

Opinion

The Future of Christian Religion in the Genetic Age

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ABSTRACT

As we enter the genetic age, where science and technology are providing more and more avenues to play God with our own futures, we need to develop social, ethical, moral and spiritual traditions which are up to the challenge of dealing with the unknown future in a way which preserves human and planetary viability and doesn't subject us to a futile endgame or an apocalyptic armageddon through our own lack of sensitivity and foresight. The Western tradition of gentile Christianity can only play a part in this future through a revolution of outlook at the most fundamental level.

Key Words: genetic age, science, technology, ethics, morality, spirituality, Christian, religion, God.

Nature, Science and Religion in the Genetic Age

Christianity remains the prevailing religion of Western culture, but is it up to the challenge of acting as a spiritual and ethical guardian of human society into a third millennium? While science has flourished and evolved into a unified description of reality and we have become technologically advanced and globally interconnected, world religions remain archaic, divided and involved in partisan utopian struggles, leading towards lethal conflict, possibly on a planetary scale.

This is particularly dangerous as we enter an age of human impact, a mass extinction of living diversity and possible human-induced threats to our own viability through climatic tipping points. It is also a manifestly inadequate basis to consider the huge implications of an age of genetic technology which could have vast and irreversible impacts on our future as a species.

While science has thrived on the skeptical principles of questioning assumptions and testing theories against the natural evidence, and social systems have moved from autocracies towards egalitarian democracy, in which government is, at least in principle, a dynamic expression of the will of the people, religions, for all their claim to being the sanctuaries of higher spiritual and ethical consciousness remain resistant to change and adamantly opposed to fundamental innovation of the kind that has accompanied the quantum leaps of our scientific revolutions, particularly fundamental renewal of the religious paradigm.

To pass any test of validity in our global planetary future, religions need to be able to pass both the kind of natural reality check scientific theories have to, and prove themselves to be a willing and autonomous

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democratic expression of the conscious experiences and will of each generation looking towards their own futures and those of their descendants. But for all the tendency to religious belief permeating even the most liberated secular societies, traditional religions seem to be manifestly failing on both these acid tests.

In the toxic centre of the cyclone of religious dysfunction, despite being the loved and cherished mainstay, are the central notions of having to have faith and affirmative belief, as the foundation of religious experience, both of which strike at the very heart of natural validity, as they *a priori* confront nature and the universe with unswerving prejudicial conviction.

Humanity has yet to discover how to come to terms with a sustainable planetary culture and avoid a hard landing caused by our own human impacts on the Earth's living environment, which could raise the oceans, deplete non-renewable resources, including energy, chemical resources and natural habitats, and wipe out up to a third of living species, in a triage reminiscent of the bitter waters of Revelation. Far from being confined to a few natural curiosities, this could cause economic collapse and widespread famine. We are also entering an era where major genetic questions interpenetrate with human survival. Is religion, and in particular Christian religion, able to cut the mustard to achieve a sustainable future for humanity and the biosphere?

Monotheistic religions are particularly unsuited to this task, because they are desert religions founded on utopian apocalyptic principles, in free flight towards tumultuous final conflict, the triage of all life, and the victory of one religion or another in a day of judgment in which the whole of the planetary biosphere is conceived as being laid waste in a rapture of the late planet Earth. This is about as far from a sustainable future as one can possibly imagine.

Even in the most technologically and scientifically developed societies of Europe and the US, a sizable minority, to a frank majority of people continue to believe in God, hold to religious convictions, and remain in a state of frank denial about basic scientific issues, from biological evolution to the age of the universe. Is this a manifestation of the undeniable reality of religion, or is it an archaic throwback from coercive patterns of belief, which people are too dependent on and frightened of any alternative to, to set aside?

Could it even have a genetic basis in 4000 years of human social selection, in which monolithic religious belief systems have been the strongest single force shaping the military ascendance of dominant societies, driven by their moral suppression of internal conflict? If so, does this verify that religiosity is paradoxically enshrined in evolution, or is it a startling example of how selective breeding can result in insidious and potentially lethal characteristics?

In this discussion, there are two complementary threads. One is the innate tendency of people to reach towards religion, and in the Christian context, belief in God, as an existential prop to cope with ultimate anxieties about life, death and suffering in the physical world, to give us comfort, even if delusory, and make some ordered sense out of a seemingly chaotic existence of tooth and claw.

The other is the specific nature of Christianity as a religion, its fundamental tenets, its historical genesis and the degree to which it is founded on real people and historical events, as opposed to fantastic myths

or contrivances which become less and less credible, as we discover more about nature and the universe around us.

If Christianity is going to cut the mustard as an influence shaping human destiny into the future, it needs to face acid tests of its validity and capacity to address the changes human culture is likely to face over the third millennium. So how does it stack up? To answer this we need to wind back to the very origins of Christianity and understand how this tradition of belief came about.

This is going to be a convoluted historical detour, but it is essential to set the groundwork for assessing the Christian heritage in the kind of terms necessary to pass the acid tests of authenticity and viability.

The Nature and Mission of Jesus

In the first instance this comes down to a scrutiny of Jesus as the centre of the Christian cyclone. We will assume here that Jesus is an actual historical figure who walked the Earth as an incarnate human, despite conflicting claims to his being God the Son by his gentile Christian apologists, or merely a figment of myth and fable by some of his detractors.

Actual records of Jesus' life are lean at best, coming principally from three sources, the four orthodox gospels, written long after his life and death by proponents who we have no real evidence actually experienced the events they describe first hand, with manifest religious political agendas; a few gnostic sayings in the [Gospel of Thomas](#); and a few derogatory remarks in the Talmud decrying him as one who led the people of Israel astray. Even the brief account of Jesus in [Josephus](#)' history is considered to be a later Christian insertion to add substance to his historical existence.

While he is the Son of God to gentile Christians, he was a false messiah to orthodox Jews. The Lexicon Talmudicum and Talmud babli Sanhedrin 106b, 43a, 51a and the Toldoth Jeshu refer to *Jeshu-ha-Notzri [Jesus of Nazareth] by mention of the wicked kingdom of Edom, since that was his nation... he was hanged on a Passover eve... He was near to the kingdom. Balaam the lame was 33 years old when Pintias the Robber [Pontius Pilate] killed him... They say that his mother was descended from princes and rulers but consorted with carpenters.*

The personality and divinity of Jesus show sharply divided descriptions between the synoptics, Mark, Matthew and Luke on the one hand, the dark and light firebrand semi-gnosticism of John, and the altogether different account in Thomas, more that of a paradoxical sage, inducing the reader to fulfill their own discovery of "the kingdom", which 'lies before you but men do not see it'.

While the synoptics have Peter declare Jesus to be the chosen messiah anointed, in Thomas he disclaims that he is not the messiah but the catalyst:

Mark 8:27: And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

Thomas 13: *Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like." Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like." Jesus said, "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out."*

The fact that many of Jesus' sayings in The Gospel of Thomas are in a root form, which appears to predate the more embellished versions in the synoptics, attests both to its authenticity and to the fact that Jesus saw discovering reality in terms of gnosis or 'knowing', rather than belief, particularly the belief in a divine Lord and saviour that Christianity later became, as noted in [Elaine Pagels'](#) (2003) work "Beyond Belief". Thomas is variously dated to 60 - 110 CE, with some of the material certainly coming from the first stratum, which is dated to 30 - 60. The [Oxyrhynchus](#) fragments date to as early as 130.

The sayings which cast Thomas as Jesus' twin brother, inviting us likewise to be twins with Jesus; in 'knowing', convey an atmosphere closer to that of an Eastern sage or a nature shaman than an anointed divine Lord. The first three sayings of Jesus in Thomas set out the core of the gnostic path of self-fulfillment in knowing in oneself, in the first person, the experiential condition of the All, and that the Kingdom is right here in this world, once we come to understand the nature of existence:

(1) *"Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."*

(2) *"Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the all."*

(3) *"If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty."*

Even when Jesus appears to say things which might be interpreted as claiming to be the divine source, we are also one and the same in gnostic awareness, manifest in everything from an overturned stone to a newly split piece of wood:

(77) *Jesus said, "It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will I find me there."*

On the other side, the synoptics would have him declare that some standing before him would not pass away before the Kingdom would come in Power, giving the church a claim to being a temporary steward, or guardian, before the Lord's return in glory, although the fulfillment of this engagement has receded ever further away, as the centuries have passed unrequited.

It is clear in the light of history that the nature of Jesus' mission set it apart from the Hebrew tradition,

which led to him being declared a false messiah by the Jews, despite having a small following among the Hebrew Christians under the banner of the [desposyni](#), [James the Just](#) and Jesus' immediate family.

Among these are blasphemous claims to performing nature miracles, including curing people of maladies, causing 'evil spirits' to enter a herd of pigs who ran in demented horror into the sea of Galilee to the consternation of their owners, calming the waters and walking upon them, climaxing in revitalizing Lazarus. The nature miracles are not part of the Hebrew tradition although some prophets performed them, such as Moses mythical parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Profligate miraculous dread is the characteristic of Dionysian legend, as the dark god of altered states, who is the original 'true vine' who turned water into wine on the same epiphany, or advent, and in particular [Dhushara](#) of neighbouring [Nabatea](#), at its height in Jesus' time, who achieved immortality while wearing a theatrical death mask (Glueck 1966).

One should also note with caution that these 'miraculous' powers were ephemeral, so that the synoptics note comments like "physician heal thyself" intimating at the lameness mentioned in the Talmud, the disciples thinking of deserting him after the episode of the 5000 loaves but having nowhere else to turn, suggesting the performance was less than convincing to them, and his frank failure to perform any convincing good works in his home town of Nazareth.

The final episodes leading to the crucifixion, including his elaborate advance preparation for the event, including his raising of Lazarus, his anointing to his burial, pre-booking a venue for the last supper, riding into Jerusalem as the Palm King, turning the tables and passing the sop to Judas as in a prearranged pact (Pagels and King), likewise read as an act of Dionysian tragic theatre, raising ultimate questions over his rapid 'demise' on the cross and subsequent medicinal treatment by the women with aloes and spices provided by Joseph of Arimathea. These ambiguities have led to repeated claims that Jesus may have survived the crucifixion (Schonfield) and was variously seen in Rome (Graves ad Podro 1957), traveled to India and was buried in Kashmir and even that he became a rice farmer in Japan and his remains lie in a [shrine in Aoomori](#).

There is also a continuing series of central events in his mission that read as a classic sacrificial rite of a fertility cult. He was anointed by a woman rather than a high rabbi, as all the other Jewish messiahs, from Solomon to [Bar Cochbah](#) were, and anointed in a very strange manner for his burial in the manner of kings sacrificed to [Inana](#) and Ishtar, a female anointing without which the title of messiah could not apply. Also highly irregular was the dependence of Jesus' mission on the support of women 'out of their very substance', followed to his demise by the women who came down from Galilee, and later discovered as an apparition in the garden by Magdalen, having been privately 'embalmed' with aloes and spices by the women, when the disciples scattered like the sheep of the foolish shepherd of Zechariah.

Both these key aspects of Jesus' mission, and the cataclysmic crucifixion, where he is supposed to have been killed, harrowed hell and risen again on the third day, come right out of the fertility religions of Sumeria, Babylon, and concurrently with his own life, of Nabatea. Even if we accept that the gospels are mythical accounts written with a Hellenistic gloss long after Jesus' death, it is very unlikely the misogynistic Christian forefathers would have inserted these themes of their own accord.

Finally we have the vein of pure gold that makes people love God and Jesus to this day and that is the completely novel idea that instead of a God of jealousy and retribution, as Yahweh is portrayed as being,

as a totemic deity of the bride Israel, Abba is deemed by Jesus to be a loving, forgiving father, who will even right in the moment forgive us all our sins if we believe in him. This also leads to Jesus, reversing Rabbi Hillel's silver rule "don't do to others what you would not have them do unto you" when asked to recite the Torah standing on one foot, to the affirmative and slightly more evangelical golden rule "do unto others what you would have them do unto you".

Finally we have the command of total forgiveness to turn the other cheek and bless them that curse you. One has to take caution about this, because evolutionary game theory has shown that [tit-for-tat](#), or an eye for an eye, is one of the most effective evolutionary strategies of survival, because it cooperates with cooperators and punishes defectors, but it is prone to cycles of reciprocal retaliation. Always cooperate is a lethal sucker's game and one could really only advance this in an apocalyptic belief that the world is transitory and a new Kingdom is about to emerge, nevertheless it is infectiously appealing. It is these sayings above all that have led Christians, over many centuries of church corruption and diabolical bloodshed against its own people, to continue to believe in God and in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Thus it becomes ever clearer that Jesus, in his mission to the lost sheep of Israel, had a wider, much more ingenious conception, of generating a root paradigm change, encompassing the wider Near Eastern religious cosmologies of his time, as well as turning the apocalyptic tables on Judaic traditions in the persona of the eschatological Son of Man coming in Power.

In this, [Nabatea](#) plays a key role, as Josephus makes clear. In the account of the beheading of [John the Baptist](#), in Mark (6:14-29), Salome dances before the generals in what is clearly a dance of the seven veils of [Inana](#), and Ishtar, at her mother Herodias' behest, claims the Baptist's head (as a sacrifice of Dumuzi, or [Tammuz](#) as he came to be called in the Hebrew temple), when Herod, as was done to Haman in [Esther](#), offers her even half the kingdom. This event occurred at Macherus on the Nabatean border, with Herod's generals present, because Herod, whom the Baptist had accused of marrying his brother Philip's wife, and his own cousin, had jilted the Princess of Nabatea, who ran in fear of her life to her parents [Aretas IV](#) and Shaqilat II the conjoint King and Queen, sparking a war between Nabatea and Herod in the neighbouring Tetrarchy of Perea in which Herod was defeated.

In a strange echo, in supposedly taking up John's mantle, (although the Baptist's surviving Sabean followers in Southern Iraq vehemently disclaim Jesus teachings), Jesus also died anointed to his burial by a woman variously claimed to be Mary of Bethany and/or Magdalen and a 'sinner' caught in adultery.

He is also claimed in the Gospel of Thomas to have come up on Salome's bed:

(61) Jesus said, "Two will rest on a bed: the one will die, and the other will live." Salome said, "Who are you, man, that you ... have come up on my couch and eaten from my table?" And Jesus says, "I am he who is from the One, and the things that belong to the Father have been given to me." Salome replies, "But I am your disciple", and Jesus answers, "When the disciple is united he will be filled with light, but if he is divided he will be filled with darkness."

The natural founders of the movement following Jesus' crucifixion are James the Just, Peter, and as we shall see in a more subterranean way, Mary, Martha and Salome.

The immediate end result of Jesus' blasphemous mission was a small religious following centered around the Jewish Christians or [Nazarenes](#) as they were called in Jerusalem after Jesus' birth place of Nazareth. It is clear the Nasarenes revered James and the desposyni. The Gospel of Thomas also asserts Jesus appointed James rather than Peter to be his successor, in apocalyptically glowing terms:

"The disciples said to Jesus: We know that you will depart from us; who is it who will lead us?" Jesus said to them, "Wherever you have come from, go to James the Just, for whom heaven and earth came to be."

The little we know of James portrays him as a very devout man. [Hegesippus](#) stated *"that he was a lifelong Nazirite, abstaining from animal food and strong drink. He neither shaved nor cut his hair, never anointed his body with oil or used the public bath. He never wore woolen, only linen garments, and prayed constantly in the Temple for the forgiveness of the people."* In 62, immediately before [Vespasian's](#) attack beginning the siege of Jerusalem, he was murdered at the temple variously cast down from the pinnacles at the behest of the High Priest [Ananus ben Ananus](#), or falling from the steps. In [Eusebius'](#) words they cried: *'O just One, whose word we all ought to obey, since the people are led astray after Jesus, who was crucified, tell us what is the Gate to Jesus?'* And he answered shouting out loudly, *'Why do you ask me concerning the Son of Man? He is now sitting in Heaven at the right hand of the Great Power and is about to come on the clouds of Heaven.'* The Christian commentary has seriously injured James cry out: *"I beseech Thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* just as Luke claims Jesus did as lots were cast on his garments. A Rechabite priest then shouted: *"Cease, what do ye? The just man is praying for us,"* but he is then struck on the head by the club a fuller used to wring out wet garments with.

The brief Epistle of James does not state it is written by James the Just, but simply a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, although Christian writers do attribute it to him. Other authors see it as a later pseudo-epigraphical or composite edited work, or a work of wisdom literature in the guise of an epistle. However it does contain a passage which exposes an area of significant conflict with Paul's Hellenistic teaching, claiming how you actually carry out the eventual acts is the key, and not faith alone - the dissonance between salvation and justification:

'What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.'

Peter is equally enigmatic, although he is the 'rock' holding the keys to the golden gate. Paul assigns him to leading the mission to the circumcised, but history suggests he taught in Antioch and moved to Rome where he was martyred by Nero. He also undertook a missionary journey to Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea, becoming instrumental in the decision to evangelize the Gentiles. The only potentially genuine remnant of his teaching is the brief first Epistle of Peter, which is notable in suggesting Jesus taught the 'imprisoned' in hell.

Even though virtually all we know of Jewish Christians or [Nazarenes](#) is sourced through subsequent gentile Christian detractors, the little we do know of Nazarenes, such as the [Ebionites](#), paint a very different picture of the emergence of Jesus' following in the first century from the Pauline version, he entitled Christianity.

During the first centuries of the Christian Era, the Ebionites or 'deserving poor' regarded Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and insisted on the necessity of following Jewish religious law and rites such as circumcision. The Ebionites used only one Hebrew Gospel, revered James the Just and rejected Paul as an apostate from the Law, as did the [Elcesaites](#). [Epiphanius](#) states (Panarion 30.16:9) that some Ebionites gossiped that Paul was a Greek who converted to Sadduceean Judaism in order to marry the High Priest's daughter, and then apostasized when she rejected him.

It has to be remembered that the Jewish messiah was always considered to be a human, not a God - a Jewish prophet or king, who was anointed in recognition of bringing about an epoch of long-term future goodness, as Solomon did, despite his many strange wives. Even with the growth of apocalyptic Judaism such as the Essene movement, who followed the Teacher of Righteousness, and the notion of the eschatological Son of Man, or Son of Adam, there is no parallel for the messiah being identified with God in the gentile Christian manner.

The Ebionites accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the greatest of the prophets, but not as the 'virgin born' Son of God and considered that he had normal human parentage. By virtue of his righteousness, he was chosen by God to be the messianic "prophet like Moses". He became one with God in the baptism and remained so until his crucifixion. They did not view Jesus' death as a bloody act of atonement. They rejected Christ's pre-existence, divinity, virgin birth, and physical resurrection. One Ebionite story does have Jesus eating bread with his brother Jacob ("James the Just") after the resurrection but this can be considered a miraculous happening in line with other prophetic miracles. They practiced a rigorous asceticism and stressed the binding character of the Mosaic Law. Epiphanius stated that they interpreted the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus, substituting a chalice of water for the chalice of blood, and became vegetarians, rejecting the temple animal sacrifices, although it has been suggested this applies rather to the Elcesaites.

Of the books of the New Testament, the Ebionites only accepted an Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew, referred to as the Gospel of the Hebrews, as scripture. This version of Matthew, Pauline Christian critics reported, omitted the first two chapters (on Jesus' virgin birth), and started with Jesus' baptism by John implying they held an Adoptionist view.

[Adoptionists](#) assert that Jesus was fully human, born of a sexual union between Joseph and Mary, and only became adopted as 'God's son', later at his baptism, because of his sinless devotion to the will of God. Adoptionism probably arose among early Jewish Nazarenes seeking to reconcile gentile Christian claims that Jesus was the Son of God with the strict monotheism of Judaism, in which the Trinity and a divinity in human form was unacceptable, and may date back almost to the time of Jesus.

After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Ebionites settled at Pella in Transjordan, but remained outside the mainstream of Christianity. Eusebius summarizes this from his perspective in that they "had poor and mean opinions concerning Christ. They held him to be a plain and ordinary man who had achieved

righteousness merely by the progress of his character" (Ranke-Heinemann 1992 173, Wilson I 154, Grollier).

The Hellenistic Transformation of Jesus into Christian Deity

Paul, who had never had direct contact with any of the historical events is the inventor of gentile Christianity, as opposed to the Jewish practices of the Nasarenes. It becomes a Hellenistic travesty of Hebrew traditions, leading to fantastic notions, from Jesus' divinity, and Mary's virgin birth, to a rapture in which the elect float up into thin air in the apparent annihilation of the living planet.

Despite Ebionite claims he was a Greek apostate, Paul was, in his own words, "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee". He was also Saul of Tarsus, a Roman citizen, persecuting Christians.

He then claimed, a few years after Jesus' crucifixion, that the resurrected Jesus had spoken to him on the road to Damascus in a great light, and that he was struck blind, but after three days his sight was restored by Ananias of Damascus. He began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. Paul was thus the first born again Christian in the modern sense, having no direct connection with Jesus' life, except through an apparition similar to Marian and other apparitions people occasionally experience today and he carried on his mission and declared his gospel exclusively on the basis of this ephemeral connection.

Paul asserted that he received the Gospel not from any person, but by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ and assertively claimed almost total independence from the Jerusalem community. It was fully three years after his conversion that he first went to Jerusalem, where he met James and Peter: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother." He emphasizes this is no lie as if it is somehow scandalous.

He claims to have subsequently received their approval for his teachings in a second meeting in Jerusalem 11 years later: "when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." Whether this 'poor' means the 'deserving poor' Ebionites who decried Paul as an apostate remains enigmatic.

A vital meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem church took place some time in the years 48 to 50, often referred to as the Council of Jerusalem. The key question raised was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. It is noted that in John, Jesus says "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man."

It is claimed it was agreed gentile Christians were not obliged to keep most of the Mosaic Law. According to the account, Peter remonstrated "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."

Paul claims that at this meeting, Peter, James, and John accepted his mission to the Gentiles. However it is clear that James remained concerned that Paul had not fully kept this agreement, in particular over non-kosher meat from the markets, in their final meeting in Jerusalem.

However there were continuing tensions over keeping the Jewish Law, for gentiles who had converted from fertility worship, leading to the incident at Antioch: "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy." Evidently Paul was on the offside, because he left Antioch never to return, although Catholic tradition claims he and Peter eventually taught together in Rome.

Since the Pauline letters are the earliest texts in the New Testament, dating from around 51, this casts a pall of doubt over the later compilations of the four New Testament gospels, which likewise contain a mix of sayings, miraculous claims, frankly implausible divine birth accounts and careful reconstructions of Hebrew scripture to make the whole event look like it was prophesied. Moreover, as Elaine Pagels (1995) has made clear, they also contain partisan polemic discrediting the teachings of other groups who had emerged, for example decrying Thomas Didymus's account as Jesus' twin brother in the doubting Thomas episode, implying Thomas's gnostic teachings didn't fully embrace Jesus' divinity and resurrected corporeality.

Eusebius notes that Papias, the second century bishop of Hierapolis said that "Mark was the interpreter of Peter and wrote down carefully what he remembered of what had been said or done by the Lord, but not in the right order" (Ranke-Heinmann 1992 219, Graves and Podro 1953 37), quoting John the Elder (Fox R 127), presumably the disciple, suggesting Mark contains retellings of accounts witnessed by Peter. The earliest hypothetical fragment of Mark is the [Qumran fragment 7Q5](#) dating to 68, but its relationship to Mark's gospel is rejected by nearly all authorities.

Matthew is variously regarded as originating from a Jewish-Christian source, but has had editorial ornamentation later. The earliest [Magdalen fragments of Matthew](#) are attributed to c 70. Both Luke and Matthew are believed to have derived partly from Mark and a hypothetical [synoptic sayings source](#) "Q", so as they stand are later reconstructions. Luke confesses at the outset that he was not present during Jesus' lifetime.

John claims to be the elusive 'beloved disciple' and is sometimes referred to, along with Peter and James in early Christian accounts (1 Cor 15.3-8). John also contains references to an older compilation of miracles, suggesting it is likewise a redacted compilation and the passage about the woman caught in adultery appears to be a later addition. The [Rylands fragment](#) of John 18:31-4 dating from c125 AD in Egypt confirms the Gospel of John's existence by a date of perhaps 90 AD.

We need to take into account here, that the founding gospels of the New Testament do not appear to have envisaged Jesus as the divine Son of God. The early Jewish-Christian Gospels make no mention of a supernatural birth. Rather, they state that Jesus was begotten at his baptism. According to the Church Fathers, the first gospel was written by Matthew, called the Gospel of the Hebrews and was adoptionist in nature. The Gospel of the Hebrews has no mention of the Virgin Birth and when Jesus is baptized it states, "Jesus came up from the water, Heaven was opened, and He saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove and enter into Him. And a voice from Heaven said, 'You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.' And again, 'Today I have begotten You.' Immediately a great light shone around the place".

Scholars also see Adoptionist theology in the Gospel of Mark. Mark has Jesus as the Son of God, occurring at strategic points, but the Virgin Birth of Jesus has not been developed. The phrase "Son of God" is not present in some early manuscripts at 1:1. This omission supports the notion that the title "Son of God" is not used of Jesus until his baptism, and that Mark reflects an Adoptionist view.

Critical parts of Mark containing the encounters with the resurrected Christ may also be later additions. Mark 16:8 stops at a description of the empty tomb, which is immediately preceded by a statement by a "young man dressed in a white robe" that Jesus is "risen" and is "going ahead of you into Galilee." The last twelve verses are missing from the oldest manuscripts.

The theology of Adoptionism fell into disfavor as Christianity left its Jewish roots and Gentile Christianity became dominant, was declared heresy at the end of the 2nd century, and was rejected by the First Council of Nicaea.

Gnostic Undercurrents

From the earliest times, an exceedingly diverse spectrum of gnostic followings (Pagels 1979) also sprang up, from the [Valentinian](#) groups of Alexandria, to the [Ophites](#), and [Phibionites](#). In trying to reclaim something of the founding tradition, we need to appreciate the diversity of these gnostic cosmologies.

The various Ophite sects, according to the accounts of Christian detractors, believed in the serpent of Eden and Moses, considering Eve worshipped the serpent as the giver of wisdom and new life, and saw Jesus as either a pretender to the serpent's power, or an emanation of it.

The [Naassene](#) Ophites claimed to have been taught their doctrines by Mariamne, a disciple of James the Just. The retention of the Hebrew form shows that their beliefs may represent the earliest stages of Gnosticism. Every temple shows by its title that it is intended for the honour of the serpent *naas* as "the Moist Essence," of the universe, without which "naught at all of existing things, immortal or mortal, animate or inanimate, can hold together. All things are subject to Him, and He is Good, and has all things in Him ... so that He distributes beauty and bloom to all that exist according to each one's nature and peculiarity, as though permeating all."

They gave to the first principle the names First Man and Son of Man, calling him in their hymns Adamas: The First Man the fundamental being before its differentiation into individuals. The Son of Man: the same being after it has been individualized into existing things and thus sunk into matter. Thus Jesus becomes 'the True Gate', through whom the Perfect Man enters. They represented their "Man" as androgynous; and hence one of their hymns runs "From thee, father, through thee, mother, the two immortal names." They declared that "the beginning of Perfection is the gnosis of Man, but the gnosis of God is perfected Perfection." The Garden of Eden, in the Naassene system, is the brain, and Paradise the human head.

The Valentinians envisaged a more complex cosmology than orthodox Christianity with the pleroma, 'light or fullness', containing a primal bythos, 'the depth', who after long contemplation emanated sexually dyadic aeons, one of which, Sophia suffered from curiosity, leading to the creation of the material world by a demiurge identified with the Jewish deity. Humanity, possessing both spiritual and material nature, achieves redemption through gnosis (personal spiritual knowledge) rather than worship of a saviour. The Valentinians held to a sophisticated ethic which allowed those who had achieved gnosis to waive the strict moral prescriptions of traditional Christianity.

The gnostics also claimed roots that went back to the women present at the embalming. The gnostic teacher Marcellina traveled to Rome to represent the Carpocratian group,' which claimed to have received secret teaching from Mary, Salome, and Martha. Tertullian commented: "These heretical women how audacious they are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and, it may be, even to baptize!" However, according to Occhigrosso, Tertullian became a turncoat. Montanus led an ecstatic movement rather like Pentecostals today. "Many of [Montanus](#)'s followers were women, who were allowed to teach, heal, and exorcise demons. Their most famous adherent was Tertullian of Carthage (c. 203), the great early Christian theologian, who first attacked the charismatic movement and then joined it."

Even non-Christian writers in the 2nd century were aware that some tradition existed of secret teachings passed down from "Salome the disciple", to sects such as the [Carpocratians](#). "There are Christian sects named after Marcellina, Harpocratian Christians who trace themselves to Salome, and some who follow Mariamne and others who follow Martha, and still others who call themselves Marcionites after their leader, [Marcion](#)."

On another tack, the Phibionites were said to engage a form of sexual sacramentalism, including smearing of hands with menstrual blood and semen, and consumption of the same as a variant of eucharist and we even accused by their detractors of consuming the aborted fetuses of sexual religious rituals.

Marcion, while not strictly a gnostic held to a docetic view. According to him, the god of the Old Testament, whom he called the Demiurge, the creator of the material universe, is a jealous tribal deity of the Jews, whose law represents legalistic reciprocal justice and who punishes mankind for its sins through suffering and death. Contrastingly, the god that Jesus professed is an altogether different being, a universal god of compassion and love who looks upon humanity with benevolence and mercy. Marcion held Jesus to be the son of the Heavenly Father but understood the incarnation in a [docetic](#) manner, i.e. that Jesus' body was only an imitation of a material body.

By the time of the burying of the [Nag Hammadi](#) texts (Robinson 1990), around 340 for the Gospel of Thomas, the gnostics had been forcibly suppressed by the conservative bishops, leading to the establishment of Christian orthodoxy, which survives to the present in the divided Catholic and Orthodox churches, and their many Protestant and evangelical splinter groups. However, gnosticism was to reappear in the middle ages as a 'spiritual contagion' of the Crusades, leading to the violent suppression of the [Cathars](#), Albigenses and others, along with many [Christian mystics](#), [assumed witches](#), and the [Free Spirit movement](#), in a 600 year Inquisition as diabolical as the Crusades themselves.

The Kingdom is a Long Time Coming

Between the death of the 'saviour' and the immortal kingdom was said to be a prophesied turbulent age called the Pangs of the Messiah. From Jesus' own words, this was meant to take no longer than one generation:

Mark 9:1 *"Jesus said unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.'"*

Luke 21:23: *"But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."*

Luke 21:32 *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."*

Matt 24:29 *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."*

However Jesus himself claimed not to know when the Son of Man would arrive:

Mark 13:32 *"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. ... Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping."*

This uncertainty of the time is echoed in Luke 12:40 and Matthew 24:44 as Christ coming as a thief in the night:

"And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

The earliest Christian writing is 1 Thessalonians, dated circa AD 50. In it Paul's message is to wait and not slumber, for the son of man shall come at any time hence, in the Rapture in the air

1:10: *"And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."*

3:13 *"... to stablish your hearts ... at the coming of Jesus Christ with all his saints ... "*

4:16 *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ... Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."*

This immediate urgency of the Kingdom remains central to Paul's teaching in 55 AD:

1 Corinth 7:25 *"Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment ... that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. ... But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."*

However by the time of the final compilation of the New Testament, a threatening heresy had arisen because the end and salvation had not occurred and the pseudo-epigraphical Second Epistle of Peter attempts to finesse the problem, explaining that God has delayed the Second Coming so that more people will have the chance to reject evil and find salvation. It calls on Christians to wait patiently for the parousia and to study scripture.

Despite his fierce opposition to the gnostic 'heresies' Irenaeus remained fully committed to the prophecies of Revelation and the belief in the end of days. However Origen threw a spanner in the works by claiming the eschatological condition was essentially in the mind - occurring only in the souls of believers. This fitted well with the Hellenistic imagination of "spiritual progress begun in this world and continued in the next".

Once the Christian church became officially adopted with the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, it became "a powerful and prosperous institution functioning to a well-established routine, and the men responsible for governing it had no wish to see Christians clinging to out-dated and inappropriate dreams of a new earthly paradise" (Cohn 1957 29). Early in the fifth century Augustine

propounded in the City of God that Revelation was to be understood as a spiritual allegory, and as for the millennium, that had begun with the birth of Christianity and was fully realized in the church.

This way it becomes possible for the gentile church to have its cake and eat it too, claiming it is a steward guarding the world for the second coming of the Lord, while at the same time never having to relinquish control, because Christ is the Son of God whom no mere mortal can emulate or become a successor to.

Irascible Squabbles and Corruption among the Church Fathers

The orthodox history is equally as bizarre as the gnostic. From the time of Paul, Christianity ceased being a Hebrew religion, or the teachings of Jesus, and became a Hellenistic religion, with strong pagan motifs, gaining an immense popular following from Egypt, through Ephesus to Greece and Rome, appealing to the sentiments and superstitions of cultures involved in polytheistic fertility religions and their mythical heros and heroines. Jesus became a heroic man-God fusion and Mary became a virgin mother. Many of the key festivals, including Christmas and Easter were effectively hijacked from the solstice of [Mithras](#) and the festival of the European Goddess [Eostre](#), noted by the venerable [Bede](#), whose ovum remains central to this day, although Christians claim this comes down to an egg that turned red when Magdalen either saw the risen Jesus or declared "Christ is Risen" to the Roman Emperor. Key elements of the communion were derived from the immensely popular worship of [Isis](#), whose archetype as the sacred mother was inherited by Mary.

Rather than the covenantal religion of its Hebrew origins, Christianity became a sacramental religion, in which the bloodthirsty soma and sangre of the heroic demi-God becomes the Eucharist - the central communion with the risen saviour, who died to save us from our sins, under the filicidal banner 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission from sin'.

Having successfully repressed the gnostics, the church fathers then began to indulge in angry disagreements among themselves about the exact nature of Jesus as a divine Son of God, rather than a prophetic innovator, and argue about his exact relationship with God the Father and the Holy Ghost, who now seems to have also become responsible for Mary's pregnancy. These became so vehement that a series of conventions were called to settle the matter of Jesus' contradictory corporeality and divinity, driving out [docetic](#) notions along with the Arian and Nestorian theology which then became an heretic anathema.

Docetic notions shared by Marcion and some gnostic teachings (and later the Quranic view of Isa who was deemed to be taken up by al-Llah without suffering, leading to all manner of Islamic suicide bombings) center around the idea that Jesus was a pure spirit and that his physical body and crucifixion were an illusion. To gnostics who saw matter as evil, it was natural that Jesus could not have his eternal spirit tainted with matter, however this contradicted the resurrection of the dead and the intrinsic goodness of God's creation in the orthodox view.

But even orthodox notions that differed in minor ways from dominant view became cursed. These contrived notions continued to cause a great deal of friction.

In [Arianism](#) the concept of Christ is that the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by - and is therefore distinct from - God the Father, so although Arianism embraces the same entities, it is not truly trinitarian. Of all the various disagreements within the Christian Church, the Arian controversy has held the greatest force and power of theological and political conflict, with the possible exception of the Protestant Reformation. By 325, the controversy had become significant enough that the Emperor Constantine called an assembly of bishops, the First Council of Nicaea, which condemned Arius' doctrine and formulated the original [Nicene Creed](#) of 325.

Later the First Council of Constantinople 381, set out in its most unambiguous form the orthodox party line about creation, God, Jesus' divinity and Mary's role in the piece:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen".

This statement leads to many of the central fallacies in Christian teaching as core fundamentals, in conflict with and violation of the natural order. It declares that God, rather than being a unity, is a Trinity oddly composed of a male Father and Son and a Holy Ghost of undefined gender, while Mary, despite being Jesus' mother, is somehow just a virgin vessel appendage. From the statement, it appears that Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' humanity results from fertilization, or direct manufacture, 'made' by the Holy Ghost. Jesus is of one substance with Abba and so both are inseparably God although Jesus was crucified as an incarnate being. Jesus is no longer a prophet, or a wise sage, nor even a demi-God, but consubstantial with God himself.

It is easy to understand, in the light of Genesis, how God the Father is deemed to have created heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible even if we now know nature has taken a more subtle and complex route, but the status of Jesus being begotten not made stands at the contradictory nub of his mythical divinity. Rejecting the docetic notion, it is clearly stated that Jesus' was crucified, suffered and was buried as a physical human being would, who then miraculously on the third day of the beborn sickle moon, ascended into heaven, just as in the older astral religions and is now consubstantial with God.

[Nestorius](#), in a second heretical conflict with Cyril of Alexandria, tried to find a middle ground between those that emphasized the fact that in Christ God had been born as a man and insisted on calling the Virgin Mary Theotokos "God-bearer", and those that rejected that title because God, as an eternal being, could not have been born. Nestorius believed that no union between the human and divine were possible. If such a union of human and divine occurred, Nestorius believed that Christ could not truly be

con-substantial with God and con-substantial with us because he would grow, mature, suffer and die (being transient while God is eternal) and also would possess the power of God that would separate him from being equal to humans.

The Emperor Theodosius II (401–450) was eventually induced to convoke a general church council, sited at Ephesus, itself a special seat for the veneration of Mary, where the theotokos formula was popular. The Emperor and his wife supported Nestorius while Pope Celestine I supported Cyril. Cyril took charge of the First Council of Ephesus in 431, opening debate before the long-overdue contingent of Eastern bishops from Antioch arrived. The council deposed Nestorius and declared him a heretic.

But while the council was in progress, John I of Antioch and the eastern bishops arrived, and were furious to hear that Nestorius had already been condemned. They convened their own synod, at which Cyril was deposed. Both sides then appealed to the emperor. Initially the imperial government ordered both Nestorius and Cyril deposed and exiled. However, Cyril was eventually allowed to return after bribing various courtiers.

As if to put the final punctuation on these conflicts the Latin church added the filioque "who proceedeth from the Father and the Son". Easterners have argued this is a violation of Canon VII of the Third Ecumenical Council, since the words were not included in the text by either the Council of Nicaea or that of Constantinople.

Specifically Canon VII states "When these things had been read, the holy Synod decreed that it is unlawful for any man to bring forward, or to write, or to compose a different Faith as a rival to that established by the holy Fathers assembled with the Holy Ghost in Nicæa. But those who shall dare to compose a different faith, or to introduce or offer it to persons desiring to turn to the acknowledgment of the truth, whether from Heathenism or from Judaism, or from any heresy whatsoever, shall be deposed, if they be bishops or clergymen; bishops from the episcopate and clergymen from the clergy; and if they be laymen, they shall be anathematized."

What has become abundantly clear is that the divine nature of Jesus is not a fact or even a valid belief but a product of the imagination of irascible church forefathers. It is not a product of Jesus' own teachings, or even of those who witnessed his mission, but a later invention, arising from the Pauline view of Christ based on his born again conversion, then ornamented into other gentile Christian New Testament accounts, passing through the gnostic controversies to finally be defined in irascible debates between conflicting orthodox clergy, centuries after his death.

Original Sin and Natural Virtue

The final nail in this eschatological coffin is human fallibility. If Jesus was actually a human in flesh and blood, at least until the Baptism, how does Christianity now view the capacity of others to also take up the challenge of primal innocence in our own visionary nature and thereby replenish the root tradition? One cannot leave this arena without mention of Augustine, who formulated the doctrine of original sin that has for centuries left humanity with a pathetic fallacy of intrinsically flawed existence.

[Augustine](#) (396-430) took up [Tertullian's](#) idea of concupiscence (or sexual desire), with all the enthusiasm of a 'twice-born'. He had at first rejected the Christianity of his childhood and lived for fifteen years with the first of his two concubines, by whom he had a son and from whom he felt a 'sharp and searing pain' when he had to reject her in order, on his mother's insistence to make a proper (but unfulfilled) marriage. He first espoused [Manichaeism](#), a form of Iranian gnosticism, which saw light and dark locked in permanent conflict, and the soul, a spark of light, seeking to escape the darkness of the physical world. Later Ambrose introduced him to Christian Neoplatonism and the writings of St Paul, leading to his conversion in 387.

Adopting the thesis, that Adam and Eve had fallen from a state of 'original perfection', Augustine insisted that Adam, through succumbing to temptation, misused the free will given him by his Creator, and as a consequential punishment, had acquired a moral debility, concupiscence, which was transmuted through physical heredity to his descendants, who were thus rendered a *massa damnata*. Death had come upon all human beings by their union with Adam, and they also shared in the responsibility for the Fall; he thereby denied that humanity had a free moral choice. 'For we were all in that one man ... who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him' (Haskins 76, Jones 222).

The monk [Pelagius](#) also held that the Fall had come about through God's gift of free will, but denied that the sin of Adam and Eve had been passed on to their descendants and thus rejected St Paul's pronouncement in his letter to the Romans. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (5:12)" Pelagius argued that man had free-will and was liable for all his deeds, whether good or evil.

Augustine disputed with Pelagius and claimed that humanity had no free will, but was doomed to transgress because original sin was congenital and universal. To allow man freedom to decide minimized the role of God and the power of the Church. Two councils of bishops in Palestine had declared Pelagius orthodox but two in Africa, led by Augustine opposed them and persuaded Pope Innocent to support them. The next pope first declared Pelagius orthodox and then after 'vehement protests from Augustine and the Africans' excommunicated him. Augustine openly courted the emperor's support, using Nubian stallions as bribes. The emperor Honorius condemned Pelagius ordered him fined, expelled from office and exiled along with his supporters. He died soon after (Pagels 1988 129-30).

Augustine's epiphany was tautological: he was powerless to control the penis because free choice is an illusion. Augustine tells us that before the Fall, Adam had been capable of moving his sexual member with as much control as over a finger. But, infected by original sin, the sexual organs functioned with no regard to their owner, in retribution for their sin of disobedience - the curse of sexual arousal. In response to Augustine's destruction of Pelagius, [Julian of Eclanum](#) challenged Augustine back. Julian responded that 'natural sin' does not exist. No physically transmitted, hereditary condition infects human nature, much less nature in general. In counter to Augustine's reading of pain in childbirth he pointed out naturally that [pagan] village women with good childbirth practice had easy deliveries. [Elaine Pagels](#) (1988 134) comments that Augustine denies nature ... for he cannot think of the natural world except as a reflection of human desire and will. Julian's greatest feat was to correctly realize that the fall is the existential situation that arises when we fall into the sin of separation from the whole and make the world harsh through our selfishness (Pagels 136-8).

The Paradigm of the Fall and the Tree of Life

The purpose and function of religion is not to bring about a messianic apocalypse, or to bring about a scorched earth Armageddon in a day of judgment, but to help ensure the survival of humanity and the biosphere over cultural and evolutionary epochs. Although many religious believers are coming to understand the necessity for the greening of religion, the current direction of the entire Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition remains targeted towards a dangerous utopian fallacy of a totalitarian rule achieved through competitive scorched-earth violence and ultimate threats to the diversity of life.

The Fall from Eden is a message ingrained in our collective stream of consciousness that shows us that the entire religious paradigm has come about through a falling out of sexual relationship between woman and man, accompanying our retreat from intimacy with nature in our gatherer-hunter origins, in which men have blamed women and cursed them in the name of God out of a fear of female sexuality and female reproductive choice.

The invocation that we must all suffer death as a consequence, and that women must go in pain of childbirth, obedient to their husbands commands, cements the patriarchal religious paradigm in place, leading to a retreat from unity with nature and loss of communication with the transcendent as well, as acknowledged in the retreat of the [Shekhinah](#), or indwelling feminine manifestation of the transcendent on earth in matrimonial concord.

In the unveiling, which apocalypse means, we must all needs come face to face with the reunion of woman and man, and feminine and masculine, in the reality of the Tree of Life as the vital cord connecting past and future, in sustaining the living planet. The Tree of Life, hidden since the foundation of the world, in the Edenic story, is at once the tree of evolution to ourselves as a conscious sentient species and the tree of biological diversity, in which humanity survives and can survive as a species only by mutual coexistence, and interdependence with our sibling life forms, strengthening the capacity of the planet to sustain itself in the uncertain vagaries of an all too chaotic universe.

The evolutionary place of humanity, having come to this point, is to act as guardians of the diversity of ongoing life, both to ensure our own survival as a species and to provide for the emergence of new forms of sentient conscious beings. The role of science and technology is to provide vehicles to make this process as inscrutable and successful as it can possibly be. Any form of religion in frank conflict with nature and natural survival or with scientific objectivity is thus a tragic fallacy.

The Mysterium is a complex Phenomenon, not an isolate Personality

We have already seen in the previous posting "[Evolution IS Intelligent Design](#)" that the genetic algorithmic processes underlying evolution act as a supercomputer which is more versatile and even more powerful than the fastest computers on the planet, and has been proved capable of generating organismic brains and the human conscious brain over evolutionary time scales. The distributed genetic algorithmic process is thus the root creative process capable of generating the designer and their individual personality - aka the conscious brain.

Just as Christians have made a fundamental error in thinking God created life in a process of so called "intelligent design" analogous to human manufacture, so the very concept of God having an individual personality possessing emotions such as anger or jealousy, analogous to a human or animal organism, is fundamentally flawed. Neither is it remotely plausible that God somehow resides in the heavens, the galactic core, black holes, dark matter, or the sweeps of intergalactic space, where the forces of nature do not reach their climax fulfillment, involving gravity, electromagnetism and the strong and weak nuclear forces together forming the complex supra-molecular structures of tissues we find in organisms, and ultimately living conscious brains.

Moreover if we look to what might complement the physical universe, we find it is consciousness itself. All the evidence points to a cosmology in which sentient consciousness complements biological existence. This is the stuff of religious experience, of heaven and hell and of prophetic visions, and this is consistent with what we know about the hard brain-mind problem in science. It is also consistent with the dilemma of free will and may be an essential property for the universe to resolve the super-abundance of the infinite number of parallel universes that arise from quantum reality, the way we find the cat alive or dead, rather than both in Schrodinger's cat paradox.

In such a cosmology conscious sentience is a collective property of the biota. It is not a single personality acting as a creator or designer, which corresponds only to an individual transient organism. Neither, as mentioned, does it correspond to other physical phenomena such as the weather, the interior of stars or black holes because the brains of biota are the most complex and sensitive physical systems in the universe and the only ones we know are capable of subjective consciousness.

Therefore we need to come to understand the process of conscious life in similar terms to the way we understand the collective power of evolution. That is God consciousness is a collective attribute of subjective consciousness manifest in the biota of the universe across space-time, which is manifest individually in each of us, which we can come to know and understand through exploring our own conscious abyss.

One can understand this in terms of the universe evolving conscious sentient life, and through the sentient consciousness of the biota, in our case humanity, the universe becoming able to become more deeply aware itself over space-time. In this sense we are the eyes and ears and a thought in the mind of the cosmic becoming.

Reproductive Sex is Sacred. Social Sex is a Human Right

Major religions, including Christianity, are centrally concerned with life and death and the ongoing process of life in fertility and reproduction. The Judeo-Christian heritage has taken a patriarchal position, fallaciously accusing women of being the 'devils gateway' due to Eve seducing Adam into eating the fruit, to be seen and not heard, to live in pain of childbirth in obedience to their husbands. The basis of this is a deep innate male fear of paternity uncertainty, which lies at the core of attempts to treat women as inferior, and the violent penalties such as stoning for adultery which still plague women in the Islamic world.

This is a fundamental and tragic error, because women are the principal bearers of new life, giving birth to live young, lactating, and being pivotal in early child care. In all mammals, which give birth to live young, the investment of the female in parenting is paramount and female reproductive choice is essential to evolution, while the males are investing in competing sexual fertilization - sewing wild oats. Humans, despite their cultural emergence, stand at an extreme of sexual polarization biologically, in which human females have a massive and risky out front investment in pregnancy an often difficult childbirth due to the large human head size followed by long years of child nurturing in a very slowly maturing highly social species, and so womens' role in the procreative process needs to be respected as sovereign and sacred.

Christianity, particularly in its Catholic form, has created a distorted sexual environment in which Mary continues to be touted as a virgin to God, a couple of centuries after the scientific discovery of the human ovum by Karl Ernst von Baer in 1827, although [Herophilos](#) (335-280 BC) also lays claim to the discovery. Priests are required to be celibate men, resulting in rampant sexual abuse, while for lay folk sex is supposed to be only for procreation and not for sensual pleasure, or social bonding, and is denied as a sacred avenue for spiritual and religious discovery.

In an era of frank population explosion in which epidemic diseases such as HIV are rampant the Catholic church still takes a self-serving and highly corrupt position banning the most basic forms of contraception and disease protection, on the fallacious basis that sex should be procreative, or abstinence should prevail, even though this has always been a transparent ploy for religious domination through a demographic flood on the part of Christians and Muslims alike.

Sexual pleasure and sexual relationship is the glue and foundation of human culture and family life, *sine qua non*. It is the central social bonding activity in humans essential for keeping the peace. Reproductive sexuality is the gateway of new life and consciousness, which humanity and religious and secular society and the diversity of life depend on for our very existence. It is a complete fallacy to infer that sex, even if some of its effects on society are chaotic and stress our emotions of jealousy and fidelity, is evil, or degenerate. The dance of Tantra shows us that in a fundamental sense, the entire universe is a sexual union between consciousness and the material universe.

Nevertheless, even though some 99.9% of sexual engagement is social and only 0.1% actually results in pregnancy, reproductive sex and sexual fertility between a woman and a man. Both human society and Christian religion is going through a period of reassessing sexual relationship and the rights of same sex couples to engage fully in the social process in terms of civil unions, surrogacy and adoption and taking clerical religions positions.

To function as guardians of future generations of humanity, it is essential that we understand the primary and sacred role of reproductive sexuality between a woman and a man as the foundation of the passage of the generations, while having an open view of the right of individuals to chose their sexual partners as they see fit. We thus cannot simply equate social sex with reproductive sex, or union between a woman and a man with same sex unions without reducing the life force from which we all came to an exercise in sensual gratification.

Future Synopsis

We have found that orthodox Christianity has dealt us a double edged sword, both deifying Jesus without valid cause and crippling humanity with the doctrine of original sin, leaving us no option but to put our faith in God, depend on the teachings of the church and believe in Jesus as Lord for our salvation, without which we would be helpless like little children. The messianic path, by contrast, is one of coming of age as an adult, taking personal responsibility both for one's incarnation and for the fate of the world in which we live, in cherishing and replenishing the life process.

Jesus, as the divine Son of God, is a pagan Hellenistic contrivance, which is neither part of his own teachings, nor is it part of the founding tradition of his followers, but rather an invention of Pauline gentile Christianity. The concept of the Trinity is a corrupt notion in frank violation of any plausible cosmology, which achieved dominance through bribery by Cyril of Alexandria. Likewise the concept of human fallibility in original sin is a corruption of nature, with no genetic basis, again foisted on the tradition by Augustine's bribery.

If we are going to bring this tradition into any sort of correspondence with reality, in a form which is going have any hope of being a beneficial influence on our planetary future, the tables are going to have to be turned, and things are going to have to change from the bottom to the top.

As we enter the genetic age, where science and technology are providing more and more avenues to play God with our own futures, we need to develop social, ethical, moral and spiritual traditions which are up to the challenge of dealing with the unknown future in a way which preserves human and planetary viability and doesn't subject us to a futile endgame or an apocalyptic armageddon through our own lack of sensitivity and foresight. The Western tradition of gentile Christianity can only play a part in this future through a revolution of outlook at the most fundamental level.

Three key principles are:

1. Sensitivity to nature and scientific knowledge

Any valid spiritual social movement needs to be sensitive to checking its assumptions against all the tests of nature and physical validity. The standards are thus even higher and more stringent than for scientific discovery, because religion purports not just to discover the nature of reality but to guide humanity. Religion cannot afford to confront nature, or attempt to overturn scientific discovery through literal interpretations of ancient scripture as fact. Denying evolution as a basis for life's diversity and the emergence of humanity is a tragic error, as is insisting the sabbatical creation is an historical fact, rather than a beautiful metaphorical and mythological account.

2. A democratic living tradition manifest through the personal experience of the participants

Any valid spiritual social movement needs to be a product of the evolving conscious experiences and wisdom of each generation in which it has an influence, with a view to safeguarding future generations. No pre-existing religious doctrine can validly be imposed on any generation. Religious viewpoints need to be a product of the people alive at the time, and not an imposed doctrine based on past messiahs, or

church fathers. Spiritual experience needs to be first hand, through inner meditation, or conveyed directly through the wisdom of a living person's experience, or the veracity of other people's written experiences and accounts, rather than through literal interpretations of scripture, prescriptive rules and taboos, or requiring affirmative belief or unquestioning faith in a past saviour or Lord. The first step is bringing Jesus down from the Cross so that we all can live in freedom from bondage. The natural destiny of sacramental religion is in the use of psychotropic sibling species to facilitate spiritual consciousness, rather than a cannibalistic feast of flesh and blood.

3. Respect for the Feminine and living fertility

The ongoing process of sexual procreation is fundamental to the future of humanity and of the diversity of life sustaining the planet. In this, women play the key role, in providing the continuity of life through pregnancy, live birth, lactation and infant child care. The women in each generation need to retain the sovereignty be able to make the best reproductive choices possible for the children they will bear, without fear of religious threats or penalties devised by males out of their fear of paternity uncertainty, so that both sexes can look to the long term future of the diversity of life, to ensure their offsprings' offspring will also be able to survive.

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