpinning shintoism. The Kojiki is the oldest one and relates in mythological terms earliest Japanese history with its

heroes and their deeds. Mixed in with this no doubt historical basis is the underlying concept that comes from animism: creation through procreation (the gods gave birth to other gods or objects). The first emperor of Japan was supposed to have been the result of one of these sexual unions. Some have traced the evolution of Shinto through:

- 1) primitive nature-worship (where natural objects are themselves worshipped),
- 2) polydemonism (where supernatural spirits are believed to indwell physical objects).
- 3) Polytheism (where true personification takes place, making it correct to speak of gods and goddesses.
- 4) Worship of ancestral spirits who were originally a local chieftain or some great national figure.
- 5) Maintaining communal, ceremonial traditions for the purpose of communal well-being.
- 6) Eventually all Japan is united under the Yamato tribe, whose chief becomes the emperor.

Morality: this is not based on classical Christian ideas of good and bad (i.e. whether it conforms to the divine will and character or not) but is essentially esthetic and animistic.

a) The good seems to be identified with that which possesses or relates to beauty, harmony, conformity, productivity. This explains why during WWII Japanese soldiers completely flouted the Geneva convention (based on Christian values) and maintained that death was something beautiful.

b) Man is basically good (containing an element of the divine) and can become a *kami*. He can become impure by contact with blood, sickness or death, the action of evil spirits, which produces ceremonial defilement. This must be remedied by undergoing a purification rite: there is no concept of inward cleansing.

Shinto shrines and worship: Shinto shrines (or temples) are where the *kami* is worshipped. They are either situated in an area of natural beauty, at a place where cures are said to have taken place, or where a local god is worshipped, who was originally the patron or protector of a tribal area. The biggest shrines contain certain *kami* objects like mirrors, beads or a sword. In Tokyo there is a shrine where the spirits of fallen soldiers are worshipped. When shrines are built, a ritual is performed in an attempt to drive away evil spirits and invoke the help of good spirits.

The shrines themselves are built on a fairly standard pattern: an avenue leading up to the shrine along which wooden arches have been erected to purify the worshippers. There is a small building next to the shrine where you can purify yourself by bathing, washing your hands or rinsing out your mouth. The worshipper never enters the inner sanctuary: he remains in an outer sanctuary where he prays by bowing or giving two claps with his hands. He worships by putting money in the offering box (in household shrines food is offered). Other buildings may include a priest's house, a store-house and a hall where ceremonial dancing is performed by dancing

girls or *miko* (upon request of the worshipper) in order to make worship more powerful. A sacred meal may also be taken, to symbolise fellowship with the *kami*. Carved sticks with strips of paper on them serve to indicate the presence of the *kami*. People in a state of ritual impurity (who are ill, wounded or in mourning), cannot take part in the worship. One a year there is usually a major festival (often coinciding with harvest) when there is a highly elaborate formal worship service: music, sacred dancing (*kagura*), prayer (*norito*), presentation of offerings to the *kami*.

Then there are two national ceremonies that are performed by the emperor himself in the special shrine of the palace: Harvest festival (*Niinemesai*) and the grand purification ceremony (*Oharai*) which is performed twice a year in June and December. Although Shinto as a state cult was disestablished in 1945, the emperor still conducts these ceremonies, somewhat like the Jewish high priest.

Most of these elements are found in Israelite OT worship. Liberal theologians would say that this is just another manifestation of global polytheism that has evolved into monotheism, whereas Christians would say that OT practice represents the true and original variant, of which all the others are a copy or a distortion. The fact that these various rituals conform to a global pattern calls for an explanation – they cannot all have evolved spontaneously but must derive from an original pattern. It shows that all men have a common origin and that

originally all were acquainted with the truth. This is exactly what the Bible says.

Buddhism, Confucianism and Shinto: due to Chinese influence, buddhism was imported into Japan and reached its greatest influence in the 8th century. Later (794-1185) various attempts were made to merge buddhism and shinto. Both the Tendai and Shingon schools of buddhism saw kami as a manifestation of the buddha spirit, and buddhist monks read from the buddhist scriptures at shinto shrines. A later period (1600-1868) produced an amalgamation of shinto and confucianism. In the 18th century a nationalist reaction followed which sought to return to original shintoism and reject all foreign elements. In 1868, the emperor ascending the throne was declared divine and extreme nationalism resulted: the Japanese people were divine, the emperor was the offspring of the god and the divine mission of Japan was to rule the world. Shintoism was no longer considered a religion but a state cult. This state of affairs lasted until the end of WWII when state shintoism was disestablished by the Allied administration which took over the reins of power in 1945. Although the emperor is no longer considered divine, he still acts as the high priest of shinto. According to a census conducted in 1969, two thirds of the Japanese consider themselves to be shinto believers. Recently there has been an attempt to revive the national importance of shintoism

CONFUCIUS

'Confucianism,' says Dr Lin Yu-tang, 'unlike Christianity, is of the earth, earth-born. Strictly speaking, it is not a religion: it has a certain feeling towards life and the universe that borders on religious feeling, but it is not a religion.' Confucius was essentially a moralist who wanted to bring about a permanent social reformation in China. He was only interested in religion in so far as it served to further this aim.

It is common to speak of the 'three religions of China', Taoism and Confucianism being native religions and Buddhism having been introduced from India. In reality, there are not three religions but three schools of thought or three elements in one religious complex. Taoist mysticism is in contrast to Confucianist pragmatism and where these failed to satisfy the Chinese spirit, Buddhism filled the need. But the Chinese people are not among the most deeply religious people of the world. The masses are superstitious animists rather than Buddhists. They tend to find their deepest spiritual values in ethical systems which regulate *conduct* without emphasis on gods or the after-life. The Chinese do not associate Confucius with 'religion', but speak of 'the School' or 'the Teaching'. His personality and character have had a decisive influence on Chinese thought and moral ideals, while his literary works have given to Chinese ethics an authoritative and classic form. Although not primarily religious in content, these works were regarded until this century with religious veneration. Confucius would have

been horrified to learn that, years after his death, attempts were made to deify him, temples were built in his honour and sacrifices offered at his tomb. But the veneration of Confucius is by no means confined to China. The Confucian classics are as highly regarded in Korea and Japan as in China, and their teaching has had as profound an influence on Korean and Japanese social life as it has had in China. It was only after its contact with China that Japan began to realize the need for an accepted code of morality. First Buddhism and then Confucian teaching exercised a profound influence. But in Japan Confucian ideals underwent a transformation. The cult of unquestioning royalty to the Emperor took precedence over all other virtues, even filial piety. One sect of the Shinto religion is known as 'Confucian Shinto'. The famous 'Bushido' idea of chivalry owes as much to Confucius as to Zen Buddhism. Vietnam also has its vigorous Confucian sect which endeavours to preserve and to practise the ethics of the Great Sage. Thus Confucianism continues to have great influence as being at once oriental and compatible with the Western secularist outlook.

Confucius the man

Kung Fu-tzû or Kung the Sage, latinized by the early Jesuit missionaries to Confucius, was born in 551 BC. He was thus a contemporary of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, and lived just before the time of Socrates and Plato. The Chinese Empire was at this time ruled by the

Chou Dynasty which was composed of a number of small and semi-independent feudal states, often engaged in civil wars. It was a troubled period of oppression, luxury and lust. But against this background it was also a time of intense intellectual activity, the classical age of Chinese literature.

Confucius himself came from an aristocratic but impoverished family in the principality of Lu in what is now the province of Shantung. At fifteen he set his heart on learning. At nineteen he married but was not, apparently, a family man. He divorced his wife, and maintained an aloof relationship with his son and daughter. At twenty-two he became a teacher. At thirty he 'stood firm' and had settled opinions, whilst at forty he 'had no doubts'.

Meanwhile, in his thirties he had gone to the Court of Chou to study the ceremonies currently in use. While in the capital he is reported to have met his senior citizen Lao-tzû, or Laocius, the founder of the 'Taoist religion.' Laocius, believing in the unity and harmony of the universal, advocated the achievement of 'oneness with the Tao (Way)' by a return to nature and spontaneous self-expression. He had nothing but scorn for the young upstart who wanted to regulate life by strict rules of conduct. On his return home Confucius, undeterred, gathered pupils around him, of whom the names of thirty-six have been identified.

His reputation became such that the prince of Lu, his native state, appointed him in 500 BC to be chief

magistrate of a town and later Minister of justice when he was fifty years of age..

Finally he settled down and gave himself to research in ancient history, poetry and ritual. In personal habits he was simple, but precise and fastidious, insisting on the appropriate costume for the particular occasion and the suitable sauce for each dish. His last five years were devoted to writing. A temple still marks the place in Chüfou, Shantung, where he lived and died in 479 BC.

2. His literary works

The famous 'Four Books' of Confucius are *The Analects*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Works of Mencius*. The first of these is a collection of Confucius' sayings, and so a trustworthy account of his interests and opinions. The 'Five Classics' always associated with the 'Four Books' consist of *The Book of Changes*, *The Books of Poetry* and *The Book of History*, all older writings taken as authoritative by the Confucian school; *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, traditionally said to have been written by Confucius; and *The Book of Rites*, a collection of later Confucian writings on ritual matters, including stories about and sayings of Confucius.

'I am a transmitter,' Confucius agreed, 'a believer in, and admirer of, *antiquity*.'

3. The Confucian ethic

The teachings of the sage are preserved in *The Analects*, which consist of questions by his disciples and the appropriate answers. This is in no sense a religious work

but an expression of the views of a *pragmatic moralist* with an interest in religion in so far as its observance was a contribution to respectability. His 'princely man' was, in modern terminology, the 'perfect gentleman', characterized by 'kindness, sincerity, graciousness, royalty, and self-denial'. He emphasizes the importance of virtue, propriety and correct ritual, while accepting the current religious beliefs in 'heaven' (*tien*) and in spirits, though his advice was to keep aloof from 'spiritual beings' (*shen*) about which he declined to express an opinion. His references to the deity are in impersonal terms. But he recognized this impersonal power as a sanction for moral conduct.

His interest was in *this world* rather than the next, though he showed a childlike pleasure in religious ritual as such. In common with most Chinese philosophers he probably believed in the inherent goodness of man, though this doctrine is first affirmed by Mencius. The innate sinfulness of man as taught in the Bible is a doctrine Chinese traditionalists have found it hard to accept. Man, said Confucius, can be virtuous if only he makes up his mind to it. 'What I do not wish others to do to me, that also I wish not to do to them' is his famous interpretation of *jen* – goodness or charity – a very different attitude from the positive 'Golden Rule' of the Sermon on the Mount, given five centuries later. But in fact, Confucius does give emphasis to helping others positively; for example, 'Wishing to stand yourself, help others to stand.' His philosophy was very simple: namely, virtue is the foundation of happiness.

Yet Confucius threw no new light on life's problems, was uncertain about God and was content to be ignorant of the after-life. He was concerned with living in Society, and when his lifelong endeavours to bring about a permanent social reformation in his home state came to nothing, he spent his last days under a cloud of disillusionment.

After the death of Confucius, his moral philosophy developed along certain lines. First it was developed by Mencius and after that absorbed influences from Chinese ancestor worship and philosophy of Taoism.

Further developments: Mencius

Meng-tzû or Mencius (371-289 BC), a contemporary of Plato and Aristotle, was even less interested in religion than his master. He made no attempt to make of the Confucian teachings a religious message and emphasized even more than Confucius the inherent goodness of man. His works give to Confucian ethics a more speculative form. 'Man's nature is good, as water flows down.' The corollary of this is that as water can flow uphill only by force, so man does evil only against his nature. Such a hypothesis, so contrary to the Christian doctrine of original sin, has had the incalculable effect of inculcating the Chinese educated classes against the acceptance of Christian teaching. When Mencius tried to guide rulers to govern wisely, only his disciples would listen and he became just as disillusioned as Confucius.

Later Confucianism

1. Its influence on the state

The cult of Confucius outlived all rival philosophies and the well-trained Confucians were the only men capable of handling public affairs. It was this scholar class that made Confucianism the cult of the state. After 631 AD the sole qualification for holding public office was a successful examination in the Confucian classics. Thus China until recent years was always ruled by scholars and gentlemen rather than by professional politicians and soldiers. It was their influence which lay behind the strong conservatism and opposition to progress which characterised China before the 1911 Revolution. With the fall of the empire in 1911, Confucianism suffered a severe blow. The old examination system was abolished and the imperial cult came to an end. In spite of periodic attempts to reinstate Confucian morals, there has been no come-back and Communists denounce Confucianism as pure feudalism and therefore a bar to progress. They have even attempted to break up the intense family royalty which Confucius inculcated and have had a measure of success, at least temporarily.

2. The cult of the ancestors

As nowhere else, this cult has been developed in China and Japan. Originally, however, there was one Supreme Being (ShangTi) who was worshipped. It was during this time that the Chinese alphabet was developed which testifies to monotheism. Ancestors were not originally

worshipped but regarded as intermediaries between man and God. The cult of the ancestors goes back into antiquity and Confucius certainly did not invent it. But recognizing the importance of filial piety for the stability of society, he carried over this reverence to the dead as well as the living. He said that children should spend three years mourning for their departed parents and revived the elaborate ritual for the 'veneration of the dead', which, until the advent of Communism at least, was practised by every devoted son, often at a cost he could not afford which might involve him in debt for life. Mencius declared, 'One of the three great sins is to be without posterity, because then there is no-one to provide for the ancestral spirits.' Marriage was therefore a duty and concubinage inevitable whenever the legal wife had no male offspring.

After death, the important thing was to set up the tablet for the deceased in the guest-room cabinet together with all the other tablets of near ancestors. Such was the home altar around which the family ritual was concentrated – the burning of incense and paper money and the offering of food to the ancestors. Every spring, when a great family reunion took place, sacrifices were offered at the grave during the Spring Festival. Formerly ancestral halls used to be built for the use of the whole clan sharing a common name. Here the older tablets were laid up as they were replaced in the home by the tablets of the more recently dead. The halls were used for meetings of the clan leaders, regular family reunions and feasts and ceremonies for the departed reverently conducted.

Professor K. S. Latourette says, 'Ceremonies for the departed constitute one of the most outstanding characteristics of Chinese culture.'

Dr Lin Yu-tang has stated that ancestor-worship is the real religion of China, and as such it constituted the greatest barrier to the progress of Christianity. For when an older son becomes a Christian, he can no longer indulge in ancestral worship and his heathen parents – as in Malaysia today – naturally feel that tradition and the long line of family royalty have been broken by an alien faith – namely Christianity. In Japan, where the cult has not been universally regarded as idolatrous, a compromise has sometimes been made to enable Christians to maintain their traditional veneration of the family ancestors.

In the seventeenth century Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit missionary and scholar, in seeking to come to terms with Chinese culture, carefully studied the Confucian Rites and concluded that they were not idolatrous. Thus a Christian could conscientiously observe them. The Franciscans and Dominicans disagreed and the controversy was bitter. The emperor Kang Hsi supported Matteo Ricci, but the pope sided with his rivals. Consequently the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries were expelled from China.

3. Taoism – the philosophy of dualism and complementarity

One important aspect of Chinese philosophy is the belief that the cosmos is governed by two opposing forces – yin

and yang. Yin represents femininity, maternity, earth, cold, darkness, weakness and death. It is negative and passive. It is the north. Yang is masculinity, paternity, heaven, warmth, light, strength and life. It is positive and active. It is the south. The *yin* force contracts, while the *yang* force expands.

The origins of this fundamental dualistic outlook are uncertain and may not be earlier than the fourth century BC. The system was finally elaborated by both Confucianists and Taoists and the form, completed in the Sung Dynasty (AD 960-1217), was Neo-Confucianism. It was an endeavour to express the phenomena of nature. Under the Taoists, it grew to be more than a speculative theory regarding the order of the universe. It became a science applied both to geomancy (*feng shui*) and to medicine, alchemy, etc.

The symbol of this system is the *pa kua* (eight trigrams), which comes from the appendices of *The Book of Changes* and is ascribed to Confucius, but may be of a later date. The trigrams are composed of combinations of a long dash (*yang*) and two short dashes (*yin*). Heaven, for instance, is totally male with three long dashes, while earth is totally female with six short dashes. The other six trigrams represent water, fire, wind, thunder, vapour and mountains. These are arranged around the central symbol of the two 'fish' (*yin* and *yang*) which was added in the Sung Dynasty. The fish complement each other and represent *T'ai chi* (primal matter). One version is included, incidently, in the Korean national flag.

While Confucius is a historical reality, Laozi is a shadowy and perhaps mythical figure of whom nothing is known except that he is the supposed author of the classic Taoist work, the *Tao-te Ching* or *Way and Moral Principle Classic*. While Confucianism is essentially down to earth, Taoism is an abstruse philosophy which might have been popular with the modern beatnik or hippie. For it advocated non-interference with the course of nature and a life free from all man-made restrictions. For the Taoist nothing stands still or is fixed. There are therefore no static standards or conventions. The term Tao from which the religion derives its name is the same word used to translate both 'the Word' in chapter 1 and 'the Way' in chapter 14 of John's Gospel. The term is of great importance in Chinese thought. It means primarily the 'way' or the 'road' and thus 'the way of the Universe'. It is supposed to be the first principle, even preceding God – the 'universal cosmic energy behind the order of nature'. But it is so mysterious that 'they who know do not tell and they who tell do not know'. Man follows the laws of earth, earth follows the laws of heaven, heaven follows the laws of Tao and Tao follows the laws of spontaneity. Thus the original reign of Tao represents the ideal state of pristine perfection when men acted spontaneously in harmony with the laws of Tao and good and evil were unknown. The Taoist therefore aims at a return to this happy paradise by Conforming to the Virtue (*Te*) of self-emptiness, seeking, like water, the lowest place and by returning to the absolutely simple life of nature. Taoist poetry expresses

this mystical communion with unspoiled nature. Its quietism and passivity have influenced many Chinese minds and it has been called 'one of the prime ingredients of Chinese culture'.

Chuang-Tzû (b. 330 BC), a disciple of Laozi, was a contemporary of Mencius and one of the most brilliant writers of antiquity. He too stressed the uselessness of mere sense knowledge, emphasized the essential unity of all creation and spoke of the 'obliterating unity of Tao'. Man can return to his primitive innocence only by discarding all vaunted wisdom and an artificial way of life. In this Taoism is more akin to contemplative Buddhism than to Confucianism. Chuang-Tzû sometimes quoted from the Tao-Te-Ching but his version of Taoism is in some ways original.

Taoism was eventually corrupted from its early simplicity by the introduction of the magical side of philosophy. Its followers set out on a search for the elixir of immortality, and engaged in spiritism. And so Taoism quickly degenerated into what it is today – a polytheistic system of spiritualism, demonism and superstition.

Confucianism and Communism

Communism as such has no objections to Confucianism as a moral philosophy, but it rejects ancestor worship (which was a later accretion anyway), as a relic of feudalism. As Confucianism encourages clan loyalty, the Communists have sought to counter this by encouraging loyalty to the state. As this failed, they decided to

promote something a bit more concrete and personal: the cult of Mao. In some places ancestral shrines were even dedicated to Mao. He came to be the great father-figure and venerated ancestor, in a conscious effort to replace Confucianism.

The religious situation in China

The following statistics give an interesting picture:

Out of a population of 1,300 million

640 million class themselves as atheists

260 m as traditional religious

130 m as Christian (consisting of 110 m Protestants and 20 m Catholics)

100 m Buddhists

30 m Taoists

20 m Muslims

Statistics from 2007 (Idea Graphic).

ISLAM

Introduction: There are in the world today 1 billion Muslims and 2 billion Christians.

According to Operation world, 17% of the world's population is Muslim, as against 33% Christian.

Concentrations are to be found in what used to be the Arab empire. Indonesia has the largest islamic population.

Countries since lost to islam are on the list of those to be regained (principally Israel). It has a missionary zeal: over 1000 missionaries leave Egypt each year to islamise the African continent. But places as distant as Britain are also on the list of objectives. Recent years have seen the rise of islamic fundamentalism, largely as a reaction against western influences. It has become a powerful ideology, and with the demise of communism, the most serious challenge to the Christian West. Turkey would dearly like to join the European community, but has so far been excluded on the grounds that the EU is basically a Christian (i.e. Catholic) super-state.

Just as many in communism were in high positions because they were power-hungry, it is also a sad fact that many regard islamic fundamentalism as a means of gaining political power and holding on to it.

Just as in communism, the world was divided into two areas: the area where there is peace (= communism) and the area where there is war (capitalism), so in islam the world is divided into the part that is already islamic (*dar al-islam*) and the part that remains to be conquered for islam (*dar-al-harb*). It is therefore a political challenge.

Islamic fundamentalists (purists) want to impose sharia law on all islamic lands, and this causes friction within islam itself.

But is it a **religious** challenge? Emphatically yes. It is a rival religion to Christianity (it is certainly in strict competition as far as Africa is concerned). Some have gone so far as to say that islam is the last and greatest judaeo-christian heresy. If we agree, we can see that

islam is a subtle rival because it contains elements from both judaism and christianity. A heresy is particularly dangerous when it incorporates many ideas of its parent body. In order to appreciate the religious challenge of islam, we need to look at its origins and in particular its founder and his claims.

LIFE OF MUHAMMED

Born in 570 AD, died in 632 AD, he was not a scholar or a philosopher (he was illiterate), but essentially a visionary. He was born in Mecca into the Quraish tribe, but at an early age was left as an orphan and brought up by his uncle Abu Talib. In his early life he became the servant to a caravan owner. The owner, Khadija, afterwards became his wife at the age of 40 when he was only 25. She had a very strong influence upon him. From the marriage came two boys and four girls: the youngest of the girls, Fatima, later became Muhammed's favourite and married his cousin, Ali, who later became the fourth caliph (successor). It was not until early middle age that he turned his mind to religion. In the caravan business he had been able to move around and see a lot of the world. In particular he had excellent opportunity to observe many religions at first hand. The Christian Church in the Byzantine empire was unfortunately very largely corrupt. He also came across much Jewish teaching.

The religion of Arabia in the 7th century was polytheism. Allah was the Moon God and head of the pantheon, who had three daughters: Allat (Sky), Manat (Fate) and Uzzah (Morning Star). The pagan Arabs worshipped the Moon-god Allah by praying toward Mecca several times a day; making a pilgrimage to Mecca; running around the temple of the Moon-god called the Kabah; kissing the black stone; killing an animal in sacrifice to the Moon-god; throwing stones at the devil; fasting for the month which begins and ends with the crescent moon; giving alms to the poor, etc.

Muhammed became appalled at this idolatry, in the light of monotheistic Judaism, but his solution to the problem was to promote the Moon God to the status of being the only god. The symbol of the moon God is clearly seen in the symbol of islam which is the crescent moon. Islam is thus essentially worship of the Moon God which predominated in the Middle East in OT times.

Maybe at this stage Muhammed was sincerely seeking after the truth. But after his crisis experience, he tried persuasion and afterwards force. He was the product of a religious crisis but what was the nature of his "conversion"? It probably resulted from his habit of meditating on Mt Hirah (outside Mecca). He belonged to a group called the Hanifas (seekers after truth - native pre-Islamic Arab monotheists) who practised meditation. They were dissatisfied with paganism but sided neither with Christianity nor Judaism. Muhammed saw in a dream a figure bringing him a piece of silk brocade with words on it. He was told to recite the words by the angel

Gabriel. Startled and frightened, Mohammad asked, "What shall I recite?" Immediately he felt his throat tighten, as if the angel had grabbed his neck and was choking him. Certainly it is true to say that he was not a normal person psychologically speaking. We treat demonism seriously: in the Middle Ages they said that he was sent by the devil in order to break up the Christian Church. Quite apart from this, with his fertile imagination and strong religious bent, he was almost bound to have a vision. His preaching probably consisted in stern ejaculations, each one of which, when written down, was called a sura (chapter). There are 114 of them in the Quran.

When he had these visions, he went into spasms, foamed at the mouth and woke up with a severe headache. His wife, who was a nominal Christian, thought that the angel Gabriel was speaking to him. What is clear is that he was in contact with some supernatural agency. In at least 11 places the Quran tries to defend Muhammed from the accusation of being possessed by demons, which proves that at least some of his contemporaries suspected the worst. The apostle John tells us to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. This is not arbitrary, because they have to agree not only with the rest of the NT but also with what the OT says.

Although he won converts from his own family circle and was encouraged by them, he soon encountered opposition from elsewhere. He won over his cousin Ali, his friend, Abu Bakr (who became the first caliph), and

his son in law, Uttmann, later to become the third caliph. He openly denounced the polytheism of Arabia. His own tribe tried to silence him, as they controlled the large black stone of the Ka'aba. Thereupon he sent some of his followers to Ethiopia, which was nominally Christian. This happened on two occasions. He couldn't even write, though he had heard the story of Jesus. Eventually he was allowed to return to Mecca, provided he only preached to outsiders. Later, opposition grew and he and his followers had to leave. They fled to Jathrib (later Medina) in 622. This flight is called the Hagirah (emigration), and all Muslim dates take their point of departure from there.

From then on, he made Medina his headquarters and became a powerful chieftain. He built a mosque with living quarters for his family. This first place of prayer and meeting was the open courtyard of Mohammad's own house. The house consisted of a number of rooms of sun-dried bricks surrounding the open courtyard. Each one of Mohammad's wives had an equal-sized room. Other houses were built for his followers. As the influx of new believers continued, however, there was not enough water for the increased agricultural needs. He gave permission for his followers – the refugees from Mecca – to plunder caravans for a living. There ensued a series of battles which established Muhammed's ascendancy. A raid on a Meccan caravan was made in the sacred month when war was banned in Arabia – this begins the conception of jihad or "holy war", no doubt originally conceived in order to justify his patently illegal action. One also gets the impression that

many of his prophecies were concocted in order to justify his illegal conduct.

His first campaign was against 1,000 Meccans, supported by a contingent of Jews, whom he routed at Basr, as he had chosen the right terrain on which to fight the battle. Up to this time he had favoured the Jews but now he visited his displeasure upon them. The Meccans launched a retaliatory attack and marched on Medina, defeating Muhammed and company. They then withdrew, honour having been satisfied. Muhammed was wounded but vowed revenge and came later against Medina with many soldiers. The Meccans were defeated. As soon as the battle was over, he turned on the Jews. They surrendered, but he massacred 800 of them. One of the immediate consequences of Muhammad's frustration was the expulsion of two Jewish tribes from Medina and the murder of all the members of a third Jewish tribe (except for the women and children, who were sold into slavery). He took over Mecca, a centre of religious worship, where he wiped out idolatry except for the black-stone. He went on to dominate the whole Arabian peninsular politically, and then he established a religious monopoly.

He died in 632 but never appointed a successor. Under Umar (one of his converts) Abu Bakr was appointed his successor. From 632-634) Islam spread to N. Africa and Pakistan area. Under Utman (644-656) it spread to the Fertile Crescent. All acted on the basis of the sword or the

crescent (i.e. be converted or be killed). Muhammed's successors were either called Caliph (political leaders) or Imam (religious leaders). After Utman, Ali and Ayesha (his wife) came to power. But after Ali's assassination, Islam started to split up into sects.

THE ORIGINS AND ESSENCE OF ISLAM

1) Economic and Political Changes

In the Mecca in which Muhammed grew up, the merchants were adjusting themselves to the new situation brought about by the Persian occupation of the Yemen. The Arabian peninsular was at this time the scene of conflicting interests between the Byzantine empire (to the north) and the Persian Empire under the Sasanid dynasty (to the east). From at least the 4th century the Persians had some influence in the Yemen. About 570 they sent a sea-borne invading force to occupy the region, and subsequently tried to develop trade from the Yemen to Iraq by the overland route which passed through Mecca. In this town, commerce was expanding and the power and the prestige of the merchants was growing. Trade grew to such an extent that Mecca had become the centre of far-reaching social change: a pastoral nomadic community was being transformed into a mercantile one. This caused an upset of every aspect of life, including religion. In Mecca, the tribal solidarity was being replaced by individualism. The great merchants were putting business interest before everything else,

including clan allegiance and religion. The breakdown of the tribe or clan led to the oppression of the weaker members of the community such as orphans and widows. With this breakdown of the tribe or kinship group went a breakdown of the public opinion which had helped to enforce the nomadic moral code, and with this breakdown of morality and failure of public opinion came a deterioration of the religious life of the Meccans. Men had ceased to think much of honour, and thought only of increasing their wealth and power. The Quran really acts as a corrective to all this, to bring men back to the nomadic ideal. Muhammed needed a unifying factor which was religious, economic and political. The Quran seeks to correct these abuses in the following ways:

- a) It calls upon men to acknowledge the power and goodness of God, thereby denying the omnipotence of the wealthy man. Man's life is now seen as meaningful only in so far as it is upright (and not through commercial success). The supreme aim in life is now not to live honourably or to increase one's wealth with no regard to the hereafter, but to live uprightly so as to attain the joys of paradise. Unless this were the case, Muhammed would soon be out of business.
- b) This leads to some practical conclusions. Men are to be generous with their wealth, especially towards orphans and destitute persons.

c) This recall to virtue is given powerful sanction in the doctrine of the Last Day when God will reward or punish men according to their deeds. This explains Muhammed's emphasis on judgement: It is a means to an end.

d) The more fundamental matters, the prevention of murder, theft or adultery, were still adequately dealt with by traditional custom, and in particular by blood feud.

As for the rest of the material in the Kuran, it has been said, not without justification, that it reflects the war of words and ideas between Muhammed and his opponents throughout the remainder of his life in Mecca. His controversy with the Jews and with non-Arabic speaking opponents are examples of this.

ISLAMIC PRACTICE in brief

Faith and practice of Islam are governed by theology and jurisprudence: Muslim theology (*Tawhid*) defines what a man must **believe**. Muslim Law (Sharia) defines what a man must **do**. There is no priesthood or sacraments.

The six greatest prophets are recognised as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Isa (Jesus) and Muhammed.

The five pillars of Islam (Din) are:

- a) Kalima (recital) or declaration of faith (shahada)
- b) Salat (prayer with 8 postures or raka)
- c) Fasting including Ramazan (sawm)
- d) Zakat/Zadaqah (almsgiving)
- e) Umra (normal pilgrimage) and Hajj (special pilgrimage to Mecca)

Another sacred duty emphasised in Islam is Jihad (holy war). This means the personal struggle to obey the will of Allah, but also the struggle to spread Islam in the world.

JIHAD

"Muslims often claim that jihad refers to non-violent 'struggle' and not to 'holy war.'" However, according to the Encyclopedia of Islam, "jihad" is the "spread of Islam by arms... a religious duty upon Muslims in general ... Jihad must continue to be done until the whole world is under the rule of Islam."

During the Mecca era (610-622 AD), Muslims were not militant, but at the same time, they did not have any political power. Therefore, the suras (chapters of the Koran) regarding non-Muslims written in Mecca are peaceful. But Mohammed changed his mind after 622 AD, following his escape from Mecca to Medina. From then on, he called for a militant jihad (war) against all non-Muslims: "Lead a war against the non-believers, be

hard on them because they are destined for hell" (Sura 66:9). This doesn't refer only to Jews, but to all non-Muslims, including Christians.

When the suras of Mecca defined Islam, Jews and Christians were treated well by the Muslims. This changed abruptly when Islamic teachers brought the suras of Medina to the forefront, which is still the case today. According to Sura 49:15, the readiness to fight in the jihad is a sign of genuine Muslim piety. According to the Harijite (Islamic Law), holy war is an essential article of Muslim faith and cannot be renounced under any circumstances.

The Koran states that anyone who dies in the jihad enters Paradise immediately. Conversely, Muslims who die under ordinary circumstances go through a waiting period and subsequent ordeal. Since Islam doesn't guarantee redemption, the jihad becomes a sort of "passport to salvation" for the Muslim.

The *Quran*, plus the *Hadith* (description of Muhammed's deeds) and the *Ijma* (consensus of the Muslim community or Muslim scholars) constitute the threefold path (*sunna*) which Muslims must follow.

These Islamic Scriptures are divided up as follows:

Quran – divided up into *suras* (chapters) and *ayat* (verses). It is regarded as superior to the Bible. The material for this book was not collected during Muhammed's lifetime but after his death and assembled

from the testimony of reliable witnesses. It exists in several versions: the version used by the sunnis is not quite the same as the one used by the shiites, nor that used by the wahabis.

According to Muhammad, the people of God, that is, the Jews and the Christians, were going astray; the purpose of the Arabic Recitation or Quran was to restore God's faithful to the proper path.

Hadith: a narrative concerning a deed or utterance of the prophet Muhammad reported by his companions. This forms the historical background to the sayings of Muhammed.

Sunna – Islamic law, based on Muhammed's words and acts but not actually written by him. The shiites do not recognise this book.

Ijma – the consensus of the Imams

Qiyas – analogy (the learned have to find out by analogy what the prophet would have said).

According to the doctrine of abrogation, God gave later suras in the Quran to cancel earlier ones. There are over 200 which have been cancelled in the Quran.

99 names are given to God, and these can be represented as beads on a rosary; by telling the beads one can get

merit. They are also portrayed in calligraphy, for which the Arabs are famous.

Great prominence is given to angels. These are:

Jibrail – the revealer or the messenger (the holy spirit who strengthened Jesus?)

Izrail – the custodian of the faithful, in life and at death.

Israfil – trumpeters of the dawn

Mikal – the providence of God.

All these fight against evil spirits on behalf of the believers.

The Jinn are either good or evil. Ruling over the Jinn is Sahitan or Iblis.

The four Sunni (orthodox) schools are split round a conflict between reason and tradition. Greek philosophy has made considerable inroads into Islam resulting in a sort of scholasticism and mysticism along Gnostic lines.

THE EXPANSION OF ISLAM

The reasons for its success were as follows:

- a) Local Christians were disgusted by Byzantine oppression
- b) Christian heretical sects were persecuted by the orthodox Greek Christians.

- c) Advantages of the Pax Islamica. Provided taxes were paid, protection was assured.
- d) Muhammed's exploitation of the jihad (holy war) principle, which was derived from the principle of the friendly razzia.
- e) Arab tribes had to have an outward stimulous in order to prevent inward-looking attitudes and harmful internal dissentions.
- f) Both the Persians and the Byzantine emperors were rapidly losing their grip on their respective possessions. The Persians had invaded the Byzantine empire but been thrown back and defeated, thus leaving a power vacuum.

By Mohammed's death (632) the Arabian peninsular was united under Islam. His successor or caliph (= head), Abu Bakr, led the largely bedouin armies against the Byzantine and Sasanian armies. The next caliph, Umar, extended the boundaries still further before his murder. The third Caliph, Uthman, belonged to the Umayyad house (650-750), an aristocratic family from Mecca. This family was to become the most prominent in Islamic history. These caliphs ruled from **Damascus** until 750 and were succeeded by the Abbasids who ruled from **Baghdad** (750-1258). The Ottomans ruled from **Istanbul** from the 14th cent onwards.

Despite internal dissension, the Muslim empire, partly religious, partly political and military, expanded until by the time of the Crusades, it was a vast area stretching from the Pyrenees to the Indus river. It was not in its

later years ruled by one caliph. In the East the Seljuk Turks had overthrown the caliphs of Baghdad: in the centre, a schismatic group, the Caliphate of Cairo, held sway; and in the west the Almoravids, a Moorish people, governed.

By 1900 almost all of the Muslim conquest came under British, French or Dutch rule. A reaction against this has produced Muslim fundamentalism.

Today, Muslim fundamentalists not only want to restore the caliphate (muslim empire) but to extend it to the whole world (i.e. to complete previous muslim conquests).

THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION AND SUBSEQUENT FRAGMENTATION INTO SECTS:

Muhammed died without leaving a successor (Caliph). This left three parties with rival views as to succession:

- a) The companions of the prophet, who believed in the eligibility of any suitable early believer of the tribe of Quraysh.
- b) The aristocracy of Mecca, who wished to capture the Caliphate for the family of Ummaya.
- c) The Legitimists who believed that no election was needed, but that Ali was the divinely designated

successor, because he was a direct descendant of Muhammad

However, Abu-Bakr nominated Umar as his successor and there was no objection to this. He in turn died without appointing a successor. When Ali became the fourth and last of the orthodox rulers, two of his leading companions rose in revolt, but were beaten at the battle of the Camel in which 10,000 Muslims lost their lives. After this, the governor of Syria marched against them and managed to get Ali, who was losing the battle, to submit to arbitration for the Caliphate. Some of Ali's followers were disgusted at Ali's compromise and seceded. They became known as the Kharijis and one of them later murdered Ali.

A split then developed between those who favoured hereditary succession (the **Shiites**) and those who did not and adhered to tradition or **Sunna** (the Sunnites). This division is perpetuated to this day in two competing theological systems. The Shiites rejected the opinion of the consensus of the community and substituted for it the doctrine that there was an infallible Imam in every age to whom God alone entrusted the guidance of his servants. According to them, Ali had received secret teaching from Muhammad which was then handed down to the imams. They also taught that the faithful must believe in all the Imams and especially in the Imam of their own time. An extreme view along these lines states that the imams are more or less incarnations of the deity. The real difference between the Sunni and the Shia is that the Sunni is a

church founded on the consent of the community whereas Shia is an authoritarian church ruled over by a pope. The parallel to Catholicism is striking. The Shiites can also be seen as an Iranian reaction against the arrogance of the Arabs whom they saw as traitors to Islam. The Shia soon split up into a large number of sects. Most Muslims, however, are Sunnis and base their beliefs on the Kuran, the teaching of the first four caliphs and collection of traditions (*hadit*). The Gulf's views on Iran are generally shaped by decades-old perceptions that the Shiite-led Islamic Republic seeks to weaken the Sunni monarchs and sheiks ruling from Kuwait to Oman.

A variation of the Shia idea of a line of infallible imams is the concept of the Mahdi: one of the imams who is destined to return supernaturally as a sort of Messiah. Iran's leader Ahmadinejad believes that he is preparing the way for the appearance of the Mahdi, a Saviour figure in Shiite Islamic teaching who will reappear at the end of this age at a time of great distress on the earth and impose Islam on the whole world. Defeating Israel is seen as a key preparation for this event.

Hezbollah is the militant wing of the Shiites in Lebanon and was formed primarily to offer resistance to the Israeli occupation. It also dreamed of transforming Lebanon's multi-confessional state into an Iranian-style Islamic state, although this idea was later abandoned in favour of a more inclusive approach that has survived to this day. But this is still probably their hidden agenda. The party's rhetoric also calls for the destruction of the state of Israel.

It regards the whole of Palestine as occupied Muslim land and it argues that Israel has no right to exist.

Other sects revolve around the problem of succession and to what extent Ali's family or the imams ought to be revered.

The Wah'habis were founded during the 18th century decadence, and called for the return of the primitive rigour of Islam. They were part of the Sunni **Salafi** movement which aimed to return to primitive islam as practised by the first three generation of Muslims after Mohammed. The sect is predominant in Saudi Arabia, from where Bin Ladin hails. They have their own version of the Quran which they have doctored in order to give it a militantly anti-Jewish and anti-Christian bias. Here are some examples of this:

The Wahhabi Koran is notable in that, while Muslims believe that their sacred text was dictated by God and cannot be altered, the Saudi English version adds to the original so as to change its sense in a radical direction. For example, the opening chapter, or surah, is known as Fatiha, and is recited in Muslim daily prayer and (among non-Wahhabis) as a memorial to the dead. The four final lines of Fatiha read, in a normal rendition of the Arabic original (such as this translation by N.J. Dawood, published by Penguin Books):
Guide us to the straight path, / The path of those whom You have favoured, / Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, / Nor of those who have gone astray.

The Wahhabi Koran renders these lines: *Guide us to the Straight Way. / The Way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who have earned Your Anger (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians).* The Wahhabi Koran prints this translation alongside the Arabic text, which contains no reference to either Jews or Christians.

There is nothing to indicate to the uninformed reader that these interpolations, printed in parentheses, are absent from the Arabic. The reader encountering Islam for the first time, as well as the Muslim already indoctrinated in Wahhabism, is led to believe that the Koran denounces all Jews and Christians, which it does not.

There are, of course, many individuals who are unprepared to read this translation with a critical eye. This is especially true wherever Wahhabis conduct the missionary outreach called *dawa* -- above all in prisons in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. Indeed, it is to just such readers that this edition is directed. The Wahhabi Koran is also a mainstay of Muslim student groups on campuses throughout the West.

Distortions of the text stating or implying that God has condemned the Jews and Christians are scattered throughout the Wahhabi Koran. Notably, they invert the meaning of the several verses that express respect for the "People of the Book," the Jews and Christians. Thus, verse 2:62 in its authentic form states: Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans --whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right -- shall be rewarded by their Lord. (The Sabaeans were followers of an ancient religion impossible to identify clearly today.) In the Saudi English translation, this

passage is footnoted to declare, *No other religion except Islam will be accepted from anyone*, although no such statement appears in the Arabic.

The standard translation of verse 3:113 reads: *There are among the People of the Book some upright men who all night long recite the revelations of God and worship Him, who believe in God and the Last Day, who enjoin justice and forbid evil.*

The Saudi translation again inserts verbiage hostile to non-Muslims. In the Wahhabi Koran, the upright Jews and Christians turn out to be *those who convert to Islam: those enjoining Islamic Monotheism and following Prophet Muhammad and not opposing Prophet Muhammad*. To repeat, where the Arabic text actually praises pious Jews and Christians, the Wahhabi English version *praises only Jews and Christians who become Muslims*.

The original verse 5:65 says of the Jews and Christians: If they observe the Torah and the Gospel and what is revealed to them from their Lord, they shall enjoy abundance.

The Wahhabi edition adds that, *in addition to Jews' observing the Torah and Christians' the New Testament, both must accept the Koran -- that is, become Muslims --* which nowhere appears in the Arabic text and conflicts with traditional Islamic theology. Mainstream Islam treats the Torah, the New Testament, and the Koran as different books. Wahhabism, by contrast, *treats the Jewish and Christian scriptures as primitive editions of the Islamic text*.

And, inevitably, the Wahhabi Koran adds language aggravating Muslim-Jewish controversies. Verse 17:1 refers to the night journey, an out-of-body experience in which the

Prophet Muhammad was taken on a magical steed to a site called in the standard text *the farther Temple*.

The Wahhabi translation alters this *to stake the Islamic claim to Jerusalem. It refers to Muhammad's journey by night from Al-Masjid-al-Haram (at Makkah) to the farthest mosque (in Jerusalem)*.

Sufis: Another important aspect of islam is mysticism. This is represented by the **sufis**, who claim that salvation can be achieved by mystic union with the deity, and that the Quran and good works are largely irrelevant in this respect. To this group belong the dervishes who attempted to gain heightened degree of consciousness (a transe) by whirling around in a dance. The Bektashis in Albania are yet another branch of the same group.

The Sufi are the non-militant counterparts of the Kharijites (who were anti-Sunni). They are the Muslim mystics who attempt to fill the gap left by orthodox emphasis on the transcendence of God to the detriment of his immanence. The word comes from *Suph* = wool: the original members wore cloaks of wool, because they lived in monastic communities under religious rulers (Shayks or Pir). The movement thus shows the influence of the desert Christian mystics, of neo-platonism and of Hinduism. In practice it mostly amounts to pantheism. Al Ghazali was the most important leader of this movement.

It is largely pantheistic: in this life, the soul is temporarily separated from God but in the next life it will be merged with God. The influence of gnosticism is seen here, but as they are Muslim, they have to correct themselves. The

Sufi's experience is that of alternate bouts of union with the world-soul and suffering in breaks until the next mystic session comes round. A famous pupil, Hallaj was crucified for his practices in this realm: He practised "*hullul*" (indwelling) which meant that he could say "Praise be to me", because he had achieved unity with the godhead.

The Bahaj: This is a modern movement founded in Persia by a man who claimed to be the intermediary of the Mahdi (a son of Ali, Muhammed). After his death he was believed to be hidden in a mountain in Arabia, miraculously fed and guarded, till he should return to rule in righteousness. He called himself the Bab and was executed for being a heretic. His son, Baha-Ullah, took over. Further revelations seem to boil down to theosophy. They have very simple decor and worship which really consists of listening to theosophical papers. They have a pantheistic theology and a continuous revelation. However, many Muslims do not recognise this as a form of Islam at all. Bahaj is really a merging of two ideas: the Mahdi who is to come again or be reincarnated, and mysticism.

Bahai really belongs to a number of modern movements that took Islam as their starting point, but some of which ended up by propagating a new religion under the pretext of reforming Islam.

They claim that their book supercedes the Quran.

ISLAM - A CRITIQUE

Muhammed can be seen as a social and religious reformer who was concerned by new social conditions (i.e. capitalism) which had arisen in the Arabian peninsular as a result of Persian occupation of Jemen and a struggle between the Persians and Byzantines for the possession of the Arabian peninsular which threatened to cause the Arabs to lose their religion. The noble nomadic ideal was in danger of being lost as business interests were being put before everything else. Muhammad therefore wanted to start a pan-Arab religion which would streamline their previous paganism and unify them. This religion, in order to produce unity, had to be monotheistic. He therefore borrowed ideas from the two monotheistic religions with which he had contact: Christianity and Judaism. Unfortunately the form in which Muhammad encountered them in Arabia was heretical and degenerate. The Jews in Arabia had come there because of either exile or trade, but they had lost touch with Orthodoxy in Jerusalem. The Christians he encountered were mostly heretics who had been banished from the Byzantine empire because of their views. They were mostly gnostics, monophysite monks, Nestorians, and a sect called the Collyridians who worshipped the Virgin Mary. From this latter group Muhammed must have concluded that the Christian Trinity consisted of God the Father, Mary the Mother and Jesus the Son.

No wonder he reacted against this distortion of the Trinity: unfortunately he threw the baby out with the bathwater by thenceforth maintaining that God was not a Trinity. Similarly, his reaction against the cross can probably be traced back to a reaction against the excessive reverence (bordering on idolatry) given to the cross by some of the Christians whom he met, especially monks who also venerated icons.

The Quranic name for Jesus (Isa) is probably based on the name Esau by which the Jews referred to him, the rejected brother of Jacob (Israel).

Muhammed seemed to have had a deep conviction that the Arabs, like the Jews or Christians, needed a Messenger and a Book, and so he longed to be favoured with some revelation that would make him their Prophet. Satan obliged. The sharp staccato style of the early suras could be explained as symptoms of intermittent spirit possession.

Muhammed received his knowledge of biblical conceptions in general (as distinct from the details of some of the stories) from the intellectual environment of Mecca, and not from reading, or from any communication with specific individuals. It is highly improbable that any Arab Christian possessed the Scriptures in the area where Muhammed circulated: no wonder he reproduced garbled accounts! Islam thus in a sense belongs to the judaeo-christian tradition because it sprang up in a milieu that was permeated by biblical ideas. The additional influence which went to make Islam

was the attempt to find remedies for the social malaise of Mecca, and not so much a desire for personal piety. In other words, Islam was an Arabic brand of monotheism geared particularly to the new Arabic social set-up. The subsequent history of Islam bears this out:

THE QURAN: According to an Egyptian cleric: "The Quran was dictated to Muhammad in a series of revelations over the course of 22 years from 610-632 by the angel Gabriel. He received them in a state of trance. When he came out of the trance, he dictated his vision to his companions, who set them down on parchment. The Quran has been revealed by God to the prophet Muhammad and a not a jot of it has been changed. The Bible, on the other hand, is merely the work of many men's hands."

Claims regarding the inspiration of the Quran were to some extent the product of Muhammed's confrontations with the Jews.

Muhammad and the Jews: They dominated the economic life of the Hijaz. They held all the best oases in the area, ran the markets and so controlled nearly all the trade among the surrounding people. They monopolised trades and businesses also in Medina and Mecca. They were thus a commercial challenge to the Arabs and to Muhammad and his tribe in particular. Some of Muhammad's harshness towards them is no doubt the result of Arab resentment at their economic exploitation of the Arabs.

After being rejected by his own tribe, Mohammed decided to flee Mecca and seek refuge in Medina, a city predominantly inhabited by Jews. Because they allowed him to move in, the Quran praised them, describing as “guidance and light” (5:44) and a “righteous” people (6:153–154), who “excelled the nations” (45:16). But as the Jews refused to convert to Islam, Mohammed’s attitude changed, growing more hostile – something that found expression in the Quran.

Paz explains the change of tone by the prophet’s desire to establish a state in Medina. “Mohammed’s verses served the constantly changing environment and had to fit the conditions on the ground. He wanted to spread his religion, so he had to be tough to make people abide by the law,” said the expert. “Initially, the prophet wanted to please the Jews, so he sought their recognition by directing his disciples to pray in the direction of Jerusalem. Following the eruption of the dispute with the Jews that caused an estimated 700 of them to die, he changed his mind, telling followers to face Mecca instead”.

Muhammad's reception amongst the Jews of Medina ranged from indifference to hostility and, among Jewish scholars, open ridicule. His accusation that the Jews and Christians had tampered with the Scriptures arose from their rejection of him. His versions of biblical accounts (which he claimed to have received as divine revelation) were so at variance with the Scriptures that they openly mocked him. To this he countered by saying that it was the Jews who had corrupted the Scriptures. He seems to

have believed, incidentally, that Isa (Jesus) received the NT direct from heaven. Maybe this is where he got his idea that the Quran arose in the same way. Such indignities Muhammad could not forgive. Within five years he succeeded in having most of Medina's Jews banished or slain.

This claim that Christians (and presumably Jews) have distorted the Scriptures is a serious challenge that has to be met head-on. One of the claims is that different translations prove that the text has been tampered with, but there are different translations of the Quran also. But what about the Quran, does it bear the hallmarks of inspiration?

Muslims claim that there is only one version of the Quran that has never been altered. However, it is clear that the Quran was collected together after Muhammed's death and that a number of variant versions existed. Nineteen years after the death of Muhammed, the third caliph, Uthman, declared his edition as official and ordered all other editions to be destroyed.

This occurred because there were disputes between different groups of Muslims as to what constituted the true text, as they each had differing versions. Uthman subsequently did not hesitate to burn an original copy which belonged to a female companion of Muhammed. The earliest surviving manuscripts must date from around 150 years after Muhammed's death. These are the Samarkand codex in Tashkent and the one in the Topkapi

museum in Istanbul. This has been established by examining the type of script used.

The suras of the Quran are written in rhymed form, which must have required time, thought and labour. How could he have believed that they had all come ready prepared by some angelic visitor?

The detailed regulations of all sorts must have been carefully worked out as each case came to his attention. They can hardly have been the direct revelation from an angel.

According to the doctrine of abrogation, God gave later suras in the Quran to cancel earlier ones. There are over 200 which have been cancelled in the Quran. Further, Muslims consider that the Quran has abrogated all previous Scriptures, including the Bible. This however is not in the Quran.

The Satanic verses: Rich Meccan merchants tried to do a deal with Muhammad whereby they would cease to oppose him if he acknowledged some secondary gods whose shrines they controlled (Aluzzat, Manat and Lat). This he did at first, but then invalidated the earlier verses with the excuse that Satan had tricked him into it. These verses (An-Naim 53) are still part of the Quran.

Some of Muhammad's personal problems were sometimes solved by a divine revelation of a most convenient kind. He was granted the right, unlike other

believers, to have more than four wives, and dispensed from the normal obligation to divide his time equally between them. He escaped criticism when, in defiance of the Arab custom, he married the divorced wife of his adopted son.

It has been said, not without justification, that the Kuran reflects the war of words and ideas between Muhammed and his opponents throughout the remainder of his life in Mecca. His controversy with the Jews and with non-Arabic speaking opponents are cases in point.

A reading of the Quran also reveals evident influences from certain Christian heresies.

a) The Quran's version of biblical stories are so garbled and lack the detail of authenticity, that one is forced to the conclusion that Muhammed must have gleaned them from apostate Christians or Jews who had no direct access to the actual Scriptures.

b) The austere use of "we" for the deity and the constant reference to secret histories and interpretation of mysteries is very similar to the tone of Gnostic writings.

'This is one of the secret histories that We reveal unto thee...' One gets the impression that Muhammed adopts a gnostic pose in order to convince his contemporaries.

c) The reference to Jesus preaching to men in his cradle, and to breathing into a clay bird to make it a living bird all point to a nodding acquaintance (presumably through hearsay) with the apocryphal Gospels (eg *The Gospel of Thomas*).

- d) The denial of Jesus' death on the Cross is the essence of docetism (first and second century heresy springing from gnosticism), against which John wrote his first epistle.
- e) Christians are accused of regarding the jinn (demons) as Allah's equals, though He Himself created them. This seems to smack of Origen's neo-platonism: the pre-existence of souls, of which one became the Word. We know that the writings of Origen were very popular among the monks.

There is much evidence to suggest that many of the practices which Muhammed introduced into Islam were done so in order to deliberately counter Christian and Jewish practices.

- a) The very word Quran means "recitation", or "that which is recited". It apparently comes from the Syriac word *qeryana* — a word that was applied to the Scripture lesson which was read or recited by Christians at public worship. Thus the command to recite seems to imply that public worship is to be instituted along with lines of the Syriac-speaking Christians, and that instead of their lessons from the Bible, this revelation given to Muhammed was to be recited.
- b) The day for going to the Mosque is Friday, not Saturday or Sunday.
- c) Muslims turn to Mecca when they pray, Jews to Jerusalem and Christians turn East when they say the creed.

A Christian assessment of Islam

1. It is an attempt to found a new religion to rival Christianity and Judaism, but with two important differences:

a. **Muhammad is in the centre:** and since he is in the centre, then Christ has to be displaced. It is not for nothing that he calls himself the Prophet (a messianic title). We have to ask ourselves the question who is the true messiah: Jesus or Muhammad, for it is quite clear that there is not room for both of them). It is inadequate to say that while Jesus is the Saviour of the Christians, Muhammad is the saviour of the Arabs. The claims of the true messiah are universal.

Muhammad

He had no divine confirmation of being a prophet by performing miracles.

(there is no reference to miracles in the Quran, but there are in the Hadit – a collection of traditions composed several centuries later.)

He gave no prophecies

He was not foretold in either the OT or NT. Muslims, however, try and find references to him in the Prophet that was to succeed Moses and in the reference to the coming of the Paraclete. They also say that the original NT actually contained the name Muhammad, but that Christians subsequently edited it out.

In contrast to this, **Jesus:**

In his teaching He used the OT. The NT was not produced by him but is a collection of sayings by a wide variety of people about Jesus and the first Christians.

He healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed storms, fed 5,000 people miraculously, came alive after being killed by crucifixion.

He prophesied the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem about 40 years before it occurred.

He fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah in the OT, (some 300 of them).

b. **Sunni islam is essentially Arab**, and therefore has become associated with the interests of the Arabs, though the Shiites can be regarded as an Iranian reaction against this.

It is the old struggle between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. It is an attempt to overthrow God's sovereign choice of the Jewish nation. This is the real reason for the deep enmity between Islam and Judaism.

2. Islam is essentially a **counterfeit**: it tries to mimic (and replace) Christianity and Judaism, but it never succeeds. It is a gigantic cover-up for what is a satanic system.

There are reasons for this:

a. When compared with Judaism, it cannot rival the divine election of the Jewish people, nor their unique Scriptures.

b. When compared with Christianity, it lacks two important things:

i. The cross, an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, which is only possible because the person who offered this sacrifice is divine, the Second Person of the Trinity.

ii. The Holy Spirit, who alone can make people new, precisely because He is God's Spirit.

3. Islam is essentially **man-made religion**, in that it dispenses with an atoning sacrifice, and replaces it (as a way of salvation) with a system of human merit, which is the exact opposite of grace. If Allah is completely just, on what basis can he be merciful and remain true to his character? There is no basis in Islam for mercy, but there is in Christianity: it is the cross.

4. Islam feels **threatened by Israel**. The Quran holds Israel to be non-existent and the Jews to be an insidious people, worthy only of contempt and punishment. The Bible, on the other hand, in both OT and NT, has the sure promise of a restored and vital Israel. A re-created Israel proves the Bible to be true and the teaching of the Quran to be false. It also lies in the heart of what used to be the Arab empire.

The fact that the Temple mount has been had two mosques built on it is intended to prove to them the superiority of Islam and the fact that Islam has surpassed Judaism. If both these mosques were to be destroyed in an earthquake and the Temple rebuilt by the Jews, this would present an even greater challenge to the Muslims.

THE ESSENCE OF ISLAM: possible approaches to the Muslim

- a) God is not really a person. He consists of various concepts (justice, holiness) multiplied by infinity. This is an inevitable consequence of denying the Trinity, a concept which is the source of all personality, as personality depends on relationship between persons. Islam has no concept of a personal relationship with God. Prayer is just a recital of divine attributes: not a conversation with God.
- b) Sin is not taken seriously. The middle way is proposed. Try hard and do what you can, but don't be disappointed if you fail – Allah is merciful. But we are not told on what grounds Allah can be merciful, in order to be consistent with his holy character. It is a religion tailored for man-made needs.
- c) There is no idea of atonement. How can a sinful man approach a holy God? There is no blood to atone for sins.
- d) The doctrine of merit plays a major role.
- e) The Prophet of the OT is made out to be Muhammed. But the word "the Prophet" in the OT refers to the Messiah, although the Jews of Jesus' time did not realise this. So, Muhammed, in claiming to be the Prophet, is thereby claiming to be the Messiah. He is a false Messiah. In preaching the Gospel to Muslims, it would be good to talk of the qualifications of the Messiah as outlined in the OT and then of how Jesus fulfilled

every one. In fact, the Muslim must be approached from the OT revelation much in the same way in which the Jews must be.

The six greatest prophets are recognised as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Isa (Jesus) and Muhammed. It would be very useful to do a study of these people, especially analysing ways in which they point forward to Jesus the Messiah.

f) Islam lays emphasis on fatalism and deliberately plays down man's free will (i.e. his personality, the fact that he is a free, responsible agent). Therefore it is useful to emphasise the concept of personality, the importance of man and the importance of his choice which God respects.

g) Whereas the attraction of Islam is:

- i) concept of One True God
- ii) worldwide brotherhood, and
- iii) unexacting nature of its moral demands.

Its disadvantages are:

- i) formality and coldness
- ii) laxity of moral standards
- iii) degradation of Muslim womanhood.

In the light of this analysis, it is useful to emphasise the reality of the victorious Christian life and the work of the Holy Spirit.

THE PERSON OF JESUS

In our encounter with Islam, as well as with all other world religions, we are not at liberty to be indifférent about the claims of the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ.

Ever since Jesus first asked the disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' the answers have been varied. Was he just a human being whom God called or adopted in some special way? Or was he so divine that he really wasn't human at all?

When Islam came on the scene in the early seventh century, its own view of Jesus was influenced by some heretical sects.

When Muslim refugees reached Ethiopia, they were persued by an embassy from Arabia who accused them of denying the divinity of Christ, to which they replied as follows:

Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of Allah and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet, His Spirit, and His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin.

There testimony was: We worshipped idols made of stone or wood, and we knew nothing of human dignity. And then God, in His Mercy, sent to us His Messenger who was himself one of us. We knew about his truthfulness and his integrity. His character was exemplary, and he was the most well-born of the Arabs. He invited us toward the worship of One God, and he forbade us to worship idols. He exhorted us to tell the truth, and to protect the weak, the poor, the humble, the widows and the orphans. He ordered us to show respect to women, and never to slander them. We obeyed him and followed his teachings. Most of the people in our country are still polytheists, and they resented our conversion to the new faith which is called Islam. They began to persecute us and it was in order to escape from persecution by them that we sought and found sanctuary in your kingdom.

It is also enlightening to hear what Muhammad said about the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures:

According to the Qur'an, Muhammad is only the last of a series of [Prophets](#) sent by God for the benefit of mankind, and commands Muslims to make no distinction between them. [Qur'an 10:37](#) states that "...it (the Qur'an) is a confirmation of (revelations) that [went before it](#), and a

fuller explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from [The Lord of the Worlds](#)". Similarly [Qur'an 46:12](#) states "...And before this was the book of Moses, as a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it)...", while [2:136](#) commands the believers of Islam to "Say: we believe in God and that which is revealed unto us, and that which was revealed unto [Abraham](#) and [Ishmael](#) and [Isaac](#) and [Jacob](#) and the tribes, and that which [Moses](#) and [Jesus](#) received, and which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered."

The idea that the Quran cancels out previous revelations came after Muhammad. All he said was that certain verses (the satanic verses) are cancelled out by later revelation *within the Quran*.

Night journey

Numerous descriptions of Jesus are also found in the hadiths or collected sayings of Muhammad. One of the most interesting of these comes from an early biography of the prophet by Muhammad Ibn-Ishaq, *Life of the Messenger of God*. In his famous Night Journey to heaven, Muhammad is said to have met Abraham, Moses, and Jesus prior to his encounter with God himself. When he was asked to describe the appearance of these great prophets, Muhammad replied 'that there was no man more like himself than Abraham, while Moses was

ruddy-faced, tall, curly-haired, with a hooked nose. Jesus had a reddish colouring, was of a medium height, and his face was covered with freckles.'

What the Quran says:

1. Jesus is presented as a prophet (*nabi*) and an apostle (*rasul*), one in a long line of messengers of God beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad (5:75)
 2. Jesus' supernatural birth is foretold to Mary who is declared by the angels to be chosen by God (3:42).
 3. Mary, still a virgin, gives birth to Jesus, beneath a palm tree which miraculously provides fresh ripe dates for her to eat (19:20-27).
 4. Jesus speaks as an infant from his cradle identifying himself as a prophet and servant of God.
 5. Jesus is referred to as the Messiah, a title not given to Muhammad or any other prophet.
 6. By God's permission, Jesus does many miracles giving sight to the blind, cleansing the lepers and bringing the dead to life again.
 7. In response to Jesus' request, God sends down a table from heaven which is meant to be a "festival for all generations" for his disciples (5:112-114).
 8. Jesus foretells both his death and resurrection.
- Although, as we shall see, Muslims do not believe that either of these events took place during Jesus' life on earth, they believe these things will happen in connection with his second coming.

What are we to make of such a Jesus as this? We Christians are struck immediately by what is denied, and what is garbled, as well as by what is left out. While Jesus is called prophet and Messiah in the Qu'ran, his pre-existence and incarnation are explicitly denied. 'God forbid that he himself should beget a son?' says the Qu'ran (19:36). This was probably a Jewish argument which Muhammed picked up.

The crucial difference

Even Christianity's severest critics agree with this fact: Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Yet Muslims deny that Jesus ever suffered and died on the cross. There can be no Christianity without this event. There can be no Islam with it. As the distinguished Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, has said, the non-crucifixion of Jesus is 'the one irreducible fact separating Christianity and Islam, a fact which is in reality placed there providentially to prevent a mingling of the two religions'.

Muslims do agree with Christians that a crucifixion took place in Jerusalem that Friday afternoon and that it was intended for Jesus.

But they teach that at the very last minute, just before Jesus was to be impaled on the cross, God intervened on his behalf. He allowed someone else (later tradition says this was Judas) to be crucified in his place. All of this is

based on one key verse in the Qu'ran, a text that has been the subject of endless commentary and debate:

'And for their saying, "verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, an Apostle of God." Yet they slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness. And they who differed about him were in doubt concerning him: No sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only an opinion, and they did not really slay him, but God took him up to Himself And God is Mighty, Wise!' (4:157-158)

The idea that it was not Jesus, but someone else, who was crucified at Calvary first surfaced among Gnostic heretical teachers in the early church. But unlike gnostic texts, the Qu'ran never denies the humanity of Jesus.

There are two tombs in the Muslim world that are designated for Jesus. One remains empty, while the other is reportedly filled with his mortal remains. The empty tomb is in Medina, next to the tomb of the prophet Muhammad. As we have seen, orthodox Muslims believe that Jesus was taken to heaven before Judas or someone else was allowed to die in his place on the cross. He lives with God in heaven now, they say, but will one day return to earth to play an important role in the last days. Islam has a vivid eschatology, and, according to a popular tradition, Jesus will return to earth and make an appearance either at the grand mosque in Damascus or at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. At that time, he will destroy all crosses to show that Christians should not

worship him. He will also slaughter a number of pigs (an unclean animal according to Islam), slay the Antichrist and inaugurate a 40-year messianic reign. During this time he will marry and raise a family. He will die and be buried next to Muhammad in Medina. He will then rise at the resurrection thus fulfilling the prophecy of the Qu'ran (19:33).

The Dome of the Rock was constructed over the place where Muhammed is reputed (not in the Quran) to have ascended into heaven. This legend was obviously concocted to overshadow the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and also the Christian claim that Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives. Just beside the Dome of the Rock is a much smaller dome which is where Muhammed's sword is supposed to begin, extending to the Mount of Olives. All believers are required at death to walk along this sword and cross the Kidron Valley: those that fall off, go to hell.

The other building on the Temple area is the El-Aksa mosque which is where Muslims actually pray. This may have been built over where Solomon's porches were, which was where the early Christians used to meet. The rock of the Kaaba in Mekka is built over the remains of a Christian Church. It seems that islamic leaders believed that by building over Jewish and Christian sites, they thereby proved their superiority to these religions and to have supercede them by something better.

It is significant that none of these legends occur in the Quran, in which Jerusalem is never even mentioned.

JUDAISM

Judaism is more than what we find in the OT — it has been considerably added to since then. The Talmud, which is the repository of Jewish thinking since then, has an authority on a par with the OT. It has also suffered two reactions: the reaction to the exile and later, the reaction to Christianity. This has produced rabbinic judaism.

It is essentially a monotheistic religion which has no room for either a Trinity or someone who makes exclusive claims, like Jesus. It also claims that one particular people has been chosen, and so a Jew is a essentially racial term: one who has been born of a Jewish mother (cf. current restrictions on Israeli citizenship). You cannot be a true Jew unless you are born one (Paul would have said; unless you are born again).

The Exile saw the development of the synagogue — a place of worship without priests or Temple. The Return to Israel under Cyrus only got a limited response and most Jews continued to live in Babylonia, which then became a centre of Jewish learning rivalling Jerusalem. During the inter-testamental period we see the development of the Talmud which consists of the Mishna (extra-canonical material which was supposed to have been communicated to Moses) and the Gemara

(comments of the Rabbis). The material was divided up into Halaka (walking = way of life, behaviour), and Hagada (stories) which contains ethical and moral teaching, legends and folklore.

The time between the Alexandrian conquest and the Christian era saw the rise of rabbinic judaism. A group of men saw that the only chance for Israel's survival was for them to become people of the Book, the strictest observance of both the written and oral law. To this end, they separated themselves from all others. These separatists (or pharisees) came to dominate Jewish life. Two schools of rabbis developed, one under Hillel, (a moderate from the Babylonian Diaspora) and one under Shammai (strict). At the opposite end of the scale were the Sadducees who were content to cooperate with the occupying power, provided they received their stipends. The pharisees, not all of whom were hypocrites, developed the doctrine of immortality and translated the Scriptures into aramaic (the Targums) and encouraged the building of synagogues wherever the Diaspora was to be found.

Through the encouragement of Alexander the Great, Jews spread out all over his empire. When Jerusalem fell in 70, rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai established the Great Synagogue in Javne (suburb of Tel-Aviv).

Central to Jewish belief were the Old Testament Scriptures, but these existed in several translations. The Massoretic text was declared to be the only accepted Hebrew text at the Council of Jamnia (AD 90) and all other Hebrew texts were outlawed. The Jews of the

Diaspora used a translation of the Old Testament in Greek called the Septuagint. It was also the favorite version of the Christians who came from this background. They kept quoting texts from it to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. In the end the Jewish authorities found this so embarrassing that they authorised a new Greek translation which subsequently superseded the Septuagint. First came the Aquila version, but this was so literal that it was difficult to read. Accordingly, two further translations were made (by Symmachus and Theodotion respectively). The Jews deliberately excluded Isaiah 52,13-15 and 53 from the synagogue lectionary, because of the well-known interpretation that Christians were putting on this passage. To this day, it is still missing! This is all part of a cover-up operation undertaken as a reaction to Christianity. See also their reaction to Trinitarianism. During the period of Roman persecution of Christianity, the Jews often played a leading role in denouncing Christians to the Romans. This gave rise to anti-semitism amongst Christians, although this cannot be compared to the variety practised by Hitler which was based on a racist interpretation of the theory of evolution. With the fall of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Sadducees disappeared, leaving the field to the pharisees who developed Jewish sacred writings further. The oral law became recognised as divinely inspired and so the term Tora was expanded to include the oral law also. The Talmud (meaning Teaching) came next in importance to the Scriptures. It was basically a com-

mentary on Scripture and an elaboration on it. The Talmud was divided into six sections:

1. Agricultural laws,
2. Laws on how to keep the various Jewish festivals,
3. laws on women and divorce,
4. civic legislation and laws on commercial transactions,
5. laws on how to offer the various sacrifices in the Temple. Temple regulations and rules on what was clean and what was unclean (that is: what made a person fit to go into God's presence — the Temple — and what made him unfit to do so).
6. Rules for priests in the Temple.

Not content with what the Old Testament had to say about the above questions, they decided to make further elaborations of these laws, just to be on the safe side.

In fact, the central thesis of the *Talmud* (a book which very much reflected the way of thinking of the Pharisees), was that the law of Moses had to be adapted to the changing conditions of the life of the Israelite nation.

Later, between 200-500 AD the Jews added a further section to the Talmud which they called the *Gemara* (lit: completion) which consisted of comments on the *Mishna* (meaning: teaching by repetition – central section of the Talmud which contains an exposition of the Tora).

The Tora's 613 commandments were divided up into 248 positive injunctions and 365 prohibitions.

The Tora is seen as the means of sanctification, whereas for the Christian it is the Holy Spirit (in conjunction with the Word) indwelling the believer. Thus, Judaism has

become a religion of the book and not the Spirit, whereas in fact it should be both, but the book should be the Bible alone.

Over against the doctrine of original sin, Judaism puts emphasis on original virtue and righteousness, which according to the Jewish doctrine of the merits of the fathers, are the common heritage of every member of the congregation of Israel. By ignoring the temple and its sacrifices, Judaism is forced to put the emphasis on merit gained by law-keeping (the very doctrine that Paul combats in Romans and Galatians). The big question that we have to ask Judaism is: where is the blood that makes atonement for sin?

In modern judaism the doctrine of a personal Messiah has been watered down to mean optimistic faith in the advent of a messianic era or the establishment of the kingdom of truth justice and peace. The word messianic as used by Jews today only has this connotation, and certainly no connection with the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 which is seen as collective Israel atoning by her suffering for the sins of men. This idea has been very attractive to liberal theologians. It is significant that this interpretation became very popular after the beginning of the Christian era.

The concept of a bodily resurrection is denied by the Reformed synagogue and watered down by many conservatives to mean the survival of the soul. The Orthodox are the only exceptions.

Jews continue to believe that they will be saved just because they are Jews, even if they turn atheist, but this is

refuted by John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul. Any attempt to undermine their exclusivism (by allowing gentiles into the community of Israel), is rejected out of hand.

Secularism has made vast inroads into Judaism, so much so that many are only Jewish by culture. The conversion of many young Jews to Christianity is also a source of grave concern to the establishment..

However, rabbinic Judaism has left its indelible stamp on Catholicism.

CREEDS: Judaism has no detailed creed. From time to time, various creeds have appeared, which have become more and more nebulous as judaism has become more and more secularised. They are as follows:

Moses Maimonides in the 12th cent drew up a summary of the Talmud:

1. Belief in the existence of a creator and providence
2. Belief in his unity
3. Belief in his incorporeality
4. Belief in his eternity
5. Belief that to him alone is worship due
6. Belief in the words of the prophets
7. Belief that Moses was the greatest of all prophets
8. Belief in the revelation of God to Moses at Sinai.
9. Belief in the immutability of the revealed law.
10. Belief that God is omniscient
11. Belief of retribution in this world and in the hereafter.
12. Belief in the coming of the Messiah
13. Belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Demands made on a proselyte (Noahism)

1. No blasphemy, 2. idolatry, 3. sexual immorality, 4. murder, 5. robbery, 6. eating a part of a living animal and administration of justice.

In the 19th cent, Dr Ehrlich laid down requirements for the belief of the Bene Berit:

1. Ahavat Jisrael, 2. Ahavat Tora, 3. Ahavat Eretz Jisrael, 4. Ahavat beriyot (love for mankind), 5. Ahavat Adonai.

SERVICES:

There are three services on the Sabbath corresponding to the three hours for sacrifice in the Temple.

There are three main feasts which they keep which correspond to the three occasions in the year when it was incumbent for Jews to go up to the Temple. To these the Jews have added Purim and Hanuka.

There is the ceremony of Bar-Mitvar and also Bat-Mitsvar.

Men pray with their head covered, though there is nothing in the Scriptures to warrant this: the custom probably goes back to the time when Jews lived under the Islamic yoke.

No prayer meeting, synagogue service or ceremony can be performed until there is a quorum of 10 males (women do not count!).

TYPES OF JUDAISM: There is Orthodox, Conservative and Reformed Judaism. There is also **Hassidism** (of which the Lubovitch movement under rabbi Schneerson,

is the latest development): this movement has sought to escape from dry legalism to a more emotional type of religion. It can be seen as a development of Kabbalism. Then there is **Zionism**: the religious Zionist and the secular Zionist. The Orthodox do not recognise the state of Israel as being the fulfillment of OT prophecy.

Theodor Hertzl, the founder of the Jewish state, was an atheist, so was Ben Gurion.

Judaism is in search of its identity and no spiritual leader has so far emerged in Israel. What about the anti-Christ?

Jesus said: when he comes, him you (Jews) will receive.

This means that the Anti-Christ is going to have no trouble in getting himself recognised. Moreover, he is the one who is destined to rebuild the temple.

KABBALAH literally means "receiving [what is handed down = tradition]" and is a compilation of Jewish mystical thoughts and practices. Though its origins date to the time of the Second Temple (via Kumran) , Kabbala became popular in the 12th century. It is the Jewish version of the Sufi movement within Islam.

The mystical teachings have been influenced by platonism and gnosticism. They deal with subjects like interpreting the heavenly chariot described in Ezekiel (*Ma'aseh Merkava*) and the appearances of God in human form. Other aspects include meditations on the names of God and symbolic explanations of numbers and the Hebrew alphabet.

Originally restricted to a few advanced Talmudic students, the teachings spread to the general community after the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492. Safed, a city in the Galilee, became its centre. It was here in 1572 that Rabbi Isaac Luria expanded the Kabbalah. In the following century, the Kabbalah acquired Messianic overtones, causing some to imagine they were the Messiah. After a major disaster caused by one such pretender, Shabbtai Zvi (in the 1660s), Kabbala was once again restricted to a few learned Talmudic students, until about 20 years ago when once again it spread to the general public.

Today there is renewed interest by Jews and non-Jews alike in the mystical teachings of Kabbala. Theoretical Kabbala, which speculates on the nature of God, is different from practical Kabbala, which emphasizes tapping into supernatural forces through asceticism and devotion to the Torah. Such aspects have more recently attracted people like Madonna and Kylie Minogue. For them it is almost like a Jewish version of New Age.

Jewish Christians: These were known as the Ebionites.. They only accepted the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. They rejected the writings of the apostle Paul whom they regarded as a traitor and a heretic. They did not believe in the virgin birth or the divinity of Yeshua. They believed that Yeshua - by virtue of being a righteous man and fulfilling the Law - became the Messiah. They did not believe in the virgin birth or the divinity of Yeshua. They believed that Yeshua - by virtue of being a righteous

man and fulfilling the Law – became the Messiah. They did believe that he would return to establish the kingdom of God.

From about the end of the fourth century, Messianic Judaism, as we understand it today, ceased to be. The Jewish believers for the most part blended into mainstream Christianity. But in 1967, when Jerusalem was united under Jewish sovereignty, the modern day Messianic Jewish revival started. God began to move in a powerful way among the Jewish people worldwide.

Today, Messianic Jews consider themselves the Jewish part of the Body of Messiah, the "natural olive tree" (Romans 11). They retain their Jewish identity, circumcise their children, keeping the Sabbath and celebrating the *hagim* (holidays), which become even more meaningful in light of the New Covenant. They think of themselves as converted sinners rather than converted Jews and are also referred to as completed Jews.

According to a recent study, there are about 10,000 Messianic Jews in Israel (not including children). They see themselves as part of the believing remnant called by God to live in the Jewish homeland, to be a light to the nation and a witness that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel.

ATTITUDES TO JESUS: a more favourable attitude to Jesus has been apparent of late, but this is because a liberal view of Him (just a good man) has made this possible. The objection remains in the minds of many: if Jesus was the Messiah, why did not the kingdom of God (in the Jewish sense) materialise? Besides, even if he were the Messiah, that would not make him divine, as Judaism does not believe in a divine Messiah. This seems to have arisen in reaction to Christian claims.

However, we are now beginning to see one or two hesitant statements in a more positive direction. There is now a chair of NT studies at the university of Jerusalem headed by Prof. David Flusser who said in an article in the new Jewish Encyclopedia: "If, as Christians believe, the martyr was at the same time the Messiah, then his death has a cosmic importance (because he was divine?) ..."

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is one of three monotheistic religions. It started off as a sect within Judaism which was subsequently forced out and developed into a new religion. But it is within Judaism that we have to trace its roots. Christianity would claim that the New Testament is a logical development of the Old Testament (Jewish Scriptures). It is the OT + the Messiah+ Holy Spirit. The founder was a remarkable Jewish rabbi who preached with exceptional authority, and became well-known as a miracle worker. This teacher clearly taught

that salvation was for the outcasts of Jewish society as well as for the non-Jews. After his execution on a charge of blasphemy and sedition, he, so it is claimed, rose again from the dead and commissioned his representatives to go out and preach the Gospel (the good news about his atoning death and resurrection).

A major turning point came when Saul, a prominent rabbi and ardent Jewish fundamentalist, was won to the Christian faith through a dramatic vision. With Saul, later called Paul, we see a dramatic development in the mission to the non-Jews. Much of his writings are a defence of this and a working out of the implications. The break with Judaism came between the 1st and 2nd Jewish Wars, during which time there was much pressure on converted Jews to return to the fold and defend the fatherland. Judaism developed in an anti-Christian direction and later on Jews were only too glad to betray Christians to the Roman authorities for them to be executed. This was the start of bad feeling which grew into virulent anti-semitism.

Towards the end of the first century the church was assailed by a heresy called gnosticism which is reflected in some of the writings of the apostle John. Then in the following centuries, as more and more pagans came into the church from a platonist background, platonism (and to a lesser extent, aristotelianism and stoicism) produced many heresies which were combatted by the various church councils. Due to unresolved theological differences, the 5th and 6th centuries saw the departure from its parent body of the Nestorian Church and five

Monophysite churches (Armenia, Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia and India).

In spite of the rejection of heresies, elements of the philosophies that lay behind them left their mark on the church, so that by the time of the Middle Ages a mixture of pagan philosophy, Jewish legalism and christianity had been produced, and so the church was badly in need of reform. This reform or reformation was unfortunately not accepted by the Catholic (or Orthodox) church and so the reformers and their followers were edged out of the church and a split resulted which gave birth to the Protestant churches.

Almost from the second century onwards Eastern and Western Christianity came to differ in terms of language, civilisation and philosophy. This eventually resulted in a split which occurred in the 12th century, and which produced the Catholic (West) and Orthodox (East) churches. Since the Middle Ages Christianity has had times of revival. The 19th century saw the development of liberal theology which resulted in the watering down of the Christian message and reactions against it. The discovery of fresh truths long neglected have spawned new denominations, so that today Christianity gives the impression of a patchwork of differing groups. In fact these can be divided into three categories:

1. Those whose final authority is the Bible
2. Those whose final authority is the Church
3. Those whose final authority is Reason.

The Founder: It is true to say that Christianity stands or falls by its founder and the church's success (or: lack of it) in living up to his ideals. Its founder was an unorthodox rabbi who claimed to be the Messiah. He claimed to fulfill the Messianic hopes of the OT. He claimed that the OT had always looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and that He was that person. The first question we have to answer is:

Who was the Messiah and what was he supposed to do?

The Messiah is another word for the king of Israel, but it is clear from OT prophecies that a divine Messiah was expected, although something kept the Jews from seeing this (Isaiah 9,6: Mt 26,63). Israel expected a perfect Prophet (a greater one than Moses), Priest and King. The Messiah was to have been all of these. It seems that the divine aspect of the OT Messiah was deliberately played down by the Jewish establishment when Christianity began become a threat to Judaism.

The Messiah was to deliver Israel from her enemies, conclude a new covenant with them which would result in forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to make Israel into the leading nation of the world, from which the benefits of the Messiah's reign would flow to the rest of the world. The question is: **How** was this to be done? The answer is: by fulfilling the mission prophesied for the **Suffering Servant**. This mission or ministry is described in detail in the book of Isaiah. He was to have a miraculous ministry and to die as sacrifice to atone for the sin of the (Jewish) people.

Jesus identified himself on several occasions with the Suffering Servant of the second part of Isaiah. In fact, the principal emphasis of his ministry as the fulfillment of the mission of the Suffering Servant. The principal emphasis of his Second Coming is to fulfill the rest of the prophecies. In other words, his first coming was to prepare the ground for his second coming.

During the inter-testamental period there was much speculation among the Jews regarding the future: many thought that several messianic figures would appear. Jesus, however, claimed to be the fulfillment of all of them. As we can see with hindsight, the Suffering servant was one of the missions which the Messiah was to perform.

The choice: The Jewish leaders had three possibilities from which to choose:

Either Jesus was 1. Mad, 2. Bad (i.e an imposter), or 3, True. They chose the second alternative. Needless to say, they made the wrong choice. The subsequent history of the Jewish nation bears eloquent testimony to this. The net result was the destruction of their nation and an exile which has lasted longer than any other exile. There must be a good reason for it, but the Jews are reluctant to face it.

The claims of Christ are based on the following:

1. **His words.** He claimed not only to speak the Words of God, but also to be the very Word of God (i.e. the source of all God's revelation and the giver of eternal life). In other words, the Second person of the Trinity whose job it is to reveal the Father and to give the Spirit, the Third

person of the Trinity. Peter's argument in Acts 2 is that because the Spirit has been given, this proves that Jesus is the Messiah. I challenge you to read the NT and especially the Gospel of John and not be struck by his words. The guards who were sent to arrest Jesus, came back empty-handed and exclaimed: "Never have we heard a man speaking like that before."

2. His miracles. He accomplished miracles which no one had ever done before. He thereby demonstrated that he was the same word that had been speaking in the creation account, a word of total authority: he spoke and it happened instantaneously. Furthermore, these miracles were prophesied as the hallmark of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 61,1-2).

3. Fulfillment of OT prophecies: Some people claim that he could have arranged on purpose to fulfil all these prophecies. But several of these prophecies describe circumstances over which a person could have no control (unless he were God). For instance his genealogy, place of birth, the massacre of the children of Bethlehem at his birth, the escape of his parents into Egypt, the existence of a precursor (John the Baptist), his betrayal by one of his disciples for 30 pieces of silver with which a field was bought, the death of this traitor, the existence of false witnesses at his trial, the miscarriage of justice, soldiers who cast lots for his clothes at the scene of the execution, the drugged wine that he was offered, his crucifixion and his resurrection. But the literal fulfillment by one person of more than 50 OT prophecies can hardly be a coincidence: the theory of probability excludes this.

However the greatest proof of the truth of his claims was the resurrection, which had been prophesied by the psalmist, by the prophet Isaiah, by Hosea and attested to not only by his disciples but by more than 500 people (1 Cor 15,6).

Integrity of historical records: During his lifetime, Jesus commissioned the apostles to write an account of his life, ministry and teaching and to expand on his teaching under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means that the authorship of the NT is confined to the apostles and the apostolic circle. We have a total of more than 5,000 New Testament manuscripts, representing whole texts or part of the text. The earliest fragments of text go back to at least 50 AD (fragment of Mark 6:52-53 found at Qumrân, plus numerous other NT fragments which cannot be dated later than AD 70), and 125 AD (John 18,31-33, 37). Complete New Testament manuscripts go back to the 4th century AD (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus), 5th century AD (Codex Alexandrinus) and 6th century (Codex Bezae). In comparison, *De Bello Gallico* by Caesar was written in about 50 BC, but the earliest manuscript we have dates from the 8th century AD. The earliest manuscripts of *The Annals* by Tacitus (55-120 AD) date from 9th to 11th century AD. All this means that the New Testament is the best attested text of the Mediterranean area.

Finally, what has all this to do with me?: Agreed that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, without whom the Jewish

nation cannot enter into its God-appointed destiny, what has all this got to do with me, a non-Jew? Muslims, for instance, would claim that although Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, Muhammad is the Prophet of the Arabs. But the Bible states quite clearly that:

1. The Jewish Messiah was to be the world-wide ruler, not just the king of Israel (Isaiah 9,7) .
2. His sacrifice was for the sins of the whole world. He died, not for our sins only, says the apostle John, speaking as a Jew, but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2,2).
3. Jesus specified that the Gospels must be preached to **every** nation. As the apostles were subsequently to discover, this meant that this Gospel must be preached to the non-Jews also, because it had to do with them. Paul concludes in Romans 2-3 that all (both Jews and non-Jews) have sinned and come short of the glory of God, therefore **all** need to be saved.

The Bible is quite clear that:

1. We need to be reconciled with God by having our sins forgiven.
2. We need to be born again into God's family.
3. We need to have eternal life, so that when we rise again, we shall live for ever (we shall forever be beyond the reach of sin and death). This is what the Bible calls immortality. This is precisely what Adam failed to achieve, because of his disbelief and rebellion.

This is what the Gospel of Good News is about and it marks Christianity out as being unique.

The Bible says: **Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ and you **shall** be saved: 1. How can you be **saved**? The Messiah's sacrifice will be credited to your account.

2. How can what I **believe** affect my eternal destiny? Surely you have got to **do** something?

Do you mean to tell me that if I believe there is a mouse behind that hole in the wall, that will change things? But this is not what the Bible means by believe. Believing means believing what God says in his word, turning our back on what we know to be wrong and asking Christ to take the steering wheel of our lives. It is essentially a moral decision.

God takes us back to a principle that is found in the first pages of Genesis and which is the essence of our problem. He takes us back to the scene of the crime. of our first parents. Adam and Eve, disbelieved **what God said** and that was the start of their rebellion. You see, what **you** say, may not be very important, but what **God** says is of the utmost importance, because he is God. It the **person** behind the words that makes the difference. Faith, or believing, means that we reverse this process which began in the garden of Eden: distrust and rebellion. I challenge you to start reading the New Testament and to ask God to speak to you, for the Bible says: Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

EASTERN ORTHODOXY

The Eastern Orthodox Church is a communion of self-governing (autocephalous) national churches. The titular head is the patriarch of Constantinople who, together with the 3 other patriarchs of the most ancient sees, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria. Then there are autonomous churches and also ecclesiastical provinces. One sixth of Christendom is Orthodox, but the church is today confined to Greek and Slavonic countries (E.Europe, Russia and E. Mediterranean).

The Byzantine tradition stretches from Russia through countries like Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. all the way down to Greece and Cyprus.

Byzantium, another name for Constantinople (Istanbul), the capital of the Eastern part of the Roman Empire was, and still is, the capital of the Orthodox Church, despite Turkish occupation since 1453. The patriarch of Constantinople is the titular head of the Orthodox Church but does not have the absolute power which the pope has over the Roman Catholic Church.

Sadly, however, that is where the differences stop. In fact one could go so far as to say that any criticism levelled against the Church of Rome can equally be applied to the Eastern Orthodox Church (apart from the doctrines of papal infallibility and the practice of clerical celibacy). The Roman Church and the Orthodox church were one and the same up until 1054 when they excommunicated

each other, more for political than for doctrinal reasons. By then the church was already steeped in the idolatrous worship of Mary, the saints and holy relics. Even to this day they believe in apostolic succession, prayers for the dead (although they do not teach purgatory), and salvation through the 7 sacraments and other good works. As in the Roman church, the Apocrypha is regarded as canonical and is used to justify prayers for the dead. They also hold tradition as an equal authority to the Bible, the best interpreter of which is, according to them, the church hierarchy.

Indeed for those who are familiar with Romish mariolatry, the following Orthodox addresses to Mary should come as no surprise. She is called ,All Holy One, Mother of God, Mediatrix, Immaculate, Pure One, the True Vine, Jacob's ladder, Burning Bush, Rod of Aaron, Bride of God, Daughter of the King", among other titles. Psalm 45,10 is given as Scriptural proof that she is the Queen of Heaven, and Ezekiel 44,1-3 is cited as proof of her eternal virginity. In the liturgy for the veneration of Mary she is asked to "redeem and save us".

This is not to say that the Orthodox Church does not have its own idiosyncratic practices for they have embraced Greek paganism and dressed it up as Christian ritual. For example, as part of the memorial service for the dead the relatives of the deceased person prepare a special dish made of wheat called *kollyva*, to be eaten by friends and relatives. Ancient Greece had a similar tradition where a similar dish, *panspermia*, made from a

sélection of grains and seeds, was offered to the dead, the living and the god Hades.

Another strange practice is to make a waxen effigy of the part of the body which needs healing and offer it to a saint, just like Ancient Greeks would to the temple gods and goddesses. And so the great human concerns of birth, death and fertility are nothing but pagan practices; the use of marriage crowns at weddings, the placing of money in a grave (a silver coin for the god Charon) and the funeral meal.

Ironically, although the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation were sparked off by the flight of Greek scholars to the West after the conquest of Constantinople, the Orthodox church itself was never blessed with a similar expérience. She could have been, had not the Catholic Jesuits, with the pope's blessing, engineered the murder of patriarch Cyril Lucaris in 1638. This Eastern "Luther" who taught salvation by faith, and the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and opposed the worship of the saints as well as the doctrine of transsubstantiation, was regarded as a threat to Rome. After his death, successive patriarchs condemned him as a heretic and, to this day, Evangelical Christians are still being persecuted by the Orthodox Church. In Serbia Evangelicals are regarded as trespassers on Christian territory, as sects to be classified along with satanists and other undesirables. Evangelical meetings are disrupted from time to time by zealous Orthodox fanatics. And yet the percentage of Orthodox people who actually go to church is between 5 and 10%! According to a book written by Dr Grujić in

1991, the Serbian church has 1,890 priests, 31 bishops, 1,200 monks living in some 200 monasteries, a lay organisation for women called the Circle of Serbian sisters, and a few theological colleges.

It is no small wonder, especially to born-again Christians who have come out of the darkness of Orthodoxy, to see people born and brought up in a traditionally Protestant country converting to the eastern Church. In a little chapel in Guildford, I witnessed people bowing down in front of icons, kissing them and lighting candles. It seems that these people experience a sense of holiness and spirituality by performing these rituals. There is an atmosphere of awe which is almost hypnotising, as the priest and the choir chant the liturgy. It is these mystical experiences in Orthodoxy which attracts Westerners seeking a spiritual dimension to their lives. To them, emotions and feelings are more important than divine truths taught in the Bible. Like all true Orthodox Christians, they believe that theirs is the church founded by Jesus and his apostles, which has continued from generation to generation by apostolic succession. According to them, it was the Roman Catholics and Protestants who deviated from the truth.

What then is their attitude to other churches? Although some of the stricter ones, like the Old Calendarists, who still abide by the Julian calendar, regard all other churches as heretical, the main body of Orthodoxy is pro-ecumenical, seeking the unity of the Church. In 1967 partial reconciliation was achieved when the Pope and Patriarch signed a mutual agreement to cancel the

excommunication of 1054. Since then there has been constant dialogue between the two parties and it is now permissible for a Catholic to receive communion in an Orthodox church if he or she is not near a Roman Catholic church, and visa versa.

BASIC DIFFERENCES

- 1) Doctrine is determined by the Bible as interpreted by an infallible ecumenical council and not by an infallible pope. There have been altogether 7 such councils.
- 2) The church has a special relationship with the government of each country, which reflects to some extent the original set-up of the Byzantine empire: the emperor was the head of the church.
- 3) The orthodox church was never affected by either the Renaissance or the Reformation.
- 4) It has been for so long under Islam that it has become fossilised and inert. There has been no development of doctrine as in the Catholic Church.
- 5) It has 7 sacraments, of which the most important are baptism (threefold immersion of the infant) and the eucharist.
- 6) The Orthodox Church has a particular place in their worship for icons – that is stylized pictures of Christ, Mary and the saints. An icon is meant to be one of the ways in which God reveals himself to men, it is a window into heaven. Each icon not only has a theological message, but is also an aid to worship. The iconostasis or screen on which icons are hung, is characteristic of Orthodox Church architecture.

- 7) The concept of divinisation by which the orthodox mean more than sanctification. They mean that glorification starts here and now by which we absorb God's energies (through the sacraments) and become more and more god-like, not just godly. It is significant that Albanian translators have real problems with word – it is probably because of their Orthodox background.
- 8) They have a much more positive view of man than the Catholic church. The Augustinian emphasis on predestination and original sin is not to be found in Orthodox theology.
- 9) Both Orthodox and Catholics believe in transsubstantiation, but the Orthodox believe that God performs the miracle – man does not have this power to effect the change.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN DETAIL:

John of Damascus (675-749): has been called the last of the fathers (theologians) of the Orthodox Church. It can be said that after John there was hardly any theological development in the Orthodox Church. He first served under the caliph in Syria and then became a monk at St. Sabas, near Jérusalem.

His main achievement was to systematise all previous teaching of the fathers. He did this in a work entitled *The Fount of Knowledge*. This consists of three parts:

1. Dialectic: a discussion of philosophical terms and concepts, especially those used in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ.
2. Heresies in Epitome: a brief summary of 103 heresies.

3. Exact exposition of the Orthodox Faith: this is a systematic summary of the teaching of the Greek Fathers divided into 100 chapters. This last section is thus a most important source book of what the present Orthodox church is supposed to believe.

John was also involved in the controversy over icons. It all revolved around the question of what was holy enough to deserve worship. By the beginning of the 7th century many of the cities of the empire had one or more local saint who was revered as intercessor and protector. From the 6th century both the church and the imperial government encouraged the development of both Christian icon-making and the honoring of monastic holy men. This led to abuse and idolatry. But such a system had had its precedents: in ancient Rome the icon of the emperor was revered as if the Emperor himself were present. This practice did not cease when the emperor became a Christian. Constantine and his successors erected huge statues of themselves in Constantinople. As this was counted a "royal treatment", the same treatment was given to the supreme king, Jesus Christ. Justinien erected a huge statue of Christ over the main gate of Constantinople. By the end of the 6th century, icons of Christ or Mary were replacing icons of the Emperor. Even coins were minted by Justinian with the icon of Christ on one side.

Iconoclasts (those who wanted to destroy icons) and iconodules (those who wanted to have icons as an object of veneration) agreed on one fundamental point: a Christian people could not prosper unless it assumed the

right attitude towards holy images. God punished idolatry but rewarded those who obeyed him. Emperors changed their view point on this question as time progressed and this affected the course of the controversy.

The controversy had important conséquences:

- 1) It served to weaken the empire and so make it more easy for the Turks to conquer.
- 2) Iconoclasm negatively affected relations between the Eastern and Western Churches.
- 3) When iconodulia (reverence for icons) was in fashion this alienated the monophysites. For them it was sacrilège. An iconodule was either a Nestorian who reduced the divine nature to human terms by making an image of it, or he was a dyophysite who distinguished two natures in Christ (one of which he claimed to be able to reproduce as an image).

The Confession of Dositheus (1672) This statement of faith marks the reaction of the Orthodox Church to one of its theologians who was sympathetic to 'protestant ideas'. It is important because it served to cristalise the opposition of the Eastern Church to the Reformation in the West. It is thus the eastern équivalent of the Council of Trent.

Cyril Lucaris (1572-1638) was a theologian who became patriarch of Alexandria in 1602 and of Constantinople in 1620. In 1629 he produced a work entitled The Eastern Confessions of the Christian Faith in which he sought to combine mild orthodoxy with a mild form of calvinism.

He believed strongly in the Infallibility of the Bible, prédestination, justification by faith and rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation. He also taught that the Church was subject to Scripture and could err. He sought to defend Orthodoxy against Rome and found allies among the Protestants in Poland where he was working. He presented England with a copy of Codex Alexandrinus which was superior to the *Textus Receptus* on which previous Protestant translations had been based.

Unfortunately for him, the Jesuits were active in Constantinople at the same time as he published his book. In order to get him condemned, the Orthodox Church using its greatest apologist Peter Mogila, who co-operated with the Catholics. In 1638 pressure was put on the Turkish government to have him executed, and in 1638 he was strangled by order of the Sultan and his body thrown into the Bosphoros. After his death there was a strong reaction against his views in the Orthodox Church and they were repeatedly condemned. Most important of the réactions was the Confession of Dositheus, drawn up by a man of the same name who was patriarch of Jérusalem and approved by the Synod of Jérusalem in 1672. In it, the following points are made: The Bible is indeed inspired by God but so are the Church Councils. It is almost in virtue of the Church's position that the Bible is inspired, as the one is the product of the other. Prédestination is defined in terms of the arminian understanding of the word foreknowledge. Justification is through faith and works: it cannot lead to

a once and for all acquittal of the sinner. Good works merit reward. But without God's grace, good works do not contribute to salvation. The doctrine of transsubstantiation is upheld.

Relations between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches

Several factors served to lead to the eventual split between the Latin and Greek Churches in 1054:

1) Misunderstandings: Relations between the Eastern and Western Churches were on the whole good but were marred from time to time by misunderstandings which rapidly snowballed. The first major problem occurred when Rome rejected canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon which granted great powers of jurisdiction to Constantinople (451). In 680 the Pope (Honorius I) was anathematised at the Third Council of Constantinople as a heretic along with 4 Byzantine patriarche. This was over the Monothelite controversy (the question of Christ's unity of will).

It was only after the 6th century that differences between West and East became truly significant.

2) Differences in church practice: These differences were:

- a) celibacy in the West but not in the East among the lower clergy,
- b) at the Lord's Supper, only bread was given in the West but both bread and wine in the East,

- c) unleavened bread in the West, but leavened bread in the East,
- d) priests were clean-shaven in the West but bearded in the East,
- e) différence of opinion over the *Filioque* clause in the Creed (the Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son), whereas the Eastern Church said “through the Son”. As a result of this controversy the Apostles Creed came to replace the Nicene Creed in the West, as the principal creed.
- f) Divorce was forbidden in the West, but permitted in certain situations by the Eastern Church.
- g) The Eastern Church disliked the West's teaching on purgatory and indulgencies.

3) Political problems served to further distance the Eastern Church from the West. Following an urgent appeal by Pope Stephen who was being attacked by the Lombards in 753, the Byzantine Emperor refused to send military assistance and so he was forced to turn to the Franks for help. This eventually led to the formation of the Western Holy Roman Empire.

4) Immediate factors:

- a. The revival of the Western Empire under Otto 962 led to the assertion of papal power. The 11th century popes wanted to control the whole of Christendom.
- b. There were conflicts of interest in Bulgaria and also in Southern Italy.

- c. The West wanted one man over the whole of the Church but the East had never agreed to this system: for them the Church Councils presided over by the 5 Patriarches had always been decisive.
- d. The Pope's secretary, Humbert de Moyenmoutier was apt to be impulsive and crude. In 1054 he went to Constantinople as the pope's personal représentant and demanded that the patriarch submit to the pope. The patriarch refused and was excommunicated. Humbert de Moyenmoutier's visit to Constantinople was a reaction to objections levelled by Leo of Ochrid (against enforcement of clerical celibacy and the use of unleavened bread in communion wafers). Humbert was also against the domination of the church by the state. All this added fuel to the fire which eventually resulted in insults being exchanged and sentence of excommunication being handed to the patriarch Cerularius during mass.
- e. The official reason was over the differing interprétations of the Creed. The East rejected the Filioque clause.

5) Factors precluding réconciliation: After 1054 other factors conspired to make a réconciliation impossible.

In 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, the crusaders captured Constantinople and founded the Latin Kingdom of Byzantium (1294-61). The Eastern Church saw this as an act of treachery which they never forgot.

In 1274, the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII had his back against the wall when he was faced with a coalition of enemies. His solution was to ask the West for help, in return for which he offered to submit to the Roman Church. This was ratified in 1274 at the Council of Lyon. But in 1296, when Byzantine fortunes improved, the council of Lyon was repudiated and Orthodoxy restored. The same thing happened in 1439 when, at the council of Florence/Ferrara, the Byzantine emperor was besieged by the Turks in Constantinople. He submitted to the pope in order to get Western help. The pope promised help but was unable to persuade Western armies to come to the help of Constantinople. As a reaction against this "treachery" of the emperor, the other patriarchates (including Russia) severed relationships with Constantinople. The end of Constantinople came when it was finally captured by the Turks in 1453. Although the schism was declared in 1054 by the issuing of a series of mutual anathemas, the two churches still remained in communion (cf. Jesuits invited to come and minister in Orthodox churches*), but the final point of no return was reached in 1724 when the final breach occurred. *This explains why the Jesuits were able to play such a part in the overthrow of Lucaris.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Background: The Roman Catholic Church, as its name implies, is the Roman branch of the universal church,

which owes its allegiance to the bishop of Rome. With the fall of the Roman Empire, it became the custodian of the Roman institutions and so became the bridge between Roman Empire and its future revived form.

Today it differs from other Christian churches in two important respects:

1. Its supreme authority (with powers to promulgate new dogmas) is the Pope, not a supreme church council (as in the Orthodox Church), because Catholics believe that the spirit of Peter (to whom Christ conferred the leadership of the church) indwells the pope. "I am tradition" said the pope at Vatican I. The Catholic church accepts an infallible pope, as opposed to an infallible church council.
2. It has a special caste of people called priests who have divine powers to preside at the mass and turn the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The Orthodox church merely says that God performs the miracle, not men.

The papacy: The bishops (popes) of Rome considered themselves to be the guardians of the Apostolic tradition because Peter and Paul had been martyred there. The general authority of the Church, especially in the East, was compromised by numerous controversies, synods and councils that contradicted each other (there was no central authority), and people who were looking for such authority and stability naturally turned to Rome. After the reorganisation of the empire in 284, the emperors no longer lived in Rome but in Milan, Trier and Sirmium (from where they could keep an eye on the barbarians) and in Nicomedia (from where the emperor could keep

an eye on the Persians). This left a vacuum in Rome which was filled by the bishop of Rome who greatly increased in power and prestige.

Because Rome was the imperial city, its bishop became more and more important. When the Western empire fell, it took over the rights and privilèges of the emperors. It was the only force which stood up to the Barbarian invasion of Italy. The Catholic Church is truly Roman in the sense that it has kept the essence of the civilisation of Rome in its laws and institutions, for better or for worse. For instance, the pope took over the title which the emperor had, *Pontifex Maximus* 'builder of bridges, chief of the pagan priests.'

THE CHURCH: its doctrinal basis: It is important to realise that the doctrinal basis is founded on the Bible and the dogmas of the church which are based on church traditions. Most of these ideas started with the Church Fathers, whose writings the Catholic Church accepts almost on the same level with Scripture. Then these ideas progressed and were added to by prominent thinkers in the church.

The writings of the Church Fathers thus become the happy hunting ground of anyone wishing to promote a new doctrine. New dogmas have either been the result of pressure groups within the church or attempts by the church to bolster up papal infallibility, chiefly in the 19th + 20th centuries. The Roman Catholic Church reckons itself to be the continued incarnation of Christ in the church whereby Christ = the Church. Christ is therefore

no longer the head of the church but He IS the church, or rather, the soul of the church. This idea has been variously traced back to Origen who believed that the Word (Christ) is the soul of the church. Others have connected it with Augustine's manicheism. Divine life is mystically communicated to the church.

Christ is also seen as a continuous living sacrament (or sign) of the reconciliation of all humanity (from Origen's idea which borders on universalism).

The church is also seen as the depository of the Holy Spirit (He is limited and controlled by the church) – an idea which we find in Irenaeus). This is also Cyprian's point of view because for him baptism administered by a heretic is not valid, since the Church is the custodian of the Holy Spirit. Because the church is all of these things, it is to the church that we must come for salvation. As Cyprian said: 'Outside the church there is no salvation'. However, Catholics, in the interest of ecumenicity, tend to tone this down.

This pressure to make exaggerated assertions about the church arose because it was trying to defend itself against heretics like Marcion and schismatics like Donatus.

Like the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church believes in salvation through faith, works and the sacraments.

This arises from a misunderstanding of Hebrew terminology used in the Epistle of James. When, in the second century, the Church cut itself off from its Jewish origins, it began to misunderstand the Hebrew thought-patterns of the New Testament. One of these is the

Hebrew word "justify" which never means to make someone good, but to put into a right relationship to God or to show that such a person is in a right relationship: to justify and to show to be justified. Another example would be the words of Jesus at the Last Supper which was modelled on the Passover meal where the bread used represents the actual bread that was used at the Exodus: the Passover, like the Lord's Supper, is essentially a reinactment – not a repetition of the event, to remind us of what happened.

The sacraments were originally a service at which a promise or undertaking was made (baptism and the Lord's) and thus enable us to deepen or renew our commitment to God, but are never seen as a means of salvation. The word "grace" means in most contexts of the NT. God's gracious act in giving his Son to die for our sins. In other contexts, "grace" can also denote a spiritual gift.

Biblical terminology has (in so many of these cases cited above) been changed and distorted by coming under the influence of Jewish legalism and pagan philosophy.

THE MASS: Catholics seem to believe that their church is a unique source of salvation (only they have the magic formula which turns the elements into the body and blood of Christ) which is gained by actually eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ. A passage in the book THE PASSION explains this. And yet they do not claim to have eternal life or the certainty of salvation, so it is hard to see what the eternal benefit of this sacrament

is. How long do they have to go on eating before they attain salvation?

MARY: 'As Mary is the mother of the body of Christ, she is the mother of all believers. As Christ is the second Adam, she is the second Eve'. Similar ideas are found in the writings of Irenaeus. Mary is an original source of grace for the church. She is the aqueduct between Christ and the church. However, since 1950 there has been a playing down of the doctrine in the interests of the ecumenical movement.

In 1854 the pope had issued a papal Bull making the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception a dogma. Both Augustine and Aquinas had denied this doctrine. It was Duns Scotus (a Franciscan) that first propounded it. Controversy developed between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, with the Vatican refusing to take sides. As a result, the doctrine was not even discussed at the Council of Trent. It was, however, revived in the 19th century, in order to support the idea of papal infallibility. It is significant to note that the dogma was promulgated, not on the basis of either Scripture or Tradition, but of consensus: a majority vote among those who were consulted. In 1950 Pius XII, without the backing of the council, defined and enforced the doctrine of the Assumption. The doctrine states that the dead body of Mary was assumed into heaven without experiencing corruption. This doctrine is not known before the 4th century, but was later held by John of Damascus. It is significant that the person of Mary was not even

discussed at Vatican II, as if the Catholic church had decided that things had gone quite far enough. Both these doctrines arise from an inadequate view of Christ's humanity. In this, monophysitism has undoubtedly played an important role. As Jesus is not seen as fully human, the vacuum is filled by Mary. A denial of Christ's humanity leads to mariolatry (the cult of Mary), whereas a denial of His divinity leads to the doctrine of the mass (a repetition of Christ's sacrifice).

Theological tendencies:

- a) **Monophysite**: There is an inherent monophysite tendency in Catholicism to divinise what is human. This is because Greek philosophy, which influenced it, failed to make a distinction between the Creator and the Created. There was always a nebulous intermediary sphere inhabited by semi-divine beings. As they cannot conceive of the divine element dwelling among the human, they make the human divine. Hence, Mary is divinised because she bore Christ who only has one nature (divine). The church is also considered divine because the Holy Spirit indwells it.
- b) **Platonic**: Another tendency is to deny the once and for all aspect of the Cross and to prolong it in a metaphysical sphere. This is why Catholics play down the resurrection and ascension. The ascension shows that Christ's work on earth is finished and that He is no longer bodily present.
- c) **Authoritarian**: Catholics would say that Christ continues to live on in His apostles and their successors.

To this we must reply that the apostles had no successors. Their ministry was a ministry of the Word (Acts 6,2) – they were Christ's ambassadors because Christ spoke through them. The only way in which they continue Christ's ministry is as that of prophets. It is the Holy Spirit who is the vicar of Christ (His representative) who directs the apostles and their successors. It is not for them to manipulate Him. As we read the NT we see that there are 2 missions: the mission of the Son (which ends at the ascension) and the mission of the Holy Spirit (which begins at Pentecost). The continuity is provided by the apostles. The Catholic Church, by saying that the church is the incarnation of Christ, thereby completely leaves out of the picture the other two members of the Trinity: the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church also claims to be able extend its authority even to the after life, by consigning men to hell, heaven or purgatory, or by canonising certain individuals who are now dead. Masses said for dead are said to shorten the life of the dead person in purgatory. This is based on the idea that the church can determine temporal punishments (or rewards) for individuals on earth, and so also after death. In this way, the church has for all practical purposes replaced Christ.

The doctrine of purgatory arises, of course, from the idea of an incomplete salvation. Its source lies essentially in Jewish legalism and pagan philosophy. For further details, see our Systematic Theology.

The future of the Catholic Church: Over the last two centuries, two tendencies have become apparent; (i) the deification of what is human – Pope and Mary and since Vatican II, catholicism has become a sort of hinduism that embraces everything with, of course, the Pope at the top of the pyramid. It is essentially a man-made system that disregards the Bible and which deifies man at the expense of God. It robs God of His glory. Vatican II virtually gave the green light to theological liberalism. Many Catholic Bibles contain footnotes which just reproduce the old theological liberalism of 19th century protestantism.

However, it must be said that the present pope is very conservative and has done his best to reverse décisions made by Vatican II. He has done this by appointing his men to important positions in each country. Reaction has been considérable, for instance in Austria and Poland. The Vatican now seems to be putting the brakes on such a drift towards universalism. In a recent statement put out by Cardinal Ratzinger (which must have the pope's approval), he combats relativism by insisting that only the Catholic Church has the right to call itself a church (the others are not "sister" churches) and that other religions contain elements that mislead men into accepting a bogus version of salvation.

Finally, some reference should be made to the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church: the Vatican is prepared to accomodate charismatics as long as they remain good Catholics. We have to be careful about charismatic manifestations because the proof of

regeneration is not so much the gifts as the fruit and perseverance. Having said this, one cannot deny that we are seeing the emergence of a phenomenon known as Catholic Evangelicals.

CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

The charismatic movement belongs within the context of the second blessing movements which have a long history.

John Wesley is an important precursor of the movement: he taught that sanctification was a second work of grace, distinct from and following justification. One of his disciples, Jonathan Fletcher, actually called this expérience "the baptism in the Holy Spirit". Both Finney and Moody claimed to have had the same expérience.

However, the idea of seeking a second blessing really goes back to the English hyper-calvinists who were constantly trying to find out whether they were elect or not. This is why they sought a second blessing as a seal on their election. From the early Methodists the stream runs directly through the Holiness movements of the 19th century. These movements were so called because they taught entire sanctification and Christian perfection. This state could be attained through a second expérience subséquent to conversion, as a result of which the Christian is cleansed from inbred sin and is enabled to live a life without conscious or deliberate sin.

In camp meetings and higher life conventions, holiness teachers proclaimed the second blessing of sanctification

as a cleansing of the heart from all sin, and sometimes called it the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Frontier life was rude, raw and exciting. Some of the frontier people saw very little of churches or preachers except once a year at a big tent revival meeting. just as the growing calves were rounded up once a year for branding, so the growing youth needed to be gathered in and saved, while the older people felt their need for a good "clean-up" in the yearly revival time. Sometimes religious fervour was accompanied by great emotional excesses such as "godly hysteria", falling, jerking, "the holy laugh", barking like dogs and such wild dances as David performed before the ark of the Lord. It explains the intensely emotional quality that has persisted in American Christianity. Towards the end of the 19th century, three significant developments in the USA heralded the emergence of Pentecostalism as such:

- a) Because of a decline in national holiness, there were splits and new denominations were founded, among them the Church of the Nazarene and the Church of God.
 - b) Belief in baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire as a third blessing became increasingly widespread.
 - c) Renewed interest in spiritual gifts, particularly healing.
- Pentecostalism was thus an offshoot of the 19th century holiness movement. In 1901 Charles Parham started a Bible school at Topeka, Kansas, called Bethel Bible College. He used no textbook but the Bible and drilled his students in Spirit Baptism teaching. He and his students then conducted evangelistic campaigns

throughout Kansas, during which many of his hearers claimed to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues (which Parham interpreted as other known languages) and worked miracles of healing. The new movement caught on quickly and spread far and wide as it met the needs in a special way of the poor and deprived members of society. They relished its emphasis on enthusiasm and expérience, its unstructured, lively, long, even interminable services where people danced, shouted "Amen" and clapped their hands as they momentarily forgot all their troubles. It was a protest against theological liberalism and formalism of many denominations. Kansas thus became the centre of this movement which held the doctrine that speaking in tongues was the initial evidence that a person had received the "Baptism in the Holy Spirit". This teaching gained scattered support in the southern states of the USA during the early 1900s. In 1906 William Seymour (a negro with one eye), a convert of Parham's, came to Los Angeles where he founded the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission on Azuza Street. There was a revival there (a three-year long meeting) which became the launching pad for 20th century pentecostalism. The movement started within already existing denominations but as splits occurred, pentecostal denominations were born. The movement spread to South America and via Norway and Sweden (Filadelphia Churches) to Britain. Splits in the Pentecostal movement occurred along the lines of:

- a) Glossolalia is seen as 2nd blessing, as opposed to 3rd blessing. Most of the Holiness churches either split over the new teaching on tongues being the evidence of spirit baptism, or else became Pentecostal in doctrine.
- b) Jesus Only movement which refuses to recognise the Trinity. It holds a unitarian view of God and baptises in the name of Jesus only. The largest church of this sort is called the United Pentecostal Church.
- c) The black-white divide. Churches divided along racial lines. The largest Pentecostal denominations today in the USA are: the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ (negro), the Church of God, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church.
- d) Foot-washing. A number of Pentecostal Churches also regard footwashing as being as obligatory as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Pentecostalism in England: As a result of the Welsh revival (1905-9) the Welsh Apostolic Church was founded in 1916. As the name implies they believed in the office of apostle and had a rigid authoritarian structure. British Pentecostalism got under way in 1907 through the collaboration of English-born Norwegian T.B. Barrat (who was directly influenced by the Los Angeles revival) and an Anglican vicar, Alexander Boddy. The movement started at Boddy's parish in Sunderland. Many of the other leaders were converts from the Welsh Apostolic Church. In the early 1920s this movement gave birth to the Assemblies of God (AOG) and the Elim Alliance. The chief difference between the

two was that the Elim Church did not demand speaking in tongues as a sign of spirit baptism. Neither groups believed in the office of apostle. In fact Donald Gee, a prominent AOG leader said: "To bestow NT titles of office upon men and women and then consider that by so doing we are creating apostolic assemblies parallel to those of the Primitive Church is very much like children playing at churches." The vision of the founders of both churches, Principal George Jeffreys (Elim) and Smith Wigglesworth (Assemblies of God) was that of a world-wide 'latter rain' that would herald the return of Christ to the world'. This revival would see the demise of denominations and the rise of the universal and Spirit-endowed church.

The charismatic movement in the USA:

a) In 1960 a new manifestation of Pentecostalism appeared – Neo-Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. The aim was to work within existing denominations. The groundwork for this new upsurge of pentecostalism was laid by such magnetic personalities as David DuPlessis and Oral Roberts. A similar influence was exerted by the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship founded in 1951 by Demos Shakarian, a wealthy Californian dairy owner. The impact of such initiatives was eventually felt within the historic denominations. In 1956 a Presbyterian minister announced to his astonished congregation that he had received the "Baptism in the Spirit". In 1960 an Episcopalian minister, Dennis Bennett, announced the same thing. His subsequent Pentecostal

prayer meetings so disturbed his parish that he was forced to resign and moved to Seattle where a more sympathetic church received him.

b) Penetration of the Catholic Church started at Duquesne University in 1967 and spread to Notre Dame. It seems to have come into Catholicism in the wake of the Second Vatican Council when many Catholics were feeling thoroughly disorientated. Cardinal Suenens in Belgium was won to the cause and in 1975 10,000 Pentecostal pilgrims from 50 countries met in Rome to hear Pope Paul VI bless their cause. Many Catholic pentecostals organised themselves into sort of communes, the most well-known of which became the Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which is one of some 40 such communities. This movement has now given birth to a group within the Catholic Church who call themselves Evangelical Catholics.

c) In the second half of the 1960s the emerging charismatic movement spread rapidly among the drop-out generation who were disillusioned with a society which justified the Vietnam war. The Jesus Movement caught attention for only a short time but made a lasting impact on that generation. This eventually became a denomination called **Calvary Chapel**. This denomination which is highly centralised (they all follow their guru, Church Smith, in California) is really

caught in the time warp of the first generation charismatics.

The Jews for Jesus Movement grew out of this as there had been many young Jews among the drop-out movement.

d) A later development in the charismatic movement is the so-called Third Wave. It involves such personalities as Wimber, McGavran (head of school of missions at Fuller seminary) and Yonggi Cho. A new breed of super-prophets from Kansas city, headed by one Paul Cain, claim that the coming movement, of which they are the vanguard, will make the previous charismatic movement pale before it. According to Paul Cain, it will have three basic characteristics

1) It will defy natural explanation. Those who have managed to explain away the claims made to date by the charismatic movement will be unable to do so in the new era.

2) There will be signs and wonders on a large and dramatic scale. Hospital wards will be emptied. The leaders of the nation will come to the church for divine wisdom

3) It will drive us back to the Word.

4) It will bring a sense of awe as Word and Spirit will be seen to coalesce. It is impossible to explain how glorious the new era will be. The glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

It is significant that this is yet another product of the pentecostal milieu of Kansas city, which is a world unto

itself. Paul Cain and others seem to be particularly upset that there are actually some evangelicals that have not accepted their unique (some would say: exaggerated) claims. They seem to have an insatiable urge to dominate other people.

John Wimber and 'power evangelism', was considered part of the Third Wave, which sees the necessity of healing going hand in hand with evangelism. It has been alleged that Wimber seriously misunderstands biblical teaching about suffering, and that the practices adopted in his healing meetings combine elements of hypnosis, suggestion and delusion. Wimber has been much influenced by Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world, claiming 520,000 members in Seoul, Korea. In his books he emphasises the importance of visualisation and incubation in his understanding of prayer, an understanding that distorts the teaching of Scripture and seems to incorporate an element of the old shamanistic Korean religion. Another book that influenced Wimber was the book "*Healing*" by Francis McNutt, a Roman Catholic priest, whose theology was certainly not very reformed.

Five Christian doctors attended a Wimber healing meeting in their own church. One of them, a psychiatrist, saw much of what happened as expert hypnosis. No organic physical healings were known, only some dealing with functional (psychologically-caused) states. It is to be feared that we are breeding a generation of gullible Christians. 'God has healed me, but the devil is

keeping the symptoms there', was said by one claiming healing from influenza.

In the 1960's Wimber had been involved with the *Righteous Brothers* pop duo and 20 years later his religious services gave prominence to guitar, keyboard and repetitive community singing. Wayne Grudem left this denomination.

f) The latest development is the Toronto Blessing which is characterised by uncontrollable laughter. The movement seems to have been heavily influenced by Health and Wealth movement (cf. prosperity Gospel of Kenneth Hagin), which in turn owes its origins to Christian Science, Eastern mysticism and New Age. Names associated with it are: Rodney Howard Browne, a South African evangelist of Rhema church of South Africa, now working in the USA, Randy Clark, pastor of a Vineyard church in St. Louis, Missouri, and John Arnott, pastor of the Vineyard church at Toronto Airport. Wimber himself distanced himself from this movement before he died.

Needless to say, most of these movements have widely impacted England. The past fifty years have witnessed the progressive "pentecostalisation" of church life in England. In fact, so widely has the charismatic movement impacted England, that those who do not worship "in a charismatic manner" are regarded as oddities..

Many previously independent charismatic movements have now developed into denominations with their own

church-based missionary societies. No longer do they meet in rented premises (like schools), but in purpose-built mega-church buildings. An example of this is the denomination called Pioneers, founded by Terry Virgo.

The charismatic movement:

The pursuit of a second-blessing experience is a core doctrine of pentecostalism and those that hold it seldom stop short of buying the whole pentecostal package. Pentecostalism completely bi-passes the Reformation and has its roots in the pietism of the late Middle Ages (Tauler, Gerhard Groote etc) who had no clear idea of justification by faith. It is significant that Wesley was strongly influenced by the Moravians, who were essentially a pre-reformation movement.

Pentecostals think that the book of acts is normative for all Christian experience, but they fail to take account of the second generation of Christianity which is portrayed in the later epistles. In fact, the book of Acts is about a great series of "firsts". Pentecost was the threshold to be crossed once into the new era.

One of the most articulate advocates of the pentecostal point of view was RA Torrey whom PD Brunner has described as: "after Wesley and Finney, the most important figure in the pre-history of pentecostalism." In his book "The Holy Spirit - who he is and what he does" Torrey proposes seven easy steps to Spirit baptism: 1) Accept Christ as Saviour, 2) Renounce all known sin, 3)

Make an open confession of this, 4) Obedience, 5) thirst, 6) asking, 7) faith.

A doctrinal critique

According to Paul, "the foundation of the church is apostles and prophets" (Eph 2,20). Prophets were thus organs of revelation: sometimes this entailed a prediction, a directive or a detailed revelation (such as the Apocalypse of John). We have the right to expect from prophets "the knowledge of every hidden truth" (1 Cor 13,2), but these are noticeably absent today. In addition, tongues + interpretaion = prophecy, so the same argument applies to tongues as well (it is essentially a revelatory gift). All these revelatory gifts were connected with the completion of the canon and therefore destined to disappear with the passing of the apostolic age: "This deliverance was first announced through the Lord, and those who heard him (i.e. the apostles) confirmed it to us, God himself adding his testimony by signs and wonders, by miracles" (Hebrews 2,4). In addition there is disagreement as to the original nature of tongue-speaking , and also as to what it is today (foreign languages, angelic tongues or what?). This poses a problem: How do I know if I have spoken in tongues, and, if therefore, I have received "Spirit baptism"? The same phenomenon is found in non-Christian religions such as Islam. Many Catholics who speak in tongues claim that this has helped them to

deepen their Catholic spirituality, including such things as devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Having said this, we can be in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The expression

"charismatic" as used in Scripture, does not mean "charisma", a dominating personality or outstanding natural gifts. Nor does it mean speaking in tongues, engaging in disco-type worship and emphasizing spontaneity at the expense of order.

To say that the church is charismatic is to say that it possesses spiritual gifts (except the revelatory ones) and that it depends on these gifts for its effectiveness. Every office-bearer in the church must be a spiritually gifted man.

Charismatic worship is not charismatic simply because it includes guitars, choruses, clapping and dancing, or because it is spontaneous, exuberant and enjoyable – we cannot afford to base our worship on the pleasure principle. On the contrary, it must be marked by biblical control and must retain a sense of God's holiness.

An assessment:

The charismatic movement is essentially a second-blessing movement which attempts to extend pentecostal practice and theology to other denominations. Similar to Montanism, the movement has done some good and many people have come to Christ through it, but it also a lot of damage.

1. It is clear that where people are sincere for the Lord, there is blessing, but there is the danger that, having

dispensed with discernment, people are pushed to unhealthy extremes and accept the latest novelty, whatever it may be.

2. It is to some extent characteristic of our age:

a. A large emphasis on emotion. Women are often dominant in the movement.

b. It reflects the age in which we live which is dominated by US popular culture.

Its choruses tend to be simple and repetitive. When AV language is set to a jazzy tune, the effect is either comic or jarring. Many choruses aim to create a mood rather than communicate a message. Words like 'glory', 'praise', 'worship' and 'love' are moved around to create a mosaic or a pretty picture rather than a clear theology.

c. Worship is given a very narrow definition: it is seen as stringing a few choruses together, handclapping and the raising of hands. A worship-leader turns out to be nothing more than a person who leads the chorus singing! The expression "manipulator" is appropriate in some cases. Christians find themselves singing choruses containing ideas which, if encountered in any other context, they would reject out of hand. To take one example: "Create a new spirit in me, O Lord...Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" This sounds all very spiritual but goes on to imply that you can lose your salvation. The words of David have been taken out of their OT context (where David fears lest he suffer the same fate as Saul, whose spiritual gift of kingship was taken away – i.e. he was sacked) and used as a vehicle for promoting a

blatantly arminian theology. The same could be said of many other choruses. There is a sort of charismatic mafia operating that seems to hold a monopoly of chorus sung by most Christians – the other choruses and hymns just do not seem to get sung. The hymnbook "Mission Praise" has virtually only retained those old hymns which contain the word "Alleluia" – if that is not manipulation, I don't know what is!

YWAM succeeded in penetrating just about every church in Lausanne (Switzerland) and making them charismatic, through the distribution of their hymnbook entitled "J'aime l'Eternel". This all goes to prove that we must be careful what we sing. This highlights a danger of charismatic collections of choruses: they are often a Trojan horse serving to introduce pentecostal theology.

d. It is presumed that, because there is the revival of one or two of the more spiritual gifts, the age of the apostles has returned (with all the gifts) and the kingdom can be built before Christ returns. It has an essentially post-millennial emphasis. The current emphasis tends to be more on "the coming great revival" rather than on the Second Coming. This all comes from the "latter rain" movement which states that as the former rains refer to the pentecostal movement, so the latter rains must refer to "the coming revival". This idea is very widespread in many churches and serves to illustrate the unfortunate tendency of many churches to accept uncritically ideas which belong to the pentecostal stable.

The gifts are defined first and then Scripture manipulated to fit these definitions (cf. prophecy), rather than the other way round. In the Vineyard movement, people are told not to worry if their prophecy doesn't come true – just try again! In the OT we are told to draw the appropriate conclusion, not to "try again". OT prophecies are artificially twisted to refer to the charismatic movement ("all over this world the Spirit is moving as the prophet said it would be" There's a mighty revelation...). Paul's rules for the exercise of spiritual gifts are often conveniently ignored, and the church is all too often turned into a disco.

e. There is a lot of froth, triumphalism and exaggeration in the interests of promoting the movement. People's expectancy level is raised by all sorts of extreme statements (see: the Kansas prophets). When this expectancy is dashed, some people leave the movement for a more stable form of Christianity, become unbelievers or devotees of some form of paganism.

f. The movement tends to make an artificial distinction between the supernatural and the natural. This can lead to a disparagement of the intellect and a one-sided view of counselling. Every person's problem is supposed to be spiritual (usually demonic): the psychological aspect is totally neglected. The demonic is real and today unfortunately on the increase, but it is not so widespread as charismatics would have us believe. An obsession with the demonic can lead to real psychological problems and to psycho-terror (see Neil Anderson *The Bondage Breaker*, a book that replaces one form of bondage by another).

g. Because of its heavy emphasis on spiritual experience, it has tended to neglect the intellectual side of Christianity. Systematic Theology is no longer taught in many Bible schools because it is seen as being either unnecessary or even divisive: it seems that, in the interests of unity, we all have to settle for the lowest common theological factor. In fact one of the aspirations of the charismatic movement is to bring about Christian unity, where other attempts like the ecumenical movement have failed. For instance, attempts within the Anglican Church to encourage "sound theology" amongst evangelicals, were dashed to the ground when the charismatic movement invaded the church and put the clock back, so that the majority of Anglican evangelicals today are as vague and open to compromise as they ever were. The retiring archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Carey, claims that a watershed in his spiritual pilgrimage came when he had a "charismatic experience". Thereafter he refused to call himself an evangelical and started on the slide to theological liberalism: women priests, homosexuality etc.

The charismatic movement is seen by many as a short-cut to spirituality. However, if we were doing what the Lord tell us to do (living in repentance, praying, witnessing, giving etc), there would be no need to look around for additional confirmations of the Lord's presence.

CESSATIONISM: There are two sort of cessationism:

1) Classic cessationism, 2) Modern cessationism

Classic cessationism was found among the Church Fathers (Augustine, Chrysostom and Gregory the Great) who explained the comparative lack of miraculous gifts in their own day as due to the more special need of them at the beginning of the church – to accredit the Christian message. Later on, Calvin allowed that the signs might appear where the Gospel came to new frontiers or where the church was weak.

b) Modern cessationism really starts with Warfield which maintained that the more spectacular gifts died out when the canon was completed. Dispensationalists developed this theory.

Warfield's hard-line approach does not really stand up to proper exegetical analysis. Classic cessationism does seem to be a much more tenable position. However, Pentecostals and charismatics still have to explain why there should be such a remarkable resurgence of gifts on a scale not seen since the apostolic period, when such a resurgence is only promised to Israel when the Messiah returns. The nub of the matter is that the Pentecostals are trying to hijack promises that rightly belong to Israel's national conversion at the end of the age.

THE SECTS

Background: There are a number of background factors that need to be taken into account when talking of the sects.

- 1) Most of them come from America which was a breeding ground for all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas.
- 2) In the late 18th and early 19th century America was swept by waves of revival. These revivals produced satanic counter-attacks in the form of heresy. Numerous sects sprang up, especially the Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses.

The first such system that we shall consider is that of

MORMONISM.

The founder of this movement, which can hardly be called Christian, Joseph Smith, has been latterly revealed (in one of his early letters recently released to the general public) to be a man under the influence of folk magic and occultism. The Mormons teach that God and Jesus Christ directly commissioned Smith to disseminate divine scriptures, inscribed on plates of gold that had been buried by ancient Israelites who had migrated to America. According to Smith's account of this momentous event, the angel Moroni showed him the site outside Palmyra (in the USA) where the plates were allegedly hidden. Harris, the author of the letter, is one of the Mormon Church's 'Three Witnesses' who attest that they too saw the plates, so his truthfulness is also a matter of faith. The Harris letter, dated seven months after the publication of the Book of Mormon, recounts what he says are Smith's words about the scriptural

discovery: 'I only just got it because of the enchantment', says Smith. 'An old spirit told me dig up the gold', but 'when I dug it up the next morning, the spirit transfigured himself into a white salamander in the bottom of the hole and struck me three times...' There is no reference to any angel from God. The Harris letter mentions Smith's involvement in 'money digging' using his supposed special powers and a 'seer stone' to find buried treasure. The letter also suggests that Smith used a magical stone to find the buried scriptures. Another letter that has recently come to light, written by Smith in 1825, is addressed to a prospective treasure-seeking client, and discusses the foiling of a 'clever spirit' who guards the buried treasure.

A leading non-Mormon historian concludes that these letters prove that magic and occult practices were present at the outset of this important religious movement. It is therefore not surprising that the movement should bear the tell-tale signs of its true originator (Satan).

Joseph Smith was also known to have connections with free-masons. Indeed some of the symbolism and ceremony practised in the Mormon temples is derived from Freemasonry.

The movement started in 1830 in Fayette, New York and moved to various places before settling (in 1844) in Salt Lake City under the leadership of Brigham Young who replaced Joseph Smith as "prophet". Smith had previously been killed in a shoot-out. This has come

about when a group within Mormonism rebelled against Smith when he claimed to have received a revelation allowing polygamy. They published a newspaper denouncing Smith, and for this Smith and his brother burned down the printing house that had published the paper. Smith was arrested and put in jail, where he died when an irate mob descended on the prison. Young was the husband of 53 wives and 57 children. In fact the movement tends to be lax in sexual matters: grace for instance is seen as a license to sin. The state of Utah (80% Mormon) is equal or worse than the national average on many important family-related moral issues. The movement was at one time or another characterised by polygamy and racism. However, both of these practices were later overturned by "subsequent revelations". Polygamy is today confined to one splinter-group (the Fundamentalist Mormons).

In the 1850's the Mormons were involved in various gun-battles in attempt to get even with their persecutors, in one battle going as far as to disguise themselves as Indians.

There are two groups that split off the main movement:

1. The Reorganised Mormons (also known as Josephites) and is at present based in Independence, Missouri. They reject the *Pearl of Great Price* and doctrines teaching plurality of gods, that God is a man, Mother God, celestial marriage, and baptism for the dead.
2. The Fundamentalist Mormons who continue to practise polygamy.

Because of its system of compulsory tithing, it has become an extremely wealthy church, second in fact only to the Catholic Church.

Mormon Scriptures: *The Book of Mormon* was published in 1830 and *The Pearl of Great Price* in 1851 based on subsequent "revelations" given to Joseph Smith. The church administration contains a Prophet (and two counsellors) at the top, with 12 apostles in the next tier of authority. This shows that they believe in an ongoing revelation.

Mormon theology is not based on the Book of Mormon or on a statement of faith, but on 'ongoing revelations' allegedly received by Joseph Smith and his successors.

The main challenge that Mormonism presents is that it claims to present **an additional revelation** to that of the Bible and an **additional prophet** (messiah) in the person of Joseph Smith. In fact it claims a continuing revelation thanks to the apostles and prophets of the movement. Bound up with this is a **claim to exclusivity**: only the Mormons, with their special priesthood, can provide you with the salvation that you need. Ultimate salvation cannot be obtained without confession of Joseph Smith as prophet. In fact, the Mormon creed says: "I testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and died a martyr for the faith, that the book of Mormon is true, that the church of Jesus Christ of the latter-day saints is the only true restored church, and that there is a living prophet upon the earth today."

In countering Mormon claims, we need to emphasise that:

1. The canon of Scripture is closed: no more prophets or apostles can extend it.
2. The book of Mormon not only adds to, but also contradicts previous revelation as found in the Bible.

Mormonism is essentially an attempt to give religious importance to pre-Columbian America (and to Joseph Smith!). Smith concocted an account which smacks of science fiction, and for which there is absolutely no historical evidence. We also learn that during the millenium Christ will reign from *two* capitals (Zion – i.e. Independence, Missouri in the USA) and Jerusalem in Palestine.

As a new religious movement, Mormonism represents a dynamic synthesis that combines frontier revivalism, intense religious experience and popular evolutionary philosophies with a respect for Jesus and Christian ethics.

The Beliefs of Mormonism

a) **The Book of Mormon** claims to supplement the Bible. For the Mormons, the Bible predicts the book of Mormon, the Book of Mormon interprets OT prophecy and claims to be part of the new covenant to Israel. It is also supposed to be "another witness" to the truth of the Christian Gospel. It is unfortunate that this witness contradicts the Bible on so many points! It draws heavily from the KJV (25,000 words!) and yet the book of

Mormon, so it is claimed, was written 1000 years before the KJV! Besides, it keeps many of the faulty renderings of the KJV, which in the light of later translations, have proved to be incorrect. The Book of Mormon (name of the angel giving the revelation) claims to be an historical account of pre-history and of pre-Columbian America. The two groups that are supposed to have made their way to America before Columbus, are:

1. One group left the tower of Babel, about 2,250 BC migrated to Europe and then over the Bering Straits emigrated to Central America.
2. The second group, consisting of righteous Jews, emigrated to America about 600, just before the destruction of Jerusalem. It is claimed that the American Indians are descendants of this semitic group who received a curse and were given dark skins. This is contradicted by genetic research which proves that American Indians are of mongoloid stock and have a different predominant blood group from that of Jews. It is claimed that Christ visited the American continent and preached the Gospel to the descendants of the Jews, instituting baptism, the communion service, the priesthood and other mystical ceremonies. Some 1400 years later it is claimed that Joseph Smith unearthed their history book, written in plates of gold and using reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics!

On some points the Book of Mormon is considered to be superior even to the Bible: there are said to be errors of translation in the Bible, whereas no such errors are said

to exist in the book of Mormon. This is strange claim in view of the fact that some 3,000 changes have been made to the text of the book of Mormon since the publication of the first edition! Statements in the book of Mormon have been nullified by later 'revelations'. Moreover, their 'version' of the Bible, contains numerous alterations and additions which have nothing to do with translation problems, but rest on the assumption that the Bible is incomplete and needed to be supplemented by the great prophet, Joseph Smith, some 1800 years later.

b) The Mormon doctrine of priesthood: it claims to possess the priesthoods of Aaron and Melchizedek. Mormons claim that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received the Aaronic priesthood from the hand of John the Baptist on May 15th 1829 and that, shortly after this, the Melchizedek priesthood was conferred on the same two individuals through the ministration of Peter, James and John! This part of their exclusive claim: you can only get salvation through Mormonism!

c). The doctrine of god(s), man and creation: tritheism (the Trinity consists of 3 gods): it is even claimed that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones; polytheism (there are a great number of other gods besides the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: they rule over other planets). The difference between God and angels is one of degree. Adam was once a spirit-creature (god) who came to earth to receive a body to live in. Man is god in the making, who will eventually receive his full divinity back again.

(cf. gnostic heresy which posited man as retaining a divine spark after the fall (creation) when he became imprisoned in body. cf. also Greek mythology!). The creation of this earth was a kind of co-operative venture between the gods and the spirits of certain pre-existent men. Mormonism believes in the pre-existence of men in spirit form. This was a period of probation: those who did badly are born with black skins.

The distinction between us and Christ is one of degree and not of kind. His body was the product of the *physical* union of God the Father and the Virgin Mary. This smacks of the very worst of pagan mythology. Christ's atonement does not determine where a man goes after the resurrection, since this is determined by man's own actions (i.e. salvation by works). In the case of grievous sins, a man must add his own blood to the blood of Christ to atone for his transgressions (this is an attack against the uniqueness of Christ as Second Person of the Trinity). Christ's atonement for our sins, merely earns us the right to be raised again (and so overcome physical death). Men are saved through faith in Christ (and Joseph Smith) but also through works. Salvation is merited by works done in this life. Only a minority will join the devil in hell: most men will be assigned a place in one of the 3 heavenly kingdoms: the celestial, the terrestrial and the telestial.

d) **Baptism:** One of the distinctive doctrines of the Mormon Church is baptism for deceased relatives. This not only enhances the prestige of the Mormon church as

the only agency through which men can be saved, but it also enables Mormons to become, at least in part, saviours of their dead relatives. Mormons argue that, since baptism is essential for salvation, and since many have died before the church was 'restored' under Joseph Smith, it seems inevitable that most of the dead will be lost. However, so the Mormons claim, the living may be baptised as substitutes for the dead – that is for those who died without a knowledge of the 'restored' Gospel.

e) **Marriage:** Another distinctive element of Mormonism is that of celestial marriage. Mormons claim that there is a special type of marriage – one contracted in a Mormon temple – that lasts eternally and is not annulled at death. Children can be born to this marriage even after death. Only people married in this way can attain the status of godhood (i.e. full salvation) – the others become angels. Needless to say, this doctrine has no basis in the Bible at all, and contradicts the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith alone in the atoning work of the Messiah.

f) **Salvation:** The Mormon doctrine of salvation involves not only faith in Christ, but baptism by immersion, obedience to the teaching of the Mormon church, good works and keeping the commandments of God, which will cleanse away the stain of sin.

Mormonism seems therefore to be a mixture of Christianity and theosophy (eastern religions). Our inevitable reaction when faced with such statements, is: how could anyone in his right mind believe such utter

nonsense which is quite clearly in contradiction to basic biblical teachings? This can only be explained by the fact that we have to do with a powerful spirit of delusion that has the power to seduce anyone who lacks firm spiritual convictions and has little knowledge of the Bible. It is all part of the devil's disinformation service. But be assured that anyone who really wants to find God (at any cost) will find him, but that those who are in two minds as to whether they want to find God, could fall victim to the devil's disinformation campaign.

Jehovah's Witnesses: its origins

The origins of this movement are to be found within the Adventist Church, which we should examine first of all. At the time there was a mania for prophecy and date-fixing which even made the headlines of local papers. It all started when William Miller, a Baptist farmer, announced that Jesus was coming in 1843. This was based on the mistaken belief that the 2300 days of Daniel 8 refer to 2300 years. In fact they are literal days and refer to the period 171-165 BC. (when the Temple was profaned by the pagans, before being restored by Judas Maccabee in 165). Christ did not return in 1843, but instead the first Adventist Church started.

ADVENTISM

When William Miller's predictions failed to materialise, Hiram Edson saw a vision that explained the discrepancy: Miller had mistakenly identified what he

was foretelling – in fact it was the opening of an investigative judgement in heaven to determine who among the dead are worthy of resurrection (a very arminian interpretation!).

Other adventists believed that the Second Coming had been hindered by their failure to keep the sabbath as outlined in the OT. Ellen G. White had a vision which supposedly confirmed this. She was led to believe that it was the pope who had changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday and that as he was the beast, those who kept Sunday had this mark. Those who kept Saturday were the 144,000 (adventists). These had the mark of the remnant church (the spirit of prophecy – see Rev 12,17). She was to become the Prophetess of Adventism. She claimed to be a divinely ordained messenger who had been granted special revelations relating to the Adventist Church (cf. references to my angelic spirit guide, very much as New Agers refer to their spirit guides. This definitely smacks of occultism). Adventists, however, claim that they are no worse than pentecostals and in this respect never accept her writings over against Scripture. But in actual fact, adventists, instead of testing her writings by the Bible, use statements from her writings to substantiate their interpretation of Scripture. An example of this is the doctrine of the investigative judgement which they accept as inspired before ever turning to the Bible for confirming quotations (Dan 7,10 and Rev 20,12). Rev 14, which contains three angelic proclamations, is quoted in support for their idea that Babylon represents other

Christian denominations (which they are to leave) and that they are to proclaim the message of sabbath-keeping. This puts them in line with other sects that claim that they are proclaiming some extra revelation that other denominations have missed.

The denomination began in 1863 with the fusion of three groups who believed respectively:

1. The doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary to explain why 1843 did not see Christ's physical return.
2. The observance of the sabbath as opposed to Sunday.
3. The acceptance of Ellen White as a true prophetess whose teachings were to be followed.

Adventists believe to this day that all as yet unfulfilled prophecy has to do with them and their church.

Adventist doctrine: Although they claim to accept the Bible as supreme authority...

1) Mrs White claims that at the incarnation Christ took on himself our *sinful* nature.

2) Mrs White claims that Christ is making atonement now. This is connected with their peculiar view of the "investigative judgement", according to which: At the cross, believers' sins were transferred to the heavenly sanctuary where they will be blotted out after an investigative judgement to determine if these sinners are worthy (their belief and their works are taken into consideration). Only then will these sins be laid on Satan – according to their interpretation Azazel in the OT ceremony represented Satan! This of course was invented to accomodate the failure of Christ to return in 1843

when what happened, according to Adventism, was that Christ passed from the holy place, having blotted out sins, to the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary! The heavenly sanctuary had first of all to be cleansed because this is where the sins of believers are kept! When we repent, sins are taken away from us and deposited in the heavenly sanctuary! Acts 3,19 (AV) is cited as a proof text for this.

3) Keeping of the sabbath: Believers should keep the Ten Commandments out of respect for God: this they explain to mean that law-keeping is a fruit of salvation and not a condition of initial salvation. In the last days however, keeping the sabbath will be a condition of salvation.

When the beast enforces Sunday observance. On the one hand they say they accept as fellow-Christians those who hold another view, but on the other hand they claim that they have been raised up at the end-times to stress the neglected truth of sabbath-keeping (i.e. keeping the fourth commandment).

4) Candidates for baptism have to profess 13 beliefs including: sabbath-keeping, spirit of prophecy, remnant church and promise to abstain from alcohol and tobacco.

5) The Lord's Supper is celebrated 4 times a year, preceded by the rite of foot-washing

6) Eschatology: Just prior to Christ's coming, a special group of adventists will be resurrected in order to witness Christ's coming. When the main resurrection occurs, both dead and alive saints will be taken to heaven where they will spend the millenium! Satan will be left on a desolate earth which will remain so for the whole

millennium. Christ will return with his saints at the end of the millennium, to live in the New Jerusalem. No future is posited for Israel as a nation.

7) Adventists also teach soul-sleep, annihilationism, free will, the deity of Christ, believers baptism. Since the wicked are annihilated when they die, the adventists have to explain their appearance at a future judgement as a sort of re-creation.

Thus the movement was characterised by a heavy emphasis upon prophecy and by an attempt to revive the Old Testament dispensation. Their big mistake is to fail to identify Israel's relation to prophecy, i.e. that prophecy refers primarily to that nation, and to misapply prophecies in Daniel and Revelation to themselves. On the face of it, it is highly improbable that these prophecies should refer to some obscure sect in the USA. Mormonism makes the same mistake: they are all trying to put the USA on the prophetic map: it is essentially an American phenomenon.

It must be said that there is disagreement amongst writers on cults as to whether the Adventists are a cult or a Christian denomination. Walter Martin (*Kingdom of the Cults*) maintains that they are Christian and criticises Hoekema (a calvinist) for misrepresenting them as a cult in his book *Four Major Cults*. Martin claims that their official writings must be taken at face value and not misrepresented. Certainly some Adventist groups are more sectarian than others, but this is true of any denomination. However, the fact that it spawned the

Jehovah's witness movement as well as Herbert W. Armstrong, makes adventism distinctly suspect, despite all that its supporters say in its defence. The spirit that was speaking to these people was in all likelihood a spirit of deception (there is no hell etc, which is just the sort of doctrine that Satan would like to popularise).

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Russell associated with Adventists from 1869-78 before breaking with them. From them he had absorbed the following:

1. There is no such thing as eternal punishment.
2. Denial of Christ's divinity and of the Trinity (only held by some Adventists).
3. The mania for date-fixing and insistence of justifying oneself when the events predicted did not occur. Russell was attracted by date-fixing for the Second Coming which he estimated first as 1874, and then 1914.

Jehovah's Witnesses can thus be seen as an outgrowth of Adventist teaching.

The early history of the movement is closely linked with the life of its first two presidents. Its founder was C.T. Russell who, at an early age, rejected the doctrine of eternal torment (hell). As a result of this act, he entered upon a long and varied career of denunciation aimed at 'organised religions'. In 1870 he organised his first Bible class which served to launch the movement. He became an extremely controversial figure, often involved in law suites. The fact that he lost most of these libel suites,

shows that accusations levelled against him for dishonesty and moral failings, cannot be lightly dismissed. In 1913 his wife divorced him on the grounds of "his conceit, egoism, domination, and improper conduct in relation to other women." Yet this is the man who claimed that his interpretations of Scripture are 'the divinely provided light upon God's Word'. This is really not far removed from the position of the Mormons who affirm that God gave his people additional revelations through Joseph Smith, which are determinative for the proper understanding of the Bible. JW's are to this day forbidden to read the Bible without the explanatory notes found in the Watchtower Magazine.

As a speaker, Russell swayed many, but as a theologian he impressed no-one of any competence. As a man, he was repeatedly convicted of perjury. In the course of his writings and lectures, he denied many of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible: the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the physical resurrection and return of Christ, eternal punishment, the eternal existence of the soul and the validity of an infinite atonement for sins. He held that the Trinity was three gods in one person and Christ was the first created being (identified with the archangel Michael!). In volume 7 of his collected works, which was published after his death, Arius and Russell are called two of the angels of the Seven Churches! Christ's death is seen as a ransom that saves man from physical death, not eternal death. He admitted in court to having no knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek and to have never had any formal theological training. It is not therefore

surprising that JW's try to distance themselves from this man, and yet it is his teachings that form the basis of their 'faith'. It is he that has bequeathed the doctrine of spiritual confusion that characterises JW teaching today. His successor, 'Judge Rutherford', declared that he was the mouthpiece of Jehovah (God) for this age and that God had designated His words as the expression of divine mandate. Rutherford also quoted Russell and his materials as authoritative material. However, he was concerned to distance himself from Russell and therefore dropped the title Russelite and adopted the term Jehovah's Witnesses, thus cleverly managing to disguise the true origins of the movement.

One of the basic principles of the movement has to been to measure any biblical doctrine by the criterion of 'reason' and in particular to the reasoning of such men as Russell and Rutherford. But God himself has said: quote Isaiah 55,8-9. By this statement God certainly does not say that reason and thought should be abandoned in the process of enquiry, but merely that no one can know the mind, nature or thoughts of God in all their fullness, since man is finite and He is infinite. For our knowledge of God, we have to depend upon revelation.

In 1942 Rutherford was succeeded by Nathan Knorr and in 1977 by Frederick Franz.

In 1975 the movement had a major crisis. It has predicted that in 1975, 6.000 years would have passed since creation and that in that year the battle of Armagedon would probably occur. When this did not happen, the

movement lost many members. Since then a major shake-up has occurred with Franz being asked to retire.

In 1981 the movement was shaken by a series of schisms which resulted in many leaving the movement. There was an attempt by Professor James Penton to put the movement on an evangelical basis, but this reform movement was expelled by the leadership.

Since 1992 Milton G. Henschel had been the president of the organisation.

The teaching of Jehovah's witnesses is characterised by the following.

- 1) Denial of the Trinity. This is seen as a satanic counterfeit.
- 2) Denial of divinity of Christ (i.e. that he is God – the second person of the Trinity) and therefore a denial of the sufficiency of the atonement. They also deny that Christ had two natures. They believe that he gave up his "divinity" when he was born a man, but that he became divine again at his baptism when he became Messiah!
- 3) Christ is now without a body: It follows that he cannot be our effective mediator. While on earth he was only a man: divinity denied. Thus not only is his atonement denied but also his mediatorial ministry. The Holy Spirit is just an "influence".
- 4) Salvation by 'faith' and self-effort. It involves faith in the ransom of Christ for our physical death, baptism by JWs and activism for the JW cause as well as a moral life. Jesus died for the sin of Adam which only means that we get a second (better) chance when we come back onto

earth again to attain eternal life this time and not make the same mistake as Adam. There are two classes of those saved: the 144,000 who will go to heaven and the others who will have an earthly destiny. In 1918 a certain number of those 144,000 were resurrected spiritually!

5) Denial of unique place of Israel in God's purposes.

Replaced by the 144,000 who are reckoned to be a special class of believer who alone have the right to inhabit the heavenly sphere. According to them, during the millenium, the 144,000 will reign from heaven but an indefinite number of men of good will reign on earth.

This extra provision had to be made when the number of JW's passed the 144,000 mark! All those who come back to life at the final resurrection will be given another chance to accept the Gospel.

6) They believe in soul sleep and conditional immortality.

Denial of hell as place of eternal punishment: only physical death exists, followed by annihilation.

7) Exclusivism: the real restoration of the church to true religion did not take place until the 1870's when Russell began his Bible class. JW's alone are God's true people — all others are followers of the Devil.

In seeking to justify their position on the above matters, they resort to a number of illegitimate means of exegesis:

1. They impose their interpretation (as contained in the Watchtower Magazine) on the Bible, and then look around for texts to support it, which they cull from anywhere, without regard to context. Passages that prove the contrary are conveniently ignored.

2. They indulge in absurd literalism. Blood transfusion is refused on the basis of the passage forbidding the eating of blood.
3. They also use absurd typology when it suits them. Noah is seen as a type of Christ and his wife as a type of the bride of the lamb (the 144,000!),
4. They fasten on to current events and then try and find prophecies of which these are said to be fulfillments.

Comparative figures:

Adventists: 2,5 million (four fifths outside USA).

JWs: 5 million active members and as many interested people. (30% in USA, 8% in Germany and 5% in GB).

Mormons: 10 million (two thirds in USA).

HERBERT W ARMSTRONG AND THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

It all started when the founder had an argument with his wife about sabbath keeping. This was the catalyst that caused him to search the Scriptures.

The Church itself began in 1934 when, according to Armstrong's calculations, the Philadelphia age of the church began. His movement is a mixture of British israelitism (Britons and Americans are the descendants of the 10 lost tribes and the throne of GB is the throne of David), seventh day Adventism, Jehovah's witnesses and Mormons plus Mr Armstrong's own unique interpretations of salvation and the nature of God.

He regarded himself as God's prophet for the age. Unfortunately, many of his prophecies have not come true. According to Armstrong, evangelism ceased when the early church fled to Pella. Paul, Valdo and Armstrong all mark turning points in world evangelism.

BELIEFS: He believes in a plurality of Gods. Although the Trinity is limited to the Father and Son, it has been enlarged to include a wider family (Mormon belief). The final destiny of man is to become God.

He believes that Jesus was born with a sinful human nature which was then perfected to enable him to offer a perfect sacrifice.

He does not believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit.

In the mean time, salvation is only completed at the resurrection – before that time you cannot know that you are saved. At the new birth we are begotten (actually conceived) but only born (again) at the resurrection.

Baptism and sabbath observance are all mandatory for those who aspire to salvation. Not to observe the sabbath is one of the marks of the beast. There is no eternal punishment for the wicked.

The resurrection: Jesus Christ was raised from death as a spirit and we shall be raised as spirits.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

Christian science is the story of a rather conceited woman, Mary Baker Eddy, who had a health problem, from which she claimed to have been healed. Out of this

she made a business and subsequently a cult with herself as the prophetess of the cult, and her writings as the Bible of the cult.

When she was a child she questioned in particular the final judgement day, the peril of endless punishment and the view that God has no mercy on unbelievers.

In her book *Science and Health*, she seems to have been very dependent on Phineas Quimby who was convinced that he had rediscovered Jesus' own healing methods. She claimed to have been healed by him. The Christian Science Church is thus a church that majors on healing and people are expected to testify during the services of their healing. However, since the advent of the charismatic movement, which also majors on this question, Christian science has had to face serious competition.

In 1879 Mrs Eddy set about founding a church. For the doctrinal elements she was heavily influenced by a Unitarian minister called Henry Wiggin. In this church it is not surprising that her writings play a dominant role: the Bible is subordinated to her interpretation of it.

Common to all cults, she claims that she has had access to direct divine revelation, and therefore her book *Science and Health* is recognised as the final authority.

Though at first Mrs Eddy used to preach at services, in 1895 she issued a law which established that reading from the Bible and from her book *Science and Health* should replace sermons after she died. The result is that today there are no sermons: Scriptural passages are read out by one reader and a second reader the reads out

corresponding passages from *Science and Health*. The closest thing to pastors are "practitioners": people who have received instruction in Christian Science and who devote their full time to the practice of their healing methods.

Another aspect of the movement that shows that it is a cult is its claim that the Bible has many errors but that the book *Science and Faith* has none (this is what Mormons also claim for their book). Moreover, the Bible is spiritualised in a gnostic manner. Genesis 2 is rejected (partly on the basis of the documentary theory). Some of the accounts of Jesus' ministry are similarly rejected as being too crude (eg. putting mud on a person's eyes prior to healing him). Everything in the Bible is spiritualised like the *Zohar* in kabalism. This is also very close to hinduism,

Basic Beliefs:

1. Matter and evil are unreal. We cannot therefore trust our senses.
2. Evil is a delusion
3. Disease is a delusion. Consequently the cure for illness is to help a person understand that he is not really ill, that his pain is imaginary, and that his imagined disease is only the result of false belief.
4. Death is also an illusion. "Death is but another phase of the dream that existence can be material...the dream of death must be mastered by mind here or hereafter."
5. God is conceived as the Supreme mind, like Brahman in hinduism.

6. Jesus is merely an example that we should imitate. The incarnation did not occur and the man Jesus disappeared when he went to heaven. This is very similar to docetism.
7. No atonement took place on the cross, sin is an illusion and the Trinity does not exist. Christ' death had nothing to do with our salvation.
8. Man, being essentially a spirit being, is part of God. This is pure pantheism.
9. Sin is not real and man never fell. Sin is a bad dream, so deliverance from sin means convincing yourself that it does not exist.
10. No sacraments are administered in their church.
11. They have no eschatology except to say that those who have not succeeded by the moment of death in liberating themselves from delusion, will be annihilated.

All this serves to underline another aspect of cultism: they use orthodox Christian vocabulary but inject into it totally different meanings. Another one is to claim that yours is the one true church and that all the others are false.

Conclusion: Christian Science has no more right to call itself Christian than has Buddhism or Hinduism, with whose teachings, indeed, Christian Science has greater affinity than with those of Christianity.

Strangely enough the Christian Science position is today maintained by the Health and Wealth movement within the context of the charismatic movement. It is today represented by Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria

Copeland, and Fred Price. Apparently the bridge between Christian Science and the charismatic movement was Alexander Boddy who virtually introduced Pentecostalism into England.

THE UNIFICATION CHURCH OR "MOONIES"

Its founder and leader is a Korean pastor called Sun Myung Moon from a Presbyterian background. At the age of 16 he claims that he received a vision while on a Korean mountainside. He says that Jesus Christ appeared to him in a vision urging him to carry out the task that he, Christ, had failed to complete. Eventually, Moon was persuaded and agreed to complete the task. He then spent the next few years preparing for the "great spiritual battle ahead".

After initial success with his movement in the Far East, Moon came to America in 1971 where his cult began to flourish also. The movement now has a following of two million members.

There is little doubt that Moon claims to be the Messiah for this age. He also claims to be presenting a "new revelation". He also makes exclusive claims for his movement: "We are the only people who truly understand the heart of Jesus, and the hope of Jesus." His chief work called the Divine Principle takes precedence over the Bible.

Doctrine:

1. **Dualism:** there is Father God and Mother God, male and female, light and dark, yin and yang (cf. taoism), Spirit and Flesh.
2. **Fall of man:** according to Moon there were two falls: one spiritual and one physical. Both falls were sexual in nature (Moon seems to have an obsession with sex). Eve supposedly has illicit sexual relations with Satan which caused the spiritual fall. Afterwards, her sexual relationship with spiritually immature Adam resulted in the physical fall. A dual fall demands a dual salvation, the second of which Moon presumably claims to provide.
3. **Coming of Christ:** when Jesus came to earth, he achieved a spiritual salvation for mankind (on the Cross) but not a physical one. However, his death on the Cross, was an accident but one in which God overruled.
4. **John the Baptist:** Moon believes that the principal reason for the failure of Jesus' mission (to establish the kingdom of God = the millenium) was John the Baptist's loss of faith. This meant that things went wrong: people deserted Christ and he was finally crucified. Moon claims that he is the "third Adam", the one who is called to redeem man physically.
5. **Jesus:** Moon denies his divinity by saying that Jesus was "a man of value" but not God himself (by which he presumably means the Father). Christianity was subsequently guilty of making a god of Christ after his death.

6. **Moon the Messiah:** Moon is reportedly worshipped by his followers and called "Father". Moon has gone on record as saying: "God is now throwing Christianity away and is now establishing a new religion, and this new religion is the Unification Church."

Moon claims to be the Messiah but he has no biblical proof to back up this claim and therefore must be considered a false prophet.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST

History: The Disciples of Christ (later Church of Christ) arose within the context of 19th century revivalism. Alexander Campbell, although interested in Christian unity, managed to cause splits within Baptist Churches during his preaching tours. Those who split off became known as the *Disciples of Christ* in 1811. They were promptly nicknamed the Campbellites.

Another man, Barton Stone, a former presbyterian evangelist, had also caused a split. At the great Cane Ridge Meeting of 1801 (part of the Camp Meeting phenomenon), he had previously abandoned his calvinistic beliefs in limited atonement and unconditional election.

In 1832 at Lexington, Kentucky, the two men led their respective groups into a union to form the "Christian Church (*Disciples of Christ*)," a church designed to imitate as closely as possible the church life described in the Book of Acts.

While advocating a return to the simpler theology of the Early Church, they both were opposed to both speculative theology and emotional revivalism. They believed that baptism and confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour were the only requirements of Christianity. The creation in 1849 of a missionary society and the use of organ music in church services began to bring division within the ranks. Moreover, the Federal Religious Census of 1906 listed the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ separately. The division was based more on differences of practice than on differences in doctrine.

The **Church of Christ** follows a congregational pattern of church polity which they regard as being in accordance with NT teaching. Indeed, to align all church practice and belief with the Scriptures is a major goal of the Churches of Christ. Nothing is to be accepted as an article of faith or as a condition of communion but "what is expressly taught and enjoined ... in the Word of God," which is "the perfect constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church." This inevitably means their own interpretation of the book of Acts – including baptismal regeneration. The Bible is the best source of information about God, far better than creeds or statements of dogma. The Churches of Christ affirm their belief in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the vicarious atonement, the necessity of spiritual rebirth, and the need for believer's baptism by immersion. Today they are divided into a strict and a moderate party. Both are represented in Vienna, for instance.

The strict party (as represented in Croatia by Mladen Jovanović) believes in baptismal regeneration and forbid the use of instruments in church services. Their Arminian viewpoint virtually means that they believe in salvation by faith and works. "Faith is an ongoing thing...Making a decision for Christ does not make you a Christian – only baptism does".

The liberal party rejects these extremes and are to all intents and purposes mainstream Evangelicals.

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UNITARIANISM

Origins: Unitarians (otherwise known as Socinians) sprang up on the edge of the Anabaptist movement. They basically questioned the decisions of the Early Church, especially on the nature, person and birth of Christ. They rejected the Trinity and also the divinity of Christ. These were not initially liberals but earnest Christians who insisted on taking nothing as true unless it was evident from the Bible. This explains the title of a book by one of their number entitled '*Against the whole world since the apostles*'. Orthodox Mennonites expelled any anti-Trinitarians but the Socinians did not.

Socinianism found strong roots in Hungary (Blandrata), Poland (Sozzini), and Transylvania and eventually spread to Holland, then to England and finally to the United States.

Developments:

The **first** period was 1800-1835. Throughout this era, Unitarianism was subject, in a large measure, to English philosophic rationalism, a semi-supernaturalism and the practice of general philanthropy.

The **second** period of development, 1835-1885, found the Unitarians strongly influenced by German idealism and rationalistic theology flavored by a definite leaning toward mysticism.

By 1865 the National Unitarian Conference was organized, and a definite theology was evolved, in which the Unitarians envisioned themselves as disciples of Christ.

The **third** period of Unitarian illusion began in 1885, and continues on to this day. This period of growth has seen an acceptance of evolution, the empirical methods in religion, higher criticism, the higher recognition of the Universal religion and "an ethical attempt to realize the higher. affirmations of Christianity."

Beliefs:

1. *The Doctrine of God and the Person of Christ.*

In general, a Unitarian is a religious person whose ethic derives primarily from that of Jesus, who believed in One God, not the Trinity. . . . Unitarians hold that the

orthodox Christian world has forsaken the real, human Jesus of the Gospel, and has substituted a Christ of dogmatism, metaphysics and pagan philosophy. Unitarians repudiate the doctrine and dogma of the Virgin Birth.... Unitarians do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, either of Jewish hope or of Christian fantasy. They do not believe He is "God Incarnate," or the Second Person of the Trinity, as the final arbitrator at the end of time, who shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

2. The Doctrines of Sin and Redemption.

The believe in the inherent goodness of man and therefore reject doctrines of the Fall, the Atonement and eternal damnation.

3. The Scriptures:

The doctrine of revelation of the absolute and indisputable authority of the Bible is alien to Unitarian faith and teaching.

It is not necessary to point out that this view of the Scripture is the same view held by reformed Judaism, Christian Science, Unity and a host of other non-Christian cults, all of whom are content to utilize the Scriptures, but in a manner never intended by the authors.

Despite this belief, unitarians constantly quote from the Bible in order to try and fool people that unitarianism is an orthodox Christian group. Unitarianism claims to be a form of Christianity, but at the same time it denies the historic doctrines of the Christian Church (the Trinity,

Deity of Christ, Virgin Birth, Vicarious Atonement,
Bodily Resurrection and Glorious Return of our Lord).

ROSICRUCIANISM

The word takes its origin from a very unorthodox interpretation of the cross: it represents not the atonement but the human body and the rose at the centre "a pure vital fluid to overcome the passion-filled blood of the human race." The founder of present day Rosicrucianism was Christianus Rosenkreuz (1378-1484), a German scholar who roundly opposed Roman Catholicism and claimed to be the revealer of the mysteries of the rose cross. He is reputed to have journeyed to the East where he was initiated into occult secrets. It is essentially a gnostic theosophical sect. From its inception, Rosicrucianism put emphasis upon the occult and the mystical relationship of Christianity to all the great religions of the world. It was by admission, a secret society. It flourished in a day when secret societies were in vogue, and "a century after its origin, Rosicrucianism underwent a recrudescence in connection with Free Masonry, which not only deemed Rosicrucianism genuine, but even borrowed usages and customs from the writings of those who had satirized the fraternity" In a world which was trying to analyze the meaning of comets, alchemy and Eastern occultism, Rosicrucianism proved to be an attractive alternative to orthodoxy. It was careful to utilize an orthodox Christian vocabulary, however, and to speak out vehemently against Roman

Catholicism, Alchemy and dogmatic theology of any type, although it zealously promoted some of the principles of the Protestant Reformation, the theology of which, it might be noted, is the antithesis of Rosicrucian teaching!

Beliefs:

- 1) God: Rosicrucianism is a type of occult pantheism, culminating in an impersonal spirit-being, who is "collectively" God.
- 2) Christ: Rosicrucianism opposes the true divinity of the Lord Jesus and teaches that Jesus Christ was not Jesus, nor was He the only begotten Son of God. Instead, Jesus was a man, the highest luminary possible. The Christ-spirit was a manifestation of the cosmic Christ and the only begotten is "an exalted being which ranks above all else in the universe, save only the Power aspect which created it."

