

CHRISTIANITY EXAMINED

by Wayne Macleod

And there is salvation through no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4: 12)

From quotations like the above, the Christian has been led for centuries to believe that his/her faith is unique, the one true light given for mankind's salvation, and that all non-Christian religions are the purest folly. To the Christian, knowledge of God was the gift of Abraham and the Jewish prophets to a fallen world, which culminated in the teachings of a one-and-only Savior who died so we might live eternally in paradise. Armed with the arrogance of the ideologue and confident of doing "God's work," the Christian has ventured into the outer darkness of the world's pagan religions with all the fervor and missionary zeal which only the righteous can muster, for to such believers all else is depravity and devil-worship. It should be of no little concern to the believing Christian, then, to find that the teachings of Christ are not particular to Christianity, and that the development of his/her faith can be traced to the very paganism he/she condemns. Far from being a unique religion, Christianity was merely the last and most successful of numerous god-man savior cults to appear in the Mediterranean world, which had the ground work for its acceptance prepared by thousands of years of very similar *mysterries*. By accepting Christianity the pagans of that time were not undergoing a radical transformation of belief habits; on the contrary, those beliefs had been evolving for millennia and were common throughout the area. To this day, regardless of all the zealots, missions, Crusades and colonial conquests, Christianity remains predominantly Western; even the Jews rejected it. Under colonial rule it never became a force in India, not to mention China and Japan regardless of earnest attempts. In areas where Christianity was firmly planted outside European culture, this was done by the Spanish sword, or it has survived meaningfully by incorporating and tolerating the local beliefs which continue side-by-side with the Church to this day. Why it became the religion of the West is owing to the specific development of religion in the West. That development was pagan, and has been clearly outlined by theological historians.

The roots of Christianity go back over five thousand years,¹ not to the land of the "Chaldea Ur" (Gen. 11: 31), but to Egypt, when invaders from Mesopotamia overran that country and imposed the worship of Osiris, a religion which over the centuries absorbed the attributes associated with the indigenous gods. According to that myth, Osiris was a benevolent king of Egypt killed by his evil brother, Set, represented by a serpent, but was resurrected by his wife and sister, Isis. By breathing into his nostrils, Isis brought Osiris to eternal life, whereby he went to rule the land of immortals and judge the dead. After a war with the evil Set, Horus, the son of Isis, crushed the serpent's head and the gods condemned Set to destruction by fire. Just as Isis and Horus became the prototypes for Madonna and Child, Osiris was the "first fruits of them that slept" to the Egyptians. Everyone lived and toiled in hope of obtaining the same immortality as their god. Upon death, provided one's physical body were preserved, it was believed the person who had lived a moral life, who had not committed robbery, violence, murder, adultery, sodomy, falsehood, who was not guilty of irreverence, insolence, deceit or causing an unjust increase in wealth, entered paradise to live forever, or if unworthy his heart and soul were devoured and his body burned in the Lake of Fire. But even if he were "clean of mouth and hand" he could not enter paradise without the mercy of Osiris at judgment.

Integral to the Egyptian belief in immortality was eating bread which represented the flesh of Osiris, and drinking barley ale to represent his blood. Without partaking in this Eucharist no one could achieve eternal life. This Osirian sacrament had its origin in cannibalism practiced by the original inhabitants of the Nile valley, and became refined under the conquering invaders who substituted wheat and beer for actual flesh. Savages around the world commonly believe that the qualities of people eaten become their own, and this notion was transplanted into the Osiris doctrine, where the quality sought was

¹ All historical accounts are derived from *The Story of Christian Origins*, by Martin A. Larson, c. 1977, Joseph J Binns/New Republic Book.

the immortality of the god-man. Subsequently, Osiris came to be associated with a divine seed to give life to humanity, and emotional passion plays were enacted depicting the life, death and resurrection of the god-man.

The influences of Egyptian civilization were not confined to Egypt; they spread widely along trade routes and the same themes of Osiris-worship recurred throughout the ancient world, under the god-heads of Bromius, Sabazius, Attis, Adonis, Zalmoxis, Corybas and Serapis. Prevalent everywhere was belief in a god-man dying to give salvation, usually associated with a sacrament.

The cult of Dionysus was originally introduced into Greece from Egypt by a priest named Melampus, then again from Thrace around 1200 B.C. Dionysus was the son of Zeus and human Semele, a Savior born from the union of god and mortal; the similarity to Christ as "the Son of God" born from the human Mary is to be noted. His veneration among barbarians was originally associated with eating raw flesh, either of a cow or child, in order that his worshippers become immortal "Bacchoi". Dionysus' worshippers mourned his death with savage pain, while his resurrection was celebrated with ecstatic orgies. The cult was phallic. Eventually it was reformed by Orphism, the first reform being the substitution of bread and wine for flesh as a sacrament. Orphism taught original sin, judgment after death, reward and punishment in an afterlife, and the notion of Dionysus as a Savior who died for mankind.

A popular cult of the ancient Mediterranean, found from Asian Phrygia to Spain, and which possibly dated as far back as 1800 B.C., was that of Attis and his mother Cybele: an amalgam of Osiris-worship with Semitic religion. This cult did not have a sacrament but offered immortality and escape from sin through castration and repudiation of sex, which was not a drastic innovation since the Osirian priests were celibates. In addition to forsaking erotic desire, devotees whipped, beat, slashed and otherwise mutilated themselves. In Phrygia, the effigy of Attis during the annual festival of Cybele would be impaled upon the trunk of a pine tree and carried into the temple. After two days of frenzied, demented public mourning and sacrifice of virility, priests removed the effigy and laid it in a tomb. The next day, March 25th, the tomb would be opened and found to be empty, indicating that the god, Attis, had been resurrected to eternal life. The cult also had a blood baptism, using the blood of a bull to give the inductee a symbolic rebirth.

Thus it is evident that the soteriology of Christianity, the belief in a god-man dying to give his followers eternal life, did not originate with Jesus Christ. In every case where it was found it preceded Christianity, meaning that this most sacred belief of Christian dogma was inherited, and that inheritance is pagan. But this is only concerning Christ as the Savior, and belief in immortality. There is much more to Christianity, which brings us to ancient Iran.

About the year 600 BC the prophet Zoroaster, as his religion told, was born of a virgin mother. At the age of thirty, after undergoing a sacred water baptism and being tempted by the devil with promises of power and magnificence, he began to preach his doctrine of heaven, hell and purgatory, cosmic dualism and apocalyptic renovation of the world. In his theology the universe was divided between the rule of Ahuramazda, the God of light and virtue, associated with a holy spirit named Pure Wind, and that of Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil, with his demons. Ahuramazda was the creator of everything good and beneficial to man, Ahriman the creator of everything harmful. Time was divided into various periods represented by gold, silver, brass, copper, iron and tin, suggesting successive degeneration. The end of the tenth millennium would be wrought with deception, hate, apostasy, lack of affection, and be afflicted with earthquakes and wars. At the end of this millennium the messiah, Hushedar, also born of a virgin, would re-establish the religion of Ahuramazda with the conversion of one third of humanity. Another messiah at the end of the eleventh millennium would have two thirds of humanity worshipping in the good religion, and again after the twelfth millennium the great Saoshyant would establish the universal Kingdom of Righteousness. Before that happened, however, Ahriman would mobilize his forces for an all out war. The archfiend, Azi-Dahak, would be released from the infernal pit to slay one third of mankind, cattle and sheep, and the earth would run with rivers of blood (compare with Revelation 8: 7,9,11 and 9: 15). After the victory of Saoshyant, everyone, good and bad, would be resurrected to face judgement (see Revelation 20: 12,13,14), when the wicked would be parted from the virtuous and sent into hell for purification. Finally, hell, Ahriman and all his demons would be destroyed forever.

Shortly before 500 BC these two belief systems, the savior cults and Zoroastrianism, came together. The first synthesis was the work of a universal genius, known today as a geometrician, but a man who was also an astronomer, philosopher, social revolutionary and theologian: Pythagoras. The Pythagoreans, as we may call his followers, were definitely monotheistic, in contradiction to Christian belief that worship of a single God was not practiced by gentiles before Christianity. The God of the

Pythagoreans was a universal, spiritual force of whom any representation in the form of pictures or statues was forbidden. Originally a social as well as a religious movement, the Pythagoreans became quite powerful, but aroused hostility because of their communistic brotherhoods. The hostility led to massacres, one at Croton in 510 BC, another in southern Italy in 450 BC. The movement was eventually destroyed politically because its members were pacifists who refused to protect themselves, and it became purely religious.

Pythagoras traveled in Egypt, Chaldea and India, and it was during these travels that he learned elements of Zoroastrianism and Brahmanism, especially concerning doctrines of heaven and hell. It was he who introduced these notions into the Occident. Other beliefs of the Pythagoreans included repudiation of all passion, especially the sexual, with renouncement of the family and property. They practiced baptismal purification with water, forbade oaths, had a Eucharist of bread and wine, used white garments, practiced healing and non-violence, believed in cosmic dualism with worship of the sacrificed Orphean god-man, and also believed that people were predestined to be either of the Elect or Reprobate; they despised earthly riches, were vegetarians, celibates and fervent missionaries.

The second synthesis occurred in Palestine, where further elements of Zoroastrianism merged with Pythagoreanism, beginning with a party of religious enthusiasts called "Hasidim". The Hasidim remodeled the Jewish Messiah on the Zoroastrian Saoshyant, and incorporated beliefs of heaven, hell, immortality, resurrection and final judgment into the original Judaism. The Hasidim then split into Pharisees and Essenes, the Pharisees externalizing religion into an elaborate formalism, the Essenes considering themselves the Elect amid apocalyptic saints who would rule after Judgment Day. Until shortly before 100 BC the Essenes were essentially Zoroastrian Judaists, but then a leader arose among them called the "Teacher of Righteousness" who gave them the discipline and mysteries of Pythagoras. The Essenes then observed holy days different from the orthodox and ignored the temple worship, took no oath, were pacifists, rejected marriage, taught the immortality of souls, practiced baptism and communism, and had a Eucharist. Ample record of their beliefs and practices has been left in the Dead Sea Scrolls, composed between 170 BC and 60 BC, and also in the writings of Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, the latter himself an Essene. Upon the arrest, trial and death of their "Teacher of Righteousness" the Essenes believed he would return surrounded by angels to set up the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, after performing the Last Judgment and sending all the worldly to a flaming hell. They identified him with the "Lamb of God" and sinless Savior of their writings who would die for ungodly men, and believed his execution brought divine retribution upon the Jews - all before the Christian era. By 25 AD the Essene messiah had failed to return, but the country was rife with expectation just before the ministry of Jesus Christ. Yet all the ingredients of Christianity have still not been listed. The remainder returns us to 557 BC.

Gautama Buddha, after pre-existing as a heavenly spirit, was born of Queen Maya who ascended into heaven upon his birth. As the legend goes, angels sang when he was born and it was prophesied that he would rule the world. After achieving enlightenment he was tempted by the god of this world with worldly power and sensualism to not begin preaching. His doctrine involved the Kingdom of Righteousness that was to be established on Earth as a physical reality, he taught in parables which included one of the Prodigal Son, and performed miracles.

India at that time was a land of grotesque social injustice. The ruling caste of priest-kings, the Brahmins, had appropriated to themselves most privileges and wealth, made all religious and civil decisions and all codes of law, and monopolized learning. At the base of their society were the Sudras and outcasts who performed all work and were virtual slaves, whose main purpose in life was to serve the higher castes. The worst punishment that could be inflicted on a Brahmin was banishment, whereas if a Sudra so much as listened to a Veda being recited he had molten metal poured into his ears; he could be mutilated for the most minor infringements against Brahmins and whipped to death on any pretext. Not only did the Brahmins terrorize in this world, they also prescribed the most graphic torments in twenty-three hells for anyone expressing independence from their control. Violent revolt against such a priest state was impossible; the method adopted derived from Brahmanic asceticism. The masses went on strike; no amount of beating or flogging could make them pick up their tools, for, led by the teachings of Jainism and Buddhism, they renounced this world and the worldly Brahmins. The doctrine of hell was turned around, to become reserved for those whose reward was in this life. In the new asceticism all were equally welcome: Sudras, outcasts, harlots, thieves and murderers. Buddhism represented the world's first universal brotherhood of the oppressed and poor. Along with it came renunciation of gold, cattle, land, comfort, and of family and sex which lead to toil. Property became a moral contaminant that could be purged only by giving to the poor. Buddhism taught pacifism and nonviolence, the return of love for hate,

kindness for abuse, that one should harbor no anger or resentment, and that sin is in the desire more than the act. It sought only conversion, not control of society, and had no barriers to membership or rules against divulging doctrine. Buddhist missionaries journeyed world wide, to Greece, Egypt, Persia and Asia Minor, the latter teeming with proselytizers by the first century.

Thus by the time of Christ all the ingredients of Christianity were in place. Due to these similarities with established doctrines, many scholars have wondered if Jesus Christ was an actual historical figure. Their skepticism was not moderated by notable authors of the time failing to mention his existence. Justus of Tiberias was a native of Galilee who lived immediately after the death of Jesus, but says nothing about his life. Josephus has one passage but it is considered a forgery because Christians of the first two centuries made no mention of it, and it was written by a Christian whereas Josephus was a Pharisee. He does mention John, the brother of Jesus, however, and the existence of Christ is confirmed by Tacitus' Annals 15: 44. But these are scanty reports for a man whose birth caused every male child under two years old in Bethlehem to be murdered by the wicked King Herod (Matt. 2: 16), of which there is no other report, nor was King Herod even alive when this deed supposedly happened; whose birth was heralded by a star that wise men in the East could recognize and follow (Matt. 2: 2); whose fame spread over the country (Luke 4: 14); whose death caused the earth to shake, rocks to split, temple veil to tear in two, and even dead saints to be raised who were later seen in Jerusalem (Matt. 27: 51-53).

The obvious discrepancies that appear between the Four Gospels also do not help to make the story believable. Christ's genealogies of Matthew and Luke do not agree, give a different number of generations, and both trace his lineage through Joseph although Christ was not supposed to be Joseph's flesh and blood. In Matthew, Jesus is born in a house before the death of Herod, wise men visited him, and the family fled to Egypt. In Luke, Jesus is born in a stable during the governorship of Cyrenius, was visited by shepherds and there is no journey to Egypt. After the crucifixion, the Matthew account is of two women, Mary Magdalene and another Mary, discovering the empty tomb, Jesus meets them on their way to tell the disciples and orders that the disciples go to Galilee, and the ascension is from a mountain in Galilee. In Mark, three women, the two Marys and Salome, find a young man in the tomb who commands them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, and the ascension is from a room. According to Luke, two women see two men at the tomb who inform them of the resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples at a meeting and tells them to wait in Jerusalem, and the ascension is from Gethany. In John it is Mary Magdalene alone who discovers the empty tomb, Jesus speaks to her outside the tomb, and the ascension is from the Sea of Galilee.

That there should be lack of agreement between the Gospels is to be expected, because all were written years after the events, Mark between 60 and 67 AD, John not before 120 AD, all were originally written in Greek, and none by eye witnesses. And during this hiatus there was ample opportunity for the original story, whatever it was, to be elaborately worked upon by minds already steeped in the myths and fables of existing creeds. The Immaculate Conception is undoubtedly such an addition. One of the earliest Christian sects was that of the Ebionites, who were Christian Jews. Their writings do not mention a Virgin Birth. Their rendition of Luke 3: 22 was: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased. *This day have I begotten thee.*" (emphasis added). To the Ebionites, Christ was the Son of God only in a spiritual sense, and he became that Son at baptism. This explains why Christ's genealogy is given through Joseph. The latter phrase of the quotation was removed from the Christian Bible after 400 AD. The reason is clear: to agree with the concept of Immaculate Conception and make Christianity more palatable to the heathen, who were used to their saviors being of divine stuff.

As a moral doctrine, Christianity is lacking. Nowhere in the *Four Gospels* of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John does Christ teach the virtue of work, of caring for one's self or responsibility for one's family. On the contrary, he tells us: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth..."(Matt. 6: 19); "...do not worry about your living - what you are to eat or drink, or about your body, what you are to wear." (Matt. 6: 25); "Do not worry therefore, in view of tomorrow..."(Matt. 6: 34). The analogy Christ draws is with "...the birds of the air: how they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them." (Matt. 6: 26). This passage demonstrates Christ's ignorance of nature, for every animal is engaged in a struggle for survival, to feed itself, raise its young and ward off predators. In addition to not seeking wealth we should give away what we have: "...go and sell what you have and donate it to the needy..."(Matt. 19: 21). Instead of being circumspect we should: "Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the borrower." (Matt. 5: 42). We must also question Christ's pacifism: "...Do not resist injuries, but whoever strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other as well. And if anyone wants to sue you for your tunic, let him have your robe as well." (Matt. 5: 39,40). "Love your enemy, and pray for

your persecutors," (Matt. 5: 44). His preaching against the family is most questionable: "Whoever comes to Me without hating his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14: 26). "The sons of this world marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy of obtaining yonder world and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage (Luke 20: 34,35). Christ's rejection of sexual relations goes to the point of absurdity: "...and some have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He that is able to accept it, let him accept it." (Matt. 19: 12). Christian doctrine has rationalized these verses, but knowing the celibate Essene background of Christianity and the fact that Christ himself was celibate, the most assured interpretation can be taken as they literally read. That Christ rejected all sexual relations is supported by Revelation 14: 4, where we are told that the 144,000 redeemed from the earth are: "...those who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are celibates." The whole doctrine of the Four Gospels adds up to an unlivable imposition on the individual and society, so by the second century when the two Timothies were written, conventional morality regarding the family, child begetting and managing a household was reasserted.

Compared to the Old Testament the change in morality is striking. In place of the admonition against property, Isaiah unabashedly proclaims to the Jews: "...the wealth of the nations shall come to you." (Isaiah 60: 5); "You shall drink the milk of the nations and drain the wealth of kings;" (Isaiah 60: 16); "You shall partake of the wealth of the nations, and with their riches you shall become famous." (Isaiah 61: 6). Instead of loving one's enemies, the order from Moses to prevent "contamination" when taking the Promised Land is: "But in cities in the area which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not keep alive one that has breath; you must wipe them out completely..." (Deut. 20: 16,17). Accounts abound of King David slaying Israel's enemies in war: "He struck down Moab; he made them lie on the ground and measured them with a line, designating two parts for death..." (II Samuel 8: 2). A leader who did that today would be considered a war criminal. "...David struck down 22,000 of the men of Syria..." (II Samuel 8: 5). After taking the city of Rabbah, King David enslaved the inhabitants: "...the people that were in (the city) he brought out and put to labor with saws and iron picks and axes, forcing them to keep working in the brickmolds." (II Samuel 12: 31). The offspring from King David's adultery with Bathsheba was the "wise" King Solomon, who, far from making himself a eunuch, had 700 official wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11: 3). In Song of Solomon, chapter seven, we are given a lusty appraisal of the female anatomy: "Your rounded thighs are a jeweled chain...Your navel is as a rounded bowl...your belly as a heap of wheat...Your breasts are as two fawns..." etc. Judah, on the road to Timnath, saw a veiled woman whom he thought was a harlot and requested: "...Let me please come in to you!..." (Genesis 38: 16) which he did for the price of a goat. Lest it be thought that Judah was not one of God's favorites, we read in Revelation 7: 5, "Of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed," as the servants of God, and learn from Revelation 5: 5 that the only one worthy of opening the apocalyptic scroll was "...the Lion out of the tribe of Judah." Genesis 12 gives account of Abraham surrendering his wife (and half sister) to Pharaoh in Egypt, for which he was rewarded with "...flocks, herds, donkeys, male and female slaves, she-donkeys and mules." As if to prove that this behavior is fine with God, in chapter 20 he does the same with Abimelech, king of Gerar. Again he is handsomely rewarded. We have to ask what man of character would journey to a foreign country where he thought such virtual pimping of his wife would be necessary. Lot offered his two virgin daughters to a depraved multitude in the city of Sodom: "...let me bring them out to you, and you do with them as you like;" (Genesis 19: 8). We should not consider Lot's daughters chaste, however, for after getting him drunk in the mountains, to save his line: "...the two daughters of Lot conceived by their father." (Genesis 19: 36).

How can two opposite views on morality be presented between the covers of the same "inspired" book? If morality is absolute, being what God wants from us, an act is moral or immoral irrespective of time, place or performer, and if the men and women of the Bible were truly people of God, their behavior would have set shining examples for all generations for all time. Must we not question the value of a book as a moral guide that presents such ambiguity?

As if the pagan origins of Christianity evident in the Bible were not enough, institutionalized Christianity has added beliefs and practices that have made the paganization of that religion virtually complete. We might think that nothing could be more Christian than the cross, until we learn that it is a modification of the Egyptian *ank*, or cross worn by Egyptian priests. Surely an emblem representing the instrument of torture and death of a religious founder is a strange symbol for that religion. The name "Easter" is reminiscent of Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess whose worship was associated with an egg and Lent of forty days. The concept of the Trinity was known in ancient Assyria, where it was represented

by a triune emblem showing the head of an old man, a circle and the wings of a bird, portraying Father, Son and Spirit. Idol processions, relic worship, rosaries, sacred heart, priests, monasteries and monks complete with tonsure could all be found in the ancient world.²

Considering the pagan origins of Christianity, the Christian is left with two choices: either his religion is false or paganism is true. But the person who comes to this realization has no justification for throwing moral caution to the wind. The case could be argued that a virtuous act done for the purpose of attaining some reward, even a heavenly one, or to avoid the punishment of hell, is not in essence a virtuous act. On the other hand, the most atrocious acts are possible in the name of God. In the book of Revelation we read of horrendous plagues, wars and aberrations of nature to be visited on the wicked, which if any mortal human performed would be cause for life imprisonment, if not an insane asylum. But because they are the supposed work of God they are automatically justified. Here we see the two handedness of morality derived from a god-head rather than based on rational principles.

Whenever Christians are faced with the unanswerable their last resort is to abandon reason for faith, which only places them in a worse dilemma. Surely the search for truth is moral, and anyone who obstructs truth or fails to accept it acts immorally. But how can truth be established except by facts and reason? The faith argument short circuits facts and reason, and therefore obstructs the establishment of truth. It can therefore be said that blind faith is immoral. Such dilemmas arise from morality derived from a godhead, because what is ultimately sought is not truth at all, but salvation bought by believing.

² Rev. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*.