

A Totality of Relationship

It is the nature of man to require a totality of relationship with his environment and his universe.

That which man gets to know and understand becomes lore, learning and science. That which he does not know he, to complete the totality, must treat as a matter of faith.

The lore, learning and science part of the equation, growing in the history of mankind at first slowly and now exponentially, continues to increase our factual understanding of our universe, but scientifically unanswerable questions still abound. So the requirement for faith continues, substantiating the belief that there is something more, that there must be something more, something we don't quite understand, behind all of the wonders the universe holds. Logic cannot but corroborate that there must be some power at the controls for as well-ordered a universe as science has at least partially revealed. That there is such a power, although much questioned, seems never to have been in serious doubt in mankind's collective mind, and so various civilizations and societies have, since time immemorial, invented various concepts of such a power.

And so, gods were invented. It seems that early man could neither imagine nor accept the concept of one being so overwhelmingly powerful as to be responsible for everything, so the job was split up. There were gods of the sea, gods of the heavens, gods of fertility gods and sub-gods of every conceivable nature and interest as required to cover those parts of the universe which did not yield to explanation by the lore, learning and science of the day.

Be that as it may, gods were invented, and around them were built religions, incorporating beliefs about the unknown. Man in all his ages was keenly aware that the future was unknowable and "in the hands of the gods". So pleasing and appeasing the invented gods became the huge focus, and appropriate precepts, beliefs and behaviours were developed, by the thinkers of the day, to invite the gods' approval and deflect their displeasure.

It is no great surprise that this pursuit, as it was severally carried out over the centuries by societies in distant and diverse parts of the worlds --- so distant and diverse that they hardly, if at all, knew of each other's

existence --- led to the development of religions and mythologies that differ from each other. More remarkable, however, are the parallels and common elements they share. I am not a student of any note on this topic, but it is quite clear that the major faiths of the world come from and point to, generally, relatively congruent directions.

Consider the following precepts of many of the religions of this world:

Gods reside separately from humanity. They are domiciled in heavens or on mountains, in oceans, in fantastic beings, in animals, trees, rocks or some other manifestation of nature, in this time and dimension or some other.

Gods have interacted with humans in the past, wherein they generally manifested themselves in human or quasi-human form to give humanity its marching orders, leaving behind a record of their teachings through the auspices of humanly composed but divinely inspired writings.

Gods promise to keep an eye on our human behaviour which, if lived in accordance with some basic rules set out in the teachings noted above, may lead to an eternity wherein we can hope to become pretty much like them, but at least rid of the hurts and evils of the world as we know it through our humanity. Failure to comply is expected to result either in eternal damnation in the fires of hell or an absence of the gods.

Among these, to bring this closer to home, was the God of the Hebrews, "the one God, the true God, by whom all things were made". Appropriating His Son, Christianity, or at least Catholicism, at once split Him into three, and acknowledged more gods by one of the earliest and most sacred dictates to the Hebrews, the Ten Commandments Moses brought down from the mount, which open by saying "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." This edict in fact acknowledges other gods if in no other way than mentioning them, and it seems to be concerned not with how many gods there may be but only with how they line up.

Here begins some serious contemplation for the rational mind.

It will serve here to iterate (alphabetically, in scrupulous avoidance of any appearance of authorial bias) the central ethic that ten major religions prescribe:

BUDDHISM: Hurt not others in ways you would find hurtful.

CHRISTIANITY: All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye ever so to them.

CONFUCIANISM: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

HINDUISM: This is the sum of duty; do naught unto others which if done to thee will cause thee pain.

ISLAM: No one of you is a believer until he desires for this brother that which he desires for himself.

JAINISM: In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.

JUDAISM: Whatever you hatest thyself, that do not do to another.

SIKHISM: As thou deemest thyself, so deem others.

TAOISM: Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and you neighbour's loss as your own loss.

ZOROASTRIANISM: That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.

Although it would be blatantly specious to argue that the foregoing represent distillates of the detailed tenets of the listed beliefs, it does illustrate how much more we are all the same than we are different in our central ethic.

I offer this only as food for thought in consideration and tolerance of our fellow man, whatever his faith may be.