A History of God
By
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From Abraham to the Present: The 4,000-year Quest for God

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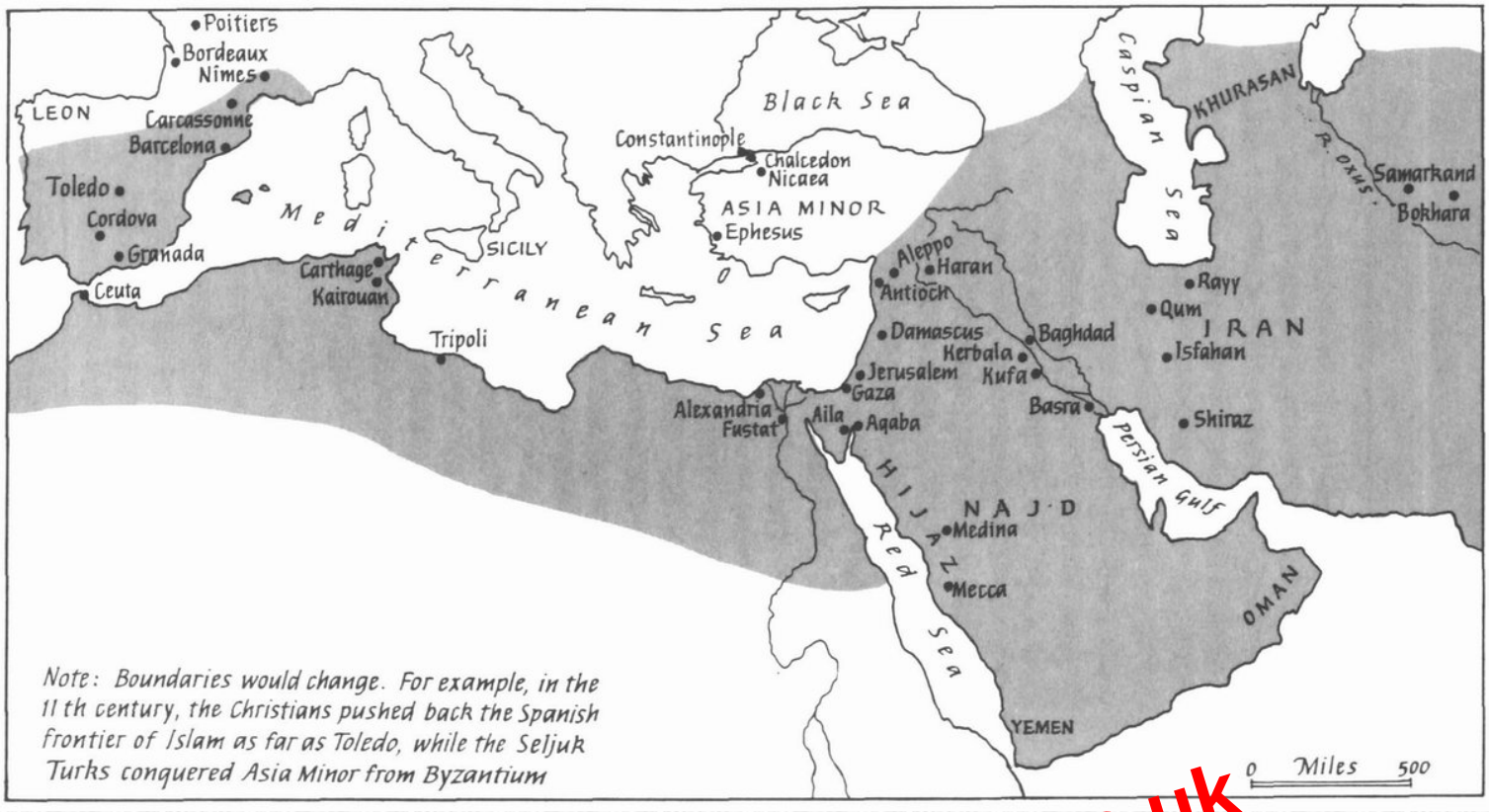
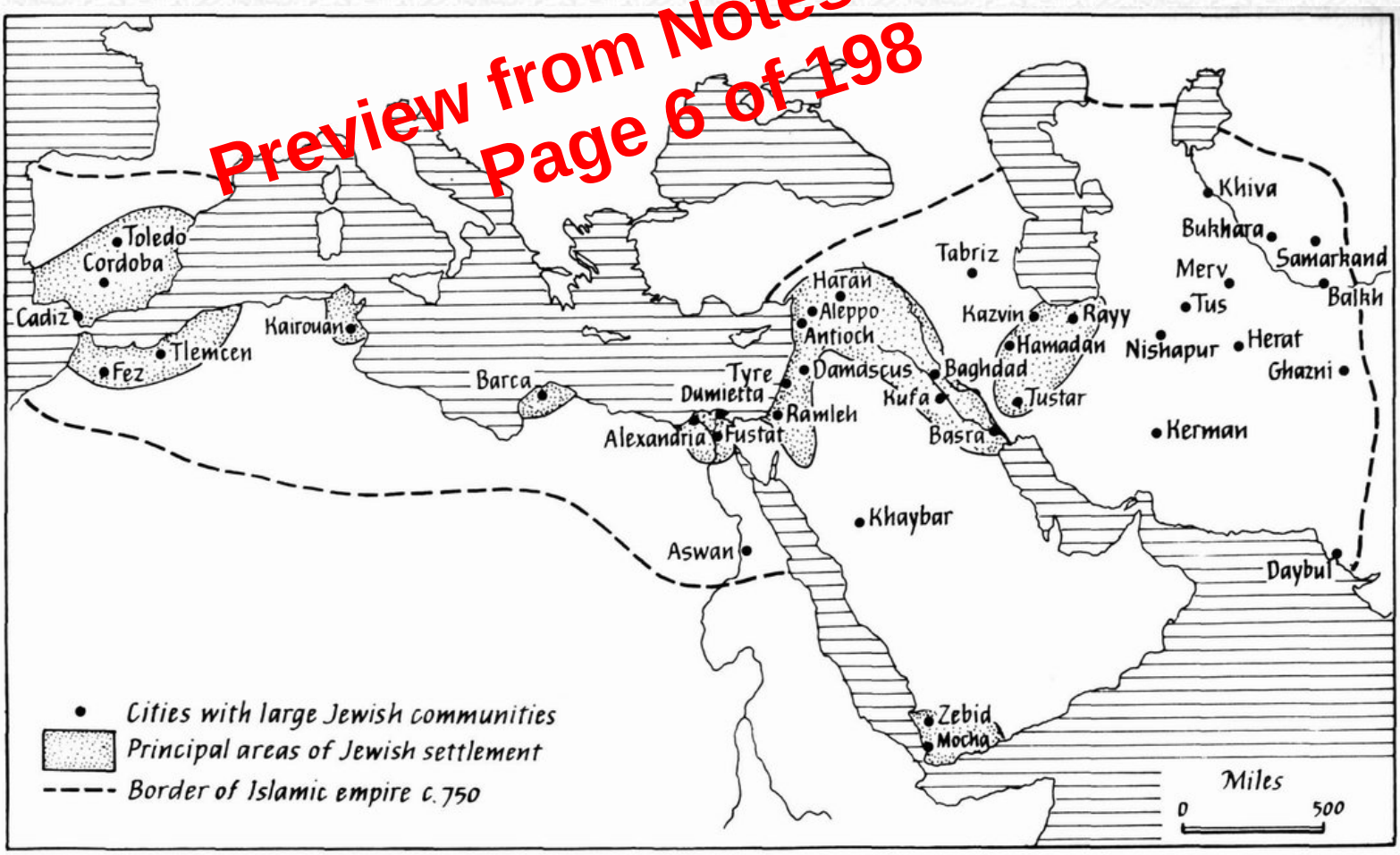


The Islamic Empire by 750



The Jews of Islam c. 750

'Tiamat' can be translated 'abyss', 'void' or 'bottomless gulf. They share the shapeless inertia of the original formlessness and had not yet achieved a clear identity.

Consequently, a succession of other gods emerged from them in a process known as emanation, which would become very important in the history of our own God. The new gods emerged, one from the other, in pairs, each of which had acquired a greater definition than the last as the divine evolution progressed. First came Lahmu and Lahamn (their names mean 'silt': water and earth are still mixed together). Next came Ansher and Kishar, identified respectively with the horizons of sky and sea. Then Anu (the heavens) and Ea (the earth) arrived and seemed to complete the process. The divine world had sky, rivers and earth, distinct and separate from one another. But creation had only just begun: the forces of chaos and disintegration could only be held at bay by means of a painful and incessant struggle. The younger, dynamic gods rose up against their parents but even though Ea was able to overpower Apsu and Mummu, he could make no headway against Tiamat, who produced a whole brood of misshapen monsters to fight on her behalf. Fortunately Ea had a wonderful child of his own: Marduk, the Sun God, the most perfect specimen of the divine line. At a meeting of the Great Assembly of gods, Marduk promised to fight Tiamat on condition that he became their ruler. Yet he only managed to slay Tiamat with great difficulty and after a long, dangerous battle. In this myth, creativity is a struggle, achieved laboriously against overwhelming odds.

Eventually, however, Marduk stood over Tiamat's vast corpse and decided to create a new world: he split her body in two to form the arch of the sky and the world of men; next he devised the laws that would keep everything in its appointed place. Order must be achieved. Yet the victory was not complete. It had to be re-established, by means of a special liturgy, year after year. Consequently the gods met at Babylon, the centre of the new earth, and built a temple where the celestial rites could be performed. The result was the great ziggurat in honour of Marduk, 'the earthly temple, symbol of infinite heaven'. When it was completed, Marduk took his seat at the summit and the gods cried aloud: 'This is Babylon, dear city of the god, your beloved home!' Then they performed the liturgy 'from which the universe receives its structure, the hidden world is made plain and the gods assigned their places in the universe'. {3} These laws and rituals are binding upon everybody; even the gods must observe them to ensure the survival of creation. The myth expresses the inner meaning of civilisation, as the Babylonians saw it. They knew perfectly well that their own ancestors had built the ziggurat but the story of the Enuma Elish articulated their belief that their creative enterprise could only endure if it partook of the power of the divine. The liturgy they celebrated at the New Year had been devised before human beings had come into existence: it was written into the very nature of things to which even the gods had to submit. The myth also expressed their conviction that Babylon was a sacred place, the centre of the world and the home of the gods - a notion that was crucial in almost all the religious systems of antiquity. The idea of a holy city, where men and women felt that they were closely in touch with sacred power, the source of all being and efficacy, would be important in all three of the monotheistic religions of our own God.

Finally, almost as an afterthought, Marduk created humanity. He seized Kingu (the oafish consort of Tiamat, created by her after the defeat of Apsu), slew him and shaped the first man by mixing the divine blood with the dust. The gods watched in astonishment and admiration. There is, however, some humour in this mythical account of the origin of humanity, which is by no means the pinnacle of creation but derives from one of the most stupid and ineffectual of the gods. But the story made another important point. The first man had been created from the substance of a god: he therefore shared the divine nature, in however limited a way. There was no gulf between human beings and the gods. The natural world, men and women and the gods themselves all shared the same nature and derived from the same divine substance. The pagan vision was holistic. The gods were not shut off from the human race in a separate, ontological sphere: divinity was not essentially different from humanity. There was thus no need for a special revelation of the gods or for a divine law to descend to earth from on high. The gods and human beings shared the same predicament, the only difference being that the gods were more powerful and were immortal.

This holistic vision was not confined to the Middle East but was common in the ancient world. In the sixth century BCE, Pindar expressed the Greek version of this belief in his ode on the Olympic games:

> *Single is the race, single*
> *Of men and gods;*
> *From a single mother we both draw breath.*
> *But a difference of power in everything*
> *Keeps us apart;*
> *For one is as nothing, but the brazen sky*
> *Stays a fixed habituation for ever.*
> *Yet we can in greatness of mind*
> *Or of body be like the Immortals.* {4}

Instead of seeing his athletes as on their own, each striving to achieve his personal best, Pindar sets them against the exploits of the gods, who were the pattern for all human achievement. Men were not slavishly imitating the gods as hopelessly distant beings but living up to the potential of their own essentially divine nature.

The myth of Marduk and Tiamat seems to have influenced the people of Canaan, who told a very similar story about Baal-Habad, the god of

At the time when Yahweh God made earth and heaven, there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth nor was there any man to till the soil. However, a flood was rising from the earth and watering all the surface of the soil. Yahweh God fashioned man (adam) of dust from the soil (adamah). Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and thus man became a living being. {6}

This was an entirely new departure. Instead of concentrating on the creation of the world and on the prehistoric period like his pagan contemporaries in Mesopotamia and Canaan, J is more interested in ordinary historical time. There would be no real interest in creation in Israel until the sixth century BCE, when the author whom we call 'P' wrote his majestic account in what is now the first chapter of Genesis. J is not absolutely clear that Yahweh is the sole creator of heaven and earth. Most noticeable, however, is J's perception of a certain distinction between man and the divine. Instead of being composed of the same divine stuff as his god, man (*adam*), as the pun indicates, belongs to the earth (*adamah*).

Unlike his pagan neighbours, J does not dismiss mundane history as profane, feeble and insubstantial compared with the sacred, primordial time of the gods. He hurries through the events of prehistory until he comes to the end of the mythical period, which includes such stories as the Flood and the Tower of Babel, and arrives at the start of the history of the people of Israel. This begins abruptly in Chapter Twelve when the man Abram, who will later be renamed Abraham ('Father of a Multitude'), is commanded by Yahweh to leave his family in Haran, in what is now eastern Turkey, and migrate to Canaan near the Mediterranean Sea. We have been told that his father Terah, a pagan, had already migrated westward with his family from Ur. Now Yahweh tells Abraham that he has a special destiny: he will become the father of a mighty nation that will one day be more numerous than the stars in the sky and one day his descendants will possess the land of Canaan as their own. J's account of the call of Abraham sets the tone for the future history of this God. In the ancient Middle East, the divine mana was experienced in ritual and myth. Marduk, Baal and Anat were not expected to involve themselves in the ordinary, profane lives of their worshippers: their actions had been performed in sacred time. The God of Israel, however, made his power effective in current events in the real world. He was experienced as an imperative in the here and now. His first revelation of himself consists of a command: Abraham is to leave his people and travel to the land of Canaan.

But who is Yahweh? Did Abraham worship the same God as Moses or did he know him by a different name? This would be a matter of prime importance to us today but the Bible seems curiously vague on the subject and gives conflicting answers to this question. J says that men had worshipped Yahweh ever since the time of Adam's grandson but in the sixth century, 'P' seems to suggest that the Israelites had never heard of Yahweh until he appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush. P makes Yahweh explain that he really was the same God as the God of Abraham, as though this were a rather controversial notion: he tells Moses that Abraham had called him 'El Shaddai' and did not know the divine name Yahweh. {7} The discrepancy does not seem to worry either the biblical writers or their editors unduly. J calls his god 'Yahweh' throughout: by the time he was writing, Yahweh was the God of Israel and that was all that mattered. Israelite religion was pragmatic and less concerned with the kind of speculative detail that would worry us. Yet we should not assume that either Abraham or Moses believed in their God as we do today. We are so familiar with the Bible story and the subsequent history of Israel that we tend to project our knowledge of later Jewish religion back on to these early historical personages. Accordingly, we assume that the three patriarchs of Israel - Abraham, his son Isaac and grandson Jacob - were monotheists who believed in only one God. This does not seem to have been the case. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to call these early Hebrews pagans who shared many of the religious beliefs of their neighbours in Canaan. They would certainly have believed in the existence of such deities as Marduk, Baal and Anat. They may not all have worshipped the same deity: it is possible that the God of Abraham, the 'Fear' or 'Kinsman' of Isaac and the 'Mighty One' of Jacob were three separate gods. {8}

We can go further. It is highly likely that Abraham's God was El, the High God of Canaan. The deity introduces himself to Abraham as El Shaddai (El of the Mountain), which was one of El's traditional tides. {9} Elsewhere he is called El Elyon (The Most High God) or El of Bethel. The name of the Canaanite High God is preserved in such Hebrew names as Isra-El or Ishma-El. They experienced him in ways that would not have been unfamiliar to the pagans of the Middle East. We shall see that centuries later Israelites found the mana or 'holiness' of Yahweh a terrifying experience. On Mount Sinai, for example, he would appear to Moses in the midst of an awe-inspiring volcanic eruption and the Israelites had to keep their distance. In comparison, Abraham's god El is a very mild deity. He appears to Abraham as a friend and sometimes even assumes human form. This type of divine apparition, known as an epiphany, was quite common in the pagan world of antiquity. Even though in general the gods were not expected to intervene directly in the lives of mortal men and women, certain privileged individuals in mythical times had encountered their gods face to face. The Iliad is full of such epiphanies. The gods and goddesses appear to both Greeks and Trojans in dreams, when the boundary between the human and divine worlds was believed to be lowered. At the very end of the Iliad, Priam is guided to the Greek ships by a charming young man who finally reveals himself as Hermes. {10} When the Greeks looked back to the golden age of their heroes, they felt that they had been closely in touch with the gods, who were, after all, of the same nature as human beings. These stories of epiphanies expressed the holistic pagan vision: when the divine was not essentially distinct from either nature or humanity, it could be experienced without a great fanfare. The world was full of gods, who could be perceived unexpectedly at any time, around any corner or in the person of a passing stranger. It seems that ordinary folk may have believed that such divine encounters were possible in their own lives: this may explain the strange story in the Acts of the Apostles when, as late as the first century CE, the apostle Paul and his disciple Barnabas were mistaken for Zeus and Hermes by the people of Lystra in what is now Turkey."

There was always a danger that the cult of Yahweh would eventually be submerged by the popular paganism. This became particularly acute during the latter half of the ninth century. In 869 King Ahab had succeeded to the throne of the northern Kingdom of Israel. His wife Jezebel, daughter of the King of Tyre and Sidon in what is now Lebanon, was an ardent pagan, intent upon converting the country to the religion of Baal and Asherah. She imported priests of Baal, who quickly acquired a following among the northerners, who had been conquered by King David and were lukewarm Yahwists. Ahab remained true to Yahweh but did not try to curb Jezebel's proselytism. When a severe drought struck the land towards the end of his reign, however, a prophet named Eli-Jah ('Yahweh is my god!') began to wander through the land, clad in a hairy mantle and a leather loincloth, fulminating against the disloyalty to Yahweh. He summoned King Ahab and the people to a contest on Mount Carmel between Yahweh and Baal. There, in the presence of 450 prophets of Baal, he harangued the people: how long would they dither between the two deities? Then he called for two bulls, one for himself and one for the prophets of Baal, to be placed on two altars. They would call upon their gods and see which one sent down fire from heaven to consume the holocaust. 'Agreed!' cried the people. The prophets of Baal shouted his name for the whole morning, performing their hobbling dance round their altar, yelling and gashing themselves with swords and spears. But 'there was no voice, no answer'. Elijah jeered: 'Call louder!' he cried, 'for he is a god: he is preoccupied or he is busy, or he has gone on a journey; perhaps he is asleep and he will wake up.' Nothing happened: 'there was no voice, no answer, no attention given them.'

Then it was Elijah's turn. The people crowded round the altar of Yahweh while he dug a trench around it which he filled with water, to make it even more difficult to ignite. Then Elijah called upon Yahweh. Immediately, of course, fire fell from heaven and consumed the altar and the bull, licking up all the water in the trench. The people fell upon their faces: 'Yahweh is God,' they cried, 'Yahweh is God.' Elijah was not a generous victor. 'Seize the prophets of Baal!' he ordered. Not one was to be spared: he took them to a nearby valley and slaughtered the lot. {25} Paganism did not usually seek to impose itself on other people - Jezebel is an interesting exception - since there was always room for another god in the pantheon alongside the others. These early mythical events show that from the first Yahwism demanded a violent repression and denial of other faiths, a phenomenon we shall examine in more detail in the next chapter. After the massacre, Elijah climbed up to the top of Mount Carmel and sat in prayer with his head between his knees, sending his servant from time to time to scan the horizon. Eventually he brought news of a small cloud - about the size of a man's hand - rising up from the sea and Elijah told him to go and {warn} King Ahab to hurry home before the rain stopped him. Almost as he spoke, the sky darkened with stormy clouds and the rain fell in torrents. In an ecstasy, Elijah tucked up his cloak and ran alongside Ahab's chariot. By sending rain, Yahweh had usurped the function of Baal, the Storm God, proving that he was just as effective in fertility as in war.

Fearing a reaction against his massacre of the prophets, Elijah fled to the Sinai peninsula and took refuge on the mountain where God had revealed himself to Moses. There he experienced a theophany which manifested the new Yahwist spirituality. He was told to stand in the crevice of a rock to shield himself from the divine impact:

> *Then Yahweh himself went by. There came a mighty wind, so strong it tore the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire came the sound of a gentle breeze. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with a cloak.* {26}

Unlike the pagan deities, Yahweh was not in any of the forces of nature but in a realm apart. He is experienced in the scarcely perceptible timbre of a tiny breeze in the paradox of a voiced silence. The story of Elijah contains the last mythical account of the past in the Jewish scriptures. Change was in the air throughout the Oikumene. The period 800-200 BCE has been termed the Axial Age. In all the main regions of the civilised world, people created new ideologies that have continued to be crucial and formative. The new religious systems reflected the changed economic and social conditions. For reasons that we do not entirely understand, all the chief civilisations developed along parallel lines, even when there was no commercial contact (as between China and the European area). There was a new prosperity that led to the rise of a merchant class. Power was shifting from king and priest, temple and palace, to the market place. The new wealth led to intellectual and cultural florescence and also to the development of the individual conscience. Inequality and exploitation became more apparent as the pace of change accelerated in the cities and people began to realise that their own behaviour could affect the fate of future generations. Each region developed a distinctive ideology to address these problems and concerns: Taoism and Confucianism in China, Hinduism and Buddhism in India and philosophical rationalism in Europe. The Middle East did not produce a uniform solution but in Iran and Israel, Zoroaster and the Hebrew prophets respectively evolved different versions of monotheism. Strange as it may seem, the idea of 'God', like the other great religious insights of the period, developed in a market economy in a spirit of aggressive capitalism.

I propose to look briefly at two of these new developments before proceeding in the next chapter to examine the reformed religion of Yahweh. The religious experience of India developed along similar lines but its different emphasis will illuminate the peculiar characteristics and problems of the Israelite notion of God. The rationalism of Plato and Aristotle is also important because Jews, Christians and Muslims all drew upon their ideas and tried to adapt them to their own religious experience, even though the Greek God was very different from their own.

In the seventeenth century BCE, Aryans from what is now Iran had invaded the Indus valley and subdued the indigenous population. They had imposed their religious ideas, which we find expressed in the collection of odes known as the Rig- Veda. There we find a multitude of gods, expressing many of the same values as the deities of the Middle East and which presented the forces of nature as instinct with power, life and

personality. Yet there were signs that people were beginning to see that the various gods might simply be manifestations of one divine Absolute, that transcended them all. Like the Babylonians, the Aryans were quite aware that their myths were not factual accounts of reality but expressed a mystery that not even the gods themselves could explain adequately. When they tried to imagine how the gods and the world had evolved from primal chaos, they concluded that nobody -not even the gods - could understand the mystery of existence:

> *Who then knows whence it has arisen,*
> *Whence this emanation hath arisen,*
> *Whether God disposed it, or whether he did not, -*
> *Only he who is its overseer in highest heaven knows.*
> *Or perhaps he does not know!* {27}

The religion of the Vedas did not attempt to explain the origins of life nor to give privileged answers to philosophical questions. Instead, it was designed to help people to come to terms with the wonder and terror of existence. It asked more questions than it answered, designed to hold the people in an attitude of reverent wonder.

By the eighth century BCE, when J and E were writing their chronicles, changes in the social and economic conditions of the Indian subcontinent meant that the old Vedic religion was no longer relevant. The ideas of the indigenous population that had been suppressed in the centuries following the Aryan invasions surfaced and led to a new religious hunger. The revived interest in karma, the notion that one's destiny is determined by one's own actions, made people unwilling to blame the gods for the irresponsible behaviour of human beings. Increasingly the gods were seen as symbols of a single transcendent Reality. Vedic religion had become preoccupied with the rituals of sacrifice but the revived interest in the old Indian practice of yoga (the 'yoking' of the powers of the mind by special disciplines of concentration) meant that people became dissatisfied with a religion that concentrated on externals. Sacrifice and liturgy were not enough: they wanted to discover the inner meaning of these rites. We shall note that the prophets of Israel felt the same dissatisfaction. In India, the gods were no longer seen as other beings who were external to their worshippers; instead men and women sought to achieve an inward realisation of truth.

The gods were no longer very important in India. Henceforth they would be superseded by the religious teacher, who would be considered higher than the gods. It was a remarkable assertion of the value of humanity and the desire to take control of destiny: it would be the great religious insight of the subcontinent. The new religions of Hinduism and Buddhism did not deny the existence of the gods nor did they forbid the people to worship them. In their view, such repression and denial would be damaging. Instead, Hindus and Buddhists sought new ways to transcend the gods, to go beyond them. During the eighth century, sages began to address these issues in the treatises called the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, known collectively as the Vedanta: the end of the Veda. More and more Upanishads appeared until by the end of the fifth century BCE, there were about 200 of them. It is impossible to generalise about the religion we call Hinduism because it eschews systems and denies that one exclusive interpretation can be adequate. But the Upanishads did evolve a distinctive conception of godhood that transcends the gods but is found to be intimately present in all things.

In Vedic religion, people had experienced a holy power in the sacrificial ritual. They had called this sacred power Brahman. The priestly caste (known as Brahmanas) were also believed to possess this power. Since the ritual sacrifice was seen as the microcosm of the whole universe, Brahman gradually came to mean a power which sustains everything. The whole world was seen as the divine activity welling up from the mysterious being of Brahman, which was the inner meaning of all existence. The Upanishads encouraged people to cultivate a sense of Brahman in all things. It was a process of revelation in the literal meaning of the word: it was an unveiling of the hidden ground of all being. Everything that happens became a manifestation of Brahman: true insight lay in the perception of the unity behind the different phenomena. Some of the Upanishads saw Brahman as a personal power but others saw it as strictly impersonal. Brahman cannot be addressed as thou; it is a neutral term, so is neither he nor she; nor is it experienced as the will of a sovereign deity. Brahman does not speak to mankind. It cannot meet men and women; it transcends all such human activities. Nor does it respond to us in a personal way: sin does not 'offend' it and it cannot be said to 'love' us or be 'angry'. Thanking or praising it for creating the world would be entirely inappropriate.

This divine power would be utterly alien were it not for the fact that is also pervades, sustains and inspires us. The techniques of yoga had made people aware of an inner world. These disciplines of posture, breathing, diet and mental concentration have also been developed independently in other cultures, as we shall see, and seem to produce {11} experience of enlightenment and illumination which have been interpreted differently but which seem natural to humanity. The Upanishads claimed that this experience of a new dimension of self was the same holy power that sustained the rest of the world. The eternal principle within each individual was called Atman: it was a new version of the old holistic vision of paganism, a rediscovery in new terms of the One Life within us and abroad which was essentially divine. The Chandoga Upanishad explains this in the parable of the salt. A young man called Sretaketu had studied the Vedas for twelve years and was rather full of himself. His father Uddalaka asks him a question which he was unable to answer, however, and then proceeds to teach him a lesson about the fundamental truth of which he was entirely ignorant. He told his son to put a piece of salt into water and report back to him the following morning. When his father asked him to produce the salt, Sretaketu could not find it because it had completely dissolved. Uddalaka proceeded to question him:

enlightenment and liberation by accustoming his mind to the divine light.

Later in his life, Plato may have retreated from his doctrine of the eternal forms or ideas but they became crucial to many monotheists when they tried to express their conception of God. These ideas were stable, constant realities which could be apprehended by the reasoning powers of the mind. They are fuller, more permanent and effective realities than the shifting, flawed material phenomena we encounter with our senses. The things of this world only echo, 'participate in' or 'imitate' the eternal forms in the divine realm. There is an idea corresponding to every general conception we have, such as Love, Justice and Beauty. The highest of all the forms, however, is the idea of the Good. Plato had cast the ancient myth of the archetypes into a Philosophical form. His eternal ideas can be seen as a rational version of the mythical divine world, of which mundane things are the merest shadow. He did not discuss the nature of God but confined himself to the divine world of the forms, though occasionally it seems that ideal Beauty or the Good do represent a supreme reality. Plato was convinced that the divine world was static and changeless. The Greeks saw movement and change as signs of inferior reality: something that had true identity remained always the same, characterised by permanence and immutability. The most perfect motion, therefore, was the circle because it was perpetually turning and returning to its original point: the circling of the celestial spheres imitate the divine world as best they can. This utterly static image of divinity would have an immense influence on Jews, Christians and Muslims, even though it had little in common with the God of revelation, who is constantly active, innovative and, in the Bible, even changes his mind, as when he repents of having made man and decides to destroy the human race in the Flood.

There was a mystical aspect of Plato which monotheists would find most congenial. Plato's divine forms were not realities 'out there' but could be discovered within the self. In his dramatic dialogue The Symposium, Plato showed how love of a beautiful body could be purified and transformed into an ecstatic contemplation (theoria) of ideal Beauty. He makes Diotima, Socrates's mentor, explain that this Beauty is unique, eternal and absolute, quite unlike anything that we experience in this world:

> *This Beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away; neither waxes nor wanes; next it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in this relation and ugly in that, nor beautiful here and ugly there, as varying according to its beholders; nor again will this beauty appear to the imagination like the beauty of a face or hands or anything else corporeal, or like the beauty of a thought or science, or like beauty which has its seat in something other than itself, be it in a living thing or the earth or the sky or anything else whatsoever; he will see it as absolute, existing alone within itself, unique, eternal.* {34}

In short, an idea like Beauty has much in common with what many theists would call God. Yet despite its transcendence, the ideas were to be found within the mind of man. We moderns experience thinking as an activity, as something that we do. Plato envisaged it as something which happens to the mind: the objects of thought were realities that were active in the intellect of the man who contemplates them. Like Socrates, he saw thought as a process of recollection, an apprehension of something that we had always known but had forgotten. Because human beings were fallen divinities, the forms of the divine world were within them and could be 'touched' by reason, which was not simply a rational or cerebral activity but an intuitive grasp of the eternal reality within us. This notion would greatly influence mystics in all three of the religions of historical monotheism.

Plato believed that the universe was essentially rational. This was another myth or imaginary conception of reality. Aristotle (384-322) took it a step further. He was the first to appreciate the importance of logical reasoning, the basis of all science, and was convinced that it was possible to arrive at an understanding of the universe by applying this method. As well as attempting a theoretical understanding of the truth in the fourteen treatises known as the Metaphysics (the term was coined by his editor, who put these treatises 'after the Physics': meta ta physika), he also studied theoretical physics and empirical biology. Yet he possessed profound intellectual humility, insisting that nobody was able to attain an adequate conception of truth but that everybody could make a small contribution to our collective understanding. There has been much controversy about his assessment of Plato's work. He seems to have been temperamentally opposed to Plato's transcendent view of the forms, rejecting the notion that they had a prior, independent existence. Aristotle maintained that the forms only had reality in so far as they existed in concrete, material objects in our own world.

Despite his earthbound approach and his preoccupation with scientific fact, Aristotle had an acute understanding of the nature and importance of religion and mythology. He pointed out that people who had become initiates in the various mystery religions were not required to learn any facts 'but to experience certain emotions and to be put in a certain disposition'. {35} Hence his famous literary theory that tragedy effected a purification (katharsis) of the emotions of terror and pity that amounted to an experience of rebirth. The Greek tragedies, which originally formed part of a religious festival, did not necessarily present a factual account of historical events but were attempting to reveal a more serious truth. Indeed, history was more trivial than poetry and myth: 'The one describes what has happened, the other what might. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and serious than history; for poetry speaks of what is universal, history of what is particular.' {36} There may or may not have been an historical Achilles or Oedipus but the facts of their lives were irrelevant to the characters we have experienced in Homer and Sophocles, which express a different but more profound truth about the human condition. Aristotle's account of the katharsis of tragedy was a philosophic presentation of a truth that Homo religiosus had always understood intuitively: a symbolic, mythical or ritual presentation of events that would be unendurable in daily life can redeem and transform them into something pure and even pleasurable.

predicament of their people but it appears that Hosea's marriage was not coldly planned from the beginning. The text makes it clear that Gomer did not become an esheth zeuunim until after their children had been born. It was only with hindsight that it seemed to Hosea that his marriage had been inspired by God. The loss of his wife had been a shattering experience, which gave Hosea an insight into the way Yahweh must feel when his people deserted him and went whoring after deities like Baal. At first Hosea was tempted to denounce Gomer and have nothing more to do with her: indeed, the law stipulated that a man must divorce an unfaithful wife. But Hosea still loved Gomer and eventually he went after her and bought her back from her new master. He saw his own desire to win Gomer back as a sign that Yahweh was willing to give Israel another chance.

When they attributed their own human feelings and experiences to Yahweh, the prophets were in an important sense creating a god in their own image. Isaiah, a member of the royal family, had seen Yahweh as a king. Amos had ascribed his own empathy with the suffering poor to Yahweh; Hosea saw Yahweh as a jilted husband, who still continued to feel a yearning tenderness for his wife. All religion must begin with some anthropomorphism. A deity which is utterly remote from humanity, such as Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, cannot inspire a spiritual quest. As long as this projection does not become an end in itself, it can be useful and beneficial. It has to be said that this imaginative portrayal of God in human terms has inspired a social concern that has not been present in Hinduism. All three of the God-religions have shared the egalitarian and socialist ethic of Amos and Isaiah. The Jews would be the first people in the ancient world to establish a welfare system that was the admiration of their pagan neighbours.

Like all the other prophets, Hosea was haunted by the horror of idolatry. He contemplated the divine vengeance that the northern tribes would bring upon themselves by worshipping gods that they had actually made themselves:

> *And now they add sin to sin,*
> *they smelt images from their silver,*
> *idols of their own manufacture,*
> *smith's work, all of it.*
> *'Sacrifice to them,' they say.*
> *Men blow kisses to calves!* {27}

This was, of course, a most unfair and reductive description of Canaanite religion. The people of Canaan and Babylon had never believed that their effigies of the gods were themselves divine; they had never bowed down to worship a statue tout court. The effigy had been a symbol of divinity. Like their myths about the unimaginable primordial events, it had been devised to direct the attention of the worshipper beyond itself. The statue of Marduk in the Temple of Esagila and the standing stones or Asherah in Canaan had never been seen as identical with the gods but had been a focus that had helped people to concentrate on the transcendent element of human life. Yet the prophets frequently jeered at the deities of their pagan neighbours with a most unattractive contempt. These home-made gods, in their view, are nothing but gold and silver; they have been knocked together by a craftsman in a couple of hours; they have eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear; they cannot walk and have to be carted about by their worshippers; they are brutish and stupid subhuman beings that are no better than scarecrows in a melon patch. Compared with Yahweh, the Elohim of Israel, they are elilim, Nothings. The goyim who worship them are fools and Yahweh hates them. {28}

Today we have become so familiar with the intolerance that has unfortunately been a characteristic of monotheism, that we may not appreciate that this hostility towards other gods was a new religious attitude. Paganism was an essentially tolerant faith: provided that old cults were not threatened by the arrival of a new deity, there was always room for another god alongside the traditional pantheon. Even where the new ideologies of the Axial Age were replacing the old veneration of the gods, there was no such vitriolic rejection of the ancient deities. We have seen that in Hinduism and Buddhism people were encouraged to go beyond the gods rather than to turn upon them with loathing. Yet the prophets of Israel were unable to take this calmer view of the deities they saw as Yahweh's rivals. In the Jewish scriptures, the new sin of 'idolatry', the worship of 'false' gods, inspires something akin to nausea. It is a reaction that is, perhaps, similar to the revulsion that some of the Fathers of the Church would feel for sexuality. As such, it is not a rational, considered reaction but expressive of deep anxiety and repression. Were the prophets harbouring a buried worry about their own religious behaviour? Were they, perhaps, uneasily aware that their own conception of Yahweh was similar to the idolatry of the pagans, since they too were creating a god in their own image?

The comparison with the Christian attitude towards sexuality is illuminating in another way. At this point, most Israelites believed implicitly in the existence of the pagan deities. It is true that Yahweh was gradually taking over some of the functions of the elohim of the Canaanites in certain circles: Hosea, for example, was trying to argue that he was a better fertility god than Baal. But it was obviously difficult for the irredeemably masculine Yahweh to usurp the function of a goddess like Asherah, Ishtar or Anat who still had a great following among the Israelites, particularly among the women. Even though monotheists would insist that their God transcended gender, he would remain essentially male, though we shall see that some would try to remedy this imbalance. In part, this was due to his origins as a tribal god of war. Yet his battle with the goddesses reflects a less positive characteristic of the Axial Age, which generally saw a decline in the status of women and the female. It seems that in more primitive societies, women were sometimes held in higher esteem than men.

The prestige of the great goddesses in traditional religion reflects the veneration of the female. The rise of the cities, however, meant that the

human condition.

As long as the enemy stood at the gate, Jeremiah raged at his people in God's name (though, before God, he pleaded on their behalf). Once Jerusalem had been conquered by the Babylonians in 587, the oracles from Yahweh became more comforting: he promised to save his people, now that they had learned their lesson, and bring them home. Jeremiah had been allowed by the Babylonian authorities to stay behind in Judah and to express his confidence in the future, he bought some real estate: Tor Yahweh Sabaoth says this: "People will buy fields and vineyards in this land again." ' {46} Not surprisingly, some people blamed Yahweh for the catastrophe. During a visit to Egypt, Jeremiah encountered a group of Jews who had fled to the Delta area and had no time at all for Yahweh. Their women claimed that everything had been fine as long as they had performed the traditional rites in honour of Ishtar, Queen of Heaven, but as soon as they stopped them, at the behest of the likes of Jeremiah, disaster, defeat and penury had followed. Yet the tragedy seemed to deepen Jeremiah's own insight. {47} After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, he began to realise that such external trappings of religion were simply symbols of an internal, subjective state. In the future, the covenant with Israel would be quite different: 'Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it in their hearts ...' {48}

Those who had gone into exile were not forced to assimilate, as the ten northern tribes had been in 722. They lived in two communities: one in Babylon itself and the other on the banks of a canal leading from the Euphrates called the Chebar, not far from Nippur and Ur, in an area which they named Tel Aviv (Springtime Hill). Among the first batch of exiles to be deported in 597 had been a priest called Ezekiel. For about five years he stayed alone in his house and did not speak to a soul. Then he had a shattering vision of Yahweh, which literally knocked him out. It is important to describe his first vision in some detail because - centuries later - it would become very important to Jewish mystics, as we shall see in Chapter Seven. Ezekiel had seen a cloud of light, shot through with lightning. A strong wind blew from the north. In the midst of this stormy obscurity, he seemed to see - he is careful to emphasise the provisional nature of the imagery - a great chariot pulled by four strong beasts. They were similar to the karibu carved on the palace gates in Babylon yet Ezekiel makes it almost impossible to visualise them: each one had four heads: with the face of a man, a lion, a bull and an eagle. Each one of the wheels rolled in a different direction from the others. The imagery simply served to emphasise the alien impact of the visions that he was struggling to articulate. The beating of the creatures' wings was deafening; it 'sounded like rushing water, like the voice of Shaddai, a voice like a storm, like the noise of a camp'. On the chariot there was something that was 'like' a throne and, sitting in state, was a 'being that looked like a man': it shone like brass, fire shooting from its limbs. It was also 'something that looked like the glory (kavod) of Yahweh'. {49} At once Ezekiel fell upon his face and heard a voice addressing him.

The voice called Ezekiel 'son of man' as if to emphasise the distance that now exists between humanity and the divine realm. Yet again, the vision of Yahweh is to be followed by a practical plan of action. Ezekiel was to speak the word of God to the rebellious sons of Israel. The ion-human quality of the divine message is conveyed by a visionary image: a hand stretches towards the prophet clasping a scroll, covered with wailings and meanings. Ezekiel is commanded to eat the scroll, to ingest the Word of God and make it part of himself. As usual, the mysterium is fascinans as well as terrible: the scroll turns out to taste as sweet as honey. Finally, Ezekiel says, 'the spirit lifted me and took me; my heart, as I went, overflowed with bitterness and anger, and the hand of Yahweh lay heavy on me.' {s} ° He arrived at Tel Aviv and lay 'like one stunned' for a whole week.

Ezekiel's strange career emphasises how alien and foreign the divine world has become to humanity. He himself was forced to become a sign of this strangeness. Yahweh frequently commanded him to perform weird mimes, which set him apart from normal beings. They were also designed to demonstrate the plight of Israel during this crisis and, at a deeper level, showed that Israel was itself becoming an outsider in the pagan world. Thus, when his wife died, Ezekiel was forbidden to mourn; he had to lie on one side for 390 days and for forty on the other; once he had to pack his bags and walk around Tel Aviv like a refugee, with no abiding city. Yahweh afflicted him with such acute anxiety that he could not stop trembling and moving about restlessly. On another occasion, he was forced to eat excrement, as a sign of the starvation that his fellow-countrymen would have to endure during the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel had become an icon of the radical discontinuity that the cult of Yahweh involved: nothing could be taken for granted and normal responses were denied.

The pagan vision, on the other hand, had celebrated the continuity that was felt to exist between the gods and the natural world. Ezekiel found nothing consoling about the old religion, which he habitually called 'filth'. During one of his visions, he was conducted on a guided tour of the Temple in Jerusalem. To his horror he saw that, poised as they were on the brink of destruction, the people of Judah were still worshipping pagan gods in the Temple of Yahweh. The Temple itself had become a nightmarish place: the walls of its rooms were painted with writhing snakes and repulsive animals; the priests performing the 'filthy' rites were presented in a sordid light, almost as if they were engaged in back-room sex: 'Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the throne of Israel do in the dark, each in his painted room?' {51} 1° another room, women sat weeping for the suffering god Tammuz.

Others worshipped the sun, with their backs towards the sanctuary. Finally, the prophet watched the strange chariot he had seen in his first vision fly away, taking the 'glory' of Yahweh with it. Yet Yahweh is not an entirely distant deity. In the final days before the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel depicts him fulminating against the people of Israel in a vain attempt to catch their attention and force them to acknowledge him. Israel has only itself to blame for the impending catastrophe. Alien as Yahweh frequently seemed, he was encouraging Israelites like Ezekiel to see that the blows of history were not random and arbitrary but had a deeper logic and justice. He was trying to find a meaning in the cruel world of international politics.

this devotion to a being outside the self was very different from the interior discipline preached by Gautama. All religions change and develop. If they do not, they will become obsolete. The majority of Buddhists found bhakti extremely valuable and felt that it reminded them of some essential truths which were in danger of being lost. When the Buddha had first achieved enlightenment, it will be recalled that he had been tempted to keep it to himself but his compassion for suffering humanity had compelled him to spend the next forty years preaching the Way. Yet by the first century BCE, Buddhist monks who were locked away in their monasteries trying to reach nirvana on their own count, seemed to have lost sight of this. The monastic was also a daunting ideal, which many felt to be quite beyond them. During the first century CE, a new kind of Buddhist hero emerged: the bodhisattva, who followed the Buddha's example and put off his own nirvana, sacrificing himself for the sake of the people. He was ready to endure rebirth in order to rescue people in pain. As the Prajna-paramita Sutras (Sermons on the Perfection of Wisdom), which were compiled at the end of the first century BCE, explain, the bodhisattvas

> *do not wish to attain their own private nirvana. On the contrary, they have surveyed the highly painful world of being, and yet desirous of winning supreme enlightenment, they do not tremble at birth-and death. They have set out for the benefit of the world, for the ease of the world, out of pity for the world. They have resolved: 'We will become a shelter for the world, the world's place of rest, the final relief of the world, islands of the world, lights of the world, the guides of the world's means of salvation.'* {11}

Further, the bodhisattva had acquired an infinite source of merit, which could help the less spiritually gifted. A person who prayed to a bodhisattva could be reborn into one of the paradises in the Buddhist cosmology, where conditions made the attainment of enlightenment easier.

The texts emphasise that these ideas were not to be interpreted literally. They had nothing to do with ordinary logic or events in this world but were merely symbols of a more elusive truth. In the early second century CE, Nagarjuna, the philosopher who founded the Void School, used paradox and a dialectical method to demonstrate the inadequacy of normal conceptual language. The ultimate truths, he insisted, could only be grasped intuitively through the mental disciplines of meditation. Even the Buddha's teachings were conventional, man-made ideas that did no justice to the reality he had tried to convey. Buddhists who adopted this philosophy developed a belief that everything we experience is an illusion: in the West, we would call them idealists. The Absolute, which is the inner essence of all things, is a void or nothing, which has no existence in the normal sense. It was natural to identify the void with nirvana. Since a Buddha such as Gautama had attained nirvana, it followed that in some ineffable way he had become nirvana and was identical with the Absolute. Thus everybody who sought nirvana was also seeking identity with the Buddhas.

It is not difficult to see that this bhakti (devotion) to the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas was similar to the Christian devotion to Jesus. It also made the faith accessible to more people, rather as Paul had wished to make Judaism available to the goyim. There had been a similar welling up of bhakti in Hinduism at the same time, which centred on the figures of Shiva and Vishnu, two of the most important Vedic deities. Yet again, popular devotion proved stronger than the philosophical austerity of the Upanishads. In effect, Hindus developed a Trinity: Brahman, Shiva and Vishnu were three symbols or aspects of a single, ineffable reality.

Sometimes it would be more helpful to contemplate the mystery of God under the aspect of Shiva, the paradoxical deity of good and evil, fertility and asceticism, who was both creator and destroyer. In popular legend, Shiva was also a great Yogi, so he also inspired his devotees to transcend personal concepts of divinity by means of meditation. Vishnu was usually kinder and more playful. He liked to show himself to mankind in various incarnations or avatars. One of his more famous personae was the character of Krishna, who had been born into a noble family but was brought up as a cowherd. Popular legend loved the stories of his dalliance with the cowgirls, which depicted God as the Lover of the Soul. Yet when Vishnu appeared to Prince Arjuna as Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, it is a terrifying experience:

> *I see the gods*
> *in your body, O God,*
> *and hordes of varied creatures:*
> *Brahman, the cosmic creator,*
> *on his lotus throne,*
> *all the seers and celestial serpents.* {12}

Everything is somehow present in the body of Krishna: he has no beginning or end, he fills space, and includes all possible deity: 'Howling storm gods, sun gods, bright gods and gods of ritual." {13} He is also 'man's tireless spirit', the essence of humanity. {14} All things rush towards Krishna, as rivers roil towards the sea or as moths fly into a blazing flame. All Arjuna can do as he gazes at this awful sight is quake and tremble, having entirely lost his bearings.

The development of bhakti answered a deep-rooted popular need for some kind of personal relationship with the ultimate. Having established Brahman as utterly transcendent, there is a danger that it could become too rarified and, like the ancient Sky God, fade from human consciousness. The evolution of the bodhisattva ideal in Buddhism and the avatars of Vishnu seem to represent another stage in religious development when people insist that the Absolute cannot be less than human. These symbolic doctrines and myths deny that the Absolute can be expressed in only one epiphany, however: there were numerous Buddhas and bodhisattvas and Vishnu had a variety of avatars. These myths

In the Roman empire, Christianity was first seen as a branch of Judaism but when Christians made it clear that they were no longer members of the synagogue, they were regarded with contempt as a religion of fanatics who had committed the cardinal sin of impiety by breaking with the parent faith. The Roman ethos was strictly conservative: it valued the authority of the paterfamilias and ancestral custom. 'Progress' was seen as a return to a Golden Age not as a fearless march forward into the future. A deliberate break with the past was not seen as potentially creative, as in our own society which has institutionalised change. Innovation was regarded as dangerous and subversive. Romans were highly suspicious of mass-movements that threw off the restraints of tradition and on their guard to protect their citizens from religious 'quackery'. There was a spirit of restlessness and anxiety in the empire, however.

The experience of living in a huge international empire had made the old gods seem petty and inadequate; people had become aware of cultures that were alien and disturbing. They were looking for new spiritual solutions. Oriental cults were imported into Europe: deities like Isis and Semele were worshipped alongside the traditional gods of Rome, the guardians of the state. During the first century CE, the new mystery religions offered their initiates salvation and what purported to be inside knowledge of the next world. But none of these new religious enthusiasms threatened the old order. The Eastern deities did not demand a radical conversion and a rejection of the familiar rites but were like new saints, providing a fresh and novel outlook and a sense of a wider world. You could join as many different mystery cults as you liked: provided that they did not attempt to jeopardise the old gods and kept a reasonably low profile, the mystery religions were tolerated and absorbed into the established order.

Nobody expected religion to be a challenge or to provide an answer to the meaning of life. People turned to philosophy for that kind of enlightenment. In the Roman empire of late antiquity, people worshipped the gods to ask for help during a crisis, to secure a divine blessing for the state and to experience a healing sense of continuity with the past. Religion was a matter of cult and ritual rather than ideas; it was based on emotion not on ideology or consciously adopted theory. This is not an unfamiliar attitude today: many of the people who attend religious services in our own society are not interested in theology, want nothing too exotic and dislike the idea of change. They find that the traditional rituals provide them with a link with tradition and give them a sense of security. They do not expect brilliant ideas from the sermon and are disturbed by changes in the liturgy. In rather the same way, many of the pagans of late antiquity loved to worship the ancestral gods, as generations had done before them.

The old rituals gave them a sense of identity, celebrated local traditions and seemed an assurance that things would continue as they were. Civilisation seemed a fragile achievement and should not be threatened by wanton disregarding the patronal gods, who would ensure its survival. They would feel obscurely threatened if a new cult set out to abolish the faith of the fathers. Christianity, therefore, had the worst of both worlds. It lacked the venerable antiquity of Judaism and had none of the attractive rituals of paganism, which everybody could see and appreciate. It was also a potential threat, since Christians insisted that theirs was the only God and that all the other deities were delusions. Christianity seemed an irrational and eccentric movement to the Roman biographer Gaius Suetonius (70-160), a superstitio nova et prava, which was 'depraved' precisely because it was 'new'. {31}

Educated pagans looked to philosophy not religion for enlightenment. Their saints and luminaries were such philosophers of antiquity as Plato, Pythagoras or Epictetus. They even saw them as 'sons of God': Plato, for example, was held to have been the son of Apollo. The philosophers had maintained a cool respect for religion but saw it as essentially different from what they were doing. They were not dried-up academics in ivory towers but men with a mission, anxious to save the souls of their contemporaries by attracting them to the disciplines of their particular school. Both Socrates and Plato had been 'religious' about their philosophy, finding that their scientific and metaphysical studies had inspired them with a vision of the glory of the universe. By the first century CE, therefore, intelligent and thoughtful people turned to them for an explanation of the meaning of life, for an inspiring ideology and for ethical motivation. Christianity seemed a barbaric creed. The Christian God seemed a ferocious, primitive deity, who kept intervening irrationally in human affairs: he had nothing in common with the remote, changeless God of a philosopher like Aristotle. It was one thing to suggest that men of the calibre of Plato or Alexander the Great had been sons of a god, but a Jew who had died a disgraceful death in an obscure corner of the Roman empire was quite another matter.

Platonism was one of the most popular philosophies of late antiquity. The new Platonists of the first and second century were not attracted to Plato the ethical and political thinker but to Plato the mystic. His teachings would help the philosopher to realise his true self, by liberating his soul from the prison of the body and enabling him to ascend to the divine world. It was a noble system, which used cosmology as an image of continuity and harmony. The One existed in serene contemplation of itself beyond the ravages of time and change at the pinnacle of the great chain of being. All existence derived from the One as a necessary consequence of its pure being: the eternal forms had emanated from the One and had in their turn animated the sun, stars and the moon, each in their respective sphere. Finally the gods, who were now seen as the angelic ministers of the One, transmitted the divine influence to the sublunary world of men. The Platonist needed no barbaric tales of a deity who suddenly decided to create the world or who ignored the established hierarchy to communicate directly with a small group of human beings. He needed no grotesque salvation by means of a crucified Messiah. Since he was akin to the God who had given life to all things, a philosopher could ascend to the divine world by means of his own efforts in a rational, ordered way.

How could the Christians explain their faith to the pagan world? It seemed to fall between two stools, appearing neither a religion, in the Roman sense, nor a philosophy. Moreover, Christians would have found it hard to list their 'beliefs' and may not have been conscious of

occasionally managed to achieve an ecstatic union with him, whereas the God of the Bible turns towards humanity. God also achieves an 'ecstasy' which took him beyond himself to the fragile realm of created being:

> *And we must dare to affirm (for it is the truth) that the Creator of the universe himself, in his beautiful and good yearning towards the universe ... is transported outside himself in his providential activities towards all things that have being ... and so is drawn from his transcendent throne above all things to dwell within the heart of all things, through an ecstatic power that is above being and whereby he yet stays within himself.* {56}

Emanation had become a passionate and voluntary outpouring of love, rather than an automatic process. Denys's way of negation and paradox was not just something that we do but something that happens to us.

For Plotinus, ecstasy had been a very occasional rapture: it had been achieved by him only two or three times in his life. Denys saw ecstasy as the constant state of every Christian. This was the hidden or esoteric message of scripture and liturgy, revealed in the smallest gestures. Thus when the celebrant leaves the altar at the beginning of the Mass to walk through the congregation, sprinkling it with holy water before returning to the sanctuary, this is not just a rite of purification - though it is that too. It imitates the divine ecstasy, whereby God leaves his solitude and merges himself with his creatures. Perhaps the best way of viewing Denys's theology is as that spiritual dance between what we can affirm about God and the appreciation that everything we can say about him can only be symbolic. As in Judaism, Denys's God has two aspects: one is turned towards us and manifests himself in the world; the other is the far side of God as he is in himself, which remains entirely incomprehensible. He 'stays within himself in his eternal mystery, at the same time as he is totally immersed in creation. He is not an-other being, additional to the world. Denys's method became normative in Greek theology. In the West, however, theologians would continue to talk and explain. Some imagined that when they said 'God', the divine reality actually coincided with the idea in their minds. Some would attribute their own thoughts and ideas to God - saying that God wanted this, forbade that and had planned the other - in a way that was dangerously idolatrous. The God of Greek Orthodoxy, however, would remain mysterious and the Trinity would continue to remind Eastern Christians of the provisional nature of their doctrines. Eventually, the Greeks decided that an authentic theology must meet Denys's two criteria: it must be silent and paradoxical.

Greeks and Latins also developed significantly different views of the divinity of Christ. The Greek concept of the incarnation was defined by Maximus the Confessor (^580-662), who is known as the father of Byzantine theology. This approximates more closely to the Buddhist ideal than does the Western view. Maximus believed that human beings would only fulfil themselves when they had been united to God, just as Buddhists believed that enlightenment was humanity's proper destiny. 'God' was thus not an optional extra, an alien, external reality tacked on to the human condition. Men and women had a potential for the divine and would only become fully human if this were realised. The Logos had not become man to make reparation for the sin of Adam; indeed, the incarnation would have occurred even if Adam had not sinned. Men and women had been created in the likeness of the Logos and they would only achieve their full potential if this likeness were perfected. On Mount Tabor, Jesus's glorified humanity showed us the deified human condition to which we could all aspire. The Word was made flesh in order that 'the whole human being would become God, deified by the grace of God become man - whole man, soul and body, by nature and becoming whole God, soul and body, by grace'. {57} Just as enlightenment and Buddhahood did not involve invasion by a supernatural reality but were an enhancement of powers that were natural to humanity, so too the deified Christ showed us the state that we could acquire by means of God's grace. Christians could venerate Jesus the God-Man in rather the same way as Buddhists had come to revere the image of the enlightened Gautama: he had been the first example of a truly glorified and fulfilled humanity.

Where the Greek view of incarnation brought Christianity closer to the oriental tradition, the Western view of Jesus took a more eccentric course. The classic theology was expressed by Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury (1033-1109) in his treatise Why God Became Man. Sin, he argued, had been an affront of such magnitude that atonement was essential if God's plans for the human race were not to be completely thwarted. The Word had been made flesh to make reparation on our behalf. God's justice demanded that the debt be repaid by one who was both God and man: the magnitude of the offence meant that only the Son of God could effect our salvation but, as a man had been responsible, the redeemer also had to be a member of the human race. It was a tidy, legalistic scheme that depicted God thinking, judging and weighing things up as though he were a human being. It also reinforced the Western image of a harsh God who could only be satisfied by the hideous death of his own Son, who had been offered up as a kind of human sacrifice.

The doctrine of the Trinity has often been misunderstood in the Western world. People tend to imagine three divine figures or else ignore the doctrine altogether and identify 'God' with the Father and make Jesus a divine friend - not quite on the same level. Muslims and Jews have also found the doctrine puzzling and even blasphemous. Yet we shall see that in both Judaism and Islam mystics developed remarkably similar conceptions of the divine. The idea of a kenosis, the self-emptying ecstasy of God, would, for example, be crucial in both Kabbalah and Sufism. In the Trinity, the Father transmits all that he is to the Son, giving up everything - even the possibility of expressing himself in another Word. Once that Word has been spoken, as it were, the Father remains silent: there is nothing that we can say about him, since the only God we know is the Logos or Son. The Father, therefore, has no identity, no 'I' in the normal sense and confounds our notion of personality. At the very source of Being is the Nothing glimpsed not only by Denys but also by Plotinus, Philo and even the Buddha. Since the Father is commonly presented as the End of the Christian quest, the Christian journey becomes a progress towards no place, no where and No One. The idea of a

And they say, 'Be Jews' - or 'Christians' - 'and you shall be on the right path'. Say: 'nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.'

Say: 'We believe in God and in that which had been bestowed from on high upon us, and in that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and dial which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto him that we surrender ourselves.' {33}

It was, surely, idolatry to prefer a merely human interpretation of the truth to God himself.

Muslims date their era not from the birth of Muhammad nor from the year of the first revelations - there was, after all, nothing new about these - but from the year of the Hijra (the migration to Medina) when Muslims began to implement the divine plan in history by making Islam a political reality. We have seen that the Koran teaches that all religious people have a duty to work for a just and equal society and Muslims have taken their political vocation very seriously indeed.

Muhammad had not intended to become a political leader at the outset but events that he could not have foreseen had pushed him towards an entirely new political solution for the Arabs. During the ten years between the Hijra and his death in 632 Muhammad and his first Muslims were engaged in a desperate struggle for survival against his opponents in Medina and the Quraysh of Mecca, all of whom were ready to exterminate the ummah. In the West, Muhammad has often been presented as a warlord, who forced Islam on a reluctant world by force of arms. The reality was quite different. Muhammad was fighting for his life, was evolving a theology of the just war in the Koran with which most Christians would agree, and never forced anybody to convert to his religion. Indeed the Koran is clear that there is to be 'no compulsion in religion'. In the Koran war is held to be abhorrent; the only just war is a war of self-defence. Sometimes it is necessary to fight in order to preserve decent values, as Christians believed it necessary to fight against Hitler. Muhammad had political gifts of a very high order. By the end of his life most of the Arabian tribes had joined the ummah, even though, as Muhammad well knew, their Islam was either nominal or superficial for the most part. In 630 the city of Mecca opened its gates to Muhammad who was able to take it without bloodshed. In 632 shortly before his death, he made what has been called the Farewell Pilgrimage in which he Islamised the old Arabian pagan rites of the Hajj and made this pilgrimage, which was so dear to the Arabs, the fifth 'pillar' of his religion.

All Muslims have a duty to make the hajj at least once in a lifetime if their circumstances permit. Naturally the pilgrims remember Muhammad, but the rites have been interpreted to remind them of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael rather than their prophet. These rites look bizarre to an outsider - as do any alien social or religious rituals - but they are able to unleash an intense religious experience and perfectly express the communal and personal aspects of Islamic spirituality. Today many of the thousands of pilgrims who assemble at the appointed time in Mecca are not Arabs but they have been able to make the ancient Arabic ceremonies their own. As they converge on the Kabah, clad in the traditional pilgrim dress that obliterates all distinctions of race or class, they feel that they have been liberated from the egotistic preoccupations of their daily lives and been caught up into a community that has one focus and orientation. They cry in unison; 'Here I am at your service, O al-Lah' before they begin the circumambulations around the shrine. The essential meaning of this rite is brought out well by the late Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati:

As you circumambulate and move closer to the Kabah, you feel like a small stream merging with a big river. Carried by a wave you lose touch with the ground. Suddenly, you are floating, carried on by the flood. As you approach the centre, the pressure of the crowd squeezes you so hard that you are given a new life. You are now part of the People; you are now a Man, alive and eternal ... The Kabah is the world's sun whose face attracts you into its orbit. You have become part of this universal system. Circumambulating around Allah, you will soon forget yourself ... You have been transformed into a particle that is gradually melting and disappearing. This is absolute love at its peak. {34}

Jews and Christians have also emphasised the spirituality of community. The hajj offers each individual Muslim the experience of a personal integration in the context of the ummah, with God at its centre. As in most religions, peace and harmony are important pilgrimage themes and once the pilgrims have entered the sanctuary all violence of any kind is forbidden. Pilgrims may not even kill an insect or speak a harsh word. Hence the outrage throughout the Muslim world during the hajj of 1987, when Iranian pilgrims instigated a riot in which 402 people were killed and 649 injured.

Muhammad died unexpectedly after a short illness in June 632. After his death, some of the Bedouin tried to break away from the ummah but the political unity of Arabia held firm. Eventually the recalcitrant tribes also accepted the religion of the one God: Muhammad's astonishing success had shown the Arabs that the paganism which had served them well for centuries no longer worked in the modern world. The religion of al-Lah introduced the compassionate ethos which was the hallmark of the more advanced religions: brotherhood and social justice were its crucial virtues. A strong egalitarianism would continue to characterise the Islamic ideal.

During Muhammad's lifetime, this had included the equality of the sexes. Today it is common in the West to depict Islam as an inherently

Like the Muslims rationalists, they emphasised the unity of truth, which must be sought everywhere. A seeker after truth must 'shun no science, scorn no book, nor cling fanatically to a single creed'. {7} They developed a Neoplatonic conception of God, whom they saw as the ineffable, incomprehensible One of Plotinus. Like the Faylasufs, they adhered to the Platonic doctrine of emanation rather than the traditional Koranic doctrine of creation ex nihilo: the world expressed the divine Reason and man could participate in the divine and return to the One by purifying his rational powers.

Falsafah reached its apogee in the work of Abu Ali ibn Sina (980-1037). who was known in the West as Avicenna. Born of a family of Shii officials near Bukhara in Central Asia, Ibn Sina was also influenced by the Ismailis who used to come and argue with his father. He became a child prodigy: by the time he was sixteen he was the adviser of important physicians and at eighteen he had mastered mathematics, logic and physics. He had difficulty with Aristotle, however, but saw the light when he came across al-Farabi's Intentions of Aristotle's Metaphysics. He lived as a peripatetic physician, wandering through the Islamic empire, dependent upon the whim of his patrons. At one point he became the vizier of the Shii Buyid dynasty which ruled in what is now western Iran and southern Iraq. A brilliant, lucid intellectual, he was no dried-up pedant. He was also a sensualist and was said to have died at the quite early age of fifty-eight because of excessive indulgence in wine and sex.

Ibn Sina had realised that Falsafah needed to adapt to the changing conditions within the Islamic empire. The Abbasid caliphate was in decline and it was no longer so easy to see the caliphal state as the ideal philosophic society described by Plato in the Republic. Naturally Ibn Sina sympathised with the spiritual and political aspirations of the Shiah but he was more attracted to the Neoplatonism of Falsafah, which he Islamised with more success than any previous Faylasuf. He believed that if Falsafah was to live up to its claims of presenting a complete picture of reality, it must make more sense of the religious belief of ordinary people, which -however one chose to interpret it - was a major fact of political, social and personal life. Instead of seeing revealed religion as an inferior version of Falsafah, Ibn Sina held that a prophet like Muhammad was superior to any philosopher because he was not dependent upon human reason but enjoyed a direct and intuitive knowledge of God. This was similar to the mystical experience of the Sufis and had been described by Plotinus himself as the highest form of wisdom. This did not mean, however, that the intellect could make no sense of God. Ibn Sina worked out a rational demonstration of the existence of God based on Aristotle's proofs which became standard among later medieval philosophers in both Judaism and Islam. Neither he nor the Faylasufs had the slightest doubt that God existed. They never doubted that unaided human reason could arrive at a knowledge of the existence of a Supreme Being. Reason was man's most exalted activity: it partook of the divine reason and clearly had an important role in the religious quest. Ibn Sina saw it as a religious duty for those who had the intellectual ability to discover God for themselves in this way to do so, because reason could refine the conception of God and free it of superstition and anthropomorphism. Ibn Sina and those of his successors who put their minds to a rational demonstration of God's existence were not arguing with atheists in our sense of the word. They wanted to use reason to discover as much as they could about the nature of God.

Ibn Sina's 'proof begins with a consideration of the way our minds work. Wherever we look in the world, we see composite beings that consist of a number of different elements. A tree, for example, consists of wood, bark, pith, sap and leaves. When we try to understand something, we 'analyse' it, breaking it up into its component parts until no further division is possible. The simple elements seem primary to us and the composite beings that they form seem secondary. We are continually looking for simplicity, therefore, for beings that are irreducibly themselves. It was an axiom of Falsafah that reality forms a logically coherent whole; that meant that our endless quest for simplicity must reflect things on a large scale. Like all Platonists, Ibn Sina felt that the multiplicity we see all around us must be dependent upon a primal unity. Since our minds do regard composite things as secondary and derivative, this tendency must have been caused by something outside them that is a simple, higher reality. Multiple things are contingent and contingent beings are inferior to the realities upon which they depend, rather as in a family children are inferior in status to the father who gave them being. Something that is Simplicity itself will be what the philosophers call a 'Necessary Being', that is, it will not depend on anything else for its existence. Is there such a being? A Faylasuf like Ibn Sina took it for granted that the cosmos was rational and in a rational universe there must be an Uncaused Being, an Unmoved Mover at the apex of the hierarchy of existence. Something must have started the chain of cause and effect. The absence of such a supreme being would mean that our minds were not in sympathy with reality as a whole. That, in turn, would mean that the universe was not coherent and rational. This utterly simple being upon which the whole of multiple, contingent reality depended was what the religions called 'God'. Because it is the highest thing of all, it must be absolutely perfect and worthy of honour and worship. But because its existence was so different from that of anything else, it was not just another item in the chain of being.

The philosophers and the Koran were in agreement that God was simplicity itself: he was One. It follows, therefore, that he cannot be analysed or broken down into component parts or attributes. Because this being is absolutely simple, it has no cause, no qualities, no temporal dimension and there is absolutely nothing that we can say about it. God cannot be the object of discursive thought, because our brains cannot deal with him in the way that they deal with everything else. Because God is essentially unique, he cannot be compared to any of the things that exist in the normal, contingent sense. Consequently when we talk about God it is better to use negatives to distinguish him absolutely from everything else that we talk about. But since God is the source of all things, we can postulate certain things about him. Because we know that goodness exists, God must be essential or 'necessary' Goodness; because we know that life, power and knowledge exist, God must be alive, powerful and intelligent in the most essential and complete manner. Aristotle had taught that since God is pure Reason - at one and the same time, the act of reasoning as well as the object and subject of thought - he could only contemplate himself and take no cognisance of lesser, contingent reality. This did not agree with the portrait of God in revelation, who is said to know all things and to be present and active in the created order. Ibn Sina attempted a compromise: God is far too exalted to descend to the knowledge of such ignoble, particular beings as men and their doings.

As Aristotle had said, 'There are some things which it is better not to see than to see.' {8} God could not sully himself with some of the really base and trivial minutiae of life on earth. But in his eternal act of self-knowledge, God apprehends everything that has emanated from him and that he has brought into being. He knows that he is the cause of contingent creatures. His thought is so perfect that thinking and doing are one and the same act, so his eternal contemplation of himself generates the process of emanation described by the Faylasufs. But God knows us and our world only in general and universal terms; he does not deal in particulars.

Yet Ibn Sina was not content with this abstract account of God's nature: he wanted to relate it to the religious experience of believers, Sufis and batinis. Interested in religious psychology, he used the Plotinan scheme of emanation to explain the experience of prophecy. At each of the ten phases of the descent of being from the One, Ibn Sina speculated that the ten pure Intelligences together with the souls or angels which set each of the ten Ptolemaic spheres in motion, form an intermediate realm between man and God, which corresponds to the world of archetypal reality imagined by the batinis. These Intelligences also possess imagination; indeed, they are Imagination in its pure state and it is through this intermediate realm of imagination - not through discursive reason - that men and women reach their most complete apprehension of God. The last of the Intelligences in our own sphere - the tenth - is the Holy Spirit of Revelation, known as Gabriel, the source of light and knowledge. The human soul is composed of practical intellect, which relates to this world, and the contemplative intellect, which is able to live in close intimacy with Gabriel. Thus it is possible for the prophets to gain an intuitive, imaginative knowledge of God, akin to that enjoyed by the Intelligences, that transcends practical, discursive reason. The experience of the Sufis showed that it was possible for people to attain a vision of God that was philosophically sound without using logic and rationality. Instead of syllogisms, they used the imaginative tools of symbolism and imagery. The Prophet Muhammad had perfected this direct union with the divine world. This psychological interpretation of vision and revelation would enable the more philosophically-inclined Sufis to discuss their own religious experience, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Indeed at the end of his life Ibn Sina seems to have become a mystic himself. In his treatise Kitab al-Asherat (The Book of Admonitions), he was clearly becoming critical of the rational approach to God, which he found frustrating. He was turning towards what he called 'Oriental Philosophy' (al-hikmat al-mashriqiyyeh). This did not refer to the geographical location of the East but to the source of light. He intended to write an esoteric treatise in which the methods would be based on a discipline of illumination (ishraq) as well as ratiocination. We are not sure whether he ever wrote this treatise: if he did, it has not survived. But, as we shall also see in the next chapter, the great Iranian philosopher Yahya Suhrawardi would found the Ishraqi school, which did fuse philosophy with spirituality in the way envisaged by Ibn Sina.

The disciplines of Kalam and Falsafah had inspired a similar intellectual movement among the Jews of the Islamic empire. They began to write their own philosophy in Arabic, introducing a metaphysical and speculative element into Judaism for the first time. Unlike the Muslim Faylasufs, the Jewish philosophers did not concern themselves with the full range of philosophical science but concentrated almost entirely on religious matters. They felt that they had to answer the challenge of Islam on its own terms and that involved squaring the personalistic God of the Bible with the God of the Faylasufs. Like the Muslims, they worried about the anthropomorphic portrait of God in the scriptures and the Talmud and asked themselves how he could be the same as the God of the Philosophers. They worried about the problem of the creation of the world and about the relation between revelation and reason. They naturally came to different conclusions but they were deeply dependent upon the Muslim thinkers. Thus Saadia ibn Joseph (882-942), the first to undertake a philosophical interpretation of Judaism, was a Talmudist but also a Mutazili. He believed that reason could attain a knowledge of God by means of its own powers. Like a Faylasuf, he saw the attainment of a rational conception of God as a mitzvah, a religious duty. Yet like the Muslim rationalists Saadia had no doubts whatever about the existence of God. The reality of the Creator God seemed so obvious to Saadia that it was the possibility of religious doubt rather than faith that he felt needed to be proven in his Book of Beliefs and Opinions.

A Jew was not required to strain his reason to accept the truths of revelation, Saadia argued. But that did not mean that God was entirely accessible to human reason. Saadia acknowledged that the idea of the creation ex nihilo was fraught with philosophical difficulties and impossible to explain in rational terms, because the God of Falsafah is not capable of making a sudden decision and initiating change. How could a material world have its origin in a wholly spiritual God? Here we had reached the limits of reason and must simply accept that the world was not eternal, as Platonists believed, but had a beginning in time. This was the only possible explanation that agreed with scripture and common sense. Once we have accepted this, we can deduce other facts about God. The created order is intelligently planned; it has life and energy: therefore God, who created it, must also have Wisdom, Life and Power. These attributes are not separate Hypostases, as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity suggested, but mere aspects of God. It is only because our human language cannot adequately express the reality of God that we have to analyse him in this way and seem to destroy his absolute simplicity. If we want to be as exact about God as possible, we can only properly say that he exists. Saadia does not forbid all positive description of God, however, nor does he put the remote and impersonal God of the philosophers above the personal, anthropomorphic God of the Bible. When, for example, he tries to explain the suffering that we see in the world, Saadia resorts to the solutions of the Wisdom writers and the Talmud. Suffering, he says, is a punishment for sin, it purifies and disciplines us in order to make us humble. This would not have satisfied a true Faylasuf because it makes God far too human and attributes plans and intentions to him. But Saadia does not see the revealed God of scripture as inferior to the God of Falsafah. The prophets were superior to any philosopher. Ultimately reason could only attempt to demonstrate systematically what the Bible had taught.

Other Jews went further. In his Fountain of Life, the Neoplatonist Solomon ibn Gabirol (1026-1070) could not accept the doctrine of creation ex nihilo but tried to adapt the theory of emanation to allow God some degree of spontaneity and free will. He claimed that God had willed or

incomprehensibility of God, the addition made the Trinity too rational. It made God one with three aspects or modes of being. In fact there was nothing heretical about the Latin assertion, even though it did not suit the Greeks' apophatic spirituality. The conflict could have been patched up if there had been a will for peace but tension between East and West escalated during the crusades, especially when the fourth crusaders sacked the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1204 and fatally wounded the Greek empire. What the filioque rift had revealed was that the Greeks and Latins were evolving quite different conceptions of God. The Trinity had never been as central to Western spirituality as it has remained for the Greeks. The Greeks felt that by emphasising the unity of God in this way, the West was identifying God himself with a 'simple essence' that could be defined and discussed, like the God of the philosophers. {27} In later chapters we shall see that Western Christians were frequently uneasy about the doctrine of the Trinity and that, during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, many would drop it altogether. To all intents and purposes, many Western Christians are not really Trinitarians. They complain that the doctrine of Three Persons in One God is incomprehensible, not realising that for the Greeks that was the whole point.

After the schism, Greeks and Latins took divergent paths. In Greek Orthodoxy, theologia, the study of God, remained precisely that. It was confined to the contemplation of God in the essentially mystical doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. They would find the idea of a 'theology of grace' or a 'theology of the family' contradictions in terms: they were not particularly interested in theoretical discussions and definitions of secondary issues. The West, however, was increasingly concerned to define these questions and to form a correct opinion that was binding on everybody.

The Reformation, for example, divided Christendom into yet more warring camps because Catholics and Protestants could not agree on the mechanics of how salvation happened and exactly what the Eucharist was. Western Christians continually challenged the Greeks to give their opinion on these contentious issues but the Greeks lagged behind and, if they did reply, their answer frequently sounded rather cobbled together. They had become distrustful of rationalism, finding it an inappropriate tool for the discussion of a God who must elude concepts and logic. Metaphysics was acceptable in secular studies but increasingly Greeks felt that it could endanger the faith. It appealed to the more talkative, busy part of the mind, whereas their theoria was not an intellectual opinion but a disciplined silence before the God who could only be known by means of religious and mystical experience. In 1082, the philosopher and humanist John halos was tried for heresy because of his excessive use of philosophy and his Neoplatonic conception of creation. This deliberate withdrawal from philosophy happened shortly before al-Ghazzali had his breakdown in Baghdad and quit Kalam in order to become a Sufi.

It is, therefore, rather poignant and ironic that Western Christians should have begun to get down to Falsafah at the precise moment when Greeks and Muslims were starting to lose faith in it. Plato and Aristotle had not been available in Latin during the Dark Ages, so inevitably the West had been left behind. The discovery of philosophy was stimulating and exciting. The eleventh century theologian Anselm of Canterbury, whose views on the Incarnation we discussed in Chapter Four, seemed to think that it was possible to prove anything. His God was not Nothing but the highest being of all. Even the unbeliever could form an idea of a supreme being, which was 'one nature, highest of all the things that are, alone sufficient unto itself in eternal beatitude'. {28} Yet Anselm also insisted that God could only be known in faith. This is not as paradoxical as it might appear. In his famous prayer, Anselm reflected on the words of Isaiah: 'Unless you have faith, you will not understand.':

> *I yearn to understand some measure of thy truth which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to have faith but I have faith in order to understand (credo ut intellegam). For I believe even this: I shall not understand unless I have faith.* {29}

The oft-quoted credo ut intellegam is not an intellectual abdication. Anselm was not claiming to embrace the creed blindly in the hope of it making sense some day. His assertion should really be translated: 'I commit myself in order that I may understand.' At this time, the word credo still did not have the intellectual bias of the word 'belief today but meant an attitude of trust and loyalty. It is important to note that even in the first flush of Western rationalism, the religious experience of God remained primary, coming before discussion or logical understanding.

Nevertheless, like the Muslim and Jewish Faylasufs, Anselm believed that the existence of God could be argued rationally and he devised his own proof, which is usually called the 'ontological' argument. Anselm defined God as 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' (aliquid quo nihil mains cogitari possti). {30} Since this implied that God could be an object of thought, the implication was that he could be conceived and comprehended by the human mind. Anselm argued that this Something must exist. Since existence is more 'perfect' or complete than non-existence, the perfect being that we imagine must have existence or it would be imperfect. Anselm's proof was ingenious and effective in a world dominated by Platonic thought, where ideas were believed to point to eternal archetypes. It is unlikely to convince a sceptic today. As the Jesuit theologian John Macquarrie has remarked, you may imagine that you have £100 but unfortunately that will not make the money a reality in your pocket. {31}

Anselm's God was Being, therefore, not the Nothing described by Denys and Erigena. He was willing to speak about God in far more positive terms than most of the previous Faylasufs. He did not propose the discipline of a Via Negativa but seemed to think it possible to arrive at a fairly adequate idea of God by means of natural reason, which was precisely what had always troubled the Greeks about the Western theology. Once he had proved God's existence to his satisfaction, Anselm set out to demonstrate the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity which the Greeks had always insisted defied reason and conceptualisation. In his treatise Why God Became Man, which we considered in Chapter Four,

reality and not relegate it to an isolated sphere of its own. Excessive intellectualism is damaging to the faith but if God is not to become an indulgent endorsement of our own egotism, religious experience must be informed by an accurate assessment of its content. Aquinas defined God by returning to God's own definition of himself to Moses: 'I am What I Am.' Aristotle had said that God was Necessary Being; Aquinas accordingly linked the God of the philosophers with the God of the Bible by calling God 'He Who Is' (Qui est). {36} He made it absolutely clear that God was not simply an-other being like ourselves, however. The definition of God as Being Itself was appropriate 'because it does not signify any particular form [of being] but rather being itself (esse seipsum)'. {31} It would be incorrect to blame Aquinas for the rationalistic view of God that later prevailed in the West.

Unfortunately, however, Aquinas gives the impression that God can be discussed in the same way as other philosophical ideas or natural phenomena by prefacing his discussion of God with a demonstration of his existence from natural philosophy. This suggests that we can get to know God in much the same way as other mundane realities. He lists five 'proofs' for God's existence that would become immensely important in the Catholic world and would also be used by Protestants:

1. Aristotle's argument for a Prime Mover.
2. A similar 'proof which maintains that there cannot be an infinite series of causes: there must have been a beginning.
3. The argument from contingency, propounded by Ibn Sina, which demands the existence of a 'Necessary Being'.
4. Aristotle's argument from the Philosophy that the hierarchy of excellence in this world implies a Perfection that is the best of all.
5. The argument from design, which maintains that the order and purpose that we see in the universe cannot simply be the result of chance.

These proofs do not hold water today. Even from a religious point of view, they are rather dubious, since, with the possible exception of the argument from design, each proof tacitly implies that 'God' is simply an-other being, one more link in the chain of existence. He is the Supreme Being, the Necessary Being, the Most Perfect Being. Now it is true that the use of such terms as 'First Cause' or 'Necessary Being' implies that God cannot be anything like the beings we know but rather their ground or the condition for their existence. This was certainly Aquinas's intention. Nevertheless readers of the Summa have not always made this important distinction and have talked about God as if he were simply the Highest Being of all. This is reductive and can make tins Super Being an idol, created in our own image and easily turned into a celestial Super Ego. It is probably not inaccurate to suggest that many people in the West regard God as a Being in this way.

It was important to try to link God with the new vogue for Aristotelianism in Europe. The Falasufs had also been anxious that the idea of God should keep abreast of the times and not be relegated to an archaic ghetto. In each generation, the idea and experience of God would have to be created anew. Most Muslims, however, had - so to speak - voted with their feet and decided that Aristotle did not have much to contribute to the study of God, though he was immensely useful in other spheres, such as natural science. We have seen that Aristotle's discussion of the nature of God had been dubbed meta ta physica ('After the Physics') by the editor of his work: his God had simply been a continuation of physical reality rather than a reality of a totally different order. In the Muslim world, therefore, most future discussion of God blended philosophy with mysticism. Reason alone could not reach a religious understanding of the reality we call 'God' but religious experience needed to be informed by the critical intelligence and discipline of philosophy if it were not to become messy, indulgent - or even dangerous - emotion.

Aquinas's Franciscan contemporary Bonaventure (1221-74) had much the same vision. He also tried to articulate philosophy with religious experience to the mutual enrichment of both spheres. In The Threefold Way, he had followed Augustine in seeing 'trinities' everywhere in creation and took this 'natural trinitarianism' as his starting point in The Journey of the Mind to God. He genuinely believed that the Trinity could be proved by unaided natural reason but avoided the dangers of rationalist chauvinism by stressing the importance of spiritual experience as an essential component of the idea of God. He took Francis of Assisi, the founder of his order, as the great exemplar of the Christian life. By looking at the events of his life, a theologian such as himself could find evidence for the doctrines of the Church. The Tuscan poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) would also find that a fellow human being - in Dante's case the Florentine woman Beatrice Portinari - could be an epiphany of the divine. This personalistic approach to God looked back to St Augustine.

Bonaventure also applied Anselm's Ontological Proof for the existence of God to his discussion of Francis as an epiphany. He argued that Francis had achieved an excellence in this life that seemed more than human, so it was possible for us, while still living here below, to 'see and understand that the "best" is ... that than which nothing better can be imagined'. {38} The very fact that we could form such a concept as 'the best' proved that it must exist in the Supreme Perfection of God. If we entered into ourselves, as Plato and Augustine had both advised, we would find God's image reflected 'in our own inner world'. {39} This introspection was essential. It was, of course, important to take part in the liturgy of the Church but the Christian must first descend into the depths of his own self, where he would be 'transported in ecstasy above the intellect' and find a vision of God that transcended our limited human notions. {40}

Both Bonaventure and Aquinas had seen the religious experience as primary. They had been faithful to the tradition of Falsafah, since in both Judaism and Islam, philosophers had often been mystics who were acutely conscious of the limitations of the intellect in theological matters. They had evolved rational proofs of God's existence to articulate their religious faith with their scientific studies and to link it with other more

was in some sense describable did not amount to an abandonment of Denys's apophatic theology, however. In his Greater Apology for the Holy Images, the monk Nicephoras claimed that icons were 'expressive of the silence of God, exhibiting in themselves the ineffability of a mystery that transcends being. Without ceasing and without speech, they praise the goodness of God in that venerable and thrice-illumined melody of theology'. {23} Instead of instructing the faithful in the dogmas of the Church and helping them to form lucid ideas about their faith, the icons held them in a sense of mystery. When describing the effect of these religious paintings, Nicephoras could only compare it to the effect of music, the most ineffable of the arts and possibly the most direct. Emotion and experience are conveyed by music in a way that bypasses words and concepts. In the nineteenth century, Walter Pater would assert that all art aspired to the condition of music; in ninth-century Byzantium, Greek Christians saw theology as aspiring to the condition of iconography. They found that God was better expressed in a work of art than in rationalistic discourse. After the intensely wordy Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries, they were evolving a portrait of God that depended upon the imaginative experience of Christians.

This was definitively expressed by Symeon (949-1022), Abbot of the small monastery of St Macras in Constantinople, who became known as the 'New Theologian'. This new type of theology made no attempt to define God. This, Symeon insisted, would be presumptuous; indeed, to speak about God in any way at all implied that 'that which is incomprehensible is comprehensible'. {24} Instead of arguing rationally about God's nature, the 'new' theology relied on direct, personal religious experience. It was impossible to know God in conceptual terms, as though he were just an-other being about which we could form ideas. God was a mystery. A true Christian was one who had a conscious experience of the God who had revealed himself in the transfigured humanity of Christ. Symeon had himself been converted from a worldly life to contemplation by an experience that seemed to come to him out of the blue. At first he had had no idea what was happening, but gradually he became aware that he was being transformed and, as it were, absorbed into a light that was of God himself. This was not light as we know it, of course; it was beyond 'form, image or representation and could only be experienced intuitively, through prayer'. {25} But this was not an experience for the elite or for monks only; the kingdom announced by Christ in the Gospels was a union with God that everybody could experience here and now, without having to wait until the next life.

For Symeon, therefore, God was known and unknown, near and far. Instead of attempting the impossible task of describing 'ineffable matters by words alone', {26} he urged his monks to concentrate on what could be experienced as a transfiguring reality in their own souls. As God had said to Symeon during one of his visions: 'Yes, I am God, the one who became man for your sake. And the Lord, I have created you, as you see, and I shall make you God.' {27} God was not an external, objective fact but an essentially subjective and personal enlightenment. Yet Symeon's refusal to speak about God did not lead him to break with the theological insights of the past. The 'new' theology was based firmly on the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. In his Hymns of Divine Love, Symeon expressed the old Greek doctrine of the deification of humanity, as described by Athanasius and Maximus:

> *O Light that none can name, for You are altogether nameless.*
> *O Light with many names, for it is at work in all things ...*
> *How do you mingle yourself with grass?*
> *How, while continuing unchanged, altogether inaccessible,*
> *do you preserve the nature of the grass unconsumed?* {28}

It was useless to define the God who affected this transformation, since he was beyond speech and description. Yet as an experience that fulfilled and transfigured humanity without violating its integrity, 'God' was an incontrovertible reality. The Greeks had developed ideas about God - such as the Trinity and the Incarnation - that separated them from other monotheists, yet the actual experience of their mystics had much in common with those of Muslims and Jews.

Even though the Prophet Muhammad had been primarily concerned with the establishment of a just society, he and some of his closest companions had been mystically inclined and the Muslims had quickly developed their own distinctive mystical tradition. During the eighth and ninth centuries, an ascetical form of Islam had developed alongside the other sects; the ascetics were as concerned as the Mutazilis and the Shiis about the wealth of the court and the apparent abandonment of the austerity of the early ummah. They attempted to return to the simpler life of the first Muslims in Medina, dressing in the coarse garments made of wool (Arabic SWF) that were supposed to have been favoured by the Prophet. Consequently, they were known as Sufis. Social justice remained crucial to their piety, as Louis Massignon, the late French scholar, has explained:

> *The mystic call is as a rule the result of an inner rebellion of the conscience against social injustices, not only those of others but primarily and particularly against one's own faults with a desire intensified by inner purification to find God at any price.* {29}

At first Sufis had much in common with the other sects. Thus the great Mutazili rationalist Wasil ibn Ala (d.748) had been a disciple of Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), the ascetic of Medina who was later revered as one of the fathers of Sufism.

The ulema were beginning to distinguish Islam sharply from other religions, seeing it as the one, true faith but Sufis by and large remained true to the Koranic vision of the unity of all rightly-guided religion. Jesus, for example, was revered by many Sufis as the prophet of the interior

be known by them.' There is no rational proof of God's sadness; we know it only by our own longing for something to fulfil our deepest desires and to explain the tragedy and pain of life. Since we are created in God's image, we must reflect God, the supreme archetype. Our yearning for the reality that we call 'God' must, therefore, mirror a sympathy with the pathos of God. Ibn al-Arabi imagined the solitary God sighing with longing but this sigh (nafas rahmani) was not an expression of maudlin self-pity. It had an active, creative force which brought the whole of our cosmos into existence; it also exhaled human beings, who became logoi, words that express God to himself. It follows that each human being is a unique epiphany of the Hidden God, manifesting him in a particular and unrepeatable manner.

Each one of these divine logoi are the names that God has called himself, making himself totally present in each one of his epiphanies. God cannot be summed up in one human expression since the divine reality is inexhaustible. It also follows that the revelation that God has made in each one of us is unique, different from the God known by the other innumerable men and women who are also his logoi. We will only know our own 'God' since we cannot experience him objectively; it is impossible to know him in the same way as other people. As Ibn al-Arabi says: 'Each being has as his god only his particular Lord; he cannot possibly have the whole.' He liked to quote the hadith: 'Meditate upon God's blessings, but not upon his essence (al-Dhat}.'* {1} The whole reality of God is unknowable; we must concentrate on the particular Word spoken in our own being. Ibn al-Arabi also liked to call God al-Ama, 'the Cloud' or 'The Blindness' {48} to emphasise his inaccessibility. But these human logoi also reveal the Hidden God to himself. It is a two-way process: God sighs to become known and is delivered from his solitude by the people in whom he reveals himself. The sorrow of the Unknown God is assuaged by the Revealed God in each human being who makes him known to himself; it is also true that the Revealed God in every individual yearns to return to its source with a divine nostalgia that inspires our own longing.

Divinity and humanity were thus two aspects of the divine life that animates the entire cosmos. This insight was not dissimilar to the Greek understanding of the incarnation of God in Jesus but Ibn al-Arabi could not accept the idea that one single human being, however holy, could express the infinite reality of God. Instead he believed that each human person was a unique avatar of the divine. Yet he did develop the symbol of the Perfect Man (insan i-kamil) who embodied the mystery of the Revealed God in each generation for the benefit of his contemporaries, though he did not, of course, incarnate the whole reality of God or his hidden essence. The Prophet Muhammad had been the Perfect Man of his generation and a particularly effective symbol of the divine.

This introspective, imaginative mysticism was a search for the ground of being in the depths of the self. It deprived the mystic of the certainties that characterise the more dogmatic forms of religion. Since each man and woman had had a unique experience of God, it followed that no one religion could express the whole of the divine mystery. There was no objective truth about God to which all must subscribe; since this God transcended the category of personality, predictions about his behaviour and inclinations were impossible. Any consequent chauvinism about one's own faith at the expense of other people's was obviously unacceptable, since no one religion had the whole truth about God. Ibn al-Arabi developed the positive attitude towards other religions which could be found in the Koran and took it to a new extreme of tolerance:

> *My heart is capable of every form.*
> *A cloister for the monk, a fane for idols,*
> *A pasture for gazelles, the votary's Kabah*
> *The tables of the Torah, the Koran.*
> *Love is the faith I hold: wherever turn*
> *His camels, still the one true faith is mine.* {49}

The man of God was equally at home in synagogue, temple, church and mosque, since all provided a valid apprehension of God. He often used the phrase 'the God created by the faiths' (Khalq al-haqq fi'l-itiqad); it could be pejorative if it referred to the 'god' that men and women created in a particular religion and considered identical with God himself. This only bred intolerance and fanaticism. Instead of such idolatry, Ibn al-Arabi gave this advice:

> *Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you may disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognise the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for, he says, 'Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of al-Lah' (Koran 2:109). Everyone praises what he believes; his god is his own creature, and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance.* {50}

We never see any god but the personal Name that has been revealed and given concrete existence in each one of us; inevitably our understanding of our personal Lord is coloured by the religious tradition into which we were born. But the mystic (arif) knows that this 'God' of ours is simply an 'angel' or a particular symbol of the divine, which must never be confused with the Hidden Reality itself. Consequently he sees all the different religions as valid theophanies. Where the God of the more dogmatic religions divides humanity into warring camps, the God of the mystics is a unifying force.

It is true that Ibn al-Arabi's teachings were too abstruse for the vast majority of Muslims but they did percolate down to the more ordinary

simply the last and outermost shell of the divine reality.

In Kabbalah, as in Sufism, the doctrine of the creation is not really concerned with the physical origins of the universe. The Zohar sees the Genesis account as a symbolic version of a crisis within En Sof, which causes the Godhead to break out of Its unfathomable introspection and reveal Itself. As The Zohar says:

> *In the beginning, when the will of the King began to take effect, he engraved signs into the divine aura. A dark flame sprang forth from the innermost recesses of En Sof, like a fog which forms out of the formless, enclosed in the ring of this aura, neither white nor black, red nor green and of no colour whatever.* {55}

In Genesis, God's first creative word had been: 'Let there be light!' In The Zohar's commentary on Genesis (called Bereshit in Hebrew after its opening word: 'in the beginning') this 'dark flame' is the first sefirah: Kether Elyon, the Supreme Crown of Divinity. It has no colour or form: other Kabbalists prefer to call it Nothing (ayin). The highest form of divinity that the human mind can conceive is equated with nothingness because it bears no comparison with any of the other things in existence. All the other sefiroth, therefore, emerge from the womb of Nothingness. This is a mystical interpretation of the traditional doctrine of the creation ex nihilo. The process of the Godhead's self-expression continues as the welling of light, which spreads in ever wider spheres. The Zohar continues:

> *But when this flame began to assume size and extension, it produced radiant colours. For in the inmost centre a well sprang forth from which flames poured upon everything below, hidden in the mysterious secrets of En Sof. The well broke through, and yet did not entirely break through, the eternal aura which surrounded it. It was entirely recognisable until under the impact of its breakthrough, i hidden supernal point shone forth. Beyond this point nothing may be known or understood, and it is called Bereshit, the Beginning; the first word of creation.* {56}

This 'point' is Hokhmah (Wisdom), the second sefirah which contains the ideal form of all created things. The point develops into a palace or a building, which becomes Binah (Intelligence), the third sefirah. These three highest sefiroth represent the limit of human comprehension. Kabbalists say that God exists in Binah as the great 'Who?' (Mi) which stands at the beginning of every question. But it is not possible to get an answer. Even though En Sof is gradually adapting Itself to human limitations, we have no way of knowing 'Who' he is: the higher we ascend, the more 'he' remains shrouded in darkness and mystery.

The next seven sefiroth are said to correspond to the seven days of creation in Genesis. During the biblical period, YHWH had eventually triumphed over the ancient goddesses of Canaan and their erotic cults. But as Kabbalists struggled to express the mystery of God, the old mythologies reasserted themselves, albeit in a disguised form. The Zohar describes Binah as the Supernal Mother, whose womb is penetrated by the 'dark flame' to give birth to the seven lower sefiroth. Again Yesod, the ninth sefirah inspires some phallic speculation: it is depicted as the channel through which the divine life pours into the universe in an act of mystical procreation. It is in the Shekinah, the tenth sefirah, however, that the ancient sexual symbolism of creation and theogony appears most clearly. In the Talmud, the Shekinah was a neutral figure: it had neither sex nor gender. In Kabbalah, however, the Shekinah becomes the female aspect of God. The Bahir (c.1200), one of the earliest Kabbalistic texts, had identified the Shekinah with the Gnostic figure of Sophia, the last of the divine emanations which had fallen from the Pleroma and now wandered, lost and alienated from the Godhead, through the world.

The Zohar links this 'exile of the Shekinah' with the fall of Adam as recounted in Genesis. It says that Adam was shown the 'middle sefiroth' in the Tree of Life and the Shekinah in the Tree of Knowledge. Instead of worshipping the seven sefiroth together, he chose to venerate the Shekinah alone, sundering life from knowledge and rupturing the unity of the sefiroth. The divine life could no longer flow uninterruptedly into the world, which was isolated from its divine Source. But by observing the Torah, the community of Israel could heal the exile of the Shekinah and reunite the world to the Godhead. Not surprisingly, many strict Talmudists found this an abhorrent idea but the exile of the Shekinah, which echoed the ancient myths of the goddess who wandered far from the divine world, became one of the most popular elements of Kabbalah. The female Shekinah brought some sexual balance into the notion of God which tended to be too heavily weighted towards the masculine and clearly fulfilled an important religious need.

The notion of the divine exile also addressed that sense of separation which is the cause of so much human anxiety. The Zohar constantly defines evil as something which has become separated or which has entered into a relationship for which it is unsuited. One of the problems of ethical monotheism is that it isolates evil. Because we cannot accept the idea that there is evil in our God, there is a danger that we will not be able to endure it within ourselves. It can then be pushed away and made monstrous and inhuman. The terrifying image of Satan in Western Christendom was such a distorted projection. The Zohar finds the root of evil in God himself: in Din or Stern Judgement, the fifth sefirah. Din is depicted as God's left hand, Hesed (Mercy) as his right. As long as Din operates harmoniously with the divine Mercy, it is positive and beneficial. But if it breaks away and becomes separate from the other sefiroth, it becomes evil and destructive. The Zohar does not tell us how this separation came about. In the next chapter, we shall see that later Kabbalists reflected on the problem of evil, which they saw as the result of a kind of primordial 'accident' that occurred in the very early stages of God's self-revelation. Kabbalah makes little sense if interpreted literally, but its mythology proved psychologically satisfying. When disaster and tragedy engulfed Spanish Jewry during the fifteenth century,

about humanity than the Protestants. Luria saw the mission of Tikkun in contemplative terms. Where the Christians of Europe - Catholic and Protestant alike -were formulating more and more dogmas, Luria revived the mystical techniques of Abraham Abulafia to help Jews transcend this kind of intellectual activity and to cultivate a more intuitive awareness. Rearranging the letters of the Divine Name, in Abulafia's spirituality, had reminded the Kabbalist that the meaning of 'God' could not adequately be conveyed by human language. In Luria's mythology, it also symbolised the restructuring and re-formation of the divine. Hayim Vital described the immensely emotional effect of Luria's disciplines: by separating himself from his normal, everyday experience - by keeping vigil when everybody else was asleep, fasting when others were eating, withdrawing into seclusion for a while - a Kabbalist could concentrate on the strange 'words' that bore no relation to ordinary speech. He felt that he was in another world, would find himself shaking and trembling as though possessed by a force outside himself.

But there was no anxiety. Luria insisted that before he began his spiritual exercises, the Kabbalist must achieve peace of mind. Happiness and joy were essential: there was to be no breast-beating or remorse, no guilt or anxiety about one's performance. Vital insisted that the Shekinah cannot live in a place of sorrow and pain - an idea that we have seen to be rooted in the Talmud. Sadness springs from the forces of evil in the world, whereas happiness enables the Kabbalist to love God and cleave to him. There should be no anger or aggression in the Kabbalist's heart for anybody whatsoever - even the goyim. Luria identified anger with idolatry, since an angry person is possessed by a 'strange god'. It is easy to criticise Lurianic mysticism. As Gershom Scholem points out, the mystery of God En Sof, which was so strong in The Zohar, tends to get lost in the drama of tsimtsum, the Breaking of the Vessels and Tikkun? In the next chapter, we shall see that it contributed to a disastrous and embarrassing episode in Jewish history. Yet Luria's conception of God was able to help Jews to cultivate a spirit of joy and kindness, together with a positive view of humanity at a time when the guilt and anger of the Jews could have caused many to despair and to lose faith in life altogether.

The Christians of Europe were not able to produce such a positive spirituality. They too had endured historical disasters that could not be assuaged by the philosophical religion of the scholastics. The Black Death of 1348, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the ecclesiastical scandals of the Avignon Captivity (1334-42) and the Great Schism (1378-1417) had thrown the impotence of the human condition into vivid relief and brought the Church into disrepute. Humanity seemed unable to extricate itself from its fearful predicament without God's help. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, therefore, theologians like Duns Scotus of Oxford (1265-1308) – not to be confused with Duns Scotus Erigena - and the French theologian John Gerson (1363-1429) both emphasised the sovereignty of God, who controlled human affairs as stringently as an absolute ruler. Men and women could contribute nothing to their salvation; good deeds were not meritorious in themselves but only because God had graciously decreed that they were good. But during these centuries, there was also a shift in emphasis. Gerson himself was a mystic, who believed that it was better to 'hold primarily to the love of God without lofty enquiry' rather than to 'seek through reasons based on the true faith, to understand the nature of God'. {7} There had been an upsurge of mysticism in Europe during the fourteenth century, as we have seen, and the people were beginning to appreciate that reason was inadequate to explain the mystery they called 'God'. As Thomas a Kempis said in The Imitation of Christ:

> *Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity ... I would far rather feel contrition than be able to define it. If you knew the whole Bible by heart, and all the teachings of the philosophers, how would this help you without the grace and love of God?* {8}

The Imitation of Christ, with its rather dour, gloomy religiosity, became one of the most popular of all Western spiritual classics. During these centuries, piety centered increasingly on Jesus the man. The practice of making the stations of the cross dwelt in particular detail on Jesus's physical pain and sorrow. Some fourteenth-century meditations written by an anonymous author tell the reader that when he wakes up in the morning after spending most of the night meditating on the Last Supper and the Agony in the Garden, his eyes should still be red with weeping. Immediately he should begin to contemplate Jesus's trial and follow his progress to Calvary, hour by hour. The reader is urged to imagine himself pleading with the authorities to save Christ's life, to sit beside him in prison and to kiss his chained hands and feet. {9} In this dismal programme, there is little emphasis on the resurrection. Instead the stress is on the vulnerable humanity of Jesus. A violence of emotion and what strikes the modern reader as morbid curiosity characterises many of these descriptions. Even the great mystics Bridget of Sweden or Julian of Norwich speculate in lurid detail about Jesus's physical state:

> *I saw his dear face, dry, bloodless, and pallid with death. It became more pale, deathly and lifeless. Then, dead, it turned a blue colour, gradually changing to a browny blue, as the flesh continued to die. For me his passion was shown primarily through his blessed face, and particularly by his lips. There too I saw these same four colours, though previously they had been, as I had seen, fresh, red, and lovely. It was a sorry business to see him change as he progressively died. His nostrils too shriveled and dried before my eyes, and his dear body became black and brown as it dried up in death.* {10}

This reminds us of the German crucifixes of the fourteenth century with their grotesquely twisted figures and gushing blood, which, of course, reached a climax in the work of Matthias Grunewald (1480-1528). Julian was capable of great insight into the nature of God: she depicts the Trinity living within the soul and not as an external reality 'out there', like a true mystic. But the strength of Western concentration on the human Christ seemed too powerful to resist. Increasingly, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, men and women in Europe were making other human beings the centre of their spiritual life rather than God. The medieval cult of Mary and of the saints increased alongside

the growing devotion to Jesus the man. Enthusiasm for relics and holy places also distracted Western Christians from the one thing necessary. People seemed to be concentrating on anything but God.

The dark side of the Western spirit was even manifest during the Renaissance. The philosophers and humanists of the Renaissance were highly critical of much medieval piety. They disliked the scholastics intensely, feeling that their abstruse speculations made God sound alien and boring. Instead, they wanted to return to the sources of the faith, particularly to St Augustine. The medievals had revered Augustine as a theologian, but the humanists rediscovered the Confessions and saw him as a fellow man on a personal quest. Christianity, they argued, was not a body of doctrines but an experience. Lorenzo Valla (1405-59) stressed the futility of mixing sacred dogma with 'tricks of dialectics' and 'metaphysical quibbles': {11} these 'futilities' had been condemned by St Paul himself. Francesco Petrarch (1304-74) had suggested that 'theology is actually poetry, poetry concerning God', effective not because it 'proved' anything but because it penetrated the heart. {12} The humanists had rediscovered the dignity of humanity but this did not cause them to reject God: instead, as true men of their age, they stressed the humanity of God who had become man. But the old insecurities remained. The Renaissance men were deeply aware of the fragility of our knowledge and could also sympathise with Augustine's acute sense of sin. As Petrarch said:

> *How many times I have pondered over my own misery and over death; with what floods of tears I have sought to wash away my stains so that I can scarce speak of it without weeping, yet hitherto all is vain. God indeed is the best: and I am the worst.'* {13}

Hence there was a vast distance between man and God: Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) and Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) both saw God as utterly transcendent and inaccessible to the human mind. Yet the German philosopher and churchman Nicholas of Cusa (1400-64) was more confident about our ability to understand God. He was extremely interested in the new science, which he thought could help us to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity. Mathematics, for example, which dealt only with pure abstractions, could supply a certainty that was impossible in other disciplines. Thus the mathematical idea of 'the maximum' and 'the minimum' were apparently opposites but in fact could logically be seen as identical. This 'coincidence of opposites' contained the idea of God: the idea of ‘the maximum' includes everything; it implies notions of unity and necessity which point directly to God. Further, the maximum line was not a triangle, a circle or a sphere but all three combined: the unity of opposites was also a Trinity. Yet Nicholas's clever demonstration has little religious meaning. It seems to reduce the idea of God to a logical conundrum. But his conviction that 'God embraces everything, even contradictions" {14} was close to the Greek Orthodox perception that all true theology must be paradoxical. When he was writing as a spiritual teacher, rather than as a philosopher and mathematician, Nicholas was aware that the Christian must 'leave everything behind' when he sought to approach God, and 'even transcend one's intellect' going beyond all sense and reason. The face of God will remain shrouded in 'a secret and mystic silence'. {15}

The new insights of the Renaissance could not address deeper fears that made God lay beyond the reach of reason. Not long after Nicholas's death, a particularly noxious phobia erupted in his native Germany and spread throughout northern Europe. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII published the Bull Summis Desiderantes which marked the beginning of the great witch craze that raged sporadically throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, afflicting Protestant and Catholic communities equally. It revealed the dark underside of the Western spirit. During this hideous persecution, thousands of men and women were cruelly tortured until they confessed to astonishing crimes. They said that they had had sexual intercourse with demons, had flown hundreds of miles through the air to take part in orgies where Satan was worshipped instead of God in an obscene Mass. We now know that there were no witches but that the craze represented a vast collective fantasy, shared by the learned Inquisitors and many of their victims, who had dreamed these things and were easily persuaded that they actually happened. The fantasy was linked with anti-Semitism and a deep sexual fear. Satan had emerged as the shadow of an impossibly good and powerful God. This had not happened in the other God-religions. The Koran, for example, makes it clear that Satan will be forgiven on the Last Day.

Some of the Sufis claimed that he had fallen from grace because he had loved God more than any of the other angels. God had commanded him to bow down before Adam on the day of creation but Satan had refused because he believed that such obeisance should be offered to God alone. In the West, however, Satan became a figure of ungovernable evil. He was increasingly represented as a vast animal with a priapic sexual appetite and huge genitals. As Norman Cohn has suggested in his book Europe's Inner Demons, this portrait of Satan was not only a projection of buried fear and anxiety. The witch craze also represented an unconscious but compulsive revolt against a repressive religion and an apparently inexorable God. In their torture chambers, Inquisitors and 'witches' together created a fantasy which was an inversion of Christianity. The Black Mass became a horrifying but perversely satisfying ceremony that worshipped the Devil instead of a God who seemed harsh and too frightening to deal with.' {16}

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a firm believer in witchcraft and saw the Christian life as a battle against Satan. The Reformation can be seen as an attempt to address this anxiety even though most of the Reformers did not promote any new conception of God. It is, of course, simplistic to call the immense cycle of religious change that took place in Europe during the sixteenth century 'the Reformation'. The term suggests a more deliberate and unified movement than actually occurred. The various reformers - Catholic as well as Protestant - were all trying to articulate a new religious awareness that was strongly felt but had not been conceptualised or consciously thought out. We do not know exactly why 'the Reformation' happened: today scholars warn us against the old textbook accounts. The changes were not wholly due to the corruption of the Church, as is often supposed, nor to a decline in religious fervour. Indeed, there seems to have been a religious enthusiasm in Europe

Catholics and Protestants were insisting that the Bible was factually true in every detail. This would make the traditional religious mythology vulnerable to the new science and would eventually make it impossible for many people to believe in God at all. The theologians were not preparing their people well for this approaching challenge. Since the Reformation and the new enthusiasm for Aristotelianism among Protestants and Catholics, they were beginning to discuss God as though he were any other objective fact. This would ultimately enable the new 'atheists' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to get rid of God altogether.

Thus Leonard Lessius (1554-1623), the highly influential Jesuit theologian of Louvain, seems to give his allegiance to the God of the philosophers in his treatise The Divine Providence. The existence of this God can be demonstrated scientifically like any of the other facts of life. The design of the universe, which could not have happened by chance, points to the existence of a Prime Mover and Sustainer. There is nothing specifically Christian about Lessius's God, however: he is a scientific fact who can be discovered by any rational human being. Lessius scarcely mentions Jesus. He gives the impression that the existence of God could be deduced by common sense from ordinary observation, philosophy, the study of comparative religion and common sense. God had become just another being, like the host of other objects that scientists and philosophers were beginning to explore in the West.

The Faylasufs had not doubted the validity of their proofs for the existence of God but their co-religionists had finally decided that this God of the philosophers had little religious value. Thomas Aquinas may have given the impression that God was just another item - albeit the highest - in the chain of being, but he had personally been convinced that these philosophical arguments bore no relation to the mystical God he had experienced in prayer. But by the beginning of the seventeenth century, leading theologians and churchmen continued to argue the existence of God on entirely rational grounds. Many have continued to do so to the present day. When the arguments were disproved by the new science, the existence of God himself came under attack. Instead of seeing the idea of God as a symbol of a reality that had no existence in the usual sense of the word and which could only be discovered by the imaginative disciplines of prayer and contemplation, it was increasingly assumed that God was simply a fact of life like any other. In a theologian such as Lessius we can see that as Europe approached modernity, the theologians themselves were handing the future atheists the ammunition for their rejection of a God who had little religious value and who filled many people with fear rather than with hope and faith. Like the philosophers and scientists, post-Reformation Christians had effectively abandoned the imaginative God of the mystics and sought enlightenment from the God of reason.

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9 - Enlightenment

By the end of the sixteenth century, the West had embarked on a process of technicalisation that would produce an entirely different kind of society and a new ideal of humanity. Inevitably this would affect its perception of the role and nature of God. The achievements of the newly-industrialised and efficient West also changed the course of world history. The other countries of the Oikumene found it increasingly difficult to ignore the Western world, as in the past when it had lagged behind the other major civilisations, or to come to terms with it. Because no other society had ever achieved anything similar, the West created problems that were entirely new and therefore very difficult to deal with. Until the eighteenth century, for example, Islam had been the dominant world power in Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean area. Even though its fifteenth-century Renaissance had put Western Christendom ahead of Islamdom in some respects, the various Muslim powers were easily able to contain the challenge. The Ottomans had continued to advance into Europe and Muslims had been able to hold their own against the Portuguese explorers and the merchants who followed in their wake. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Europe had begun to dominate the world and the very nature of its achievement meant that it was impossible for the rest of the world to catch up. The British had also gained control of India and Europe was poised to colonise as much of the world as it could. The process of Westernisation had begun and with it the cult of secularism that claimed independence of God.

What did the modern technical society involve? All previous civilisations had depended upon agriculture. As its name implied, civilisation had been the achievement of the cities, where an elite had lived upon the agricultural surplus produced by the peasantry and had the leisure and resources to create the various cultures. Belief in the One God had developed in the cities of the Middle East and in Europe at the same time as other major religious ideologies. All such agrarianate civilisations were vulnerable, however. They depended on variables, such as crops, harvests, climate and soil erosion. As each empire spread and increased its number of commitments and responsibilities, it ultimately outran its limited resources. After it had reached the zenith of its power, it began its inevitable decline and fall. The new West, however, was not dependent upon agriculture. Its technical mastery meant that it had become independent of local conditions and external, temporal reversals. The accumulation of capital had been built into the economic resources that - until recently - seemed to be indefinitely renewable. The process of modernisation involved the West in a series of profound changes: it led to industrialisation and a consequent transformation of agriculture, an intellectual 'enlightenment' and political and social revolutions. Naturally these immense changes affected the way men and women perceived themselves and made them revise their relationship with the ultimate reality that they traditionally called 'God'.

Specialisation was crucial to this Western technical society: all the innovations in the economic, intellectual and social fields demanded a particular expertise in many different fields. Scientists, for example, depended upon the increased efficiency of instrument-makers; industry demanded new machines and sources of energy, as well as theoretical input from science. The various specialisations inter-meshed and became

gradually interdependent: one specialism inspired another in a different and perhaps hitherto unrelated field. It was an accumulative process. The achievements of one specialisation were increased by their usage in another and this in turn affected its own efficiency. Capital was systematically reinvested and multiplied on the basis of continued development.

The interlocking changes acquired a progressive and apparently unstoppable momentum! More and more people of all ranks were drawn into the process of modernisation in an increasing number of spheres. Civilisation and cultural achievement were no longer the preserve of a tiny elite but depended upon factory workers, coal miners, printers and clerks not only as labourers but also as buyers in the ever-expanding market. Ultimately it would become necessary for these lower orders to become literate and to share - to some degree - in the wealth of society if the overriding need for efficiency was to be preserved. The great increase in productivity, the accumulation of capital and the expansion of mass-markets as well as the new intellectual advances in science led to social revolution: the power of the landed gentry declined and was replaced by the financial muscle of the bourgeoisie. The new efficiency was also felt in matters of social organisation, which gradually brought the West up to the standards already achieved in other parts of the world, such as China and the Ottoman empire, and then enabled it to surpass them. By 1789, the year of the French Revolution, public service was judged by its effectiveness and utility. The various governments in Europe found it necessary to reconstitute themselves and engage in a continuous revision of their laws in order to meet the ever-changing conditions of modernity.

This would have been unthinkable under the old agrarianate dispensation, when law was regarded as immutable and divine. It is a sign of the new autonomy that technicalisation was bringing to Western society: men and women felt that they were in charge of their own affairs as never before. We have seen the profound fear that innovation and change had unleashed in traditional societies, where civilisation was felt to be a fragile achievement and any break in continuity with the past was resisted. The modern technical society introduced by the West, however, was based on the expectation of constant development and progress. Change was institutionalised and taken for granted. Indeed, such institutions as the Royal Society in London were dedicated to the collection of new knowledge to replace the old. Specialists in the various sciences were encouraged to pool their findings to aid this process. Instead of keeping their discoveries secret, the new scientific institutions wanted to disseminate knowledge in order to advance future growth in their own and other fields.

The old conservative spirit of the Oikumene, therefore, had been replaced m the West by a desire for change and a belief that continual development was practicable. Instead of fearing that the younger generation was going to the dogs, as in former times, the older generation expected their children to live better than they. The study of history was dominated by a new myth: that of Progress. It achieved great things but now that damage to the environment has made us realise that this way of life is as vulnerable as the old, we are, perhaps, beginning to realise that it is as fictitious as most of the other mythologies that have inspired humanity over the centuries.

While the pooling of resources and discoveries drew people together, the new specialisation inevitably pulled them apart in other ways. Hitherto it had been possible for an intellectual to keep abreast of knowledge on all fronts. The Muslim Faylasufs, for example, had been proficient in medicine, philosophy and aesthetics. Indeed, Falsafah had offered its disciples a coherent and inclusive account of what was believed to be the whole of reality. By the seventeenth century, the process of specialisation that would become so marked a feature of Western society was beginning to make itself felt. The various disciplines of astronomy, chemistry and geometry were beginning to become independent and autonomous. Ultimately in our own day it would be impossible for an expert in one field to feel any competence whatever in another. It followed that every major intellectual saw himself less as a conserver of tradition than as a pioneer. He was an explorer, like the navigators who had penetrated to new parts of the globe. He was venturing into hitherto uncharted realms for the sake of his society. The innovator who made such an effort of imagination to break new ground and, in the process, overthrow old sanctities, became a cultural hero. There was new optimism about humanity as control over the natural world, which had once held mankind in thrall, appeared to advance in leaps and bounds. People began to believe that better education and improved laws could bring light to the human spirit. This new confidence in the natural powers of human beings meant that people came to believe that they could achieve enlightenment by means of their own exertions. They no longer felt that they needed to rely on inherited tradition, an institution or an elite - or, even, a revelation from God - to discover the truth.

Yet the experience of specialisation meant that people involved in the process of specialisation were increasingly unable to see the whole picture. Consequently innovative scientists and intellectuals felt obliged to work out their own theories of life and religion, starting from scratch. They felt that their own enhanced knowledge and effectiveness gave them the duty to look again at the traditional Christian explanations of reality and bring them up to date. The new scientific spirit was empirical, based solely on observation and experiment. We have seen that the old rationalism of Falsafah had depended on an initial act of faith in a rational universe. The Western sciences could take nothing for granted in this way and the pioneers were increasingly ready to risk a mistake or knock down established authorities and institutions such as the Bible, the Church and the Christian tradition. The old 'proofs' for God's existence were no longer entirely satisfactory and natural scientists and philosophers, full of enthusiasm for the empirical method, felt compelled to verify the objective reality of God in the same way as they proved other demonstrable phenomena.

Atheism was still felt to be abhorrent. As we shall see, most of the philosophers of the Enlightenment believed implicitly in the existence of a God. Yet a few people were beginning to see that not even God could be taken for granted. Perhaps one of the first people to appreciate this

excluded from the divine plan. Hence his philosophy dispensed with the abstruse intellectual skills demanded by Falsafah — which were only possible for a few people — and relied more on common sense which was within everybody's grasp. There is a danger in such an approach, however, because it is all too easy to make such a God conform to our own prejudices and make them absolute.

When Phaedon had been published in 1767, its philosophic defence of the immortality of the soul was positively, if sometimes patronisingly, received in Gentile or Christian circles. A young Swiss pastor, Johann Caspar Lavater, wrote that the author was ripe for conversion to Christianity and challenged Mendelssohn to defend his Judaism in public. Mendelssohn was, then, drawn almost against his will into a rational defence of Judaism, even though he did not espouse such traditional beliefs as that of a chosen people or a promised land. He had to tread a fine line: he did not want to go the way of Spinoza nor bring down the wrath of the Christians upon his own people if his defence of Judaism proved too successful. Like other deists, he argued that revelation could only be accepted if its truths could be demonstrated by reason. The doctrine of the Trinity did not meet his criterion. Judaism was not a revealed religion but a revealed law. The Jewish conception of God was essentially identical to the natural religion that belonged to the whole of humanity and could be demonstrated by unaided reason. Mendelssohn relied on the old cosmological and ontological proofs, arguing that the function of the Law had been to help the Jews to cultivate a correct notion of God and to avoid idolatry. He ended with a plea for toleration. The universal religion of reason should lead to a respect for other ways of approaching God, including Judaism, which the churches of Europe had persecuted for centuries.

Jews were less influenced by Mendelssohn than by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, whose Critique of Pure Reason (1781) was published in the last decade of Mendelssohn's life. Kant had defined the Enlightenment as 'man's exodus from his self-imposed tutelage' or reliance upon external authority. {25} The only way to God lay through the autonomous realm of moral conscience, which he called 'practical reason'. He dismissed many of the trappings of religion, such as the dogmatic authority of the churches, prayer and ritual which all prevented human beings from relying on their own powers and encouraged them to depend upon Another. But he was not opposed to the idea of God per se. Like al-Ghazzali centuries earlier, he argued that the traditional arguments for the existence of God were useless Because our minds could only understand things that exist in space or time and are not competent to consider realities that lie beyond this category. But he allowed that humanity had a natural tendency to transgress these limits and seek a principle of unity that will give us a vision of reality as a coherent whole. This was the idea of God. It was not possible to prove God's existence logically but neither was it possible to disprove it. The idea of God was essential to us: it represented the ideal limit that enabled us to achieve a comprehensive idea of the world.

For Kant, therefore, God was simply a convenience, which could be misused. The idea of a wise and omnipotent Creator could undermine scientific research and lead to a lazy reliance on a deus ex machina, a God who fills the gaps of our knowledge. It could also be a source of unnecessary mystification, which leads to acrimonious disputes such as those that have scarred the history of the churches. Kant would have denied that he was an atheist. His contemporaries described him as a devout man, who was profoundly aware of mankind's capacity for evil. This made the idea of God essential to him. In his Critique of Practical Reason, Kant argued that in order to live a moral life, men and women needed a governor, who would reward virtue with happiness. In this perspective, God was simply tacked on to the ethical system as an afterthought. The centre of religion was no longer the mystery of God but man himself. God has become a strategy which enables us to function more efficiently and morally and is no longer the ground of all being. It would not be long before some would take his ideal of autonomy one step further and dispense with this somewhat tenuous God altogether. Kant had been one of the first people in the West to doubt the validity of the traditional proofs, showing that in fact they proved nothing. They would never appear quite so convincing again.

This seemed liberating to some Christians, however, who firmly believed that God had closed one path to faith only to open another. In A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity, John Wesley (1703-91) wrote:

> *I have sometimes been almost inclined to believe that the wisdom of God has, in most later ages, permitted the external evidence for Christianity to be more or less clogged and encumbered for this very end, that men (of reflection especially) might not altogether rest there but be constrained to look into themselves also and attend to the light shining in their hearts.* {26}

A new type of piety developed alongside the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which is often called 'the religion of the heart'. Although it was centered in the heart rather than the head, it shared many of the same preoccupations as Deism. It urged men and women to abandon external proofs and authorities and discover the God who was within the heart and capacity of everybody. Like many of the deists, the disciples of the Wesley brothers or of the German Pietist Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (i 706-60) felt that they were shaking off the accretions of centuries and returning to the 'plain' and 'genuine' Christianity of Christ and the first Christians.

John Wesley had always been a fervent Christian. As a young Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, he and his brother Charles had founded a society for undergraduates, known as the Holy Club. It was strong on method and discipline, so its members became known as Methodists. In 1735, John and Charles sailed to the colony of Georgia in America as missionaries but John returned disconsolate two years later, noting in his journal: 'I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who will convert me?' {27} During the voyage, the Wesleys had been much impressed by some missionaries of the Moravian sect which eschewed all doctrine and insisted that religion was simply an affair of the heart. In 1738 John underwent a conversion experience during a Moravian meeting in a chapel in Aldersgate Street, London, which convinced him that he had received a direct mission from God to preach this new kind of Christianity throughout England. Thenceforth he and his disciples

toured the country, preaching to the working classes and the peasantry in the markets and fields.

The experience of being 'born again' was crucial. It was 'absolutely necessary' to experience 'God continually breathing, as it were, upon the human soul', filling the Christian with 'a continual, thankful love to God' that was consciously felt and which made it 'natural and, in a manner, necessary, to love every child of God with kindness, gentleness and long suffering'. {28} Doctrines about God were useless and could be damaging. The psychological effect of Christ's words on the believer was the best proof of the truth of religion. As in Puritanism, an emotional experience of religion was the only proof of genuine faith and hence of salvation. But this mysticism-for-everybody could be dangerous. Mystics had always stressed the perils of the spiritual paths and warned against hysteria: peace and tranquillity were the signs of a true mysticism. This Born-Again Christianity could produce frenzied behaviour, as in the violent ecstasies of the Quakers and Shakers. It could also lead to despair: the poet William Cowper (1731-1800) went mad when he no longer felt saved, imagining that this lack of sensation was a sign that he was damned.

In the religion of the heart, doctrines about God were transposed into interior emotional states. Thus Count von Zinzendorf, the patron of several religious communities who lived on his estates in Saxony, argued like Wesley that 'faith was not in thoughts nor in the head, but in the heart, a light illuminated in the heart'. {29} Academics could go on 'chattering about the mystery of the Trinity' but the meaning of the doctrine was not the relations of the three Persons to one another but 'what they are to us'. {30} The Incarnation expressed the mystery of the new birth of an individual Christian, when Christ became 'the King of the heart'. This emotive type of spirituality had also surfaced in the Roman Catholic Church in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which established itself in the face of much opposition from the Jesuits and the establishment, which were suspicious of its frequently mawkish sentimentality. It has survived to the present day: many Roman Catholic churches contain a statue of Christ baring his breast to display a bulbous heart surrounded by a nimbus of flames. It was the mode in which he had appeared to Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-90) in her convent in Paray le-Monail, France. There is no resemblance between this Christ and the abrasive figure of the Gospels. In his whining self-pity, he shows the dangers of concentrating on the heart to the exclusion of the head. In 1682 Margaret Mary recalled that Jesus appeared to her at the beginning of Lent:

> *covered all over with wounds and bruises. His adorable Blood was streaming over Him on every side: 'Will no one', He said in a sad and mournful tone, 'have pity on Me and compassionate Me, and take part in My sorrow in the piteous state to which sinners reduce Me especially at this time.'* {31}

A highly neurotic woman, who confessed to a loathing of the very idea of sex, suffered from an eating disorder and indulged in unhealthy masochistic acts to prove her 'love' for the Sacred Heart, Margaret Mary shows how a religion of the heart alone can go awry. Her Christ is often nothing more than a wish fulfilment, whose Sacred Heart compensates her for the love she had never experienced: 'You shall be for ever Its beloved disciple, the sport of Its good pleasure and the victim of Its wishes,' Jesus tells her. 'It shall be the sole delight of all your desires; It will repair and supply for your defects, and discharge your obligations for you.' {32} Concentrating solely on Jesus the man, such a piety is simply a projection which imprisons the Christian in a neurotic egotism.

We are clearly far from the cool rationalism of the Enlightenment, yet there was a connection between the religion of the heart, at its best, and Deism. Kant, for example, had been brought up in Konigsburg as a Pietist, the Lutheran sect in which Zinzendorf also had his roots. Kant's proposals for a religion within the bounds of unaided reason is akin to the Pietist insistence on a religion 'laid down in the very constitution of the soul' {33} rather than in a revelation enshrined in the doctrines of an authoritarian church. When he became known for his radical view of religion, Kant is said to have reassured his Pietist servant by telling him that he had only 'destroyed dogma to make room for faith'. {34} John Wesley was fascinated by the Enlightenment and was especially sympathetic to the ideal of liberty. He was interested in science and technology, dabbled in electrical experiments and shared the optimism of the Enlightenment about human nature and the possibility of progress.

The American scholar Albert C. Outler points out that the new religion of the heart and the rationalism of the Enlightenment were both anti-establishment and both mistrusted external authority; both ranged themselves with the moderns against the ancients and both shared a hatred of inhumanity and an enthusiasm for philanthropy. Indeed, it seems that a radical piety actually paved the way for the ideals of the Enlightenment to take root among Jews as well as Christians. There is a remarkable similarity in some of these extreme movements. Many of these sects seemed to respond to the immense changes of the period by violating religious taboos. Some appeared blasphemous; some were dubbed atheists while others had leaders who actually claimed to be incarnations of God. Many of these sects were Messianic in tone and proclaimed the imminent arrival of a wholly new world.

There had been an outbreak of apocalyptic excitement in England under the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell, especially after the execution of King Charles I in 1649. The Puritan authorities had found it difficult to control the religious fervour that erupted in the army and among the ordinary people, many of whom believed that the Day of the Lord was at hand. God would pour his Spirit on all his people, as promised in the Bible, and establish his Kingdom definitively in England. Cromwell himself seems to have entertained similar hopes, as had those Puritans who had settled in New England during the 16205. In 1649 Gerard Winstanley had founded his community of 'Diggers' near Cobham in Surrey, determined to restore mankind to its original state when Adam had tilled the Garden of Eden: in this new society, private

sensory perception to see things from God's point of view. To an unenlightened eye the world seems empty of God: the contemplation of Kabbalah will break down the rational boundaries to help us discover the God who is in the world around us.

Habad shared the Enlightenment confidence in the ability of the human mind to reach God but did so through the time-honoured method of paradox and mystical concentration. Like the Besht, Zalman was convinced that anybody could attain the vision of God: Habad was not for an elite of mystics. Even if people seemed to lack spiritual talent, they could achieve enlightenment. It was hard work, however. As Rabbi Dov Baer of Lubavitch (1773-1827), Zalman's son, explained in his Tract on Ecstasy, one had to begin with a heartbreaking perception of inadequacy. Mere cerebral contemplation is not enough: it had to be accompanied by self-analysis, study of Torah and prayer. It was painful to give up our intellectual and imaginative prejudices about the world and most people were deeply reluctant to give up their point of view. Once they had gone beyond this egotism, the Hasid would realise that there was no reality but God. Like the Sufi who had experienced 'fana, the Hasid would achieve ecstasy. Baer explained that he would get beyond himself: 'his whole being is so absorbed that nothing remains and he has no self-consciousness whatsoever.' {65} The disciplines of Habad made Kabbalah a tool of psychological analysis and self-knowledge, teaching the Hasid to descend, sphere by sphere, ever more deeply into his inner world until he reached the centre of himself. There he discovered the God that was the only true reality. The mind could discover God by the exercise of reason and imagination but this would not be the objective God of the philosophers and such scientists as Newton, but a profoundly subjective reality inseparable from the self.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been a period of painful extremity and excitement of spirit which had mirrored the revolutionary turbulence of the political and social world. There had been nothing comparable in the Muslim world at this time, although this is difficult for a Western person to ascertain because eighteenth-century Islamic thought has not been much studied. It has generally been too easily dismissed by Western scholars as an uninteresting period and it has been held that while Europe had an Enlightenment, Islam went into decline. Recently, however, this perspective has been challenged as being too simplistic. Even though the British had achieved control of India in 1767, the Muslim world was not yet fully aware of the unprecedented nature of the Western challenge. The Indian Sufi Shah Walli-Ullah of Delhi (1703-62) was perhaps the first to sense the new spirit. He was an impressive thinker who was suspicious of cultural universalism but believed that Muslims should unite together to preserve their heritage. Even though he did not like the Shiah, he believed that Sunnis and Shiis should find common ground. He tried to reform the Shariah to make it more relevant to the new conditions of India. Walli Ullah seemed to have had a presentiment of the consequences of colonialism: his son would lead a jihad against the British. His religious thought was more conservative, heavily dependent upon Ibn al-Arabi: man could not develop his full potential without God. Muslims were still happy to draw on the riches of the past in religious matters and Walli-Ullah is an example of the power that Sufism could still inspire. In many parts of the world, however, Sufism had become somewhat decadent and a new reforming movement in Arabia presaged the swing away from mysticism that would characterise the Muslim perception of God during the nineteenth century and the Islamic response to the challenge of the West.

Like the Christian reformers of the sixteenth century, Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab (d 1784), a jurist of Najd in the Arabian peninsula, wanted to restore Islam to the purity of its beginnings and get rid of later accretions. He was particularly hostile to mysticism. All suggestion of an incarnational theology was condemned, including devotion {1} Sufi saints and the Shii Imams. He even opposed the cult of the prophet's tomb at Medina: no mere man, however illustrious, should distract attention from God. Al-Wahhab managed to convert Muhammad ibn Saud, ruler of a small principality in Central Arabia, and together they initiated a reform which was an attempt to reproduce the ummah of the Prophet and his Companions. They attacked the oppression of the poor, indifference to the plight of widows and orphans, immorality and idolatry. They also waged a jihad against their imperial masters the Ottomans, believing that Arabs, not Turks, should lead the Muslim peoples. They managed to wrest a sizeable portion of the Hijaz from Ottoman control which the Turks were not able to regain until 1818 but the new sect had seized the imagination of many people in the Islamic world. Pilgrims to Mecca had been impressed by this new piety, which seemed fresher and more vigorous than much current Sufism. During the nineteenth century, Wahhabism would become the dominant Islamic mood and Sufism became increasingly marginalised and, consequently, even more bizarre and superstitious. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims were beginning to step back from the mystical ideal and adopt a more rationalistic type of piety.

In Europe a few people were beginning the trend away from God himself. In 1729 Jean Meslier, a country priest who had led an exemplary life, died an atheist. He left behind a Memoir which was circulated by Voltaire. This expressed his disgust with humanity and his inability to believe in God. Newton's infinite space, Meslier believed, was the only eternal reality: nothing but matter existed. Religion was a device used by the rich to oppress the poor and render them powerless. Christianity was distinguished by its particularly ludicrous doctrines, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation. His denial of God was too strong meat for the philosophers. Voltaire removed the specifically atheistic passages and transformed the abbe into a Deist. By the end of the century, however, there were a few philosophers who were proud to call themselves atheists, though they remained a tiny minority. This was an entirely new development. Hitherto 'atheist' had been a term of abuse, a particularly nasty slur to hurl at your enemies. Now it was just beginning to be worn as a badge of pride.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) had taken the new empiricism to its logical conclusion. There was no need to go beyond a scientific explanation of reality and no philosophical reason for believing anything that lay beyond our sense experience. In the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Hume disposed of the argument that purported to prove God's existence from the design of the universe, arguing that it rested on analogical arguments that were inconclusive. One might be able to argue that the order that we discern in the natural world pointed to an intelligent Overseer but how, then, account for evil and the manifest disorder? There was no logical answer to this and Hume,

who had written the Dialogues in 1750, wisely left them unpublished. Some twelve months earlier, the French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713-84) had been imprisoned for asking the same question in A Letter to the Blind for the Use of Those who See, which introduced a full-blown atheism to the general public.

Diderot himself denied that he was an atheist. He simply said that he did not care whether God existed or not. When Voltaire objected to his book, he replied; 'I believe in God, although I live very well with the atheists ... It is ... very important not to mistake hemlock for parsley; but to believe or not to believe in God is not important at all.' With unerring accuracy, Diderot had put his finger on the essential point. Once 'God' has ceased to be a passionately subjective experience, 'he' does not exist. As Diderot pointed out in the same letter, it was pointless to believe in the God of the philosophers who never interferes with the affairs of the world. The Hidden God had become Deus Otiosus: 'Whether God exists or does not exist, He has come to rank among the most sublime and useless truths.' {66} He had come to the opposite conclusion to Pascal, who had seen the wager as of supreme importance and utterly impossible to ignore. In his Pensees Phtlosophiques, published in 1746, Diderot had dismissed Pascal's religious experience as too subjective: he and the Jesuits had both been passionately concerned with God but had very different ideas about him. How to choose between them? Such a 'God' was nothing but temperament. At this point, three years before the publication of A Letter to the Blind, Diderot did believe that science - and science alone -could refute atheism. He evolved an impressive new interpretation of the argument from design. Instead of examining the vast motion of the Diverse, he urged people to examine the underlying structure of nature. The organisation of a seed, a butterfly or an insect was too intricate to have happened by accident. In the Pensees Diderot still believed that reason could prove the existence of God. Newton had got rid of all the superstition and foolishness of religion: a God who worked miracles was on a par with the goblins with which we frighten our children.

Three years later, however, Diderot had come to question Newton and was no longer convinced that the external world provided any evidence for God. He saw clearly that God had nothing whatever to do with the new science. But he could only express this revolutionary and inflammatory thought in fictional terms. In A Letter to the Blind, Diderot imagined an argument between a Newtonian, whom he called 'Mr Holmes', and Nicholas Saunderson (1682-1739), the late Cambridge mathematician who had lost his sight as a baby. Diderot makes Saunderson ask Holmes how the argument from design could be reconciled with such 'monsters' and accidents as himself, who demonstrated anything but intelligent and benevolent planning:

> *What is this world, Mr Holmes, but a complex, subject to cycles of change, all of which show a continual tendency to destruction: a rapid succession of beings that appear one by one, flourish and disappear; a merely transitory symmetry and a momentary appearance of order.* {67}

The God of Newton, and indeed of many conventional Christians, who was supposed to be literally responsible for everything that happens, was not only an absurdity but a horrible idea. To introduce 'God' to explain things that we cannot explain at present was a failure of humility. 'My good friend, Mr Holmes,' Diderot's Saunderson concludes, 'admit your ignorance.'

In Diderot's view there was no need of a Creator. Matter was not the passive, ignoble stuff that Newton and the Protestants imagined but had its own dynamic which obeys its own laws. It is this law of matter -not a Divine Mechanick - which is responsible for the apparent design we think we see. Nothing but matter existed. Diderot had taken Spinoza one step further. Instead of saying that there was no God but nature, Diderot had claimed that there was only nature and no God at all. He was not alone in his belief: scientists such as Abraham Trembley and John Turbeville Needham had discovered the principle of generative matter, which was now surfacing as an hypothesis in biology, microscopy, zoology, natural history and geology. Few were prepared to make a final break with God, however. Even the philosophers who frequented the salon of Paul Heinrich, Baron of Holbach (1723-89) did not publicly espouse atheism, though they enjoyed open and frank discussion.

From these debates came Holbach's book The System of Nature: or Laws of the Moral and Physical World (1770)5 which became known as the bible of atheistic materialism. There was no supernatural alternative to nature, which, Holbach argued, was 'but an immense chain of causes and effects which unceasingly flow from one another'. {68} To believe in a God was dishonest and a denial of our true experience. It was also an act of despair. Religion created gods because people could not find any other explanation to console them for the tragedy of life in this world. They turned to the imaginary comforts of religion and philosophy in an attempt to establish some illusory sense of control, trying to propitiate an 'agency' they imagine lurking behind the scenes to ward off terror and disaster. Aristotle had been wrong: philosophy was not the result of a noble desire for knowledge but of the craven longing to avoid pain. The cradle of religion, therefore, was ignorance and fear and a mature, enlightened man must climb out of it.

Holbach attempted his own history of God. First men had worshipped the forces of nature. This primitive animism had been acceptable because it had not tried to get beyond this world. The rot had set in when people had started to personify the sun, wind and sea to create gods in their own image and likeness. Finally they had merged all these godlings into one big Deity, which was nothing but a projection and a mass of contradictions. Poets and theologians had done nothing over the centuries but

> *make a gigantic, exaggerated man, whom they will render illusory by dint of heaping together incompatible qualities. Human beings will never see in God, but a being of the human species, in whom they will strive to aggrandize the proportions, until they*

not a lie but a device of the unconscious which needed to be decoded by psychology. A personal god was nothing more than an exalted father-figure: desire for such a deity sprang from infantile yearnings for a powerful, protective father, for justice and fairness and for life to go on forever. God is simply a projection of these desires, feared and worshipped by human beings out of an abiding sense of helplessness. Religion belonged to the infancy of the human race; it had been a necessary stage in the transition from childhood to maturity. It had promoted ethical values which were essential to society. Now that humanity had come of age, however, it should be left behind. Science, the new logos, could take God's place. It could provide a new basis for morality and help us to face our fears. Freud was emphatic about his faith in science, which seemed almost religious in its intensity: 'No, our science is not an illusion! An illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give we can get elsewhere." {9}

Not all psychoanalysts agreed with Freud's view of God. Alfred Adler (1870-1937) allowed that God was a projection but believed that it had been helpful to humanity; it had been a brilliant and effective symbol of excellence. C. G.Jung's (1875-1961) God was similar to the God of the mystics, a psychological truth, subjectively experienced by each individual. When asked by John Freeman in the famous Face to Face interview whether he believed in God, Jung replied emphatically: 'I do not have to believe. I know! Jung's continued faith suggests that a subjective God, mysteriously identified with the ground of being in the depths of the self, can survive psychoanalytic science in a way that a more personal, anthropomorphic deity who can indeed encourage perpetual immaturity may not.

Like many other Western people, Freud seemed unaware of this internalised, subjective God. Nevertheless he made a valid and perceptive point when he insisted that it would be dangerous to attempt to abolish religion. People must outgrow God in their own good time: to force them into atheism or secularism before they were ready could lead to an unhealthy denial and repression. We have seen that iconoclasm can spring from a buried anxiety and projection of our own fears on to the 'other'. Some of the atheists who wanted to abolish God certainly showed signs of strain. Thus despite his advocacy of a compassionate ethic, Schopenhauer could not cope with human beings and became a recluse, who communicated only with his poodle, Atman. Nietzsche was a tender-hearted, lonely man, plagued by ill-health, who was very different from his Superman. Eventually he went mad. He did not abandon God joyously, as the ecstasy of his prose might lead us to imagine. In a poem delivered 'after much trembling, quivering and self-contortion', he makes Zarathustra plead with God to return:

No! come back,
With all your torments!
Oh come back
To the last of all solitaries!

All the streams of my tears
Run their course for you!
And the last flame of my heart -
It burns up to you!
Oh come back
My unknown God! My pain! my last - happiness. {20}

Like Hegel's, Nietzsche's theories were used by a later generation of Germans to justify the policies of National Socialism, a reminder that an atheistic ideology can lead to just as cruel a crusading ethic as the idea of ‘God'.

God had always been a struggle in the West. His demise was also attended by strain, desolation and dismay. Thus in Memoriam, the great Victorian poem of doubt, Alfred Lord Tennyson recoiled in horror from the prospect of a purposeless, indifferent nature, red in tooth and claw. Published in 1850, nine years before the publication of The Origin of the Species, the poem shows that Tennyson had already felt his faith crumbling and himself reduced to

An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry. {21}

In 'Dover Beach', Matthew Arnold had lamented the inexorable withdrawal of the sea of faith, which left mankind wandering on a darkling plain. The doubt and dismay had spread to the Orthodox world, though the denial of God did not take on the precise lineaments of Western doubt but was more in the nature of a denial of ultimate meaning. Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose novel The Brothers Karamazov (1880) can be seen to describe the death of God, articulated his own conflict between faith and belief in a letter to a friend, written in March, 1854:

I look upon myself as a child of the age, a child of unbelief and doubt; it is probable, nay, I know for certain, that I shall remain so to my dying day. I have been tortured with longing to believe - am so, indeed, even now; and the yearning grows stronger the more cogent the intellectual difficulties that stand in the way. {22}

reminiscent of the prophets. Whether he existed or not or whether we 'believe in him' is superfluous. Without the idea of God there is no absolute meaning, truth or morality: ethics becomes simply a question of taste, a mood or a whim. Unless politics and morality somehow include the idea of 'God', they will remain pragmatic and shrewd rather than wise. If there is no absolute, there is no reason why we should not hate or why war is worse than peace. Religion is essentially an inner feeling that there is a God. One of our earliest dreams is a longing for justice (how frequently we hear children complain: 'It's not fair!'). Religion records the aspirations and accusations of innumerable human beings in the face of suffering and wrong. It makes us aware of our finite nature; we all hope that the injustice of the world will not be the last word.

The fact that people who have no conventional religious beliefs should keep returning to central themes that we have discovered in the history of God indicates that the idea is not as alien as many of us assume. Yet during the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a move away from the idea of a personal God who behaves like a larger version of us. There is nothing new about this. As we have seen, the Jewish scriptures, which Christians call their 'Old' Testament, show a similar process; the Koran saw al-Lah in less personal terms than the Judaeo-Christian tradition from the very beginning. Doctrines such as the Trinity and the mythology and symbolism of the mystical systems all strove to suggest that God was beyond personality. Yet this does not seem to have been made clear to many of the faithful. When John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, published Honest to God in 1963, stating that he could no longer subscribe to the old personal God 'out there', there was uproar in Britain. A similar furor has erected various remarks by David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham, even though these ideas are commonplace in academic circles. Don Cupitt, Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, has also been dubbed 'the atheist priest': he finds the traditional realistic God of theism unacceptable and proposes a form of Christian Buddhism, which puts religious experience before theology. Like Robinson, Cupitt has arrived intellectually at an insight that mystics in all three faiths have reached by a more intuitive route. Yet the idea that God does not really exist and that there is Nothing out there is far from new.

There is a growing intolerance of inadequate images of the Absolute. This is a healthy iconoclasm, since the idea of God has been used in the past to disastrous effect. One of the most characteristic new developments since the 1970s has been the rise of a type of religiosity that we usually call 'fundamentalism' in most of the major world religions, including the three religions of God. A highly political spirituality, it is literal and intolerant in its vision. In the United States, which has always been prone to extremist and apocalyptic enthusiasm, Christian fundamentalism has attached itself to the New Right. Fundamentalists campaign for the abolition of legal abortion and for a hard line on moral and social decency. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority achieved astonishing political power during the Reagan years. Other Evangelists such as Maurice Cerullo, taking Jesus's remarks literally, believe that miracles are an essential hallmark of true faith. God will give the believer anything that he asks for in prayer. In Britain, fundamentalists such as Colin Urquhart have made the same claim. Christian fundamentalists seem to have little regard for the loving compassion of Christ. They are swift to condemn the people they see s the 'enemies of God'. Most would consider Jews and Muslims destined for hell or, like Urquhart has argued, that all oriental religions are inspired by the devil.

There have been similar developments in the Muslim world which been much publicised in the West. Muslim fundamentalists have toppled governments and either assassinated or threatened the enemies of Islam with the death penalty. Similarly, Jewish fundamentalists have settled in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with the avowed intention of driving out the Arab inhabitants, using force if necessary. Thus they believe that they are paving a way for the advent of the Messiah, which is at hand. In all its forms, fundamentalism is a fiercely reductive faith. Thus the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, the most extreme member of Israel's Far Right until his assassination in New York in 1990:

> *There are not several messages in Judaism. There is only one. And this message is to do what God wants. Sometimes God wants us to go to war, sometimes he wants us to live in peace ... But there is only one message: God wanted us to come to this country to create a Jewish state.* {13}

This wipes out centuries of Jewish development, returning to the Deuteronomist perspective of the Book of Joshua. It is not surprising that people who hear this kind of profanity, which makes 'God' deny other people's human rights, think that the sooner we relinquish him the better.

Yet, as we saw in the last chapter, this type of religiosity is actually a retreat from God. To make such human, historical phenomena as Christian 'Family Values', 'Islam' or 'the Holy Land' the focus of religious devotion is a new form of idolatry. This type of belligerent righteousness has been a constant temptation to monotheists throughout the long history of God. It must be rejected as inauthentic. The God of Jews, Christians and Muslims got off to an unfortunate start, since the tribal deity Yahweh was murderously partial to his own people. Latter-day crusaders who return to this primitive ethos are elevating the values of the tribe to an unacceptably high status and substituting man-made ideals for the transcendent reality which should challenge our prejudices. They are also denying a crucial monotheistic theme. Ever since the prophets of Israel reformed the old pagan cult of Yahweh, the God of monotheists has promoted the ideal of compassion.

We have seen that compassion was a characteristic of most of the ideologies that were created during the Axial Age. The compassionate ideal even impelled Buddhists to make a major change in their religious orientation when they introduced devotion (bhakti) to the Buddha and bodhisattvas. The prophets insisted that cult and worship were useless unless society as a whole adopted a more just and compassionate ethos. These insights were developed by Jesus, Paul and the Rabbis, who all shared the same Jewish ideals and suggested major changes in Judaism in

91. Mekhilta de Rabbi Simon on Exodus 19:6. Cf. Acts of the Apostles 4:32.

92. Song of Songs Rabba 8:12.

93. Yalkut on Song of Songs 1:2.

94. Sifre on Deuteronomy 36.

95. A. Marmorstein, The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God, The Names and Attributes of God (Oxford, 1927), pp.171-4.

96. Niddah 3ib.

97. Yalkut on 2 Samuel 22; B. Yoma 22b; Yalkut on Esther 5:2.

98. Jacob E. Neusner, 'Varieties of Judaism in the Formative Age', in Arthur Green (ed.), Jewish Spirituality, 2 Vols, (London 1986, 1988), I pp.172-3.

99. Sifre on Leviticus 19:8.

100. Mekhilta on Exodus 20:13.

101. Piske Aboth 6:6; Horayot 133.

102. Sanhedrin 4:5.

103. Baba Metziah 58b.

104. Arakin 15b.

3 - A Light to the Gentiles

1. Mark 1:18, 11.

2. Mark 1:15. This is often translated: 'The Kingdom of God is at hand', but the Greek is stronger.

3. See Geza Vermes, Jesus the Jew (London, 1973); Paul Johnson,^ History of the Jem (London, 1987).

4. Matthew 5:17-19.

5. Matthew 7:12.

6. Matthew 23.

7. T. Sof. 13:2.

8. Matthew 17:2.

9. Matthew 17:5.

10. Matthew 17:20; Mark 11:22-3.

11. Astasahasrika 15:293 in Edward Conze, Buddhism: its Essence and Development (Oxford, 1959) p.125.

12. Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna's Counsel in War (New York, 1986), XI, 14, P.97.

36. Quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'The Significance of the Sunnah and Hadith' in Islamic Spirituality, pp.107-8.

37. 1 John 1.1.

38. W. Montgomery Watt, Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam (London, 1948) p. 139.

39. Abu al-Hasan ibn Ismail al Ashari, Malakat 1.197, quoted in A.J. Wensinck, The Muslim Creed, Its Genesis and Historical Development (Cambridge, 1932), pp.67-8.

6 - The God of the Philosophers

1. Translated by R. Walzer, 'Islamic Philosophy,' quoted in S. H. Nasr, 'Theology, Philosophy and Spirituality' in Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations (London, 1991), which he also edited, p.411.

2. Because they both came from Rayy in Iran.

3. Quoted 4n Azim Nanji, 'Ismailism' in S. H. Nasr, Islamic Spirituality: Foundation, which he also edited (London, 1987), pp. 195-6.

4. See Henri Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, From Mazdean Iran to Shiite Iran (trans. Nancy Pearson), (London, 1990) pp.51-72.

5. Ibid. P51.

6. Rasai'il I, 76, quoted in Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York and London, 1970), p. 193.

7. Rasai'l IV, 42, in ibid., p.187.

8. Metaphysics XII,ioj4b, 32.

9. Al-Mundiqh al-Dalal, trans, in W. Montgomery Watt, The Faith and Practice of Al Ghazali (London, 1953), p.20.

10. Quoted in John Bowker, The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God (Oxford, 1978), p.202.

11. When Western scholars read his work, they assumed that al-Ghazzali was a Faylasuf.

12. Mundiqh, in Watt, The Faith and Practice of Al Ghazzali, p.59-

13. Bowker, The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God, pp.222-6.

14. Koran 24:35, quoted on p.176-7.

15. Mishkat al-Anwar, quoted in Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p.278.

16. Kuzari, Book II, quoted inj. Abelson, The Immanence of God in Rabbinic Literature (London, 1912), p.257

17. Koran 3:5.

18. Listed in Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, pp_313-14.

19. Listed in Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judaism, the History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenztveig (trans. David W. Silverman) (London and New York, 1964), p. 179.

20. Quoted in Abelson, The Immanence of God in Rabbinic Literature, P.245.

21. For early crusading attitudes, Karen Armstrong, Holy War, The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World (New York, 1991, London, 1992) pp.49-75.

(London, 1990), pp. 168-9.

38. Mircea Eliade, Shamamism, p.9 508.

39. J.P. Sartre, The Psychology of the Imagination (London, 1972), passim.

40. Futuhat alMakkiyah II, 326, quoted in Henri Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of lbm Arabi (trans. Ralph Manheim), (London, 1970), p.330.

41. The Diwan, Interpretation of Ardent Desires, in ibid. p.138.

42. La Vita Nuova (trans. Barbara Reynolds), (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp.29-30.

43. Purgatory xvii, 13-18 (trans. Barbara Reynolds), (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 196.

44. William Chittick, 'Ibn al-Arabi and His School' in Sayyed Hossein Nasr (ed.) Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations (New York and London, 1991), p.6i.

45. Koran 18:69.

46. Quoted in Henri Corbin, Creative Imagination in Ibn al-Arabi, p.m.

47. Chittick, 'Ibn Arabi and His School' in Nasr (ed.) Islamic Spirituality, p-58.

48. Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York and London, 1970), p.282.

49. R. A. Nicholson, The Mystics of Islam, p. 105.

50. R. A. Nicholson, (ed.) Eastern Poetry and Prose (Cambridge, 1922), p.i48.

51. Masnawi, I, i, quoted in Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, II, p.250.

52. Quoted in This Longing, Teaching Stories and Selected Letters of Rumi (trans, and ed. Coleman Banks and John Moyne), (Putney, 1988), p.20.

53. 'Song of Unity' quoted in Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 2nd edn., (London, 1955), p.108.

54. Ibid, p.11.

55. In Gershom Scholem (ed. and trans.) The Zohar, The Book of Splendour (New York, 1949), p.27.

56. Ibid.

57. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p.i36.

58. Ibid. p. 142.

59. Quoted in J.C. Clark, Meister Eckhart, An Introduction to the Study of his Works with an Anthology of his Sermons (London, 1957), p.28.

60. Simon Tugwell, 'Dominican Spirituality' in Louis Dupre and Don. E. Saliers (eds.) Christian Spirituality III (New York and London, 1989), p.28.

61. Quoted in Clark, Meister Eckhart, p-40.

62. Sermon, 'Qui Audit Me Non Confundetur' in R.B. Blakeney (trans.) Meister Eckhart, A New Translation (New York, 1957), p.2O4.