



## Cyclic Compensation in Islam, Christianity and Judaism

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As the last revelation and the last of the world religions Islam is tailored to the conditions of cyclic decline, which conditions include the decline in the spiritual, mental and other qualities of men. Islam addresses these conditions by providing a revelation of greater clarity and simplicity than those that came before it and, within the context of that fresh revelation, a mitigation of earlier severities. Most obviously, Islam simplifies and clarifies the Abrahamic/Judaic complex of religious tradition while at the same time reducing the severity of such strictures as Judaic food laws. This is a Koranic theme: *The End approaches and so We are making things both clear and easy for you!* Moreover, both the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet have an awareness of the hastening of decline and cater to the fact that, as time goes on, even the mitigated clarity of Islam cannot prevent a decent into confusion and irreligion. One of the most important characteristics of the Islamic revelation is that, while it is a return to the primitive simplicity of primal revelation, it presents this in an inherently flexible form suitable to the conditions with which it must contend, namely the conditions at the end of the cycle where men are far from the integrity of primal man. In the context of the whole cycle it is a religion for weaklings. According to the Traditions, God had originally required fifty prayers from men each day, and the whole Koran had to be recited at each prayer. The angels praise God continually: God requires less of man, given that he is a creature of clay. But the Prophet - acting as Intercessor - was ashamed to represent to God that his people could not possibly endure such a burden. God mitigated the requirement to forty prayers. Still the Prophet said that this was something his people could not bear. So God mitigated the requirement to thirty prayers, and so on, until at last it was reduced to five prayers per day after which, we are told, Muhammad was too ashamed to plead for further mitigation. These Traditions are characterized by the ideas of proportion and compensation. Man was created weak, and his weaknesses grow and dominate him the more remote he becomes from his primal state, but his Creator is cognizant of this and compensates accordingly. Islam is preeminently a religion of cyclic compensation.

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Christianity is also a religion of the End Times and therefore also a religion of cyclic compensation, but in a very different manner. For a start, it does not entail mitigation of former strictures in the same way as Islam; rather its compensatory nature takes an entirely different form and it specifically rejects the Islamic response to cyclic decline. The Two Commandments of Christ are not a mitigation of the Decalogue but rather an exposure of their interior. In this, it is not mitigation that Christ brings, as James and the so-called Ebionite Christians supposed, but, as Paul maintains against them, freedom from the yoke of the Law altogether, which is to say, in Christianity's Jewish context, the exteriorization of an inherently esoteric freedom. This is the important thing to realize about Christianity: it represents an inherently esoteric viewpoint of which the exoteric form is, properly speaking, Mosaic Judaism. The compensation to cyclic decline, in this case, takes the form of exteriorizing an interior perspective (namely Edenic freedom) so as to make accessible to a broader range of souls Mysteries which had formerly been accessible to only the few. This was in response to the rapid hardening of cyclic conditions under the Roman Empire and the dramatic decline of the sanctity of not only the ancient Temples and Oracles and Mystery Schools but, more importantly, of exoteric sanctity. Christianity - especially in its central resurrection myth - was an exteriorization of what had previously been an esoteric, initiatic order in the ancient world. But the veil was rent asunder. All was exposed. In the Christian perspective, God's response to cyclic decline was to sacrifice His only begotten Son in an incarnate, pivotal dramatization of the death and resurrection Mysteries in order to arrest exoteric decay. The Mysteries themselves were in decline and their integrity could no longer hold, primarily because the exoteric supports that are essential for the maintenance of such inner Mysteries had effectively collapsed. The inner, we must remember, cannot long survive without the protective shell of the outer, and in the Christian case we see the phenomenon of an inner perspective reconfigured - per force - as an outer perspective in order to offer the prospect of salvation to as many souls as possible as the end of the cycle nears. This is not a case of mitigating an exoteric Law but of invoking a perspective that is beyond Law and so intrinsically internal. The proportionate compensation of the Divine to the conditions of Late Antiquity was to throw open the Mysteries to all and to install a sacred pivot into the hardening historical (and anti-mythological) worldview fostered by both the Romans and the Jews. The death and resurrection of Christ, fixed into a single historical event and a single avatar, serves the cyclic purpose of making the experience of the Mysteries accessible to all not by gnostic initiation but by bhaktic identification. In doing so, of course, Christianity imperiled the integrity of the esotericism it brought out into the open, as well as displacing Judaism, and necessarily manifested a tendency that is against non-exposed esotericisms, a tendency that in fact eventually hardened into a formal position. Instead, the proper inner dimension of Christianity is cloistered and monastic and is removed from the world and only non-exposed in that sense.

The issue here is the distinction between spiritual liberation and mere salvation. In a traditional order, the exoteric religion provides a means to salvation while the concern of the esoteric dimension of that same religion is complete liberation even from that blessed state called "salvation". As a consequence of cyclic decline, as the quality and strength of souls diminishes, salvation becomes almost as difficult as liberation had been in former times, while liberation itself becomes proportionately more difficult and rare. The simple fact is that men are not the beings they used to be and even the most rudimentary spiritual discipline becomes too much for them. And on top of man's diminished inner powers, his

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whole environment conspires against any form of spiritual realization. Furthermore, the nature of the cycle is that the Iron Age serves as a preparation for the Golden Age of the next cycle so that that salvation of souls rather than their liberation from the cycle altogether is, in a sense, the proper work of the Iron Age - it is the Golden Age that offers the conditions that make liberation most accessible; such conditions decline as the cycle proceeds. In such circumstances, the Mercy of the Divine is directed in the Last Days to the salvation of the many rather than the liberation of the few and this is precisely a leitmotif of Christianity. It is significant that traditional Christianity takes a monastic form and imposes the monastic ideal upon the Roman Empire. This represents a narrowing of the path to liberation and is, as it were, a counter-balance to the extension and broadening of the path to salvation. As the exterior of Christianity is already an exposure of previously esoteric symbols and doctrines, its interior modes become more remote and difficult to attain. The Christian settlement is that Christ makes salvation easier - He died for our sins and passed through the Initiatic death for us - but at the same time liberation - where there is none but Christ and no "me" - now requires the extra ardor and mortifications of fully monastic vocation. Liberation is not by any means impossible within the Christian orbit, but in cyclic terms liberation is not its primary or original focus, and indeed it may be said that, more than other religions, it neglects and is sometimes hostile to this dimension in favor of a universal salvationism in which, nevertheless, liberation is accessible to those that can attain it by virtue of the intrinsically esoteric and inner nature of the Christian symbolism.

A contrast between Islam and Christianity should be noted at this point: in (Sunni) Islam the exoteric shell is anti-priestly and denies priestly modes of succession, while the Sufi tariqah are rigorously apostolic, forming chains (silsillah) back to the Companions and to the Holy Prophet himself. In Christianity the reverse tends to be true. It is the external aspect of the religion that finds authority in apostolic chains of transmission, while there is no continuous, formal initiatory esoteric structure. Liberation, in Christianity, takes the form of mysticism in the proper sense, usually in a monastic context. The "heresy" of the Templars (and the Masons after them) consisted of attempting to install into the Christian order a Sufi-like (indeed, Sufi inspired) tariqah-style Christian esotericism, in defiance of the contrast we have just noted. While the strongly Sufi-Judaic spirituality of the Carmelites could be absorbed into Latin Christendom at the close of the Crusades (though not without causing significant disruption), that of the Templars could not. The difference was that the Carmelites could be situated within the monastic structures of Christianity, which is to say that they could be absorbed into the monastic core and made to conform to monastic norms. The Templars, on the other hand, proposed importing a new type of esotericism - fraternal but not monastic - that was in direct imitation of the Solomonic Sufi esotericism of the Muslim Near East. At a later date, under the cover of the Protestant Revolt, Rosicrucianism attempted to do the same. These were cases of failed cross-faith appropriations and adaptations - attempts at an Islamicized Christianity - not signs of a "secret" Christian tradition.

It needs to be appreciated that Christianity, like Buddhism, is a special case and an extreme correction to cyclic conditions. Islam, like Hinduism, is more "normal" in this respect and so a stabilization - a return to "normal" or primal patterns - made necessary, in part, by the disequilibrium created by the advent of Christianity which is, in a sense, a tradition that is inside out, so to speak, with the interior exposed and the exterior (i.e. Judaism) locked in ghettos. More generally, it needs to be appreciated that, as cyclic conditions decline,

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certain compensations need to be made and that one of these is that salvation becomes a more urgent matter than liberation. The Sufis rightly regard Paradise as a prison but the fact remains that one needs to get to Paradise before one can escape from it and of this modern man is less and less assured. In the case of Islam, cyclic compensations take the form of proportionate adjustments - a "flattening" - until a new equilibrium is restored, but even then its ultimate concern is for the salvation of the many - it "flattens" or "broadens" Jewish Law to do this - and thus, outside its core, it is a mass religion in which believers swarm to Allah like insects. Modern Islam, infected by Wahabism and subject to other pressures, steadily betrays or forgets the Sufi tradition and increasingly hardens into an empty externalism, and an externalism of merely external symbols - Muslim externalism is all the more external because of this. That is the fate of Islam. The fate of Christianity has been for its monastic core to shrivel and its exoteric unity to crumble, leaving the spectacle of the most profound of esoteric symbolisms falling into the hands of the very worst of men.

As far as Judaism is concerned, it is not a question of cyclic compensations but of being overtaken by cyclic events. The vigorous proselytizing Judaism of the Second Temple that challenged Romanism with its "ethical monotheism" was splintered, yielding Christianity, firstly, and secondly a retarded and ossified rabbinism almost entirely occupied with externalist praxis. In this respect, the Jews were victims of cyclic compensation, and their "adjustment" to cyclic conditions involved the utter destruction of the Temple, its cultus and its priestly lines and a corresponding retreat into a separatist, bookish legalism that surrenders its remaining esoteric possibilities to the device of Elijah's return. Nevertheless, because the external symbolism of Judaism - the Law - is unmitigated and unadjusted it remains, in a sense, more symbolically translucid than the Islamic Shariah - the Hebrew alphabet is a more primal set of symbols than the Arabic for all of Islam's primitive spirit - and hence is inherently "deeper" or more metaphysically perspicuous, and so, even in its externalism, Judaism remains a potentially fertile spiritual order with an inner dimension that may, in theory, be accessed via quite outward symbols and practices, although with correspondingly greater dangers of diabolical miscalculation, it should be said. The "chains of transmission" in Judaism are, like Elijah - nay, with Elijah - occluded but exist as spiritual realities accessible by Eliatic transport made possible by the Divine Presence in the sacred text. The severities of the Torah still hold even though cyclic conditions are against the narrowly exclusivist salvationism of the Jews these severities maintain. Nor is there a New Covenant to open sanctity to the mass of End Time souls, but only a continuation of an embattled and, in our times, belligerent exotericism which may even be described as counter-cyclic. Without mitigation or other compensations Judaism remains encumbered with a rigor of which its adherents and the weak souls who populate the cycle's close are increasingly unworthy. The "esotericism" of Judaism, we might also say, consists in the status of the Jews as "Chosen People" among all men, which gives their exoteric order an esoteric quality insofar as they can say that their exotericism is subject to a special Divine favor - among exotericisms. The whole concern of rabbinic Judaism is the identification of the Jews as the 'Chosen People', which is to say the Golden Race of the forthcoming cycle (of whom circumcision and resurrection of the dead are emblems), and so liberationism - by which one seeks to escape the cycle and avoid this destiny - may even be construed as a sin in rabbinic Judaism. It is not going too far to say, referring to levels of symbolism at least, that Judaism is an "esoteric exotericism," while Christianity is an "exoteric esotericism," and in this way they form a necessary complement to each other.

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There is no prospect of this complementarianism ever reconstituting a new unity, however, except in an apocalyptic context, but it is entirely to be expected that these perspectives together form a bloc against Islam such as we see in the contemporary context. The effect of this on Islam - sustained militarism in its Middle Eastern heartland - has been - and will continue to be - a hardening of Islamic externalism and the further marginalization of Sufism which - like monasticism in the modern Christian environment - seems like escapism in the face of on-going civil and political crises. The reason for the prolongation of Judaism, which, properly speaking, should have been fully superseded by the Christian religion in the "normal" course of events, is precisely because of the extreme and peculiar nature of the Christian adjustment. Had Christianity merely mitigated Judaism in the Ebionite manner, there would have been no basis for the Jewish prolongation, but because Christianity adopted a more extreme mode of cyclic adjustment - namely exteriorizing an intrinsically inner perspective - Judaism necessarily had to continue because Christianity did not replace it in a directly one-to-one manner. While the Christians become the New Israel, the old Israel is nevertheless "un-negated", to coin a term, and persists if for no other reason than to remind Christianity of what Christian "freedom" is freedom from. Judaism is the counter-force in the cycle. And it is furthermore because this matter was left unresolved, and so a radical disequilibrium was created, that the third revelation, Islam, was necessary at all and when it appeared it did so in the semitic environment. The intrusion of Islam - unexpected and unaccountable as far as the Christian perspective was concerned - creates its own internal stabilization, in which the earlier religions, Christianity and Judaism, may participate - Moorish Spain being a conspicuous instance of this - but at the same time the presence of the primal recapitulation that is Islam must also introduce a new level of disruption simply by adding a third term to the equation. In fact, this disruption eventually proved fatal to the Christian order as it traded its spiritual integrity for the means to compete with the 'Infidels' on a material plane and Christian heresy - the whole of Protestantism included - gathered around such pseudo-Islamic themes as the "priesthood of believers".

These, in conclusion, are the cyclic configurations that dominate our times and as the end of the cycle hastens they become all the more stark and apparent. It needs to be added that, while the religions we have been considering are, by definition, devices to postpone cyclic decline and to provide shelter from the storm, they are not by any means immune from cyclic decay themselves and are, from another point of view, not only symptoms of decay but agents of it as well. For all that Islam is an expression of Divine Mercy to men in these Last Days, and for all its official policy of tolerance towards 'People of the Book' it is, in other respects, a menacing force hostile to integral sacred perspectives that do not obviously conform to the narrow definitions of semitic monotheism; most notable is its hostility towards Hinduism, Islam being, as it were, that religion's cyclic nemesis. So the intrusion of Islam, with all its compensations, into the cycle provides, as it were, a life-raft for souls in the coming flood, but it also further complicates cyclic conditions and, by the very nature of things, does damage as well as good. This is certainly true of Christianity as well. Part of its mission, for example, is to sacralize time and the historical consciousness, and while this is a blessing and a mercy, it then neglects or is hostile to the mythological mind and so draws a wider and wider orbit of people (including the Muslims who followed them chronologically) into a historical mentality. More significantly, its posture of exteriorizing an inherently internal point of view disrupts the "normal" inner/outer distinction, and so while it is an agent for universal salvation it increasingly takes

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specifically anti-liberationist or anti-esoteric forms insisting that all that is inner must be laid bare and contextualized by merely sentimental devotions. These things, we should add finally, are never a question of one religion being superior to another but of simply understanding their distinctive natures and seeing their place in the economy of the whole cycle and its current phase.