Allan W. Janssen

The Plain Truth About

GOD-101

What the Church Doesn't Want You to Know
The Plain Truth About God

or

A donkey with a load of holy books is still just a donkey!

This book is dedicated to my wife Ellen, who through her personal example taught me the true meaning of Christian values!

“So many Gods,
So many creeds.”
”So many paths,
That wind and wind.”
”While just the art of being kind,
Is all this sad world needs.”

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919)

“I look after the big picture, son.”
Said God!
“Life is a crap-shoot.”
“You take your chances like everyone else!”

George Burns as God

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Those who have studied American popular culture tell us that the Bible has profoundly influenced the way we tell our stories, look for meanings, quest for transformations, imagine our futures, and hope for apocalyptic solutions to our problems.

If the Bible is that important to our culture, is it not strange that we have not questioned the reasons why?

The list of issues currently under discussion includes the place of creationism in public schools, the role of women in our society, social attitudes towards various sexual orientations, Jewish-Christian relations, theories of white supremacy, patriarchal institutions, the use of natural resources, the definition of family values, understanding violence, how best to relate to other cultures, and what responsibility we have for maintaining human rights around the world.

Most of these issues could be discussed without referring to the biblical heritage, but the Bible is always lurking in the background, and positions have been taken on all of them that ultimately appeal to the Bible as the final word.

When that happens, thinking and reasonable discussion stop. We do not know how to proceed after the Bible has been invoked. We are all complicit in letting an appeal to the Bible count as an argument.

One of the reasons for our silence when confronted with a proof text from the Bible is that we simply do not know what to make of the Bible and its contents. Thus we do not know what to say in response to those who use the Bible as an authority for their views.

Despite the enormous investment in biblical studies in our society, there is actually very little public knowledge about the Bible.

I have also been impressed with the authority we grant the Bible when discussing issues of social consequences. Here we are with the Bible on our hands and we do not know how we got it, how it works, and what to make of it in public forum. An acquiescence that pertains whether one is a Christian, or not.

That is the stimulus for this book.
Prologue:

From the Great Flood to the Legend of Atlantis, this book looks at the great truths and also the myths and legends that have shaped our lives. We examine the story of Jesus and Muhammad, the rise of Christianity and Islam, and the forces that have shaped our religions (Both East and West) over the centuries.

First, I would like to say that this book is not in any way against God, or for that matter really about God at all.

Rather it is about the human experience concerning God, and how we have taken the Divine and used it for our own ends.

This book comes in two parts. The first half looks at how we as a civilization got to where we are now in both our physical and spiritual development. It gives a history of Humanities development of religion and spirituality.

The second half allows us to take a long look at ourselves as a people and a civilization. It examines our religious beliefs and the practices of the “priesthood” that have made our world here in the twenty first century the way it is!

There now seems to be as many different types of spiritual beliefs and practices as there are groups or tribes in the world.

In spite of this diversity of belief systems, there is an underlying commonality present in every practitioner of every belief!

This common denominator is very simply the overwhelming need to have that belief system in the first place.

There are so many types of belief’s present in the world today that naturally they cannot all be right.

It seems logical that only one of them could be the “True” religion.

This by default means that all the rest are wrong.

Actually, in the light of day, they are probably all wrong to a greater or lesser degree. However, in spite of this, the universality of our common craving for a belief system makes a very convincing argument for a Higher Power.

Remember the old saying “If there was no God, man would have to invent one.”

The only real question is how do we separate the fact of a “God” with the myths of man that have so shaped our lives?

**This book attempts to find some answers.
My hope in writing this book is to have people come back to God without the trappings and false impressions that have been fostered on us by organized religion over the centuries.

Spirituality is what brings us closer to the Divine while the practices of the “priesthood” or “priest-craft” leads us in the opposite direction and could even be called the devils work.

What I object to is the human trait of forming special interest groups whose purpose is to give only their explanation of God, and making proclamations and laws in God’s name.

This to me is the height of human arrogance and self-deception.

We can look with awe and reverence upon God but the minute we put ourselves into the position of interpreters of “Gods Will” it seems to suggest a plot to twist all that is holy into a perversion of God’s works.

(To quote Flip Wilson; “The devil made me do it!”)

Probably the best example of this is the fact that some of the greatest wars and atrocities in humanity’s history have been perpetrated in the name of “religion!”

Historically, the study of religion was central to the discipline of sociology, with early figures such as Durkheim and Max Weber writing extensively on the role and function of religion in human society.

Social scientists who study religion perform a vital function in helping journalists and the general public make sense of religious themes.

They study how religion influences television, political conflicts, personal issues such as abortion and homosexuality, and highly publicized “cult” tragedies.

They also examine the collision course that Christianity and Islam seems to be on!

The discipline of sociology of religion has much to teach about how religion functions for the individual and in society.

Unfortunately, research done by sociologists of religion seldom filters out of the “ivory towers” to those “in the trenches.”

I would like to thank Burton L. Mack for his insightful work in “The Lost Gospel-The book of Q.”

I would also like to thank James Breech for his work “The Silence of Jesus” and Tom Harpur with “For Christ’s Sake” and now “The Pagan Christ.”
Richard Dawkins and Susan Blackmore also bear special mention for their work in “Memics.” Especially for their work in “Viruses of the Mind” and “The Selfish Gene - the Study of Meme’s.”

The same goes for Max Weber, Carl Jung, Descartes, Nietzsche, Durkheim, and a host of others.

*Since it is naturally impossible for me to have been at the historical events discussed in this book, I had to rely on the reports and words of others who have directly and indirectly contributed to this book and many whose ideas mirrored my own.*

*For this, I remain forever in their debt.*

It is said that once upon a time a king gathered a few men who had been born blind. They were asked to describe an elephant, but each one was presented with only a certain part of it.

To one was presented the head of the elephant, to another the trunk, to another its ears, to another the leg, the body, the tail, tuft of the tail, etc.

The one presented with the head said, “The elephant is like a pot!”

The one who was presented the trunk answered, “The elephant is like a hose.”

The one who touched only the ears thought that the elephant was a fan, and the others said that it was a pillar, a wall, a rope, a brush, etc.

Then they quarreled among themselves, each thinking that he was the only one right and the others were wrong.

The obvious truth is that the elephant is a unity of many parts, a unity that they could not grasp in their ignorance.

Christianity and Islam (as well as their individual sects) claim to be the only right path to God.
Although this vision is arousing a lot of enthusiasm amongst their adherents, it is important to know that these are not the only views. We need only look at the Eastern religions.

According to the pattern suggested by this tale of the elephant, it is often said that world religions form a unity, and only this total unity provides the right perspective on ultimate truth. Theoretically, two possibilities exist!

If the first is true (all religions lead us to the same goal), and we choose the second (only one of them is right), we have not lost anything.

Despite our ignorance, we will arrive at the same happy end as the other travelers who have chosen different spiritual paths.

A less happy situation would be given by the second possibility, that a single spiritual path is valid and we have chosen the wrong one. In this case we are courting a spiritual disaster.

(A third possibility, that all spiritual paths are wrong, is denied by the nature of our spiritual quest itself. This search demands a real fulfillment, otherwise our hunger for ultimate truth could not be justified, and all religions would be nothing but fantasy.)

By default then, because one option is so unpalatable, (that there is nothing after life) we would have to choose the view that all religions lead us to the same goal!

The following pages are not meant merely to generate rational proofs for justifying one or another alternative.

No matter how complex and logical the proofs of one or the other causes might be, it is possible to find counterpoints of the same nature.

At a rational level, these disputes could fill many books with no benefit to anyone. No one can be persuaded or converted to another religious perspective only through rational proof and logic.

This may be possible in science, but not in religion. Otherwise everyone would already be of one faith!

However, rational proofs have to be considered because we are rational beings. Reason should not be rejected and experience proclaimed the only way of knowing truth.

No divorce between reason and experience should be accepted because they are complementary and work together. Neither should exclude the other.
We do not have to reject the proof of reason in our spiritual quests, whatever their nature might be. Rather than generating sterile debates, the information presented here should help you clarify your own views toward comparative religion and develop a critical ability to analyze today’s spiritual market.

The analysis presented here focuses on Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and the major Eastern Religions because they play the biggest role in defining today’s world spirituality from a Western viewpoint.

Some believe that a comparative analysis like this may fuel religious hatred and intolerance, but this is wrong. Religious tolerance and freedom cannot be built on ignorance, but rather should be built on the understanding of commonalities.

Therefore, as Jesus said: “Loving the person is possible even if one rejects his or her religious convictions!”

** This book, after all is said and done, will not have “The meaning of life” or anything closely resembling it! After reading this book, we might not find out what God, or religion is, but we might have a better understanding of what God and religion is not!

This is approaching the whole subject matter through the back door, but at our present level of understanding of the Divine, maybe it is the best we can do!

** “The world of poetry, mythology, and religion represents the world as a man would like to have it, while science represents the world as he gradually comes to discover it.” ---Joseph Wood Krutch

** “Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution.” - -Kahlil Gibran
Some Major World Religions:
1. Christianity: 2 billion
2. Islam: 1.8 billion
3. Hinduism: 950 million
4. Secular, Agnostic, Atheist: 850 million
5. Buddhism: 400 million
6. Chinese Traditional: 300 million
7. Primal-indigenous: 150 million
8. African Traditional: 95 million
9. Sikhism: 23 million
10. Judaism: 15 million
11. Baha’i: 6 million
12. Jainism: 4 million
13. Shinto: 4 million
14. Neo-Paganism: 1 million
15. Unitarian: 800 thousand
16. Rastafarians: 700 thousand
17. Scientology: 600 thousand
18. Zoroastrianism: 150 thousand

(One of the first is now last!)
Book I –
A history of Humanities development of Religion and Spirituality!

Chapter 1 - GOD-101 - Reflections on the Human condition.
Chapter 2 - In the Beginning - Out of the forest and into the light of day.
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Chapter 4 – Stairway to Heaven. - Early religious concepts. Religion splits into Animism and Priest-craft.
Chapter 5 – Timelines - You can’t know where you’re going until you know how you got to where you are!

Book 2
Shamans, the inventors of Priest-Craft, perfect their trade!

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Chapter 11 – The Jesus Tapes - What Jesus really said and meant!
How early Christianity borrowed from Pagan myths.
Chapter 12 - Jihad Inc. - Just like early Christianity, the Islamic hierarchy needs a reformation!
Chapter 13 - Thanks for the Meme-ories. - How “memic” reproduction is not only a superb advertising tool, (a contagion of the mind) but has worked equally well with its first great success story — religion!
Chapter 14 - I’m a Believer – A “belief system” to sort it all out.
Chapter 15 - Random Notes. - All the stuff you think about after.
** Perhaps the greatest sin of the Western churches (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) has been the particular brand of narcissism that impels so many to feel they have God all sewn up and put in their back pocket. People who think that they not only have a ticket to heaven, but anyone who disagrees with them is going straight to hell! They believe in God, but do not believe that God is bigger than their own theology. In their arrogance they do not realized that God is not theirs to possess!

*Paraphrased from M. Scott Peck.*

Pascal’s Wager:

“It is safer to believe in God.

Even if there is no definitive proof that God exists!”

*”Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”*

-Arthur C. Clarke

**Chapter 1 GOD-101 -- Reflections on the Human Condition**

(Or, ‘A donkey with a load of holy books is still just a donkey. -Traditional Sufism)

Humanity is on an incredible journey of which we are only now slowly becoming aware. Whether our universe has been around for seven thousand or more than ten billion years is not relevant to this journey, this book, or people in general.

Let me explain; the common thinking now is that our universe is some ten to fifteen billion years old, with the most likely figure somewhere around thirteen and a half billion.

Meanwhile, the thought, (sorry, the belief) among some North American *Fundamentalist Christians* is that we are some seven thousand years on this planet and no more!

Although this line of thinking is patently absurd, it really has nothing to do with the basic reason we are here. Or, why so many people devote so much of their time wondering about it.
It is the mere fact that we can, and do wonder about it, that sets us apart from all the other creatures of this planet.

As far as we know, not even the great apes, dolphins, whales, dogs, cats, or any other living thing has ever given even the slightest thought to our reason for being!

** You will never hear fido say to you, “What’s it all about - Alfie.”

People, on the other hand, spend an inordinate amount of time and effort on the question of purpose.

So much so, that it seems to influence almost every aspect of not only our lives, but also everything around us.

It is a feeling everyone has felt at some time or other, to a greater or lesser degree.

These are but small examples of the Divine spirit of God that is within us all.

There are many grand and spectacular wonders to be seen no matter where we look.

Nevertheless, it is the quiet affirmation of a loving God, and that sense of peace and tranquility, that is a constant reminder that we are not alone!

After all is said and done, the crux of the matter is that we do not want to be alone with the knowledge of our own mortality.

There is a basic human belief that is a common denominator among every culture and group on this planet. It is a sense that in a universe this grand, and even overpowering, there is a purpose to it all.

We cannot imagine that we are here by random chance or luck and that our existence is dependant upon a simple roll of the dice!

**”God not only plays dice with the universe, He sometimes throws the dice where they cannot be seen.” - Steven Hawking

When viewed from space our planet is in stark contrast with everything else we have so far observed.

Yes, we are minuscule in comparison to the rest of the universe, and no, we are not at the physical centre of things as was once believed.

We are however, central to creation in a very special way.
We, alone as human beings, are able to look out at the rest of creation and reflect upon it.

Whether anyone else on some other planet is in the position to observe and reflect upon this majestic universe is unimportant in the grand scheme of things.

Sure, it would make it a little less lonely if there were other intelligences out there, but the mere fact that our planet Terra is a harbor of self-awareness makes us a very rare and precious jewel in the vast empty reaches of the universe.

**“I AM.” – GOD**

**”I Think, Therefore I am.” -Descartes**

**”I yam what I yam, and that’s all what I yam.” – Popeye**

All the different worlds we have studied seem bereft of life. Terra, on the other hand, is recognized as something quite different and out of the ordinary, no matter from what distance it is viewed from.

Terra, through incredible luck or Divine intervention, is not only just the right distance from the Sun, but has an amazing list of fortunate events that led up to our development. It is beyond imagination, let alone comprehension. It is a list far too long to have happened merely by chance.

***Does this mean that we are unique in the universe? No!*** We are however, certainly so rare that when life does occur, it is to be cherished and celebrated.

There is a feeling of purpose that seems to pervade all of creation.

It is a feeling of connection felt by everyone who has ever lived. It is a feeling that will continue to carry us down through the ages and is a need that is inherent in all of humanity. It is the basis of all our religious beliefs and superstitions.

Since our ancestors first huddled together around a fire so many hundreds of thousands of years ago, we collectively tried to protect ourselves against the dangers and terrors of the world.
Then, with the advent of a rudimentary language, blind acceptance of our lot in life gradually gave way to questioning the meaning to all of the suffering that fell upon us. With the gift of awareness however, also came the curse of knowledge.

*The knowledge of our own fate!*

By taking the responsibility for life’s hardships from our own shoulders and putting it onto some *Higher Power*, Humanity’s misfortunes became easier to accept. “It’s not our fault,” became the haunting cry of humanity as it echoed down through the millennia!

The concept of a Supreme Being, whose pleasure / displeasure could influence how life treated us, was a thought that gradually evolved over time. When we had a feeling that we were being punished for some presumed misdeed, like a small child that was being admonished, we could make it right again with the proper thought or attitude!

*If this great God, or many gods for that matter, could be appeased, then it put us into a position where we finally had some measure of control over the worst that life could throw at us.*

Sure life was tough. Our fate hinged on the whim of a Deity we could never really know or understand. But, if we followed some simple rules and kept our nose clean, then we would at least have some hope that the human condition would eventually improve. *If not in this life, then certainly in the next!*

Naturally, our lot in life usually stayed the same, or if anything got even worse! In the natural order of things, events always seemed to go from bad to worse.

If, despite the constant homage and sacrifices made to the Great Spirits, if things did not improve, then a crisis of confidence would develop.

This meant some other means of comfort was required and this is where early humans developed one of the most remarkable and insightful theories about how the world works.

By showing how well we could suffer and still carry on, we showed the gods our courage, tenacity, --- and above all, our *Faith*!

Everyone soon realized that our willingness to suffer for a higher cause was all that was required of us to gain the promise of reward at some time in the future.

“Voila,” the afterlife was born.
Chapter 2 - In The Beginning

**"Life is what it is!" - Anonymous**

There is a principal called Occam’s Razor, which states; “Whenever something needs explaining, the simplest answer is usually the right one!
So, if you hear hoof-beats - look for horses, not zebras!”

The corollary of that is if you want to find God, look inward, not at the horizon!

By the same token, when it comes to evolution, all biologists of any reputation at all accept the evidence that present-day species have developed slowly from simpler forms.

The cell has developed from pre-cellular scraps of life, and these in turn have arisen from nonliving materials by changes that are in accord with the laws of nature over a vast stretch of several billions of years.

*The exact mechanism of evolution, (the fine details) remain under dispute since the process of discovery and development is not yet finished and may never be entirely completed. Even the most argumentative of those who quarrel over the details do not deny the evolutionary concept itself.*

Creationists, on the other hand, present no evidence in favor of their view. They argue entirely from the negative. They maintain that if the concept of evolution is wanting, then that alone is sufficient to force acceptance of creationism.

*They then insist that the concept of evolution is indeed found wanting. They point out insufficiencies, uncertainties and contradictions in the evolutionary arguments and say, triumphantly, “Thus we establish creationism!”*

-Isaac Asimov - *The Dangerous Myth of Creationism*

**"I can swear there ain’t no heaven.
But I pray there ain’t no hell,
But I’ll never know by living.
Only my...dying will tell.” - David Clayton Thomas**
When the ancestors of humanity made their first tentative journeys from the treetops of Africa down to the savanna at their doorstep, it was a step that made any other human endeavor, before or since, insignificant by comparison. It was the first and original “Giant leap for mankind.”

Let’s call the leader of one of these groups Urk!

The current thinking is that food was more plentiful on the savanna and that is what brought them out into the open.

Things finally got to the point where Urk and his wife “Lucy” journeyed out onto the plains to make a better life for themselves.

(On a side note, it is interesting to remember that Lucy made her own headlines many years later when scientist discovered her remains and termed her the ‘mother’ of humanity!)

After this, our forbearers lived as one of the great number of species of animals on the African savannas.

The great herds of Africa had a way of life not that far removed from ours. Our ancestors have spent millions of years foraging the savannas as one amongst the many, while we, (modern humans) have only spent only a few thousand years getting to know the ropes of civilization.

The human story is told in broad sweeps. We, in our humble way, were once part of the endless procession of herds and flocks that waited their turn at the watering hole in times of thirst. We came to drink, and occasionally, bolted in panic at the approach of lions or other predators.

Our ancestors of some two to three million years ago were small, hairy, ape-like creatures.

Less than human but certainly more than their simian cousins.

They used sticks for digging and clubs for protection as they walked upright through the tall grass of the savanna.

Not only were the clubs protection, (Many carnivores considered hominids a tasty lunch!) but they were also weapons used to supplement their diet of plants and berries with a growing taste for meat.
Coming out of the ancestral forest, where game was scarce at best, to the abundance of herd and grazing animals on the wide plains, men found a whole new world open to them.

As they became bolder and more resourceful men started to compete with other savannah predators. This change to hunting larger animals no doubt had an effect on what was also taking place in our development as a species.

Although small in numbers at first, people spread out and developed to the point where they ranged over large portions of Africa, Southern Europe and points eastward through the Middle East, India, China, and present day Malaysia.

By the time they had migrated to these far away lands, the cooperation that was necessary for big game hunting had also put extreme evolutionary pressures on the wandering tribes.

There was a need to develop larger brains that were capable of the organizational and rudimentary linguistic tasks required for the systematic hunting of large game.

In simpler terms, humanity changed from just “being dinner” to a group of hunters who went and “got dinner.”

*This major evolutionary jump was an expansion of the human brain due to increased competition with other animals and a more intricate cooperation amongst the hunters.*

*It was also during the process of becoming better hunters that we, at the same time, also became more human.*

*Look at that thing run!*

At one time small bands of people lived together mainly for mutual defense against other humans and the larger predators. They were considerably safer in small groups for the purpose of defense, but still-hunted individually when obtaining small game and other food.

With the shift to hunting larger animals, a new level of cooperation was required between the males actually on the hunt and the non-hunters back at home base.

Adult male hunters had to develop ways to work together. This meant a need to communicate more readily, and even more important, to temper their tendency to behave in selfish and self-serving ways.

*We can safely say that the rise of Homo Sapiens culture goes hand in hand with the rise of big game hunting.*
Not only did the human brain gradually increase in size to handle the complex tasks of organization and co-operation, but it also increased the level of contact with a multitude of individuals.

This necessitated a need to develop a framework of social rules and skills.

Quite simply the birth of what made us human

............ Culture!

Humans began to slowly dominate their environment several hundred thousand years ago, and since then our evolution has been developing at an ever-increasing rate.

This included the high point of the hunter-gatherer communities, the mass killing of herd animals on a many-band or tribal basis.

The hunt, and then the mass hunt, gradually declined as an activity essential to the community about ten thousand years ago with the invention of agriculture.

This, and the invention of writing about five thousand years ago, may be taken as the official end to pre-history.

The last part of our long journey from pre-humans to modern man also includes the oldest traces of religion and art. Thus Man the philosopher was born.

The development of the human mind over the last hundred thousand years led to the unprecedented awakening of a new order and purpose to life that we are only now beginning to fathom.

Our position with regard to the other animals centers around two apparently contradictory truths.

One is that we have much in common with them, indeed even more than is generally realized. At the same time, we represent an entirely different order of being that has never before been seen on this planet.

All species, with only the recent exception of humanity, evolved by a process of mutation and natural selection.

This came about through the changes in inherited genes that were duplicated repeatedly during successive divisions of cells following the fertilization of an egg.
The duplication process at work on the molecular level of cells turns out millions of copies of itself within close biological tolerances. This process ensures a kind of natural conservatism that maintains the “status quo” and ensures a distinct and unchanging species.

Powerful biological forces make the cells resistant to change and it is only through the very rare slip-up of the chemical reactions that hereditary traits depart from the master plan that guides one generation of cells to the next.

Eventually a mutation does occur on the genetic assembly line, and although rare, these small discrepancies occur simply because nothing is perfect. The molecule departs in a small way from its inherited blueprint and this is what makes evolution possible.

As we said, Man is not only a different kind of species, but also the pioneer of a very recent and completely new kind of evolution.

But before we get into the reasons we stand apart from the millions of other species that are now alive, or have become extinct over the ages, let us look at the basic workings of evolution that can be demonstrated with a colony of ants.

Adding something poisonous to their environment, such as a pesticide, produces a catastrophic event that will kill off almost all of the millions or even billions of ants.

You will notice that we said almost all of the ants. If they all had identical genes, then they would all die.

However, because of genetic error or mutation, we have an effective insurance policy against total disaster. The total population of ants is neither identical nor uniform.

Out of the billions of individuals, there might be a few - a very few - that through a rare combination of mutated or rare genes, will happen to be more resistant to the effects of the pesticide.

Therefore, out of a population of a billion ants, the survival of as few as a handful will insure the future of their kind. They will pass on the resistance to that particular poison and give rise to a new population of individuals.

Ants that can survive and multiply in what would normally be a deadly environment.

This process is at work in all species, because every population has individuals with a wide assortment of traits that make them capable of adapting to a wide variety of environments.
It must be said that this process plays havoc with the individual. Millions may perish from changes in the environment, climate, or available food supplies. They all die so that a few may progress to a better model of their species.

This in a roundabout way is God at work. Many are sacrificed for the good of the few. The long-term gain however, is the survival of the species.

Evolution works in terms of the entire population. Survival depends on being in the right place, at the right time, with the right genes.

All the living things on this planet, with the exception of humanity, have all the things they need to survive right on and in their bodies.

Their genes alone determine what sort, shape, and size, they need to be in the daily struggle for survival.

**People, on the other hand, do not only depend on just their genes to get by!**

They also learn and pass on accumulated knowledge from one generation to the next.

Learning might play an important role amongst the lower animals, but it is always a one-generational / one-dimensional lesson.

We are the only animal that takes the accumulated knowledge of all previous generations and then uses this as a foundation to expand and build.

This was the very first step, in the mists of our distant past, which started to set us apart from what we now refer to as the “**lower animals.**”

The dominate influence of heredity on evolution is that given a reasonably stable environment, the focus is on the status-quo. People on the other hand may use their inherited brains to make their own shelters and weapons, and even their own environment.

Learning and traditions acquire a new order of importance.

**We can now say that cultural evolution has overtaken the importance of genetic evolution.**

The progressive step that made humanity different from the great apes is that we no longer need any outside pressure to bring about change.

At some time in the past we ceased to adapt to the world at large in the conventional way and became self propelled, generating our own internal pressure.

**In other words, we not only adapt to change, but in our own way we “make” change occur.**
We now believe that cultural and sociological factors play a much bigger role in defining who we are, and where we are headed, than any other single factor.

For example, Tarzan was the king of the jungle. Unfortunately that was the only place he could have been anything since he was raised without any human contact or guidance.

The movies are fine for entertainment. In real life, sociologists tell us that a person growing up without the social and cultural interaction of other human beings would be more animal-like than human in spite of their modern brain.

The process for which we are biologically programmed by nature cannot take place unless subjected to the social and linguistic forces of human culture.

Thus, the lack of contact with other members of our species prohibits the onset of logical thinking and reasoning.

It is a widely accepted fact that infants depend on the care and example of adults much more, and for a longer period than any other species.

Without the influence of other human beings to help them form a coherent thought processes and personality development in the early stages of life, these children are unable to relate to anyone at all.

They will always behave in a sub-human way.

There are documented cases, some quite recently, where these “feral children,” who had been bereft of any human contact, used primarily the right half of their brains to function.

The lack of interaction with other people and the development of language was necessary for the left (or logical) side of the brain to develop.

Early man had a much simpler way of life than that of people living today.

Modern relationships are more complex than those of thousands, or even hundreds of years ago. Our ancestors lived much as their forbearers did through many generations.

Things did not change appreciably over the years and certain rules of conduct were worked out that slowly formed the basis for social interaction.

It was only the increasing rate of change over the last few millennia that started us on the road to being fully human in action as well as appearance.
There are many and varied characteristics that have been proposed over the years for the difference between humankind and the other species.

Some might argue it is the use of fire, which separates us from our worldly co-inhabitants.

Others propose the influence of religion in our lives, and still more say it is almost certainly the fact that we have a soul and none of the other living things on this earth are so endowed.

Although the reasons for our differentiation from the “lower” animals are varied, we can go by some basic guidelines. One of the things that seem to be unique among humans is the ability to mentally travel outside of ourselves.

To view our surroundings from a perspective other that what we actually see with our eyes. We seem able to mentally check-up on others and ourselves.

We are not only the product of our feelings, moods and thoughts, but to a great degree we constantly do a “reality check” on how we present ourselves to others.

Then, (here is the good part) how they might see and think of us!

Actually, unless we take “how” we see ourselves into account, we are unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves, or even more importantly, how they feel about us!

Because of our unique human capacity for self-awareness, we not only live in this world, but can also transcend it!

The nature of man seems to be controlled by three social factors.

Independently or in combination, they explain how we relate to the world.

1. **Genetic determinism holds that the actions and ways of our ancestors influence our behavior to a large extent.**

In other words, if I have a temper, and also my great grandfather, my grandfather and my father all had a temper; it must be hereditary and passed down through the generations.

2. **Psychic determinism is based loosely on the theories of Freud, in that “what we are” has a lot to do with how we were brought up.**

Whatever happens to you in infancy and childhood governs your personality and character from then on. It regulates things such as our value systems, judgment, and work ethic, or lack thereof!
3. Environmental determinism is the effect of the world around us on our psyche!
What sort of day you will have is a result of the everyday joys and aggravations of living!
The three factors of Genetic, Psychic, and Environmental determinism are the stimuli that govern how we respond to the world.
The lower animals will almost always have the exact same response to certain stimuli. It is the human trait of having the freedom to choose our response to it by the use of self-awareness that makes people more flexible and unpredictable. Here within this freedom of choice are the endowments that make us uniquely human.
We judge and shade our response to life and living with the implementation of a “conscience.” A sense of right and wrong governed by the principals that shape our behavior. We also employ “imagination” to step outside the confines of here and now, and a healthy dose of “independent will” so that we can act free of outside influences.
Animals have none of these parameters. Their response to outside stimuli is on a basic level. They are like a pre-programmed computer that relies on instinct and training. They cannot change their programming to any degree because they are not even aware of it.

At the same time, history shows the greatest influences on us are the events and forces that have produced the ever-increasing complexity of modern society. This ability to make change occur is at the heart of humanities long struggle up the evolutionary ladder.
The recent leap to a new and different kind of evolution, life and intelligence, is a road that began many thousands of years ago. It has now turned into something of which our distant ancestors were only dimly aware!
The mere fact that evolution favors the many and is hard on the individual also led to the first human cries of Lebenschmerz……….. or why me!
Since the dawn of our existence, it is this cry in the wilderness and the wonder and mystery of the human condition that eventually led to the advent of self-awareness and free will!
It is no wonder humanity’s united cry is; “Why me!”
To which God answers:

“Because!”
Chapter 3 - Onward and Upward

"Humanity has, in the course of time, had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages upon it’s naive self-love.

The first was when it realized that our earth was not the center of the universe, but only a speck in a world-system of a magnitude hardly conceivable.

The second was when biological research robbed man of his particular privilege of having been specially created, and relegated him to a descent from the animal world.” - - Sigmund Freud

Between fifty to sixty thousand years ago, a combination of ice ages and population explosions had forced us ever outward until we were centered on the fertile valleys south of the Black Sea, in the area between the Tigress and Euphrates Rivers and stretched in all directions from there.

The region of Europe encompassing what is today Southern Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Greece and the Baltic’s was an offshoot of the main collection of people through Turkey and the rest of the Middle East.

There were other branches of our ancestors down the Nile Valley, and through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. We were also in Uganda and over towards Nigeria and the Ivory Coast.

We also traveled north and west over the Caspian and Black Sea, following the ice sheets during one of their retreats.

We then traveled into Northern Europe and Scandinavia to finally become the Druids of Britain and the Vikings of the North.

Our search for new lands had also lead us eastward, first through the fertile valleys of northern India, north to Russia and south down to Cambodia, Thailand, and Sumatra.

We then went over the lush plains between modern day Shanghai and Beijing.

We also made our pilgrimage across a chain of islands into the great Pacific.

The southern route through the pacific was still formidable, but there did not seem to be much that deterred our early ancestors in their search for new lands and horizons.

The lower ocean levels during the last ice age also gave us access to North and South America by way of a land bridge across the Bering Straight.

So there we have it, by fifty thousand years ago, we had reached Australia, and by fifteen thousand years ago, humanity had spread to all parts of the globe.
By less than ten thousand years ago, we formed what is now known as the “Four River Valley Cultures” along the banks of the Nile, the Tigris/Euphrates, the Indus/Ganges, and China’s Yellow/Yangtze.

The four “Cradles of Civilization!”

By the time, we had migrated to all these areas the human population had increased in size to perhaps 5-10 million.

Humanity had also gone from the discovery of how to tame fire, about half a million years before, to the making of fire throughout most of the settled world.

This important advance in the manipulation of the environment was still not as great a milestone in the early formation of human culture as the appearance of our greatest act of awareness and consciousness - the formal burial!

Learning to tame our surroundings was one thing, but when we changed the basic way we looked at our situation and our place in the world, we began to exhibit the first signs of free will and independence.

These ancient burial sites contain the first evidence of ritualistic or ceremonial human culture.
This suggestion that ritualized burial implies a view of an after-life gives evidence to the huge power of abstract thought that was being developed among our forbearers. The beliefs in a continuation of self-after-death lead to a view that things are not always as they seemed.

It lead to a belief that ritual could, if not dominate, then at least to some extent control our surroundings.

The beginnings of religion and warfare are lost in the mists of time but we do know that our ancestors had to go through a number of changes in their transition from pre-human to being a fully aware and cognizant humans.

From the methods of communication and co-operation that were developing, we saw an increase in the size of the brain, and a different internal structure or wiring of the brain.

All of this, taken together, brought about the advent of abstract thinking.

An awareness that things in the world were sometimes bigger than we were!

The changes that separated our distant ancestors from all the other species on the planet involved the attainment of full self-awareness, a moral sense of right and wrong, and a sense of community!

According to most paleontologists and anthropologists, fully developed human beings with all the attributes of modern man emerged somewhere around a hundred thousand years ago.

During this time of humanities awakening, we lost our ignorance, and by default, lost our innocence.

** “It is that human capacity to be fully self-conscious that makes Homo sapiens different from any other form of life in the natural world. That separating difference is what fills human beings with a sense of dread and anxiety,” says Paul Tillich. “It is born in the human recognition of finitude and is therefore as omnipresent as humanity itself.”

With awareness, we became cognizant that people were largely helpless, insignificant and insecure!

** “To be human is to experience self-consciousness, to know separation, to be made aware of limits and to contemplate ends. One cannot be human, therefore, without being filled with chronic anxiety. It sounds depressing, but surely it is true.” -Bishop John Spring.

We, as a race, do not like chronic anxiety, and some coping mechanism had to be developed.
Many theologians and even anthropologists felt that our ancestors developed an intuitive concept of God but then had to described God in human terms out of sheer necessity to lesson their anxiety about what life was going to deal them next.

The early hunter-gatherer societies began the first religion of Animism by assuming that since they were themselves aware and self-conscious, then the same could be said of their surroundings.

This would apply to the forests, sky, sun and heavens, moon, land animals, birds, fishes and all manner of things they were in contact with in their daily lives.

With the belief that all these things were animated by a spirit, or contained vital powers, the native healers and wise men played defining roles in this new religion! Dread of the unknown dissipated somewhat when our ancestors felt more in control of their lives and future.

**Since early humans couldn’t describe this Higher Power or Supreme Being, (God is by definition indescribable) the tribes would have to invent their own Gods!**

**THIS IS THE MISTAKE WE HAVE BEEN MAKING TO THIS VERY DAY!**

**PUTTING SOMETHING INDESCRIBABLE INTO HUMAN TERMS TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND IT!**

The first awakenings of thoughts about spirits and even a great spirit called God gave people assurance, confidence, and peace of mind. This early explanation of religion was a product of human creation to ease an otherwise intolerable situation brought about by day-to-day living.

A set of behavioral expectations was developed for members of the tribe that gave rise to a set of moral truths to govern human behavior. These “Moral truths” in turn formed an oral tradition that was passed down from one generation to the next.

Where we get into trouble is with the beginning of writing. This resulted in a major loss of flexibility. Oral traditions can evolve over time. Written documents tend to be much more permanent!

Because belief systems are based on hunches and conjecture, various local religions developed, and their teachings were in conflict with one another. This was because most adherents thought their beliefs were derived directly from God, and as a result, inter-religious compromise, combined with the inflexibility of written cannon, made agreement almost impossible………………!

*A situation still in effect today!*
Chapter 4 - Stairway to Heaven

Society imposes limits on human desires and constitutes a regulative force that plays the same role for moral needs as the small group provides for physical needs.

Without social controls, any society, whether primitive or modern, is bound to degenerate and decay! The natural insatiability of the human animal can only be held in check by external controls.

Religion plays this role perfectly by providing a disciplinary, cohesive, vitalizing, and euphoric social force. Rituals prepare people for social life by imposing self-discipline and parameters on our everyday interactions.

Religious ceremonies bring people together and so serve to re-affirm their common bonds and re-enforce social solidarity! Observance maintains and revitalizes the social heritage of the group and helps transmit its enduring values to future generations.

It also has a euphoric function in that it serves to counteract feelings of frustration and loss of faith by re-establishing the believer’s sense of well being.

In general, religion is a social institution that serves to give meaning to man’s predicaments by tying the individual to a set of values which is ultimately rooted in society.

Emile Durkheim

In the Old Testament of the bible, it is interesting to note that there are some similarities between religion and science at an early stage of the game.

Adam and Eve were described as proto-human, that is, not fully human with no moral sense, and no knowledge of good and evil as we now define it.

According to the bible, God wanted the couple to stay in this stage of innocent, un-aware, partly developed existence that afforded them a life free from worry and strife.

In Genesis, 2:17 God said; “Do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

When they did this anyway, they became fully human and aware of the difference between right and wrong, developed an ethical sense, and became cognizant of their own mortality.
Self-consciousness was a truly momentous human development that was lacking in all other creatures.

The animals of the land lived, met their needs to survive, and eventually died with no anticipatory anxiety or a real awareness of whom or what they were.

We Humans on the other hand, became quite different.

We were blessed, (If I may use that word) with advanced reasoning abilities and relied less on instinct.

We became pro-active instead of re-active. Each generation building on the knowledge of its forbearers and developing new ways of coping, planning, and co-operation.

** “The gulf between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom is so great because of our unique outlook and appreciation of existence! We might see flashes of pseudo-cognizance in fido’s eyes every now and then, but I can tell you for sure that fido and his buddies do not sit around and discuss the merits of art or literature!”**

We became aware that people are largely helpless, insignificant, and insecure.

Human beings do not like chronic anxiety and some coping mechanism had to be developed.

Many theologians and anthropologists felt that our ancestors had to develop a primitive human concept of God to lesson their anxiety about what life was going to deal them next.

The hunter-gatherer societies began the first religion of Animism by assuming that since they were aware and self-conscious themselves, then the same could be said of their surroundings.

This would apply to the forests, sky, sun and heavens, moon, land animals, birds, fishes and all manner of things they were in contact with in their daily lives.

With the belief that all these things were animated by a spirit or contained vital powers, the village shamans, native healers and wise men played leadership roles in this religion because dread of the unknown dissipated somewhat when our ancestors felt more in control of their lives and future.

This early explanation of religion was solely a product of human creation to ease an otherwise intolerable situation brought about by day-to-day living.
Animist’s ancestors created their god’s and myths because they couldn’t comprehend the real Supreme Being! Gods did not reveal themselves to the tribes. The tribes had to invent the gods.

“*”In Essentials, all religions are the same. They differ only in non-essentials. The wise appreciate the essentials. The base dispute over the non-essentials.”
   -Unknown

The religion of early Australian Aboriginal Cultures was, essentially, identical to the first religions practiced by hunter-gatherer societies worldwide.

Australian Aboriginal Cultures have a chain of practices virtually unbroken. It extends back over 50,000 years to a time when their ancestors first settled the continent. *It is also a society has remained almost unchanged since the advent of self-awareness.*

Totemism and Animism were one of the elementary and first forms of religion. The Australian Aboriginal Religion therefore, is the perfect model for religion in its original form.

Ritual is formal ceremonial behavior used to approach or deal with the supernatural. Rituals act out or dramatize scenes from the religious and social origins of society - its methodology depicts how its members believe they came to be a distinct people.

A society’s collective consciousness therefore is re-enforced in group experiences. These experiences acted out as rituals in a religious context create and sustain a sense of identity within their own group. As opposed to other groups who have different beliefs and rituals.

Rituals seem to evoke high levels of emotion, and with the worship of a God, they re-create the story of how they came to be a group.

The Australian Aborigines found their meaning for life in the stories and songs of their particular tribe. The answers to questions such as “who am I?” and “where do I belong?” and “what happens after I die?” all were found in their local legends and beliefs.

Their stories and songs related accounts of ancestral beings taking the form of animals, birds, and other creatures during the creation period known as the………

“Dream-Time.”
This was a very common belief amongst not only the aboriginals of Australia, but also North and South America and, to some extent, both the Neanderthals and the Humans of Central Europe.

It gave people a view of life in which they believed that ancestral spirits were not only involved in creation, but also remained in the tribal land after death.

The ancestors’ played and active role in the life of each succeeding generation!

Religious leaders led each tribe, (of which there were about 500 in Australia) with no political chief or formal government.

They were broken down into hunting groups and family units and these units were vitally important as all members of the tribe were related!

The territory of the tribe was centered on the place where its ancestors had originally settled. It was believed that the spirits of these ancestors remained at the watering place at the center of the territory awaiting re-incarnation.

None of them ever really died, but rather merged with the natural world and so remained a part of the present and of the tribe.

This was one of the plainest and simplest methods of avoiding the pain of death and separation, since the departed had not really gone anywhere!

These myths and rituals, signifying communion with nature, and the past, were known as the “Dreaming” or “Dream-Time.” They reflected a belief in the continuity of existence and harmony with the world!

They were also a source of inspiration for aboriginal art, including paintings, carved objects, symbolic weapons, and poetic chants. (Similar to the Vedic chants of the Indus Valley Culture thousands of years later.)

For the Aboriginals the “Dream-Time” is the period in which the original ancestors were thought of as heroes and spirits. They took a variety of forms, both animal and human, and created a pattern for the very existence of these people.

It was a great comfort for early people to think that death did not separate them from their loved ones!
Aboriginal people believed that the land was their mother, and their dreaming had answers to life’s mysteries. The forces - the heroes and spirits - of the “Dream-Time” were all the creative ancestors of the tribe.

It is through their traditional art forms, especially rock carvings, (Some as old as the original settlement of Australia) that the past is realized.

The “Dream-Time” existed as long as the people exist. They re-create it with their rituals, their arts, their life, and their stewardship of the land. That is why when a Christian kneels down in Church, or when a Neanderthal or Aboriginal bows down in fetish, it is done with the same purpose, submission!

Also, Australian Aborigines, who have been virtually untouched by either Western or Eastern religions for the past fifty thousand years, show God did not sent prophets or emissaries with warnings of a final judgment. It did not make them aware of a negative force we choose to call the “devil,” or Satan.

_This is a factor only in the religions that have developed a “priestly” or privileged class, so that they had something to protect you from!!!_

It turned out that the progressive increase in the availability of free time for socializing and leisure amongst the members of an agricultural society, brought about a corresponding increase in a priestly hierarchy.

Anyone who was a bit on the lazy side but was creative and ambitious enough could proclaim themselves a “shaman” or priest.

This automatically conferred upon them the duty to attend to “priestly” tasks and left the hunting and manual labor up to others.

Among the ancients, the mutual interdependence of people in a tribe or group meant they more common beliefs to tie the members of a society together. After all, if you spent every waking hour with other members of your tribe, it also followed that you were all anchored in common sets of representations and assumptions about the world around you.

This led to a natural “moral unity” amongst the tribe members.

**BUT!** Once we get beyond the 25-30 member size of a tribe and the population goes into the hundreds, as it did in the four early “River Valley Cultures,” we see a marked change in morality.

When the hunters were replaced by an agricultural society, a profound change occurred in their religious life as well. People remained in one place and settled into a more structured and organized way of life.
The fertility of the crops, animals and even the tribe itself became of paramount importance and became the new focus of social interaction and planning.

Fertility was obviously feminine by its very nature as only females could produce offspring so here the group’s religion tended toward the Earth Mother, Great Mother, or Matriarchal goddess.

(Today we still have followers of this ancient Pagan ritual in the form of Wicca’s, who derive their beliefs from the ancient Celtic people and Druids. Much as their forbearers, they also follow many aspects of early fertility religions.)

The beliefs of early fertility religions were to fulfill a very early human and societal need. That was the guarantee of high fertility rates for their crops, animals and other tribal members.

As far as we know there was an ancient fertility culture about thirty thousand years ago, that made the first clay representations of the female nude. These fertility idols, made by the “Gravettian” or ancient Aryan people, were the first “manufactured” pieces of art and were a talisman to guard against the extinction of humankind by representing a perpetuator of the species.

This fertility cult was widespread, and one of the areas that were inhabited by the Gravettian people is in an area of France known as the Dordogne region.

Here we have a series of caves that has been continuously occupied for almost all of the last 100,000 years, first by Neanderthals and then our own ancestors.

(In other words since the dawn of our own awareness.)

To understand the advantages and disadvantages that humanity faced over the millennia, it is important to realize that man alone emerged from the early primates as a change maker.

We spent a long, long infancy living much the same as the rest of the inhabitants of this planet. Then, about 12,000 years ago, we began the momentous journey that was to take us from the Stone Age to the beginnings of recorded history 5,000 years later.

It was the first vague awakenings of wonder and terror about the world around us that provoked early feelings of religion and art that is evident today in ancient cave dwellings and pottery.

By about 7000 B.C.E. the Indo-European cultures centered around what is now modern day central Turkey and Iraq had been in one place long enough that they took on their own distinct culture and language.
Then, after the retreat of the ice fields those many thousands of years ago, various migrations of light skinned, partly nomadic “Aryan” Indo-European tribes left their homeland in what was to become the Middle–East and advanced east into the Indus Valley of India and also back over the Black Sea and into Europe.

With them, they brought their religion called Vedism. This religion had such innovations as the practice of war, belief in male gods, exploitation of the land and knowledge of the male role in pro-creation. Goddess worship had been augmented and combined with the worship of male gods.

The Sun was viewed as a male entity by this time because it encouraged the crops to grow, just as rain was also a male energy.

These beliefs mingled with an equal or even more advanced Indian native belief is often referred to as the “Indus Valley Culture.”

Although the people around the Indus Valley began a decline in about 1600 B.C.E. that led to a gradual fragmentation of the area, its religion continued to flourish and grow through the centuries. This Indus, or Indian culture, underwent a renaissance of change that would ultimately lead to the establishment of the first of the great religions.

-----Hinduism
You cannot tell who, or where you are, unless you know how you got there!

100,000 B.C.E. – Although highly speculative, it is thought that this is about the time when humans first attained all the traits (Including consciousness) that we see in people today!

90,000 B.C.E. - Early Gravettian man competes with Neanderthals for space and game in regions of Southern Europe centered on the hills of Southern France.

50,000 B.C.E. - Early men reach the Pacific Islands and Australia. Ice cover in Northern and Southern Hemispheres at their maximum.

30,000 B.C.E. - First ancient artwork found in Dordogne, Southern France. (Other than cave paintings) Clay figurines representing a Fertility goddess. Invention of the bow and arrow.

10,000 B.C.E. - Neolithic Age: Glaciers retreating, warmer climate develops in California, S W Australia, Chile, SW Africa and then deserts in sub-tropic regions.

8000 B.C.E. - World population 5 million. Copper age, silkworm cultivation in China. - Plants domesticated and first pottery in China and Japan.

7000 B.C.E. -Walls of Jericho erected. - The area that is now central Turkey sees the beginning of Indo-European language—the mother tongue of all modern European languages.

6000 B.C.E. -Wheel invented and chickens domesticated.

5500 B.C.E. - With the melting of the polar ice caps and a gigantic shift-and-melting of the ice fields in northern Canada, world ocean levels rise dramatically.

•The The Greenland Ice cap melts and the Mediterranean Sea breaks through at the location of modern Istanbul (Bosphorus) to flood what is now the Black Sea.

It floods the basin fast enough to wipe out entire villages and towns giving rise to the world flood legends.

Evidence of the old shoreline still there under hundreds of metres of water.

5000 B.C.E. - Earliest small cities. - Horses domesticated. (Modern horses not native to North America - introduced by the Spanish)
3761 B.C.E. - (Year of Creation) October 7 - Year 1, Jewish calendar.

**HUMANITY FIRST STARTS TO BECOME A CIVILIZED SOCIETY!**

3600 B.C.E. - Troy founded. - Beginning of Sumerian Culture in the Tigris-Euphrates river basin and first crude writing. The Sumerians (Aryans) make use of many agricultural advances, such as domestic animals to pull plows, irrigation of the land, drained marshlands and more.

- A large, cosmopolitan civilization appears.
- The increased output of food allows for the further development of a “leisure class” which does not have to work for food, allowing them to become priests, artist, merchants, scholars, etc.
- The Sumerians also develop oar-powered ships, animal-drawn wheeled chariots, and other, similar vehicles.
- Bronze objects and written cuneiform alphabet begun.

3500-3000 B.C.E. - Man’s earliest civilizations developed in Mesopotamia and Egypt. - The Indus Valley followed soon afterwards and later a farming population emerged along the Yellow River in China.

3000-2800 B.C.E. - World population 100M. (Increased twenty-fold in five thousand years due to agriculture.)

- The subsequent history of Eurasia became a contest between the superior military ability of the Nomads in the North, and the superior numbers of people made possible by farming in the South.
- In the North, the wide grasslands of the steppes provided a feeding ground for the herds of the Nomads. The mobility of the warlike Nomads provided them with an advantage in any military confrontation with the richer farming communities further south.
- Sea levels about at present levels after rising 1000’-1500’ with the melting of the polar ice caps.
- Bering Straight, English Channel, low costal areas of the Mediterranean, large parts of Indonesia, and many other locations now under water.
- Rising water levels may also have flooded some ancient coastal or island civilization to give rise to the “Atlantis” theory.

*(Such as the Mediterranean breaking through the Bosporus Straight and flooding what is now the Black Sea!)*
2800 B.C.E. - Advances in Sumerian Cuneiform writing.
- Agriculture in Peru.
- Chinese alphabet and early Minoan pictographic writing.
2767 B.C.E. - Methuselah tree, oldest living thing. (Carbon dated!)

2637 B.C.E. - Year 1 of Chinese calendar.

2600 B.C.E. - Historical Gilgamesh? King of Uruk, Sumeria.
(First and oldest person referred to in ancient literature, Epic of Gilgamesh;
written c.1200 B.C.E.) - Fu Hsi, first Chinese King?
2550 B.C.E. - Old Egypt - Beginning of Pyramids and mummies
2400 B.C.E. - Harappan Civilization before Indo-European Invasions

2350 B.C.E. - Walls of Jericho fall.
2200 B.C.E. - Troy sacked.
- Hsiao dynasty in China
- Indo-European invaders come over and
under Black Sea and enter the mainland
of Greece.
- Stonehenge built in Britain.
2000 B.C.E. - Rise of Babylon \(\rightarrow\)
and Minoan Civilization on Crete.
1800? B.C.E. - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.
1800 B.C.E (?) - Approximate date of historical Zoroaster (???) and beginning of
cult of Zoroastrianism!

(Date for Zarathustra could have been before this time, could be around this time
or could be later - around 600-700 B.C. when his teachings finally became very
widespread in Mesopotamia.)

- He was a major influence on Cyrus the Great and so inadvertently saved the Jews.
Zoroastrian dogma also a great influence on Judaism, Christianity and then - Islam!
1800-1700 B.C.E. - Vedic period. Aryan invasion of Indus Valley in India.
1750 B.C.E. - Founding of Hittite Empire
1750 B.C.E. - Mesopotamia/Babylon - Development of “Code of Laws.”

- Hammurabi created his code of laws, which consists of 282 laws, in the year 1750 B.C.E. The code of laws encouraged people to accept the authority of a king, who was trying to give common rules to govern the subjects’ behavior.

The actual laws range from public to private matters, with humane approaches to societal problems.

The code of laws applies to the entire Babylonian society. The penalties of the code varied according to the status of the victim. The law of retaliation protected the patricians, while the lower classes received only monetary compensation.

The purpose of the Code of Hammurabi was to use political power to create common bonds among the diverse people of the society. It greatly influenced a total dependence on the power of their one ruler, and it was a conscious effort to exalt the king as the source, the only source, of earthly powers.

It unified the empire by offering the standards for moral values, class structure, gender relationships, and religion. It was the most important of all Mesopotamian contributions to civilization.

1700 B.C.E. - Joseph in Egypt. - Cult of Yahweh (Jewish “God.”)
- Beginning of Persian Empire!
- The Mycenaean Civilization emerges.
1628 B.C.E. - Santorini Greece destroyed by volcano. (Legend of Atlantis?)
1595 B.C.E. - Babylon sacked for first time.
1500 B.C.E. - Beginning of Iron Age.
- Shang dynasty in China 1492 B.C.E.
1470 B.C.E. - Minoan Civilization destroyed by volcanoes and earthquake. (Possible site of Atlantis!)

1450 B.C.E. - Mycenaean civilization replaces Minoa after the destruction of Thera and Knossos. Dominates the Aegean world for 200 years.

1400 B.C.E. - Cult of Mithra starts some where between Persia and India. Based on, or even a part of Zoroaster’s ideology, it becomes a major player in the region until finally being driven into extinction in Rome by the fledgling Catholic Church.

1350 B.C.E. (?) - Ten Commandments given to Moses.
- EXODUS out of Egypt – Parting of the Red Sea.
Israelites refuse to enter Canaan and wander the desert for forty years. Etc.
1325 B.C.E. (?) - Tutankhamen assassinated.

(3300 years later, King Tut-farewell tour - coming soon to a city near you!)

1300 B.C.E. For several generations the Hittites and Egyptians remained diplomatic and military rivals.
The great battle of Kadesh was fought between these superpowers around 1300 BC and was commemorated in Egypt by a great pictorial relief, an epic poem, and an official written record.
Despite the heroics of Rameses II, the battle apparently was a draw.
After several decades of uneasy peace, the two powers signed a peace treaty and mutual defense pact, perhaps in response to growing Assyrian power to the east.
A copy of the treaty was inscribed on the walls of an Egyptian temple at Karnack where it can still be read today.
1284 B.C.E. - Troy Sacked again, one possible date for Homers Trojan War!
Because of its strategic location, sacking Troy was a regional pastime for almost 1000 years!
1280? B.C.E. - The next eighty years were relatively peaceful and prosperous for the Hittites and much of the Middle East.

Then during the great catastrophe of..................

1200 B.C.E - The Hittite Empire was destroyed, leaving only the shell of a civilization that was overrun 500 years later by the Assyrian’s Collapse of Mediterranean trade world.
** This era, at times referred to as the “great catastrophe” saw a time when invaders finally learned how to overcome chariots in battle and many civilizations were overrun.
- Joshua

- End of the Bronze Age.
1180 B.C.E. - Troy sacked again, this time they get it right!
- Camel domesticated.
- Phoenician Alphabet.

1150? B.C.E. - Start of Greek dark ages.

1122 B.C.E. - Chou dynasty of China. - Chauvin Culture of Central America.

1006 B.C.E. - Saul, first King of Israel.

1004 B.C. - David, King of United Israel.

**Between 1000 and 600 B.C.** - The beginning of the second millennium coincides with the emergence of new styles of civilizations as the result of the interaction between nomadic invaders from the north and the ancient agricultural people further south.

- A distinctive European style of civilization emerged in Greece.
- In the Middle East, three civilized empires (Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt) struggled for supremacy.

1000 B.C.E. - Classical period of Hebrew literature.

950 B.C.E. – Bible - Composition of “Yahwistic” (J) document, one of the four major sources believed to have been the basis of the Pentateuch, (Books of Moses): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. - Queen of Sheba

**945 B.C.E. (?) - Solomon, King of Israel.**

After Solomon’s death, the 10 northernmost Hebrew tribes revolted and broke away from the southern tribes.

These 10 tribes created a separate kingdom with its centre at Samaria and used the name Israel.

In the southern kingdom, the line of David continued and they took the name Judah.

870 B.C.E. - King of Israel married Jezebel, lived unhappily ever after.

741 B.C.E. - Modern calendar perfected in China.
753 B.C.E. - Rome founded. (Romulus and Remus?)
750 B.C.E. - Beginning of Astrology by Nabu-Nasir, Babylonian King.
(Naturally, he was a Capricorn! **If you believe astrology works, that’s fine. You’re not bright enough to make your own decisions anyway. - Scott Adams)

750 B.C.E. - Assyria becomes a world power, while Egypt declines. The Greek people, inspired by the Homeric epics, form a common culture around their cultural centers of Olympia and Delphi. The Phoenicians and the Greeks begin to set up trading colonies around the Mediterranean.

750? B.C.E. - This is the other date for the Historical Zarathustra, (1800 B.C.E.?) founder of Zoroastrianism. He finally had his teachings gain wide acceptance, and then written down in a comprehensive manuscript of which only 70% survives! He had the single greatest effect on Judaism, and then by default Christianity and Islam.

•In Israel, the Prophets reshape the religion of Yahweh, elevating him to a universal God, keeping in line with Persia where a world religion emerges under the influence of Zoroaster’s followers.

700? B.C.E. - Bible-First Isaiah written.

- Height of Assyrian Empire,
- Babylon sacked.

700 B.C.E. - 476 C.E. - The rise and fall of the western half of the Roman Empire, until the fall of Rome to the Ostrogoths in 476 C.E...

621 B.C.E. - Bible-Deuteronomy and Book of Kings written in Babylon.

- Draco of Athens wrote “Draconian Laws.” Death for most offenses.
600? B.C.E. - First circumnavigation of Africa by Phoenicians, took 3 years!

600 B.C.E. - Nebuchadnezzar, best remembered for his relationship with the Jews and as the builder of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The Jewish Kingdom of JUDAH was positioned between two great powers - Egypt and Babylonia. It was unable to remain independent or neutral.

If it joined one side, it would be attacked by the other.

In 597 and again in 586 when the kingdom was under Egyptian domination, Jerusalem was besieged and captured by Nebuchadnezzar.

The second time he destroyed the city and carried off the Jews into their BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY.
In Babylonia, but most conspicuously in Babylon itself, Nebuchadnezzar engaged in numerous building projects.

Babylon was fortified, many temples were constructed, and a great step-pyramid, or ZIGGURAT the so-called Hanging Gardens, was erected.

The last was later numbered among the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD.

600 B.C.E. - Mayan civilization in Mexico. - Aesop’s fables.

-Sappho of Lesbos. Greek poetess, first feminine love cult.

600?B.C.E. - Indian priest come to believe that repeating a prayer makes it more powerful so they begin using knotted strings as rosaries in order to keep track of the number of times a prayer is said. Monks of the Eastern Christian Church adopt this practice in the third century C.E.

575? B.C.E. - The Exile - Bible, Genesis, and Numbers written in Babylon.

559 B.C.E. - Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire when he defeated the Median kingdom in Iran and King Croesus of Lydia.

He conquered Mesopotamia and the rest of the Middle East.

Cyrus’ biggest conquest was Babylonia, a wildly rich and powerful kingdom in the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Babylonian king Nabu-Naid was unpopular with many segments of his population. He had alienated the high priests, captured, and enslaved ten of thousands of Jews and generally behaved as the despot he was!

So, Cyrus took Babylon, the greatest city of the ancient world, in 539 B.C. He did so to the cheers of its citizens, who welcomed him as ruler because of the word of his just treatment.

He lived up to that reputation, freeing more than 40,000 enslaved Jews and allowing them to return to Palestine.

This assured the continuation of the Jewish people.

He is mentioned 22 times in the Bible for these and similar deeds and was considered a liberator rather than a conqueror.

He was also the role model for Alexander the Great!

539-330 B.C.E. Achaemendid Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great and his successors, then Greek Classical Age! Until c. 250 B.C.E.
The Aegean Region, to 300 BCE
529 B.C.E. - Under King Cyrus’s son, Darius I the Persian Empire became the greatest empire the world had ever seen. The empire ended in 334 B.C.E. when Alexander the Great invaded the Middle East.

507 B.C.E. - Pythagoras, Greek Mathematician, Pythagorean Theory.

500? B.C.E. - Persian War, Athenians defeat Persia at battle of Marathon.


- Time of Socrates (Philosopher) and Hippocrates “Father of Medicine.”

430 B.C.E. – Bible - Book of Ruth written. - Temple of Apollo in Rome.

400 B.C.E. - World population 150 million.

- Socrates condemned to death.

- Nehemiah comes from Babylon to aid Jerusalem temple rebuilding and “Ezra the Scribe” brings the Torah from Babylon to Jerusalem.

356 B.C.E. - China builds “Great Wall” as protection against the Huns.

350 B.C.E. – Bible - Chronicles, Nehemiah and Jonah.

- Mahabharata: Indian Epic, including the Bhagavad-Gita.

- Plato, pupil of Socrates “Academy” (School of Philosophy) in Athens

340 B.C.E. - Buddhism splits into “Greater and Lesser Vehicle”

*”Reality is merely an illusion, a very persistent one.” - Albert Einstein

332 B.C.E. - Alexander the Great begins his conquest of the known world with the defeat of Egypt and founding of Alexandria, then Babylon, Persepolis, and then India right to the Indus Valley.

330 B.C. - 1453 C.E. - Eastern Roman / Byzantine Empire. Began with the founding of Constantinople by Emperor Constantine”1” in 330 B.C. and ended when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 A.D.
323 B.C.E. - Start of Hellenistic Age
- Cosmopolitan civilizations.
- “Diogenes the Cynic” lived in a barrel in Athens.
(Start of the tradition of “town fool” or maybe even “village idiot.”)

300 B.C.E. - Euclid, Greek Mathematician.
- Aristotle, disciple of Plato founded Lyceum Philosophy School in Athens.

275 B.C.E. - Colossus of Rhodes built, destroyed by earthquake in 244.

250 B.C.E. - Ecclesiastes written in Hebrew.

233 B.C.E. - Sun-Tzu, Chinese philosopher writes “The Art of War.”

212 B.C.E. - Archimedes, Greek Mathematician.

200 B.C.E. - Han Dynasty in China
- Shih Huang Ti, first Emperor of united China.
On the western and eastern flanks of Eurasia, the Roman Empire and Han China reach their greatest power and are able to repel the attacks of northern nomadic Barbarians. The nomads, instead, attack Parthia, and invade India. - The Silk Road links Rome and China and brings East and West into regular contact for the first time.

182 B.C.E. - Hannibal and his elephant’s world tour.
165 B.C.E. – Bible - Daniel written in Jerusalem.
- Bible - Book of Esther written in Persia.
149 B.C.E. - Third Punic war, Romans kill 500,000 in sack of Carthage.
146 B.C.E. - Greece under Roman rule.
134 B.C.E. - “Supernova” recorded by Chinese.
125 B.C.E. - Qumran, Dead Sea Scrolls hidden,
- 10 Hebrew manuscripts at Qumran Cave #4,
- Ethiopic Bible found at Qumran cave #7.
120 B.C.E. -Death of Spartacus.
63 B.C.E. - Julius Caesar elected Pontifex Maximus (highest Priest) by Roman Senate. 
(Originated Julian calendar)

60 B.C.E. - 1st Roman Triumvirate, Caesar-Pompey-Crassus.

44 B.C.E. - March 15th, - After being made “Dictator for Life” by Roman Senate was assassinated by Cassius, Casca, Brutus, etc. – “Et tu Brute?”
- Octavian Augustus, 1st Roman Emperor, defeats Anthony and Cleopatra who commit suicide.

**Death of the Republic - Birth of the Empire**

37 B.C.E. - King Herod the Great of Judea assumes power.

**Life of Jesus of Nazareth**

Just for old times sake we are going to use A.D. instead of the current C.E. (Common Era)

36-65 A.D. - Oral period of Christianity between Jesus and Gospel of Mark.
- Only about 120 initial believers, then quickly to 3000 and 5000.
- Paul converts to “Apostle of the Gentiles”
- Main activity of Christianity shifts from “Jewish-Christians” of Judea and Galilee to “Gentile - Christians” led by Paul and his Patroness Phoebe.
- The stoning death of St. Stephen, who became the first Christian martyr.

31-37 A.D. - Saul of Tarsus, formerly a rabbi and enemy of early Christianity, converts and becomes St. Paul.


58 A.D. - Ming-Ti, Chinese Emperor, introduces Buddhism to China.

60 A.D. - Paul was imprisoned in Rome for sedition, and martyred for treason in…
62 A.D... It was also during this time that nearly everyone connected with Jesus was executed by Rome. (In one way or another) - A hard way to start a faith!

62 A.D. - James, brother of Jesus, and some others, were brought before a group of judges and accused of transgressing the law. They were then stoned to death.

- “Q” documents circulated and Dead Sea Scrolls hidden in various caves.
- Gospel of Thomas, based on Q?

64 A.D. - Great fire of Rome. Nero fiddled and then accused the Christians of setting the fire. He suppressed them for a while, but like the fire, they were too far advanced to be put out.

66-73 A.D. - Roman-Jewish war, final destruction of Herod’s Temple.
70 A.D. - Gospel of Mark, ends at Mk 16:8; (New ending added in c400 CE.)

- Signs Gospel, hypothetical Greek text later used in Gospel of John to prove Jesus is Messiah.

- Center of Christianity shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.

73 A.D. - Massada, stronghold of Jewish zealots’ falls to Roman assault.

79 A.D. - August 24th, Mount Vesuvius destroys Pompeii.
79-91 A.D. - Pope Anacletus. (Titus the Blameless?)

91-101 A.D. - Pope Clement 1 - In two or three instances, he speaks of remembering “the words” of Christ, so it seems he had a written record in mind, but does not call it “gospel.” He knows several of Paul’s epistles, and values them highly for their content; the same can be said of the Epistle of the Hebrews, with which he is well acquainted.

Although these writings obviously possess for Clement 1 considerable significance, he never refers to them as authoritative “Scripture.” What he does is write a letter arguing that church leaders possess a Divine authority inherited from Christ and his Apostles. So here, less than a hundred years after Jesus, we already have the Church trying to supplant God!
91-150 A.D. - Secret Book of James. - Gospel of Mary Magdalene,  
- Early Gospels of Thomas and James. - Secret gospel of Mark.  
105 A.D. - Ts’ai Lun of China invents paper.  
110 A.D. - Ignatius, 3rd Bishop of Antioch, martyred in Rome, letters subjected to heavy Christian forgery.  
100-125 A.D. - Justin Martyr, first apologist to offer a defense of Christianity. - Gospel of John composed!

c150 A.D. - “Western Reviser” Probably one of St. Paul’s companions, transcribed Luke’s book (Acts) after the authors death and inserted details of which had personal knowledge. He made other alterations in accordance with his own taste, on which he regarded himself as having authority equal to that of Luke!

C160 A.D. - Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, complained Christians were changing and faking his own letters just as they had changed the Gospels.

-School of Alexandria founded in Egypt. Becomes a major centre for both Christian theology and Greek philosophy.
c190 A.D. - Pope Victor 1: First Latin Pope. Called council in 190 to determine “official” new date of Easter but failed.

- Excommunicated Eastern Churches that continued to observe Easter on old Biblical time
- New Testament cannon are fixed in currently known form.


- While Rome and China slowly disintegrated under Barbarian invasions, India, secured from Nomadic attacks behind a revived Persian civilization, enters classical age under the Gupta kings.

286 A.D. - Emperor Diocletian divides Roman Empire in two, forming Modern Greece. (The Byzantine Empire) - Christians banned from Roman army.

- Constantine defeats Maxentius to become the absolute ruler of Rome.
- Converts to Christianity after a vision of a cross in the sky and the words: “In Hoc Signo Vinces” (“With this sign, (the cross) you shall conquer.”)
315 A.D. - Roman Empire split into Eastern (Byzantine) and West (Rome)

325 A.D. - First Ecumenical Council of Nicea convened by Emperor Constantine; establishes Nicene Creed as the fundamental statement of Christian doctrine.

Constantine offered to make the sect the official state religion if they would settle their differences. By compiling a book of sacred writings that they could all agree on Constantine thought this would give authority to the new church. Composed of about 300 religious leaders, this council was given the task of separating the divinely inspired writings from those of questionable origin.

The actual compilation of the Bible was an incredibly complicated project since it came three hundred years after the death of Jesus and involved churchmen of varying beliefs, in an atmosphere of dissension, jealousy, intolerance, and bigotry.

To add to the dissention, they were split into two groups that questioned the divinity of Jesus.

The purpose was to settle the dispute over the teachings of Arius, that Christ was not equal in divinity to God.

The council (in their wisdom) declared that Jesus WAS equal in divinity to God by a majority vote and declares Arianism a heresy.

(Dateline-Middle East Times - “Jesus declared equal by majority vote!” “Jesus relieved, would like to thank all his supporters.”)

(Byzantine Empress Irene convened the second council of 787 CE the 7th ecumenical council. - It was called to refute “iconoclasm” and the council declared that images ought to be venerated - but not worshiped, and ordered them restored in the churches. It is the last council accepted by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Eastern Church as ecumenical.)

380 A.D. - Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire under the reign of Theodosius I.
381 A.D. - First Council of Constantinople decides that the “Holy Spirit” has the same divinity as “The Son.” (Decided by the Council of Nicea 56 years earlier)

(GOD at first objected strenuously to having to share Divinity three ways, but eventually consented to a “Trinity!” ;-)"

C.400 A.D. - Great library at Alexandria burned by Christian Zealots, destroying 750,000 works including most of the world’s historical pagan literature on religion!

405 A.D. - St. Jerome completes the Vulgate - a Latin translation of both the Old and New Testaments. This remains the Latin Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

433-453 A.D. - Attila the Hun, known-world tour!

476 A.D. - The Western Roman Empire falls to barbarian armies, leaving the church as the primary authority in the West. - In the East, the Byzantine Empire, based in Constantinople, continues for the next 977 years.

500 A.D.-600 A.D. - The Talmud, a compilation of Jewish oral laws and traditions is put in its final form in Babylonia.

- It consists of two parts: an oral law (Mishna) in Hebrew, and commentaries (Gemara) in Aramaic.


570 A.D. - Muhammad born in Mecca.

610 A.D. - According to Muslim belief, at the age of 40, Muhammad is visited by the angel Gabriel while on retreat in a cave near Mecca.

The angel recites to him the first revelations of the Koran and informs him that he is God’s prophet.

Later, Muhammad is told to call his people to the worship of the “One God,” but they react with hostility and begin to persecute him and his followers.

622 A.D. - After enduring persecution in Mecca, Muhammad and his followers migrate to the nearby town of Yathrib (later to be known as Medina), the people there accepted Islam. This marks the “hijrah” or “emigration,” and the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

In Medina, Muhammad establishes an Islamic state based on the laws revealed in the Koran and the inspired guidance coming to him from God. Eventually he begins to invite other tribes and nations to Islam.
625A.D. - MUHAMMAD BEGINS DICTATING THE KORAN.
- Muhammad begins either dictating or writing the Holy Koran. (There is a lot of debate as to whether he could read and write, although the popular consensus is that he was a trader and therefore probably literate!)

630 A.D. - Muhammad returns to Mecca with a large number of his followers. He enters the city peacefully, and eventually all its citizens accept Islam. The prophet clears the idols and images out of the Kaaba and rededicates it to the worship of God alone.

633 A.D. - Muhammad dies after a prolonged illness. The Muslim community elects his father-in-law and close associate, Abu Bakr, as caliph. - This leads to the schism between the Sunni and Shiite sects.

635-638 A.D... - Muslims begin conquest of Persia and Syria. - Muslims enter the area north of Arabia, known as “Sham,” including Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.

641 A.D. - Muslims enter Egypt and rout the Byzantine army. Muslims consider their conquest as the liberation of subjugated people, since in most instances they were under oppressive rule. - Islam begins to spread throughout North Africa.

661 A.D. - Imam Ali is killed, bringing to an end the rule of the four “righteous caliphs:” Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. This also marks the beginning of the Umayyad rule and the dispute between Shiite and Sunni Sects.

695 A.D. - Spain begins persecution of Jews in mistaken belief that they, and not the Romans, were responsible for the death of “Christ.”

711 A.D... - Muslims (Moors) enter Spain in the west and India in the east. Eventually almost the entire Iberian Peninsula is under Islamic control.

712 A.D. - Less than one hundred years after the founding of Islam, Christian and Muslim armies are already at war when Pelayo, a Visigoth King, defeats the Muslim Army in Covadonga, thus beginning the Christian Re-conquest of Spain.

732 A.D. - Muslim forces defeated at Tours by the Christian Armies under the command of Charles Martel.

750 A.D. - First great British epic poem, Beowulf, written in Old English. It exemplifies early medieval society and shows roots in Old Testament Law!

768-814 A.D. - Charlemagne is crowned emperor by Pope Leo 111 at St. Peters Basilica in Rome. This Coronation marks the beginning of a new relationship between the church and state, with the emperor’s temporal authority depending upon the blessing of the pope.
871 A.D. - Alfred the Great of England constructs a system of government and education that allows for the unification of smaller Anglo-Saxon states in the ninth and tenth centuries. This was the start of the codification of English law, public interest in local government, and the reorganization of the army. He founds schools, promotes literacy, and a national culture.

900-1000 A.D. - House of Hapsburg starts accumulation of land and power with Otto 1st. - Forget about the British Royal Family or any of the other monarchies; this is who really pulled most of the strings in Europe for over a THOUSAND years!

-Vikings settle Iceland; establish Althing, the oldest body of representative government in Europe.
- Eric the Red distributes travel brochures for Greenland.

- Mayans immigrate to Yucatan Peninsula.
- Otto 1 expands German Empire to Poland and Austria. Under Otto 1, the Holy Roman Empire (German) [House of Hapsburg] is officially revived making Catholicism the prevalent and dominant religion throughout Europe.
- Europe immediately descends into the dark ages. (Coincidence?) - Exact start of Dark Ages unknown - too dark!

980 A.D. - As Europe descends into the ‘Dark Ages’ menaced by Vikings and Magyars alike, the Byzantine Empire struggles endlessly with Persia where the Arabs suddenly flare out in splendor under the banner of Islam.
1050-1200 A.D. - First agricultural revolution of Medieval Europe begins in 1050 A.D. with a shift to the northern lands for cultivation, along with a period of improved climate from 700 to 1200 A.D. in Western Europe.

This was combined with the widespread use and perfection of new farming techniques including the use of the heavy plow, the three field system of crop rotation, the use of mills for processing cloth, crushing pulp for paper manufacture, and the widespread use of iron and horses, and last, but not least, the brewing of beer!

With an increase in agricultural advancements, western towns and trade grow exponentially to the point where Western Europe runs on a money economy, in no small part started by the House of Hapsburg.

1054 A.D. - Schism between the Western Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches finalizes a long standing split between them when Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Cerlarius excommunicate each other!

1066 A.D. - William the Conqueror invades England and claims the throne at the Battle of Hastings. England is, for the next few centuries, heavily influenced by French language and culture to the point where French becomes the language of the political realm. - William goes on to establish the feudal system.

1073 A.D. - Pope Gregory V11 begins widespread reforms of church practice, liturgies, and administration.

- One of his first acts is to excommunicate all married priests.

1085 -1099 A.D. - At the Council of Claremont, Pope Urban II called the First Crusade (out of a total of eight) against Muslims in the Holy Lands. This crusade was carried out in an effort to aid Byzantine Christians against Muslim invaders.

They sacked Jerusalem and killed 40,000 people!

1120 A.D. - Founding of the “Knights Templar” in Jerusalem.

1122 A.D. - Diet of Worms finally ends the long-standing investiture fight with a compromise, which retains church authority over Europe.

-Death of Omar Khayyam, Persian poet.

1147-1149 A.D. - Second Crusade.

1184 A.D. - Spanish Theologian Dominic founded the Dominican Order of Monks. The group was authorized by Pope Innocent II the convert Muslims and Jews and put an end to Heresy. (This Medieval Inquisition was actually a practice run for three later Inquisitions)

1189-1192 A.D. - Third Crusade, lead by Frederick of Germany, Philip of France and Richard the Lion Heart of England. (The time of Robin Hood!)
1198-1216 A.D. - Power of the medieval papacy reaches its height with the reign of Innocent III who manages to excommunicate both Holy Roman emperor Otto IV and King John of England at the same time in 1209.

1202 A.D. - Fourth crusade launched. – El Cid.

1204 A.D. - St. Francis of Assisi launched a monastic revolution in the Latin Church. Started the “Franciscans” in 1210 C.E.

1206 A.D. - Venetians convince soldiers to attack Constantinople before moving to the holy land. The residents of the city suffer the worst devastation on the city’s history. As a result, Latin domination of the Eastern Church began!

1208 A.D. - “Now we find a new game to play.” First witchcraft trial in England took place. Gideon, alleged to be a sorcerer, was acquitted!

1215 A.D. - Pope Innocent III organized the Fourth Lateran Council in Rome in order to discuss and define central dogmas of Christianity. It was one of the most important councils ever held, and its canons sum up Innocent’s ideas for the church. It recognizes the necessity of the Eucharist and penance as sacraments for salvation.

1215 A.D. - **Magna Carta** was signed by King John when English Barons forced him to agree to a statement of their rights. - The Children’s Crusade was launched. More than 50,000 children sold into slavery. (Pied Piper legend.)

**While Europe was caught up in the conflict between Pope and Emperor, a storm was brewing in Asia. Genghis Khan united the Mongols in a military confederation and achieved such a series of conquests that has no parallel in history.**
1220 A.D. - The earlier Mongols conquests drove a tribe of Turks out of Turkistan into Asia Minor. There they established the Ottoman Empire, which advanced until it controlled the entire eastern Mediterranean.

Heavy custom tolls levied by the Ottomans, who controlled the Black Sea trade, stimulated the European search for alternative routes to the Orient.

1225-1274 A.D. - Life of theologian Thomas Aquinas, who codified Catholic theology, marking the high point of the medieval scholastic movement.

1228 A.D. - Sixth Crusade launched. - The (Papal) Inquisition prohibited the reading of the bible by laypersons.

1233 A.D. - After proclaiming the Excommunicqamus two years before, Pope Gregory 1X established the HOLY INQUISITION to abolish heresy wherever it could be found. *This provided the church with literally hundreds of years of entertainment.*

1252 A.D. - The papacy approves the use of torture for religious disobedience.
1258 A.D. Pope Alexander IV issues decree Ut Negotium, which allowed inquisitors to absolve one another of any “irregularities” while at work! “It’s a rough job but somebody has to do it!”

1270 A.D. - The crusades come to an end. - Marco Polo begins his journey to China to see Kublai Khan. (Grandson of Genghis Khan)

1273 A.D. - Rudolph I becomes first House of Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperor after extinction of the House of Lenzberg.

1302 A.D. - Pope Boniface VIII issued the papal bull Unum Sanctum, declaring that the pope had supreme and final authority in all matters, both civic and spiritual.

1327 A.D. - German Dominican Master Eckhart defined the individual soul as a “spark” of the Divine at its most basic element.

1336 A.D. 100 Years War – Here’s a good lesson in history why wars and most human endeavors are so foolish. English nobility began to imitate French aristocrats in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and changed from being beer drinkers to wine connoisseurs.

There was only one problem, and that was ---- all the vineyards were in France!

To gain access to the grapes, England fostered civil war in the area of Flanders in the hope of gaining control of them for wine production. This brought England and France into direct conflict and resulted in a war that was actually on and off for 229 years. (1336-1565)

C-1350 A.D. - “Black Death” Bubonic plague sweeps across Europe.

1350 A.D. - Renaissance begins in Italy.

1368 A.D. - Ming Dynasty established in China by a monk who led a 13-year long rebellion against corrupt and ineffectual Mongol rulers.

1378 A.D. - The “Great Schism” when the election of Pope Urban V1 was challenged by French Cardinals who elected Clement V11 instead.

Rome and France had rival Popes for 40 years.

1429-1430 A.D. - Joan OF Arc. Led French rebellion during 100 Years War and drove out most of the English troops.

1438 A.D. - Johan Gutenberg invents the printing press and movable type. Created the Gutenberg bible and was responsible for the Reformation to be so wide spread instead of a local insurrection. He made it possible for Martin Luther’s 95 Theses to be mass printed for distribution across most of central Europe.
1439 A.D. Albert 11 - House of Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperor. From here on in, Hapsburg, Holy Roman Emperor, and German King were all the same.

This zenith of the Hapsburg rule was achieved through many wide and varied marriages, as we will see in the list of Hapsburgs that stretches from the tenth to the twentieth centuries.

Their overriding motto seemed to be; “Let others wage war, we get married!”

**Habsburg** (in English sometimes written "Hapsburg") and the successor family, **Habsburg-Lorraine**, were important ruling houses of Europe and are best known as the ruling Houses of Austria (and the Austrian Empire) for over six centuries.

Their principal roles were as:

- Kings of Germany (several centuries to **1806**), mostly also as
- Holy Roman Emperors, and
- Rulers of Austria (as Dukes 1282–1453, Archdukes 1453–1804, and
- Emperors of Austria 1804–1918),
- Kings of Bohemia (1306, 1437–1457 1526–1918),
- Kings of Hungary (1437–1439, 1445–1457, 1526–1918),
- Kings of Croatia (1437–1439, 1445–1457, 1527–1918),
- Kings of Spain (1516–1700),
- Kings of Portugal (1580–1640),
- Kings of Galizia and Lodomeria (1772–1918), and
- Grand Princes of Transylvania (1690–1867).
- Grand Dukes of Tuscany (1737–1801; 1814-1860).
- Archdukes of Austria-Este {1771}. **(One of Hapsburg’s Castles!)**

Other crowns held briefly by the House:

- King-consort of England (1554-1558)
- Dukes of Parma (1814–1847)
- Dukes of Modena (1814–1859)
- Emperor of Mexico (1864–1867)

The family first started to gain prominence around 950 c.e. and continues to this day. Although known primarily for their role in the Austria-Hungarian Empire, they had a major influence in every country in Europe for the last thousand years!
One of the greatest influences the family had on history was in 1914 when Archduke Ferdinand of Austria (A Hapsburg) was assasinated by a Serbian nationalist. This led to the start of WW 1 and the eventual dissolution of the Hapsburg Dynasty and most of the royal Houses of Europe. (Many of the legal ramifications of the dissolution of the Hapsburg Empire are still before the courts of Europe to this day! A further history of the Hapsburgs is presented in the index pages)

1478 - Spanish Inquisition - Ferdinand and Isabella end Muslim rule in Spain.  
1483 A.D. - Martin Luther born. (The Reformation)  
1492 A.D. - Ferdinand and Isabella send Christopher on a mission - Columbus sails the ocean blue. (Five hundred years after the Vikings!)  
1496 A.D. - Spanish Crown marries into Austrian House of Hapsburg  
1502 A.D. - Reign of Aztec Ruler Montezuma.  
- Persian Shah executes any Sunnis who refuse to accept Shiite version of Islam. 

(Not that you think that it was just the Christians that got carried away.)  
1509 A.D. - Birth of John Calvin. (Started Calvinism, which preached predetermination and good conduct.)  
1514 A.D. - “Albrecht” Archbishop of Mainz - sold indulgences in return for contributions to building the new St. Peters Basilica in Rome.  
1516 A.D. - House of Hapsburg Charles V now King over Germany, Netherlands, and Spain.  
1517 A.D. - October 31, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on indulgences to a church door in Wittenberg. He protested the selling of indulgences and other corrupt church practices.  

Some people got a hold of this piece of paper and printed thousands of copies. (Thanks to the recently discovered printing press!) They were then distributed across most of Europe to start the Protestant Reformation.  
- Luther had intended this to be a local protest and had no idea it would spread the way it did due to mass dissatisfaction with the church.
1520 A.D. - Papal bull “Exsurge Domine” gave Martin Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated. Luther burns the papal bull. - The next year he was condemned as a heretic and outlaw at the “Diet of Worms.”

- **Charles V divides Hapsburg Empire between Austria and Spain.**
1525 A.D. - Northern Italy re-taken from France by House of Hapsburg.

- **Hungarian and Bohemian crowns unite with Austrian Hapsburgs.**
1530 A.D. - Luther publishes his Large Catechism and Small Catechism.

- A south German peasant uprising, inspired by Luther’s reform work began 150 years of religious wars.

- Jesuit order is founded.

- **The term “Protestant” was first used at the Diet of Speyer.**
1532 A.D. - In Denmark a royal decree made Lutheranism the sole religion. Martin Luther, as an outlaw, could not attend the Diet of Augsburg. He was held in an attempt to end religious division of the Holy Roman Empire.

**Phillip Melanchthon, Luther’s co-worker, presented the “Augsburg Confession,” a statement of Lutheran beliefs. - Starts the Lutheran Church.**

- Henry V111 breaks away from the Catholic Church and makes himself the head of the Episcopal Church, or, Church of England.

1534 A.D. - John Calvin publishes his first edition of the “Institute of the Christian Religion.” This work is destined to become one of the most influential works of Protestantism. The book details his theology of Humanities depravity, the necessity of grace for salvation and predestination.

1535 A.D. - House of Hapsburg drives Turks out of Hungary.
1536 A.D. – Portugal has its own version of the “Inquisition.”
1543 A.D. - Spanish Catholics begin burning Protestants at the Stake while Sweden made Lutheranism the official state religion and banned Catholicism.
And, oh yes. Did not burn anyone!
1540 A.D. - Copernicus refuses to publish “De Revolutionibus Purbitum Coelestium” out of fear of Church censure.

**Is it so bad to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.**

---Ralph Waldo Emerson
1542 A.D. - Pope Paul IV decides that Rome needs its own Inquisition, vows that Rome will not be outdone by Spain. New twist to an old tale, he boiled them rather than burnt them!

1545-1563 A.D. - Council of Trent Catholic Reformation, or Counter Reformation, met Protestant challenge by clearly defining an official theology.

1553-1558 A.D. - Catholic Queen Mary reigned in England, persecuting Protestants and restoring Catholicism as the official religion.

1558 A.D. - Elizabeth I succeeded Mary as Queen of England and restored Protestantism as the official religion.

- The Puritan movement develops among those dissatisfied with her reforms of the church.

1560 A.D. - Phillip I inherits Spain for House of Hapsburg.

1550-1580 A.D. - John Knox publishes “The First blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women.” Deploiring the authority of women. “Misogynists to the left of us, Misogynists to the right!” Scotch Presbyterian Church founded by John Knox. Knox was a follower of Calvin because of his disagreement with Lutherans over sacraments and church government.

1604 A.D. - John Smith establishes Baptist Church. - King James bible.

1616 A.D. - The Church prohibits Galileo from further scientific work

***“I do not believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use.” -Galileo

1620 A.D. - English Puritans, known as Pilgrims, established a colony in America at Plymouth Rock to escape religious pluralism in England. **By the way, they only stopped at Plymouth Rock because they “ran out of beer” and had to stop for more supplies!**

1633 A.D. - Galileo forced by the Inquisition to renounce theories of Copernicus.

- Descartes stops publishing in France in response to the Churches attacks on Galileo.

1647 A.D. - George Fox founded the Society of Friends. (Quakers)
1648 A.D. - Peace of Westphalia ends thirty years war
- Guarantees greater religious freedoms and...........

**The Beginning of the Modern Era;**

Let us take a quick refresher course in European history. Civilization in the West evolved following the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the late 5th century.

The adoption of Christianity as a major state religion in Rome and the absence of Imperial authority saw the eventual birth of the medieval world.

The major emphasis of this culture was humankind’s relationship with God. Popes, Bishop’s, Priests and Monks were extremely influential and exercised an enormous amount of power.

There was only one Church, and it was referred to as “universal,” or in Latin, the Catholic church. Judaism was more or less tolerated, but its followers often became the focus of persecution during times of distress.

Because of this “Catholic” viewpoint, Western Europe eventually followed a path that led in a completely different direction than that of the Eastern World. This included the Near East and the territories, which would become Eastern Europe and Russia.

The most deciding factor had been the split during the Early Middle Ages between East and West over the issue of the supremacy of the Pope.

Elsewhere, the Near East and Africa (including what is now Spain) remained more or less unified by Islam and it retained supremacy unrivaled in either Western or Eastern Europe until the coming of the Renaissance.

It was during the Renaissance period when Humanist philosophers began to question their contemporary culture that the medieval framework began to breakdown.

As these scholars began to look at the classical past, the ideology of man’s place in the world started to rival the ideology of man’s place in heaven. Eventually Renaissance humanism caused some to question the Church’s monopoly on thought and we slowly emerged from the dark ages that started when Otto the First turned out the lights in 962 A.D.
Of the people that questioned the Churches theology, most were burned at the stake. One of them, however, a monk by the name of Martin Luther, was able to avoid the flames, at the same time causing some flames of his own.

Luther’s ideas were not new. He just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

The political situation in Germany was greatly divided. For centuries, the disorganized principalities had been paying tribute to Rome in an attempt to court Papal favor.

The princes saw Luther’s ideology of religious reform as a means to circumvent the Papacy and so he gained the backing and protection of a majority of influential German princes.

Luther’s “Reformation” eventually fragmented into groups that adopted some of his beliefs and rejected others.

The result was that Europe became divided into two camps, the Protestants (including Lutherans and other offshoots of Lutheranism), and the Catholics.

The Catholic Church then launched a Counter-Reformation in an attempt to restore the “universitality” of Christian belief.

Despite its attempts at eternal reform, most notably the Council of Trent and the creation of the Jesuits, the Catholic effort to restore Catholicism to all of Western Europe eventually failed. However, not before a great deal of blood was shed on both sides.

The bloodiest struggle, and one of the most terrible wars in all of history, began in 1618. The fighting, which raged off and on all over Europe came to be known as “The Thirty Years War.” A conflict that at its heart was due to the manipulations of the Church and the Hapsburgs.

The war was a last attempt by Catholic forces to restore Religious unity in Europe. It was a dismal failure and the Catholic Church finally surrendered to the fact that their religion was no longer “universal.” This failure led to a new European worldview. One that included the possibility of alternative thought.

The exploration of new ways of thinking began with religion, but did not end there.

**This is the turning point historians mark as the beginning of the Modern Era.**

1664 A.D. - First women were condemned as witches in the new world, leading up to the Salem witch panic in Salem, Massachusetts.

1720-1760 A.D. - American Colonies experienced the “Great Awakening,” involving the widespread conversions to Charismatic Protestant Churches emphasizing personal piety and individual interpretations of the Bible. (Influenced the “Founding Fathers”)

1727 A.D. - Death of Sir Isaac Newton. ➔
- Voltaire preaches ideas of political freedom.
- Methodist Church founded by John Wesley.

1776 A.D. – The American Revolution

1788 A.D. - The French Revolution

1827 A.D. - Mormon Church established by Joseph Smith because of visions of the Angel Moroni. - Degradation of women still practiced by allowing men to have multiple wives. (Not quite as good as seventy two virgins upon arrival in Paradise, but what the hell!)

1832 A.D. - Spanish Inquisition was finally abolished.
1858 A.D. - “Mary” in a one-night engagement at Lourdes.
- Florence Nightingale held over during the Crimean War.

1859 A.D. - Charles Darwin publishes “Origin of Species.” ➔
1863 A.D. - House OF Hapsburg - King Maximilian of Austria made Emperor of Mexico. – (Hapsburg’s attempt to get into North America.)
- Maximilian shot dead in 1867. -So much for that!

1870 A.D. - First Vatican Council affirmed the doctrine of Papal infallibility.
1896 A.D. - Billy Sunday, American Presbyterian evangelist, began his preaching with road shows. Attracted huge crowds and foreshadowed the modern-day evangelists and televangelists.

1901 A.D. - Beginning of Pentecostal Church.

1914 A.D. - Archduke Ferdinand of the “House of Hapsburg” is assassinated by a Serbian Nationalist leading to the start of the “war to end all wars.” - World War I.

1917 A.D. - “Mary” comes back for an encore after Lourdes and appears at Fatima, Portugal. Reportedly witnessed by 100,000 people.

1918 A.D. - With the end of the First World War in 1918, most of the House of Hapsburg’s possessions and titles were either taken away or abolished. This ended a thousand years of significant control over most of Europe. Many claims by various members of the House of Hapsburg to have titles or land reinstated are still going through the courts in Europe here in the 21st century!


1947 A.D. - Discovery of the “Qumran” or “Essene” scrolls. (Dead Sea Scrolls.)
- Discovery of the “Gospel of Thomas” sayings of Jesus written down shortly after his death.

1957 A.D. - Founding of Church (?) of Scientology.
L. Ron Hubbard


1979 C.E. - The Iranian Revolution results in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the first Islamic state in the modern era.

2000 C.E. - Pope John Paul II offers apology and asks for forgiveness for Catholicism’s history of “Violence in the service of truth.”

Now that’s one small step for a man and a giant leap for humanity!

**”And so it goes!” - Kurt Vonnegut Jr.**
**BOOK 2**

*Chapter 6. Let Me Tell You a Story*

*”We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.”*

"We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

• Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

Gilgamesh was the first actual person mentioned in recorded literature.

(The Epic of Gilgamesh c. 2000 BCE.)

The historical Gilgamesh lived even further back in the mists of time (3000 B.C.E.?) where such words as Babylon, Sumerian and Mesopotamia bring back images of the dawn of human history.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the story of a famous King of ancient Mesopotamia.

It could be viewed as the forerunner and example for all other epics that came after, such as the “Iliad” by Homer, (which was not written until about 800 BCE,) and certainly parts of the Bible.

The storyline has little to do with actual events that happened during this period since the exotic plot is really about human relationships and the human condition.

It explores feelings of loneliness, love, loss, revenge, envy, regret, jealousy and most of all the fear of death. In other words, the seven deadly sins all rolled into one!

“The Epic of Gilgamesh” is considered the bases for many of the thoughts and beliefs of all early religions and fables for the people of what is now Europe and the Middle East.

This influenced Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism, as well as the cults of Mithra and Horus, who together formed the foundations of Judaism, and then Christianity and finally Islam.

Different parts of the story have been found on eleven clay tablets in the general region of the ancient city of Uruk.

Only about 70% of the epic has been recovered, and it seems there are three versions of the story. What is portrayed is not only grand and amazing in its sweep and majesty, but there are also uncanny parallels to later literary events including the great flood, the nature of good and evil, eternal life, Armageddon and much more, as told in the old testament of the Bible.
**Plot Summary:**

1. **Enkidu:**

   King Gilgamesh’s strength and lust left him with no rivals, so the gods prevailed on the goddess Aruru to make him a brother, which she did.

   Enkidu was created and brought up in the wild, eating grass in the hills. He was the strongest man in the world and was discovered by a hill trapper who was so afraid of his strength that he sought advice from his father on what to do with the beast.

   The trapper’s father instructed him to go to Gilgamesh and ask for his advice. Gilgamesh advised him to hire a harlot (second oldest profession -after priests!) and introduce her to Enkidu.

   She persuaded him to accompany her to see Gilgamesh in the city of Uruk where Enkidu challenged Gilgamesh by preventing him from entering the house of a newly wedded bride. *(According to the customs ordained by the gods of the time, the King was to be first in the house and the husband was to follow and be introduced by the King.)*

   Gilgamesh threw him aside, so Enkidu acknowledged Gilgamesh’s strength and they became friends.

2. **The Forest Journey.**

   Enkidu regretted that he was losing his powers and becoming weak, so Gilgamesh had the idea of making a name for himself by raising a monument of cedars to the gods.

   The trouble was, as Enkidu knew all too well, the cedars were guarded by a fearsome giant called Humbaba, who was aroused and then eventually vanquished by the power of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

   The god Enlil was not happy about this, and vowed revenge on them both.

3. **Ishtar and Gilgamesh, and the Death of Enkidu.**

   Having returned from this adventure, Gilgamesh washed himself and put on his royal robes.

   He looked very handsome and was noticed by Ishtar, the goddess of love. She asked him to marry her and promised all sorts of things.

   Gilgamesh was not having any of this, and reminded Ishtar of how unfaithful she had been to a whole list of previous lovers.
Ishtar fell into a rage and went up to high heaven to ask her father, Anu, for the Bull of Heaven with which to avenge Gilgamesh.

The fearsome Bull of Heaven rampaged over the earth.

Early in the fight Enkidu was knocked down and injured, but got up immediately.

It was Gilgamesh who defeated the Bull and they cut out its heart and gave it to Shamash.

Ishtar came to the walls of Uruk and cursed Gilgamesh for killing the Bull of Heaven and said Enkidu would die of his injuries from the bull.

With tears in his eyes, Enkidu prayed to Shamash, cursing the trapper.

Shamash, however, reminded him of the good times he had had, and Enkidu repented for his harsh words.

At this point despite Gilgamesh’s prayers, his lingering illness worsened and he died.

4 - The Search for Everlasting Life:
Gilgamesh wept bitterly for his brother, whose demise reminded him of his greatest fear - death.

He decided to find Utnapishtim (known as the Faraway), who lived in the land of Dilmun, in the garden of the sun.

It was to him alone had the gods granted eternal life.

By the sea, he encountered Siduri and she told him that Utnapishtim lived across the ocean.

The boatman Urshanabi, to whom he introduces himself in much the same way as he did with Siduri, carried Gilgamesh across.

Utnapishtim reminded Gilgamesh that nothing on earth is permanent and concerning how he came to enter the company of gods and possess everlasting life, he would tell Gilgamesh a secret:

5 - The Story of the Flood
Utnapishtim told a story of a city called Shurrupak, on the banks of the Euphrates.

The gods considered the noises made by man in this city to be intolerable - so they agreed to exterminate humanity.
Enlil was the main protagonist, but Ea, god of waters, warned Utnapishtim of their plan in a dream; telling him to tear down his house and build a boat, giving precise measurements; and to take into it the seed of all living creatures.

The boat was built and loaded, and the rain came. (The Great Flood) The storm raged fiercely for six days and nights.

On the seventh day, the storm subsided and Utnapishtim opened the hatch and saw water all around. The boat was grounded on the mountain of Nisir. (Ararat)

When it had been becalmed for seven days, he released a dove, which found no resting place and returned.

A swallow was then released who found no perch and returned, and finally a raven, who did not return.

Utnapishtim made a sacrifice and poured out a libation on the mountain. The gods were pleased and took him, and made him kneel down, saying “In times past Utnapishtim was mortal; now he shall live forever.”

6 - The Return:
Utnapishtim told Gilgamesh to prevail against sleep for six days and seven nights if he wished to gain eternal life.

Gilgamesh, however, could not stay awake; and slept for seven days, waking up with his ever-present fear of death.

Utnapishtim promised Gilgamesh a memento of the trip - a plant, like a rose with a prickle like a thorn, found at the bottom of the sea. This would restore lost youth.

Gilgamesh dived into the water to obtain this plant. Then, having traveled another twenty leagues, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi were attacked by a serpent and lost the plant.

On returning to Uruk with Urshanabi, our hero was worn out. However, he was able to engrave the story of his adventures on a stone before dying.

7 - The Death of Gilgamesh:
Gilgamesh’s destiny, decreed by Enlil (the father of the gods), was now fulfilled.

The people of Uruk and his mother Ninsun mourned. The mourners weighed out their offerings to Ereshkigal, the Queen of Death, Namtar, the god of fate, and to all the gods of the dead.

Gilgamesh now lies in his tomb.
THE PROPHETS - (SO FAR) - INTROS AND EXTROS

1. Adam (? B.C.E.)
2. Abraham (? B.C.E.)
3. Zoroaster, Zarathustra (varied dates -1800 or 750 B.C.E.?)
4. Moses (1456 B.C.E.)
5. Krishna (1249 B.C.E.)
6. Buddha (757 B.C.E.)
7. Jesus of Nazareth (4C.E.)
8. Muhammad (613 C.E.)

“Sh*t Happens” in various religions:
Taoism: Sh*t happens.
Confucianism: Confucius says: “Sh*t happens”.
Buddhism: If sh*t happens, it isn’t really sh*t.
Hinduism: This sh*t has happened before.
Protestantism: If sh*t happens, it happens to someone else.
Catholicism: If sh*t happens, you deserve it.
Judaism: Why does sh*t always happen to us?
Agnosticism: What is this sh*t?
Atheism: I don’t believe this sh*t.
Rastafarianism: Let’s smoke this sh*t.

Samuel Kamens

** Sonnet of the Seven Creeds
“Be pure,” said Zoroaster, “Pure as fire,”
“Be just,” said Jahveh, “Just as him that speaks,”
“Be wise,” said Buddha, “Wiser than desire,”
“Be beautiful,” said Orpheus to his Greeks.
“Be loving,” said the founder of our creed,
“Be true,” commanded the Osirian three,
“Be one with me,” said Brahma, “ and indeed
Thou shalt be one with all, and all with thee.”
Lo, as the seven colored rays unite
To form one ray of pure and perfect light,
So in the mystic sunlight of the soul
The seven creeds become the perfect whole:

Pure, just and wise, and beautiful and kind.

True, and united in the Cosmic Mind. -Anonymous
Chapter 7. Have I got a deal for you!

When we concern ourselves with the study of Asian religions in world history, we are into a completely new ball game from what we know of European and North American beliefs.

What we believe to be the world’s oldest major religion, Hinduism, begins with the Vedic scriptures called the “Forest Books” (Aranyakas).

Sages, who naturally lived in the forest, wrote these texts.

The culture of the forest was the fuel that started the culture of India some ten to twenty thousand years ago. This philosophy eventually spread to the developing urban areas and flourished in the vast river plains and adjacent regions of what are now Pakistan and Western India.

The earliest villages, and then cities, became part of an extensive urban culture that had its beginnings about 5000 B.C.E. (you will notice that this was about the same time as our first religions claimed God created the world) and reached its height between 2600 to 1900 BCE.

This “Harappan” or “Indus Valley” civilization developed at about the same time as the early City-States of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The ruling communities of the area were located at the major crossroads of trade routes and in rich agricultural regions. They appear to have controlled a vast area of some half a million square kilometers, which is an area twice as large as that of the Mesopotamian or Egyptian cultures.

One of the main misconceptions of this early period is the notion of the so-called “Aryan or Hittite” invasions destroying the Indus cities and establishing a very new culture and language on the sub-continent.

In fact, these “outsiders” were very nicely integrated into the Harappan culture.

There was a fusion of ideas and beliefs that not only strengthened local rituals, but also helped them to flourish and grow through the years.

The Aryans themselves were part of a great migratory movement of people from the Russian steppes and the land between the Black and Caspian Sea.

They were the descendants of a still earlier people who had lived in caves in the Dorgeone region of central France many thousands of years before that and had spread to the British Isles on the west, to the Bay of Bengal in the east.
They also went to the Scandinavian countries in the north where they then moved out again ahead of the advancing white wall of the last great ice age to the warmer Mediterranean climates in the south.

Although these Indo-European people possessed many common cultural traits found in Europe and the West, they had closer similarities to the culture of Persia and points East.

They were a branch of the many migrations that came and went and eventually crossed over the Khyber Pass and entered the land of India.

Without the aid of written texts, it is difficult to reconstruct the very early Indus religion, but it is known they made clay figurines of animals that were probably brought with them from their previous homes in France (Dorgeone region) and used in special rituals.

The Indus people had quite elaborate ceremonies for the dearly departed and they buried their dead in wooden coffins, along with pottery vessels filled with food for the afterlife.

Most individuals were also buried with some simple ornaments such as copper bangles and agate beads. It is interesting to note that elaborate ornaments of gold, silver, and precious stones were never included in the burials.

These people were obviously practical in their outlook and anything of intrinsic values was “inherited” by living relatives. It should also be noted that no “Royal” burials were ever performed. Everyone was treated equally in death.

Animal sacrifice was a common practice amongst the Indus people from the earliest of times. When we talk about animal sacrifice in its simplest form, we have to remember that humans were, and are, meat-eaters.

Aside from the rise of Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century B.C.E., humans were for the most part carnivorous.

If we are to eat animals, they also have to be killed, this is fact.

When we talk of the ancient Romans, or Aryans of India, or Jews, or any other religious group offering a sacrifice to the gods, this is only another way of saying; “They threw a big feast for the people!”

That a wide variety of spiritual meanings was attached to animal sacrifice in olden days is evident from the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.
These various rites are seen as different facets of the death of Christ, and are now expressed in the modern Communion Service.

In the old days, the head of the household, or the tribe, usually conducted the sacrificial worship.

In more settled conditions, and with the passage of time, the advent of a regular priesthood was inevitable, especially with the growth of villages and the increasing pomp and circumstance of the local shaman or “witch doctor.”

This lead to the development of the first priests who became full-time attendants in the service of God, and they were supported by the tithes of the other people and tribes.

After all, there was always a need for appeasement of the gods when a sin was committed, or a flagrant breaking of the moral order or any other transgression of village and family life was in evidence.

That was the time to call in the local priest and set things right again.

A good job if you could get it, especially since it was often hereditary. Your kids would then have job security and tenure as well!

(The Prophets of old had to constantly fight priestly rapacity and misconceptions of the people in general. Where there were no Prophets, the priesthood, and temple worship in general, always degenerated into the ugliness of “priest-craft.”)

This was very evident even in this “first of the major religions” with the history of the Brahmin Priesthood of India.

They pretty well controlled things and could set the tone and direction of their “religion” to whatever was most opportune at the time. They were also the ones who composed the hymns and chants.

The earliest group of Vedic hymns, called the Rig-Veda, (Verse wisdom) was first collected in oral form as the Aryan tribes were migrating to India about 2000-1500 B.C.E.

This collection of songs must have been the work of the first regular priests, because at that time a sacrifice could still be offered by anyone.

The priesthood was by necessity in these early stages, only a part-time position, but as villages and then towns proliferated, the priests had what could be called a “captive” audience and they began to exert more influence.
They suggested that unless the correct sacrifices were offered, the gods would be displeased and therefore only the highly trained priests could learn and perform the rituals and prayers that were necessary.

This is where specialization began, and a school of “singing” priests arose who chanted the special hymns for each sacrificial occasion. Their collections of 1,225 hymns, (with the exception of about 75) were all from the Rig Veda.

Then a class of priests who did the actual offering of sacrifice produced a third book called the Yajur Veda. Their collections were mainly ritualistic formulas muttered in low voices during the various stage of the sacrifice.

By about 900 B.C.E., there were at least three groups of priest, each with their own special duties and training schools. The priests were the ones who had the leisure time to study and teach, and do not forget, with knowledge comes power!

It was only natural that the priestly schools should produce notes and commentaries on their duties and this became known as the Brahmans, which included explanation of the hymns, the rituals of sacrifice, and the duties of the priests, etc.

The study of this material produced an elaborate scholasticism, and was referred to as the first “University.”

By 800 to 700, B.C.E. there developed a hereditary priesthood in charge of all sacrificial duties. *(For which they were paid quite well by the people)*

The Brahmins were now suggesting that by giving the right sacrifices, which they alone could offer, they could procure the favor of the gods. This put them in charge of various temporal blessings and a good place in heaven too!

Thus, gods, men, and governments were all very quickly under priestly control!

Although there was a definite “Priesthood,” Hinduism as such, does not have any one founder, or any single doctrine to which controversies can be refereed to for resolution.

There is also no definite time when it could be said to have begun.

It also did not require its adherents to blindly accept any one creed, so it could be refereed to as cultural, not creedal.

However, it was due to the influence of the priesthood (and their various interpretations of the faith,) that Hinduism was marked.

It’s also an attitude that seemed to envelope religious and cultural perspectives of a great many different points of view.
Hinduism is perhaps the only religious tradition that is so diverse in its theoretical premises and practical expressions that it is more like a compilation of religions.

It could be said that Hinduism can never be pinned down into monism, monotheism, polytheism, or pantheism, --- for all these systems are reflected.

The gods and goddesses of Hinduism amount to many thousands, all representing the many facets of the one supreme ruler “The Brahman.”

BUT! Hinduism, like Christianity, is composed of a Trinity. “The Brahman” is in fact made up of Brahma - the Creator, who continues to create new realities. Vishnu - the Preserver, who preserves these new creations, and Shiva - the Destroyer, compassionate, erotic, and at times, destructive.

(Especially the erotic part – remember, they invented the Karma-Sutra!)

It is difficult to assign any specific dogmatic orthodoxy to Hinduism since one of the oldest aspects of Hinduism is as much social as it is religious.

By this, we mean the practice of the caste system.

According to Hindu teaching, especially from the Bhagavad-Gita, (song of the blessed one!) each of the four castes or social classes (as well as their sub-castes and the untouchables) are paramount to maintaining order in society.

They serve as a guide to how adherents are progressing in their search for release from the “Cycle of Life.”

A persons “Karma” (every action, thought, or decision one makes has consequences-good or bad) determines how he or she will progress in the search for reincarnation into a higher caste.

Of course, bad “Karma” through improper thinking or actions, can also lead to the next life being of a much lower caste or even reverting to an animal existence!

The ultimate aim of these re-births is to reach a state of grace so high that a person “eats the fruits of his deeds,” and is released from the cycle of reincarnation and pain to a state of “nothingness” or “Nirvana.”

The basic tenet of Hinduism is the oneness of all things.

There is only one ultimate reality - Brahman.

Brahman is pure, unchanging, eternal and impersonal. From Brahman comes “Maya.” (Which has connotations of illusion and deception?)

Maya is the reality of the dream world, which means this existence is actually insubstantial and transitory.
This implies that man’s existence is just an illusion and the only worthwhile objective that a person can have is to escape from the perception of existence and be swallowed up in the “Oneness of Brahman,” just as the river returns to the sea!

Whether this is accomplished through the practice of yogic meditation and/or the observance of “right” and “wrong” conduct, the result is a means of finding God within ourselves.

All ethics are a way of finding the “Right” action, which brings us nearer to the knowledge of God, while “Wrong” action leads us away from that knowledge.

For the same reason, in Christianity, our path to a state of grace leads us “inward.” Expressing ourselves “outwardly” to bring others around to our way of thinking leads away from a state of grace.

Our ideas of “Good” (right or inward) and “Evil” (wrong or away) are therefore relative values that must not be used as an absolute standard by which we judge others.

Each of us has an individual problem and an individual path of development. In the end, the goal is the same for all!

Here we come to one of the greatest differences in the philosophy of two major world religions.

For better or worse, Christianity can be summarized by saying that it affirms life, while Hinduism denies it!

Christianity holds out the hope of survival of the individual after death, where in Hinduism the goal is to escape from the “wheel of existence,” and the final loss of the “illusion” of personal identity!

**”I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying.” - Woody Allen (1935-)**

The “people of the book” (Christians, Jews, and Muslims) reach out in compassion to the poor and hungry, and say they are special in the eyes of God.

Hinduism teaches that they are merely getting their just desserts!

Although it might seem harsh by western eyes, this doctrine provides Hinduism with a ready explanation for all inequality and human suffering.

It enables devout upper-class Hindus to shrug off the misery of the Indian masses, who because of the caste system, are pre-destined to a certain kind of work, how much education they will get, where they will live, and how far they can expect to go in life.
Zoroastrianism

There has been a lot of debate about the origin of what we could call modern day Western Religion, as compared to early Hindu, pagan and tribal sects.

It is believed the concept of Monotheism, as it is practiced now, began in ancient Sumeria with the teachings of Zarathustra.

Although personally never claiming to be a prophet and only being elevated to that position many years later by his followers, his teachings were finally written down (650-700 B.C.E.) and gained wide acceptance about a thousand years after his death.

They not only had a profound influence on religion in general, but also are actually considered by some to be the foundation for Judaism, and then by default, Christianity and Islam.

** The historical Zarathustra, by some accounts, lived somewhere between 1500-2000 B.C.E., although it could even have been as late as about 800-600 B.C.E., since this is when his religion became mainstream and popular amongst the masses.

His followers, of course, attribute many wonders and miracles to him that never really happened and also claim he lived about 10,000 years ago (8000 BCE) right after the end of the last ice age.

Zarathustra, after much debate and conjecture about the duality of good and evil finally decided that there was only one God, “Ahzura Mazda” and that life in the physical world was a battle between good and evil.

As per a man’s actions, he would either cross the “sword bridge” after death, and reach Heaven, or fall and go to the abode of evil.

In the “final days,” there would be a battle between good and evil.

Evil would be vanquished and the world would be purified by a bath of fire. God would then judge the world, resurrect the dead, and His kingdom would be established on earth. (Sound Familiar?)

Zarathustra was convinced that all events of the world are based on cause and effect. He therefore based his teachings on three principles:

“Good reflection.”

“Good Word.”

“Good Deed.”
The creed recognized that all motives of human beings are based on action and reaction. So in the realm of human intercourse, when people act favorably, they receive a favorable reaction. (*As in today’s Modern Age “Law of Attraction.”*)

Zarathustra never assumed prophet-hood. He never claimed to be associated with God, and never ordered his followers to perform certain rituals. Rather, he urged them to try to know God and Heaven and adopt a good manner.

Zarathustra, during his lifetime, was never officially a prophet, nor can we call his spiritual path an actual “religion.”

He was a thoughtful man who recognized God because of his wisdom and never said he had been conscripted or chosen to bring any special message from God to humanity.

Zarathustra never imagined praising a God who is bribed by worship, and then rewards his worshiper with a promise of paradise.

God, to him, was not a deal maker. He was neither a buyer nor a seller, and did not need be flattered.

**“You cannot petition the Lord with prayer!” - Jim Morrison - The Doors**

The God of Zarathustra was the initiator of justice, kindness, and truthfulness and guided his flock to the same principles.

Zarathustra based his philosophy on good reflection, good word, and good deed.

Everyone had the liberty to choose the right way. (Free will!)

According to tradition, Zoroastrianism had only one symbol of note. “Faravahar” is the human spirit that existed before our birth and will continue to exist after our death.

Faravahar should not be confused or replaced with God, but rather looked upon as our soul!

Zarathustra also never believed in anthropomorphism of any feature of God. In no way was there any mention of the “Face of God,” or any reference to a Divine figure in a material form.

Zarathustra was reputed to have said, “God, when I was looking for you, I recognized that you are the starter and the end of everything. You are the source of wisdom and reflection. You are the creator of truthfulness and purity, and the judge for the behavior of all human beings.”

Zarathustra was against bartering to gaining power through the name of God. In other words, he did not teach any form of ritualized religion.
He was also against the needless sacrificing of animals, which was a common practice and lucrative source of income for religious leaders of that day.

Zarathustra’s philosophy frequently indicated that the three principles of good reflection, good words and good deeds lead to human enlightenment.

Therefore, there was no need for religious leaders to assume the role of mediators between God and his people.

(The priesthood did not exist.)

Although Alexander the Great destroyed most of the teachings of Zoroastrian concepts and ideals, surprisingly, many survived down through the years to become Christian, Judaic, and Islamic dogma.

** Concepts such as heaven and hell, good and evil, the coming of the Savior, born of a virgin, the end-time purge of the world by fire, followed by the resurrection of the dead, and the final battle between good and evil.

These beliefs filtered down to Judaism and from there they came to Christianity and finally Islam.

There are scholars who consider Zoroastrianism to be the mother religion of all the present day Western World’s faiths.

It is probable that the Jews were influenced by the Zoroastrian faith in those days - and originally took on the concepts of heaven and hell, God’s evil adversary Satan, the resurrection and the final purification of the world, the virgin birth, any many others, and adapted them as their own.

There are other similarities too. Certain purification observances such as the impurity of menstruation etc. are found in our modern faiths.

** Indeed, the very idea of the “Messiah” could well be Zoroastrian in origin.

Zarathustra’s religion was the prominent one in Iran until the conquest by Arabs around 1300 years ago.

To preserve the Zoroastrian faith, a band of Zarathushtrians sailed to India about 1300 years ago and settled in the now familiar Indus Valley where they were, and are now, called the Parsees (from “Pars” i.e. Iran).

Although one of the oldest of religions, Zoroastrians have been decimated over the centuries, first by Alexander the Great, and then by everybody else who happened to come along.

At last count, the total world population of the followers of Zarathustra numbered around 150,000.
**Buddhism:**

**Q:** What did a Buddhist say to the hot dog vendor?
A: “Make me one with everything.”

*The vendor prepares the hot dog and gives it to the monk.*
*The monk pays him and asks for the change.*
*The hot dog vendor says, “Change comes from within.” :-)*

**“Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology, and covers both the natural and spiritual.”**

“It is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity!” - Albert Einstein

Although Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, it is difficult to imagine a religion that would be much closer in spirit (no pun intended!) to the views of an agnostic or atheist. Nonetheless, a spiritual leader who now has some 350 million adherents throughout the world started it.

The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, founded it in Northern India.

He was born in what is now Nepal in 563 B.C.E. Although leading a privileged life that was pre-determined for him, he followed the practice of the time and left his wife and children to lead the life of an ascetic.

First, he studied Brahmanism, but rejected its tenets.

He did acknowledge that the basis of Hinduism was correct in declaring that “suffering” was the basis for all of humanities ills and foibles.

*This concept of suffering will be addressed in detail later on in the book, along with its parallels to other religions, and theologies.*

Through his insights, Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment in 535 B.C.E. and assumed the title Buddha.

Siddhartha Gautama’s story is one of rejection and then acceptance.

He became disillusioned with Hindu teachings concerning creation and the self, but remained close to Hinduism in his acceptance of the belief that existence continues through many lives and controlled by the laws of Karma.

He rejected useless speculations that go beyond human experience, such as creation, God and the nature of a future life.
He urged a pattern of conduct and meditation leading to enlightenment and freedom from sorrow.

His belief was that man has no soul but is only a combination of elements controlled by Karma!

He taught that when man is free from the illusory attachment to this world he becomes free from rebirth and attains “Nirvana” or nothingness.

What happens then is beyond our powers to know so it is not worth idle speculation.

*”All that we are - is the result of what we have thought.”—Buddha*

Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism is simpler and more direct in its approach to the correct way to lead your life.

It begins with the “Eightfold Path” which is a combination of three qualities that lead to eight courses of action in the quest for “Nirvana.”

** The first is “Wisdom” that is achieved through the right view and right thought.
** The next is “Morality” which is practiced by right speech, right action and right livelihood.
** Finally there is “Meditation.” It depends on right effort, right mindfulness and right contemplation.

According to the Buddha’s way, our lives of transience, sorrow and selfishness can be helped by the “Four Boundless States” of loving kindness, compassion, The five hindrances to a life well lived almost sound like the “seven deadly sins” of the West.

They are:

1- Aversion and ill will

2- Sloth and torpor

3- Restlessness and worry

4- Skeptical pride.

5- Sensuous lust
When this is followed with devotion and dedication, we achieve a state of grace, which we call the “Ten Perfection’s,” as opposed to the “Ten Fetters.”

“Ten Perfection’s” VS. “Ten Fetters to Existence”

1. Generosity
   Self-delusion
2. Morality
   Doubt
3. Renunciation
   Clinging to Ritual
4. Wisdom
   Sensuous Lust
5. Energy
   Ill Will
6. Patience
   Greed-for material existence
7. Truthfulness
   Greed-for immaterial existence
8. Resolution
   Conceit
9. Loving-Kindness
   Restlessness
10. Equanimity
    Ignorance

Just as in Zen Buddhism, when all these practices are followed the enlightenment that comes might not do much for the next life but it sure will make the adherent grounded and stable in this existence.

Probably one of the best examples of this way of life is the serenity and peace that surrounds the “Dali Lama” of Tibet.

**A few brief notes on Sikhism, Taoism, and Confucianism:**

**Historians and specialist in Eastern religions believe Sikhism is a syncretistic religion, taking its roots from not only Hinduism, but also the Sufi movement of Islam.**
The Sikh Holy Texts consist of hymns and writings by the 10 Gurus (all regarded as re-incarnations of the first, Guru Nanak) attempting to build a close, loving relationship with God, who is a single formless God with many names. This belief is similar to the followers of Islam who also believe in a single God with 99 names, and only He can be worshipped. They follow the Hindu religion in the belief of re-incarnation but at the same time reject the “caste system” and regard everyone as having equal status. Devout Sikhs, aside from not cutting their hair and wearing it rolled up and covered on their head, wear the ceremonial dagger called the “Kirpan.”

**Back around 500 BCE the Chinese philosopher “Lao-Tzu” wrote the “Tao Te Ching” (or “The Way and its Power” / I-Ching) and laid the groundwork for Taoism in the Far East.**

This is a philosophy and religion that must have inspired filmmaker George Lucas since “The Way” is the natural order of the universe, or the “Force” that flows through all living things.

*Duct Tape: It’s like the force, one side is dark, the other light, but together, they bind the universe. - Lao-Red Green*

“The Tao” is less a Deity than a transcendent reality however, since Taoists seek equilibrium above all else.

Many traditional practices such as acupuncture and “Chinese Medicine” are founded on this principal.

It is no wonder the Tao symbol is the Yin/Yang circle divided into equal areas of light and darkness, symbolizing equilibrium and the harmony of opposites.

**Although Confucianism is more of a philosophy than a religion, to many people, Confucius (or Kung-fu-tzu) is no more than a one-line joke.**

Few have heard or read any of his teachings yet the truth and importance of his words still resonate today. Confucius’ teachings developed according to times that are common to us all. According to his writings, the days in which he lived were a time of moral chaos in which common values were widely rejected or simply disregarded. Crime was on the rise, the gulf between rich and poor was broad and growing. Government was corrupt and distrusted by the people and a general feeling of apathy and suspicion pervaded society.
Confucius can perhaps best be termed the greatest “poet” of all time since his sayings and gems of wisdom not only caught on, but have been passed on to us over these thousands of years!

**Baha’i**

Our newest, and by far the most progressive of the major world religions, started in Persia/Iran when Siyyid Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850 C.E.) assumed the title Bab, which means the Gate.

In May 1844, he announced the “Declaration of the Bab.” He explained that the purpose of his mission was to herald the arrival of “One greater than himself,” who would fulfill the prophetic expectations of all the great religions.

This date is regarded as the founding of the Baha’i Faith. His followers became known as Babis and right from the start, 20,000 were martyred for their beliefs.

His movement caused religious unrest and led to his execution in 1850 by order of the Shah’s chief minister and at the instigation of Muslim clerics.

In 1863, one of the Bab’s followers, Mirza Husayn-‘Ali-i-Nuri (1817-1892), a prominent follower of the Bab to whom he had given several indications of his future station, confided to some of his followers that he was the manifestation predicted.

In April 1863, he began proclaiming his station openly and publicly to the world at large. He assumed title became Baha’u’llah by which he was generally known.

Baha’i beliefs promoted major social changes when originated in the 19th century. They supported gender and race equality, world government, freedom of expression and assembly and world peace. In many ways, they were a century of more ahead of many other faiths and followers are heavily involved in promoting theses concepts today.

In addition, unlike many other religions, Baha’i views scientific inquiry as essential to expand human knowledge and deepen their member’s faith. They do feel that science needs to be guided by spiritual principles so that its applications are beneficial to all of humanity.

The Baha’i teachings promote the elimination of all forms of prejudice and uphold equal dignity and respect for all peoples. This, regardless of their racial, religious or national background.

It advocates the equality of men and women, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth and economic justice for all peoples. Universal education and the dignity of the individual are also central Baha’i principals.
Chapter 8. Let My People Go!

Of all the civilizations archaeologists have studied there seems to be a special interest in the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians.

This is probably because Babylon and Assyroia had a close connection with the world that was depicted in the Old Testament of the Bible.

A great part of archaeology revolves around attempts by people to find records of this culture that lend support to their faith in the Bible.

So much so, that with the beginning of a critical study of the Bible, questions were posed as to the accuracy of many of the passages that had been considered historical fact instead of the metaphorical stories they were intended to be.

(See forward: by Dr. Burton L. Mack)

It was this desire to find corroboration of the Biblical narrative that first started scholars on their search throughout the Babylonian and Assyrian area of the Middle East.

It was known from the Old Testament that there was a close relationship between the civilizations of the Hebrew and the Babylonian-Assyrian people.

Abraham himself had become a migrant to the west when he left the Babylonian city of Ur after the Assyrians and Babylonians became a political threat to the independence of the Hebrew people.

The ten northern tribes of the Hebrews were eventually dispersed by the Assyrians, while a small group continued in Babylonian captivity.

With the superior force of their enemies, the Hebrews were to begin their Exile, much as they had endured the Exodus about 600 years before.

The Babylonians, much like the Assyrians and the Egyptians had many writings that were in the nature of scripture but they never set aside a specific book that was described as having Divine origin.

It is without doubt that there was much borrowing between the Hebrews and Babylonians though, and from this “borrowing,” we have a remarkable similarity between Babylonian and Egyptian stories.

1. The creation and flood story
2. Hymns and prayers
3. Ritual texts
4. Their legal code and -
5. Omens, all of which find some correspondence in the Bible.
**Moses came down from the mountain carrying two stone tablets. Today he would have gotten the information over the Internet and on a CD disc! -A.W. J.**

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Chaldeans and the Babylonian empire, started to deport most of the prominent citizens of Judah about 597 B.C.E., and by 586, B.C.E. Judah ceased to be an independent kingdom.

Although most of the professionals, priests, artisans and the wealthy were deported, the “people of the land” were allowed to stay and then gathered in a single place by Nebuchadnezzar.

These people called themselves the “Gola.” (Exiles) They forged a new national identity and a new religion that was a reworking of the cult of Yahweh.

These “exiles” lived in a time of despair and loneliness that was brought about by the realization that the ‘Exile’ itself was unexplainable.

Hebrew history had been built on the promise of Yahweh (God) protecting them and using them for his purposes throughout human history.

This defeat and the loss of land promised to them by Yahweh implied that their faith in him was somehow misplaced.

This crisis, when their view of reality and the fact of reality did not match, resulted in a most profound despair.

It eventually led to a reworking of the Hebrew “world-view” that had existed until then.

Biblical texts such as Lamentations, Job, and many of the Psalms were written at this time.

Job in particular, an upright deserving man, is made to suffer the worst series of calamities possible.

When he finally despairs and states that there is no cosmic justice, the only answer he receives is that humans should not question God’s will!

Out of shear necessity, the Jews of Babylon had to re-make themselves.

They grew to blame the disaster of the Exile on their own impurity and lack of direction in following the word of Yahweh.

*They had betrayed God and allowed their laws and practices to become corrupt.*

Their exile was the final proof of God’s displeasure.

It was during this period that the direction and emphasis of the Jewish faith changed from a religion of judgment to a theology of salvation.
In texts such as Isaiah and Ezekiel there was talk of a purified and renewed faith where the Israelites would be gathered together in a purified religion and just society.

They talked about the re-establishment of a Davidic kingdom.

It was also during this period of resurgence in Jewish tradition that the Torah started to take its final shape and became the central text of the Jewish faith, helped along by “Cyrus the Persian.”

When “Cyrus the Great” conquered Mesopotamia around 535 BCE, he set in motion a series of events that was to shape the Jewish people and faith for all time!

The Persian people before that time (1000-800 B.C.E.) were a rag-tag group of tribes living north of Mesopotamia and part of the widespread group of Indo-European families.

The Mesopotamians had considered them no better than animals and they were largely ignored.

All this changed about 750 BCE when the followers of the “prophet” Zarathustra, already well entrenched in other areas of the Middle East, came to the fore in this area as well.

They spread their religion of Zoroastrianism which stated that Cosmic history was simply the epic battle between the two Divine forces of good and evil.

At the end time, a climactic battle would decide, once and for all, which of the two forces would dominate the universe.

Human beings were part of this struggle, as well as all the gods and religions.

Cyrus the Great was a follower of Zarathustra and set out to conquer not only the Middle East, but also the entire world.

He did this out of a wish to guarantee his territorial safety by conquering potential enemies, but he also wanted the whole world united for religious reasons.

Cyrus believed that the final battle between good and evil (The End Time) was fast approaching and the legions of humanity had to be brought to the side of the good forces.

He sought to conquer the entire known world, much like Alexander the Great did some few hundred years later.

Cyrus was the greatest conqueror the world had ever seen up to that point and his empire reached a sized never before imagined by anyone.
He was wondering about the circumstances for the Armageddon to come and believed that the Hebrew God “Yahweh” was aligned on the side of good and visited him one night in a vision.

In this vision he was commanded to re-establish Yahweh worship in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple there.

After the temple was rebuilt, Cyrus ordered the Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and worship Yahweh for the forgiveness of their sins.

At the same time during this Exile, the Jews had set about “purifying” their religion and were attempting to return to the laws and cultic practices of their Mosaic origins.

This newfound concern with cultic purity and the Mosaic laws, combined with the re-establishment of Judah as a theological state, produced a totally different society from what had gone on before.

The Jews had adapted many things from the Persians and included these elements into their religion as well. This attempt to purify their faith resulted in a belief in a dualistic universe.

In early history everything happened from two forces, Yahweh and human will.

Now, in an effort to make sense of the Exile, the Hebrews adapted the Persian idea that the universe is composed of two opposite forces, one good, and the other evil!

This development closely followed the Zoroastrian concept of duality, which was now the foundation of their faith. Therefore, after the Babylonian exile, the Hebrews talk of an evil force opposed to God, which became the “Devil” in Christianity.

Before the Exile, the Hebrews believed that the soul of a person lived on for a short time before fading completely from existence, thus making it a this-world religion.

The Persians, meanwhile, believed the souls of good people would re-unite with the forces of good in eternal bliss and the souls of evil people would reunite with the forces of darkness until the final defeat of Evil.

This view of the afterlife that was adapted by the Hebrews explained all the suffering of this life, such as the Exile, and made it apparent that cosmic justice was apparent only after one’s death rather than during their lifetime.

_This laid the foundation of the Judaism we have today!_
Chapter 9. ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

(With special thanks to James Breech and Burton L. Mack.)

**“So many gods, so many creeds;
So many paths that wind and wind,
While just the art of being kind
Is all the sad world needs.”—Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919)

We have to keep in mind, and never lose sight of the fact that the historical “Jesus” was culturally a product of the ancient Near East, and in an area under Roman sovereignty.

“Christ” was a product of the people and times that came after him, most notably Pauline thought, as well as a Greek influence.

The parables and stories of the historical Jesus were the product of a first century Jewish “rabbi-sage-cynic” from Galilee who had an enormous influence on a handful of people around him.

We will refer to the historical figure as “Jesus” from now on, and the person of mythology as being the “Christ” of our modern religion.

Christianity, in its simplest terms, is the result of previous centuries of Jewish and Greek myth and conjecture.

It’s all about the coming of a “Messiah,” and revolves around the Resurrection.

The teachings of Jesus were altered to fit the legend but definitely took a secondary role.

We all know that the gospels were composed many years after the death of not only Jesus, but even of most of the people who knew him directly.

Not only were these Gospels displaced in time, but were also displaced culturally, and since Greek speaking Christians composed them, even further meaning was lost in translation from the Aramaic.

There are now two main, and disparate, schools of thought about the origin of Christianity.

The first, and mistaken belief is that Jesus himself, as well as his teachings, was the founder.

The other is that the Christ or “Anointed One” of the Resurrection, (Shaped by Pauline thought) is the bases of this religion.
This may seem to be a small distinction upon first inspection, but in the end a very crucial one.

If it is based on the teachings, and more importantly, the example of Jesus, then his words take on enormous significance.

If, on the other hand, the “Resurrection” and “Pauline thought” is taken as the bases for Christianity, then it is based on the ideas and beliefs of the people who came after him!

**The Problem with the Historical Jesus** (as postulated by Dr. Burton Mack.)

1. The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the gospel portraits of him.

2. Jesus taught his disciples orally. Jesus wrote nothing.

3. Traditions about Jesus were circulated by word of mouth for many years after Jesus' death. Oral tradition is fluid.

4. The oral mentality remembers, not the precise words, but the core of what was said.

5. Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic; the gospels were written in Greek.

6. Jesus was itinerant: he moved around and adapted his sayings and parables to the occasion. Jesus' disciples were also oral and itinerant: they moved around and revised his sayings and parables as the situation demanded.

7. The oral tradition exhibits little interest in biographical data about Jesus.

**Chronology**

1. At least two decades separate the death of Jesus from the first written records.

2. Forty years elapsed after the death of Jesus before the first canonical gospel was composed.

3. Mark was the first of the canonical gospels to be written. (Mark was not an eyewitness of the events he reports.)

5. Between them Matthew and Luke incorporate nearly all of Mark into their gospels, often almost word for word, and they also make use of a sayings gospel, known as Q, often almost word-for-word. (Q is a collection of sayings without a narrative framework.)

**Gospel of Thomas**

1. The Gospel of Thomas has provided a new and important source for the Jesus tradition. It consists of 114 sayings without a narrative framework.

2. Thomas represents an earlier stage of the tradition than do the canonical gospels and represents an independent witness to the Jesus tradition.

**Age of the written gospels:** *(Now agreed upon most scholars!)*

1. Q and Thomas were composed during the period 50-60 C.E.

2. Mark was written about 70 C.E.

3. Matthew was composed about 85 C.E.

4. Luke-Acts was created around 90 C.E.

5. The signs gospel embedded in the Gospel of John was composed during the period 60-80 C.E.

6. The first edition of John appeared between 80 and 100 C.E.

**Independent and derivative gospels:**

1. The major independent sources of information about Jesus are Q, Thomas, Mark, and the signs gospel embedded in the Gospel of John. The earliest sources are “Q” and Thomas.

**Assessment of written sources:**

1. Only a small portion of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels was actually spoken by him.

2. The greater part of the sayings tradition was created or borrowed from common lore by the transmitters of the oral tradition and the authors of the gospels.
Surviving copies of the gospels:

1. The original manuscripts of the gospels have disappeared.
2. The earliest small surviving fragments of any gospels date from about 125 C.E.
3. The earliest major surviving fragments of the gospels date from about 200 C.E.
4. The earliest complete copy of the gospels dates from about 300 C.E.
5. Prior to 1454 C.E. no two surviving copies of the same gospel are exactly alike.
6. In the copying process, copies of the gospels were "improved" and "corrupted."

Research Methods: Revolt against dogma:

1. The same methods of study should be applied to the Bible that are used in the study of other ancient texts.
2. Jesus should be studied like other historical persons.
3. The Bible should be studied without being bound to theological claims made by the church, after all, Jesus was not a Christian. He was a Jew.

Oral Evidence

1. In the oral transmission of Jesus' words, his disciples remembered only the core or gist of his sayings and parables, not his precise words.
2. The bedrock of the sayings tradition is made up of single aphorisms and parables that once circulated independently.
3. The simpler forms of saying and parables are more likely to be original with Jesus. More complicated forms may mask earlier and simpler forms.
4. Words are frequently borrowed from the fund of common lore or from the Old Testament and put on the lips of Jesus.

Burton L Mack:
There has been much debate on why there are no early records of the sayings of Jesus.

It would be natural to assume that they would be preserved and handed down to us, and this would normally be the case, but remember the early Christians felt no need for either a biography of Jesus or a collection of his sayings.

They believed that the “Christ” event in history was the immediate prelude to the end of the world and final judgment of humankind.

Paul, in his epistles, wrote that the present generation, his own, would see the apocalypse.

*In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus of Nazareth also claimed that the people around him would still be alive for the “Last Days.”*

Anticipating the immediate end of the world at any moment, the early Christians felt no obligation to record the life or sayings of Jesus.

There was, after all, no future anticipated for this material.

These early Christians were more concerned with preparing themselves for the expected apocalypse and for spreading the truth of Christianity to as many people as possible before the end of history.

As a result, the life and sayings of Jesus circulated in an oral form through Christian teachers and public speakers.

This oral material included stories and sayings attributed to Jesus, but they did not exist in any systematic, organized, or universal form.

Teachers and speakers alike would use these sayings and stories to emphasize the particular occasion or subject. In other words, a public speaker would use a saying attributed to Jesus as an occasion to lecture or discuss some aspect of Christianity or morality with his audience. What the speaker talked about largely determined what the speaker chose to remember about the life and sayings of Jesus.

The very first thing that needed to be accounted for was the death and resurrection of Jesus. The history of Jesus’ death (The Passion) and the resurrection are probably the oldest of the stories surrounding Jesus.

The early Christians, however, needed more than the Passion and the Resurrection to legitimize Christ as having Divine status.
Therefore, the early Hebrew teachers of Christianity turned to the prophetic and messianic tradition of Judaism and began to develop proofs of Christ’s divinity by aligning events in Jesus’ life with older prophecies.

This process also included configuring the humbly born Jesus of Nazareth to a descendant of King David through his father, Joseph, since the messianic prophecies were clear that the Messiah would come from the line of David.

This legitimizing process continued when the religion entered the Greek world.

The Greeks associated divinity with miraculous stories and miraculous birth. From here came the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin……..Even though the virgin birth of Jesus contradicted the placement of Jesus as a descendant of David through Joseph.

We also, dare I say it, have a major problem with the physical resurrection of Jesus. This we will discuss further when we have a look at St. Paul.

The Gospels, in spite of being a “product of their time,” and open to various revisions and alterations during their telling and eventual documentation, still came from a recognizable and firm historical reality.

This was a time of rebellion, political unrest, civil disobedience, and social discontent. It was also a time of religious questioning, and hopes and dreams for the arrival of a new King.

It was a time where the anticipation of the arrival of a new Messiah reaches a fever pitch verging on mass hysteria.

It was a time where the political freedoms of Judea were brutally extinguished by the two wars of A.D. 66-74 and again A.D. 132-135 that led to the destruction of Massada.

The Gospels were the first attempts in early Christianity to come up with a coherent picture of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

*During and after this time there was a wholesale destruction of written records and documents, including, no doubt, the first few gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and even John.*

*The earliest of these documents, Mark, seems to have been actually composed during the revolt of 66-74 or shortly after.*

Although not one of Jesus’ original disciples, Mark (whoever he was) was a disciple of Paul and his Gospel bears an affinity to Pauline thought.

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and shows the greatest familiarity with Jewish life and thought.
The later gospels, however, show increasingly less familiarity with the Jewish context of Jesus’ life and mission until we come to the last gospel whose author is totally uninterested in that context.

All of the authors of the gospels show some unfamiliarity with Palestinian geography which indicates that they were written by non-Palestinians, either Jewish or Greek.

Mark seemed to be a native of Jerusalem, and as Clement of Alexandria stated many years later, the document (as well as Paul’s epistles) was composed in Rome, and addressed to a Greek-Roman Audience.

Judea and Galilee had recently been in open revolt against Rome. Thousands of Jews were being crucified for their rebellion against the state, just as Jesus had.

If Mark wanted his Gospel to survive and impress a Roman Audience, he could not possibly present Jesus as being politically oriented, let alone anti-Roman!

In order to ensure the survival of his message, he would have to exonerate the Romans of all guilt for Jesus’ death and blame the “death of the Messiah” on certain Jews who were against his teachings because Jesus challenged the existing power structure.

This was the start of the myth that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

About a decade later, the authors of Matthew expanded Mark’s gospel, this time also using “Q” and other traditional material.

Five to ten years after this, the author of Luke-Acts (a two-volume work produced by the same person) also published his own revised and expanded version of Mark, again using “Q” and even more traditions about Jesus.

As Christian teachers moved into different communities, it had a couple of results.

First, they would find need for different parts of the tradition for different circumstances.

Second, the long period of oral transmission and the decentralized way in which the stories and sayings were distributed indicate that many of these were distorted, or even made up whole-cloth, to suit particular needs.

This has led some scholars to assert that, even if there was a historical Jesus, his life and teachings are permanently lost to history.

In spite of this, there is a remarkable consistency to the teachings and actions of Jesus of Nazareth. (Except those contained in John)
This lends tremendous credence to the Christian belief that the fact of a historical Jesus is not only proven, but that he is the Jesus of the Gospels.

Therefore, it would be a fair bet to assume that Jesus was an actual historical figure who had great influence on his peers and times. As for his teachings, they have to be looked at not only by what he said, but also by what his actions portrayed.

There is much truth to the saying “Actions speak louder than words!”

The truth probably lies somewhere between the scholarly belief in the unreliability of the gospels and the Christian belief in them as an infallible, literal portrait of Jesus.

Most Christians would say that their religion is based on the teachings of Jesus, in words divinely inspired to men who wrote the New Testament.

But, the first books of the New Testament all came from one man, Paul of Tarsus. The books were later rearranged to take some of the emphasis off Paul, but it is impossible to deny that he was the primary architect of what would become Christianity.

Paul of Tarsus, or Saint Paul, is the person most responsible for the spread of Christianity. Without Paul, Christianity may have well died as an obscure apocalyptic Jewish sect.

Paul wrote up to about half of the New Testament. His influence on the bible is hard to discount.

Many Christians will tell you that his words were God inspired, so it doesn’t matter who actually penned them, or when.

If that is true, it doesn’t explain the myriad contradictions between the ideas of Paul and the rest of the bible.

Paul knew little of the actual life and history of Jesus, and most likely never met him. What mattered to Paul was the resurrected Christ and his soon to be expected return.

Paul was very apocalyptic and believed the return of Christ to be imminent, and preached so.

In his letters and writings that became part of the Christian New Testament, Paul put forth much of the doctrine followed by Christians today.
Paul had very stern things to say when it came to matters of home life, including husband wife relationships and sexuality. He wrote that a woman “may not teach or have authority over a man” although Jesus never said that.

He also railed against homosexuality, another subject not mentioned by Christ.

Paul may well have been the first popular Christian homophobe!

One of the most important differences in the teachings of Paul, as they differed from what other Christians at the time were teaching and learning, was the doctrine of salvation through grace.

Essentially, Paul taught that the lost are forgiven through the grace of God, not through any works.

This has come to be an excuse where individual Christians and Churches separate themselves from the teachings of Jesus.

Instead of living a life that helps others, Christians were able to free themselves from the heavy responsibilities for their brothers that Jesus taught, and instead put all the responsibility on Christ’s resurrection.

But, however you come down on Paul himself and how he related (or manufactured) Christian doctrine, his influence throughout the Mediterranean and the Mid-East cannot be denied.

He dedicated a good portion of his life to traveling throughout the area, converting Gentiles to Christianity.

Churches that he started grew until Christianity overtook the Pagan traditions and eventually led to their demise.

In spite of Christianities triumph over the unbelievers, remember a very important fact!

Jesus never personally claimed to be conducting his ministry to “erase man’s sins,” just as he never claimed to be Divine himself.

Jesus constantly referred to himself as the “son of God,”—just as we all are!
Chapter 10. - Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up!

The early Christian gospels are not historical biographies of Christ and do not really give us insight into the personal life of Jesus.

These gospels proclaim a message about Jesus and express a significance that the early Christians found in Jesus.

They are written in a way that appeals to historical truth, but they are not history in any actual sense.

The gospels expressed what people experienced about Jesus in the context of the first century Near East.

This experience was taken as a “revelation” of the Divine, and they tell us what the early Christians actually believed about Jesus!

Until the recent deciphering of the Gospel of Thomas and the discovery of the “Q” sayings, this knowledge of Christ was the only bases we had to explore the historical Jesus.

As a result, it was very difficult to differentiate between the actual words of Jesus and the words his followers (Christians) attribute to him.

It must be noted that “Q” (German for Quelle, or source) has only recently been deciphered from the first three gospels by comparing them side by side.

In this comparison, there were many divergent views and stories, but scholars also found a commonality within them that made no mention of the miracles of Christ.

Rather they pointed to the stripped down sayings and parables that were probably the “authentic words of Jesus.”

Since the first gospel Mark, was not written until thirty-five or forty years or so after the death of Jesus, (Well over a generation later!) we have to remember that early Christian preachers told stories about Jesus in order to convey the significance they saw in him.

In explaining his parables and stories, it was necessary to paraphrase them and even add to them by way of clarification.

The early Christians did not distinguish between the actual Jesus and the Christ of their religion. They also did not distinguish between the sayings of the earthly Jesus and the explanations and interpretations of Christ’s sayings given by their leaders.
Here we have a case where the actual sayings of the earthly Jesus, (Q) were mixed with Christian interpretations of his words.

Then, various popular sayings and words of wisdom of the time, and the purported words of the risen “Christ” were all collected in a primary work which started out with the synoptic gospels of Mark, then Matthew and Luke.

After these three gospels, things took an even sharper turn and went in the direction of our modern version of Christianity with the apocalyptic works of John.

The authors of the gospels were actually anonymous, (Except for Paul) but for convenience sake, we use the traditional names of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.

The first gospel -Mark, is loosely based on the first three or four decades of oral tradition plus “Q,” and the “Gospel of Thomas,” which was passed down to the author(s)

The first gospels were written largely in an attempt to provide some standard collection of the stories circulating about Jesus.

All, that is, with the exception of the Gospel of John, which is apocalyptic and more concerned with making a theological statement.

These gospels were not immediately recognized as authority.

As late as 96 A.D. Clement, the Bishop of Rome proclaimed the only authoritative texts of Christianity to be the Old Testament and the various sayings attributed to Jesus then in circulation.

The Gospels did not appear in purely Christian writings (as opposed to Jewish writings) until around 135 AD.

The same lack of authoritarian certification can be said of the Gospel of Thomas, which might well be the most informative discovery about Christian origins in modern history.

The Gospel was often mentioned in early Christian literature, but no copy was thought to have survived until the discovery of a Coptic manuscript in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt.

Portions of Greek versions of the Gospel of Thomas were found in Oxyrhynchus Egypt about one hundred years ago and these can be dated to about 140 C.E. or somewhat before.
A complete version in Coptic (the native Egyptian language written in an alphabet derived from the Greek alphabet) as we mentioned, was found in Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945.

That version can be dated to about 340 C.E. This Coptic version was a translation of the Greek version.

Thus most, if not all, of the Gospel of Thomas was written well prior to 140 C.E. Thomas is a pure sayings gospel; that is, it consists only of a collection of the sayings of Jesus without any extended narrative or explanation.

While Thomas is not Q, its discovery proves the theory that such collections existed in the early days of Christianity.

The discovery of Thomas as part of a Gnostic library has led many to believe it a Gnostic creation.

However, very little of it would have been considered unorthodox to the early church. What little questionable material can be found is probably a later addition.

Thomas does represent a Jewish “Wisdom” philosophy that was embraced by Jesus and the Gnostics. “That the kingdom of God is not something we must await for, but is in fact already here, if we can only become spiritual enough to see it.”

One of these documents found at Nag Hammadi begins with a note in the margin, “The Gospel According to Thomas.”

The first sentence of that document says, “These are the secret words which the living Jesus taught and which Judas Thomas Didymos wrote down.” Then they start over 110 sayings, each introduced with “and Jesus said.”

Now this is very reveling since some of those sayings have parallels with the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, -- and some not.

However, we can state that sayings or parables that are repeated two or more times in any of the early Gospels have a much higher chance of being an actual utterance by the historical Jesus.

These sayings may go back to a very early period of Christianity, and some of them may have been added later.

The document itself comes from the fourth century and as with all gospel text, we have to remember that these texts were fluid.

Remember, scribes could add, could leave things out, or could add comments and even their own interpretations.

They not only could, but also did!
We cannot reconstruct with certainty what the Gospel of Thomas looked like around the year 100 or earlier.

It is very likely that it existed at that time or before, and that a good deal of the material that’s now in that manuscript was already in a Greek manuscript that dates back to the first century.

Now what is typical about these sayings is that in each instance, they tell us that if you want to understand what Jesus said, you have to first recognize yourself.

You have to know yourself, know who you are.

It begins with a saying about the Kingdom of God, which is probably one of the most important, and reveling proclamations.

“If you seek the Kingdom of God in the sky then the birds will precede you, and if you seek it in the sea, then the fish will precede you, but the Kingdom is in you, and if you know yourself, then you know the Kingdom of the Father.”

However, if you do not know yourself, you live in poverty, not knowledge! To know yourself is the knowledge of our Divine origin.

“The fact that we have come from the Kingdom of the Father.”

What does it mean really to know oneself?

To know is to have insight into one’s own ultimate Divine identity.

“Know yourself” is a very old Greek maxim... That is, you have to know that your own soul is Divine, and then you know that you are immortal.

Whereas, the body is the mortal part of human existence.

Now this is radicalized in the Gospel of Thomas into saying that everything that is experienced physically and through sense perception, everything in the world that you can perceive in this way is nothing.

It is, at best, chaos and, at worst, it does not even exist in reality.

The only thing that really exists is your Divine spirit or your Divine soul, which is identical in its quality with God.

This, in many ways, exactly reflects the philosophy of the Eastern Religions.
(There is even a lot of conjecture about the lost years of Jesus, between the time when he was in his late teens until he began his ministry at about the age of thirty. There are also unsubstantiated reports of his having visited a monastery in India and studying Eastern Philosophy!)

This leads us to another question: “Does the Gospel of Thomas really reflect the views of Jesus?” ……………..Maybe!

There was once a “Q” gospel and a Mark gospel. These were revised and combined into a Matthew gospel and a Luke gospel. Therefore, four interrelated texts testify to a single view of Jesus.

That in turn leads us to the further question of what is “Q” and what does it have to do with Thomas since none of this material existed in a written, coherent, or universal form for several decades after the death of Jesus.

At some point, scholars believe that a written text of only the sayings and teachings of Jesus was in circulation. This was probably in an effort to standardize the proliferating teachings attributed to Jesus in the oral tradition.

If you realize that Matthew and Luke are revised versions of Mark you will see that an extended set of sayings are in Matthew and Luke that do not occur in Mark.

Both Matthew and Luke, it is generally agreed to in scholarship, took those sayings from a mid-first century document that consisted of a list of Jesus’ sayings. That document, called “Quelle,” has come to be known as Q.

It does not exist any longer, but it can be recovered by analysis of Matthew and Luke. Simply put, Q was the written list of sayings that we find common and not too apocalyptic in Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

In other words, things that have a high probability of being said by the historical Jesus, instead of the apocalyptic sayings of “The Christ” that we find in the Gospel of John.

** At the end of the first century C.E. The “Alexandrian School of Thought,” of which Origin and Clement of Alexandria were part, taught that there were three possible approaches to be taken to the scriptures.

(That there were already discussions of this magnitude and significance tells us a lot of the early Christian movement.) The first approach was the literal translation, the second was symbolic, or allegorical, and the third was spiritual.

1. The first/ literal was described as simplistic and solely for the un-educated.
2. The second/symbolic was the use of parables to convey a deeper meaning.
3. The third/spiritual transcended the mortal plane and bought us closer to God.
Unfortunately at that time, as now, the un-washed masses cried out for a ready-made, simplistic, popular faith. A faith that can best be described as closer to a romance novel than any serious attempt at theology, history and philosophy.

This is also the reason that the “Resurrection” was proclaimed as the basis for Christianity.

This version of the “Faith,” when combined with the Roman gift of organization and brute force, led to the “Christianity” that has been handed down to us.

It seems to be the consensus among New Testament scholars that “Jesus” preached a message that teaches a way of behaving and living that applied to a first century reality.

**However, the words of “Christ” are another matter.**

If the sayings and parables of “Christ” are examined closely with the purpose of separating those words that were actually uttered by “Jesus” from those that were later attributed to him, we see a vast difference in the context, meaning, and purpose between the two.

The sayings of “Christ” display a metaphorical and allegorical context that suggest someone slightly removed from the everyday world.

The biblical words of “Jesus,” however, were indeed a direct reflection of their place and time. (Just as today, we are all products of our own time and age)

The actual sayings of the historical “Jesus,” which upon close examination shows only a handful of thoughts and parables, are so simple and basic, with such underlying truth, that they can be applied to the human condition of any age.

The origin of Thomas is a question hotly debated by scholars. Many scholars say that it was written at about the same time, or even somewhat before, the gospels in the bible.

Their argument is that most of the sayings in Thomas show no signs of having any dependence on, or knowledge of the Biblical gospels and so Thomas’ sayings derive from oral tradition and not from written Biblical texts.

This does not seem to have been possible after the end of the first century. This is when the Biblical texts began to be authoritative.

Other scholars find bits of evidence that indicate Thomas was indeed dependent in part, on Biblical texts. They surmise that the author of Thomas must have edited out almost all indications of the particular styles and ideas of the Biblical authors.

(Those scholars date Thomas in the mid second century C.E. and are suspect.)
However, the choices for a compilation were made at this time, it could well have been that Thomas was unknown to those who made them.

Alternatively, there might have been elements of Thomas that were distasteful to them.

On the other hand, given a preference for narrative biographical gospels, Thomas might have been thought dry and irrelevant.

*We know hardly anything about the process of Canonical gospel choice except that biblical canon is not open for debate, it is a closed entity.*

*A church that adds Thomas to its collection of scriptures would move outside the margins of orthodox Christianity and no well-known denomination has the slightest intention of adding Thomas to its scriptures.*

If you take the set of sayings that are in common in Thomas and either “Q” or the gospels of Mark or Matthew or Luke (no sayings in Thomas are repeated in John) then you have a pared down set that could have come from Jesus himself.

These we will list at the end of the chapter.

The only thing that is known about Thomas for sure is that it will never be included in the Bible.

There is even more conjecture about the lost years of Jesus, between the time when he was in his late teens until he began his ministry at about the age of thirty.

During this time, it must be assumed that he followed the normal Hebrew custom of learning a trade and getting married.

Yes, married! It would have been highly unusual - even suspect, for him to be in that society and not be married!

*Mary Magdalene, by the way, was his wife.*

*She was only drastically reduced in her role much later by the church hierarchy.*

They could not stand the thought of a woman with that much influence on the “Son of God” so they reduced her to the status of a whore!

With all the different views presented in the various Gospels and sayings, we have looked at so far, it makes sense to try to find out how many in total actually came from Jesus.
We do not know exactly how the texts in the bible were chosen but we do know that whatever happened occurred principally in the middle of the second century up until 325 C.E. when the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea was convened by Emperor Constantine.

He established the Nicene Creed as the fundamental statement of Christian doctrine.

In his book “The Silence of Jesus,” James Breech takes an in-depth and impartial view of the words that have been attributed to “Christ,” and compared these with the words that composed the core material said by the historical “Jesus.” (See previous chapter!)

According to Breech, all the thoughts attributed to Jesus, a collection of eight sayings and eleven parables, can definitely be followed back to (Q) and do not have the taint of something said by “Christ.”

Modern day scholars would agree that these sayings, at least, are authentic.

They are remarkably free of the language and concepts of the early Christian movement, and show a purity of thought and concept, that upon close examination, reveals a simplicity and universal message not constrained by time or culture.

To truly understand the sayings that were uttered by the historical Jesus, we must keep an open mind and not make assumptions, or at least keep them to a minimum. To do otherwise would be to fall into the same trap that ensnared the early “Christians.”

They created a body of work that first collected, then glossed over and distorted the sayings of Jesus to provide a basis for their own teachings.

One of the most basic assumptions that Breech examines is the concept of Christian “love” that forms the basis of most of the teachings of Jesus.

Let me explain:

** The foundation of Christian ideology revolves around “Love” for one and another.

To understand this we need to define exactly how the term or meaning of “Love” is used when compared to (the small) love!!

In the first instance, there is the true “Love,” which means it is rooted in the power of the kingdom of God.

This is the “Love” that the historical Jesus preached to his followers.
The second type of Christian “love” (small L) is defined solely as an ethical idea that was propagated by the spreading Christian faith in trying to define the words of Christ.

Nietzsche probably best defined this form of Christian ‘love’ as a masked feeling of pity or charity.

In other words, we feel sorry for others and from this superior moral ground, we lend a helping hand.

Nietzsche claims that Christian ‘pity’ (love) is a device used by those who are not themselves truly vital and alive to obtain a perverse elevation of their own position by undermining others.

In other words, “I can make myself feel better by thinking you or someone else is worse-off and deserving of love.”

We often confuse the feeling of Christian “love” for someone with:

1. Pity for them.

2. Humanitarianism-or a love of Mankind.

3. Altruism, or self denial, and:

4. Sentimentalism, or wanting to be with others.

** These concepts of “love” have been re-enforced over and over again through one story or another.

What Jesus actually said was something more basic and infinitely harder to achieve.

The historical Jesus did not urge us to love humankind or to feel pity for someone else. He did not tell us to deny ourselves for someone else’s sake, or flagellate ourselves, or even to enjoy another’s company!

What He did say was pure and simple and straight to the point, “Love one another!”

This sort of Love is not the altruistic love of humanity, nor the possessive love for our mate, but rather something that requires hard work, tenacity, and sacrifice.

It is easy to love your wife or husband, child or parent, but to Love your neighbor (or stranger) is a task that is never ending and always requires effort.

It is a Love that seems to have no immediate benefit and is therefore not practiced by many people.
However, in the end, this is what will make Humanity rise up to it is potential and approach what Jesus referred to as the “Kingdom of God (The Father).”

This is not something that is to be expected in the near, or far, future. Rather, it was a state of being that is present at this time, and only has to be observed and followed in order to achieve a state of Grace.

One of the core sayings of Jesus was “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For behold, that kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

Jesus tells us quite clearly that the “Kingdom of God” is not a coming kingdom, or a future kingdom, but rather something already in and amongst his disciples. It is not a place, but rather a state of mind!

To quote James Breech once more: “Your concept of the kingdom of God, whether it belongs to the future mythological conceived, in either eschatological or apocalyptic terms, misses the reality of the kingdom. The symbolism really refers to a power that is a basic factor in human experience!”

In the teachings attributed to Jesus, it is abundantly clear that he was an apocalyptic teacher who believed that the world would end within the lifetime of the people to which he was speaking. The foundation of these teachings was that human beings could be saved by both believing his word and by modeling their lives on the higher moral law of God. That higher moral law was the foundation of Jewish law. To this end, he believed that Pharisaical teaching were an appropriate guide to following this higher moral law.

His criticism of the Pharisees was that they did not live by what they taught. In line with this higher moral law, Jesus of Nazareth preached an ethics of selfless concern for the welfare of others, rejection of material wealth, and non-retribution, all of which were standard in Jewish ethics. The religion that he taught was an intensely individual religion. Righteousness, which means the performance of right actions, was not a quality of actions but rather a quality of the interior state of the individual.

There is also abundant evidence in the Gospels that Jesus considered his teachings to be for Jews only.

This is a curious tradition to maintain in the face of the massive spread of Christianity into the Gentile world.
However, nowhere does Jesus of Nazareth construe his teachings or the religion he is espousing as anything other than for Jews and in one place explicitly says that his mission is only to the Jews.

Ultimately, the Jesus who emerges from the gospels is concerned with preparing the Jews for the last event in history.

The Christian religion was at first, obviously, a Jewish religion. It was a movement amongst the population in the immediate area of the land Jesus lived in.

Its message aimed directly at a Jewish audience by Jews.

*However, with the advent of the Prophet Paul the message changed and was geared towards a Gentile population that was eager for the “word” as well.*

*Onto this template, Paul of Tarsus would add a new emphasis Jesus as a dead and risen God co-extensive with God.*

*This developed into two branches, which we could call a Jewish Christian and a Pauline (Gentile) Christian.*

They not only lived side by side, but also competed for the same converts.

It was not until the Romans suppressed an uprising by the Jews in c A.D. 66-74 and again A.D. 132-135 that led to the destruction of Massada that the Pauline Christians gradually won out.

They became the defenders of the faith while the Jewish Christians were left by the wayside.

(Actually in the ashes of Massada!)
Chapter 11. “THE JESUS TAPES”

Here we have, after decades and even centuries of research, what can be defined as the core sayings of Jesus.

These sayings -at least- can be directly attributed to Jesus.

Researchers have considered many variables to gain an insight into what Jesus actually said to his disciples and followers. All of the sayings had to have the ring of authenticity of having originally come from the historical Jesus.

They also had to be in character with Jesus and not something that was obviously added later by one of his “Christian” followers.

In other words, it had to be historically appropriate rather than something that was obviously a product of early Christianity or borrowed from the contemporary world! (His or Ours)

It was also helpful to have it confirmed by being included in two or more Gospels.

1. **-“The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There! ’For behold, the kingdom of God (Father) is in the midst of you.” (Luke 17:20)

2. **-“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of God (Father) has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force.” (Matt 11:12; cf., Luke 16:16.)

3. **-“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘we piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; I came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Matt11:16-19; Luke 7:31-34)

4. **-“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God (Father) like a child shall not enter it!” (Mark 10:15 = Luke 18:17)

5. **-“If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God (Father) has come to you!” (Luke 11:20)

6. **-“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God (Father).” (Luke 9:62)
7. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Father)!” (Mark 10:25 = Matt 19:24 = Luke 18:25)

8. “Father. Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us what we owe those whom we have injured. As we ourselves forgive what is owing from those who have injured us. Put us not to the test!” (Luke 11:2-4 Matt 6:9-10)

There is one other saying attributed to Jesus but not one of the core sayings because it was widely used in antiquity and is known from both pagan and Jewish sources - but the thrust of it coheres with the meaning of Jesus’ core sayings.

**“The gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many”! “The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those that find it are few.” (Mat 7:13-14: cf., Luke 13:24)

This saying, whether a core saying or not, is in the tradition of a neutral observer of the human condition. An observer who notices that most people lead lives that end in destruction. (As well as quiet desperation)

Only a few “find” the way to life, a way that involves hardship, and presumably, courage. The saying, if authentic, promises to those who choose to enter the realm of the power of God nothing more than life itself!

A life in the here and now, that if properly lived, opens the door to whatever may come after!

*There are no transcendental promises, no rewards, or punishments.*

*It is an eloquent expression of the fulfillment or destruction of human existence.*

*It depends entirely on the mode of being human that one chooses.*

“Hell” then would be the wasting of human existence, and “Heaven” would be life fulfilled!

This sounds very interesting from an Eastern viewpoint, since, as we speculated before, there are hints that Jesus was exposed to Hinduism and other eastern philosophies.

It also relates to a belief among North American Indians that the way to live is to be in the “Now.”

That is, life is meant to be lived moment by moment in the present, not wondering about what is to come, or remorse about what has happened.
We are rather to fully experience, and if possible, enjoy life, from one moment to the next.

****To be fully human there is nothing more or less than to live “now.”

*THE ELEVEN PARABLES OF JESUS ACCORDING TO “Q”

1. <-The Sower. - “The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed. Some fell on the path and did not grow, some fell amongst thorns and were choked, and some fell on good ground and increased a hundredfold.”
   **-This tells us that in a ministry not everyone will be converted. Those that do multiply!

2. <-The Mustard Seed. “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of seeds, but grows to be the greatest of all shrubs, giving shade to the birds of the air.”
   **-In spreading the word of a ministry, it may start out small indeed, but has the potential to grow beyond all bounds.

3. -The Leaven. “There was a woman who took leaven, and hid it in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.”
   **-In a ministry, scatter or hide the faithful amongst the masses and they will eventually “leaven” the rest.

4. -The Hidden Treasure. There was a man who found treasure hidden in a field, which he covered up; he then went and sold all that he had and bought that field.
   **-The kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field. If you find it, give all you have to posses it!

5. -The Lost Sheep. “The Kingdom of God is like a shepherd who has one hundred sheep. If one goes astray he will leave the other 99 to seek the one.”
   **-Everyone is important. If 99 are safe, go after the one who wandered.

6. -The Lost Coin. “What woman, having ten silver coins, if she looses one coin, does she not light a lamp and sweep until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends to rejoice with her. Likewise when God finds one sinner who repents, there is joy in heaven.”
   **-God rejoices in finding a sinner who repents and comes back into the fold.
7. -The Unjust Steward (servant). There was a rich man who had a steward. He said to him, “what is this I hear about you?” “You are no longer able to steward!” The man then went to his master’s debtors one by one and said, “Write down half of what you owe (1/2, 4/5, ¾ etc.) so that they might be ingratiated to him in the future when he no longer was a steward.”

**-This parable is about trust.

8. -The Great Supper. There was a man who once gave a dinner and invited guests. At the time of the dinner, he sent his servants to call those who had been invited. They all made excuses why they could not come so the master said; “Go outside to the streets and bring back the first people you meet.”

**-Share your bounty with those who appreciate it.

9. -The Laborers in the Vineyard. A man went into the town market at dawn and hired men for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them one (1) denarius for the days work. He went back at mid morning and hired more and again in the early afternoon and hired more. All for one denarius per day. When we wanted to pay them at suppertime, the ones who had been there since early morning complained, saying: “We worked many more hours for the same pay as those that started in the afternoon and it’s not fair.” The man said: “Of course it’s fair, you agreed to work for a denarius, and how I pay my money is my business!”

**-Life is not fair!

10. -The Prodigal Son. A son asked his father for an early share of his inheritance and then went out into the world. He did not do well and thought: “Even my father’s servants are better off than me. I will go back to my father and ask to be treated as one of the servants so that I may at least eat.” While he was still some distance off, his father saw him and came running, saying: “Bring a robe for my son and kill a fated calf for him, for my son was dead but now he is alive and returned to me!”

** - What we have done is in the past. A father will always love his son.

11.-The Good Samaritan. A man fell amongst robbers who beat him and departed, leaving him half-dead. Several men who passed him walked to the other side of the road until a Samaritan stopped and helped him. He dressed his wounds and then took him to an Inn. As he left he said to the Innkeeper: “Here are two denarii’s, give him what he needs till he is better!”

** -Two lessons here! First, it is our responsibility to look after each other. Secondly, the Samaritans were considered outcasts at the time, so the lesson was also do not judge a person by what he is, rather by what he does!
As we have discussed, the way we have come to know the historical Jesus is through the gospels, and as we now know, these Gospels were written relatively late in the dawning of Christianity.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the reason for the time lag before the biographies were written was that early Christians felt no need for a biography or collection of his sayings.

This was because his followers considered the event of “The Christ” or “Anointed One” was the immediate prelude to the end of the world and final judgment of humanity.

Paul of Tarsus, in his epistles, wrote that his generation would see the apocalypse. This was because Jesus of Nazareth claimed that the people around him would still be alive for the end days. Since there was no future, there was also no need to record any of these events for posterity.

These early Christians were more concerned with preparing themselves for the expected apocalypse and for spreading what they saw as the truth of Christianity to as many people as possible before the anticipated “End Time.”

(On a side note here, I still vividly recall when I was twelve years old in 1960; our next-door neighbor told me that the world would end on a specific date that year. She was just like any “end of the world” adherent, still trying after 2000 years to experience the rapture, and all she managed to do was scare the crap out of a young kid - me!)

At the same time these apocalyptic stories and sayings were circulating around the Christian world, another set of stories about Jesus were also being created by Paul.

When Paul of Tarsus had his vision, underwent an epiphany, and converted to Christianity, he did so with such energy and creativity that it soon made him the most prominent leader of the new movement.

**In fact, Paul was so instrumental in spreading Christianity that the movement became the world religion it is today almost solely on his account.**

Unlike Jesus of Nazareth, Paul’s role in the founding of Christianity is clear. The narrative of his career was collected within a few short years of his death so that, unlike Jesus, many of the writings were preserved.

Therefore, we can be definite in ascribing certain ideas and doctrines to Paul, while there is much dispute over what genuinely belongs to Jesus in the accounts of his career.
Different from the other followers of Christianity in those early years, Paul was not a native of Palestine. As a citizen of Tarsus, he was officially a citizen of Rome and was raised in a Greek culture and fluent in Greek.

Because of this, it was only natural that he would take the side of the Hellenists in the dispute over the direction of the Church.

Paul orientated towards the Greek world, and because of this, his innovations in the new religion left it a substantially different one than the material he started out with.

Where Jesus and many of his followers seemed to consider their beliefs as a “religion of the Jews,” Paul, in the debate between the Hebrews and the Hellenists, re-cast Christianity as a universal religion for all peoples.

Paul had to do a lot of juggling with the new religion because of the debate between the Hebrews and the Hellenists about the refusal of the Hellenists Christians to abide by Jewish law.

It was, after all, a foreign law to them.

The main sticking point in the dispute was the Jewish rule of diet and the act of circumcision, neither of which the non-Jewish Christians wanted to adopt.

This made the Jewish Christians consider the Greek Christians unclean!

Paul had an epiphany and came up with the novel idea that Jewish Law was worthless in gaining salvation since the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was what really mattered.

He relied on the Greek and Roman legal concept on the difference between the spirit and the letter of the Law.

He argued that even though the non-Jewish adherent had broken the letter of the Law about diet and circumcision, they had not broken the law in terms of the spirit or intent.

This outright rejection of the Jewish Law was an unheard of precedent since it allowed Christianity, which did not have many Jewish followers anyway, to spread rapidly amongst the Gentile population of the Roman World.

It should also be noted that “Jewish” Christianity was mainly restricted to rural adherents while Paul promoted “Gentile” Christianity amongst the towns and cities in the region.

(Jewish Christianity for the country hicks and Gentile Christianity for the sophisticated townsfolk!)
This led to a rapid rise in non-Jewish adherents and widened the schism between the two.

Despite his efforts to make Christianity a populous religion, some of Paul’s prejudices show themselves in remarkable ways that have caused us trouble for the last 2000 years!

While Jesus strongly focused on women and the status of women, Paul was an old reactionary misogynist.

He was against both Jesus’ radicalism towards women and the Greek liberality that allowed women a stronger voice in the community than was allowed among the Jews.

Do not forget that in the Middle East, then as now, women were culturally treated as no better than chattel and have suffered for it at the hands of men for many millennia.

Paul demanded that women be silent in church and in matters of theology.

Jesus had worked hard to erase these injustices but in the end old habits and cultural prejudices won out.

It was the same with the matter of slavery.

Jesus had nothing to say about slavery but Paul seemed to have approved of it.

While he demands that slaves obey their masters, he also understands the contradiction of one Christian owning another as a slave so he waffles.

(While he does not demand that slave-owners give up their slaves, he does say it would be the Christian thing to do.)

One of the most contentious issues from the works of Paul is the subject of the resurrection.

St. Paul, along with St. Clement of Alexandria after him (115-215 C.E.) took the allegorical / spiritual approach to the scriptures and would have been shocked to see the way today’s “Christianity” often distorts the original reality.

**Paul is quoted in 1st Corinthians 15 as saying that Jesus’ resurrection, and by default our own, was categorically and supremely a “spiritual” event!**

According to Tom Harper, amongst others, Paul quotes the tradition handed down to him on how various people “saw” the risen Lord as “one born out of due time.”

This was a technical term, widely used in the popular Mystery Religions of the time, to denote a paranormal, psychic vision.

Obviously, he was not talking about ordinary physical sightings at all!
When you move on to verse 35 he discusses and answers the obviously legitimate question, “How are the dead raised up?”

**His argument, after all is said and done, is basically that what goes into the ground at death is definitely not what moves on to the dimension of eternal life or the life of the “age to come.”**

**What goes into the grave is corporeal, physical, and eminently corruptible.**

**What comes out is immortal, spiritual, and certainly non-corporeal. On the other hand, as the old Egyptians said: “The body to earth, the soul to heaven!”**

Paul’s most emphatic statement on this was when he said; “Now this I say…flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption…we shall all be changed!”

This also helps explain why he was not immediately recognized when he appeared after the crucifixion.

****When you’re dead, you’re dead! The body is gone but the spirit goes on!****

From all the evidence we have about the spread of early Christianity it might be fair to say that without Paul, the fledgling movement might not have ever got off the ground.

Above everything else, Paul was a masterful compromiser.

He knew when to hold them, and he knew when to fold them.

He knew when issues mattered and when something should be let go in favor of expansion of the Church.

Although this gave his writings a sense of indecisiveness, contradiction and opportunism, Paul’s ultimate goal was the expansion of the central teachings of Jesus of Nazareth throughout the Roman world.

As long as Paul felt the “spirit of the teachings” was being adhered to, he was willing to compromise on other things, or even tolerate one situation while he wouldn’t another.

**So much for the infallible and literate word of God!**

**“Never let a sense of morals prevents you from doing what is right!” - Asimov**
About the same time that Jesus and Paul where spreading the message of what was to become known as Christianity, there was a whole host of different religions and beliefs that had been traveling around not only the Middle East, but also most of the known world for hundreds and even thousands of years.

This proliferation of ideas and beliefs took many forms and names but they all seemed to fit a general mold that was repeated time after time!

Religions and religious sects are a lot like a family business. Most come and go within three generations! This has been true throughout most of history, but never more so than at the time of Jesus in the Middle and Far East.

There seems to have been numerous contenders for the throne.

We do not know with certainty how much of the lore from these competing religions was borrowed from, and incorporated into Christianity, but there is a remarkable similarity between them and I will leave it up to you to draw any conclusions from them.

**Gnosticism;**

Gnosticism (Greek for knowledge) was popular throughout most of the Greek world at the time of Christ. Although we do not know much about the origins of this sect, the first recorded Gnostic was Simon Magus who lived at the time shortly before the first Jewish uprising against the Romans about 30-40 years after the death of Jesus.

Gnosticism was based on an old Canaanite religion that goes back to at least the seventh or eighth century B.C.E.

One of the remarkable features about Gnosticism is that it was like almost every other belief system prevalent in the area at that time. The Gnostic religion centered on the figure of Sophia (or Wisdom), who was believed to have been disgraced, but raised up again by God.

The worship of Sophia easily found itself at home with Zoroastrianism and its battle between good and evil, Judaism with its concept of a supreme God, Mithraism, with its story of the descent and resurrection of the sun-god, and above all else with Christianity and its story of the descent and resurrection of Christ.

At one time there were Zoroastrian Gnostics, Jewish Gnostics, Mithra Gnostics and of course Christian Gnostics.

Christian Gnosticism was a major competing religion for early Christianity.
One of its most popular manifestations was the assertion that the Divine spirit of Christ dwelled in the body of the man Jesus.  

In this respect, then, the spirit of Christ did not die on the cross with Jesus.

*There is now a belief that Jesus himself was a Gnostic.*

*Some of the other competing beliefs at the time of Jesus:*

**MITHRA, Sun God of Persia.**

Official recognition of sun worship in the Roman Empire began when they instituted the cult of “Sol Invictus.”

*(The cult of Sol Invictus and that of Mithra are virtually the same.)*

The story of Mithra precedes the Christian Jesus by over a thousand years.

It first appeared as an Aryan sun god in Sanskrit and Persian literature, circa 1400.

Mithra was introduced into the Roman Empire in the 4th century BCE.

The cult was, shortly before the Christian era began, the most popular and widely spread “Pagan” religion of the times.

Mithra has the following in common with the Christ character:

**Mithra was born of a virgin in a stable on the winter solstice, frequently December 25 in the Julian calendar.**

**Attended by shepherds who brought gifts.**

**Shown with a nimbus, or halo, around his head.**

**Believed not to have died, but to have ascended to heaven, whence it was believed he would return at the end of time to raise the dead for a final judgment.**

**Granted his followers immortal life following baptism.**

**He had 12 companions or disciples.**

**He performed miracles.**

**He was killed for his views.**

**After three days, he rose again. His resurrection is celebrated every year.**

**Mithra was called, “The Good Shepherd.”**
**He was “the Way, the Light, the Redeemer, the Savior, and The Messiah.”

**His sacred day was Sunday, “The Lord’s Day,” hundreds of years before the appearance of Christ.

**Mithra had his principal festival on what was later to become Easter, the time he was resurrected.

**His religion had a Eucharist or “Lord’s Supper.”

**Followed a leader called a ‘papa’ (pope), who ruled from the Vatican hill in Rome; celebrated sacramenta (a consecrated meal of bread and wine).

**Had a Myazda -corresponding exactly to the Catholic Missa {mass}.

**Used chanting, bells, candles, incense, and holy water in remembrance of the last supper of Mithra.

**Horus of Egypt

The legends of Horus go back thousands of years, and he shares the following in common with Jesus:

**Horus was born of a virgin on December 25\textsuperscript{th} in a cave/manger.

**His birth was announced by a star in the east and attended by three wise men.

**He was a child teacher in the Temple and was baptized when he was 30 years old.

**Horus was also baptized by “Anup the Baptizer,” who becomes “John the Baptist.” –

**He had 12 disciples.

**He walked on water.

**He performed miracles and raised one man from the dead.

**Horus was transfigured on the Mount.

**He was crucified, buried in a tomb and resurrected. **He was “Way, the Truth, the Light, the Messiah, God’s Son, the Son of Man.”

**He was the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God, and the Word, etc.

**He was “The Fisher,” and was associated with the Lamb, Lion and Fish.
**Horus was called “The KRST,” or “Anointed One,” long before the Christians duplicated the story.**

**In the catacombs at Rome are pictures of the baby Horus being held by the virgin mother Isis - the original “Madonna and Child.”**

**KRISHNA of India**

The similarities between the Christian Jesus and the Indian messiah are many.

**It should be noted that a common earlier English spelling of Krishna was “Christna,” which reveals its relation to ‘”Christ.” –**

**Krishna was born of a Virgin -His father was a carpenter. –**

**His birth was attended by angels, wise men and shepherds, and he was presented with gold, frankincense and myrrh. –**

**He was persecuted by a tyrant who ordered the slaughter of thousands of infants.**

**He was baptized in the River Ganges.**

**He worked miracles and wonders.**

**He raised the dead and healed lepers, the deaf and the blind.**

**Krishna used parables to teach the people about charity and love.**

**He was transfigured in front of his disciples.**

**In some traditions he was crucified between two thieves.**

**He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.**

**Krishna is called the “Shepherd, God” and “Lord of lords,” was considered “the Redeemer,” and “The Word.”**

**He is the second person of the Trinity, and proclaimed himself the “Resurrection” and the “Way to the Father.”**

**His disciples called him “Jezeus,” meaning “pure essence.”**

**Krishna is to return to do battle with the “Prince of Evil,” who will desolate the earth.**
The Council of Nicea – What Christianity is really about!

As we have seen, there are many gods with similar stories to those that are found in the Christian Bible. By far the most significant event in the early history of European Christianity was the conversion of Emperor Constantine.

The Emperor was a follower of Mithra until he declared December 25th the official birthday of Jesus in 313 C.E and adapted the cult of Christianity as the state religion.

Constantine found he had several problems with his new faith.

First among these was that Jesus had proclaimed his faith as being staunchly anti-political. Jesus has insisted that his way was a non-worldly, individualistic and non-political way of life.

As a result the Christian texts were not only Anti-Roman (Judea was part of the Roman Empire during the life of Jesus), but since Jesus was also part-Rabbi and part Cynic he was also dismissive of human worldly authority.

If Christianity were going to work as a religion in a state ruled by a monarch who demanded worship and absolute authority, it would have to be changed.

The early Christians had tolerated the emperors and regarded them as a kind of necessary evil.

However, Constantine demanded their obedience both temporally and in terms of faith.

To this end, he merged the office of Emperor with the Christian faith and assumed authority over doctrinal matters.

Constantine’s belief that he was Divine presented a new and unsolvable problem for Christianity.

As long as the Emperor was a pagan, there was no question of the relationship between the church and the state.

The old rule was that the church and the state essentially each did their own thing.

However, the presence of Christian imperial authority led to severe conflicts and disruption.

(In fact, the question of the relationship between the church and a Christian government has yet to be resolved in the West.)

Constantine had other problems as well.

In his view, the Christian church was a powerful tool for unifying the Empire socially and politically.
If the church could become unified, that would provide a balance against the forces pulling the empire apart. The only problem was that there was no established or unifying doctrine. In fact, there were as many forms of Christianity as there were communities of Christians. (Just like today)

The Vatican itself is built on the papacy of Mithra, who shared many qualities with Jesus and who existed as a Deity long before the character of Jesus was formalized. In fact, the Christian hierarchy is nearly identical to the Mithraic version it replaced.

The church was also severely divided over some fundamental questions. In particular, the speculations by the Eastern Churches on the nature of divinity were considered grossly heretical by the Latin churches.

This is what would finally call Constantine into action to unify the church. It was the schism between the Arians and the Athanasia’s.

**Perhaps the most important task that Constantine undertook was the Council of Nicea.**

That was convened to arbitrate a conflict between the Western Church and the Arians to decide the question of the relationship between imperial power and the church.

This council made major doctrinal statements that applied to the whole Christian world, and was the first to centralize doctrinal authority among Christians.

This was known as the Nicene Creed and began the long struggle, lasting to this day, between the anti-political views of Jesus of Nazareth and the views of human authority, which manifests itself as the “Christian Church.”

Faced with the task of determining what was to go into the bible out of the thousands of manuscripts available by this time was a daunting task that was taken on with great trepidation.

By compiling a book of sacred writings that they could all agree on, Constantine thought this would give authority to the new church.

Composed of about 300 religious leaders, this council was given the task of separating the Divinely inspired writings from those of questionable origin.
The actual compilation of the Bible was an incredibly complicated project since it came three hundred years after the death of Jesus and involved churchmen of varying beliefs, in an atmosphere of dissension, jealousy, intolerance, and bigotry.

To add to the dissention, they were split into two groups that questioned the divinity of Jesus.

The purpose of the Council was to settle the dispute over the teachings of Arius - that Christ was not equal in divinity to God.

The council (in their wisdom) declared that Jesus WAS equal in divinity to God by a majority vote and declared Arianism a heresy.

Here is another example of human arrogance – they decided….Who was actually Divine? And who was not! What belonged in the bible- and was the actual word of God. And what was not!

A typical headline in the local newspaper would have looked like this!

**Dateline - Middle East Times:** “Jesus declared equal by majority vote!”

“Jesus relieved, would like to thank all his supporters!”

**Sects and Cults;**

While we can use the mainstream church as an example of religion that has gone wrong, let us be kind and just look at cults and sects for a minute!

At any given time there are between 500-600 cults and sects operating in North America.

Worldwide that number grows to the thousands, and their basic philosophy and code of conduct is as varied and diverse as their numbers.

It is at first, important to recognize the meaning of the words cult and sect.

We shall discuss cults presently but a sect is primarily an offshoot of an established religion or denomination. It holds most beliefs common with it’s religion of origin plus a number of novel concepts that differentiate and set it apart.

The most obvious North American example of a sect that evolved into a denomination is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons.

Their founder, Joseph Smith, had a revelation from God that the ministry of Jesus Christ continued after his crucifixion and is told in the book of Mormon.

The Mormon sect has since evolved into the Mormon Denomination due to the passage of time and increased number of members.
Within the next few decades, it is even expected to develop into the dominant faith group in the American North-West.

Even though the Mormons have been somewhat integrated into mainstream religious movements of North America, it has not been without a few impediments to their beliefs and practices.

The state of Utah had a lot of trouble achieving statehood due to the large Mormon population and their practice of polygamy.

In due course there was suddenly a new revelation from God that banned the practice of polygamy and so “lo and behold” Utah became a state and everybody was happy.

[Except a few male members who wanted to keep their multiple wives!]

(Of course, there was an answer to this dilemma. The males who were in favor of polygamy broke away from the church to form their own sects of the Mormon faith, and, although excommunicated, continue to this day in the United States and Canada.)

There is a belief amongst these Mormons that men must accumulate “plural wives” in order to achieve salvation! (As opposed to the Muslims who get their “virgins” after salvation!)

Sects can then be considered a process by which a new religious movement is generated.

Most die out quickly, a few linger, and one or two grow into an established denomination of a major religion.

Cults on the other hand, automatically have a negative connotation with most of society, and must be looked at in the context of how the word is used.

In the sociological use of the term, a cult is also thought of as a small religious group that is in a state of tension with the predominant religion.

Therefore, Hinduism could be considered a cult in North America while Christianity would be a cult in India.

A cult is also, in the general religious usage, termed a “small, recently created, religious organization which is often headed by a single charismatic leader and is looked upon as a spiritually innovative group.”

This means that early Christianity and Islam were definitely cults.

In fact, it took the early followers of Jesus nearly 200 years before they had progressed to the point of having an established hierarchy and doctrine that became known as the Holy Roman Church.
Chapter 11. Jihad Inc.

According to the National Intelligence Council, a C.I.A backed agency in the United States; “Religious differences (often fueled by ethnic grievances) mean few, if any, Muslim states will grant full political and cultural rights to any religious minorities.

At the same time they will certainly not remain indifferent to the treatment of Muslim minorities elsewhere in the world.”

This section on Islam is written from a Western Judeo-Christian perspective for a like-minded audience, so there are two main areas that need to be addressed right at the beginning. (Both of these subjects are areas that plagued Christianity throughout its early history.)

Since Islam is a relatively young religion, and is practiced in a part of the world not as developed as the West and we still find old human habits that are hard to break.

The first of these bad habits is of course the way that Islam treats its women.

Throughout history the women have been mostly subservient to the males of their tribe or group and have been downtrodden much the same as they are now in Islamic culture.

While Christianity does not historically have an enviable record in its treatment of women, we have slowly matured over the years and developed a more equitable way of relating to “the fairer sex.” (This written from a male point of view.)

Throughout most of the third world, Islam still regards women with the same contempt that was prevalent in the seventh century when Mohammed had his revelations from God. (These were naturally male-oriented revelations!)

Now, whether this is a religious or cultural habit is hard to tell, but the misogynists among the tribes of the Middle East hold sway, and in order to maintain their “honor” and “manliness” they have kept women in a subservient position ever since.

In other words, women were, and are, treated as nothing more than chattel.

This is a situation that has to change and can only be brought about by the education of these populations.

The second area that needs careful scrutiny is the issue of fundamentalism.

Just like the fundamentalist in the Christian faith, these groups are painting a distorted picture of the basic tenants and practices of their religion.
Part of this, of course, can be attributed to the general ignorance of the fundamentalist adherents concerning the world at large.

It does not matter whether it is a Christian fundamentalist proclaiming his or her belief in the sanctity of their faith, or a Muslim fundamentalist claiming to be on a mission from God.

What does matter is the fact that these people are living in this world with blinders on, and refuse to see anything else than what they have been told to see and believe.

Science and Religion have been at odds for all of their existence, (But not science and spirituality!) and it is only through the gradual education of humanity, with the help of the information age, that these old prejudices will gradually disappear.

When looking at Islam, we have a community that has at its heart and core, a most precious and distinct possession: A Book.

This is a scripture that sets forth the dogma and legislation for the community. The essential themes for the faith.

This material that the followers of Muhammad could gather from various sources after his death has come down to us as the Koran. It is the fundamental document for the religion of Islam and is regarded by the faithful as the holy, revealed, eternal Word of God.

Muhammad called his new religion “Islam;” a word that means submission to the will of Allah.

One who accepts Islam and makes such submission is a Muslim and termed a mu’min (believer).

One who does not accept Islam is a kafir (unbeliever).

To live in submission to Allah and in obedience to the teachings of the Prophet, a Muslim must follow rules formulated for him.

Islam is a very structured religion!

Islam is not only the religion of Muhammad. Islam means devotion to God, and is instead regarded as a newer version of the religion of Abraham.

This original religion declined and was then renewed by Moses.

After Moses things were renewed once more by Jesus and then again by Muhammad.

They were all “people of the Book.”
{We know that in Islam it is said that Muhammad is the “last of the prophets,” but this can be attributed more to his adherents claims of greatness in their own religion and a natural tendency among people in general to want to be the biggest and best in everything. The last of the prophets can already be disputed by an offshoot of Islam, the Baha’i.}

After the Prophets death however, the growing population of his followers found that a great many problems of religious and community life were arising. Problems to which there was no specific guidance in the Koran!

Guidance was therefore sought in the “Traditions” as to what the Prophet had said and done. (Or, was reported to have said and done.)

This vast accumulation of genuine, partly genuine, and often quite spurious traditions was digested into the collections of Hadith, six of which are considered the canonical collections.

It is well known to Muslims that much of the Hadith material was spurious.

But, for the study of Islam even those traditions, which the community invented and attributed to Muhammad, have their value! Often as much value as those that may actually have come down from him.

One such rule is provided in the Shariah, which is in the first instance the Koran. In the second instance comes the Hadith, or “The Traditions,” and the third is “Ijma,” which is the consensus of the community.

The fourth instance relies on Giyas, which is the application of analogical reasoning to the other three sources for the deduction of new rules.

This combination of rules starting with the Shariah combines to form a religion that is supposed to be open to revision. Yet it is structured in such a way as to give adherents a set of guidelines on the method of proper conduct.

_Unfortunately, due to the very nature of Islam with the traditions and consensus of the community playing such a vital part, the stagnation of the creed is all but assured._

There is great comfort amongst the faithful in the structured environment of Islam.

It places importance in the observance of daily routine and ritual.

This, combined with the strong family and social ties (tribal) that are encouraged, makes for a religion that is both vital and dynamic in its zealousness, while at the same time fostering a strong inertia and resistance to change from outside sources.
The main obstacle to growth and development in Islam is the overwhelming sense that there is absolutely no need for change. In fact, by its very nature, Islam preaches that it is complete and fully developed as the personal word of God.

This has also been the case in the Christian church and as such we have religions that are stuck in the nineteenth century in the case of Christianity, (both Protestant and Catholic) and the twelfth century in the case of Islam.

Where we have the conflict with most Christian and Muslim fundamentalists is that the answer to these criticisms will always be met with the question; “Well what’s the matter with that?”

In answer to that question we have to remember that in religious terms the path to good living is directed and regulated by the Koran.

On the other hand, when we talk about Shariah law there is no uniform opinion among Muslims on how this law is to be understood or applied.

Traditional authorities, beginning in the time shortly after Muhammad, viewed holy law as the revealed will of God and subordinated politics to holy decree.

Historically however, it was politics (tribal or otherwise) that invariable shaped Islamic law and led to complex discourse on a subject that was contentious on the surface but at its base rather simple.

The religious precepts are pretty straightforward, but the task of explaining them and choosing a method for their application is left in human hands. This means they are automatically constrained by human limitations.

(Perhaps what Islam needs is a “Reformation” along the same lines as the upheaval of the Catholic Church by Martin Luther.)

On top of this, Muslims became politically divided early in their history with the division into the Shiite and Sunni sects (see below) and that oriented their respective understandings of the law and its applications.

After Muhammad’s death, Islam also got off to a rocky start when warfare was used to spread the faith and three of the first four Caliphs died by violence.

The fourth Caliph, Ali, was a cousin of Muhammad and his followers then tore the community in two by claiming that Ali should have been the first caliph by virtue of his blood ties to Muhammad.

These people came to be known as the Shi’a or Shiite sect while the great majority of the followers of Muhammad, who claim that succession does not rely on blood ties, are known today as the Sunni.
A great many differences exist to this day between these two main sects of Islam, and the distinctions go far deeper than just who should have succeeded Muhammad.

In fact, in the interpretation of the Koran itself, there were already differences between the sects. There were passages that briefly summarized the things a Muslim should believe. These were too brief however, to be sufficient. And they were also too bare to be satisfying.

Because of this, we find different “creedal statements” circulating amongst the communities of both the Shiite and Sunni’s, as well as amongst the Sufi. (Who are mystical branches of Islam.)

These became the subject of discussion and commentary until in time they grew into different Islamic theologies and a Muslim science of dogmatism.

One result of this was that Islam developed its heretical sects, and so part of the task was to distinguish orthodox belief and practice as opposed to various schools of heretical teaching.

This led to a condition within the faith where almost anyone could at one time or another consider a person of another sect to be a non-believer and heretic.

The similarity between this and the situation between the Catholics and Protestants is not mere coincidence but the result of the schisms that can develop between different groups of even similar beliefs!

As we said, Islam became highly divisive right from its inception when it split into the Sunni, Shiite, and Sufi sects. Add to this the fact that Islam was spread through war and conflict as opposed to the philosophy of “love thy neighbor” that was the foundation of Christianity, and we have a religion that is ripe for dissention and conflict.

On top of the divisiveness amongst the practitioners of Islam, we can see how the faith slides still further with the triumph of fundamentalist interpretations of the Koran in the 11th century.

This resulted in the triggering of major conflicts amongst the population of the region and the gradual decline of Islamic, and then by default, Arab civilization.

Now the word “fundamentalist” was originally used in a broad sense to describe the American Protestant movement of the late nineteenth century in opposition to modernist tendencies in American religious and secular life. The term itself is derived from a series of works, “The Fundamentals,” which was published in the U.S.A. in 1909.
However, this return to the fundamentals of a religion and a rejection of secularism was soon discovered to be a worldwide phenomenon.

There are today many groups that have organized themselves in such a way as to find alternatives to secularism! There are fundamentalist Jews, fundamentalist Buddhists, fundamentalist Hindus and so on.

However, it’s the Muslim fundamentalists who are most in the Western news.

It would be a major mistake to think, as some people do, that Islamic fundamentalists form a homogeneous group with common beliefs, objectives and a united leadership!

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Even within the different groups, as with the Shiite and Sunni sects, there are disparate groups and movements. All of which are lumped together by the media as being fundamentalist.

The “fundamentals” that they go back to are an attempt to renew their religion once again by going “back to the basics.”

It is either that or watch their religion slide into secularism.

Now remember that all religions are capable of rise and fall. All cultures have their ups and downs over the course of their existence. Any religion, as well as any civilization, is always vulnerable to decadence and therefore has to be continually renewed.

One of the great strengths of Islam is that it does not have any one “official” person or institution. (Even though “unofficially” the Imam’s carry the same clout as the cardinals, or even the Pope, as they do in Christianity)

In theory every Muslim, every believer, has direct access to God and direct access to the sources of his religion.

*Unfortunately, in practice they are all swayed by the hierarchy of the religion and affected by both the dogmatic and cultural forces at play.*

There are many different man-made interpretations of the Holy Koran (just as in the bible), and this leads to the fact that many sayings and traditions were fabricated and attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in order to support one or more understandings of the Koran text according to the interpreters.

These understandings were constantly adjusted to fit the socio-economic situation as well as the political views of the time. As a result, they were in a constant state of flux, sometimes close to the intended message and at other times quite removed.
In spite of this, the Koran and the religious philosophy it espouses is arguably the most pristine and simple of all the major world religions with the possible exception of Baha’i.

(With the meaning that simple is less convoluted and therefore better and more to the point. As in “clear and simple”)

Where we run into a problem is that, as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, there is no actual copy of the Koran that can be said to have come directly from the hands of Mohammed.

The earliest written record of the Koran (and the 45 scribes who supposedly documented it) was written in the biography of Mohammed by a certain Ibn Ishaq who wrote Sirat Rasul Allah, (The life of the Prophet of God) about 100 years after the death of the prophet Mohammed!

From this point on, it gets even hazier since there is no actual record of this document as well, but rather, it is extensively quoted in an even later work by al-Tabari who lived close to 200 years after the death of Ibn Ishaq. Suddenly we have a space of 350 years (close to 1000 C.E.) that cannot be properly documented.

With this in mind we can look back to about 620 C.E. when Mohammed, (or someone like him,) started on a campaign of dominance.

Here in less than 100 years Arab tribesmen, riding on horseback, emerged out of the Arabian deserts to conquer Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya and Spain.

Now the great question we have to ask here is whether the Arab armies were fuelled during their expansion by religious fever; or was the religion “spiced up” during the 350 years where it was not documented properly.

**In other words, was this re-vamping of Islam the manipulations of a politically dominant group whose aim was to establish a religious justification for Arab imperialism?**

**Or was it based on a religion that advocated the expansion of its ideals by force?**

Don’t forget, during the first 200 years of this great expansion Arab conquerors were a minority against a non-Moslem majority.

Then, once the Arabs had acquired a sizable empire—a coherent religion was necessary in order to hold that empire together.

(Note: in the long run, over the centuries, the main purpose of any religion, once it had gone beyond the “sect” stage, was to perpetuate itself and also act as a glue to hold the empire together.)
So once again, was the religion in place and acting as the fuel for Arab hegemony, or was it the glue that was manufactured “after the fact” to hold the whole empire together. This is a question that will never be properly answered - as it is now lost in the mists of time.

However, we can draw certain inferences from it.

One of the facts that we have to consider is that while Christianity was founded on the premise of “love” for others, the main driving force behind Islam is that it was bound up in war and aggression from its very inception.

As a result, no matter how close or far from the intended message of the Koran it was, portions of it were always used to justify an Arab extremist and expansionist view.

History has now given us an almost unbroken string of militant Islamic movements from the “Assassins” of the 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} century to the Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers.

(Even if he is technically a Persian and not Arab.)

The crusades were the first catalyst that got Islam to “rally round the flag” in Middle East terms and the second was the Mongol invasion shortly after.

Arab society became full of hatred to both Eastern and Western invaders. Many lives were lost and cultures destroyed before the infidels were defeated by the religiously mobilized Islamic armies.

The early result of this hatred was the emergence of Ibn-Taymeyah as one of the first Arab extremists. He was born in 1263 C. E. during the Mongol invasion and died in jail for his extremist views in 1328 C.E.

During his lifetime, almost all of the main Islamic schools of theology (to their credit) rejected his extremist views and he was constantly at odds with the authorities, but had a great and loyal following among the masses.

This seems to have set the tone for the following centuries with constant upheaval among theologians and clergy (Much the same as in the early Christian church.)

One of the modern day results of this dissension in the religion was the establishment of Wahhabism in the mid part of the sixteenth century.

This brand of ultra-conservative Islam, which we now loosely call fundamentalism, was established by Mahammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab around 1715.

Mahammad ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhab’s ideas spread amongst the villagers of Dar’iyya and were adopted by their chief, Mahammad ibn Su’ud.
Those who accepted his ideals, which were termed Wahhabiyya, were called Wahhabis.

Al-Wahhab was very aware of the fact that he was not a mere preacher but the leader of a movement that sought to effect a real change in society.

Like all practical social reformers, he was convinced of the necessity of power for the realization of the goals that he advocated.

Unfortunately, like so many before him, he mistakenly turned the Divine message from God “outward” to try and influence others instead of turning it “inward” to effect personal betterment as he was supposed to.

Islam makes the same mistake that Christianity and most other religions make. That is taking the “message” of God and applying it outwardly against people who are not in sync with their own personal idea of how things should be.

Rather, we should all be turning the message inward and changing ourselves for the better.

In other words our goal is to change “ourselves,” not to “get others to do what we think is best for them!”

*Take God’s message and turn it inward to attain a state of grace.

*Turn it outward to control others and it becomes corrupted.

*Lead by example; do not use the example to lead!

The Wahhabis main practitioners were the Bedouin tribes in the deserts of what is now Saudi Arabia.

The Wahhabis point of view is that anyone who does not follow their particular brand of Islam is a disbeliever and infidel.

As they increased in number, Wahhabism was firmly established by 1737 C.E.

It now forms the basis for most of the religious and political life in Saudi Arabia, and by extension of their money and influence, other areas of the Middle East.

It has slowly become the standard by which a lot of Islam is being held accountable to.
The Arab Muslim.

In this chapter we have referred to Muslims in general but that fact of the matter is that most of the people in the Middle East are Arabs who happen to be Muslim and who also happen to have oil on their land.

The decline of Islam has led down a road to where the modern Arab, for the most part, wonders how his faith and culture fits in with a rapidly changing world. This is a far cry from originally belonging to one of the greatest cultures in the history of human kind.

Whether it is acknowledged or not, the Middle East (because of Israel and oil) is a vital part of the modern world and as such has to make changes and concessions to its own religion and culture. As of this writing in the early part of the twenty-first century, Arabs, and Islam, have one hell of a public relations problem in the Western world.

One of the main problems with the Arab-Muslim religion of the Middle East today stems from outright religious intolerance combined with an insular culture that is still stuck in the tribal twelfth century!

It is a curious situation where on the one hand the average Arab confesses to overwhelming piety and subservience to Allah; while at the same time he looks with arrogance down on everyone else as being “infidels” and inferior.

This, combined with the rage average Arabs have against perceptions of them in the West as being nothing more than camel herders living somewhere in the middle ages, makes for a truly schizophrenic outlook on their part.

Just as Christianity was stuck in the Middle Ages for a long time, so the religion of Muhammad has, among certain groups, been stuck in the past.

It needs to be dragged into the modern age, kicking and screaming if need be!

One of the best examples of this can be seen in the recent practices of the Taliban in central Afghanistan. They held a whole nation hostage to their religious zealousness and it took the intervention of outside forces to finally remove them.

To gather some insight into this volatile situation in the Middle East, (other than the never ending conflict between Arabs and Jews over the Palestine issue) we need go back only a few short years to discover how the situation got to the point it is at today!

It all revolves around the discovery of oil!
Oil is both a blessing and a curse for the people of the Middle East. It brought the region great wealth, and at the same time exposed them to the rest of the world on a scale never before experienced.

Gone is a centuries old way of life as their governments and population are thrust unto the world stage. Their religion and lifestyle has been given a millennium long drop kick from the eleventh to the twenty-first century. The cultural shock alone has seriously disrupted the social order and fabric of their society.

The fact remains that without oil, this situation would also not get nearly the attention it does. It is now fashionable to blame Western colonization and economic domination for most of the woes and predicaments of the Muslim countries.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out that Muslims themselves bear the most responsibility for the situation they are in right now.

Their complicity in the rise of militant Islam must be borne just as much by themselves as by their former colonizers.

When we look at the tensions between East and West in the light of day, religion is a handy way to rile the population against the “infidels” of the West. The fact of the matter is that it is more of a fear of Western ideals and culture, combined with jealousy of Western affluence that drives the leaders in the Middle East into such fits of rage.

The Western influence is a direct threat to their authority, especially amongst the young!

Don’t forget that no matter what form of government a Middle East country has, outside of some large urban areas it is still largely controlled by the tribes and Imams!

By the end of the 1970’s America, Europe and various Arab regimes extended too many fundamentalist and extremist groups military, diplomatic, financial and logistical support for two main reasons.

The first was to deflect the attention of Muslims around the world from the anti-American Iranian understanding of Islam that was being fostered by the clerics under the Ayatollah Khomeini.

The second was of course to reduce American casualties in trying to counter the U.S.S.R. incursions into Afghanistan.

Sponsored by petrodollars, all aggressive interpretations of Islam were published and abundantly distributed in the Muslim world.
This was accompanied by a vigorous publicity campaign assuring Muslims that this was the only right path and correct understanding of Islam.

Other interpretations quickly disappeared amongst the uneducated masses. Religious and cultural tolerance was slowly eroded while fundamentalism was on the ascent.

However, literature and propaganda didn’t work alone amongst the frustrated Arab citizens living under totalitarian regimes for the better part of a century. The extreme interpretations of Islam that were circulating provided them with a fascinating religion based Utopia.

A dream that the Imams were only too glad to foster and spread.

The truth of the matter is that Islam now enjoys the same sort of power over the masses as Christianity displayed a thousand years ago.

Why should the power structure of Islam give up any of their perks? It does not matter whether it is Al-Qaida, the Taliban, the clergy running Iran or the militants in Egypt and half a dozen other countries. They all want to turn their little piece of Eden into an Islamic state.

In other words, a state that is run according to their own ideals, beliefs and benefit; and to hell with everyone else! (Literally)

The problems in the Middle East are not only religious, insofar as the clergy is all to glad to foster discontent to further their own ends, but is also cultural and political. It is what might be described as a:

“Political agenda seeking justification in religion!”

The Islamic State, as it has come to be known, exists in the Middle East on the principal of obedience being due to God only and that Muslims reject the Western, secular idea of separation of church and state!

This is a nice trick fostered by the Islamic clergy to hold on to as much power as possible in spite of the emergence of democratic and populist movements in the world at large.

One of the greatest drawbacks to Islam is that it operates on the surface as being infallible, much as Christianity does.

Among Muslims however, it is acknowledged that the Prophet Muhammad left no actual interpretation of the Koran, but rather said it should be read and taken literally as the word of God. This means we have a Divine text that is adding to the confusion by being interpreted differently from scholar to scholar and person to person.
This interpretation by individuals depends on every one’s personal understanding, experience, social, political, and economic environment.

In fact, this happened almost exactly the same way among the early Christians.

In Islam, no one, not an individual dictator, an elected national body, or a scholar of religion, theoretically has the right to make any legislation that contradicts what is stated in the Koran or the Hadith of the Prophet.

If they do so, they are committing an act of grave Shirk, or “putting themselves in God’s place.”

Naturally, the clergy interprets and decides which part of the Koran they want the general population to use. They are also the ones that give guidance as to “what it really means.”

It is also one of the greatest con-jobs in history since anything that goes wrong or not according to their particular plan is obviously “God’s Will.”

(It is also the one of the main reasons that a Muslims will end every second sentence with the phrase “Insh-Allah” - or –“God willing!” Being as pragmatic as they are, this puts the onus back on God for whatever happens and absolves them of being in “Shirk.”)

As a believer, a man (remember this is a male dominated organization that would put the Catholic Church to shame) can offer his own proposals for the renewal of his religion, so it is always open to change.

The sad truth of the matter is that in Islam, as in every other religion in the world, there are no shortages of people who try and put themselves in positions of influence and power. This, for the purpose of spreading their own version of reality amongst the masses.

Another one of the other great threats to the Islamic state comes from a source that has been kept in check for the last 1400 years. Of course, we are talking about the subjugation of women throughout the Muslim world.

Men are concerned that any loosening of the reins that keeps their females in a position of subservience will lead to an all out revolution by women.

They also stand to loose face amongst their Arab brothers and be referred to as un-manly for not being able to control their women!

In light of this, it is interesting to note that women enjoyed an almost equal position with men in Arab society before the coming of Islam.
This makes us wonder how much of the abolition of rights for women was a cultural phenomenon and how much can be attributed to a misogynistic group of men using religion to undermine a woman’s place in society.

We are not just pointing the finger at Muslim society here, since it is a fact that the Christian community has also done its fair share in the subjugation of women.

(After all, it was Jesus who championed the cause of women, only to have it put on the back burner again by Paul!)

It might seem a bit unfair to bring this subject up in the section on Islam but the Muslims are, for the moment, the greatest perpetrators of injustice to women, and since the matter must be addressed, it may as well be here.

As we saw earlier in this book, throughout history it has been the men who waged war, made laws, and generally ran things according to their outlook. That was fine when the men went hunting while women stayed back at the campsite or early settlements.

Over the centuries, however, we have seen a gradual shift in responsibilities and division of work, with females taking an ever more proactive role in society, as they should!

Men, by their very nature of being the hunter-gatherers, have always had the inclination to “shoot first and ask questions later.” This might have worked well in the past, but society is at a point now where the more reasoned and analytical approach employed by women might be a lot better for us in the long run. The natural balance that the female mind gives to a male deserves to be listened to much more than it had been so far in history.

Remember, in the jahili culture of old, women used to mix freely with men. They used to dress in the same way as women in the secular societies now dress themselves. It was only after the advent of Islam that it became the custom for Arab women to spend most of their time at home, to cover their bodies, and be kept away from other men.

You will now find some people who tell you that the hijab (women’s Islamic dress) is an Arab custom, and not an Islamic requirement. Wrong!

Arab society was at one time much more enlightened than now and it is through the diligence of a few religious extremists through the centuries that the population has become narrow-minded in their world and cultural views.

This is one of the first things that have to be changed for women to take their rightful place in Arab society.

But then again—the difference between the wishing and the doing is great.
** Women have three roles - obey the father, obey the husband, obey the son.
—Mid-East Proverb.

** It goes without saying that societies in the Islamic, Christian, and Judaic areas of the Middle East have always been, and will try to stay, patriarchal societies.
—Anonymous

** “The true republic; men, their rights and nothing more.” ”Women; their rights and nothing less.” -Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)

In spite of some of the harsh words leveled at Arabs and Muslims in this chapter, we must not lose sight of the fact that this culture has given the world much throughout its history.

As well as the world's second largest (and growing) religion it is also the ancestral home to the numerical and mathematical system that is now used throughout the world. This culture has given us great literature and art as well as the birthplace of many of our theories on the human condition.

Given the Arabs love of logic and debate, the human family has benefited enormously from their contributions to the humanities and sciences.

** Sufism and Baha’i.

Even with the constraints placed upon Islam that give it a great inertia against any change, there are nonetheless great movements in the religion that have manifested itself in two very different ways.

The first of these, Sufism, can be described as the “mystic” version of Islam and its adherents refer to themselves as Sufis---people who see themselves on a spiritual journey toward God.

In order to guide spiritual travelers and to express the states of consciousness experienced on this journey, the Sufis have produced an enormously rich body of literature.

Suffice to say that the Sufi, while acknowledging they are on the pathway to God and will achieve oneness of spirit in Paradise, also believe that it is possible to become close to God in this life.

Furthermore, the attainment of the knowledge that comes in intimacy with God is the very purpose of creation---while the difficulties in following the path derive primarily from one’s self or ego.

(Sounds a lot like Eastern Religion)
In other words, it can be said that if one is not recognizing or experiencing God’s “closeness” (or presence) the responsibility for this condition lies within.

Some of the effects of the dominance of the ego are that one may become overwhelmed by the need to gratify desires such as anger, lust, anxiety, boredom, regret, self pity, depression, and the many addictions that afflict us.

Hence, one of the emphases of Sufism is the struggle to overcome the dominance of one’s ego. A struggle that first and foremost involves choosing at each moment to remember and surrender actively to God— irrespective of whether the form in which God manifests is one of absence or presence, benevolence or severity.

The struggle with one’s own ego has been called the greater struggle or greater “Holy War” (al-jihad al-akbar) in contrast to the lesser struggle, “holy war” (al-jihad al-asghar), which is against injustice in this world.

The lesser struggle of Jihad is certainly against perceived injustices and oppression in the world, but the greater struggle is what Muhammad talked about whenever he officially declared a “Jihad!”

It was, in effect, a war against the “seven deadly sins.”

Numerous Muslim scholars have spoken favorably about Sufism while one of the criticisms often leveled at Sufis by their fellow Muslims is that they withdraw from social and political activity.

This is far from being true in Muslim central Asia, where in Chechnya for example, Sufis were very active in fighting against Russian invaders.

The regions (Middle East) distinction as being the birthplace of a great majority of humanities philosophical and religious endeavors means it should come as no surprise that there is another movement in the works today that could once again change the course of our spiritual development.

Here I am referring the advent of the Baha’i faith and its possible impact on future religious thought!

The practice of Baha’i has at its core some of the seeds of a religion that could one day unify all the “people of the book.”

Its philosophy is not only simple and elegant, but seems to have the fundamentals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam within its framework.

It has the potential to become a world religion that is not driven by the old demons (pardon the pun) of the past!

It bears watching!
Chapter 12. Thanks for the Meme-ories

Among some Psychologists and nearly all Sociologists of the last few decades, a new phrase has come into use that describes a “belief system” which contains within itself the instructions for its own self-propagation. This belief system we could call a replicator!

In The Selfish Gene-Viruses of the Mind (1976) Richard Dawkins proposed that just as biological evolution can be studied at various levels - cultural evolution can also be broken down and studied in its most basic forms.

He argues that the clearest way to think about any form of evolution would be to work from the point of view of its smallest replicating entities.

In the case of genetics, it is the gene.

By analogy, studies of cultural evolution in Darwinian terms can best be looked at by examining the smallest replicating units in a culture.

In this case, they are units, or ideas, that we call “Memes.”

Examples of these “Memes” are popular tunes, catch phrases, fashion, and ways of making certain objects or cultural norms that are practiced by everyone.

** Thoughts, like fleas, jump from man to man. But they don’t bite everybody.— Stanislaw Lec (1909-1996)

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so Memes propagate themselves in the Meme-pool by leaping from mind to mind by imitation.

In addition, this imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

A perfect example of a self-replicating Meme is a catch phrase from a T.V. commercial for a hamburger that you might remember!

“Where’s the beef!”

This phrase was self-propagating to the point where it took on a life of its own and was repeated by everyone.

“Where’s the beef” became a catchword for the product itself and could stand on its own without any other explanation.

It had a rhyme and rhythm to it that made it a natural to be passed from one person to the next and by this very characteristic is one of the prime examples of a cultural “Meme!”
These “Memes” or replicators, cannot do anything on their own of course, but have within themselves the ideas or “hooks” that can trigger a self-replicating process within our brains that seem to give them a life of their own.

Every bit of fashion, or style, or new song, or popular phrase, or idea that is a Meme will be self-replicating to a greater or lesser degree.

And like a virus or parasitic worm, every successful Meme must perform at least two actions.

1. Ensure it takes up long-term residence in its host.

2. Brings about the conditions for its spread.

Biological evolution works by the mutation of genes and natural selection. The genes that produce an advantage are reproduced at a greater rate than genes that fail to confer an adaptive advantage.

In other words, genes that produce a biological advantage are rewarded, while genes that do not are punished by being reproduced less and eventually dying out.

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has argued that something similar happens with ideas and social practices.

Since ideas are not autonomous beings, we know that it is humans who do the actual competing for bits of information in our minds.

So, while these “Memes” do not compete on their own, they propagate in our minds.

Nevertheless, some ideas and practices act as if they were autonomous since they promote their own success by encouraging their survival and accurate reproduction in a large numbers of believers.

In the competition for believers, Memes that aggressively promote their own survival propagate, while those that do not die out.

This is what we mean by Memic selection.

In real life, Memes are usually sets of related ideas that we can call belief systems, and they must do more than simply require their reproduction in people.

Some beliefs become very adept at sticking in people’s minds, such as the phrase from an old T.V. commercial; “Where’s the beef!”

Because these Memes stick out, they eventually spread to wide prevalence.
This line of study, known as Memetics, has far-reaching implications for beliefs about religion, health, family politics, war, abortion, sexuality and just about every other topic that concerns us.

Memetics offers us new ways to look at the spread of irrational thoughts and ideas by reversing the old adage of how people acquire beliefs.

Instead, it asks us the reverse: “How beliefs acquire people!”

When beliefs take an active roll in acquiring new adherents, they are turned into very potent Memes that we can call “thought contagions!”

These “thought contagions” are insidious in their propagation from mind to mind because first of all, as the phrase suggests, they are so contagious.

(Where’s the beef!)

Secondly, and even more importantly, successful mind viruses, just like computer viruses, are extremely hard to detect. If you happen to be the victim of one, the chances are that you do not even know it!

If you is sitting in a state of blissful ignorance about a Meme-infestation, what are the tell tale signs to look for? Imagine how a medical symposium might describe the symptoms.

1. The patient finds him/herself impelled by some deep inner conviction that something feels true, right, or the way it should be; a conviction that does not have any evidence or reason, but which, nevertheless, they feel is totally compelling or convincing!

Doctors refer to such a belief as “faith.”

The typical patient will make it a positive virtue to have his/her “faith” strong and unshakeable.

This feeling of superiority or righteousness will persist in spite of a lack of evidence. In fact most people will believe that the less evidence there is ----the more virtuous the belief!

This lack of evidence is a positive virtue where faith is concerned because if is a self-sustaining program. This means that once a proposition is believed, it automatically undermines opposition to itself.

The “lack of evidence is a virtue” idea is admirable since it teams up with “faith” itself to form a mutually supportive viral program!
2. Along with the two already mentioned symptoms of a Memics infection, we have a related symptom that may also be present in a faith-sufferer.

This is the conviction that “mystery” (i.e. the mystery of faith) is not something to be solved. It is not a virtue to solve mysteries, but rather we should enjoy them and revel in their insolubility.

Roman Catholics, for example, have a belief in infallible authority, which compels them to accept that wine becomes physically transformed into blood.

By the same token, they have the exact same trick performed in the “mystery” of the Trinity!

3. If you have a faith bug, it is statistically overwhelming that it is the same faith as your parents and grandparents had.

Moving stories and parables, along with stirring music and magnificent houses of worship have had some influence, but by and large, the most important variable in determining your religion is an accident of birth!

The convictions that you so passionately believe would have been a completely different set of beliefs if you had been born somewhere, or by someone else!

4. The infected persons may find themselves behaving intolerantly towards rival faiths, in extreme cases even killing them or advocating their deaths. They may be similarly inclined towards apostates or heretics!

This feeling of animosity can even be translated into hostility towards other modes of thought that are potentially inimical to their faith, such as the scientific method (evolution, etc.) which may be an anti-viral agent to him/her.

The road that leads to denunciation of another person’s faith is a long and perilous journey at best.

Because these viruses implant themselves so deeply into our psyche, often from a very early age on, to challenge them or attempt to “bring down the house of cards” can have serious consequences for the individual.

The threat to kill the distinguished novelist Salmon Rushdie or the Danish cartoonist who made fun of Muhammad is only one in a long list of sad examples.
Murder is an extreme example of course, but we have examples of even more extreme behavior in the suicide of the militant observers of a faith.

Like a soldier ant in a colony of Arab, or Japanese, or Sikh extremists, (ants) they are programmed to sacrifice their life.

To die in a holy war is the quickest way to heaven.

On the surface, this may seems outright preposterous, but remember, the true test of a faith is the ability to believe without question!

Memes are not only immaterial thoughts, but can also manifest themselves as concrete objects when they are employed as the bases for objects such as a book.

A book is a successful way of transmitting a Meme and we are going to look at one of the most successful Memes of all time. The Bible!

In terms of the number of copies in existence, the Bible represents one of the most prolific books ever produced. Where other great texts of the ancient world have either been lost or else exist only in a relatively small number of copies, the Bible is everywhere!

The Bible has existed generally in its present form for the last two millennia.

If “survival of the fittest” has any validity as an evolutionary slogan, then the Bible seems a fair candidate for the accolade of the fittest of all books.

It exists today in over two thousand different languages and is distributed worldwide making it one of the best examples of a self-propagating “Meme.”

The Bible has exerted more influence on Western and even World culture than any other book. In art, literature, politics and religion, the biblical narratives and quotations are all-pervasive.

As Western culture became globalized, so to did the Bible. For example, fully one quarter to one third of all Japanese households today possess a bible. This in a country where only one or two percent of the population has any Christian adherence whatsoever.

The Bible has propagated itself so well in Japan because it is regarded as essential background for a proper understanding of Western culture.

This means that one effect of the spread of Western culture through trade, conquest and missionary activity has been the spread of an ancient Hebrew and Greek text to every corner of the globe.

Where Western culture goes, so goes the Bible.
“What a Meme!” And remember, a Meme has exactly the same psychological motivation for us as a chain letter; “If you propagate me then something nice will happen. If not, then something horrible will happen!”

One of the great advantages offered by the Bible in replicating itself is a unique variety of strategies that will insure its survival. This method of self-preservation is closely associated with our whole enterprise of human culture.

This, in its simplest terms is a method of fending off the threat of death.

It is a survival mechanism that has found a way of promising survival in the face of the inevitability of individual death.

In other words, the individual may die, but we have immortality expressed as a soul continuing in lock step with the culture that nourished it.

Being a faithful follower of a religious group, our duty is to then to ensure our own survival by enhancing the long-term prospects for continuation of our beliefs and way of life.

In other words, the afterlife of the believer is strictly tied to the continuity of the Meme pool (or community) within that faith.

This strategy is offered to the reader of the biblical text, along with a stern warning on the likely outcome of failing to abide by the word of the text. (Hell!)

This is aligned to a particular set of strategies that reinforce the integrity of the biblical text and maintain continuity and cultural identity by filtering out undesirable interlopers.

The bible has within itself powerful instructions that re-enforce its own unique worth and the limits to be placed on foreign information or texts into the communities that propagate it.

The whole process of canonization for instance, reveals a complex interaction between the text and the community that it serves.

The propagation of the text and the founding of new communities to spread the text are linked to the survival of the reader and his or her own community (Meme-pool).

The Hebrew and Christian Bible, and the Koran, are full of admonitions about the duty to hand down their teachings, and by implication their text, to the next generation.

Secondly, the text contains a strong message of evangelization. The survival of the reader’s community depends on the production of new texts and new communities.
This complex of strategies forms a powerful ensemble to ensure the accurate transmission of the text.

Communities based on the bible have a strong interest in conserving it unchanged. Paradoxically, from the point of view of the bible itself however, its ability to adapt to new communities is an essential part of its success.

The fact that so much human ingenuity has been expended on ensuring that the bible does not change, and that such mutations have at times been physically rooted out, merely goes to show how strong the pressure is to mutate, and its potential for evolution.

After all, the interests of the text and those of its nurturing community may not always coincide, but since the Meme (text) can be considered symbiotic, rather than parasitic, its co-operation with its host ensures a mutual benefit.

Let me give you an example of this:

“The Bible is full of so many stories of a contradictory nature and moral purpose that every generation can find scriptural justification for nearly any action it proposes, from incest, to slavery and mass murder, to the most refined love, courage and self-sacrifice. Indeed, this has surely contributed to its survival.”

-Carl Sagan

A book to which both the Apartheid regime of South Africa and its most fervent opponents could turn to justify their positions may not offer simple moral precepts, but does ensure that both sides will own their own copies!

For the survival of “The Book,” its amazing capacity to sustain opposing camps is a very successful strategy.

The Bible contains more information than any one community can readily assimilate, especially as it may seems mutually contradictory or impossible to apply in a given situation.

What happens then is the formation of a canon within the canon where the community opts to read and follow a particular smaller set of instructions, read with its own particular interpretive slant.

Frederick the Great, (one of the Hapsburgs!) was once asked to give proof of the existence of God. He said. “The continued existence of the Jews.”

This is an existence bound up with the identity, adaptability and continuity that the Bible confers.
Conversely, that continuity is bound up with, and depends upon, the continued existence of the Bible.

The community of readers sees it as its duty to ensure the survival of the book, but more than this, it sees the book as the guarantor of its own continuity and survival.

The book itself contains a whole array of strategies for survival, and in particular, is the record of an amazing feat of cultural continuity among the widely divergent communities of Jews.

They managed to retain a sense of themselves as Israelites and members of one “Meme-pool” or culture, protected by firm filters from external contamination.

Despite the evidence of all that might have led to its dissolution and destruction, the community has maintained itself........ In addition, the text is also preserved!

Daniel Dennett, in his book Consciousness Explained, says this:

“The haven that all Memes depend on reaching is the human mind. But a human mind is itself an artifact created when Memes restructure a human brain in order to make it a better habitat for themselves.

The avenues of entry and departure are modified to suit local conditions, and are strengthened by various artificial means to enhance fidelity in replication!”

Susan Blackmore, (The Meme Machine) has pointed out that many religious beliefs exemplify Memic selection, especially those that advocate spreading “The Message.” To quote Susan Blackmore:

“Although old minds differ from young minds, and male minds differ from female minds, what Memes provide is an easily transferable store of advantages.”

In this context Christianity, Islam and Judaism are highly successful Memes.

Through the idea of a father-like God, they offer a sense of purpose, of security, and of belonging that is familiar and attractive to all humans.

At the social level, they provide cultural identity, legitimize social structures, and sanctify moral codes.

Like all good Memes, the religious ones protect themselves in various ways.

First they place absolute reliance on faith, which precludes any introduction of reason that would be detrimental to the Meme.

Secondly, they also have a naturally embedded “catch 22” situation.

** “This Meme says it is the Divine truth; so whatever it says must be true! Therefore it must be Divine truth because it says so and all competing memes must be the work of the devil!”
Upon detailed analysis of Memes, we usually see the following features that help it establish itself in the minds of its host.

1. Promise heaven for belief!

2. Threaten eternal punishment for disbelief!

3. Boost the believer’s egos by telling them they are “chosen” or “superior” to believers of false memes!

4. Disable the means to disbelieve by claiming that faith is superior to reason!

5. Establish itself as the “One True Meme,” usually by some sort of holy book containing catch 22 situations. (circular logic)

** “This Religion” is the one true religion.

We know “This Religion” is the one true religion because God has approved only “This Religion.”

God has approved “This Religion” because “This Religion” contains statements that say so!

Therefore we know what “This Religion” says is true because “This Religion” is the one true religion.

Most religions teach that they are the one true path to salvation and all unbelievers are cast into hell.

This is a doctrine known as exclusivist, and unfortunately, certain sects of Christianity went to great lengths to claim that they were the one true faith and the other denominations of Christianity were corrupt, (or even in league with the Anti-Christ).

To this day “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus” (No salvation outside our Church) is still the official doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Now once it has established itself in the mind of its host, (congregation) a Meme needs to propagate itself.
Therefore, a successful Meme will contain instructions for some or all of the following:
A. Holy War - convert or kill all non-believers
B. Intimidation - threaten and discriminate against unbelievers!
C. Social isolation or “death to apostates.”
D. Encourage believers to breed faster than believers in false Memes!
E. Dis-information - spread lies about rival Memes. Demonize them.
F. The bigger the lie the more likely it is to be believed!

Now here comes the good part—we have had many centuries, even millennia, to perfect this way of thinking and have it down to a science.
(Not an “Art,” it is now at the point where it is a “Science.”)
These two types of self-referential statements, “propagate me” and “I am the only truth” provide the driving force for Memes to invade the minds of their hosts and spread throughout susceptible populations.
In addition, all religious Memes contain the instructions “help people who believe in this Meme, attack people who do not!”

And there you have it; an instant recipe for religious war!
Chapter 13. I’m a Believer

Although it was just in a movie, one of the most profound and accurate statements about the human condition ever uttered was by God Himself.

“I look after the big picture son.” said God. “Life is a crap-shoot and you take your chances like everyone else.” (A.K.A. George Burns)

(Now remember that earlier in the book we said evolution was great for the human race but extremely hard on the individual.)

Even though it was just a movie, a truer statement was probably never made!

We don’t have to try and analyze and explain why God allows pain and suffering in the world by saying; “God moves in mysterious ways!” or “God has a Divine purpose that is hidden from us.”

No! If we look at this rationally and take the obvious simple explanation, then we have to conclude that God does not interfere in the everyday workings of the world!

(remember Occam’s old saying; “When all else fails, the simple solution is usually the right one!”)

So far, we have only discussed what the problems are with religious dogma. These are “Belief Systems” that should be regarded with a great amount of skepticism.

What we need now is a method by which we can find out what is real and what is “Meme-orex.”

We need a system of basic beliefs!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Anytime we wish to examine a “belief system” that someone (such as the priesthood) proposes to us, it is always wise to look at it from the perspective of how it fits into our “basic beliefs” or “core value system,” instead of how it’s spun into their value system.

Here is one of the best ways to get to the heart of the matter as illustrated by Jim Leffel:

“A basic belief is an idea we hold that can not be explained by some other idea. Its truth seems self-evident to us. That is what makes it basic or foundational.”

Says Jim: “Let me provide an illustration.”

>“In teaching philosophy to undergraduates, I sometimes begin with a little exercise to help students get in touch with the fact that they hold basic beliefs. The exercise goes something like this.”
>”Tell me, why are you here in my class?”
The typical answer: “To satisfy a humanities requirement.”
>”All right then.” I ask. “Why do you want to satisfy a humanities requirement?”

Obvious response: “To complete my college degree.”
>”Fair enough, but why do you want to get a degree?”

“Well, to get a job of course.” As if it were somehow self-evident.

The inquiry continues.
>”Why do you want to get a job?”

The somewhat exasperated response is. “To make money!”
>”Ah, yes,” I continue, “But why do you want to make money?”

“It takes money to buy things.” They retort, as if I were nuts.
>”Okay, but why do you want to buy things?”

“Well, to be happy.” They somewhat hesitatingly urge.

Then I press the issue further by saying:

>”Yes, that’s nice, but why do you want to be happy?”

“To this, there is no response.” “We finally arrive at a basic belief.”

These basic beliefs are the yardstick with which to measure any belief system or way of thinking.

The only way we can do this, to get to the core of what we mean by basic beliefs, is to do this: We have to take all the dogma and human interpretations of the Divine and throw them out the window!

Once we have done this we can start to look at religions objectively instead of from the highly subjective viewpoint of an adherent. (Sort of like -not being able to see the forest for the trees!)

When we look at religions from the outside, they start to take on a whole different perspective.

Many early religious movements, as we have already discussed, were very short lived. The beliefs and thoughts on which they are based did not have a strong enough hold on the minds of those who joined the movement so they died out quickly.
Once the faithful faced adverse circumstances, or even when the special circumstances that induced them to join the movement change, they leave and forget about it. This has happened to the vast majority of cults and sects throughout history.

*It is only the few that start out with a message that is meant to be internalized and spread by example that the message survives at all.*

Could it be that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have a “message” strong enough to keep the human interpretations and manipulations of religion in check?

(This “internal message” is also what would keep the seven deadly sins slowed down somewhat!)

If this is the case then the base religion is strong enough that all the manipulations of the “priesthood” have not destroyed it in the following years.

*This means that all the recorded words of the old prophets, (including Jesus and Mohammed) are not only suspect, but probably misleading in our search for the Divine because they have all been tainted by the agenda’s of the people who came after.*

The reason behind this is the fact (as we said earlier in the book) that we cannot trust the exact words of the prophets.

They were not only handed down to us second and third hand, but were also subjected to human interpretation and “spin” for a great variety of reasons.

So, for the sake of clarity we have to strip religion down to its bare bones to arrive at a set of “basic beliefs” that everyone can agree on. This would not only be our starting point in our search for God but might be the end as well.

(At least in this life!)

What we need to do is take the actions of Jesus or Mohammed, or Buddha, or Baha’u’llah or any other prophet into account.

Instead of just trying to interpret what they were supposed to have said, we look at their deeds.
From this perspective (rather than upon “words” which are much easier to “spin”) we arrive at a completely different point of view in regards to how we should conduct ourselves and relate to God.

Remember, we have no tape recording of what Jesus or any other prophet actually said, and the written record of their teachings is so far removed in time and purpose as to make them almost totally irrelevant.

*Although the Prophets may have said one thing, the interpretation of their words often means something else entirely. Those that came after can only offer us what “they think” the Prophets meant!*

The major and fatal flaw in the assumption of knowing what the prophets said is that they are made by humans claiming to know the mind of God.

Be that as it may, we can look at Jesus’ actions - strip them down to their basics - and we find that they correspond very closely to his concept of “love one another.” No more - no less!

These are ideals that he not only taught but apparently tried to live as well.

We might not know exactly what they said, but we do know that the Prophets did not put themselves in the position of being the ultimate authority on heavenly matters.

Rather they showed us how we should live “here and now” in such a way as to obtain a “state of grace.”

They led by example and this is what set them apart from the masses!

**Anything of a religious nature that is explained by other humans as being the “correct way” or “correct interpretation” of Divine will is by its very nature wrong. It is always tainted with the underlying motives of the interpreter whether they realize it or not! -A.W.J.**

Our relationship with God is strictly between the Almighty and ourselves. Anyone who attempts to be a go-between in matters concerning the Divine is following their own agenda and trying to mislead us into accepting them as the ultimate authority. (In Gods name of course!)

To put it metaphorically, by it’s very nature, spirituality and attaining a state of Grace is God moving amongst us. While religion and the conversion of the infidels is the metaphorical Devils Work.

(The metaphorical “devil” that is inside us all - and tries to get us to do things for our own selfish ends.)
This is where we have to start employing “basic beliefs” as a measure of what is “Gods Will” (since it is self-evident), and what is actually the secret agenda of human desires and arrogance.

Before we delve further into which basic beliefs we need to incorporate into our “world view” of God and spirituality, let us take a quick look at the question of religion as a whole and put the practice in perspective.

** “With all these Gods revealed and interpreted by the major religions on the planet there are in fact 9 major religions and two paths to God.”**

Even with the proliferation of many different sects and cults there has been considerable debate about the actual number and types of religions.

Upon careful analysis there seem to be nine distinct religions and two ways to follow them.

I think we should start with the two different forms of religion since they are more direct and easy to understand in their make-up.

**The first way to explain faith or religion is the path of absolute awareness.**

This is achieved through meditation as in yoga.
This is the path that Buddha, all the Zen masters, and many others took.
A way to look at it is to think of God as pure Awareness, or Nirvana.
This way is centered mainly in the east.

**The second way to religious enlightenment is by way of faith.**

This is achieved primarily through prayer and is the path that Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad etc. chose.
This path, followed in the West, experiences God as having a more human touch or personality, such as Allah, Krishna or the Father.
So, if we look closely at these two different schools of thought, we find they have some fundamental differences!

We can take the statement that God created everything, which we all hold as self evident, and say that the original eternity contained only God, who was eternal.

** The eternal God (or awareness) that was here before creation and does not interact on a personal level, but simply IS, explains the way of Tao, Buddhism and Zen.**

** On the other hand, the way of a “personal,” “involved” God is contained in the story of the Jewish prophets, Krishna, Christ, Mohammed etc.**
These two paths or ways of religion give rise to the nine different religions that are divided three ways as follows;

1. First, we have three primary religions that teach resurrection. This is what people in the west are most familiar with and include Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
2. Then we have the three religions of the east that teach reincarnation and they are Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism.
3. Finally, we have three more that are a blend of the two paths. They are the way of Zen, which is a blend of Buddhism and Taoism, The Sikhs who blend Hinduism and Islamic Sufism, and finally a blend of Judaism and Christianity called Sabbath Christians, Messianic Jews and Jews for Christ, etc.

** On the surface, Western religion has gone in one direction, while Eastern religion went in an entirely different direction.

In the West, we commune with God through prayer, while in the East the goal is to become one with an ultimate reality through meditation. In either case, it all has the same goal “getting the hell out of the here and now!” A.W.J.

Where East and West differ greatly is the basic core belief of a dualistic (good/evil) aspect. The Western dualistic point of view is opposed to the eastern train of thought that there is no distinction between good and evil because ultimate reality is pure impersonal unity.

In the West, it is the non-material aspect of humanity that is the goal of our belief system. We attempt to escape the physical world and enter a spiritual existence that is free of “lebensschmerz.” (The pain of living!)

In the East, it is the reverse. When we overcome the illusion of duality, (distinct spiritual and physical realms) and realize that the material world is non-existent, then we are freed from earthly constraints and woes.

Now whether we agree or disagree with the tenants of Eastern Religions, it is a simple fact that the Eastern, and more specifically, the Indian religions have a history of over three thousand years of tolerance towards other creeds.

Two hundred and fifty years before Christ, King Asoka, who was a great promoter of Buddhism, proclaimed not only tolerance, but love of the other religions.

On the other hand, Judaism, Islam and Christianity have always had a tendency toward exclusivism and intolerance.
As Arnold Toynbee stated in his book, A Historian's Approach to Religion the three “book” religions are so exclusive that their followers often look upon other religions as the outgrowth of error, sin and malice.

To promote your own cause is one thing, but to do so at the expense of others seems inherently wrong and bears scrutiny.

** Is it just a coincidence that these three belief systems are the ones that also still have a solid “priesthood!” A.W.J

** “God please save me from your followers!” —Bumper Sticker

Aside from the different types of religions, we should take a quick look at the concept of “good” and “evil.”

Historians have now traced the concept of Satan to the Indo-European migrations of about 2000 B.C.E.

These “Kurgan’s” emigrated from the Turanian Plain between the Caspian and Aral Sea into the Near East, Middle East and Europe.

These people brought with them a set of beliefs loosely based on the Hindu sacred writings of the Vedas.

This belief in the polytheist concept of a mother earth goddess and opposing male god was carried outward by the Kurgan’s who split into two main groups.

One group traveled west over the top of the Caspian Sea and across the central Russian uplands into Northern Europe and formed the Celtic people who gave us Druids and the early version of Wicca, or nature worship.

The other group traveled south and west into what is now modern Iran and then on to Mesopotamia. This group developed beliefs along very different lines than their cousins that had gone into Europe.

They came to believe in the twin concepts of salvation and damnation. (There was a definite Zoroastrian influence here!)

*It was thought that upon dying the soul of the deceased had to pass over a narrow “bridge of the petitioner” and the god “Rashu” judged each one and decided who was righteous enough to cross the bridge safely or would fall into a place of punishment for worldly deeds that had flames and terrible punishment.*

This later developed into the Zoroastrian concept of walking across a sword into the afterlife, and of course the story of the dead crossing the river Styx.
Once salvation and damnation were established, (or Heaven and Hell) things were all set for the next step:

The Devil.

In the Hebrew Scriptures written before the influences of Zoroastrianism, the original verb “Satan” was defined as:
“One who opposes.”

There are no parts within the older Hebrew Scriptures where Satan is cast as evil. At most, he is described as a subordinate who carries out God’s instructions. Thus, before Zoroastrianism, there is no dualism between two supernatural entities - an all good God and all evil Satan. Rather, God is portrayed as being the cause, directly and indirectly, of good and evil deeds.

God was responsible for the plagues and disasters that befell humanity such as the flood, the testing of Job, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

A truly vengeful God.

This brings us to the final question on the duality of good and evil and how it affects us.
Do we blindly follow what is put before us as “scripture,” or do we look inside of ourselves for the answer?

The end result is: “Do we accept what other people tell us is the way, the truth and the light.” or “Do we go about it our own way by looking at what makes sense!”

>Does God control everything? - Obviously not, at least not in any way that we as mere mortals can see! (Look back a few pages at the Eastern school of thought!)

>Is there a God? - Look around you, there has to be! (This is the only thing I personally apply the term “believe” to.)

>Can we petition the Lord with prayer? Obviously not! - Otherwise I would be rich, famous, handsome, and in perfect health.

-So would everyone else!
Is there a purpose to it all? There has to be! The mere fact that we believe in a Supreme Being and wonder about the purpose of the cosmos pre-supposes that there must be a plan.

This does not mean that we are in any way smart enough to start second-guessing God as to what that Plan is!

God is by definition much too big for us to comprehend, but there are certain things that give an indication of God’s presence.

** One is “instinct.”

** Another is: “Human reason, which can conceive a God.”

** Altruism as a manifestation of God’s Love.

** The “wonder and joy” as well as the “pain and sorrow” of daily living. All to be experienced as part of our connection to the infinite!

Life has been described as “bitter-sweet” and it is not up to us to question why or how, but rather, just to do the best we can.

This is how we, as a people, will develop and evolve into a higher state of being!

In other words, we cannot control how life treats us, but we can control how we react to life. No matter what is thrown our way, we should face our destiny with a bit of class and a state of grace!

That is the true human virtue, and one that shows we are on the right path!!!!

We, as human beings, also do not need to be told what is right and what is wrong.

This is a knowledge that is inherent in all of us!

It is only our ability to choose between the two that sets us apart from the other inhabitants of this planet.

It is also the trait that either brings us closer, or leads us further away, from a state of grace.

The choice is ours!

** In other words, our connection to God is an intensely personal relationship that should never be interfered with by another human being telling us what God wants or means.
If another person tells you they know the mind of God, you can bet it is the “metaphorical devil” doing the talking.

If that someone tells you how to avoid going to Hell and attaining Paradise, run like hell…away from them!

Allan W. Janssen

A final few words to end the “evolution/creation” debate once and for all!

“What we have here is failure to communicate!”

Maybe not an original quote, but as far as the evolution / creation debate goes, perhaps a very appropriate one! The constant war of words between Darwinists and Creationists has been ongoing for many years and has not been resolved to anyone’s satisfaction.

Perhaps we should go right back to the very basics and start to build from there; just to see what happens!

First of all we have to take a position that there is either a God, or there is not! If there is no God then the Darwinists are absolutely right and everything was created by dumb luck and there is no purpose to anything!

I can see why evolutionists have been so adamant that natural selection and the progression of lower life forms into higher ones, without outside help, seem to be the natural order of things. They have a compelling argument and the term; “Just the facts, Ma’am” bear them out.

However, the supposition that life, and by correlation intelligence, is the result of blind chance with no interference from a God, is the same as saying that by default there is no God! In other words, to accept evolution from a scientific point of view without taking into account the theological implications of the Atheists being right, does a great disservice to anyone who has any feelings at all of a religious/spiritual nature.

I personally cannot imagine a world where there is no God at all. That this whole kit-and-caboodle we call the Universe is just a random organization of the basic elements with no ultimate purpose!

This extremist’s view is no better than those of religious fanatics who try and tell me that the world is no more than seven thousand years old. Both are the result of people polarized in their own views and beliefs. After all, a belief that there is no God is in no way any different than the view that there is a God; both depend on a personal belief system, since neither can be scientifically proven!
This is not to say that we should teach the biblical version of the creation of the universe as literal truth.

Any rational, semi-educated person realizes that Holy Scripture is a compilation of parables, prophesy, folk-lore, metaphor’s and common sense in a first century context!

Nor should we refer to the bible as a historical work since it is more concerned with the mind-set and morality of people than an account of their achievements!

If we can learn to distinguish between the metaphorical and the historical aspects of the scriptures then it makes it all the easier to differentiate between the divergent aims of scientific and theological schools of thought.

Just as the far right claims biblical truth and rejects scientific evidence, the Darwinists are at a loss to explain how the Universe (The Big Bang) came into being from absolutely nothing.

It’s like comparing apples and oranges. Both are different and have a different purpose.

To attempt a comparison is the same as looking for common ground when talking about two totally different things. With this in mind there is no real conflict between religion and science. God is by God’s very nature unknowable.

What I object to is the human trait of forming special interest groups whose sole job is giving only their explanation of God and even making proclamations and laws in God’s name.

This to me is the height of human arrogance and self-deception.

We do not know how God interacts with our universe and should not use one philosophy (religion or science) to try and explain the other.

“Render therefore to Cesar the things which are Cesar’s, and to God the things which are God’s.” In other words, I am all for teaching Creationism in school; as soon as they start teaching evolution in church!

I have a theory, and it’s called Evolution! I have a belief, and it’s called Intelligent Design! Allan W Janssen

God started us on this incredible journey – and is now waiting for us at its conclusion!

(I’m not talking about our mortal existence – I’m talking about the human experience.)

fini:
Post-Script

So there you have it! A quick look at what seems to be wrong with our “belief systems.” As I said in the beginning of this book there is no explanation provided for the “meaning of life” or anything close to it!

All we can do is look at how we relate to the world around us, and to God in particular.

We have to find out what our purpose in life is, and how best to achieve this. To do this there are a few clues that can help us on our way!

We were given free choice and intelligence with the understanding that we would use it. This, unfortunately, has not been the case so far.

Yes, we have made great strides in understanding and taming the physical world around us, but at the same time we pollute and destroy much of our planet with our technology.

Just a few short years ago we came dangerously close to all out nuclear war, which would have destroyed civilization, and perhaps even heralded the demise of the human race. Yet in spite of this, conflicts continue world wide and show no signs of diminishing.

The “aggressive nature” of human beings is what made us what we are today, but this needs to be curbed and tempered in the future.

It might very well turn into our nemesis instead of one of the forces that enabled us to climb down from the trees and become the dominant species.

We have to learn how to tame our “base instincts” and then by following the example of the prophets attain a “state of grace” in our daily living.

If there is a negative or “evil force” in this universe, then it is exemplified by the aggressive, base instincts that compel us to try and convert other people to our way of thinking rather than to “show by way of example!”

The age old saying “Do as I say, not as I do!” can no longer be used as an excuse for humanity to shirk the responsibility of becoming accountable for its actions.

In other words, it is time for the human race to “grow up,” leave its infancy behind, and become fully functioning members of “God’s great plan!”

(Whatever that is! Remember, we are just not that smart, .....yet!)
Chapter 14. Random Notes

** God inspired the bible, he didn’t write it. People base their lives around the manic scribbling of a bunch of desert baked primitives who ate bugs and honey! Of course they saw God! -Anonymous

** Muslims have their holy day on Friday, Jews on Saturday and Christians on Sunday. Since we are all “Theists” and “people of the book” it would be nice to find a way to harmonize all three beliefs. Aside from the obvious results of an end to religious strife, one of the most immediate benefits would be a three-day weekend!

** There seems to be a basic duality woven into the universe. Light/dark, God/Devil, good/evil, male/female, positive/negative, on/off, right/wrong, etc. Corollary: there seems to be some correlation between spirit/ego as being two sides to the same coin; as in God/Devil, good/bad, night/day, man/woman, light/dark, and ying/yang etc. It is as if the entire fabric of reality is made up of parts that encompass both viewpoints, such as the Western idea of duality. Theists view reality as material and spiritual -a metaphysical dualism where we live in the material and aspire to the spiritual, non-corporal! In the West, we live in a material world and hope to have a spiritual experience. In the East they live in a spiritual world that is having a material experience. -A.W.J.

** The promise of eternal life is a powerful drug that is hard to resist. Bring the people in with promises of everlasting reward, happiness and the answer to life’s problems, and then tell them that the only was this can be achieved is to follow your instructions absolutely. (What a way to get adulation and subservience from the great-unwashed masses. Become the overlords and protectors of the faith).

** “Fight all the forces of evil with the word of GOD as your personal compass. Let no one stray from the path of salvation that only God can bring. We cannot save you, but we shall show you how to be saved! That is why we are the just and true defenders of the faith, and our way is the right way!” (Take your pick of any modern evangelist!)

** Even Moses’ name was Egyptian in origin so it is not surprising that there is not a single ethical or religious idea in the Bible (Old and New Testament) that did not have its basis in the lore of ancient Egypt. Both Judaism and Christianity are based on the premise of Zoroastrianism, which was a direct result of the teachings of the early Greeks. –A.W.J.
** If the Library at Alexandria had not been torched by a mob of zealots (Christians) we would have a much clearer understanding of the origins of religious practices and beliefs! –A.W.J. {The Library at Alexandria was torched in 400 A.D. and 750,000 volumes were destroyed -and it is no coincidence that it happened so soon after the Council of Nicea which was partly convened in an attempt to hide the pagan origins of the new faith}

** “I think if the devil does not exist, then man has created him. He has created him in his own image and likeness.” “Just as man created God, then?” observed Alyosha. Fyodor Dostoevsky, in “The Brothers Karamazov.”

** The bible states clearly that nobody can earn his salvation through morality and good deeds (Gnosticism) since we are all sinful by nature. We have the perfect catch 22 situation were only in the blind acceptance of Christ atoning for our deeds can we be saved. In other words, we are in a no-win situation against the so-called logic of the shaman; if we do not take his word for it then all is lost! -A.W.J.

** On Nihilism: This is one belief system makes absolutely no sense to me. How can an existence that has no purpose or reason come into being. The universe is so vast and wonderful because we have the consciousness to perceive it, yet the nihilists view is that “all is for naught” since upon our departure from this mortal realm -it is all as if it never was. -A.W.J.


** When I look at the arrogance of Islam with the way they treat women and the brutality they exhibit towards others under the direction of their Imam’s, it seems very disturbing that a major world religion can exhibit such barbaric acts. That is until we realize that Christianity is guilty of just as many, if not more infractions against humanity through its history. Islam is one of the youngest of the major religions and still rooted in its origins. Let’s face it, almost everyone in the six and seventh centuries held comparable views to what Islam does today, including the Christians. -A.W.J.

. ** The Middle East male will not let his “honor” be questioned by giving females equality. The hierarchy of Islam is doing its best to keep their followers in the dark and under their thumbs with a culture that is millennia out of date. –A.W.J.
While the Imams hold sway, the uneducated mass of men in the Middle East will remain nothing more than camel herders at heart. After all, it is a sure sign of their warped mindset when they can seriously think that going to heaven means there will be seventy-two virgins waiting for each of them! These misogynists need to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twenty-first century. – A.W.J.

“Consciousness is the physical manifestation of God within us!” - A.W.J.

“Conscience is God’s presence in man.” - Emanuel Seidenberg

Deism - The Deists in general have a philosophy that is generally appealing. Deists (such as Voltaire, Rousseau and Tindal) believe that although God is the creator of the universe and the grantor of human rights as conscious beings, it does not interfere with humanity or favor one person or nation over the other. This pretty well corresponds to the way things are in the “real world!” Many of the American founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, James Madison and Ethan Allen were well known Deists. This resulted in much of the language and philosophy that is in the “United States Declaration of Independence.” One of the most well known, being the separation of church and state! – A.W.J.

Another path that has great validity is the practice of Monism. As part of the great revolt against the priesthood in the sixth century B.C.E. Monists such as Lao-Tse, (Taoism, and a contemporary of Confucius) advocated a freedom from ritual and regulations. (The priesthood) He sought to banish priests and sacrifices by offering a parallel and deeper way of union with the Absolute. The sacrifices are spiritualized and God no longer becomes the theistic creator, but rather a God that is given a new meaning by becoming the deepest self, ultimate reality, or what modern writers call “the ground of all being.” Priests and sacrifices were suitable for the uninitiated, but the true Monist had a direct access to the Absolute, which bypassed the need for ritual. The discipline developed to attain this union with the Absolute was called Yoga! – A.W.J.

In regards to Oral Roberts’ claim that God told him that he would die unless he received $20 million by March, God’s lawyers have stated that their client has not spoken with Roberts for several years. Off the record, God has stated; “If I had wanted to ice the little toad, I would have done it a long time ago.” Dennis Miller, SNL News

Many theologians think of Christianity as two different religions, one conservative and one liberal. They share the bible and the name, but not much more. Much the same can be said for the followers of Islam! A.W.J.
** If faith were the result of logical reasoning, we could expect that most intelligent people would by now be converted to one ideology or the other! –A.W.J.

** Our path on the road to religion followed a set pattern that was repeated throughout most of the world. The first religious system gave rise to the first priesthood and the first set of rituals to appease the gods. Other rituals were invented to control fertility and other aspect of the environment. A set of behavioral expectations was developed for members of the tribe that gave rise to a set of moral truths to govern human behavior. These “Moral truths” in turn formed an oral tradition that was passed down from one generation to the next. When we get into trouble is with the beginning of writing, which resulted in a major loss of flexibility. Oral traditions can evolve over time. Written documents tend to be much more permanent. Because belief systems were based on hunches, various local religions developed and their teachings were in conflict with one another. This was because most adherents thought their beliefs were derived directly from God. As a result, inter-religious compromise combined with the inflexibility of written cannon made agreement almost impossible.

A situation still in effect today! –A.W.J.

** It is co-incidental that the typical forms of revolt against priest craft appear suddenly in Greece at the same time they erupted in India? Whether it was due to borrowing, or just similar minds with identical problems, remains to be seen. However, it does not alter the fact that the sixth-century revolt against ritualism did sweep across the known world from the Middle East to China and Greece. –A.W.J.

** Once we can find a way to separate our self-image from our “world-image by way of religion,” it might be a whole lot easier to look at other viewpoints and not feel threatened. In other words, if we can stop looking upon ourselves as a “good Jews” or “good Muslims” or “good Christians” or “good Rastafarians” then we can concentrate on just being “GOOD PEOPLE!” -A.W.J.

** ”Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.” -Blaise Paschal

** A Hinduism and Zen truism: “A person is like a drop of water separated from the sea. To fall as rain, it considers itself distinct from the world soul. Then, through hill and dale, its destiny is to return to the sea!” Anonymous

** “I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures.”—Lao-Tzu
** The similarities between Hinduism and Christianity are not only remarkable, but also perfectly understandable when we consider the fact that the development of Hinduism can only be the result of direct Christian influence as well as vice-versa. Over the past few years there has been more and more evidence that the Apostle Thomas (as well as perhaps Jesus himself during the time before his Ministry) traveled to India. It is significant that the origin of Hindu Bhakti can be pinpointed to an area within a few kilometers of known, well established Christian centers in the sixth century C.E. - A.W.J.

** Christian Theism makes sin a personal revolt against a personal God, while Monism holds that sin is a result of the ignorance of the principal, or nature of the cosmos! Since Islam is a Monistic religion its look upon the Trinity of Christianity as a whole is a simple mathematical formula; $1+1+1=3$. Christianity takes the view that the Trinity is the same as an atom. One electron, one proton, and one neutron, held together by atomic (or Divine) force to make one unit.

Rather simplistic, but what the hell! - A.W.J.

** “Here we may reign secure, and in my choice.” ”To reign is worth ambition though in hell.” ”Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav’n.” - John Milton

** You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. -Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

** “The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.” -Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

** “The more you complain, the longer God lets you live.” -Anonymous

** ‘Religious distress is at the same time the expression of the real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless condition. It is the opium of the people.’ Karl Marx

** “I do not consider it an insult, but rather a compliment to be called an agnostic. I do not pretend to know where many ignorant men are sure—that is all that agnosticism means.” - Clarence Darrow, Scopes, 1925.
**I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and by men who are equally certain that they represent the Divine will. I am sure that either the one or the other is mistaken in the belief, and perhaps in some respects, both. I hope it will not be irreverent of me to say that if it is probable that God would reveal his will to others on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me. - Abraham Lincoln**

**“God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.” -Voltaire**

**There seems to be an abundance of GOD’S on this planet. There is the God of Abraham, the God of Muhammad, and the GOD of Jesus. Then there is the loving GOD, the all-powerful GOD, the vengeful GOD, the GOD of grace, the GOD of peace and the GOD’S of war. There is also the “Holy Trinity,” which is actually “three for the price of one,” and even a “dead” GOD. -A.W.J.**

**”What can you say about a society that thinks God is dead and Elvis is alive!”—Irv Kupcinet**

**“If life was fair, Elvis would be alive and all the impersonators would be dead!”—Johnny Carson**

**The very word God is deceiving since we don’t really know what the term means other than as an expression of the Divine force that rules and organizes the cosmos. -A.W.J.**

**We operate according to Gods’ wishes not the other way around. -Anonymous**

**”I don’t know why we are here, but I’m pretty sure that it is not in order to enjoy ourselves.” - Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)**

**Sacred cows make the best hamburger.—Mark Twain**

**The religion that is afraid of science - dishonors God and commits suicide. —Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**The common denominator is the universal need for God - not the dogma of human explanations, they are all different. God is revealed daily through what we refer to as “instinct.” God is so far removed from our corporal existence that it is ludicrous to believe we can have a handle on what God is, or how God operates. A.W.J.**

**I was all screwed up on drugs until I found Jesus; NOW I’M ALL SCREWED UP ON HIM! --Cheech and Chong**
** There is a theory that if anyone ever discovers exactly what the Universe is about, and why it is here, it will instantly be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. Of course, there is another theory that this has already happened! - Douglas Adams.

** Crutches come in many forms and the only similarity between them is the end result; denial of the hardships of everyday living. - Anonymous

** I first got interested in religion when I was a young teenaged recruit for Scientology in 1967.

I quickly caught on that it was a scam. Then a few weeks later L. Ron Hubbard himself came to Toronto from his boat in the Caribbean. (Sea-Org) I overheard him talking to one of the other guys about some new tenets they were going to introduce to the faithful.

The guy said, “Ron, we can’t tell them that! It will never fly, these people aren’t completely stupid you know!” To which Hubbard replied, “Let’s just see how stupid they really are!” (By the way - Hubbard might be dead - but I’ll bet he’s still laughing his ass off!) Just so you know. ----Allan

Generally, the documents suggest that a major cause of mankind’s problems began 75 million years ago, when the planet Earth, then called Teegeeach, was part of a confederation of 90 planets under the leadership of a tyrannical ruler named Xemu.

Then, as now, the materials state, the chief problem was overpopulation. Xemu decided to take radical measures to solve the overpopulation problem.

Beings were captured on Earth and on other planets and flown to at least 10 volcanoes on Earth. The documents state that H-bombs far more powerful than any in existence today were dropped on the volcanoes, destroying the people but freeing their spirits, called “thetans,” which attached themselves to one another in clusters.

After the nuclear explosions, according to the documents, the thetans were trapped in a compound of frozen alcohol and glycol and, during a 36-day period, Xemu “implanted” in them the seeds of aberrant behavior for generations to come.

When people die, those clusters attach to other humans and keep perpetuating themselves.

Before a Scientologist can learn about thetans and how to eradicate them, he must go through a progression of costly programs. L.A. Times (As posted to alt.religion.scientology, Scientologists Scramble to Keep Secrets)
The 100 Monkeys Phenomenon

I have been vaguely aware of this story for years but never really gave it much thought.

I had heard the theory a few times and sort of agreed but never got into it to the point where I could make an informed opinion and so remained ambivalent towards it.

Then yesterday, in the space of one (1) day I ran across this story four (4) times and figured that somebody, somewhere and somehow was trying to tell me something!

I will give you the story now!

*The Japanese monkey, Macaca Fuscata, had been observed in the wild for a period of over 30 years.*

*In 1952, on the island of Koshima, scientists were providing monkeys with sweet potatoes dropped in the sand. The monkeys liked the taste of the raw sweet potatoes, but they found the dirt unpleasant.*

*An 18-month-old female named Imo found she could solve the problem by washing the potatoes in a nearby stream. She taught this trick to her mother. Her playmates also learned this new way and they taught their mothers too.*

*This cultural innovation was gradually picked up by various monkeys before the eyes of the scientists. Between 1952 and 1958 all the young monkeys learned to wash the sandy sweet potatoes to make them more palatable.*

*Only the adults who imitated their children learned this social improvement. Other adults kept eating the dirty sweet potatoes.*

*Then something startling took place. In the autumn of 1958, a certain number of Koshima monkeys were washing sweet potatoes -- the exact number is not known.*

*Let us suppose that when the sun rose one morning there were 99 monkeys on Koshima Island who had learned to wash their sweet potatoes. Let's further suppose that later that morning, the hundredth monkey learned to wash potatoes.*
THEN IT HAPPENED!

By that evening almost everyone in the tribe was washing sweet potatoes before eating them. The added energy of this hundredth monkey somehow created an ideological breakthrough!

But notice: A most surprising thing observed by these scientists was that the habit of washing sweet potatoes then jumped over the sea...Colonies of monkeys on other islands and the mainland troop of monkeys at Takasakiyama began washing their sweet potatoes.

Thus, when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind.

Although the exact number may vary, this Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon means that when only a limited number of people know of a new way, it may remain the conscious property of these people.

But there is a point at which if only a few more persons tune-in to a new awareness, a field is strengthened so that this awareness is picked up by almost everyone!

Call it "cosmic consciousness," or group psychology or the herd instinct or whatever you please, but the more I think about it, the more sense it makes. And, the more I remember experiencing events like this myself.

There is also a good possibility that this is where fads come from. A few people start something and when it reaches a critical level.......... the next thing you know everyone and his brother is doing it!!!!!

** “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.” -Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

** It was the Greek philosopher Protagoras who said. “Man is the measure of all things. While we live in a valueless universe, each person, being an integral part of God, has the ability to create values.”
I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition (Christianity) one redeeming feature. They are alike, founded on fables and mythology. - Thomas Jefferson

“...I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth.”—Umberto Eco

Let me see if I have his right! Jesus was a small town Jewish rabbi-sage-cynic who preached to the Jewish faithful in Aramaic. A few generations later, his words were then translated into Greek and edited/changed for the benefit of a mainly urban Roman audience. Then a couple of hundred years after this it was translated into Latin and edited by the Catholic Church for their benefit. Finally, it was translated into fourteenth century English, which is what we still quote today! Yeh, Verily! A.W.J.

It is the very disagreement over “what the purpose of it all is” that has given us so much strife over the millennia. Everyone thinks that they have a franchise on the truth, and the moment you start thinking like that, your belief system becomes self-defeating. (Negative influence) If there really is a Devil, (Which I doubt!) what better way for him to corrupt humanity than to turn our religious feelings over to the control of fanatics. It is they who undermine the original purpose of religion, from “communing with God,” to a tool for furthering human avarice and greed.

If you need further proof that human religion is the devil's work read on. “The truth is that Christian theology, like every other theology, is not only opposed to the scientific spirit; it is also opposed to all other attempts at rational thinking.” “Not by accident does Genesis 3 make the father of knowledge a serpent—slimy, sneaking, and abominable.” “Since the earliest days, the church as an organization has thrown itself violently against every effort to liberate the body and mind of man.” “It has been, at all times and everywhere, the habitual and incorrigible defender of bad governments, bad laws, bad social theories, and bad institutions.” “It was, for centuries, an apologist for slavery as it was the apologist for the Divine right of kings.” - H. L. Mencken

“One of my objections to religion is that it prevents the search for God.”

—Arthur C. Clarke
Some Major Contributing Books

Mere Christianity – C. S. Lewis
The Sociology of Religion – Max Weber
Modern Man in Search of a Soul – Carl Jung
The Will to Believe, and Other Essays – William James
Judaism – Arthur Hertzberg
The Pagan Christ – Tom Harpur
The Silence of Jesus – James Breech
Protestantism – J Leslie Dunstan
The Lost Gospel, the Book of “Q” – Burton Mack
The Hutchinson History of the World – J. M. Roberts
The Story of Civilization, Vol. 1 - 10 – Will and Ariel Durant
The Varieties of Religious Experience – William James
The Elementary Forms of Religious Life – Emile Durkheim
The Phenomenon of Man – Pierre Teilhard De Chardin
Holy Blood, Holy Grail – Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, Henry Lincoln
When Religion Becomes Evil – Charles Kimball
The Rules of Sociological Method – Emile Durkheim
The Selfish Gene – Richard Dawkins
Language, Truth and Logic – Alfred J. Ayer
The Emergence of Man – John Pfeiffer
Hinduism – Luis Renou
The Four Loves – C. S. Lewis
Consciousness Explained – Daniel Dennett
The Meme Machine – Susan Blackmore
The Road less Traveled – M. Scott Peck
Buddhism – Richard A. Gard
For Christ’s Sake – Tom Harpur
Further Down the Road Less Traveled – M. Scott Peck
Cultural Anthropology – William A Havilland
Catholicism – George Brantl
Viruses of the Mind – R. Brodie
The Problem of Pain – C. S. Lewis
Islam – John A. Williams

And in case these books get a little too dry!

Sex in History – Reay Tannahill
The Hapsburg Dynasty

The Habsburgs were named from their ancestral castle Habsburg in Aargau in Switzerland in about 980 C.E.

In 1273 Count Habsburg became the German king Rudolf I and in 1282 gave Austria and Styria to his two sons beginning an Austrian identity.

The Habsburgs ruled until 1918 as Dukes, Archdukes and Emperors. They ruled Hungary and Bohemia and then the Austro-Hungarian Empire for hundreds of years and Spain for nearly two centuries. They allowed each country functional rule under their elective monarchies.

Frederick V was also crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1452 and this honour stayed in the family until dissolution of Holy Roman emperors in 1806. His son Maximilian I through a clever marriage also acquired the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Burgundy and eventually his descendants also gained Spain, Naples, Sicily and Sardinia.

The zenith of Habsburg power was under Charles I when the titles were: -Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, King of Germany, Emperor of Mexico, Spain, Naples, Sicily and Jerusalem; Arch Duke of Austria; Duke of Burgundy and Brabant; Count of Habsburg, Flanders, Tyrol and Bavaria.

In 1918 Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo and this ended the Habsburg dynasty and also started the First World War.
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A Ilan W Janssen

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The Plain Truth about God
(What the church doesn’t want you to know!)

or

“A donkey with a load of holy books is still just a donkey!”

We lift ourselves by our thoughts.
We climb upon our vision of ourselves.
Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924)

I hope you enjoy the book. And, find it informative!
P.S.

(Fernando Lama was the black sheep of the Dali Lama’s family!)