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**God Is Red**

A Native View of Religion

30th Anniversary Edition

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transferred from one context to the other without the proper consideration of what is taking place.

Western European peoples have never learned to consider the nature of the world discerned from a spatial point of view. And a singular difficulty faces peoples of Western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space. The very essence of Western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; further it assumes that at a particular point in the unraveling of this sequence, the peoples of Western Europe became the guardians of the world. The same ideology that sparked the Crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of Imperialism, and the recent crusade against Communism all involve the affirmation that time is peculiarly related to the destiny of the people of Western Europe. And later, of course, the United States.

The postwar generation of which we are a part has refused to accept any alteration of this fundamental premise. It is particularly revealing that the first major doctrine enunciated as an anti-Communist foreign policy was that of containment. Through containment it was believed the spread of Communism could be restricted to certain geographical areas from which no further extensions of Communist ideologies could emanate. The anachronistic nature of this theory should have been apparent. Western political ideas came to depend on spatial restrictions of what were essentially nonspatial ideas. The inherent contradiction of opposing dissimilar definitions within a single theory proved fruitless to the colonial powers in Southeast Asia, Africa, and India, and led to unjustifiable woes in Central America and military adventurism elsewhere.

Without venturing further into the field of foreign affairs, it may be well to note in passing that the determination of two American presidents, fighting in Vietnam, not to be the "first to lose a war," when winning that war in any final sense would have meant total destruction of a land and a people, would seem to indicate the extent to which Western peoples—and particularly Americans—have taken the dimension of time or history as an absolute value. Our withdrawal from Southeast Asia would seem to demonstrate that in most military collisions, history is clearly negated by geography. We have seen this phenomenon before in the two classic,

unsuccessful attempts by Napoleon and Hitler to conquer Russia, in which that country's vast interior subdued military forces that appeared to be riding the crest of historical change. We may now be facing that phenomenon again in the Middle East.

The disclaimer of colonialism in recent years has presented Western peoples with a major dilemma. Deprived of their traditional source of wealth from the undeveloped and former colonial nations, they now have little choice but to seek ways of rechanneling their present wealth through the various forms of social organization already present domestically. A certain inertia has been achieved, perhaps unwittingly, that means a major shift in political thinking among Western peoples. The creation of wealth today is more dependent on new technology and manipulation of the tax laws than on the exploitation of untapped resources. That is not to say that exploitation of mineral and other resources will not continue. As undeveloped nations, such as those in Africa or the Middle East, continue their own growth, severe modifications of exploitation must occur, and more sophisticated forms of colonialism, such as sanctions and embargoes, must be created if Western countries are not to suffer economic collapse.

It is doubtful that many Americans understand the meaning of this shift from the colonialist attitude. At best it means the humanization of peoples who for centuries were considered merely producers of raw materials and consumers of those products they were required to purchase. At worst, the end of one form of colonialism means the beginning of a movement to feudalize political systems around the globe so as to stabilize the economic conditions of the more affluent nations. Either approach means that the ecological problem is not dealt with, the problem of technological dehumanization is not reduced, and the breakdown of individual and community identity is not reversed.

There can be little doubt that a major part of the Western world is now suffering from an increasingly complicated task of revitalizing institutions to prevent collapse. Revitalization has been primarily an effort to force outmoded institutions to respond to novel situations for which they were not created. If we take Toffler's *Future Shock* seriously (and there does not seem to be sufficient reason to consider it a trivial analysis), or if we recognize the logical conclusions of the thinking of both Buckminster Fuller and

Marshall McLuhan, we discover neither a planet Earth of the spaceship model nor an instantaneous universe of communications linking a global village, but the disappearance of time itself as a limiting factor of our experience. In a world in which communications are nearly instantaneous and simultaneous experiences are possible, it must be spaces and places that distinguish us from one another, not time nor history.

The world, therefore, is not a global village so much as a series of non-homogeneous pockets of identity that must eventually come into conflict because they represent different historical arrangements of emotional energy. What these concentrations of emotional energy will produce, how they will understand themselves, and what minimovements will emerge from them are among the unanswered questions of our time. If we believe that religion has a presence in human societies in any fundamental sense, then we can no longer speak of universal religions in the customary manner. Rather we must be prepared to confront religion and religious activities in new and novel ways. The recognition that there is no homogeneous sense of time shared by all societies must certainly become apparent to us if it is not already clear. We can and must, therefore, create a new understanding of universal planetary history.

Beneath the minimovements of activity on the local level, we will most certainly see the emergence of religious movements that appear out of time, movements that have been somehow triggered either by the influences of the places in which they have originated or movements of restoration that seek to invoke some type of authentic religious experience to validate the identity of the small ethnic, racial, or religious group. Thus, Southern California can be the hotbed of Christian fundamentalist beliefs and at the same time support a substantial number of devil-worshippers and Satanists. Both movements are disconnected from a universal passage of time and are a product of the concentration of beliefs as modified by their human and natural environments.

Religion has often been seen as an evolutionary process in which mankind progresses from primitive superstitions to logically perfected codes of conduct, from a multiplicity of deities to a monotheistic religion with well-developed institutions and creeds honed to philosophical purity of expression. The validity of most religious traditions is believed to be

their ability to explain the cosmos, not their potential to provide a wide range of spiritual experiences. But monotheism, as Nathan Soderblum has pointed out, is usually the product of the political unification of a diverse society more often than it is the result of a revelation of ultimate reality.

In the western tradition, revelation has generally been interpreted as the communication to human beings of a divine plan, the release of new information and insights when the deity has perceived that mankind has reached the fullness of time and can now understand additional knowledge about the ultimate nature of our world. Thus, what has been the manifestation of deity in a particular local situation is mistaken for a truth applicable to all times and places, a truth so powerful that it must be impressed upon peoples who have no connection to the event or to the cultural complex in which it originally made sense. The recounting of the event becomes its major value and both metaphysics and ethics are believed to be contained in the description of the event. Ultimately the religion becomes a matter of imposing the ethical perspective derived from repressing the religious experience on foreign cultures and not in following whatever moral dictates might have been gleaned from the experience.

The question that the so-called world religions have not satisfactorily resolved is whether or not religious experience can be distilled from its original cultural context and become an abstract principle that is applicable to all peoples in different places and at different times. The persistent emergence of religious movements and the zeal with which they are pursued would seem to suggest that cultural context, time, and place are the major elements of revelation and the content is illusory. If not illusory, it is subject to so many cultural qualifications that it is not suitable for transmission to other societies without doing severe damage to both the message of revelation and the society which receives it.

American Indians and other tribal peoples did not take this path in interpreting revelations and religious experiences. The structure of their religious traditions is taken directly from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life. Context is therefore all-important for both practice and the understanding of reality. The places where revelations were experienced were remembered and set aside as locations where, through rituals and ceremonials, the people could once again

communicate with the spirits. Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible and gradually the structure of ceremonial reality became clear. It was not what people believed to be true that was important but what they experienced as true. Hence revelation was seen as a continuous process of adjustment to the natural surroundings and not as a specific message valid for all times and places.

The vast majority of Indian tribal religions, therefore, have a sacred center at a particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature. This center enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it. Regardless of what subsequently happens to the people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in their cultural or religious understanding. Thus, many tribes now living in Oklahoma, but formerly from the eastern United States, still hold in their hearts the sacred locations of their history, and small groups travel to obscure locations in secret to continue tribal ceremonial life.

Other religions also have a sense of sacred places. The Holy Land has historically been a battlefield of three world religions each of which has particular sacred places it cherishes. But these places are appreciated primarily for their historical significance and do not provide the sense of permanency and rootedness that the Indian sacred places represent. European Christian shrines are often standing on the ruins of former temples and holy places of the original peoples of Europe, indicating that something of the sacred always infuses a site regardless of the religious expression that may temporarily possess it. The ancient Chinese developed an incredibly complex system of geomancy in order to make human habitations conform to the sacred landscape of China. But of all these expressions of human religious experiences, none has so faithfully remained close to the original location and original revelation as those of the tribal peoples of North America.

The nature of revelation at sacred places is often of such a personal nature as to preclude turning it into a subject of missionary activities. Thus most Indian tribes will not reveal the location of sacred places unless they

are compelled through dire circumstances to do so. But having once identified a location as having sacred properties, they will not then reveal the kinds of ceremonies that are supposed to be held there. Sacred places thus inform us of the particularity of revelation—that it is not a universal message to be placed in secular or immature hands for distribution. Rather it is as intimate as our own personal thoughts that we would never utter in profane ears. (See chapter 16 for an in-depth discussion of sacred places.)

One of the features of Western religious practice has been the dependence on teaching and preaching techniques. Indeed, take away the preaching and teaching and there is very little substance left in many world religions. Christianity has been singularly involved in proclaiming the “good news” that involves the articulation of an impossibly complex scenario involving original sin, a cosmic redeemer, the catastrophic end of the planet, and transportation of the “saved” to a new heaven where presumably people will behave much better than they did on the old earth. Preaching and teaching have, as their goal, the possibility of changing individual personality and behavior, presumably in a manner more pleasing to the deity. A glance at the historical record will show that the hope of transformation is rarely realized and never seen on a large scale.

Changing the conception of religious reality from a temporal to a spatial framework involves surrendering the place of teaching and preaching as elements of religion. Rearrangement of individual behavioral patterns is incidental to the communal involvement in ceremonies and the continual renewal of community relationships with the holy places of revelation. Ethics flow from the ongoing life of the community and are virtually indistinguishable from the tribal or communal customs. There is little dependence on the concept of progress either on an individual or community basis as a means of evaluating the impact of the religious practices. Value judgments involve present community realities and not a reliance on part of future golden ages toward which the community is moving or from which the community has veered.

In conjunction with this notion of eliminating the teaching and preaching of abstract propositions, the gulf between religious reality and other aspects of community experience is not nearly as wide. A religion defined according to temporal considerations is continually placed on the

defensive in maintaining its control over the interpretation of historical events. If, like the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament, political, economic, and cultural events can be interpreted in a religious format, then religious and secular time can be made to coincide—at least for a time. But how does one continue the interpretation of history over a long period of time? The Exodus may well reveal divine intervention in addition to being a political event of great significance. Do all subsequent political events of comparable magnitude then become religious experiences? Obviously it becomes increasingly difficult to give a religious interpretation to secular events, and the basic framework of interpretation begins to beg credibility.

Western religion seems to have resolved this problem of interpretation by secularizing itself. Instead of working toward the Kingdom of God on Earth, history becomes the story of a particular race fulfilling its manifest destiny. Thus, Western history is written as if the torch of enlightenment was fated to march from the Mediterranean to the San Francisco Bay. But reaching the western edge of North America, history then must inexorably move to Japan, and it has appeared to do so, stripping the American experience of its cosmic validity. The Cold War retooled this concept so that the interpretation of the past half decade suggested that democracy was the favorite child of divine concern. But Russia is broke and America nearly so, and it takes incredible will power to pretend that history is the unfolding of a divine plan for humanity.

A variant of manifest destiny is the propensity to judge a society or civilization by its technology and to see in society's effort to subdue and control nature as the fulfillment of divine intent. This interpretation merely adopts the secular doctrine of cultural evolution and attaches it to theological language. If we factor in the environmental damage created by technology the argument falls flat. In less than two and a half centuries American whites have virtually destroyed a whole continent and large areas of the United States are now almost uninhabitable—even so we seek to "sacrifice" large rural areas to toxic waste dumps. The idea of defining religious reality along temporal lines, therefore, is to adopt the pretense that the earth simply does not matter, that human affairs alone are important.

Restructuring religious understanding to anchor experience in sacred places enables us to avoid the complications that temporal definitions

create. We are left with the question of the function of religion in human society. Was it meant for us to remain tied to a particular place without an adequate technology and refusing to use the intelligence that our species obviously possesses? How do we understand religious experiences if we are confined to one or simply a few locations where religious events can take place? These questions are important but they represent a tendency to make principles absolute and describe a polarity that does not and should not exist in theological discussions. Just as the temporal world religions find a place for sacred sites, so spatial religions deal with the passage of time and the increasing complexity that it brings to human societies by attaching stories to the sacred places.

Tribal religions are actually complexes of attitudes, beliefs, and practices fine-tuned to harmonize with the lands on which the people live. It is not difficult to understand that the Hopi people, living in the arid plateau and canyons of northern Arizona, had need of a rain dance to ensure the success of their farming. Here place and religion have such an obvious parallel that anyone can understand the connection. It becomes exceedingly more complicated, however, when we learn that the Lummi and other tribes of the Pacific Northwest also had a rain dance. Perhaps once or twice in a person's lifetime the West Coast would have an exceedingly heavy snow storm. The snow would bury the longhouses in which the people lived, and if it remained deep for any significant period of time, the Lummi would be unable to get out and hunt and fish and would starve to death. A man with powers to make rain would then perform the rain dance, and the snow would cease falling, turning to rain that melted the snow and prevented the people from being snowbound.

Space has limitations that are primarily geographical, and any sense of time arising within the religious experience becomes secondary to present geographical existence. The hazard that appears within the spatial conceptions of religion is the effect that missionary activity has on its integrity when it tries to leave its homeland. Can it leave the land of its nativity and embark on a program of world or continental conquest without losing its religious essence in favor of purely political or economic considerations? Are ceremonies restricted to particular places, and do they become useless in a foreign land? These questions have never been critically examined



within Western religious circles, because of the preemption of temporal considerations by Christian theology.

Time has an unusual limitation. It must begin and end at some real points, or it must be conceived as cyclical in nature, endlessly allowing the repetition of patterns of possibilities. Judgment inevitably intrudes into the conception of religious reality whenever a temporal definition is used. Almost always the temporal consideration revolves around the problem of good and evil, and the inconsistencies that arise as this basic relationship is defined turn religious beliefs into ineffectual systems of ethics. But it would seem likely that whereas religions that are spatially determined can create a sense of sacred time that originates in the specific location, it is exceedingly difficult for a religion, once bound to history, to incorporate sacred places into its doctrines. Space generates time, but time has little relationship to space.

The problem of religious imagery is also confounded when we shift from temporal patterns of explanation. The procedure by which religious imagery arises is still the subject of great debate among theologians. It is such a serious problem it has burst the boundaries of religious thought and become the subject of psychoanalytical investigation. How do people conceive of the symbols, doctrines, insights, and sequences in which we find religious ideas expressed? How do we come to conceive deity in certain forms and not others?

Theological explanations that depend on temporal world views would appear to be relatively helpless in examining this question. Perhaps the best that can be said is that temporal theologians place great reliance upon the poetic imagination as the source of religious symbolism. The best and most lofty considerations of a society or culture over a period of time eventually distill themselves into a poetic mythology that comes to express the community's experienced realities. That is about as close as we can come when using temporal conceptions of religious reality—eventual distillation of concepts and symbols.

If the spatial dimension of religion is considered, the answer would appear to be fairly clear. Something is observed or experienced by a community, and the symbols and sequences of the mythology are given together in an event that appears so much out of the ordinary experiential

sequence as to impress itself upon the collective memories of the community for a sufficiently long duration of time. The basic myth may be refined to some extent, but it is not subject to very much editing because it is the common property of the community, not the exclusive property of the community's poets or religious leaders. The symbols are always representations of the concrete and the place always has precise location.

When considering the multitude of flood stories, for example, we can suggest the possibility of a planet-wide flood at some specific time, because of the appearance of the story in many diverse religious traditions. If we accept the spatial dimensions of religion can we reach reasonably profound conclusions? The flood, experienced in a number of places, gave rise to the legends that recorded memories of the flood. These accounts can be related to the geography of the region, recording the date of occupation of the location. The twist that each locale represents give us more specific information on how the religious experience was received and what it came to mean to the people indigenous to the site. Thus, instead of general principles that support one or another world religion, the flood becomes primarily a historical event with moral and ethical codes particular to the religion reporting the flood experience and explained by the complex of religious events within each tradition.

Remaining committed to temporal concepts, we can only conclude that at a certain stage in evolution it became necessary for societies—extremely diverse and with little in common—to have evolved a myth about a flood. Or, as it is the case with Christianity and Judaism, the possibility of a world flood is taken as proof that the religion is the only correct religion. It does not seem possible for adherents of these religions to conceive of the flood as a universal geological event to which each cultural tradition has attached religious significance. Theological explanations frequently become abstract, and the universal need for baptism was even once advanced as a sufficient reason for the origin of the story. Yet all religious traditions have not depended on baptism, and there seems to be no particular doctrinal need to have created a flood story in the first place.

We are virtually helpless to understand the symbols, stories, doctrines, and ideals that religions have traditionally espoused if we are content to define religion according to temporal terms of explanation. Once we leave

time behind and consider the nature of geographical events of extraordinary nature, we can begin to project the possibilities for understanding the nature of religious language and the efficacy of religious doctrines as an explanation of man's religious experiences because symbols are rooted in real events in specific locations. It is, if we will consider it, a very different thing to create a religion out of the best of ideas, symbols, and explanations, and to pass down memories of religious experience absent speculation and reinterpretation.

There appears to be a peculiar relationship between thinking in temporal and spatial terms. We are inevitably involved, whether we like it or not, with time; but when attempting to explain the nature of our experiences, we are often not necessarily involved with spatial considerations once we have taken time seriously. The whole nature of the subject of ethics appears to validate this peculiarity. Ethical systems are notorious for having the ability to relate concepts and doctrines to every abstract consideration except the practical situations with which we become involved. Ethics seems to involve an abstract individual making clear, objective decisions that involve principles but not people. Ideology unleashed without being subjected to the critique to the real world proves demonic at best. Spatial thinking requires that ethical systems be related directly to the physical world and real human situations, not abstract principles, are believed to be valid at all times and under all circumstances. One could project, therefore, that space must in a certain sense precede time as a consideration for thought. If time becomes our primary consideration, we never seem to arrive at the reality of our existence in places but instead are always directed to experiential and abstract interpretations rather than to the experiences themselves.

A great segment of the American public has been rudely pushed beyond the traditional temporal Western doctrines by the influence of the modern communications media. This is the true nature of the problem of postwar American society. The meaninglessness and alienation discernible in our generation results partially from our allowing time to consume space. The shift in thinking from temporal considerations to spatial considerations may be seen in a number of movements by which we are struggling to define American society. Ecology, the new left politics, self-

determination of goals by local communities, and citizenship participation all seem to be efforts to recapture a sense of place and a rejection of the traditional American dependence on progress—a temporal concept—as the measure of American identity.

A great many other considerations could be made in attempting to define how our consciousness is gradually shifting away from Western cultural and religious patterns. Development schemes of the federal government began as early as the Great Depression, when the Tennessee Valley Authority marked the first departure in programming from traditional patterns—railroads, settlement, and industrial development by private parties—to federally sponsored projects to enhance regional development. Since that time, the Missouri Valley Authority, the Appalachian Development Authority, the Four Corners Development Authority, and the river compacts of states have evolved, so that geographic considerations are playing a much more important role in how we conceive social, economic, and political problems.

The field of religion has been peculiarly isolated from this development in American thought. Rather, theological considerations have fluctuated from Fundamentalism to social gospel and back. If we consider the social gospel and activist church involvement in social problems such as Civil Rights as an indication of concern with the problems of this world and land, we can find even in the theological movements of the past generation a movement away from temporal considerations.

It is doubtful if American society can move very far or very significantly without a major revolution in theological concepts. In a very real sense religious doctrines define the brooding sense of identity without which societies appear helpless to function. The present theological vacuum is being filled to a great degree by efforts to establish exotic religions in America. The great appeal of oriental religions that appear to provide a meaningful answer to contemporary questions, demonism and fascination with satanic cults, and the rejection of traditional mainline denominations for the simplicity of Fundamentalism all seem to indicate that a comprehensive effort to derive a new religious conception of the world is badly needed.

Before we can have a new theological understanding of our situation, however, the tools of analysis of religious ideas must be changed. This will



require a tremendous reversal of ideas that have been held by Western peoples, particularly Christians, for many centuries. Perhaps religions can answer only a few questions concerning our existence; Christian doctrines have attempted in the past to answer everything. Perhaps we will find that the present situation makes it impossible for religion to function at all; perhaps we are stuck with psychodrama and other scientific techniques.

Many religions have been held in deepest contempt because they do not in some manner measure up to the definitions of religion as promulgated by Western/Christian ideas of the nature of religion. They were held invalid, not because they did not provide an understanding of the universe with which that particular society was confronted, but because they did not coincide with ideas held by Western society that is heavily dependent on its technology and nearly independent of its religious ideology.

In almost every instance in which other religions were considered as invalid, it was because the categories of explanation on which they were judged to be false, were those derived primarily from temporal considerations of how the world ought to be. If the categories are turned around and the Christian religion is judged by nontemporal categories, the story becomes somewhat different. In most instances Christianity has either no answer or an extremely inadequate answer to the problems that arise. The difference is notable. While Christianity can project the reality of the after-life—time and eternity—it appears to be incapable of providing any reality to the life in which we are here and now presently engaged—space and the planet Earth.

American Indian tribal religions are among those so downgraded, because they did not fall into the easily constructed categories of religion as defined with temporal concepts and doctrines. Yet in a variety of ways the American public, searching for a sense of authenticity that it cannot find in its own tradition, is turning to American Indians as it wishes to visualize them. It is not simply the nobility of the novelists or the tragic vision of the historians that America is seeking. In a very real sense, the quest is for the religious insight of American Indians and the feeling of authenticity that Indians project.

In seeking the religious reality behind the American Indian tribal existence, Americans are in fact attempting to come to grips with the land that

produced the Indian tribal cultures and their vision of community. Even if they avoid American Indians completely, those Americans seeking a more comprehensive and meaningful life are retracing the steps taken centuries before by Indian tribes as they attempted to come to grips with this land. Recently Congress discussed compensation as a principle of criminal law. The days of the oriental potentate and justice as vengeance may be closing. If so, would not the religion that sees deity as the stern judge of mankind also be fading?

In the pages to come we will deliberately place several concepts of general religious interest under examination. We shall attempt to define in Western terms that nature of Indian tribal religions as they differ in their method of framing questions from a predominantly spatial conception of reality. And we shall discuss traditional Christian solutions to these questions, comparing the two types of answers to learn if any distinct differences do in fact exist.

We cannot, of course, pretend to give an exhaustive answer to any particular question or to present a final definition of either Indian tribal religions or traditional Christian ideas. What is important is that alternative methods of asking questions or of viewing the world may arise. By learning where differences can or do occur at least one thing may become clear. Before any final solution to American history can occur, a reconciliation must be effected between the spiritual owner of the land—American Indians—and the political owner of the land—American whites. Guilt and accusations cannot continue to revolve in a vacuum without some effort at reaching a solution.



would be maintained as long as there were people who could remember what the figures and symbols meant.

One could not find a very accurate concept of history in the winter counts. In general they indicated the psychic life of the community—what was important to that group of people as a group. The chances of a continuous subject matter appearing on a winter count were nil. One year might be remembered as the year that horses came to the people, the next year might be the year when the berries were extremely large, the year after perhaps the tribe might have made peace with an enemy or visited a strange river on its migrations. The chances of a series of political or military events being recorded year after year as in the Western concept of history was so remote as to preclude the origination of history as a subject matter of importance. One recent Sioux winter count, for example, does not mention a number of important treaties, and one does not even mention the battle with Custer.

Other tribes devised methods of recording community experiences similar to the winter counts. The Pimas and Tohono O'odhams of Arizona had calendar sticks on which symbols were carved. By remembering what the symbols represented, a reader could recite a short chronology of recent years. But again the ability of the reader limited the extent to which the history could be recorded.<sup>1</sup> Some Indian accounts involved prodigious memories and recitations of events could take weeks of ceremonial storytelling. The Delaware in post-Discovery times created a long chronology that had many political references called the *Wálum Olum*. It mentioned the tribes immediately bordering the Delawares with whom they shared a general political fate. In this sense, the *Wálum Olum* can be said to be more complex than the Sioux and Pima/Tohono O'odham systems. However the accuracy of Western European recounting and recording events was a distant goal for the most history-conscious of the American Indian tribes.<sup>2</sup>

Lacking a sense of rigid chronology, most tribal religions did not base their validity on any specific incident dividing human time experience into a before and after. No Indian tribal religion was dependent on the belief that a certain thing had happened in the past that required uncritical belief in the occurrence of the event. Creation, gifts of powers and medicines, traumatic

events, and the lives of great religious leaders were either events of the distant past and regarded as such or the memories of the tribe were still vivid and occupied a prominent place in the people's perspective and understanding of their situation. Salvation and religious participation in communal ceremonies did not depend on the historical validity of the event but on the ceremonies and powers that were given to the people in the event.

Culture heroes were plentiful in the tribes. Deganiwidah founded the Iroquois League some time in the pre-Discovery days. Iroquois religion and politics did not revolve around him in the traditional western religious sense, but the great law of the Iroquois held the major position in tribal religious and political life. Sweet Medicine, the Cheyenne religious figure, was believed to have received his powers in historical times, but the ceremonies he brought were important, not Sweet Medicine himself. The story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman of the Sioux happened in the distant past. The importance in the story was the reception of the Sacred Pipe, not the woman herself as a personal object of salvation or adoration.

The tribal religions had one great benefit other religions did not have and could not have. They had no religious controversy within their communities because everyone shared a common historical experience and cultural identity was not separated into religious, economic, sociological, political, and military spheres. It was never a case, therefore, of having to believe in certain things to sustain a tribal religion. One simply believed the stories of the elders, and these stories had significance as defining the peoples' identity. Today we can say they have specific themes, but that is our interpretation and not the way the people originally understood them. No tribe, however, asserted its history as having primacy over the accounts of any other tribe. As we have seen, the recitation of stories by different peoples was regarded as a social event embodying civility. Differing tribal accounts were given credence because it was not a matter of trying to establish power over others to claim absolute truth. To be sure, tribes that had fallen under the wide-ranging military power of the various confederacies were reminded who ran things. Under the Iroquois and Creek alliances, weaker allies had no doubt about who was in charge. But there was no coercion to convert the smaller tribes to an Iroquois or Creek conception of past historical events and their efficacy.

In the turbulent period of conflict with the whites, speeches recorded at treaty sessions, statements made to the president of the United States to remind him of previous promises, and other statements of historical importance made use of chronological references. But one cannot say, on the basis of these speeches, that a fascination with historical reality was developed through contact with whites. Rather the speeches reflect negotiations and arguments over specific proposals made by the U.S. representatives.

Perhaps the best articulation of an Indian theory of history is found in the great speech by Chief Seattle at the signing of the Medicine Creek Treaty in Washington Territory in 1854. Recognizing that the loss of lands and establishment of reservations doomed his people, the Duwamish, Seattle sadly remarked as follows:

It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days. They will not be many. A few more moons; a few more winters—and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend with friend, cannot be exempted from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see.<sup>3</sup>

Seattle's theory of history may be much more a recognition of life's cyclical nature than a statement of historical process. For many tribal religions the distinction would be irrelevant. The recognition of growth and decay as limiting factors in a tribe's or nation's existence is worthy of note, it runs contrary to the Western European conceptions of the Heavenly City and the Thousand-Year Reich.

The idea of world ages, held by some tribes, is comparable in many ways to the world age concepts held by people in India. The flood stories, even the

most remote, gave rise to the belief that the world is periodically destroyed by flood, fire, or other natural catastrophes, and this idea was held by a number of tribes with stories of some antiquity. Some substance was given to the belief in periodic destruction by particular stories, and in this sense the people could be said to have had a conception of history. For example, the Sioux explanation was framed in familiar terminology. They held that the world was protected by a huge buffalo that stood at the western gate of the universe and held back the waters that periodically flooded the world. Every year the buffalo lost a hair on one of its legs. Every age it lost a leg. When the buffalo had lost all its legs and was no longer able to hold back the waters, the world was flooded and renewed.

The Hopi had the most comprehensive understanding of world ages, as Frank Waters and White Bear recount in *The Book of the Hopi*. These people believed that they had survived three world destructions and that each world had been marked by peculiar circumstances. Before each destruction they were given special instructions for survival, and as each new world began they received songs and ceremonies designed for living in the new world. Their ceremonial life would end with each world destruction. Other tribes had legends of similar content, although a great many tribes now appear to have had prophecies about the whites that have been so garbled and popularized as to confuse efforts to come to any conclusions as to which stories were quasi-histories and which were real prophecies.

Suffice it to say, even the closest approach to the Western idea of history by an Indian tribe was yet a goodly distance from Western historical conceptions. What appears to have survived as a tribal conception of history almost everywhere was the description of conditions under which the people lived and the location in which they lived. Migrations from one place to another were phrased in terms descriptive of why they moved. Exactly when they moved was, again, "a long time ago." The scholars have had a difficult time piecing together the maps of pre-Discovery America because of the vague nature of tribal remembrances. The Iroquois, for example, relate that they once lived on the plains but then migrated eastward. When is not important to them, but their relative hardship on the plains and eventual prosperity in the East are important.

The result of this casual attitude toward history was, of course, that history had virtually no place in the religious life of the tribe. The appearance

of the various folk heroes who brought sacred ceremonies and medicines could often not be located in time at all. Only recent and specific events, such as the Cheyennes' loss of some of their sacred arrows to the Pawnees, were remembered and formed a conjunction of history and religion. But the ceremonies, beliefs, and great religious events of the tribes were distinct from history; they did not depend on history for their verification. If they worked for the community in the present, that was sufficient evidence of their validity.

In theory it is entirely possible to construct a chronological history of a tribe. This task would be accomplished by knowing the sacred places within the tribe's geography and all of the stories that are related to these places. By identifying the *before* and *after* of the stories and then arranging them on a time scale, one could project a chronology. Some exceedingly wise people in some tribes can perform this function reasonably well and some years ago the White Mountain Apaches began to develop a historical atlas of their lands that had something of this flavor. In effect, *The Book of the Hopi* is a reconstruction of a basic Hopi chronology as defined by the migrations and locations that the people remember.

In contrast, Christianity has always placed a major emphasis on the idea of history. From the very beginning of the religion, it has been the Christian contention that the experiences of humankind could be recorded in a linear fashion, and when this was done, the whole purpose of the creation event became clear, explaining not only the history of human societies but also revealing the nature of the end of the world and the existence of heaven, or a future world, into which the faithful would be welcome. Again, we have a familiar distinction. Time is regarded as all-important by Christians, and it has a casual importance, if any, among the tribal peoples.

The contrast between tribal religions and the Christian religion, therefore, can be made painfully clear with a brief and general sketch of the Christian religion itself. In a real sense, the Christian religion can be said to be dependent on the historical accuracy of the Hebrew religion as found in the sacred books of the Jews. After the death of Jesus the remaining disciples began to preach the doctrine that his crucifixion had been more than a simple execution. It was regarded by them as the culminating event in a direct sequence of events going back to the creation of the universe.

We have already seen in chapter 5 how Paul made the connection between a historical man Adam and the historical man Jesus in such a way as to explain how the disobedience of Adam had been canceled with the death of Jesus. It was within the recorded experience of the Hebrew people and the remnant peoples of the tribe of Judah, then known as the Jews, that the Christian innovation of world history took place. Two of the Gospels written to interpret the life of Jesus and his teachings had as their introductory remarks genealogies of Jesus purporting to trace his ancestry back to Adam. That they are different is cause to wonder if a biological history of his family is the intent; if it is not accurate genetics, what is it?

At any rate, the events of the Old Testament were seen as actual events of history in which a divine purpose was gradually unfolding. The idea had been inherent in Jewish religious circles prior to the advent of Christianity, but with the missionary explosion of the Christian religion, the events could be said to have taken on cosmic significance for believers of the new religion. For some time before the lifetime of Jesus, Jewish theological circles had seen the development of a curious type of literature. A large body of literature purporting to have been written by the major folk heroes of the Hebrew past began to surface, and its concern with predictions about the end of the world and the salvation of the Jews appeared to be a common feature. Such writings were called apocalyptic writings, and it is from these sources perhaps more than any others that we derive the Christian idea of a divine purpose in history and a subsequent fascination by Westerners for history.

The religion that took form around the person of Jesus came to regard the events of the past as directly prefiguring his life and teachings. To arrive at such consequences, the books of the Old Testament were scoured for verses that might be interpreted as predicting certain events of his life. What we have in the four Gospels, therefore, is a curious mixture of historical events, parabolic teachings, and tortured proof texts from various sources in the Jewish writings. At best the Gospels, which can be said to be the first Christian effort to define the meaning of past events in terms of humankind's universal history, are exactly that—tortured.

The immediate followers who had known Jesus had come to the conclusion, apparently nurtured by Jesus himself, that their Lord would return



within their own lifetime to restore the Kingdom of Israel to the glory known during the eras of David and Solomon. So impending was this feeling that the original commune in Jerusalem, headed by Jesus' brother James the Just, felt no desire or need to gather worldly goods. As a result they were soon bankrupt, and one of Paul's first acts was to take up collections from converts to bail them out of their financial difficulties.

The whole basis for the Christian belief in life after death was the alleged resurrection of Jesus after he had been dead for three days and his subsequent ascension into heaven. As the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were written, there can be little doubt that the primitive Christian community wished its converts to believe that Jesus in his physical body had risen upward to heaven in a cloud. Early converts saw visions in which he returned on the clouds. When Jesus failed to return within the lifetime of those who had been his closest associates, the religion should have folded. But as the original group grew smaller and the religion spread to Asia Minor, the initial prediction was continually modified so that while the basic idea had been an immediate conclusion to history through divine intervention, its immediacy gradually became symbolic, not historic.

It is now nearly two thousand years since Jesus lived and died, and there has been no return. New converts periodically become wildly enthusiastic about the impending return of Jesus, and evangelistic Christianity continuously phrases its message of mission and conversion in terms of a return of Jesus in the not-too-distant future. As the years have passed and certain milestones have been reached, Christianity has gone into traumas with the idea of imminent judgment. The arrival of the year 1000 was particularly disappointing for the thousands of people who sold their earthly goods and prepared to meet their maker. When the crisis passed and the Western world returned to normal, apologists for the religion trotted out their favorite Bible verses, attempting to smooth over the downhearted. "A thousand years is but a day in Thy sight" and other comforting verses were used to cover over the failure of Jesus to reappear.

The Christian religion looks toward a spectacular end of the world as a time of judgment and thus an end of history. It is thus theologically an open-ended proposition because it can at anytime promote the idea that the world is ending; when such an event fails to occur, the contentions

can easily be retracted by resorting to philosophical warnings about the nature of time. Time thus becomes a dualistic concept for Christians. It is both divine and human; prophecies given with respect to divine time are promptly canceled by reference to human time and its distinction from divine time.

The concept of history became a rather nebulous subject matter as Christianity continued to grow. The events of the Old Testament were regarded as actual historical events, and their miraculous nature was ascribed to divine intervention on behalf of the Hebrews. As the Old Testament came closer to the days of Jesus and the writings became closed to further prophecies, with Malachi the idea of divine intervention in human affairs also appeared to slacken. The first several centuries of the Christian religion appear to have been filled with miraculous acts of God in direct assistance to the Christian martyrs. After several centuries, however, even this tendency ebbed, and with the establishment of the organizational Church as a political power in the crumbling Roman Empire, Christianity adopted the temporary doctrine that Jesus had established a "church" to supervise the affairs of men until he decided to return.

This condition of nearly total Church control over the lives of people was strengthened during the centuries that followed, and for many centuries the political struggles of Western Europe had to have Christian approval to be considered valid. The Protestant Reformation was instrumental in breaking the control of the organized Church structure over the political and economic life of Europe. Since that time, while the political structures have continued to expand their power, the relative influence of the Church has declined.

The original doctrines of Christian expansion, however, did not decline with the waning influence of the Church organization. In the first several centuries of Christian existence, one of the most popular justifications for the failure of Jesus to return to earth was his alleged admonition to his disciples to preach the message of his life to all nations. Thus, a substantial portion of the Christians believed that until every nation had heard the message of Christianity, Jesus could not come. In almost every generation of Christians, there was somewhere a militant missionary force seeking to convert non-Christian peoples, and this propensity to expand the religion's



influence meant in realistic terms an expansion of control by the church structure over non-Christian peoples.

With the rise of secular governmental forms after the Protestant Reformation, the bitter competition between nations for lands in the newly discovered Western Hemisphere and the very violent struggles between competing interpretations of the religion following the Reformation missionary activity was seen as an arm of national politics, and the national imperialistic movements were justified on the basis of bringing the Christian religion to the "heathen." This attitude is covered more thoroughly in chapter 15. What is important for our purposes here is to note that as secular goals became more important, they were clothed in familiar terms of Western cultural attitudes, not in terms of religious reality.

Christian theology also had a direct influence on the development of the manner in which Westerners conceived the nature of the world. In the development of Christian theology, the two Greeks Plato and Aristotle were highly influential. Both of their philosophical systems sought to bring order out of the chaos of the world, and as the two major theologians of Christian history, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, sought to reconcile Greek philosophy with Christian ideas of history, people in the West became accustomed to thinking of natural processes in terms of uniformity. In the popular mind the Old Testament was filled with highly exciting supernatural events, while the story of humankind since the life of Jesus was filled with smaller miracles and lacked the spectacular nature of Old Testament happenings.

Western history as we now have it has failed to shake off its original Christian presuppositions. It has, in fact, extended its theory of uniformity to include Old Testament events so that the history of humankind appears as a rather tedious story of the rise and fall of nation after nation, and the sequence in which world history has been written shows amazing parallels to the expansion of the Christian religion. China with its history going back far beyond the days of Abraham thus does not appear as a significant factor in world history until it begins to have relations with the West. India with even more ancient records appears on the world scene only when the British decide to colonize it, despite its brief role as a conquest goal of Alexander the Great.

We are faced today with a concept of world history that lacks even the most basic appreciation of the experiences of mankind as a whole. Unless other cultures and nations have some important relationship with the nations of Western Europe, they have little or no status in the interpretation of world history. Indeed, world history as presently conceived in the Christian nations is the story of the West's conquest of the remainder of the world and the subsequent rise to technological sophistication.

Because we cannot understand humankind from a more profound point of view, we have in recent years fallen into a number of easily avoidable difficulties. The original thrust of Christians opposing pagans translated itself many times in Christian history. Shortly after the discovery of the New World, Christianity was thought to be opposed on the one hand to the societies of the New World and on the other to the heretics of Europe. The peoples of the New World were virtually destroyed by the European invaders at the same time that Europe was being ravaged by witch-hunts, the Inquisition, and religious wars.

The tendency of placing Christianity against the social or political forms of man's secular existence continues to this day. After World War II planetary history was seen as a struggle between godless Communism and the chosen people of God—the Christian nations. At least part of the involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia was because of the influence of an important figure in the Roman Catholic Church, Francis Cardinal Joseph J. Spellman, who sought to bolster the fortunes of the Church and also subscribed to the good guys/bad guys interpretation of world events. Much of the misunderstanding of the role of the United States in postwar worlds involves this tendency to reject the Russians because of their rejection of Christianity.

A major task remains for Western man. He must quickly come to grips with the breadth of human experiences and understand these experiences from a world viewpoint, not simply a Western one. This shift will necessarily involve downgrading the ancient history of the Near East, thus serving to cut yet more subject matter away from the Christian religion. Louis Leakey's discoveries concerning early humans in Africa would seem to indicate that we are reaching a point at which the history of the Old Testament must assume a rather minor importance in the whole scheme of development. In addition to surrendering the historical Adam and his successors, we must surrender the

comfortable feeling that we can find a direct line from ancient times to the modern world via the Christian religion. This involves, of course, giving up the claim by Christianity of its universal truth and validity.

Already the field of history appears to be reaching a crisis. Ancient history is taken much too casually today because it is assumed that whatever happened within human experiences could not be much different than the mythology that has grown up to explain the relics of history. We have an apparent computer of great sophistication at Stonehenge, England, and yet the traditional conceptions of life during the times when this massive structure was built continue to reflect the Western/Christian idea that nothing of major importance occurred until the advent of Western culture and its religion.

The experiences of the Hebrews do not really take precedence over the experiences and accomplishments of other peoples when viewed with an unjaundiced eye. The world abounds with ruins of incredible proportions relating hardly at all to the history of the Hebraic-Christian peoples. Yet these ruins are passed off with casual and hardly credible explanations based on the old theory of uniformity, which projects that the past had to be experienced in the way in which we experience life today.

The pyramids of Egypt are a case in point. In the popular mind of Western peoples, the pyramids were built a la Cecil B. De Mille with thousands of slaves tugging the large vine ropes up inclines to make a final resting place for the pharaoh. That the only reference to slave labor in the Old Testament remotely connected with building involves the Hebrew slaves making mud bricks is difficult for the popular mind to assimilate. It is when we go to the scholarly mind that we find even greater confusion so that our sense of human accomplishments and the meaning of history are hardly enhanced by even the best of our educated minds. Walter Fairservis, for example, rejects the concept of slave labor in pyramid building in his book *The Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile*.

We know that there were few slaves because foreign conquests were at a minimum. The labor for the pyramids came from the peasant farmers who, at times of high Nile, were comparatively idle and could be used for public projects. In such cases they were maintained at government

expense, which in view of the job to be done could not have been meager. The number of pyramids, and the years it took to build each of them, indicates that a stable arrangement between government responsibility and peasant labor had been established.<sup>4</sup>

The picture appears to be idyllic. In times of unemployment the benevolent pharaoh provided work for his people by having them put together what must certainly be among the most massive structures in history. But is this even a realistic picture of what happened in earlier times? That the U.S. government put forward the make-work projects of the Great Depression years does not mean that the pharaoh did likewise. The very bulk of the pyramids precludes Fairservis' solution to the problem.

The Great Pyramid of Cheops, for example, is incredible. Its base covers

13 acres or 7 midtown blocks of the city of New York. From this broad area, leveled to within a fraction of an inch, more than *two-and-a-half-million* blocks of limestone and granite—weighing from 2 to 70 tons apiece—rise in 201 stepped tiers to the height of a modern forty-story building.<sup>5</sup>

A construction project the size of this pyramid would have been a task of no mean proportions. Suppose that the workers had placed a minimum of twenty blocks of stone a day in the structure—a feat that would have been virtually impossible, yet still conceivable. Working steadily they would have assembled the 2.5 million stone blocks in about 125,000 days or 342 years. In this projection we have still not accounted for cutting the blocks, carrying them down the Nile, and bringing them to the assembly place. And we have projected a straight working project, not a summertime government make-work project as Fairservis and other scholars have assumed. If the Pilgrims had begun building a pyramid the size of the pyramid of Cheops to celebrate their safe landing in America, they would have finished the project in 1962, perhaps just in time to receive a government grant to celebrate. Is the traditional interpretation of history really an exercise in credibility?

At Aswan Dam in Egypt the people of many nations worked to save four sandstone statues from an ancient temple from being destroyed by the waters of the dam. Engineers from nearly one hundred nations pooled their talents to save these priceless treasures. They had the benefit of helicopters, the latest in hydraulic jacks, lifts, cranes, and other modern construction equipment. Yet they had to cut the statues into smaller pieces to move them a mere sixty feet above the waters. In a quarry near Baalbek in Asia Minor, the Hadjar el Gouble stone lies squared and ready for removal. It weighs more than four million pounds. And primitive men are going to get their logs and ropes and move it? Hardly.

The world is, as we have noted, literally strewn with ruins of overwhelming proportions, structures that we cannot duplicate today if we wished to do so, yet the Western interpretation of world history is always skirting a straightforward effort to incorporate theories about the origin of these ruins and structures. We are fixed on a rather staid reading of human history because we are emotionally and religiously tied to the assumption, today perhaps subconsciously at least, that everything is pretty much the way people once believed centuries ago.

Even the relatively short time period of American history has been influenced by our religious heritage. There is sufficient evidence that this continent was visited by numerous expeditions prior to the arrival of Columbus. Pottery discovered in South America suggests fairly early contact between Japan and this hemisphere. Ruins in Massachusetts and Arizona may be evidence of early visits by Phoenicians and Romans. Yet up to this time scholars have adamantly refused to believe that any pre-Columbian landing took place. Even the Viking ruins in Minnesota have been buffeted by tremendous criticism and the jeers of skeptics, while the Columbian primacy has prevailed.

Cyrus Gordon, a noted scholar at Brandeis University, took a cautious stand in favor of pre-Columbian expeditions in his book *Before Columbus*.<sup>6</sup> He documented two possible pre-Columbian visits to the New World. Gordon's courage in dealing with a controversial subject produced great fruits during the past two decades. Today there are literally hundreds of books dealing with pre-Columbian expeditions to this continent and many of them make a great deal of sense. The best writing is being done

outside academic circles because it covers data and theories that are not regarded as orthodox because they make uncomfortable the reigning elder statesmen of anthropology, archaeology, and history.

The reluctance of scholars to consider the possibility of pre-Columbian visits to the Western Hemisphere is but one example of the stranglehold that the one interpretation of history has had. There is, to a certain extent, a political justification in refusing to accept pre-Columbian discoveries. The land title of the United States relates back to the famous doctrine of Discovery, whereby Christian nations were allowed by the pope to claim the discovered lands of non-Christian peoples. To accept a series of pre-Columbian visitations would mean that the lands of the Western Hemisphere were hardly "discovered" by Europeans. It would call into question the interpretations and justifications given to colonization, exploitation, and genocide committed by Europeans during the last five centuries.

Christian religion and the Western idea of history are inseparable and mutually self-supporting. To retrench the traditional concept of Western history at this point would mean to invalidate the justifications for conquering the Western Hemisphere. Americans in some manner will cling to the traditional idea that they suddenly came upon a vacant land on which they created the world's most affluent society. Not only is such an idea false, it is absurd. Yet without it both Western man and his religion stand naked before the world.

It is said that one cannot judge Christianity by the actions of secular Western man. But such a contention judges Westerners much too harshly. Where did Westerners get their ideas of divine right to conquest, of manifest destiny, of themselves as the vanguard of true civilization, if not from Christianity? Having tied itself to history and maintained that its god controlled that history, Christianity must accept the consequences of its past. Secular history is now out of control and its influence has become a rather demonic, disruptive force among nations—this is part and parcel of the Christian religion. If the lack of a sense of history can be called a shortcoming of tribal religions, as indeed it can, overemphasis on historic reality and its attendant consequences can certainly be assigned a bad grade for the Christian religion.



of history and seek to discover how and when it can be said that the Christian God does work in the affairs of people. At first glance it appears that God has not been as active in recent years as He once was. The Old Testament is filled with stories about the direct intervention of the Hebrew God in the affairs of people. These events were initially taken as actual historical facts, but in recent years an effort has been made to reinterpret them as representative of the spiritual quality of the Hebrew people and, by implication, the consequent spirituality of Christian peoples.

As Western people became more sophisticated about the nature of the universe, it became harder and harder to project exactly what the people of the Old Testament meant by seeing the action of their God in historic events. The victory of the English over the Spanish Armada (1588) was understood as an indication that God favored the Protestant English over the Catholic Spanish. While it did give rise to a plethora of religious poetry, prophecy, and theological development, it did not result in the establishment of a new religion. Even considered as a Christian renewal, Elizabethan England was not an exemplary Christian society.

Again, the victories of Russia over Napoleon and Hitler, aided each time by an unusually harsh Russian winter, might have in earlier times given rise to the idea that the Russians were especially chosen by God to be His people. Yet the theological development following those notable victories was practically nil. The American Civil War resulted in the banishment of slavery in the continental United States; yet as significant as this triumph was, it had practically no subsequent theological effect on the Christians of the land. Its major theological result could be said to have been the splitting of several major Protestant denominations into northern and southern branches, and thus if the war proved anything in a religious sphere, it proved damaging to the organizational churches.

Or we can ask what effect the numerous economic depressions in this country have had on the people's religious sensitivity. A depression as devastating as that of the 1930s visited on a nation in former times might have called forth a generation of repentant sinners and resulted in a renewal of religious faith of amazing intensity. Yet America's periodic depressions seem to call forth only bitter debates over the place and function of the federal government in the lives of citizens.

These are important questions to be asked, because of the contention of Christians that their God is specifically working in the events of mankind. In what specific way could God be said to be represented in the affairs of a person's life? This question is a penetrating one; it is not easy to point to any specific event and find incontrovertible evidence of divine intervention. The problem puzzles theologians of all stripes, and some of them have made valiant efforts to derive a sound explanation of what is meant by the idea that God is working in history.

One of the significant efforts to recapture the Christian idea of history in the postwar era was the movement known as "demythologizing" history. Originally advocated by C. H. Dodd, an English theologian, the school of history demythologizers took on a broader aspect when Rudolf Bultmann began a systematic reinterpretation of the New Testament by using the framework of Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy to eliminate the embarrassing eschatological sense of time from the New Testament. Bultmann felt that there was a basic Christian method and essence apart from any cultural values that might have crept into the text during New Testament days. His demythologizing thus involved an attempt to knock the Jewish apocalyptic flavor out of the Christian message. Under Bultmann's influence the idea grew that the events of the Bible were more symbolic than actual; the message of the coming of the Kingdom was primarily a psychological event, not an event of the real world.

In addition to Dodd and Bultmann, a movement known as the "death of God" philosophy attempted to revise and revitalize Christian theology. It was the child of Thomas J. J. Altizer. The God-is-dead theology flowered during the social turmoil of the 1960s, enjoyed a brief day in the sun and vanished quickly, much to the relief of other Christian theologians, who were not prepared to back Altizer and state that God had literally died on the cross and humankind had been godless ever since. Whatever else can be said about Altizer, one could only affirm that he took Western European history as a very valid reference point. And evaluating Western history there is a good argument to be made that Altizer was right.

Other attempts have been made to realize, at least to some extent, the nature of God's activity in human history. Some Lutherans have been content to maintain that history is "His story," which is linguistically clever but



does not tell us much. Other Christians, particularly those involved in the Civil Rights, conservation and ecology, the peace movement, hunger, and even antiabortion have been willing to see the action of God reflected by the presence of the professional church in social movements. Nonclerical participants have also been very numerous in these movements; thus, the mere presence of clergy at rallies has not provided a startling renewal of theological doctrines.

Harvey Cox was among the most active clergymen in the movements of the 1960s, and if he did not have impeccable theological credentials, at least he made an effort to analyze modern society and suggest ways in which Christian peoples could speak. But even Cox with his Civil Rights experiences and work in the inner city was unable to derive a strong doctrine of God at work in history. In *The Secular City*, Cox finds that "the action of God occurs through what theologians have sometimes called 'historical events' but what might better be termed 'social change.'"<sup>1</sup>

Cox admonished us to engage in social movements, in effect creating a *feror* type of history—a qualitative, group type of historical reality. His empirical evidence that this is the correct Christian theory of history is singularly misty, however, because verification of the action of God depends on the ability of the Christian to *reflect*.

Reflection is that act by which the church scrutinizes the issues the society confronts in light of those decisive events of the past—Exodus and Easter—in which the intent of God has been apprehended by man in faith. Thus the church looks to the hints God has dropped in the past in order to make out what He is doing today.<sup>2</sup>

If we take the traditional conception of the events of history and attempt to locate the presence of theological dimensions, we basically arrive at Cox's conclusion, for traditional historical interpretation involves the premise that conditions were never much at variance with what we experience today. We have already seen the ridiculous conclusions attainable by applying a uniform method of arriving at descriptions of historical events. We find a benevolent pharaoh building pyramids on a part-time, make-work

basis. Yet the position that Cox takes—that the Christian God is somehow tiptoeing through history dropping sly hints that are to be discerned by a church critique based on the Exodus and Easter—presents even more problems. Do people believe that the Exodus actually happened as recorded in the Bible? Is the Bible a historically accurate book with respect to the events of major importance to both the Christians and Jews?

One would suppose that the Exodus would have been a startling event in the experiences of the Hebrews. Slaves from their birth and with a heritage of slavery of nearly four centuries, they had no reason whatsoever to expect a release from their condition. Yet from the Exodus event can properly be said to have produced not only the modern Jewish religion but also Christianity and Islam—the two heretical offshoots of Jewish religious tradition. What may be surprising to many people, particularly since theologians such as Cox depend so heavily on it for their verification, is that many significant theologians do not regard the Biblical accounts of the Exodus as historical. Theodor H. Gaster, for example, characterizes the events of the Exodus as recorded in the Old Testament as a flight of fancy of undiminished proportions.

It is obvious to any unbiased reader that this story, with its markedly religious coloration and its emphasis on supernatural "signs and wonders," is more of a romantic saga or popular legend than an accurate record. Written down centuries later than the period which it describes, it is clearly more indebted to folklore than to sober fact.<sup>3</sup>

Gaster, while not the final authority on the Old Testament, is not an incon-siderable figure in the scholarly world. Yet he is unwilling to grant that the Biblical record could represent a literal historical event. Rather he understands the story as basically a romantic legend. Can Cox base his theology on a romantic legend? Can it be said then that God is not present in history at all or only within the poetic imagination that creates such romantic legends?

Gaster is a Jew, not a Christian. Johannes Pedersen is a noted Christian scholar who has specialized in Old Testament life and times. Almost every



Protestant seminarian knows that *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, originally published in Swedish by Pedersen, is nearly *the* classic Christian study of early Israel. The book covers almost every aspect of Hebrew culture, illuminating many theological doctrines previously misunderstood or misinterpreted. In the book's appendix, Pedersen indicates that the Exodus is not history in the usual sense of the term but a highly colored legend meant to glorify the Jews.

In forming an opinion of the story about the crossing of the Red Sea, it must be kept in mind as we have remarked above, that this story, as well as the whole emigration-legend, though inserted as part of an historical account, is quite obviously of a cultic character, for the whole narrative aims at glorifying the god of the people at the paschal feast though an exposition of the historical event that created the people. The object cannot have been to give a correct exposition of ordinary events but, on the contrary, to describe history on a higher plane, mythical exploits which make of the people a great people, nature subordinating itself to this purpose.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Pedersen finds the Exodus a historical event of no particular significance or relevance except as the Jews look backward into their past and attempt to glorify themselves. Again we have modern forms of interpretation as a basis for determining the historical reality of events of the ancient past. The assumption that humankind's experiences have remained fairly uniform and constant dominates Pedersen's considerations and negates the possibility that the Exodus might have been a real and important event.

Louis Dupré, a brilliant young Christian theologian at Georgetown University, devotes a chapter in his book *The Other Dimension* to an excellent review of the various Christian ideas on creation. Spinning away from traditional pitfalls of logic that maintain a benevolent God and the presence of evil in the world as a dualism, Dupré illustrates by a mention of the Exodus the idea that divine intervention can never eliminate the deficiencies of people's

freedom: "The separation of the waters of the Red Sea may be seen as an affliction of physical evil for the Egyptians or a miraculous escape from it for the Hebrews, but it did not affect the moral or immoral intentions of either party."<sup>5</sup>

One would conclude from Dupré's sentence that here is one Christian theologian who is not afraid to contend that the Exodus was a real-life, significant event of the ancient world featuring tidal waves, sweat, dust, blood, and all the grit of our existence. Where Cox and Pedersen—even Gaster—fear to affirm God working in historic events, Dupré charges right in as a true believer. Such is not the case! After making this careful distinction between the morality of freedom and the goodness of God, Dupré has a little footnote stating, "Obviously in all this I do not take a position on the historical character of this event or of any particular miracle."<sup>6</sup>

Can this be? Can Christian theologians tell us that their God works in and dominates history while maintaining in their footnotes that they are not prepared to affirm that anything really happened? What about the Resurrection? What kind of body did Jesus actually have? A "glorified body"? Or the body in which he walked on earth? Are Christian thinkers prepared to say? Popular Christianity, of course, is prepared to affirm almost everything it may happen to have called to its attention, including Jonah and Job, the subjects of two stories that seem to fall well within the categories of romantic legend these theologians advocated. Yet the biblical stories of Jonah, Job, and others are not central to the Bible's major premise, that God specifically chose one people from out among the peoples of the world, or that the logical conclusion to the Exodus event was the Crucifixion of Jesus and his Ascension into heaven after being dead three days. If we narrow the historical requirements of the Christian religion to affirming only two of the infinite number of events which have taken place in time and space, even then, apparently, we are left with legend and folklore.

If the major events of the Bible are to be taken not as actual events involving people, events of such significance that they could be used later as patterns by which the subsequent church could discern God dropping "hints" in the affairs of men, then what do we make of the Christian religion? Can we take it seriously? Even more, can we affirm that it is superior to any other religion, and if so, on what basis? Surely, at least, not on the basis that it tells us the true story of humankind.

Behind the Christian theory of history lies a peculiar logic of interpretation. One can see it clearly in the proposition put forward by Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology* as follows:

It can be stated that in Christianity the decisive event occurs in the center of history and that it is precisely the event that gives history a center; that Christianity is also aware of the "not yet," which is the main emphasis in Judaism; and that Christianity knows the revelatory possibilities in every moment of history.<sup>7</sup>

In other words the Christians ask us to accept that there is a history, that there is a central event making the rest of the history intelligible, and that because there is a central event, there must necessarily be a history. The logic is clearly a precursor of the catch-22 rule. Whenever we focus on one of the very important events of that line of history, we are told by Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews alike that what happened was really just the growth of legend, folklore, and glorification, not a spectacular event. Yet these thinkers insist that a whole chronology of nonexistent events constitutes an important historical time line that is superior to any other explanation of human experiences.

This dilemma over the nature of history occurs and will occur whenever a religion is divorced from space and made an exclusive agent of time. Events become symbolic teaching devices, and the actual sequence of physical action that could indicate a divine intervention becomes unimportant; what is important are the moral lessons and ethical choices the legend illustrates. The Christians of another era believed that their Bible was the real record of events. While they could not geographically pinpoint the Garden of Eden, they damn sure could find Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. So they took everything as historical fact.

The contrast between Christianity and its interpretation of history—the temporal dimension—and the American Indian tribal religions—basically spatially located—is clearly illustrated when we understand the nature of sacred mountains, sacred hills, sacred rivers, and other geographical features sacred to Indian tribes. The Navajo, for example, have sacred mountains

where they believe they rose from the underworld. There is no doubt in any Navajo's mind that these particular mountains are the exact mountains where it all took place. There is no beating around the bush on that. No one can say when the creation story of the Navajo happened, but everyone is fairly certain *where* the emergence took place.

Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a "sacred geography," that is to say, every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produced the tribe in its current condition. Traditional Cherokees today can still tell stories about the sacred places in Georgia and North Carolina that illuminate the tribal history. The Sioux, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho all have traditions that describe Bear Butte in South Dakota and the Devil's Tower in Wyoming. The most notable characteristic of the tribal traditions is the precision and specificity of the traditions when linked to the landscape, a precision lacking in most other religious traditions.

The test of the extent to which a religion has a claim to historical validity, therefore, should as least partially involve its identification of the specific location and lands where the religious event that created the community took place. And that religion should stand by the historical nature of the event; it should never back off and disclaim everything while becoming furious with other peoples for not believing its claim. If the present interpretation of religious history that is accepted by many Christian theologians is maintained, we are left with a religion devoid of any significance in either time or space. History becomes a series of glorified legends that teach ethical lessons and it becomes a demonic thing to believe that the world operates one way for religious purposes and an entirely different way for secular purposes. Leaving aside popular Christianity, which has rarely questioned anything and remains comfortable in a three-dimensional universe while astronauts walk on the moon, what effect would there be if we took the Exodus story—it really triggers the origin of three world religions—and maintained that, in fact, it records a specific happening that occurred at a definite time and in a specific space? Do we have a problem?

The problem is that one man dared to challenge the historians, theologians, and scientists on their own grounds and made the uniformitarian

interpretation of history very uncomfortable. Immanuel Velikovsky,<sup>8</sup> a psychoanalyst and intellect of superstar magnitude, while doing research on a projected work encompassing three of Sigmund Freud's heroes, Moses, Oedipus, and Akhnaton, found evidence that Egypt had suffered a devastating catastrophe at one point in its history. The parallels between the Egyptian calamity and the accounts of the Exodus were so startling that Velikovsky began to trace other evidence of natural disaster on a global scale in the legends of peoples around the globe. By 1950, he was ready to unveil his documented conclusions on the Exodus.

In 1950, Velikovsky published *Worlds in Collision*, in which he contended that global cataclysms fundamentally changed the face of the planet in historical times, the Exodus being the event most clearly documented, thanks in part to the religious interpretation given it by the Hebrews who had seized the chance to flee Egypt in the confusion and disorder. The major thesis of the book was that Venus was a recent addition to the groups of planets circling the sun, having been ejected from Jupiter sometime earlier and was careening through our solar system for a period of centuries. During the time of the Exodus and later in the eighth century B.C., Venus came into near collision with Earth and Mars, disrupting the orbits of each and at one point saving Earth from a fatal collision with Mars.

Pointing out that prior to the second millennium B.C., there were no records of Venus as a planet by either the Hindus or Babylonians, Velikovsky asked why the most visible object in our night sky, outside of the moon, had not attracted the attention of the meticulous ancient astronomers. He replied that the only reasonable conclusion was that Venus could not be observed because it was not in the sky at that point. Ancient tales describe Venus as coming from the head of Jupiter, and other ancient records describe the struggles between the dragon and the cultural hero. Combining these features of humankind's collective memory, Velikovsky concluded that the tail of a comet doubled back in an electric field attraction with its head and would appear to people as a struggle between a hero and a reptile of enormous length and strength.

The testimony of the peoples from around the globe was compared to see if the legends bore any resemblance to the description obtained from the Near East. The legends bore out the thesis, and where they appeared

to vary, the variance bolstered the thesis since the geographical location of the people changed the nature of the spectacle they would have been able to observe. Velikovsky thus unveiled a cosmic struggle between a comet and the two planets most familiar to mankind—Earth and Mars. In doing so, he called into question the psychological theories of religion as a fantasy of dream projections, raising the question of whether or not a substantial number of religions did not arise from activities taking place in the night sky and by implication offered rebuttal of the idea that natural processes have been uniform throughout earth history.

The sequence developed by Velikovsky up to the Exodus explains a substantial number of lesser and more puzzling verses that theologians have always interpreted as evidence of the Hebrew prophets' extreme poetic pretensions. It is, as briefly and accurately as possible, the following: at some time, as yet not accurately identified but before 1500 B.C., Jupiter ejected a comet of planetary size, the red spot of the planet observed today being the scar remaining on Jupiter from this incident. The comet began to travel on a highly irregular path through our solar system, menacing Earth on a number of occasions. Its bright light was the initial indication of its presence.

Eventually, Venus began to intrude on Earth's presence as it passed its perihelion and began the long distance of its elliptical orbit. In or around 1500 B.C., Earth passed through the tail of the comet. The first indication that the planet was in trouble was a rusty iron dust that covered the globe, giving the land and waters a bloody hue. The miracle of Moses turning the waters red was, therefore, not the poetic flight of a later scribe but the comet's initial effect.

As Earth went deeper into the comet's tail, hydrocarbon gases covering parts of the planet exploded in great bursts of fire. Billions of gallons of hydrocarbons in the form of petroleum rained on parts of the planet, forming the oil fields we have tapped in recent years. Great pools of naphtha fell into depressions, caught fire, and burned for years giving the whole planet a twilight of nearly a generation. Then, as Earth went even further into the comet's tail, it was caught in an electromagnetic vise and its axis tilted, resulting in the sudden destruction of the Near East's major cities.

The catastrophe was worldwide, traumatic, and highly destructive. Rivers reversed themselves. Islands disappeared into the sea, other islands emerged. Mountains crashed skyward where peaceful strata had lain for

centuries. A global hurricane ensued, leveling forests in a moment. Monstrous lakes were formed when waters jumped mountains and could not return to the seas. Arabia, once a prosperous land, and the Sahara, then populated by several large cities, were turned into desolate wastes. Part of the world lay in utter darkness, part in extended but smoky light.

The Hebrew slaves fled from the smoking ruins of Egypt as the Middle Kingdom fell in a major catastrophe. Racing for the sea of reeds, they saw the comet as a pillar of smoke during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Reaching Pi-haKhiroth at the edge of the Red Sea, they were pursued by the Pharaoh Taoui-Thom and his army. The action of the comet temporarily pulled the waters from their bed, allowing the Hebrews to cross and destroying the pharaoh's army as the waters collapsed.

The hydrocarbons of the comet's tail formed, by precipitation every morning, a nourishing substance that the Hebrews ate, thus providing them with sustenance during their flight into the Sinai desert. This was the manna from heaven of which the Bible speaks. The sun, which had previously risen in the west and set in the east, appeared to have reversed itself, now setting in the west and rising in the east. Those societies that had survived relatively intact began the laborious task of locating the new directions, making up calendars, and determining the length of the year.

Earth had only begun to recover, however, when Venus made another close approach. It was some fifty years later and coincided with Joshua's conquest of Canaan. This time the first notice of calamity occurred just prior to a battle, when a rain of meteorites pelted the Near East. Again the sun appeared temporarily to stop in the sky, and Joshua, who was just beginning a battle, used this prolonged day to achieve victory in the valley of Beth-horon.

This sequence of events, as projected in Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision*, was more precisely developed in his companion volume *Ages in Chaos*, published some years later. Where all previous historians proudly interpreted the books of the Old Testament as divine and sublime poetry of first-rank quality, the Velikovsky thesis explained the trauma and disasters suffered by the people of the Near East and gave startling new meaning to the Bible's descriptions. The verses celebrating the power of the Lord, taken as spectacular but impossible sequences of natural events by Christian scholars, began to leap from the pages as descriptions of natural phenomena.

Ravaged by the approach of Venus twice within a fifty-year period, the nations of the world decided that they had better find a way to appease and pacify the goddess of the comet before she destroyed everything. Religions began to emphasize rites and rituals to prevent the near approach of Venus. Blood sacrifices were offered as peoples desperately sought ways to avoid continued destruction by the comet. Venus continued to cross Earth's orbit, beginning to come dangerously close to Mars so that the comet, while apparently appeased by the new religious ceremonies, was still feared by people as the initiator of destruction. A new conflict was building in the heavens as the orbits began to move closer toward a collision course.

In the days of King Uzziah, Venus missed Earth but managed to pull Mars from its orbit, sending it on a collision course with Earth. Mars was much smaller than Earth and did not have the velocity of Venus, so its approach to Earth did not result in the same degree of destruction that earlier passes of the comet had caused. Earth, which had earlier stabilized its calendar at 360 days, was forced farther out into space away from the sun, resulting in our present year of 365.25 days.

In 687 B.C., Sennacherib led his Assyrian army into Israel with the intent of conquering Jerusalem. On the evening of March 23, the first night of the Hebrew Passover, the Assyrians camped outside the city, ready to capture it the following morning. In what may have been history's most spectacular lightning bolt, the army, 185,000 strong, was destroyed when an electromagnetic charge suddenly arched between Mars and Earth. The Hebrews had been saved twice on the same date by heavenly intervention. Is it any wonder that they used the most powerful, descriptive terms to praise their God?

Earth did not grind to a halt again, but its rotation was slowed or halted for a number of hours—the prolonged night during which the Assyrian army was destroyed. The axis was somewhat shifted again, coming back closer to its original position before the start of the catastrophes. Mars and Venus then set up an electrical field between themselves, resulting in the repositioning of Mars away from its collision course with Earth. In the sky an immense drama was enacted, as Mars and Venus set and reset fields of incredible electrical energy with respect to each other. The struggle was recounted by the Greeks as the gods intervening in the battle to take Troy.

Mars finally achieved a release from Venus and settled in its present orbit. We have pictures today from our space probes showing the terrible extent of destruction suffered by Mars from the catastrophe. The planet, with heavy scars from the rain of meteorites, looks like the moon. Venus settled in its present orbit in a highly incandescent state, gathering up remnants of its tail as thick hydrocarbon clouds that space probes have disclosed cover the planet.

Now, of course, all of this activity in the heavens was not new to Christians believing in the power of God and His role in history. They had read and believed it for centuries and had taught it as fact to generations of converts. When Velikovsky published his books documenting the catastrophes, however, Christians were not to be found defending the thesis or applauding his scholarly effort, which caused severe traumas in several sciences, including astronomy, geology, physics, and history. Rather they remained silent, while the academic community carried on what may have been history's most closed-minded, libelous attack against a thinker daring to ask separate academic fields to achieve a unity of knowledge.

*Worlds in Collision* was attacked by "respectable" scientists even before it was published. A concentrated effort was begun to force the Macmillan Company, Velikovsky's publisher, to stop the presses. Scholars began a boycott of Macmillan's textbook division, its most vulnerable place. Macmillan could not withstand the concerted attack and transferred the book's rights to Doubleday. A conspiracy of silence dropped over discussion of Velikovsky's works. He subsequently published *Earth in Upheaval*, which was an embarrassing revelation of geological shortcomings. The book simply took extant geological works and showed that the subject matter had been incorrectly interpreted and slanted by numerous geologists to make it conform to the then prevailing theories of geologic change based upon the interminably slow processes already defined by biologists to explain evolution.

This scientific basis of Velikovsky's work involved a recognition of the possibility that cosmic catastrophes could take place and had in historical times. These catastrophes were observed by peoples all over the globe and became part of their creation legends or myths explaining the origin of their sacrificial rites and rituals. Thus in the folklore of the ancients had been hidden important observations that were crucially important for an

understanding of the nature of the universe. Scientists disagreed, however, and they began to produce facts and figures to refute Velikovsky. Fear set in among scholars, and no one stood up to demand that Velikovsky be allowed to present his views. He was subjected to bitter criticism by people who had not read his books but who had learned, from their earliest childhood, that the tales of non-Christian peoples about serpents swallowing the sun and prolonged nights of utter darkness were just pagan, hardly historical, superstitions and probably the work of the devil.

As Velikovsky unveiled his concept of the solar system, respectable scholars guffawed at his apparently wild predictions and suppositions. Practically every point he suggested was derided as being totally contrary to what science had already "proved" to be true. Scholars in the major disciplines affected by the thesis ridiculed Velikovsky, announcing satirically that if his thesis were true, it would require certain phenomena to be present, which everyone knew was not the case. All of these wild predictions, made in 1950 by Velikovsky, were universally rejected.

Then the evidence began to come in. Science had new opportunities to conduct sophisticated experiments through the initial space probe programs. New methods of dating materials began to be developed, the International Geophysical Year of 1958 was held to determine systematically certain facts about the planet, and eventually the Mars and Venus probes by space rockets were made. Universally and without exception Velikovsky's predictions and suggestions about the planets were confirmed. No other comprehensive explanation of the solar system had returned as many different accurate results as had the theory espoused in *Worlds in Collision*.

Naturally the scholars who had derided Velikovsky did not credit him with the results of his creative thought. They continued the curtain of silence while stealing his ideas as fast as they could read his books. Some of the more prominent scientists had made dramatic announcements that if Velikovsky were right, then Earth, the sun, Venus, the moon, Mars, and other heavenly bodies would have to have certain characteristics. When Velikovsky was proved correct, they promptly hedged rhetorically and dodged their embarrassment in double-talk, too chagrined or perhaps too stupid to apologize. Some of these memorable statements by noted scientists should be recorded for posterity's sake.



Velikovsky suggested that the sun was an electrically charged body. Donald Menzel, a Harvard astronomer and one of Velikovsky's most bitter critics, ridiculed the idea. He maintained that the sun cannot hold a charge above 1,800 volts if positive and a single volt if negative and said that Velikovsky's theory required a charge of 1019 volts, which he assured everyone was patently impossible. This was in 1952. In 1960, V.A. Bailey of Australia discovered that the sun carries a negative charge of  $10^{19}$  volts.

Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, another Harvard astronomer and the scientist who reviewed Velikovsky's first book, misquoted him and then ridiculed her own misquotations. In 1950, Payne-Gaposchkin maintained that the planets could not possibly possess electrostatic charges sufficient to produce the effects Velikovsky claimed for them. Three years later in an article in *Scientific American*, she advocated a universe that was essentially a gravitating electromagnet. She never mentioned that the idea had already been advanced by Velikovsky and rejected by herself as evidence of his instability as a scholar.<sup>9</sup>

Velikovsky maintained that Venus, deriving from an erratic past as a comet, would be in an incandescent state. This was in direct opposition to what was "known" by science in 1950. Menzel lost no time in ridiculing Velikovsky because he was one of the leading proponents of the theory that Venus had an extremely low temperature. In 1955, he revised his estimate of the ground temperature of Venus, concluding that it was probably 50° C. The Venus probe of 1962 indicated that the surface temperature of Venus was some 800° F. Later probes showed that ground temperature was closer to 1,000° F.

Because Velikovsky believed that the comet Venus erupted from Jupiter, he predicted at a 1953 talk at Princeton that Jupiter was probably a dark star giving off radio signals. Less than two years later, two scientists discovered radio signals coming from Jupiter, and by 1965 Jupiter was declared a dark star. Velikovsky also predicted that Earth would have a magnetosphere reaching as far as the moon. In 1958, the Van Allen belts were discovered, named after James Van Allen who had only measured them and not after Velikovsky who had predicted them.

The May 1972 issue of *Pensée*, a journal published by the Student Academic Freedom Forum in Portland, Oregon, gave the complete story

of Velikovsky's amazing predictions and his history of scientific persecution and derision. It devoted a considerable number of pages to a simple listing of his suggestions about the nature of the universe and the history of ancient peoples. Even a casual glance at the list of Velikovsky's predictions in the face of then-accepted scientific theory, which turned out was really dogma, is staggering to behold. There appeared to be no doubt that Velikovsky had been vindicated.

Science and the academic community revealed themselves as superstitious, dogmatic, narrow-minded, and spiteful little people as a result of their treatment of Velikovsky. For nearly two and one-half decades, they refused to allow him to discuss the theories that have produced such a plenitude of newly verified facts about the universe as to make the basic theory the most revolutionary explanation of the creation we have ever seen. Some men borrowed Velikovsky's ideas almost totally without giving him any credit or even mention. Others reversed themselves completely without apologizing for their past errors or acknowledging Velikovsky's earlier and correct contentions.

The most common attack leveled against Velikovsky was that he simply made a series of lucky guesses and hit on quite a few of them. The point that this attack missed was that every prediction he made had to fit into his general interpretation of the nature of the solar system. He was not simply spinning a tale and casually throwing off unrelated predictions. Everything suggested by Velikovsky originated from the implications of his thesis. His predictions involved pulling together the anomalies and inconsistencies of numerous fields of interest to form a unified view of the universe. Taken together they give us a picture of a different kind of world and a different kind of history in which things of utmost significance happen—similar to the original Christian contention that God does work in the affairs of men.

*Worlds in Collision* has great relevance for religious thinkers. Velikovsky's original point of departure was the belief that the Exodus was an event of worldwide significance and experienced by peoples on a global basis. His search of many peoples' folklore and their religious and cultural myths and stories indicated that celestial events viewed from different places gave rise to different descriptions of phenomena which scientifically



described a definite sequence. The religious interpretation of the events varied, of course, with the respective peoples' location, language, culture, and state of existence.

With the exception of Fulton Oursler, who wrote an article for the *Reader's Digest* correlating Velikovsky's thesis with the Old Testament (a duplication of effort considering that *Ages in Chaos*, Velikovsky's second book, is a supreme demonstration of Velikovsky's skill as a biblical scholar and historian) no Christian theologian or Old Testament scholar of any note supported the consideration of the thesis that the Old Testament might be historically accurate in many respects. Christianity thus lost an opportunity to recoup its lost ground and assert the historical nature of its revelation.

Certain subtleties thus emerge that require further analysis. If Christian theologians and historians did not see the opportunities in this new evidence that events of the Bible, hitherto felt to be symbolic imagery and hyperbole, were actually historical events, what prevented them from understanding? Had they adopted the secular interpretation that all ancient stories were basically a fictional mythology devised to prove a moral point but certainly not indicative of the nature of the physical universe? Were they afraid that proving the historicity of the flood, the Exodus, and other seemingly impossible phenomena would validate corresponding legends of non-Christian traditions, thereby rendering any appeal to history and geology on behalf of a particular religion moot? Or did they simply never believe the Old Testament in the first place? It is exceedingly difficult to determine why even the fundamentalists did not move to support Velikovsky's thesis.

With regard to the Exodus itself, the Makahs who live on Cape Flattery in the northwest corner of the United States have a story that one day the sea withdrew from the land and was nowhere to be found. The wise men of the tribe told everyone to build rafts and boats as quickly as possible. Some days later the sea returned in the form of a gigantic tidal wave, tossing boats and rafts all over, drowning most of the people, and forever separating portions of the tribe from each other. Geologically and geographically this phenomenon can be linked to the disappearance of the waters when Moses and the people crossed the Red Sea, suggesting that at many other places on the planet the same water tidal behavior occurred. Verification of the Exodus as a physical, historical event might then verify the Makah story, but so what?

More important, if the planet is likely to be subjected to immense displacements of its land and waters, it would be better to know than to be caught thinking that a catastrophe of this magnitude was impossible.

Granted that it is a severe rupture for the theological mind to go from a conception of God slyly dropping hints for the church to discern to a belief in a cataclysmic event in which a number of religions are founded because of a belief in Divine intervention and physical salvation. But even today we have to take seriously the possibility of the planet experiencing changes of such a magnitude that they can only be credited to the action of higher powers. Every bit of evidence we have must be brought to bear on the question of how religions originate because it is not useful to pretend that while various deities once spoke to people and performed some incredible feats, they no longer do so. Religions do not rise simply because poets become too eloquent and people want to glorify their past.

World War II brought Americans into contact with parts of the world then unknown to them and unvisited by modern travelers. After the Americans had left certain islands in the South Pacific, scholars discovered that a new religion had grown up among the natives that interpreted the airplanes and machinery left by our soldiers as manifestations of their Gods. The cargo cults, as they have been called, would indicate that if an event is out of the ordinary and makes a sufficiently strong impression on people, a new religion can be called forth that seems to explain the experience regardless of how simplistic it might have appeared to more knowledgeable observers.

The Old Testament is probably extremely accurate in many respects, particularly when describing those events that changed the way people understood their world. It is difficult for many people to accept the fact that the Old Testament is primarily an effort to record first Hebrew and then Jewish history and not a volume of Divine admonitions about the nature of ultimate reality. But it is entirely possible that events recorded in the Old Testament and believed to be highly religious are also described in the legends and folklore of other people and not given the same religious significance. Our responsibility today is to discern from the many different human traditions the probable historical sequences that have shaped our modern earth and come into closer understanding of the nature of the planet on which we live.

## ORIGIN OF RELIGION



## ▲ NOTES

1. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 91.
2. *Ibid.*, 222.
3. Theodor Herzl Gaster, *Passover: Its History and Traditions* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949), 29.
4. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, vols. III-IV, translated by Geoffrey Cumberledge (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 728.
5. Louis K. Dupre, *The Other Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 395.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 88.
8. Velikovsky's work has created a number of schools of interpretation so that his original thesis—catastrophism on a planetary scale within historic times—is reasonably acceptable today, although people within the mainstream of orthodox science do not use his name only his ideas. Among his disciples the tendency has been to advocate new cosmic scenarios that attempt to expand his original idea to include information on Saturn and other planets and hypothesize a time when our solar system had two suns. Alfred de Grazia has created his own version of solar system catastrophism that I like very much as a story but that has some severe problems when translated into the language of physics, I suspect.  
Zecharia Sitchin has done the best job of analyzing the possibility
- of ancient astronauts and their effect on us today, and I sketch out some of his theory in chapter 9. I would, however, make an effort to combine Velikovsky's ideas with Sitchin's because I think the chronology that Velikovsky develops, from 1500 B.C. forward, still has a great deal of validity.  
When he was alive, I used to send Velikovsky copies of the Indian legends and traditions that might have been useful in supporting some of his ideas. He was always very gracious in receiving them, although I don't think I ever provided him anything important.  
This chapter is basically my interpretation of the ideas that Velikovsky presented in a series of books, the majority of which actually dealt with the reconstruction of ancient Near Eastern history. Any errors or misinterpretations are mine.
9. These conflicts and many others are discussed by Alfred de Grazia in an issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* in 1964 which evolved into a book, the *Velikovsky Affair* (University Books, 1966). A group of students at Reed College produced a ten-issue series in *Pensée* magazine that reviewed all of Velikovsky's predictions and his accuracy rate as well as the inaccurate statements of his critics. I have merely discussed two of the most spectacular instances of Velikovsky's critics being wrong here in this chapter.

SUPPOSE IMMANUEL VELIKOVSKY IS CORRECT? Suppose that instead of the Exodus accounts being a poetic elaboration of religious doctrine of a later time, they are fairly well-remembered accounts of the phenomena encountered by the Hebrews as they left Egypt. How then do we approach religious writings? Are they to be understood as actual events, and do we take all religious stories as having been real events at some time and some place in man's experience? It would seem that we have a major task of discovering to what extent we can accept the historical veracity of any story of ancient times. That Velikovsky's projections about the nature of the physical world continue to produce startling verifications would tend to make us hesitate, reflect, and take another look at religious doctrines, symbolism, and beliefs.

The assumption made by theologians when discussing religious writings and their symbols and images is that world events have followed a fairly homogeneous pattern and that no particular event has happened that we cannot observe in similar pattern today. Using this assumption the Exodus does become simply another political revolt, which in later years had the fortune to be accepted as illustrating religious beliefs. But if we make this assumption, we are almost immediately faced with a more fundamental question about the origin of the religious beliefs illustrated in the stories that are found in religious traditions.