



# ST. ANDREW'S THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE P R E S S

## AT THE INTERSECTION: A Caribbean Philosophy of Religion

Burton Sankeralli

**At the Intersection –  
A Caribbean Philosophy of  
Religion**

**By: Burton Sankeralli**

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www.satc.edu.tt  
1.868.657.7554 | 1.868.653.0449  
SATC@satc.edu.tt

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## **Dedication**

*To my Lecturers of the Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Ugandan  
Martyrs  
&  
My Students of St. Andrew's Theological College*

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## **At the Intersection – A Caribbean Philosophy of Religion**

### **(Supplemental Lecture Notes)**

The hermeneutical circle – We arrive where we begin. This is our space, our context which is one of rich cultural religious intersection. Thus what we are here engaging relates to our space and indeed I argue that we can only come to proper understanding of any and everything in terms of our context.

In terms of our specific quest this as a course in “philosophy of religion” context brings us to the Indigenous presence of our First Peoples.

Here animist traditions are defining.

### **I. Animism**

The term comes out of the Western view of religions that supposedly sees nature as having a “soul”. We are here using it to speak of an understanding of radical Divine “immanence”. The Divine is at the vital centre and source of all reality. The totality that is the true meaning of “nature”.

One is led to use the word “animist” or some such term. We note the word “pagan” is by and large a pejorative monotheist designation.

There is the elemental – water, fire, earth, air.

The constitutive elements of nature are alive and patterned. They are so constituted in energy and intelligence. Thus this energy and consciousness runs through nature as a whole. It is an understanding of continuity.

Leela.

The word is Sanskritic but the understanding is found throughout the animist worldview.

Reality as sustained in this living patterning energy is alive, it is vibration, it is music, it is word, play, dance. Dance is here revealed as a core metaphysical concept that describes this essential vitality and pattern of reality.

The world is a dance play drama (perhaps Trinidadians may want to say “fete” or “lime”) put on by the Divine. Hence the gods dance, this is their natural state as revealed in our own culture by the dancing Orisha who manifest in the “feast” or in the Hindu “Ramleela”. The former is the prominent form of traditional Trinidadian Orisha worship and the latter being the story of the Avatar Ram danced as village drama.

This is order, pattern, harmony that defines reality fundamentally. Even as it is always having to deal with disruption and ever threatening chaos.

The vibrating word is sound and meaning this as primal unity. Thus meaning is inherent in the vibration/pattern itself even as it unfolds in the “myth”, the telling. Thus when a community

enacts the myth as in Orisha feast or Ramleela the very reality itself unfolds and the integrity of our world is sustained. In the mantra the very sound is the meaning is the reality.

This vibrating vital word is codified into what is now termed “scripture”.

Yet the source is vital vibrating dance coming alive in the body itself.

It is this vital patterning that is the elements – water, fire, earth, air – that constitute reality. And it is from this intelligent and vital patterning energy that the “gods” emerge as defined centres of personality.

I will use a perhaps contentious term and speak of “original animism”. The mythic root (I propose) of the religious enterprise. This defines a great deal (not all) of our First Peoples culture in the Americas. The Source giving a community oneness. The pattern it yields is more egalitarian. There is a metaphysical disclosure of feminine-masculine balance. Indeed the feminine is prominent.

Thus animism discloses the interplay of feminine and masculine principles. The one is two. Even as they mirror each other in the one. This as dance/play of pattern and energy. The dance of the Divine constituting the very architecture of reality itself. This is the living order of Cosmos. Here is Relation. Community.

I was asked to talk a little about this. The point is that the Cosmos is as it were born of the interplay of these principles. And here is a profound animist insight into sexuality and creativity that is not only biological (in the limited sense) but metaphysical.

However when it comes to understanding say of human beings as female and male we are not talking of a rigid binary. A human male does not simplistically represent the masculine principle nor a female the feminine. True, in woman or man we see a particular principle as overt but it is also true that to be “woman” or “man” involves an intersection of the principles and this interplay may show itself in a range of ways. Indeed the principles themselves indwell and constitute each other.

So without going into controversy while all this indicates why heterosexuality shows itself to be the “norm” it also throws light on the manifestation of a range of “sexual orientations”.

Here might be a good point to speak of an ancient articulation of this “order” this is the Egyptian Ma’at.

It is the one and single order among the gods, in the cycles of nature and in human society. This also indicates that we pay particular attention to these cycles of nature as it is here the patterning is often most clearly revealed.

One manifestation of this vital order of feminine-masculine interplay is seen in fertility rituals. It is when nature is fertile that we human beings should act similarly and embrace these life forces ritually and socially. We see this in the “fertility cults” that poses such a problem in the Bible as well as in vital spring festivals like Holika (Phagwa) in Hinduism. This celebration of the vitality and fertility of nature is a key basis for what we here know as “Carnival”.

As we are speaking of the Egyptian context we may note that here “God” the primary male principle is viewed or articulated as the Sun and is understood as emerging from, being born of, water – the female – as one looks to the horizon at daybreak one actually sees the Sun being born of the Sea – Mother of God – “Theotokos”.

(But definitely not the Catholic interpretation.)

Yet at a point the masculine principle becomes culturally dominant. Sky gods come into greater prominence. This corresponds to the establishing of more complex hierarchical society and “civilization”. Though the historical details of this are in dispute. There arises what may be termed a “hierarchic animism”.

In what I mythically term “original animism” that is more communally egalitarian the female principle is strong. And the structuring is matrifocal.

There is in this spiritual mythic configuration the key place of the “Goddess”, the Prime Mother. In the spirituality of the First Peoples the role of the female elements of earth and water is central. The female disclosure unfolds in various forms of animism as is evident in Kali who discloses the “Prime Mother”, this even in the “orthodox” Hinduism. She is indeed the embodiment of Time. Indeed in many of these traditional spiritualities across the board in India, Africa, the Americas and elsewhere the role of the Goddess is pronounced. Note our own Hemispheric “Pacha Mama”, Earth Mother.

Though let it be clear we are not positing any female/male opposition or competition.

But here Modern Western anthropological mythology has been I think helpful. The agricultural revolution brought about a dramatic increase in food production. Hindu philosophy teaches us that the human body is a modified form of food. That is to say it is food in human form. Thus more food means more people. This leads to a more complex social structure and the rise of hierarchical masculinist civilization. Whether complexity necessarily means hierarchy and vice versa is an important philosophical question but it appears that this is how it unfolded. Hierarchy from the “top” controlled by elite men involves the prominence and domination of the masculine principle and the hierarchic sky gods. This has defined our present religious ideas and outlook such as masculine “light” conquering feminine “darkness”. And why is God in the sky and the Devil beneath the earth? The metaphysical patriarchy also brings into play the reality of systemic “class” oppression.

This male-centred power-relation leads to what has become a very standard view of the subjugation of matter to spirit. Matter/mater/mata is Mother while spirit here denotes the “immaterial”, masculine mind/consciousness etc.

As said, this speaks to social order and hierarchies. Order on earth reflects the order in heaven. This shows itself in the mythic record of conflicts where sky gods representing order defeat other forces. These forces may be represented in terms of the feminine principle water that has to be subjugated. Thus the flood narrative found in the ancient “Gilgamesh Epic” and elsewhere (that ends up in the Bible) tells of the unleashing of Chaos.

Marduk defeats Tiamat. Tiamat the primeval Goddess is here rendered “Chaos”. In Greek mythology the sky god Zeus defeats the Titans whose leader – Cronos – though male represents the female principle Time, that is flux, change, fluidity. We see the dominant Aryan sky gods of India.

This metaphysical unfolding, as we said, brings into play rigid hierarchies. This characterizes a great deal of “High Civilization”. The hierarchic civilizational structuring unfolds in Africa, India, China, the West and the Americas.



This complexity and hierarchy discloses a world that involves a condition of bondage and here animism

yields spiritualities of liberation. Beyond animism this unfolds into notions of salvation and seeing the

world and human condition as “fallen”. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

This is an estrangement a trauma that has sent ripples across the worlds that we term our human cultures. A trauma that far from healing has seemingly worsened through the unfolding ages. This as we seek the Mother for whom we long.

*A note on myth this as we appropriate a Modern term.*

Myth is this vital word-vibration-dance-play. In its uttering and performance it actually occurs. It is the very word that sustains. And if it is not uttered the world as we know it, our world, our living reality would collapse.

In our own context the Orisha feast actually makes present the dance of the “gods” – the Orisha – in their lifegiving sustaining role. In Hinduism this takes place in the reading of the Sacred Text – in our space there is the Ramayana and its performance in the Ramleela.

But this is also revealed in the monotheist traditions. So there is the “Passover” where the story of Israel’s liberation is remembered. But we must be aware that in the ancient world across the board “memory”, like “symbol”, is a re-actualization of the thing itself. If the myth is not remembered uttered performed chaos will engulf the world.

This is most graphically revealed in the traditional Christian understanding of the “Lord’s Supper”. Here Catholic theology is unambiguous. The Mass is the very sacrifice of Christ. And this is the very centre purpose and substance of the Church itself in making actually present the saving work of Christ. Thus if the myth of the Mass is not performed there can be no salvation.

In Islam while the Koran may not present a “story” the Divine Revelation and Law revealed in the Word discloses the mythic principle at work. This the very Word of God to which one is to submit so brings about fulfilment, liberation, peace.

It is the vital myth that in written form is scripture. The Word sustaining community.

*Orisha and the Tedwa Nza Kongo.*

We can say more about the Orisha worship of the Yoruba of West Africa as this is a fully functioning animist system traditionally rooted in the Trinidadian landscape, and elsewhere in the Hemisphere notably Brazil and Cuba.

Here the constituting flow of energy-consciousness of the universe is disclosed as vital patterning centres – the Orisha. The Orisha articulate the very living architecture of reality and the human personality itself. Orgun as primal warrior, the fire that crafts the tools of civilization from the womb of the earth. Shango wielder of the double-blade axe who is the thunderbolt and the Great King Lord of the Dance the epitome of masculine beauty. Oshun the fertile life-giving dancing sensual beauty of Woman, Goddess of sweet water and the living river. Ye Manja the First

Womb who in the Diaspora especially is the Sea that birthed us here, She who is the Mother for whom we long.

It is this the living dancing energy patterning that shows itself in the central Trinidadian practice – the feast. Here the patterns manifest in ritual, song, dance, drumming and possession. The dance revealing the very work they do in engaging their devotees. The “god” is the living dance itself manifest in the body of devotee of community.

Special mention must be made of Eshu, Master of the crossroad, Guardian of possibility and communication. He who opens and closes doors. Eshu embodies the raw vital patterning energy of the Cosmos. He is crossroads, possibility, ambiguity and promise. Here order may be established or chaos unleashed. Thus we may say he places the ball in our court to craft the dance of harmony. Eshu reveals the universe as beautiful as it is deadly.

Central in this the defining animist African architecture located in our space is the Congo cosmogramme – Tendwa Nza Kongo. It is the sign of the Cross. The horizontal is the boundary between worlds while the vertical unites. This latter is the “poteau mitan”, the centre post of Haitian Voodoo, the centre pole of the Spiritual Baptists, a profound African spiritual presence in our part of the Caribbean.

The cross is encircled by the sun the flow of energy. In the basic representation the cosmogramme is represented as such a basic cross (a “plus” sign) with the disc that is the sun as a circle drawn on the four points.

Water is the vital element dividing and uniting worlds. For the Shouters/Spiritual Baptist – a church that discloses a Christian belief outlook grounded in African animist cosmology – one is immersed in water and placed on the “mourning ground” as gateway through which one may access and travel to a range of spiritual spaces. The church is itself a ship that so sails to these spiritual worlds... “nations”... biblical, Africa, India China... Here is the intersecting nature of our Caribbean and Hemispheric spaces.

The vital accessing of a range of implicate spaces is revealed in this the most sacred rite of “mourning” where one actually spiritually travels, journeying to these spaces. Here is revealed the implicate space of the metaphysical cosmography revealed in the cosmogramme. The Baptists (as elsewhere in the Americas) have elaborated the Congo Cross into beautiful and potent chalk drawings – seals – that map and articulate this implicate space revealing the intersecting architecture of the Cosmos, the rich patterning flow of energy. Here is its fundamental metaphysical animist nature, the nature of nature of reality itself – “everything in the spirit world can talk.” The universe(s) in its entirety is alive with vital intelligence.

Here is articulation of community. Community as articulating this the very relation that is nature. Community that is ancestrally grounded. This in the oneness of Time where we live because the ancestors live even as the ancestors live in our very living.

Hence in the animist understanding the ancestral grounding is fundamental in this the very sustaining of the dance of energy that is all-embracing community.

## II. The Rise of Monotheism.

Monotheism emerges from the male sky gods. Yahweh is a male god, a sky god and a war god.

Before we engage the distinction of monotheism from what we are terming animism. And then move on to what appears to be the standard Eurocentric “philosophy of religion” debate about whether this God actually exists. I think we need to understand something of the emergence of monotheism and this from the animist worldview.

The emergence of what we now recognize as monotheism thus takes place in this broad context we are engaging.

It follows the bloodline of Abraham. Interestingly enough we have in our own context this understanding of spiritual patterns and practices that follow bloodlines like Kali Mai Puja and the Orisha feast for instance. This god “El” one among many “Elohim” establishes a connection with Abraham and instructs him to leave a centre of the civilized world and go into the middle of nowhere. This with a promise.

It leads to the revelation of the Divine name and the creation of a People.

“I am” is so revealed as the essence of the Divine name “Yahweh”. In Hebrew there is no future tense and what is used here is the present continuous. The word “Yahweh” is derived from the verb to be. Yahweh says “I am” this as a continuing present, as continuing presence.

The Divine name is ancestral – I am (Yahweh) the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Tell them Yahweh (I am) sent you. Note the word play. And because the Hebrew present continuous includes what we refer to as both present and future it may be translated I am, I will be, Yahweh your God and you my people.

But the revealing is also a concealing. Moses asks God His real name but knowledge of a name indicates a capacity to summon, control and even manipulate, but this God cannot be summarily summoned, controlled and manipulated so he tells Moses in effect – You want to know who I am? I will be who I will be. You will see and experience who I am as you live your life. The Divine essence of God then is not some object of abstract philosophical thought. It is revealed in the material life of the people.

So we see here a continuity of the profound animist insight of Divine immanence even as it is the foundation of monotheist transcendence.

This indicates an ongoing presence that is tangible and real. Thus “faith” in Yahweh is a living experience and reality particular to this tangible particular nation. Thus faith is not abstract but lived. It is textured reality. This is the Covenant.

While there is the roots of monotheism what is manifesting here is henotheism. The God of Israel emerges, out of a bloodline as the God of a people. Other gods exist but Yahweh is “our god”. Thus the First Commandment forbids “strange” gods not false gods. These gods are real but they are not our g/God.

So I want to ask a question – who is our God in our context? Our God has to be rooted in who we are as a people. In our culture. To use a Rastafari term in our – “livity”. Our God has to be so real and immediate to us, this is how Israel knew and experienced Yahweh. And indeed the very Hebrew word for knowledge “*daarth*” means an intimacy even a sexual intimacy.

Thus there is nothing abstract or “spiritualized” or ethereal about love and faith it is real tangible and textural. A material immediacy. It is the very life the very survival of the people.

While the animist outlook as I have defined it speaks of Divine “immanence”. The monotheist speaks of Divine “transcendence”. God is above His creation. God is in this sense other. Yet it is a tangibly real involved presence. Do you believe the two necessarily contradict?

Moreover as we noted monotheism itself emerges from this animist immediacy.

*Do two people travel together  
unless they have agreed to do so?*

*Does the lion roar in the forest  
if it has no prey?*

*Does the young lion growl in his lair  
if it has caught nothing?*

*Does a bird fall on the ground in a net  
unless a trap has been set for it?*

*Will the net spring up from the ground  
without catching something?*

*Does the trumpet sound in the city  
without the people being alarmed?*

*Does misfortune come to a city  
if Yahweh has not caused it?*

*No indeed, Lord Yahweh does nothing  
without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.*

*The lion roars: who is not afraid?*

*Lord Yahweh has spoken: who will not prophesy?*

(Amos 3:3-8)

Here is the animist wisdom approach of as it were mapping patterns in reality. Two men travel together because they know each other and agree, a lion roars because it has caught prey. More than mechanical cause and effect there is pattern structure in how the world unfolds. And this structure is manifest in Divine Revelation itself.

And as we have been seeing this emerging monotheism continues the animist material immediacy.

Yet note the violence of the imagery, traps springing, cities being destroyed, lions devouring. And such is a key aspect of the experienced reality of Divinity itself. God is not to be romanticized. The word of Yahweh uttered by the prophet is as terrible and deadly as the roar of a lion. This is no exaggeration, this is no empty parable, it is quite literal and real and Israel knows this. We will speak of the “idea of the Holy” and its dimension of awe even terror. Yet it is not only the awe inherent in the nature of the Divine (which is real). Rather this inherent nature of the Divine is a very material terror of what Yahweh has proven himself capable.

Yahweh is a war god and has proven himself very proficient at bloodletting. He is the cause of Israel’s military victories. And His people kill in His name and at His command –

*“...you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them...”*  
(Deuteronomy 20:16-17)

Then there is Psalm 137:9 and bashing babies’ heads against the rocks (atheists have a field day with all this but they ought to examine their own civilization). The word is *herem* or the “ban”. When you defeat a nation in war you kill everything that breathes. Quite a literal Divine command leaving very little interpretive latitude, little space for creative scriptural exegesis.

Now the “Christian” approach to this is to say that this is “Old Testament” that the message of Jesus has converted even the nature of God. But let us pause awhile.

A note on violence.

Violence in itself is the chaos that is to be overcome it may also function as an instrument in the overcoming. The ancients were not squeamish about violence. Indeed when one follows the path of non-violence (ahimsa) taught by Jesus, Buddha and Gandhi it does not mean being squeamish about violence, squeamishness is no virtue. It means being able to confront violence, even being capable of violence oneself, but instead choosing the path of “ahimsa”.

Yet the ancients understood the reality the texture and vitality of life. Not the banal anti-septic existence that we consider so Modern and progressive. The universe is a beautiful and vital place, but it is as dangerous and deadly. And yet for all its squeamishness the Modern world remains as violent as ever.

So much for linear history.

Let me be clear, it is categorically good that in certain ways our understanding of God in terms of violence has improved. But have we really progressed? Or does our Modern liberalism merely sanitize a deeper violence? On the other hand we ought to note the vitality and texture of the ancient insight into the Divine. As the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber put it the ancient may have been violent but at least it was real.

Another interesting theological point from the Amos passage and that will come up later in our “God debate” is that God has no opposite. Both good and so-called evil is the responsibility of Yahweh. So we do appear to be well on our way to full-blown monotheism.

Now there is a problem. Yahweh is a war God.

Yahweh proves himself an effective (a very effective) warrior but everybody knows that Baal is the god of agriculture just as we know that if we are sick we go to the doctor not the police station or the army base.

Baal's seminal rain fertilizes Astarte the earth in bringing forth abundance. This is the agricultural science of the time and even the Israelites knew this. So imagine a pastor going to UWI (the university) and telling them to close down the faculty of agriculture because it is the one God not science that causes crops to grow.

Here are the "fertility cults" that the prophet Hosea opposed. When nature is fertile it indicates that the gods are fertile and are prepared to rain fertility upon human beings. So we ought to set about being fertile ourselves. In a range of areas.

Interestingly enough Hosea's counter proposal was similarly sexual and patriarchal. The God of Israel is the husband of Israel His unfaithful wife. Hosea dramatized this by marrying a prostitute whom he was told to take back after she strayed. The wife Israel is called to honour the Covenant and be faithful to her husband, her God who loves her unconditionally.

Thus as we move toward full-blown monotheism the male sky God is established as pre-eminent in everything.

It is He who defeats the (female) water, darkness, chaos. Here drawing on the animist myths but articulated monotheistically.

In the first biblical account of creation – Genesis 1:1-2:4 – there is not even a war. The primeval waters representing chaos – *tohu wabohu* – are completely pliant and readily subjugated by the all-powerful one God. The first account of creation that opens the book of Genesis comes from the post-Exilic "Priestly" source where full-blown monotheism has established itself. But interestingly enough in the opening line the term for the Divine "Elohim" can technically be translated as "the gods". This points to the "Pagan" roots, of Hebrew monotheism.

Even in the flood narrative the chaotic water is completely obedient to the dominant sky god. It is He who causes the flood and ends it all the while remaining in complete control. In the Gilgamesh Epic while the gods cause the flood they panic when the full extent of the chaos is unleashed.

This theme of creation as the subjugation of water as the conquest of chaos is key throughout the Bible. It is fundamental in understanding the liberation of Israel in the Exodus, the pivotal Event, that is described in terms of creation. The subjugation of chaos by the warrior Yahweh. Note the graphic "Song of the Sea" (Exodus 15:1-21) describing the terror and destruction of Israel's enemies. The creation of Israel and the creation of the world here unfolds as a single Event. Scripture scholars tell us that it is Exodus that comes first and the account of creation is written from this perspective.

Gustavo Gutierrez in his book *A Theology of Liberation* describes creation as the first salvific act and explores this thread of creation, liberation, salvation, covenant/marriage for it all constitutes a single reality.

This primeval watery chaos is akin to a monster that Yahweh defeats, a cutting in two as he parted the Red Sea. This primeval beast has different names – Rahab, Leviathan, Behemoth. This goes back to the animist myth of the defeat of Tiamat by Marduk.

It returns in Second Isaiah's recounting of this Event of creation/liberation/covenant as recurring in the situation of Exile. Here is re-creation as the parting of the sea becomes the parting of the wilderness. It is evoked in the New Testament when Jesus calms the raging sea. And in the book of Revelation when the Kingdom is established there is no sea, no more chaos.

Yet also note the tangible textured nature of Hebrew thinking. Creation is not "*ex nihilo*", it does not take place out of some abstract "nothing" as in later formally philosophical monotheist thought. Rather God creates out of the very material "tohu wabohu". Chaos is thus possibility.

It is perhaps noteworthy that here the more "mature" Priestly monotheistic God is not understood primarily in terms of war.

Yahweh throughout this experience of Israel is the "I Am"... the God-who-is... His Name is His essence... is His active on-going disclosure in the materiality of Israel's existence. God inheres in the Event itself. This the "original monotheism" of Israel thus reveals its animist roots.

On the other hand Yahweh is not like the other gods thus Israel does experience itself as fundamentally chosen and particular. While this God emerges from a bloodline a henotheistic bond with his people the monotheistic universalistic impulse is there and unfolds in the succeeding missionary Faiths.

While the emergence of Yahweh from a henotheist God of Israel to the monotheistic Lord of heaven and earth who still happens to be the God of Israel remains in a sense particularistic this gives birth to the universalistic missionary Faiths of Christianity and Islam. However while these traditions seek to be universal their cosmology is exclusive hence one needs to convert to join the chosen community. In this sense these Faiths have remained tribal.

Ironically with the animist outlook it is in a sense the other way around. Here each tradition has its own particular insight into the Divine but it is not exclusive. They are in this sense radically open to the other and there is no contradiction. So the Hindu scriptures teach that there is one Source but the wise call it by different names for the good of the world. A universal Vision.

So we have arrived at the articulation of full-blown monotheism by Israel that provides the platform for the present-day global monotheistic Faiths of Christianity and Islam, along with Judaism. This provides the framework for the philosophical questions we will be engaging. But before we frontally engage the "God" of the philosophy of religion we need to interrogate "philosophy" itself.

### III. Philosophical Frames

So here are philosophical terms with which we ought to be acquainted – ontology, epistemology and praxis.

So far we have been engaging the question of the foundation of being and reality. What is now termed “God”. This is “ontology”.

Music, vibration, pattern, energy, order, dance, God, henotheism, monotheism etc. We have been tracing such ontological understandings of the Divine. And there are more to come. This is important because all too often in the Academy, on the street, in cyberspace (facebook etc.) the discussion concerning God makes the assumption that we know what it is we are talking about. That God is some manner of demarcated “being” and all we need to discuss is whether it exists or not.

So we now come to confronting a key concern of “philosophy of religion”. It is that of knowledge. How can we know what is true? How do we know anything at all? This is “epistemology”.

In epistemology they speak of modes of knowledge. Do we know through our senses? Does our knowledge come through our intellect? We can say that both are involved but this has been elaborated in different ways. Some use the model akin to mathematics where everything seems to be known in advance through *a priori* rational process and is revealed as necessary and compelling truth. Others believe we have to engage the world and figure things out.

Again do these necessarily contradict?

We have said that in the Bible the emerging monotheist faith is textured and grounded. In the animist worldview, the Immanent Divine Source is woven into, inheres in, lived reality in all its aspects. One does not ask an Orisha worshipper whether she “believes” in Shango or Oshun. That is as absurd as asking whether one believes in storms or rivers.

I once came across a marvellous “serious joke” – Animists worship Nature and we can prove it exists.

Thus we need to clarify this relation between being and knowledge, ontology and epistemology.

As may now be evident in a great deal of the “traditional” worldview such knowledge inheres in being itself. People to a profound extent know and understand the nature of being in its immediacy, as vital lived material pattern as we have been discussing.

There is the pattern of community and its structuring which may even be viewed as ritual structuring unfolding in one’s action. Now we are of course not romanticizing as we have seen the ancient world was often a very violent place. Yet the ontological grounding is known in the very being and living that is community. I think we can speak of such unfolding truth even if it is all too often distorted by the ever insinuating chaos inherent in living and the hierarchies of a social order.

Now in speaking here of being and knowledge as “living” – or “livity” – we come to the key term – praxis. This I understand as grounded action.

It is this unity of ontology, epistemology and praxis where a community, live and know their truth that constitutes a “worldview” or “cosmology”



This has unfolded as a defined philosophical approach that has been termed “wisdom”. It is at core profoundly animist. Such animism is disclosed in wisdom being unitive knowledge. We know because we are grounded, rooted in the dancing pattern. This as the lived material “beingness” of community where Truth shows itself. This immediate unitive knowledge is elaborated as a discourse.

This concerns the wisdom and insight into the nature of things that is discussed at a common grassroots level (among the “folk”) right up to the centres of political power. Thus there is a wisdom Kings must have to rule. (Note here the biblical story of Solomon).

Such wisdom then is not mere theory but radically practical insight. Indeed it is such practical insight and insightful practice that makes one “wise”. Such wisdom can only properly come through years of practice and reflection that we call “experience”. Hence the traditional view that the young cannot be wise.

One key mode of conveying wisdom is through proverbs –  
“Monkey know which tree to climb”.

One does not sit down and analyse a proverb rather its insight leaps out and shows itself as immediacy. One “gets it”.

Such wisdom is also conveyed through stories, songs, riddles, speaking with elders and so forth.

In the Bible (the so-called Old Testament), Dame Wisdom is presented as a female principle emanating from and at play beside God in creation. (Proverbs 8:22-31, Wisdom 7:15-8:1). Note this motif of “play”.

Here is biblical monotheism actually participating in a movement rooted in the animist world. Indeed Wisdom here begins to appear as a goddess.

Wisdom unfolds as such lived practical insight into the working of the world. Wisdom is herself such vital principle at play in reality. Human living is understood as integrally participating in this vital principle. Wisdom thus shows herself as the practical insight of so living according to such principle.

Such communal unitive knowledge unfolds in the articulation of what we now call religious truth as disclosed in ritual and the engaging of scripture. Then there is also the revealing and experiencing of truth as mystical experience and “esoteric knowledge”. We might even here mention the knowledge pertaining to magic.

Here then knowledge is a radically communal material reality. It is so lived and articulated.

We spoke of “discourse”. The elaboration of knowledge as, as it were, culturally structured. Out of the wisdom impulse emerges a distinctly structured analytical approach to knowledge. This I have termed “disciplinary philosophy”.

This formal disciplinary philosophy as it emerges in the so-called “East” nevertheless remains close to this unitary wisdom. It is grounded in animism.

Now in both the philosophical frames that I term “unitive knowledge” and “disciplinary philosophy” the female and male principles show themselves.

However in the “High Civilizations” of Africa, China, India, the West and the Americas this unfolds in the framework of patriarchy and hierarchical oppression. Thus it is unsurprising as we engage the philosophical frames we will often see the dominance of the male principle.

First a glance at Chinese philosophy.

Here again there is the animist understanding of an immanent unitive principle that defines the Cosmos and human life – the Tao. There is dancing interplay of the feminine and masculine principles Yin and Yang. And an insight that everything in the Cosmos has its place – the equality of things.

Philosophical insights rooted in traditional communal spirituality and wisdom were spelt out in articulated Chinese philosophical schools of Confucianism and Taoism. They were joined by Buddhism from India that itself became Chinese.

Here as elsewhere throughout this developing disciplinary philosophy the animist frame is so being engaged analytically.

The Indian term for philosophy is “dharshan”. Which means “sight”, really an implicate inner essential insight. Engaging yet so gazing upon the vital principle/s of Cosmos.

We may briefly mention and speak of some of the formal classical schools of Indian philosophy.

In Purva Mimamsa whose founder is Jaimini the vital dancing patterning that is the Cosmos is articulated in ritual action itself. Thus does our human word actually structure the Cosmos. For us today ritual pertains to what we may consider to be explicit religion but here in the frame of ancient insight human action taken as a whole is so ritually articulated and so structured this as community as society. As an articulation this is insightful but it does need to be seen in the context of a hierarchical society with its ambiguities and problematic/oppressive power-relations.

Yet within this structured framework we see elaborated the fundamental idea of “Dharma” – that which sustains – the vital action that so sustains community.

The dualist philosophy of Samkhya, the school founded by Kapila, articulates Cosmos as duality. The male purusha is changeless consciousness that moves the vital elemental energy of female prakriti.

Yet the pivotal Hindu philosophical school that seeks to resolve this duality is that of Vedanta whose greatest exponent and the major philosopher of Hinduism – Sankara – articulated the philosophy of Advaita a radical non-dualism. Here the female principle, the primal Mother – maya – is seen showing itself as the material delusion of change.

The primal Source is Brahman who generates the dance/play that is Cosmos. It is this vital energy and magic that congeals as matter. Note the primal linguistic connections here, matter is “mata” who is Mother or “maya”. Yet we have this idea that Vedanta teaches that matter is some

manner of wispy vaporous “illusion”. But it is the other way around. Matter is seen as sticky, tactile and entangling. Hence matter is exactly what it appears to be, it may thus be viewed as quite solid but this very solidity is entangling and traps and sticks one in attachment. Or even if it is viewed as a spider’s web the tangible power of the entanglement is very real (Buddhism has the same view of matter as we shall see). Thus this entanglement has us see the reality generated by Brahman in terms of the “delusion” of change.

To see reality correctly is to see through this delusion of change, it is to see its inner changeless eternal nature that is the essence of consciousness – Atman. Atman thus reveals the true nature of Brahman and the male principle is revealed as dominant.

But there is another Western misconception that needs to be addressed. Two really, that Brahman is impersonal and that Atman constitutes a single entity that is the one cosmic self.

The Vedantic view of Brahman is the same as the Christian view of God (as we shall see) in that the Brahman is utterly beyond the limitations of human language and conceptualization. It is thus neither personal nor impersonal. Moreover if its truest essence is revealed as Atman which in human terms we understand as consciousness to describe it as impersonal is ridiculous.

The same goes for seeing the Brahman or Atman as some sort of “cosmic narcissism”. It is in reality beyond human conceptions of unity and community and there is no Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction at work here. Yes, Advaita articulates a radical unity but that this Source shows itself as the two eternal principles it does not rule out an insight into community. Also there are other approaches in Vedanta itself that are not as radically non-dualistic as Advaita. However it is the Atman that remains prominent and dominant.

Buddhism provides us with another philosophical outlook emerging from India. We shall be looking at it in a later section. But we can mention that it has given rise to different Schools. One such has as its major exponent the philosopher Nagarjuna.

He speaks of a foundational reality that is termed Sunya or Sunyata. In seeking to engage this foundational reality Nagarjuna draws on an approach to logic that as it were posits three perspectives... either Being or non-Being... neither Being nor non-Being... both Being and non-Being...

Without going into a deep discussion of Buddhist philosophy (which by the way I am really not competent to do) we may mention two points relevant to the discussion of this course.

First, the issue of the relation of what the West terms God and Nothing-ness or the Void. If God be beyond our human language and conceptualizing concerning foundational Being, may we look at such foundation in these terms?

Two, we are offered in Buddhism and the philosophy of Nagarjuna a different approach to logic than that of Aristotle and the West (which we shall be looking at). Here is an approach that is inclusive. It is by the way consistent with the animist vision that does not view the Divine in exclusivist terms.

Let us touch very briefly on the unitive philosophic animist vision in Africa.

We have discussed Egypt and the Ma'at principle. Here there is the feminine and masculine interplay but the sun emerges into prominence.

We can relate all this to our own context. We have the West African Orisha cosmology that unfolds into our own space. Here we have a profound philosophical understanding of the dancing interplay of the two principles revealed in the male and female Orisha that literally dance in the worship space.

A key note for future reference this is very much a living immediate and complex philosophy of the body.

In the philosophical articulation this is understood as principles of feminine-masculine, contraction-expansion, darkness-light whose interplay constitutes the Cosmos itself.

## IV. Greek Philosophy

It is the animistic frame that gives us Greek philosophy centuries before it was taken over by monotheistic Faiths.

The Greeks perhaps articulated most clearly this analytical engagement with reality. This has been referred to as the “Greek miracle” but perhaps it ought to be viewed in terms of its own sense of differentiation of consciousness from the Prime Mother. This even as it seeks engagement.

So there is the West and its dialectic (most celebrated in the Platonic dialogues) this in its spirit of philosophical analytic engagement. The West begins to disclose reality as an “other” to be so analysed, “dialectically” so to speak. This for reality to be “seen”. The use of the word is deliberate. Such “vision” parallels yet is distinct from the Indian “dharshan”, the latter being more inner or implicate. In the West “vision” becomes the primary sense.

Yet in the origin, in the beginning that is strangest and mightiest, of Greek philosophy the animist insight is key. Here they are drawing on the Egyptians and other older cultures. The Pre-Socratics search for the primal element. Thales asserts it is water. While Heraclitus says it is Fire. Yet his Fire is vital flux, even as it is the “*Logos*”. *Logos* becomes the masculine principle of Cosmos itself as seen in Stoicism. And is of course taken up in Christianity.

The Pre-Socratic Parmenides posits Being as necessarily changeless. Being is and non-Being cannot be. Thus change, which is becoming, is impossible as this means the coming into Being from non-Being. But the former already is while the latter cannot be.

Parmenides is influential in his leading to the later positing of Highest Form or God as absolute changeless Being. He also gives us an early *a priori* ontological argument, this is argument derived from the very meaning of words, in this case “Being”, that we will run into again.

Pythagoras is so steeped in the ancient mystery system that he may not even be considered a philosopher (in this sense) yet his defining of the Greek philosophical project is profound, for him the principle of Cosmos is Mathematics.

Of course, running through this animist Greek insight of inherent order – Cosmos – is that its patterning is musical. This pertaining to the Muses the daughters of Zeus. Pythagoras noted the profound relation between math and music.

The mathematical theorem that bears his name reveals the precise mathematical structuring of space itself. The musical notes produced at precise mathematical intervals on a string reveals the essential pattern of the Cosmos.

Plato gives us the pivotal doctrine of the Forms. Everything in the material plane is but an imperfect shadow of the really real perfect essence that are the original Forms in the spiritual plane. And here above them is the Form of the “Good”. So we in the material plane imperfectly participate in the perfection of the spiritual.

Is this animism or monotheism?

The world of Forms is that of the Eternal, it is one of mathematical perfection. Plato draws deeply from Pythagoras.

Thus phenomenal reality is imperfectly derived from this matrix of mathematical perfection.

The soul comes from this perfect spiritual realm and so inhabits the material body. Hence in Plato we encounter body/soul dualism. This plays a key role in Christianity. Indeed the Platonic understanding is still very much the popular view.

The Forms provide us with the notion of essence or substance (*physis* and *ousia*) that is to play such central and pivotal role in the philosophical elaboration of Christianity.

“Forms” also conveys an understanding of reality in terms of vision or sight. As noted sight is the key sense for the West.

Greek philosophy also unfolds in terms of dualities. What postmodernists like to call “binaries”. Here appears again a fundamental characteristic of the Western mind.

Moreover philosophy literally love of Dame Wisdom arrives at this masculinist view of immaterial all-defining rationality this in a system of patriarchy though in fairness the vitality of Dame Wisdom remains present as is evident.

This patriarchy is a hierarchically structured slave society.

Aristotle, Plato’s student, takes up his idea of Forms, but does not separate them in their own realm. Rather Aristotle speaks of matter and form. Things are so constituted of matter in a form – hylomorphism. It is form that constitutes essence and enables us to define.

Aristotle is very much a biologist. He gives attention to the understanding of living things. His legacy continues to this day when we classify living beings in terms of species or kind and genus or family.

It is here we encounter Aristotle’s idea of soul.

For Aristotle soul is the principle of life. It is the form of a living being that makes it a living being and that particular kind of living being. A living being is here different from one that is not alive like say a bronze statue. In this latter case the bronze is the matter and the shaping makes it a statue. It remains a statue once it has this shape. In the case of a living being the form is not only the shape of its matter but the architecture of its life. When a living body dies it ceases to be what it was. It apparently retains its shape but it is now a corpse in a state of decay and eventually the material shape itself disintegrates. Death is thus a formal change. It is this vital principle of life – the soul – that makes the living being what it is.

Following Aristotle there was posited three sorts of soul. The vegetable soul that sustains the most basic life (as in plants), the animal soul associated with animal functions like motion and emotional responses, and the rational soul proper to human beings. Humanity is thus the “rational animal”.

It was even posited that humans may have two or three souls covering the different functions. To this day we refer to someone who has lost the capacity for movement or consciousness only having minimal life functions as a “vegetable”. But Aquinas said that the rational soul is capable in itself of doing the work of the vegetable and animal.

The souls of plants and animals are ultimately perishable as is the life functions of these beings. However for Aristotle rationality is a spiritual function and is thus not perishable. Thus as it was taken up by Christianity the Aristotelian soul was immortal like the Platonic. But the understanding is different. For Plato the soul is in the body. For Aristotle the body may be viewed

as in the soul, the body as a living body is fundamentally ensouled, it is constituted in its principle of life.

For Aristotle everything in the universe has a purpose a final cause or “telos”. This being to fully actualize their essence and thus play their part in the functioning universe set in motion by God. For living beings this involves a healthy existence. Christianity understands the telos as the transcendent God.

However, God as first mover and telos as the Aristotelian formal, efficient and final cause is characterized in a sense by an animistic immanence.

How this functions for human beings and their telos – ethics – we will look at in a subsequent section.

Actually for Plato and Aristotle the non-material counterpart to matter is not termed “spirit”. Spirit really means breath that is subtly material. The immaterial is idea, essence, form, it is a principle of rationality and consciousness. Plato saw it as an as it were higher reality of which our material realm is a shadow. But Aristotle has a sense of their intersection as in the Human being who is the “rational animal”.

Greek logic is articulated by Aristotle.

There is induction where we move from the evidence of the particular to formulating an understanding of the universal. And deduction where we move from universal premise to specific conclusion. It is this latter that provides the master key this revealed in the logical syllogism.

*All men are mortal*

*Socrates is a man*

*Therefore Socrates is mortal*

Thus from a universal premise we move to specific conclusion. Note that we have here a universal logical form that can be imposed on particular reality as a whole. Indeed we do not even need the specifics. All As are Bs... C is an A ... therefore... C is a B. We have here a purely immaterial realm of logical structure.

There are the three laws of thought. First, the law of identity – A is A. Second, the law of non-contradiction – A cannot be non-A. Third, the law of the excluded middle – B must either be A or non-A. Thus there is at work a logic of exclusion.

Thus we have neat, fixed, in or out, “categories” in which reality as a whole can be fit, and analysed in terms of this rational apparatus. These categories are themselves the definable essence and qualities of things by which they can be placed in a logical box. Thus can everything be rationally framed.

So there is in the Greek philosophical formulation this masculinist overarching logic and rationality, this domination of universality and form, of consciousness, mind and immateriality. This is a hierarchical social structure. Here is articulated the “Logos” the vital principle that so rationally constitutes the Cosmos as well as human rationality. This understanding of universal

cosmic Logos that involves and defines human beings was spelt out by the Stoics. This comes to be articulated as the “Natural Law”.

Greek philosophy articulates this principle of unity, of rationality, of purpose, of universality that both defines the Cosmos. And comes to transcend it.

Now, we have evidence in the New Testament itself that the Gentiles or the “Greeks” or those of the Greek world were being drawn to monotheism. My Early Church history teacher Knolly Clark told us that Greek philosophical thought was leaning toward monotheism. A profound statement.

The immanent animist Source becomes in Greek philosophy the vital and rational “Logos”, changeless Form of the Good, the Unmoved Mover, First Cause and Telos of the Cosmos. So there emerges a fit between religious monotheism – the “God of the Bible” – and Greek philosophy. This in the frame of a categorical – in or out – logic and an ontological “othering”.

The “God of the Philosophers” is born.



## V. The God of Philosophy I

This is the Transcendent, Eternal, Immutable, Rational, Perfect Being, who is immaterial Spirit. A God rather different from Yahweh even though they become as it were identified in the Monotheist Faiths.

The God of the Bible – He who is and will be – is very much involved in time and in human affairs this in all their materiality. He is to put it mildly quite emotional, “tripping” when his wrath flairs and then apparently regretting it (Isaiah 40:1ff). He describes himself as a mother and a husband. The God of the Bible may be fairly described as a “Heart” with all its emotional complexities and ambiguities.

The God of the philosophers is the perfect, changeless, non-emotional, omniscient Mind.

Of course it is not as clear cut as all this. At a popular level aspects of Divine involvement and distance mingle. As they do in the positions and pronouncements of religious orthodoxy. The God of Philosophy might even appear to be an elitist construction. But it is a pivotal enframing one when it comes to an intellectual engagement and articulation of the Divine that is key in both Christianity and its power-structure, and in Modern debates – the kind that gave rise to an academic course like this.

Christianity at the very heart of the Graeco-Roman world in a rich cultural intersection articulates itself in terms of this “monotheistic fit” of Jerusalem and Athens (with apologies to Tertullian). Indeed there was a view that just as the Jews had their scriptures God gave the Pagan Greeks philosophy to prepare the way for Christianity

Gospel and culture. The monotheist message of the Christian Gospel is now defining Pagan culture and philosophy itself. But it works both ways. The culture is in turn framing the message. Pagan Greek philosophy is articulating a framework for a philosophical monotheism. In actuality they constitute a single emerging fabric.

Christ is the Logos the Eternal Word of God creating and sustaining the Cosmos. Thus the opening of the Gospel of John connects the Jewish insight of the Ancient Wisdom to Greek philosophy – in the beginning is the Word.

But in the New Testament the word Greek is used as a term for “Gentile”. Hence the Greek culture and language (Greek being the *lingua franca*) of the Roman Empire is really an articulation of a rich intersection of cultural currents. Here is included dualistic philosophies such as Gnosticism prizing esoteric spiritual knowledge.

There is in this cultural matrix orientations coming from Greek thought, more recent Judaism and elsewhere (such as Persia as we shall see) that put good over evil, light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, spirit over matter, soul over body, heavenly over earthly. Such dualities being readily super-imposed on each other. This has fateful consequences in the history of Western Christianity.

The process of Greek elaboration is pivotally disclosed in Paul. A diasporic Jew very much at home in Greek culture. Paul as it were sets the matrix for this “Greek” Christianity that is to

make it the Western religious tradition. Philosophically this elaboration is continued by the Church Fathers.

But what is here unfolding? There are roots in Israelite now Jewish understanding where the monotheist God has his anointed King – David. It is out of this line that the pre-eminent “anointed one” – the Messiah – is to emerge. And though monotheist the Israelite-Jewish understanding is derived from the ancient hierarchic animist idea of Divine kingship. The king is a god. Thus did David as this Divine embodiment represent Yahweh as well as unleash His violence as we discussed.

Christ is the Son of David the resurrected Messiah. Beginning with the Greek speaking Diasporic Jews this figure relates to the Greek worldview of Divine Beings including Kings. And of course a certain Emperor. Here is the frame for Paul’s “Christocentricity” where in his Gospel the messenger now becomes the message. The lords and gods aplenty of the Hellenist world frames the understanding – Jesus Christ is the One Lord of lords (I Corinthians 8:5-6). From the Jewish “Jesus Movement” Christianity is born.

And Christianity so unfolded in the cosmological field of the Graeco-Roman world.

Framed by the Roman Empire.

#### *Philosophy and the unfolding orthodoxy.*

We witness in this Graeco-Roman world a philosophical revival of Plato now known as Neo-Platonism. The key figure is the philosopher Plotinus. Perhaps the last of the great classical “Pagan” philosophers.

Interestingly enough there here arises at the same time the first of the great Christian philosophers – Origen – who it is said shared a teacher with Plotinus.

Another important philosophical movement of the time was Stoicism. It was advocating a path of virtue in accordance with the principle of Cosmos. Pagan though it was it shared with Christianity this insight into the “Logos”. Or rather Christianity was drawing on this animist philosophical insight articulated by Stoicism. Logos is the vital patterning that constitutes Cosmos and is the ethical path we ought to follow and submit to.

Origen stands at this pivotal point where philosophy as it were gets baptized. He is one of the three great philosopher-theologians along with Augustine and Aquinas. He is a Neo-Platonist.

Here he has some views that to present day Christian belief might appear unusual. He held to the Platonic view of the pre-existence of the soul. Remember for Plato the soul is not necessarily related to the body and before birth it exists in the perfect spiritual realm of the Forms. Origen further believed that the spirits in the universe, including human souls, fell away from this perfect Divine realm but in the end they will all return. This including the Devil and his angels.

This is the famous (or notorious) doctrine of Apocatastasis. Everything returns to God and there is an “empty hell”. The doctrine of course was not taken up. But at the present time perhaps

possibilities open this if we put together Calvinist irresistible grace and the more recent Catholic teaching of the universal salvific will. But what about free will? Yes, hell must remain as a theological possibility for free will to be meaningful. But the mystery is that if the almighty Divine love is total all-embracing and irresistible God can find a way. Perhaps.

Origen also plays an important role in developing the doctrine of the Trinity in saying that the Son is “begotten” of the Father.

The pivotal unfolding of this cultural process in terms of the very articulation of Christian orthodoxy is to be found in the creeds and definitions of the Great Ecumenical Councils.

This by the way is troubling to religious “purists” as these Councils were enmeshed in the politics of the time including that of the Roman Empire itself. But such is the nature of what is termed religion. This includes the writings of the scriptures. Indeed Matthew in his opening genealogy makes a point of not so subtly indicating the incestuous and adulterous scandals in the ancestry of Jesus. Reminding his Jewish audience that it is the essence of God – He who will be what He will be – to reveal His essence in the messiness and chaos of history. *Pace* the Manichees.

The Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325 AD) was convened by the Emperor Constantine himself to deal with the Arian controversy concerning the Divinity of Christ. To simplify, perhaps over simplify, the Arians were denying the full Divinity of Christ. The Council deployed a key word to assert Christ’s divinity saying He was “one substance” – *homoousion* – with the Father. The only problem (well maybe not the only one) was that the term is not scriptural. Others favoured the scriptural assertion that the Son is “like” the Father – *homoiousios* – a substantial difference of only one Greek letter. But the term it was thought was too vague as it could be, and apparently was being, used to either affirm or deny the full Divinity of Christ.

It was thus hoped that saying the Son was “one substance” with the Father would settle the matter (but the crisis raged for the better part of a century). Here the Church is turning to precise philosophical definition to articulate its essential beliefs. It is out of this crisis and its philosophical resolution that the doctrine of the Trinity comes to be formulated. The process of this formulation was more or less completed in the Council of Constantinople (381) effectively presided over by the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa – the philosopher-theologians (influenced by Origen) who so formulated the Trinity.

This is of course the orthodox Christian understanding of God.

It needs to be noted that there is in this formulation of the Trinity a continuity of the old animist worldview. Not only may some question its actual monotheism but there is discernible in the doctrinal formulation the animist principles.

The Father as Source by His consciousness/intellect begets His Son, the Word, and by His will/love spirates the Spirit, His Breath. Here then is Source, consciousness (male) and energy (female) through which the universe comes into being and is constituted. Augustine speaks of the memory, the will and the intellect.

The three come to be understood as persons and we shall discuss this critical term. The language, Father, Son and even Spirit, refers to them as male thus revealing the continuing patriarchy.

There is a later controversy when the Christian West (as opposed to the Christian East) says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father... and the Son – *qui ex patre filioque procedit* – which was seen as setting the Son up as a second Source.

Interestingly enough (and we may have to speak to the scripture scholars) the principles viewed as darkness and light may be glimpsed even in the Genesis creation story. The Spirit hovers over the darkness and the Word brings the light.

Finally we may note another truly Pagan insight in this the monotheist Trinitarian Christian Godhead. This is the fundamental doctrine of “circumcession”. The three persons are so intimately united that they indwell each other. The Greek word for this indwelling is *perichoresis* which means – Dance.

Persons are disclosed in the dancing relations. God is dancing community.

*And so we come to Chalcedon.*

I have noticed that when some speak of philosophy and Christianity or “Christian philosophy” in this period they see Augustine in the Latin West as “the” key figure. This is a mistake. The primordial encounter takes place in the Greek East. We have mentioned the founding figure of Origen, his disciples the Cappadocians, the Council of Nicea and Constantinople, and the “Trinitarian controversy” etc., we now come to the high-point of this movement.

Of course this begins in controversy.

There was a question concerning whether Mary ought to be called the Mother of God – *theotokos* – literally “God-bearer”. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, said it should be balanced with *anthropotokos* that the Blessed Virgin is the mother of the man Jesus but he also advocated the compromise – *Christotokos* – Christ-bearer. Nestorius however because of his perceived position comes into conflict with one Cyril the Patriarch of Alexandria. Not only do these two represent perhaps the two most powerful churches of the Christian East but they also both have winning personalities (and I am being sarcastic). Controversy flairs, they both appeal to Rome, Cyril apparently wins out in the Council of Ephesus (431). Cyril let it be noted is no stranger to political manipulation if not outright conniving (but he does manage to be called a “Saint” but I digress). But the controversy continues.

Now there are at work two approaches to Christology named after the two great centres of Antioch and Alexandria. The question here is no longer whether Jesus is God but rather how can he be both God and man? Are there really two beings here? Or if he is one how can Christ be both God and human or is He some kind of freakish Divine-human entity – *tertium quid* – comparable perhaps to the “Pagan” Demi-gods?

The approach championed by Nestorius (that of the so-called Antiochene School) stressed the distinct humanity of Christ. Christ is as fully human as He is Divine. But if so how can he be one? The other approach evident in Cyril (called that of the Alexandrene School) stressed that Christ is utterly one. But if so how can a Divine Christ be truly human? Cyril went so far as to say that Christ was “*mia physis*” which seems to mean one nature or essence.

It is this that came to a head in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

Now our concern here in the context of this course is not primarily the truth of what was formulated (this is an internal Christian affair). But rather the “how”, the method by which the resolution was formulated and the understanding of God involved. Chalcedon is indeed a brilliant application of Greek philosophical procedure, one that renders philosophy inseparable from what we now know as the very core of “Christian orthodoxy”.

So one and the same Christ (the Aristotelian logical law of identity) is understood as having a Divine *physis* and *ousia* (nature and substance) as well as a human *physis* and *ousia*. The two exist without “confusion... change... division... separation”. (The Aristotelian procedure of establishing categories and exclusive logic.) Yet they come together in one *prosopon* and *hypostasis*.

Here we come to a fundamental point and problem. And we need to take a back-step to the fall-out from Nicea.

Now different people may use the same philosophical terms differently. So it was recognized that one may have to go past formulae to grasp the core conception. Cyril said “*mia physis*” and Chalcedon “*duo physesin*”. Linguistically, at least, a contradiction.

It is a characteristic of language that it is fluid and maybe Cyril was contradicting the eventual orthodox formulation or maybe not. But it is an aim of philosophy to define the very language we use in defining. The setting up of linguistic categories so fixes not only what is being referred to but the very language itself. So whatever Cyril meant by “*mia physis*”, this in his clear attempt to stress the complete and utter unity of Christ, at Chalcedon *physis* now becomes fixed and the term cannot be used in Cyril’s way. The term *mia physis* is now heretical.

Thus Christ has two natures or essences or substances in one person and our English terminology is derived from the less philosophically elegant Latin. The terms used to describe the unity of Christ are *prosopon* and *hypostasis*. And this language business surfaces again.

These terms have come to be translated as person. But it seems that at the time there was no such concept. The Greek *prosopon*, the Latin *persona*, becomes the English “person”. The only problem is that this is not the actual meaning of the word. *Prosopon* originally means “mask” this as a character in theatre, this is (it seems) the root meaning of the Latin and indeed the present English word “persona”. So “person” so understood is a character we play on the stage of life.

But such a formulation would contradict what Chalcedon is seeking to affirm. It gives the idea that they are really two Christs, one human one Divine, and the union is only apparent or superficial, a mask. As we would say here, Christ playin’ a mas’.

True, *prosopon/persona* seems to have taken on greater weight but in the context of the crisis a breakthrough was nevertheless called for.

So how then does one give greater metaphysical grounding to the unity of Christ? Enter “*hypostasis*”. And indeed the unity of natures in Christ is described, theologically, as a “hypostatic union”. However the term itself may be problematic. It refers to subsistent being and if you were to examine the creed of Nicea the term is used in a way that is clearly contradictory. There *hypostasis* is used interchangeably with *ousia* – substance-essence-nature this the philosophical concept of “form” – while Chalcedon deliberately contrasts the terms. If the contradiction were metaphysical then the entire edifice of Christian orthodoxy collapses – Nicea and Chalcedon being

absolutely its two pivotal doctrinal formulations . Here there would be a suggestion that the Trinity consists of three Gods. However we come back to the fluidity and fixity of language. The contradiction is rendered semantic and it was sorted out by the Cappadocians here taking perhaps the critical step in the unfolding of “person”. The two Councils in their respective contexts are seen to use the term *hypostasis* differently.

I say “rendered semantic” because what we actually seem to have is a philosophical gap and the term “*hypostasis*” had to be surgically severed from “*ousia*”. The latter is generic nature or substance while hypostasis comes to mean specific subsistence – establishing the philosophical concept of “person”. This making the formulations of the Trinity and Incarnation possible.

After Chalcedon “*hypostasis*” becomes permanently fixed. Not only that but it does appear that in formulating the term so radically, utterly and totally in a manner so ontologically laden this in a decisively pivotal historical fundamental orthodox frame Chalcedon has put down one of the central pillars of Western civilization. This in articulating the very philosophical idea of “person”. Person as *hypostasis* comes to mean a distinct ontological subsistence.

The understanding of person is thus at the very core of these absolutely foundational Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation.

It is also the point of departure for the decisive break that is the Modern Age. As individuating subsistence becomes the individual. We will get to that.

All this without ... division, change, confusion or separation... the entire exercise is one in finely chiselled and deftly handled Greek philosophical, logical, categorical application.

And the One God remains intact.

Of course Chalcedon did not invent all this, it brought together the two Schools, Antiochene and Alexandrene, The Greek Fathers as well as the insight of the Latin “West” key at the Council being the Tome of Leo. The one person two natures formula that provides a certain Latin solidity in the midst of all the Greek subtlety. Chalcedon established all this in precise philosophical terms as the framework of orthodoxy.

Here we may also note that the Cappadocian Fathers by so re-defining hypostasis in articulating the One God as a Trinity of three subsistences disclose a key bridge between the two great Christian doctrinal formulations.

The Platonic Forms taken up by Aristotlean framing, logic and defined categories is critical to these Christian doctrinal formulations.

The very content of Christian “Faith” is so articulated in propositional terms as categorical doctrines to be believed in and given assent to. It is doctrine that Christians argue over. And you can tell a lot by what a people or tradition argue over.

In examining this it does seem to be the case that these Greek philosophical minded Church Fathers, perhaps due to the animist roots of philosophy, had problems grappling with this idea of “Person”. The received Greek philosophy did not have the notion. And that it was precisely here it first receives proper philosophical articulation.

This monumental articulation of *hypostasis* enables us to see three subsistences (persons) as one form – God as Trinity – and two forms as one subsistence – the incarnate Christ. This is the philosophical idea of “person” going beyond the “mask” of *prosopon/persona*. Out of this the

Modern idea of the “individual” emerges. So the mischievous question one is tempted to ask is whether this would have occurred if Christianity did not find itself in such doctrinal tangles.

So we have a philosophical articulation of the “Person”. The “prosopon” of cosmic leela discloses specific metaphysical subsistence. And we have the vision of the One God as a community of Persons. That the Foundation is itself relation. Indeed personhood is disclosed in terms of relation.

If we were to put this alongside the animist conception or rather have them intersect we can so arrive at an articulation of Cosmos in terms of relation and continuity.

We may also note that a key trigger in these theological controversies was the title of Mary as “*Theotokos*” – Mother of God. This was formulated to assert the unity of Christ in His Divinity and humanity. However we must engage its feminine affirmation in a patriarchal system. Moreover outside the orthodox Christian box it articulates a profound metaphysical vision. As below so it is above.

*In closing.*

Aristotle called logic the instrument – organon. It is meant to be an instrument of the rational probing of reality in all its aspects. But we should know by now that the instrument readily becomes the defining frame.

Christianity comes to be defined in this rational philosophical frame that is articulated as universal. Now we should be aware that the ancient view of rationality is not rigid and reductionistic as is the Modern. The Patristic Period and the Medieval West where the greatest Christian philosophy was produced were profoundly mystical. The rationality here is more open than the secular scientific understanding. Yet it is framed by Aristotelian logic, by its categorical tightness, identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle, it is yes or no, in or out.

Thus there is disclosed an exclusive cosmology of missionary religion (so-called) in the service of the one and only God as a vision of conquest this in the context of the Roman Empire this framed in an exclusive logic and view of religious Truth and there is this old notion of “Chosen People”. All this is to take on further political and imperial dimensions in monotheist history. It is such process we see unfolding in these pivotal enframing formative Christian Councils.

In a way there is here movement toward the monotheism of Islam. Allah (Most Gracious and Most Merciful) as revealed in Islam is Eternal and Transcendent. And very much One. Thus doing away with the Pagan influenced Trinity. He does reveal the historical concern of Yahweh but even His involvement is marked by this profound sense of monotheistic Transcendence. This One God here gives his definitive Word, His final universal Transcendent Revelation – The Koran.

But there is in the Revelation this very characteristically Semitic material concern for praxis, for ethical action. So Islam is practical and it does not get entangled in the Greek philosophical theorizing of Christian doctrine.

Yet in a real sense it is with Islam that strict philosophical monotheism seems to reach its religious highpoint.





## VI. The God of Philosophy II

### *Medieval unfolding.*

Philosophical rationality is now very much at the heart of the monotheistic God presiding over a patriarchal order.

And out of the ashes of the Roman Empire, Medieval Christendom emerges as the immediate precursor of Modern Western civilization.

Derived from its formative culture there is here the Western Christian dualities Eternal/Temporal, good/evil, Church/World, Divine/Human, grace/ nature, creator/creation. This fitting neatly into the Western philosophical frame.

Of course this unfolds as a political praxis that is patriarchal and hierarchical.

But there is an attempt in the Medieval unfolding to synthesize dualities. We see this in the great philosophical enterprise that we will now be engaging. It is also seen in how the Church comes to be viewed as evident in the theological-political “two-swords” theory of the Pope wielding spiritual and temporal (political) power.

In the Medieval philosophical articulation we encounter the very colourful character of Pierre Abelard.

Scholars have pointed out the central role played by the monasteries in the preservation of Western civilization through the Dark Ages and in laying the foundation of the Christendom of the Medieval synthesis.

Philosophically the monastic spirituality and vision may be described as broadly Platonic... emphasis on spirit, the eternal, the mystical ... duality of body and soul with the priority of the soul. But let us also remember that monks can also be very materially hands-on. And monasteries were the key centres of learning.

Moreover the as it were attempted revival of the philosophical project in the earlier Medieval period was carried out in a Platonic-Augustinian key.

So here comes Abelard with his application of hardcore logic and rationality – of the Aristotelian kind – to the very core of the Christian message. He challenged the intellectual *status quo*, set up his own school and had numerous followers (as I re-call I read somewhere these included Bishops and a Pope). It is said he was a celebrity that children would watch and point to in the street.

Of course he got in trouble over questions of his religious orthodoxy. That and his celebrated affair with Heloise (a story better told orally in class). It seemed that he wanted to reduce the Mysteries of the Christian Faith to a matter of human rationality.

Abelard I think can be rightly described as the founder of Medieval scholastic philosophy i.e. in the Aristotelian sense. This was to reach its highpoint in the towering figure of Thomas Aquinas. And calling this name brings us back to the “God question”.

But let us back pedal a bit to another key Medieval thinker in St Anselm. He belonged in a sense to the old Platonic, Augustinian, monastic order. Anselm has given us what is still to this day a standard definition of theology – *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding. And it is true that Anselm vigorously sought understanding. He thus reminds us as Augustine himself does that Platonism is rational not merely “mystic”.

Anselm enjoined us – to believe so that we may understand. Abelard challenged this in saying or seeming to say – I believe because I understand. (And as I re-call he did not have kind things to say about Anselm).

Thus does Abelard as it were set the agenda.

The question bears on the relation of philosophy and theology. This also involves the issue of the rational proof of God and his Revelation. Is theology, as in “God talk”, really beyond the realm of the rational proof and exposition that is the concern of philosophy? Or does it all lie in the domain of the rational in which case theology is really a branch of philosophy?

If the latter is the case then God can be proven. Some may even want to say that the entire Christian message is rationally accessible and there is thus no absolute need for Faith.

Aquinas’s attempted reconciliation was that while the full content of Faith could not be arrived at or even fully explained by reason Faith cannot contradict reason. And we can gain deep rational insight into matters of Faith.

For Aquinas this rests on a certain anthropology, human nature while fallen remains good, and human reason while weakened is still capable of arriving at Truth. Hence the famous Thomistic axiom – grace perfects nature.

Interestingly enough Aquinas and Anselm both agreed that the existence of God can be rationally established. However their agreement ended. As they offered two rather different approaches.

As regards the proof of Anselm I must confess that I have had problems getting my mind around it. It goes something like, God is the highest Being that can be conceived and if we can conceive such a Being then it must exist. If not we will have an “idea” of a highest Being that is superior to the Being itself because it (the former) exists while the latter does not. The point seems to be that the idea of perfection means it exists because the idea of perfection involves existence. A necessary being has to exist (obviously) thus the very idea of such a Being means its existence.

For Anselm the very meaning of the word “God” proves He exists.

One can make general sense of proofs of this sort. They are termed *a priori* proofs because they depend on the prior idea we have of God without reference to creation, to the knowledge we receive from the senses.

The “idea” of God is that of a necessary Being. And such a necessary Being for it to be a necessary Being has to exist. As one attempted proof goes if God can exist in one possible universe then He must exist in all.

This is also called an ontological argument springing from considering the very Being (ontology) of God.

We may note that this is in the Platonic tradition proposing a rationalist *a priori* mathematical type knowledge disclosed at the level of pure ideas.

*The Angelic Doctor.*

Before I go further let me properly introduce the great Angelic Doctor St. Thomas Aquinas. He is the one thinker whose work and vision has as it were been officially canonized by the Catholic Church. Aquinas worked at a time when through contact with the Muslim world the philosophy of Aristotle was apparently attacking the Church. We tend to forget today that at this time it was Islam that represented high culture and civilization in that part of the world. It was Islamic learning and scholarship that preserved the classical tradition while what we now refer to as Europe was in the “Dark Ages”.

In the context of the Islamic-Aristotelian encounter two major Muslim philosophers we may note are Averroes and Avicenna. And as an aside it appears that in these theological circles at any rate it was not Islam but Aristotle that seemed to pose an existential threat to Christianity.

It was Aquinas who intervened, appropriated and where necessary reformatted Aristotle for Christian ends. For this some viewed him as a heretic. As I re-call he was condemned by a Bishop. But in so doing Aquinas created what many consider to be the greatest Christian philosophical edifice.

In contrast to Anselm, Aquinas offers an *a posteriori* Aristotelian cosmological argument for God’s existence derived from considering how the universe works as it shows itself to the human senses and intellect. In contrast to the more pessimistic Platonists, Aquinas held that human senses and intellect can be trusted.

But before we go there let us look at Aquinas’s own framework.

As my teacher to whom I will soon introduce you put it, when it comes to enquiring into the being of something we can ask two questions – What is it? Or – Is it? The first enquires into essence. The second into existence. This distinction between essence and existence is key for Thomas Aquinas.(1)

God is perfect form and all forms are thus here to be found located in their perfection, and so find their purpose in the perfection of the Divine prior to their existence. Hence essence in this sense precedes existence. Something thus need not exist for its essence to be intellectually meaningful or intelligible. So a salamander does not exist but the word has “meaning”, it conveys an essence or form.

Aquinas deploys this to reject the idea that the universe is God (metaphysical monism) and gives the Christian account of creation. To say that the universe is in essence God means that God changes, that He is subject to time and has potency. But God is perfect and therefore is beyond change and potency, God is eternal (not subject to time) and pure actuality, and as these are clearly not attributes of the existing universe then the universe in essence is not God.

However it is God that not only brings the universe into being but sustains it constantly. If God were to stop thinking and willing the world into being for an instant it would cease to exist. It is thus wrong to say God “created” the universe, God creates the universe constantly in the eternal now of His Being. To say He creates the world out of nothing – *ex nihilo* – indicates that it is not created out of His substance or essence. Hence God is not the “essence” but the “esse” (existence) of the world. The universe exists with the existence of God.

Moreover as we said, God as the perfect essence is the matrix out of which the essences of the universe are derived and toward which they seek to return as their telos or end or purpose.

So in Aristotelian terms, God may be said to be the “formal cause” of the universe in the sense that His is the perfect form out of which all other forms are derived, though he cannot be the actual form of the universe. He is the “efficient cause” because he constantly brings/sustains the universe into being, essence into existence. He is the final cause as all forms seek to return to the perfection from which they are derived and sustained, that is God Himself. And here serve His purpose. God is not the “material cause” of the universe as it is not and not made from the actual Divine substance, this would make the universe Divine materially and in essence which it clearly is not. Thus it is said to be made out of nothing “*ex nihilo*”.

However perhaps – or perhaps not – we may note a shift in outlook from Aristotle to Aquinas. The Aristotelian insight worked out in terms of his framework of causality discloses the old animist understanding of Divine immanence. We may here view God not as transcendentally “above” but as a formal, instrumental and teleological immanent “centre” of the universe.

Aquinas being Christian is committed to Divine transcendence. But on the other hand how is this to be understood in terms of his theory of “esse”? God is thus to be viewed as transcendent and immanent.

For Aquinas God is as it were quite different from the beings in His creation. In the understanding of Aquinas, God’s essence is his existence. His essence or meaning is his actual Being itself and vice versa. God is thus the necessary Being. His very meaning means he exists. The identification of esse and essence applies *intra* to God not *extra* to his creatures who have his existence but not his essence.

So Anselm and the ontological arguments are correct after all in saying that to postulate the essence of the necessary Being proves its existence?

The problem is that when it comes to God we cannot actually conceptualize or think His essence. If we could and his essence is his esse, this as the necessary Being, then God would have to exist. A necessary Being, if there is such a thing, of course has to exist. But as such Being, according to Aquinas, cannot actually be “thought” then this cannot stand up as a proof. What Anselm really has as his idea of God is a human construction of an essence that may or may not exist.

But if we cannot think God. If God is utterly beyond human language then is not all Aquinas’s “God talk” itself non-sense? How can we say anything at all?

There are two approaches.

One approach is to say what God is not – the *via negativa*.

In talking of God we can only say what He is not. God is neither being nor non-being, neither good nor evil, neither personal nor impersonal etc. Human description necessarily falsifies God so we may only speak of Him in the negative.

Here is articulated an approach to contemplative prayer. One is united to God not by “meditating” on Him but by emptying your mind of all necessarily false, concepts and thoughts of Him. Here in the “cloud of unknowing” one may be united to Him.

Given that God is beyond language even to say that “God is” is to falsify Him. So my teacher Austin Milner, a Dominican like Aquinas himself, asked us – Is God is? Is God? When we use the word “is” we are using human conceptions of being. But God is so utterly other to and beyond our ideas of being that if we say that we are then God is not. Or as God told one of the mystics – I am and you are not.

Now while the *via negativa* is by no means necessarily Platonic one can see it being favoured by this kind of outlook with its focus on the mystical.

There is another approach favoured by Aquinas that permits us to talk of God in a positive way, one that fits well with Aristotelian more down to earth analysis. It is that of analogy.

Here it is pointed out that a word may be understood in one of three ways.

It may be used “univocally”. If we say a horse is “big” and a house is “big” we are using the word “big” in the same way. In both cases “big” has the same sense.

It may be used “equivocally”. A “bat” is a creature that flies at night or an instrument used for hitting a ball in cricket. Here the word “bat” is used in two different ways that are completely unrelated.

Or we may use analogy. Consider the word “sweet”. One can say, “the cake is sweet”, or “that melody is sweet”. Now a melody is not “sweet” in the same way that a cake is. But it is also clear that the word is not being used in a way that is unrelated. The word “sweet” is here being used as an analogy. The sweetness of a melody is analogous to that of a cake.

Thus in “God talk” while it may be pointed out that God is neither being nor non-being, personal nor impersonal, good nor bad, because “being”, “personal” and “good” indicate superior states we describe God as being, personal and good by analogy, what they indicate here is analogous to their meaning in human language even though we know God is beyond this.

There are the famous Thomistic proofs of God.

Now these proofs have been approached in an abstract manner like a supposedly culturally disembodied mathematical formula. But that is simply not what such proofs are. Rather they are grounded in an Aristotelian cosmology. Or rather the cosmology Aquinas defines from Aristotelian science in his own Medieval theistic and ordered space.

The first is the proof from motion. The universe remains in a constant state of motion without coming to rest so there must be an Unmoved Mover keeping it in motion. Similarly with the proof of causality. The universe manifests a chain of efficient causality that brings beings into being so there must be a First Cause. The alternative to First Cause and Unmoved Mover is an infinite regress which is irrational. Thus this Source has to be God.

An aside that I think is important lest we misunderstand. Aquinas is not here speaking of God as the first source of movement in time. According to Aquinas philosophy cannot establish a beginning in time though we know there is such a beginning from Revelation. Rather God is the Source that establishes and sustains motion. Similarly God as First Cause establishes causality.

Then there is the proof from necessity. Everything in the universe is contingent or at best not necessary in itself. Hence it is possible for them not to be or their being depends on something else. If the former then there has to be a time when they were not. If the latter to again avoid infinite

regress they must depend on a Being necessary in itself the very Being responsible for the contingent beings. This we call God.

Fourth is gradation. Everything in the universe exhibits qualities of more or less. Beings are hotter or colder, bigger or smaller, more or less intelligent etc. So do we now have a case of possible infinite progress? No. There must again be a point toward which all such gradation tends. This is God.

Finally teleology. Everything even beings without rationality seeks to fulfil its purpose. Thus there must be some Prime Being that so establishes purpose this is also the very telos toward which everything moves. This is God.

In these proofs we note the Aristotelian dynamic of potency and actuality. In one and two beings are moving from a particular state of potency to one of actuality. Moreover they cannot so propel themselves on their own. Most beings in the universe do not move themselves and even those living beings that have an inherent principle of motion (soul) had to get it from somewhere this as (proof two) nothing in the universe causes itself.

Proofs four and five indicate a movement toward full actualization. Beings ultimately seek to fully realize themselves in moving toward ultimate Purpose which is the Source that is God.

As stated these cannot be read as abstract proofs. There are no abstract proofs. Even mathematical proofs assumes a consciousness that so understands them as proofs and consciousness is always materially grounded.

Aquinas himself recognizes this the earthed nature of our knowledge. As stated above, Anselm in his proof asserts that God as perfect and necessary Being has to exist. As we said, it is of course by definition true that such a necessary being has to exist. But Aquinas points out we cannot actually “think” the essence the meaning of such a perfect necessary being. As humans we cannot think God. If we could then Anselm’s proof holds but God is beyond our direct human conception and we understand Him by analogy. And in seeking to so rationally establish God’s existence we must humbly do so within the limits of our actual human understanding and begin by engaging the world as it shows itself to the senses and as we may scientifically come to understand its workings.

Questions raised are – What is proof? And what is science? Because such proofs only stand as proofs within a scientific frame. Aquinas himself was not concerned with what moderns would consider abstract mathematic type proof. But science is itself not abstract. It is the articulation of a cosmological frame and this is a matter of human articulation. What we may term “myth”.

These Thomistic proofs seem very much out of place in the mythic frame of Modern science this with its value-neutrality. But Modern value neutrality is itself a profoundly value-laden framework – myth – and the question needs to be asked whether it is the best framework. Perhaps the Aristotelian scientific frame of teleology, Prime Source, causality, potency/actuality, matter/form etc. makes more philosophical sense. Or perhaps we are called to so work out our own frame in our cultural intersection.

*In closing.*

Does God know the world or only Himself? As Aristotle puts it God is consciousness conscious of consciousness. How then can the God of the Bible even exist? It’s like philosophy

has created its own God. The God of the philosophers in such a case cannot even know or be concerned with the changing imperfect realm of creation and human history

But perhaps God ought not be viewed in terms of such duality.

I did mention (but not sufficiently) that there was a significant Islamic (as well as Jewish) participation in the Medieval philosophical discussion. There was here rich intellectual exchange among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed as was said Islamic civilization was ahead of the West in its access to classical knowledge after the collapse of the Roman Empire plunged the West into the Dark Ages.

We may speak of an Islamic philosophical tradition. Here the presence of Aristotle is prominent. Here Islam itself was wrestling with philosophy and the idea of God. The Aristotelian philosophers Averroes and Avicenna played a key role in the movement that involved Aquinas. Averroes even contrasted philosophy and theology putting the former on top. It has been said this led to some Christian philosophers (the Latin Averroecists) to arrive at the notorious theory of the “double truth” where philosophy and theology provide two contradictory versions of truth. Aquinas vigorously opposed this. Reason and Revelation cannot contradict.

Islam arrived at the conclusion formulated by al Ghazali of a strong philosophical monotheism where God is responsible for everything, even the appearance of causality in the universe is really due to direct Divine action – occasionalism.

## VII. Problematic and Praxis

How ought we to act and why? How are we to arrive at the state that we are supposed to be in in the Cosmos to which we belong? Traditions describe this state as salvation, liberation, harmony-alignment or right relationship, realization of oneself or purpose etc. Similarly the course of action involved to bring it about... faith and/or works, law keeping, prayer or meditation, knowledge, ritual, virtue, dharma etc.

Moreover these different traditions as it were understand the workings of the world in a range of ways. And it is this “working” that provides framework and rationale for the understanding(s) of fundamental action, action that seeks realization of the state one is seeking. Here there is understanding of the state the world is and ought to be in. Such framework has been described as a “problematic”.

Like “animism” and “monotheism” in terms of such problematic we may note a distinction in orientations. One understanding being that of harmony, balance alignment, the other concerned with liberation and salvation. Animism more focussed on the former monotheism on the latter.

But it is of course not as simple as this. For instance, Hinduism has both orientations and animist based Buddhism is at core a path of liberation. Such concern for liberation/salvation appears bound up with the movements toward greater social complexity and patriarchal, hierarchical formations that give rise to the later “high” animism and monotheism.

To simplify the discussion we will engage this issue of problematic under four headings – Animist, Semitic, Christian, Hindu/Buddhist.

### *Animist.*

In the animist the fundamental state one seeks is harmony. Such harmony or alignment is a living praxis, a material reality even as it extends to the so-called “afterlife”. Yet while one’s actions determine one’s state after death this realization is material occurrence while one lives in this realm. Thus in our African spiritual traditions we may say that heaven and hell are or can be living material realities. They are never abstractions.

Alignment is so actualized in engaging the patterning energy (obeah) that constitutes reality.

Animism gives us the praxis of wisdom which we have discussed even as it extends into all traditions. Here we may say ontology is epistemology is praxis – being is knowledge is action.

One does not first learn how to swim then go and swim. One learns to swim by engaging the praxis of swimming, by getting into the water. One arrives at knowledge of how to swim when one actually swims.

Such praxis may also be discerned through processes of divination found throughout the world. This rooted in the animist worldview. So for instance, we note the Chinese *I Ching*. There are the various ancient astrological systems still found in the contemporary as in China, India, the West and so forth. It is even biblical as in the ephod or drawing of lots.

Yoruba Divination, whose highpoint is often seen as the “Ifa Oracle”, is very much an aspect of the “Afro-Caribbean” context. The divination apparatus yields configurations of dancing feminine and masculine patterns that map out possible paths of action one is advised to take or avoid. As regards Ifa this reveals itself as an oral and more recently written corpus, it is text –



“scripture” – fluid yet defined indeed new verses may be articulated. The vital patterns of Ifa are the very creative vibrations that is the Divine communication constituting reality as a whole unfolding as specificity where it may show one the path to alignment.

Also important in the animist worldview is ancestral foundation and continuity. Here is an understanding of the continuity of life including what the West might term “re-incarnation”. Family and community is thus ancestrally grounded and constituted ... “the dead are not dead”... goes the African poem.

The foundational role of the ancestors is profoundly animistic and is to be found for instance in Africa, India, China and traditional peoples in the Americas. In the oneness that is time it is because of the ancestors we are constituted in the now. It is seen as well as in the Semitic worldview as revealed in the Bible. Remember Yahweh – “I am” the God of your ancestors thus I am with you. This includes the Jewish origins of Christianity. The ancestry of Jesus Son of David is key to who He is, the New Testament gives two full genealogies. In Christianity it continues in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

This involves death. Understood as transition and journey to the ancestors. Death rituals done improperly or not done at all may be disastrous. Proper journeying to the ancestral realm brings alignment and blessings to family and community. And failure brings chaos. For instance, for the Yoruba the ancestors are said to sit at the feet of Olodumare (God/ess) and they return in the family line. The ancestral principle is indeed the Divine living at the very centre of one’s being. This is called – Ori.

It may indeed be said that all traditional cosmology can be termed – ancestralist.

### *Semitic.*

In what I have termed the “Semitic” we have examined ancient Israel. Here liberation/salvation is very material and political. We have noted that the very name “Yahweh” means radical engagement, this the Divine act of liberation in all its political cultural materiality.

This is the foundation of the Covenant with the God of the ancestors who is living presence. Israel is the People of the Covenant whose praxis is understood as the Law – *Torah*. Such earthed non-speculative practicality continues in later Judaism and Islam.

One lives and lives on as a member of this People. But unsurprisingly it unfolds very materially. If you keep the Covenant you will have the Divine blessings of prosperity, posterity, health and long life. This is also the teaching of Israelite Wisdom even though it is questioned in the Books of Job and Qoheleth.

In terms of so-called afterlife while there is an ill-defined notion of survival in shadowy “Sheol” true immortality is found in posterity. “Name” is essence and it is in one’s descendants this true ontological essence persists.

Israel’s grounding with the earth is profoundly animist and characterizes traditional peoples across the board even as it takes on particular meaning in the context of the Covenant. It is the Promised Land.

“Personal” salvation is communal participation, it is lived reality, it is articulated through the praxis of living in accordance to the *Torah*. Thus faith is faithfulness, very much a praxis. Of course this is a response to a Divine initiative. It is God we acts decisively to liberate, to save. This as historical reality. And of course the personal is radically communal.

This brings us to the “Word”, “Scripture. This is central in the monotheist faiths. Perhaps most decisively so in the Koran, the very, actual, perfect, final Word of God giving the definitive unambiguous path for life and fulfilment. Islam is the Faith of the Book *par excellence*. To the “Word” one submits.

In Islam all is here subject to the will of Allah (most gracious and merciful).

In later Judaism and Islam this practical communal ethos of the Word, of the Law, continues even as it takes in notions of resurrection, the immortality of the soul and everlasting life.

There is the reality of evil. In this formative period such evil was viewed as the very real material and often the political as in other nations or evil kings. There is practical concern for survival against very human enemies and real life challenges. See for instance the Psalms. Here again we may point out that such practical concerns for survival and thriving and confronting such very tangible evil is in its roots deeply animist.

But at the end of the day not only is God “in charge” but there is a strong understanding that all comes from Him. God has no opposite.

The Semitic monotheist problematic indeed takes on board later cultural information this with its dualities such as good and evil (we discussed some of this in the context of the Graeco-Roman world), included here we may mention such currents as Zoroastrianism and Greek philosophy. There is acknowledgement of evil spiritual forces.

There is the eschatological horizon. For Israel it is radically political leading to the Kingdom or Reign of God. A world of harmony. Politically it comes to be articulated in Davidic dynastic terms concerning the Messiah. All this the ground of the understanding of the resurrection. This has been described as a linear view of history in contrast to the animist view termed cyclic. Yet even this linearity works itself out in terms of the animist vision of harmony. For Israel the order of creation is inherent to the order of “history” itself. Moreover while we may point out the cyclic dimension in the animist one ought not view the animist cosmology as static.

This is the eschatological horizon grounded in Semitic materiality revealing the fulfilment of time, full Revelation and reign of God, judgement and salvation. It is taken up in Christianity and Islam.

Monotheism as it unfolds an understanding of salvation in more (quote unquote) spiritual terms involving an “afterlife” develops the doctrine of “hell” and eternal punishment for the unrighteous from which one has to be saved. But the immanent grounding and understanding of praxis is disclosed in Judaism and Islam.

### *Christianity*

Christianity’s point of departure is the Semitic tradition. The ethical code of the Hebrew Covenant – the centre being the Decalogue – the eschatological horizon revealed in Jesus’s teaching of the Kingdom and understanding of resurrection. Some may want to say that

Christianity begins with the other worldly notion of resurrection. But this is not accurate. The original Jewish insight as we have seen is quite material and practical and even the realization of the Kingdom is profoundly “historical” and political in the sense we have been discussing. The Jews (including Paul himself) were not Platonists and as a community were not defined by Greek philosophical abstraction (Hellenist indulgence notwithstanding).

Hence the original Christian or rather the eschatological message of the original Jesus movement concerning the realization of the Kingdom beginning with the resurrection of Christ is historically, as in materially, grounded.

Thus God’s Kingdom is realized in the death and resurrection of Christ. However the message becomes set in the dualist “Graeco-Roman” cultural intersection with all its metaphysical and cosmological substance and baggage. Eventually eschatology becoming properly “otherworldly”.

There is a shift from Semitic “Theocentricity” to Greek “Christocentricity”.

Now as indicated above Paul could be a very practical ethical Jew and we can imagine how different the view of him would be if he were interpreted through the lens of the Corinthian correspondence. However he is a Hellenized Jew, the Apostle to the Gentiles, this with his Gospel for the Greeks. Here he is read through the lens of Galatians which is more of a rant than an Epistle (referring to the circumcision party he expresses the wish that the knife slips). Yet he most brilliantly and in a more balanced, thoughtful even calculative fashion develops this in his letter to the Romans. And this Epistle would have to count as one of the foundational documents of Western civilization.

Christian orthodoxy really unfolds as an elaboration of the Christocentric Pauline soteriological narrative along with Johannine High Christology. It is quite fitting that the Gospel of John, the Book of Acts (half of which is about Paul) and the Pauline Epistles constitute the central core of the New Testament Canon.

Here the great Semitic praxis rooted ethical code found in Judaism and Islam gets a pretty thorough working-over.

Salvation is attained through grace by faith “in Christ”. And this last “in Christ” formula is an utterly Pauline phrase summing up the entire orthodox message in two words.

True, this ought to result in ethical behaviour and later Christianity was to have a rather well known row on this very question. However it is clear that the Galatian Paul clearly delinks the ontological point of departure of “Faith” from the Jewish “Law” (which he views as a curse) or indeed “works” of any kind. Otherwise grace would not be grace.

Paul’s disciple the great Saint Augustine takes the final fateful step. Given the inherent bondage defining the state of humanity “in Adam” in need of grace this at the core of the Pauline problematic, Augustine now describes this natural state as that of “original sin” as we are so embryonically in Adam, as a tree in its root. (He also speaks of human beings being born “inter faeces et urinam”, best left untranslated).

As far as I can tell the doctrines of “grace” and “original sin” are uniquely Christian. Indeed they may even be said to be alien to the actual original teaching of Jesus. However it does fit well in the new dualist setting. One that includes the Manicheist sense of “tainted matter”. (Augustine earlier on was a Manichee). This discloses the problematic of human and cosmic “fallenness”.

The problematic is very much set in the Graeco-Roman cultural field. This with its framework of dualities. As we have seen, it takes up the very “Greek” concern for precision of doctrine and a view of faith as involving intellectual assent to doctrines. A problematic of “correct belief”, orthodoxy. Along with the resurrection of the body there is the Platonic immortality of the soul which goes to heaven or hell where the resurrected body will follow. Here the redeemed in the heavenly spiritual plane enjoy the “Beatific Vision” of God.

Western Christianity thus functions in terms of dualities which as we have seen is located in the Graeco-Roman cultural intersection that is its formative matrix.

There is one more...

The Persian religious tradition of Zoroastrianism was a major cultural force even before Hellenism. It is a cosmology of a marked good/evil dualism. Here there is a good creator God who has an evil counter-part.

The question may be asked of the (so-called) Old Testament – where is the Devil? Upon careful examination the Devil as we now know him the radically evil enemy of, even counterpart to, God is found to be absent from the Hebrew Bible.

The question may be asked of the New Testament – where did all these demons come from? Again they are absent in the Old but Jesus has to deal with them everywhere.

Zoroastrianism appears to here play a pivotal role in this re-defining of radical evil in monotheism. But while Satan and his associates are present in Judaism and Islam the One God remains very much in charge. There continues this Semitic sense and insight that ultimately everything comes from God who can have no opposite.

But it does appear to have most fundamentally defined Christianity.

Here the Devil and his demons whose abode is hell emerge as the evil counter-part to God and his heavenly angels. Now it is true that the correct Christian philosophical position is that evil in so far as it is evil has no inherent substance. Evil is the privation and perversion of good. In the natural realm no impulse begins by being evil rather evil is to be seen as the perversion the misdirecting of inherently good natural impulses. Yet it may surprise many Christians that this is the theologically correct Christian view as functionally Christianity has all too often operated dualistically viewing evil as some manner of substantial metaphysical opposite to God.

Indeed when one considers how some Christian groups obsess over the Devil and his demons an animist anthropologist might conclude that he, the Devil, is the most feared god in the Christian pantheon.

Evil as the dualistic opposite of the Divine, God and Devil, heaven and hell are inherent to the articulated mythic narrative of Christian salvation in Christ that we have been discussing.

Indeed such good-evil duality is very much inherent to the actual metaphysical architecture the problematic of Western civilization.

This is evidenced say in the colonial project and the imperialist treatment of the “natives”. The bringing of the Gospel to the “savages”, the civilizing mission and whiteman’s burden etc.

We may note the lurid demonology of Christian fundamentalism, seeing the Devil everywhere. And the Zoroastrian motif of an U.S. President defined by such fundamentalism in his speaking of “evil doers” prior to his bombing of the infidel.

We may also note such dualism at work in the Islamic extremist use of “Jihad”. And Islam’s own imperialist history.

Of course “good-evil” fits well into the entire dualist framework that characterizes the “us-them” of monotheist exclusivity.

Zoroastrianism is an aspect of this culture field that manifests in the Graeco-Roman world and it further morphs. There emerges a new religious movement called Manichaeism. This extends the good/evil dualism to one of good spirit against evil matter. This is revealed for instance in the Western attitude to sexuality.

The Manichee comes to fatefully define Christianity itself.

### *Virtue ethics and Christianity.*

There is another aspect to this Christian problematic that merits attention. It is one however derived from “Pagan” Greek philosophy with its animist roots.

This is the key place of “virtue” in Greek Philosophy as evidenced for instance in Plato and the Stoics. This flows into Christianity. However Augustinian “will” in ethics reveals the radical bondage of fallen humanity.

Virtue is the crafting of life. This in alignment with Cosmos. Such crafting is personal, communal and political. Of course this understanding of virtue of life as craft is itself rooted in the wisdom tradition and Greek culture as a whole. In Greek philosophy the ethos comes to be embodied in Socrates.

When it comes to actual virtue theory once again pivotal and key are Aristotle and Aquinas.

The former is the central Greek virtue ethical theorist primarily elaborated in Christianity by the latter.

The Aristotelian cosmology is driven by purpose – Telos. Aristotle actually calls this the final cause. A cause being a fundamental that brings something into being. The final cause is the end, the telos. And here meaning or form that constitutes the entire universe and everything that is in it comes to fulfilment. This being evident in Aristotle’s metaphysical biology.

This is the basis for Aristotelian ethics. Ethics is the science that brings the Human as rational animal to its fulfilment, its telos.

This purpose is “happiness” – *Eudaimonia*. But for Aristotle, unlike the Modern, happiness is not primarily a psychological state but a state of activity that realizes fulfilment. Indeed one may even ask (as Aristotle does) whether one can realize happiness after death.

The activities of soul that is to say the activities proper to human beings as living and rational beings that so bring about telos that is happiness are called virtues.

Virtues are thus the activities that bring about human “good”. Please note that while it is indeed metaphysical as in a constituting feature of life and existence itself in the Aristotelian

scheme it is never abstract. Good is practical and functional. It is brought about through the praxis of the virtues that realize that state of activity called happiness.

Here Aristotle makes an assertion that I find quite astonishing. Aristotle says that virtues are not natural. I find this to be a, well, shocking departure from an ancient idea. For Plato this is all about metaphysical memory. In the Bhagavad Gita what may be termed virtue is similarly metaphysically hardwired even as it unfolds in the material gunas or qualities. In Yoruba the *Ori* or one's ancestral metaphysical centre descends with such ethical orientation and the Orisha themselves are constituting virtue archetypes.

But for Aristotle while the capacity for virtue is natural, virtue is not naturally inherent, spontaneous or remembered. Virtue is learnt. Thus is Aristotle one of the key architects of what we would now call "education theory" as he proposes what appears to be a revolutionary theory of action. Virtue is learned activity. This learning takes place in a structured community – the polis – a structured political community. Being a "good" human being is a learned structured social practice akin to mastering a musical instrument or a craft.

The craft of human goodness is called "ethics". It is grounded in the social and finds its highpoint in intellectual contemplation. However the end of ethics is politics, political articulation, that is to say the structuring of human community. For Aristotle "Man" is the political animal. But the structure is hierarchical and those oppressed like slaves and women are not citizens.

Aquinas takes up and continues the Aristotelian ethical project. For him the telos of human action, ethics, the virtues, is God Himself. Here along with the natural he takes up three specifically Christian virtues as "theological" – Faith, hope love. These relate directly to God and realize union with God. The focus of Aristotelian intellectual contemplation is the Vision of the Divine. Here the originally natural realm of human action achieves its supernatural end through Divine grace. Hence Christian living that carries one to its telos – God – is itself an exercise of the virtues.

Aquinas as a Christian also holds that ethics is a matter of praxis. It is not a merely theoretical enquiry but it is about living well. Here the Christian outlook neatly coincides with Aristotle's own position. Ethics is a practical science.

Indeed while ethics as praxis does involve theoretical reasoning it is not reducible to modes of analysis. And such knowledge may even precede the analysis. Aristotle in defining the ethical project says it is how a virtuous man acts. This means to say that we do not only reason prior to acting and then implement what we reason. Ethical reasoning also emerges out of the praxis of ethical action itself.

Aquinas has a term for this – conaturality. The virtuous human being knows how to act virtuously because he or she is a virtuous human being. Thus the very exercise of virtue has a teaching function. Just as an accomplished musician can play a melody without prior reflective study, or without intellectual analysis a master sculptor can tell on viewing a work of art whether it is well crafted or poor. This is because an artist or musician is "conatured" with her craft. Remember, human action is itself a craft.

There is a particular virtue that speaks to the specific implementation of any and all virtue. It is one of the ancient Greek cardinal virtues, cardinal because they are necessary for virtue as such. This virtue whose concern and aim is the specific implementation of the virtues is (in Greek) called "*phronesis*". In English this is translated as the word "prudence". Yet this word connotes a timidity that is its very opposite as *phronesis* is the virtue of "practical action".

Without *phronesis* there is no virtue. One may have a thorough theoretical knowledge of justice, courage or love but if we do not know how to act justly, courageously or lovingly in a specific situation then these virtues are absent. *Phronesis* then applies the virtues to specific situations. It thus has two aspects. First, it is able to discern (through analysis and conaturality) what is the virtuous act in a given situation. Second, it leads one to so act! Aquinas states that one may take as long as is necessary to discern the proper course of action but having done so one must act. To hesitate is to sin.

Here is a wider understanding of rationality than that of reductionistic Modern rationalism. Indeed Aristotle's insight into the rational, materially specific and practical nature of ethical science goes back to the old wisdom tradition. As we are seeing with virtue Aquinas himself draws on the old animist cosmology for an ethical framework.

This is articulated as the "Natural Law" that in Greek philosophy passes through Stoicism. Here is the fluid fiery vital rationality, the immanent *logos* constituting Cosmos.

We may point out his first two steps that have implications for this our discussion of the Christian problematic.

For his first rational principle of Natural Law Aquinas gives an Aristotelian formulation – Good is to be done and evil avoided. A first principle is a given that is not open to discursive critique. So is it then "irrational"? An important question because this is the basis of rational ethical discussion so if it is then ethical rationality is itself irrational. The principle posits that there is a rational order in the universe that human beings may know. Rationality itself primordially tells us that there is good that we ought to seek and evil that ought to be avoided. Teleology is thus hardwired into human reason itself.

Good, as telos, is that which realizes our nature. There is another key assumption Aquinas is making that we will discuss in the next step.

Finally this first principle is "formal". It tells us to seek good but in itself it does not give us ethical content. This awaits the second step that flows from this open view of human rationality.

Aquinas says that there are fundamental natural orientations that provide the basis for the goods that are actually to be sought and the evils avoided. These concern the preservation of human life, sexuality and offspring, the truth of God, seeking the truth, and living in society.

We can arrive at these as general orientations through consideration of reality itself and how it works. Note we have not as yet arrived at specific "commandments" or injunctions of the Natural Law. These are further steps as are the clearer defining of the specific goods sought by the virtues. We note two points. First, Aquinas' approach is more flexible than that of his later commentators. Second he points out that this becomes more difficult as we move to greater specificity. He is thus aware of Aristotle's warning that we do not expect from a science greater exactitude than what it is designed to deliver.

We now engage a critique that applies to both these steps. Namely, is not Aquinas making huge and untenable assumptions concerning human nature itself? That it remains basically oriented to good which human reason may discern and go a far way in its pursuit. That it may even discern and pursue these primary orientations that as it were constitute the content of human ethics.

In terms of the Christian problematic we are back to original sin.

Beneath the “faith alone” controversy, church corruption, debased scholasticism power politics and good old fashioned hierarchical oppression, it can be argued that the substantive theological issue in the Reformation is precisely this Thomistic view of human nature. Following Augustine (Luther was an Augustinian monk) the Reformers held a rather negative view of human nature, reason and will that formed the basis for such positions as “faith alone” and “irresistible grace”.

Here the classical Protestant impulse is to hold such things apart... faith vs works... grace against nature. While the Catholic seeks synthesis... faith and works... grace perfects nature...

It is thus a question of one’s “anthropology”. Beyond the Reformation this question bedevils Western Christianity as a whole (this in the different meanings of what is “West”). The ongoing debate between Augustine and Aquinas. The latter affirming this inherent positive orientation of human nature and rationality.

It is evident today in debates concerning Christianity and culture (examine for instance the views expressed about Carnival in our context) as well as the goings on of religious fundamentalists.

The point is not whether the doctrine of original sin is true or false. Indeed in strict philosophical terms it is compatible with an animist worldview. We do not come into this world in perfect alignment or harmony with the universe. And such “original misalignment” is not external but ontological and genealogically rooted, our very being is defined by this. However the rectification in animist terms is no imposition on the natural as the Divine is at the centre of nature. Moreover there is no reification into a fixed immutable “sinful human nature”.

The problem with original sin particularly in its harsher Augustinian understanding is that it readily casts forth a world where humanity is viewed as naturally radically corrupt, the world as a whole is fallen and in hopeless bondage. And there is here set up a radical unbridgeable dualism between the saved and the damned. Between God and nature itself. This blossoms in key aspects of Protestantism.

The word for such worldview is “Manichaeism”.

I further assert that such anthropological Manichaeism is at the very root of the bereft individual of modernity.

And the exclusivist ideology of the saved and chosen readily legitimizes the colonial project.

### *Hinduism and Buddhism.*

Hinduism, like Christianity, pulls together a range of orientations.

It is rooted in the animist worldview. And it takes on pronounced liberationist concerns.

This is how it unfolds in the “South Caribbean”. Communal, village-based and elemental. A people seeking this natural alignment. This radical concern for animist alignment is revealed in the divinatory astrological system and practice called here “*patra*”. Giving guidance in mapping out one’s life path. Such patterning frames one’s religious devotion.

Socially it is structured around an extended family that is both profoundly community oriented and hierarchical. Patriarchal and matrifocal, vitally centred in the Mother.



There are afterlife rituals culture-wide, India, Africa, China, ancient Greece (remember the coins for Charon the boatman) and so forth, this is also found in monotheism very notable in the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. A key concern is the journey of the departed to the ancestral realm. This involves the traditional insight in the foundational nature of this realm.

In our South Caribbean context this is very clearly worked out in traditional Hinduism. The rituals for the journey of the *jiva* are intricate and exact, it involves the *patra* and if not done properly it can have dangerous even deadly consequences. Such as that matter of “*Panchak*” where if death occurs at an astrologically inauspicious time five more related deaths may take place if the proper rituals are not performed. In such times of transition the membrane separating the worlds becomes thin.

Death ritual reveals the critical nature of the ancestral realm in the animist worldview. Alignment here brings about healthy community. Misalignment results in chaos.

There is here the Hindu understanding of this journey and eventual re-incarnation of the *jiva* – not the Western “soul” – the *jiva* is a centre of consciousness and matter/energy that is woven into the continuity and entanglement that is the universe itself even as it seeks to realize its Divine essence.

Hinduism and Buddhism share this concern for liberation. In this regard these “liberationist” faiths have similar problematic concerns with the “salvationist” Judaism, Islam and Christianity. There is this sense that the phenomenal world as it shows itself involves bondage. For Hinduism before one achieves such liberation one needs to first experience material existence in its fullness. This includes, pleasure (*kama*), wealth and success, and Dharma. Indeed in Buddhism and Hinduism there is this sense and insight that one is to experience the different aspects of life in the universe not only human.

Dharma means right action in this life. It means literally – that which sustains. It sustains community and Cosmos. In our South Caribbean reality this has involved sustaining, family and village as well as the embracing “Hindu Dharma”. One’s action therefore actualizes the animistic principle that constitutes reality in its fullness.

Dharma discloses one’s role that so sustains community. This is one’s occupation – *jati*. However this has become fixed and fossilized in the rigid *varna* (so-called caste) system that has here been superimposed. It is an orthodoxy spelt out in the text of the *Manu Smriti*. Here *varna* and gender roles have been oppressively fixed in the hierarchical patriarchal structure. This with dominant male sky gods. Let it be noted that this is significantly less rigid in our part of the world.

But we must be wary speaking generally about Hinduism as this so-called religion functions as an umbrella for a range of paths and schools. So in our landscape there is the mainstream “Sanatanism” with its complex of rituals, deities (male and female), murties and texts etc., as well as coming out of a Reformist impulse in India a movement – the Arya Samaj – that has advocated the return to a strictly Vedic path involving acknowledging the Divine as revealed in Fire. Indeed at present there is manifest in India, across the Diaspora and beyond, a range, perhaps a bewildering range, of groups, movements, spiritualities, organizations and gurus.

Hinduism presents different paths that may lead to liberation. There is ritual action – karma – that is religious, social and political. As we have seen the Mimamsa school has paid attention to this. There is devotion – bhakti. This is derived from very powerful movements that swept India. Put in present-day terms this involves devotion and focus on a particular aspect of the Divine. In

this profound spirit of love one realizes union with God/ess, the Source of all. There is meditation and knowledge in this is revealed the need for ontological insight and sight into the centre of reality. This as practical actualization.

This concern for authentic knowledge and liberation from ignorance is at the centre of Vedanta which has been the dominant philosophical school of Hinduism. Maya is this delusion of not seeing the world as it really is, the Primal Source and Foundation – Brahman. It is the failure to see through the conditional nature of one's manifest self, the *jiva*, and see it for what it really is, primordial Consciousness – Atman. Thus when one arrives at such “knowledge” (*jnana*) one achieves Moksha or liberation.

Yoga postulates a practical embodied discipline for such realization of liberative knowledge.

In practice the path to liberation is seen to unfold over cycles of re-incarnation – departure and return – *samsara*.

Buddhism reveals a similar point of departure.

One's state in this life is one of a delusional entanglement in the phenomenal world. This entanglement brings suffering – dukkha. But suffering can be overcome by the eightfold path that involves non-violence to all life – ahimsa – and proper mindfulness and concentration.

What here is the nature of reality? The phenomenal world is one of matter-energy causality and entanglement that brings suffering. But there is no Western separation of subjective and objective. Thus this objective entanglement involving our very engagement in phenomenal reality through the senses is radically subjective, it is the condition of the self itself. Indeed, in apparent contradiction to Vedanta, this entangling construct actually constitutes the self. Entangled consciousness is a knot that continues after bodily death and once again congeals bounded materiality around it in a next body. Thus the path of liberation involves disentangling the knot of consciousness itself. This reveals liberation, nirvana, as the “non-self” – anatman.

What of this “anatman”? Is it absolute reality? Is it the Void? One approach to Buddhism turns to the path of negation. Indeed here both being and non-being, negation itself, may be negated as well as affirmed. We are once again in the realm beyond language.

But in may be noted in viewing reality in terms of such vital energy Buddhism is itself rooted in the animist worldview. Such is as well the religious worldview of the different Buddhist peoples that take on board such traditional ancestral animist practices.

There are animist aspects of Hinduism focussed on the Feminine. It ought to be noted that what is termed “Hinduism” emerges out of the encounter, engagement and entanglement of its Aryan and Dravidian strands. The former that dominates Hinduism's “Grand Narrative” is quite patriarchal and hierarchical. In the Dravidian the old animism of the Goddess is strong. So in the South and East of India there is profound worship of the Goddess. There are approaches to bhakti that so pay homage to the Feminine Divine.

In our own context this is pivotally disclosed in the ritual of Kali puja. Here the Shakti, the female principle of energy of the Cosmos is sought to address very practical often urgent issues. Revealed here in our space is the animist problematic that focuses on the tangible the immediate. Kali puja has unfolded as an umbrella for such elemental practices as engaging of the female energies of the water and the “Masters” (that address such practical concerns) Munesh Baba,

Bhairo Baba and Dee Baba the Landmaster, the firepass (involving walking on burning coals and so forth) etc. this along with Goddess worship revolving around Kali herself that includes the very raising of Shakti in spirit possession. Moreover the roots of this Goddess worship is to be traced to the old spirituality of India preceding the establishing of “standard” Hinduism.

So Hinduism indeed acknowledges this originary place of the Divine Mother. We’ll get to her.

*Some thoughts.*

In these range of problematics we may view the Cosmos as a dancing continuity of energy on the one hand and as constituted in the relation of persons on the other. Do they contradict or complement? Do they intersect?

Scriptures not only outline the problematic but articulate occurrence. They are here understood as the very creative, actualizing vibrations that constitute the animist Cosmos, the creative and salvific Word of God. The Koran in Islam represents the very perfection of the God of whom it is the Word.

It is this very Word that constitutes community even as the Word is here constituted. Birthing the Myth that births.

The path of praxis and ethics.

Is this focussed on other worldly salvation, bringing about the Kingdom, maintaining harmony/order, actualizing oneself and one’s community through virtue, travelling well in the spirit world, returning to the ancestral ground and the First Source...? The different problematics reveal different foci, thus even within a single tradition one finds different approaches. But the range of approaches can learn from each other.

Similarly with death.

We have been encountering but do need to give some focus on “death”. As should be clear this is understood and so articulated in the range of problematics, the telos purpose fulfilment of life, living on through posterity, going to heaven or hell, return to the ancestors, to home, the Source, views of re-incarnation or resurrection. Of course a specific tradition may again have more than one perspective.

Death becomes a troubling issue in the secular world of the Modern age where the horizon of meaning has shrunk. Indeed in our time death has been described as the new taboo, replacing sex.

But the French Christian existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel suggests death ought not be viewed as a problem at all but a mystery, not to be solved but entered into. Perhaps the Mystery is best to be engaged in our own space.

The problematic we accept defines how we see people – Are they basically good or bad? How we interpret political events, natural disasters or in our own daily life the incidents we encounter

– Are we out of alignment with the universe? Is it God’s will, Divine punishment or blessings? Human sinfulness? Karma? Demons?

We come to the experience and understanding of Evil.

Of course in our time we understand the happenings that involve and befall us in terms of science and psychology or chance etc. We call in doctors or “shrinks” or engineers or sociologists... academics or scientists etc. This brings us to the Modern problematic.

## VIII. The Modern Problematic – God Becomes a Problem

Philosophically we may say that modernity departs from the idea of the person rendered the individual. The individual however is a fracture. In contrast to the person it is not defined in terms of relation but in terms of a being-unto-itself.

The rise of modernity is evident in the Renaissance. This was an affirmation of human creativity, learning, art etc. It also involved spiritual and magical exploration that at its best sought a genuine mystical elevation.

Here is as well the point of departure for the scientific method.

But it is also disclosed in the overtly dark and violent side of European history that unfolded and unfolds in colonial expansion. Hence we here are on the receiving end of modernity.

The Reformation is another pivotal point in the unfolding of the Modern. And while in the Renaissance and the first colonializing this begins in the Catholic South it is the Protestant narrative that goes on to articulate the core of modernity.

The unfolding scientific method like the Renaissance with its magic that births it moves North. And while again there continues genuine spiritual quest the “occult” or animist agenda of phenomena possessing an inherent living pattern is eventually expunged from the formalized scientific method.

Protestantism which emerges as a protest against corrupt imposed authority is culturally entangled in the rejection of the old metaphysical religious order in its totality that was once upon a time represented by Catholicism and Christendom.

Thus the “Protestant narrative” involves the rise of liberalism and the secular worldview.

Driving the process is the articulation of the individual.

The establishing of the “secular” means the displacement of the “religious” as a worldview and the invention of “religion” as a reified system, a compartment of life rather than a vital principle of life itself. This compartment is rendered increasingly marginal.

Luther rejected the Medieval synthesis and postulated the separation of spiritual and secular. Now the secular becomes the defining worldview. Luther indicates the individual standing before God by Faith, grace and Scripture alone. All that is left is for God to be removed and it is the individual who stands alone.

Yet the conundrum is similarly Paul’s as Christ is expelled from Pauline Christocentricity and we are left with the secular humanist fractured person that is this individual.

So what is termed “religion” once referred to actual peoples and cultures. But there is now only the individual and the organization he belongs to, his “religion”. Religion is thus invented in the secular – and God becomes a problem.

*A New Mythology.*

The secular may be said to begin in the scientific worldview. This framed in mechanical movement and mathematical laws. In such a secular scientific world the existence of a now reified invisible all-powerful “God” who is needed to make things happen is called seriously into question.

So there is empiricism which has been explained in terms of the Medieval notion of Ockham’s razor. We need not multiply causes unnecessarily. The simplest mechanical explanation is enough. There is “rationalism” which says we can use rigid reason and mathematics to explain how things work, to engage and understand reality.

Today we think of empiricism and rationality as two sides of the same coin. But originally they were in conflict. Here there is a parallel with what we were saying about Plato and Aristotle. Empiricism says we know through *a posteriori* observation. Rationalism by *a priori* reasoning. Isaac Newton who formalized the scientific method put them together. The objective world cleansed of all subjectivity and spirit functions in terms of empirical mechanical movement following mathematical laws. This revealed in Newton’s “Laws of Motion”.

Among the metaphysical baggage banished is “value”. Objective reality is the realm of facts and this describes the “real” world. Value is a subjective add-on.

Science is a conclusive argument against God who is now rendered an unnecessary hypothesis. And the secular world presents us with a functioning reality without reference to God. But if you still choose to believe in this “invisible man” you can join a “religion” or be nebulously “spiritual”. Marx indeed indicates that religion is some kind of escapist drug.

There are hangovers from the old religious order... God as meaning... God as the ethical... but these are once traditional understandings that in the Modern become impoverished.

It is in this context that a great deal of the discussion that one reads about concerning the existence of God takes place. This God problem has to be tackled from the viewpoints of a range of arguments for and against. Indeed it is from the point of view of this “God problem” that the traditional understandings and arguments that we have been looking at are now engaged. But like the traditional, the secular-scientific may be viewed as simply another cultural invention, a mythological lens now accepted as common sense that defines and privileges a certain perception and understanding.

Whether it was animistic grounding in the vital patterning dance of Cosmos. Israel and its similarly vital articulation of Yahweh – the I am of the ancestors – as on-going continuous presence in its life. Or the Koranic revelation constituting Islam. Or Jesus Christ at the centre of an articulated Christian cosmology. The immanent Divine or even the God of the philosophers. We are dealing with a worldview where the Divine is an ontological given in all its immediacy. It is important to understand that Aquinas’s Aristotelian oriented proofs of God are rooted in such cosmology and it is here we make sense of them as proofs.

There is an assumption that there is some value-neutral ground from which we can prove whether or not God exists. But Divinity is itself the ground. Without this ground questions of meaning, value, foundation, do not appear to make sense. There is no value-neutrality, so-called scientific neutrality really means scientific values. A secular ground.

So we are really being offered a new mythology.

Yet this new mythology stands in a certain relation to the old monotheism. As a philosopher of science (Davies)(2) points out Newton's Laws positing a universal mathematical immutable rational transcendental order appear suspiciously familiar, indeed they remind one of the old God of the philosophers.

But this is now not the old embodied worldview of relation albeit with all its hierarchies. It is the secular worldview of the stripped individual, stripped of relational "value" in its secular scientific horizon where hierarchy, power and the fixing of this individual in a bureaucratic grid is the new order.

And the supposed shift away from Newton to a random fluid quantum or relativistic mechanics still leaves one in a mathematical grid only now the chaos may be prized.

The chaos is in reality the "liberated" individual.

Yet hierarchy remains in place. This is evident in that the scientific method is a function of and really serves technological domination as does the entire social matrix itself. So at the core and foundation it is really all about power. Thus this is revealed in the nature of a capitalist system driven by dislocated power and the individual's need to fill its ownmost ontological void, to acquire... life, liberty, property, pursuit of happiness etc. And as we mentioned when we began the discussion on modernity this is the nature of colonial expansion itself.

The Modern cosmology is by nature colonizing this is precisely how the societies in our Hemisphere came into being.

### *Substituting God*

But how does God fare in this secular worldview? We have mentioned that He has become a problem. But the Modern worldview has here also thrown up what we may term "God substitutes". We have mentioned how science functions as such mythic replacement. There are other notions that have been formulated in philosophical terms that we ought to examine.

Thus the Modern mythology has its narrative... exploration, linear evolution and progress and so forth. It may even be said to have its scriptures in its texts on science, philosophy, history and social sciences etc. etc. It has its stories and its lore.

The Bible lent some of its orientations to the Modern project, linear history and eschatology which in the Modern is the supposed movement of humanity toward some liberal, secular scientific Utopia. Now history here carries a specific meaning, it is the 19<sup>th</sup> century discipline of the accumulation of supposed value-neutral "facts" to tell a story. Placed in the grid of Cartesian time and space. In reality Modern history is really itself myth making. Presenting us with this Modern Eurocentric worldview as the norm and measure. Put in racial terms it may be said to be "white supremacist" in that all of us natives are meant to cosmologically evolve into the "whiteman".

I mentioned that we are supplied with philosophical God substitutes. Now there are here some important Western philosophers whom we cannot address in detail but I urge you the student to research if you are interested in such philosophical issues and problems in modernity. Names like,

Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Hume, Hobbs, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bentham, Mill and others ... who laid out the Modern philosophical agenda.

But in the context of this course we do need to outline some of these philosophical ideas in terms of their functioning as “God substitutes” in the Modern worldview.

The philosophical frame was set by Descartes, who has been considered the Father of Modern philosophy.

His pivotal statement – *Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am. Subjectivity thus becomes a realm unto itself – the individual – this as subject is wrenched away from object. The objective is the realm of science.

But what of the individual? Can it have the ontological grounding that God once provided? Descartes interestingly enough does attempt a Platonic styled ontological argument for God in saying we limited beings can only have such an idea of God because God put it there, that subjectivity can so arrive at this idea of a good God who does not deceive. So God thus provides foundation for our knowledge. But this turns out to be untenable. As has been pointed out such Being cannot actually be thought and what we are left with is subjectivism.

The problem turns out to be not God but the dislocated individual who is no longer grounded and embodied in the traditional foundational relation. And so foundational God substitutes have to be sought. Kant speaks of a transcendental subjectivity that may articulate such transcendental norm. Spinoza speaks of an all-embracing Cosmic order. Hegel of “*geist*”, mind/spirit and posits this order and subjectivity as a principle of history.

So there is an attempt to posit some manner of transcendental or natural or historical rational principle. A principle modelled after natural science. This has been termed the “Enlightenment Project”.

At its height in the 18<sup>th</sup> century this provides the philosophical basis for “liberal democracy” and the “rights of man”. This today continues to be the global political orthodoxy. We thus encounter the very foundation of the Modern world order.

There are in this context attempted renderings of this principle of order in terms of versions of Stoicism, Deism and as “Mother Nature” etc. But the key point here is not whether the Enlightenment thinkers and those who followed them were atheists but that they were articulating this understanding of the inexorably unfolding secular world. The “God substitutes” revolving around this Enlightenment and scientific notion of order thus represent the secularization of the God idea.

But apart from the instrumental rationality of the new scientific-technological praxis and the violent political, social, economic imposition the Enlightenment Project proves to be rationally unsustainable. Indeed it rather farcically ends up in the Utilitarians with values being a matter of calculation, of counting and weighing.



*The Romantic.*

The Enlightenment Project came under challenge by the Romantic response. Indeed it meets with a devastating dismantling at the hands of Nietzsche.

But before Nietzsche we need to engage his mentor the philosopher who (for our purposes at least) is the architect of the Romantic impulse – Schopenhauer. He posits that the inner essence of reality, past the order that shows itself in rational and scientific analysis, is that of will. Will discloses the essence of nature Herself this as a realm of pure irrationality and chaos. Indeed his description approaches the monstrous.

One writer indicates that if for “nature” we substitute “woman” then Schopenhauer’s vision would be clear.(3) He articulates the core of the patriarchal suppression and demonization of the feminine. The raw feminine unleashed – will – means terror and destruction. Thus it requires patriarchal containment.

Schopenhauer thus lays bare the Manichean essence of patriarchal oppression that finds fulfilment in the Modern fracture. It is this the “raw feminine” that requires containment by the patriarchal God(s) and His substitutes. Such “containment” is key in understanding patriarchy.

Yet Nietzsche in his philosophical genius lays hold of this Schopenhauerean “will” as his own God substitute.

Nietzsche thus goes on to critique the Enlightenment (in my view correctly) in saying that the Enlightenment philosophers under the façade of “reason” are in reality engaging in will-to-power. Indeed such exercise of will is the very nature of reality. And its structure defined by “power” is thus hierarchy.

Everyone knows Nietzsche’s most famous and celebrated soundbyte – God is dead! Nietzsche means this as an analysis of the praxis of the Modern West. Western civilization has killed God. It has no more use for him in its life and functioning. But “God is dead” is not only about the God of religion, it indicates for Nietzsche the overthrow of the metaphysics of rationality. Studying the Enlightenment Nietzsche correctly realizes that its rationality has failed to give us a coherent sustainable cosmology. Nietzsche thus proposes that reason be done away with and replaced by will.

This replacement of God, rationality, traditional order and values calls for the creation of a new entity – the *Übermensch* – translated as... great... over... super... man... He functions by new tables of values based on such strength, hierarchy, will-to-power. Indeed man is a transient state of becoming between ape and *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche calls up the founding figure of Zoroastrianism called in the West “Zarathustra”. In his masterful book “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*” this prophet who gave to the West the very value-system based on “good and evil” revises his position to inaugurate a transvaluation by overthrowing the old order. This means, in the title of another book, going beyond good and evil to presenting new tables of values.

Following from Nietzsche there arises such currents as that strain of “existentialism” represented by the 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Sartre who puts existence before essence which

is to say that the natural state has no inherent meaning. It is up to human beings to so create their own meaning. And “postmodernism” which similarly “deconstructs” grand narratives of truth and meaning. One of its key exponents, Foucault, says that knowledge is really a function of power.

Interestingly enough the seeds of this is found in Descartes himself who doubts everything except individual subjectivity.

It is my own view that the Nietzschean project carries the philosophical attempt at a “God substitute” down the road to nihilism. But this is as a direct result of the failure of the Enlightenment Project to provide secular rational foundation. As Leo Strauss put it – Enlightenment leads to nihilism.

### *More substitutes*

This Enlightenment-Romantic trajectory produces certain manifestations of the God substitutes.

One is progress. This in the 19<sup>th</sup> century receives formulation as “evolution”. An idea flowing from natural science.

Humanity and human societies supposedly evolving and progressing. Of course what they are or are meant to progress into is Modern Western society. A notion at the root of the formulation of such disciplines as sociology, history and anthropology. This coupled with the vision of Nietzsche and Hume that values are artificial constructs.

When this is combined with racial ideology it means that we natives are meant to evolve into “whiteness”. And here is legitimation for the (racist) colonizing civilizing mission. Thus missionary Christianity is joined by science, secularism and now liberal democracy as indication of progress and development.

Evolution/progress as a principle at work in the natural and social world thus functions as a mythic God-substitute to explain how reality works.

But Marx gives a counter account of this evolution. Following and flipping Hegel who speaks of the “spirit/mind” of history’s dialectical progressing, Marx views this as a movement of dialectical materialism that will eventually topple the capitalist system.

One need not accept the wider philosophical frame to see the insight and truth in realizing that Modern/colonial industrial societies are hierarchically structured in terms of an inherent class conflict between the capitalists who own and control the means of production and the proletariat workers who are subject to it. In our time this class line may be in certain ways fluid but it is definitely real. Our aim then is to turn this class conflict into explicit class “warfare”.

Liberation theology draws heavily on this Marxist analysis and we will need it when we address our own context.

There is as well coming out of this Modern worldview secular re-interpretations of God in terms of ethical principle and meaning. Now of course the Divine as we have been engaging it is indeed the foundation and the meaning, “telos”, of life and existence. But in the Modern this all gets reduced to the secular with the fully embodied traditional framework drained away.

Indeed in the Modern the Aristotelian “ethical” which refers to life in its totality in a community or the Stoic view of life in accordance to the Natural Law or Logos of the Cosmos, or the Divine as this ethical Source and final cause or Lawgiver of a living community, etc. all this gets reduced to following secular rules and principles. Thus ethics becomes morality. For Aristotle and the Stoics and the Hebrew “Law Giver” etc. ethics is “positive” it being concerned with what you actually do, and even prohibitions serve this purpose. In the Modern world ethics becomes this “morality” thing. It gets to be seen in “negative” terms... what you do not do. Thus morality like religion becomes a compartment of life that need not define your life in its totality. One’s “job” which in actuality is the centre of daily living need have little or nothing to do with morality and religion which we would like to think are really important, and even these get marginalized morality indeed becoming an obstacle course. Unless you are lucky and really enjoy your “work” even the activities we really care about get consigned to “hobbies”.

In terms of Modern public discourse perhaps the key moral idea has become that of “human rights”. There is no such thing. It is a philosophical fiction like that of the “individual” on which it depends. Though as a term that signifies human dignity the phrase is important. The idea is tied to the Enlightenment Project which has collapsed philosophically and in our time is unravelling culturally (including politically) and it thus in effect becomes an imposition of the power structure. Such “human rights” are readily done away with if it does not suit this power structure as evident in such realms as business, politics and “imperial foreign policy”. One need only watch the news.

Another substitute or secular re-interpretation of God revolves around there being an inherent meaning of life and existence. This may indeed play a crucial role in the life of the relationally culturally dislocated individual. In daily existence this may take different forms. For some this may unfold in a religious institution, some say they are ethical or spiritual but not religious, some may attach themselves to various causes many praiseworthy indeed noble, some seek to be simply “good people”.

This question of meaning is the secularized “telos”.

It functions within what has in the Modern become very much the key religious/mythic understanding of the individual – psychology.

We live in the age of “psychological man”.

So the detached individual subject – the “I” – becomes its own mythic landscape. The Freudian ego is subject to the masculine moral principle – the super-ego – and that feminine reservoir of raw primal irrational cosmic energy – the id. It is also no coincidence that in rough Christian terms the poor Freudian individual (the ego) has to negotiate between God and the Devil. Jung goes the whole way introjecting the entire mythic universe into the mind. It is Frankl who sees this psychology as being driven by the quest for meaning.

But even beyond the theorists, or what these important figures indicate, is that the Modern individual is defined by this psychological “myth of the mind”. And this is of course well enunciated in popular culture, film, music, literature, cyber-space etc.

It is this bereft isolated psyche that is left to navigate these treacherous seas of meaning.

*A world come of age?*

It may be pointed out that such formative Modern currents as the Renaissance, the rise of nationalism, the printing press and the Reformation signifies the shift away from the old Ecclesiastical centre of authority.

Here we may focus on the “Protestant narrative”. The rejection of corrupt patriarchal Church authority leads to this secular reified understanding of religion as a human invention to be done away with. And we are here not even looking primarily at theology but the Modern secular as a cultural impulse and unfolding.

It is in this context that the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer gives us his own analysis of the relation of Christianity, religion and the Modern Age.

The problematic is that of the secular and linear worldview. Bonhoeffer calls it the “world come of age”

Bonhoeffer speaks of the “*Deus ex machina*”, this is the God who fills in the gaps, who meets human needs doing what we are incapable of doing. However in the world come of age there is less and less need for this God. Thus, as humanity is able to do more and more God is getting pushed to the margins.

In the starkness of the humanist world Bonhoeffer offers a more positive view of modernity but he nevertheless makes a strong point.

He calls for a “religionless Christianity”. Just as Paul did away with the Law we are now called to do away with religion as a garment that is no longer relevant. The “*Deus ex machina*” is the God of the “religious *a priori*” that is becoming less and less necessary. Thus people are happily living their lives without reference to God and religion.

Bonhoeffer points out two less than noble attempts to address this.

One is carried out by the religious who still seek to foist sin on people. “You think you’re alright but you’re a SINNER!” One is here reminded of the religious fundamentalist who comes up to you tract in hand where the first instruction is, “Confess you are a sinner!” Bonhoeffer contrasts this with the attitude of Christ who addressed people’s sins and even exposed sin but he did not seek to carry people into sin. And he did not so define them.

The second attempt comes from supposed secular psychology that nevertheless plays a religious role, in seeking to expose peoples failings by, as they say, getting the dirt on them. These are attempts to define people in terms of weakness. Bonhoeffer interestingly suggests that the critical sins to be addressed are not sins of weakness but sins of strength.

Bonhoeffer thus rejects the understanding of God as the filler of gaps. God ought not be relegated to the margins where our humanity fails. The Church ought to be in the middle of the village. God ought to be in the middle of the vigorous exercise of our humanity. Here is Christ the “man-for-others” who on the cross presents the weakness of God in the midst of our human affirmation.

Bonhoeffer engages a Protestant discourse that runs counter to religion that may indeed be quite needed in our Modern time. Not that it is always particularly helpful, one here thinks of the fundamentalists who say religion cannot save only to foist their own religion on you. However this discourse has been taken up by key 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestant thinkers who Bonhoeffer engages and critiques.

Barth agrees that religion does not speak to the Modern situation but he proposes what amounts to a positivist imposition of Revelation, of the Gospel.

Bultmann proposes that the Gospel message be “demythologized”. The Gospel as we have it contains mythic material like miracles and resurrection that cannot be sustained in the Modern world and thus needs to be removed so we may have the substantial message. Bonhoeffer says this is an “abridgement” of Christianity that he rejects. What we need is Christianity in its wholeness but free of religion.

Tillich seeks to render the secular world religious by interpreting the secular religiously yet for Bonhoeffer it is precisely religion that is the problem.

Thus what he is grappling with is this prospect of a truly “religionless Christianity” that is neither imposed, abridged and that takes the Modern world seriously on its own terms. Bonhoeffer talks of ordinary people who can find a joy in the immediacy of life without religious baggage and do not need to have this foisted upon them. How then is the Divine to be located in the immediacy of life without such baggage, without the felt need for some system of otherworldly salvation?

And perhaps we do need to be wary of religious baggage (here we may learn from the Protestant Reformers) that can be quite oppressive. Monotheist and animist spirituality may be and have been rendered oppressive religion.

Bonhoeffer indicates that Western humanism may indeed have a future and what he says may prove insightful. However, the actual Modern world we inhabit of the individual this along with its Manichean baggage has to be overcome.

And what of God/ess? We do not need an understanding of the Divine defined by human weakness and limitation. Rather we seek the Divine in our existential immediacy. It is to be Presence in the midst of the human condition in our fracture and pain but also in the glory of human agency and creativity. The “animist” Divinity is not competing with humanity. “He/She-who-is-within” is in reality creative of and revealed in human freedom and glorified in human strength.

And not only the human. It must be Ecocentred and so oriented. I propose there need be no contradiction.

Moreover while religion in the Modern frame may indeed be an instrument of oppression, and the Rastafari brethren would wholeheartedly agree, it is this very invention of “religion” that is a problem. It does not properly come to terms with the traditional vital cosmologies we have

been engaging. The vital patterns of our now intersecting spiritual traditions are not to be dismissed.

Indeed there is the “original animist” view that sees no need for salvation or liberation because we never left the garden. This is not to say that it is Utopia but it is a very real occurrence and quest, material and spiritual (there is no difference), for earthed alignment as vital immediacy.

Indeed I propose any authentic articulation of the Divine discloses such vital immediacy. Thus we turn now to the varieties of religious experience.

But the unfolding and expansion of this the Modern secular problematic has to be addressed. The present colonial West in reality represents the high-point of dominating patriarchy in all its forms of hierarchical oppression. And in our Hemisphere we cannot forget that little matter where one civilization’s exploration is other peoples’ colonization.

## IX. The Varieties of Religious Experience

### *The Idea of the Holy.*

This being the title of a classic book on the subject. God as this absolute wholly and holy other elicits a human response of awe. Of a presence that can be as terrifying as it is irresistible.

This is indeed a core experience of that which is beyond language.

Such holiness may be articulated in terms of a worldview of transcendence or immanence. Both are traditional and not necessarily contradictory. In the Modern it is strange and alien. In the traditional frame alien it is not.

There is the mystical. For the animist this is at centre the natural. Spirit shows itself as inherent to this architecture. In our range of traditions it indicates a realm profound and powerful. In Hinduism it is transcendent and immanent. And so-called “Eastern mysticism” has impacted the West. For the monotheist it is real transcendental “substance”. Yet in our time mysticism discloses Being that may seem strange, distant, ethereal or surreal. In this the Modern it may be safely tucked away in its own compartment – the mystical realm.

Then there are miracles. Again these are seen as claims, evidence concerning such alien unnatural power. But for the ancient “signs and wonders” there may be but they are not unnatural. In the animist understanding so-called “miracles” are carried out by the very natural energy of the universe flowing from its Source. In the monotheist they are the result of the Divine power of the Creator.

But “holiness” as a concept is quite monotheistic in origin or so it would appear, it is that of the wholly other transcendent God. How may it be approached from an animist perspective? This as we need not define the holy solely in terms of transcendence. Here is the Divine as awesome immanent presence as the immediacy of life – in all its beauty and terror.

Let us return to the Orisha Tradition.

The Orisha may be viewed as deities/gods or as aspects of the Divine Source immanent in nature and the human personality. Thus they are core aspects of nature or human archetypes. Ye Manja is the Sea and She is Mother. Ogun is the iron of the earth, its crafting, and the primal warrior, Shango is the thunder bolt and the King, the epitome of masculine beauty. Oshun is the river, female beauty, sensuality and fertility.

These nature-archetypes are immediately felt existential reality. They show themselves as this the very architecture of nature that constitutes the human world and personality. They are here manifestations of Divine feminine and masculine presence this as noted in all beauty and terror. They thus engage the human in its totality including our sexuality. (I once heard it said that the phrase “sexual energy” is a tautology). How can one stand before the archetypal source of feminine or masculine beauty and not be moved to the core? Is this not the essence of Divine presence itself?

We may thus speak of nature as inherently sacred. As I “joked” earlier unlike monotheists animists can readily “prove” the nature they worship exists. Of course, it is not a matter of proof at all but a certain perception, of an insight into what nature actually is. So by “perception” I really mean an engaging of all senses and sensibilities, it is epistemology that is ontology. Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling this is not only believing, it is being. The world is recognized articulated as and simply is Divine. This is its very architecture.

*Let us talk of Time.*

The West contrasts Time as temporality with Eternity. Eternity being not an infinite temporal extension but an occurring now. We suggest that the problem here is not the conception of Eternity *per se* but the contrasting. It here becomes another Western duality or binary where Time as temporality becomes the realm of inferior if not fallen if not evil matter.

The problem does not only haunt Christianity or other strands of monotheism. In Hinduism Time is the unfolding female principle. Kali. Yet in what we may term the “orthodox” view it comes to be seen as a realm of bondage or ignorance. But Hinduism at core is not dualistic. The real issue here is not with Time but with how the bounded human world experiences Time, as limitation. It is the failure to recognize the true nature of Time as disclosure of the Absolute, the totality. It is again that ignorance that fails to see rightly.

Here Hinduism discloses the animist perspective that is at its foundation. The Absolute, the occurring now is really the immanent structuring that shows itself as temporality. Eternity then ought not be viewed as timeless but “timeful”.

And this is how I believe we ought to view the Orisha. They are the occurring of the total Eternal now as the perduring structuring now that is temporality. Time and Eternity is one and the same “now” that is the Divine “I am”. In other words Time and temporality ought not be given second rate status. We experience God or the Divine as the world we live in. Time is the very now of Eternity that unfolds as the now of experienced temporal unfolding. “Past”, “present” and “future” are in reality a cultural means of describing this unfolding structure of the “now”. It also reveals that Time is structured as space. And we actually experience space temporally. In Kantian terms we may experience one as an implicate or inner intuition and the other as explicate and outer but it is one and the same.

Here is the powerful animist insight that the Divine is this living pattern. Events do not take place in time-and-space as in the Cartesian grid. Rather time-and-space is the structure of events, of the world as it shows itself. The Orisha thus show themselves as the very axes or principles of Divine immanence as it reveals itself in vital material immediacy.

We may thus speak of time-and-space as such immediate Divine occurrence and unfolding.

In the African cosmology Time is the ancestral grounding. Now it would seem clear to us that we live because the ancestors “lived”. But the ancestors do not belong to something called the “past”. The ancestors “live” as the grounding of occurring presence. Thus, in the structuring occurrence that is the oneness of Time we exist because of the ancestors and the ancestors live in the now that is our existence. Time as presence thus articulates the ancestral grounding. The



ancestors then do not belong in the past but in the foundational metaphysical grounding that gives the present as “presence”, the grounding to which we return. Thus the metaphysical structure of reality is ancestral.

### *Quest.*

The quest for Divine experience today has a range of manifestations, mysticism, miracles, affective emotional even psychedelic experience. In what was once victoriously proclaimed secular culture religious movements have very much been on the rise including so-called cults, a bewildering range of “New Age” spirituality and yoga and of course forms of religious fundamentalism – which I understand as religious ideology that is rigid and imposed and exclusionary. There is a tremendous interest in and searching after things spiritual. There is the quest for better living that may draw on mysticism and psychology. Also traditional so-called ethnic expressions are also thriving in forms healthy, unhealthy and ambiguous. A return to the “tribe”. This encompassed or at least touched by the search for what the West calls “God”.

We may also ask – Can the secular experience of absence actually be or be rendered Divine experience? The God of the Void, found in the chaos, in the emptiness? Paradoxically the apparent absence of “religion” may itself be religious. Here is raised the question of how we feel the world, how we quest for the holy and the mystical as needed dimensions.

### *Evil.*

Here we may fittingly raise the problem of Evil. Evil emerges as that which opposes good, order, relation, God, community etc. It is thus found in the range of traditions and is inherent to our human condition. Evil is indeed praxis and we shall go on to engage some of its material political reality. Also in a range of cultures it manifests as actual spiritual agents. Sometimes such agents are or are akin to the “demons” found in Christianity. Often they are ambiguous or even negative but not like the irredeemable Devil.

Hope for apokatastasis?

But in the West evil is as it were personified.

Now in the Hebrew Bible God has no opposite. So we asked, where do all these demons come from? We indicated the presence of such dualism in Zoroastrianism. And the dualism that defined what became Graeco-Roman culture. This as we have seen is inherent to the Western worldview.

In such dualism we have the Devil. Integral to the Christian cosmology he is viewed popularly as absolute evil. A “God opposite”. This Devil is at the head of a host of such evil spiritual agents – demons.

Indeed in the global Christian fundamentalism, so widespread today, the Devil (as noted) often appears to be the most feared god in the Christian pantheon.

And this is no exaggeration because here it indeed appears to be the Devil who elicits the kind of visceral terror at the very mention of his name that ought to be reserved for God. Unsurprisingly such fundamentalism exhibits extreme dualism and Manichaeism.

But evil in all its manifestations, in the range of ways that it is understood, indicates a profound aspect in the experience of reality.

Like death, evil is no mere problem it is a mystery. And in our human existence this all too readily reveals itself as the profound mystery that is suffering. Suffering is overtly experienced evil yet we propose, paradoxically, it is also a profoundly religious experience, a profound experience of what some call “God”.

For the Buddha his path to liberation is one out of a phenomenal entanglement that is ontologically suffering. In the animist, chaos is as it were inscribed in the very structuring of Cosmos as a possibility. Thus the Yoruba Ifa-Orisha Tradition speaks of the everpresent negative energies, “warriors against man”.

Yet we may find in both animism and monotheism the insight into “Absolute Good”. And that thus God has no opposite. Indeed good and evil may be understood as coming from God. So in the Hebrew Bible and Islam even evil is viewed as God’s will.

In the praxis of African spirituality that is very much an aspect of our own Caribbean and Hemispheric landscape this Absolute God is acknowledged but in practical terms good and evil are seen as being not opposites but on a “pragmatic” continuum. We can here speak of better and worse. Better carrying us in the direction away from suffering and chaos toward the very practically experienced good things of life... health, prosperity, long life, spouse and children, success etc. And in practical terms our people regardless to what tradition one belongs often engage whatever spirit or spiritual/religious mode will bring these pragmatic blessings.

#### *Two texts.*

I want us to turn to the Book of Job for a classic and insightful engagement with the problematic of suffering. We get distracted by seeing this book as “Old Testament” scripture and so fail to recognize it as one of the great and beautiful poems. Moreover let us remember that it is a Hebrew monotheist book in a wisdom movement rooted in the animist cosmology of order.

The problematic is set in the ancient Hebrew worldview we have been discussing. God is completely and utterly in charge having no opposite or counterpart. Contrary to a conventional view, in the Book of Job there is no Devil but there is “the Satan” who is among the “Sons of God”, he is one of the angels in God’s heavenly court and has an assigned role but he is merely an instrument of Divine purpose.

The Satan’s job is to patrol, observe, report and test (on behalf of God). The Satan suggests that Job’s faithfulness, goodness and obedience to God is very profitable. This in accordance with the orthodox view of an order of actions and consequences. Goodness is to be rewarded with the blessings of prosperity, posterity, health and long life. The text is at pains to point out Job’s flawless service. But the question raised counter to the orthodox view is whether obedience to God is about reaping the blessings. Are we to be good because it is profitable? It is in this context the Satan is sent by God as his agent to visit unspeakable suffering on Job.

It is widely said that Job’s suffering is a supposed lesson in patience but the Book really calls into radical question the justice of God. The Satan is one of God’s heavenly angels who is simply doing his job as an instrument of the Divine. The text makes it clear that it is God who takes full

responsibility for Job's condition (Job 2:30). What follows is a scathing attack on the orthodox notion of Divine justice. Indeed it seems like a scathing attack on God Himself.

The question asked is simple – Is God unjust? It takes for granted the theology of Divine responsibility. It confronts the orthodox position found in the Torah, notably Deuteronomic theology, the Prophets and the Wisdom movement, that God rewards the just and punishes the wicked. Well here is a man completely just in every way upon whom God inflicts unimaginable suffering. This while his friends like a chorus mindlessly repeat the orthodox position.

God rewards the just and punishes the wicked and this ought to be experienced in one's lifetime. Thus God is unjust. To make matters worse God Himself at the end of the Book says Job spoke correctly of Him (Job 42:8).

Job proclaims his innocence even swearing an oath. And he accuses God of attacking and tormenting him without just reason. He takes God to court.

The text indicates a crisis in problematic. What God does is to invite a fundamentally new vision.

God's response is through theophany, the whirlwind (Job 38:1) and the Word that reveals mystery and power. Here he asks Job questions concerning this Divine mystery and power at work and play in the Cosmos... "Where were you when I created the earth...?" (Job 38:4ff) Now God is not saying that might is right or as we say here he is not "wrong and strong". Neither is God denying that there is a Divine order in the Cosmos and the human participation in it. But he is saying that this, including the reality of suffering, all involves the Mystery that is God Himself.

We are back to the apophatic *via negativa*, God is beyond any human theology and any attempt at calculation.

Job acknowledges this Mystery that is the Divine encounter itself... "Before I knew you only by hearsay but now I have seen you with my own eyes" (Job 42:5)... encounter... relation... Being good is not an accounting exercise. Divine order, wisdom and power in nature is beyond human arithmetic. "I have seen you with my own eyes"... without such encounter we are all like Job's friends... Liars who repeat second-hand hearsay and gossip concerning God. And how good holy religious people and pastors, clerics, imams, priests, pundits, spokespersons of perhaps all religious traditions... how good we are at lying on God. We all do this when we repeat theology, platitudes and "God talk" without encountering the Mystery.

The problematic of suffering arises again in another great poem, the Hindu text the Bhagavad Gita.

The Gita seeks to bring together the different approaches to liberation in a theory of action. The warrior hero Arjuna is on the battlefield where he is contemplating the prospect of killing his family and his teachers.

So here the question is one of violence inflicted by supposedly righteous action.

Krishna, the Divine Avatar, advises Arjuna that he ought to do his Dharma, the action that sustains the world, no matter how repugnant and violent, even if it means killing his relatives and teachers.

But such action is to be done in a certain way. It is done in a spirit of bhakti that is to say love, devotion and focus on the Lord. And with true insight into and knowledge of the Absolute foundation of reality.

Such action is both focussed and unattached... not detached but non-attached. It is not cold and unemotional as many interpreters would have it. This is because Krishna teaches that action is derived from the material qualities of nature itself – the *gunas*. Thus to exist in the world is to be involved in action. Action is inscribed in the very structure and architecture of material reality. Moreover as these *gunas* are responsible for and pattern human emotion the action that they structure cannot be unemotional however through focus action can be non-attached.

Krishna in reality proposes a path to liberation very much grounded in this animist understanding of vital action that sustains community. Krishna advocates an approach to action as a vital praxis that itself flows from the pattern of Cosmos that is a manifestation of the very nature of the Divine.

Here we have noted that unlike Aristotle's rather radical dissenting view that action grounded in "habit" is not inscribed in nature itself but though rooted in natural capacity is a human articulation Krishna gives the original traditional insight that human action flowing from the *gunas* the qualities are thus inscribed in the very fabric of nature itself. For the animist vital sustaining action is essential and natural seen for instance in the Chinese *tao* or in the Orisha as nature's archetypes of human being and action. Though of course such action is to be habitually developed, it is to be crafted.

Now in the *Gita* this action is located in hierarchical structure this with its oppressive gender and caste contradictions yet it does open a possibility for liberating action, political and metaphysical.

This finds a spectacular highpoint in the terror of "theophany" (Bhagavad Gita 11:5ff). Krishna reveals to Arjuna the real nature of the Divine and its unfolding as all-consuming Time. Of this process of unfolding purpose, destruction/creation, Arjun's action is merely an instrument because his enemies are already dead (v. 33).

Here is the spectacular and terrible animist dance of possibility (also revealed in Yahweh's creation out of chaos). It is the New Creation born out of violence, out of destruction that is in reality transformation, destruction and creation being two sides of one and the same process.

And here we may put the Book of Job beside the Bhagavad Gita. Both protagonists face violent conundrums brought on by the failure of conventional theology. Arjuna enquires about action, violent and righteous. Because the old order is moribund. Action that involves the killing of relations and loved ones. Job enquires into what is being done to him, the suffering of the innocent, that contradicts the received orthodoxy. There is in both resolution through theophany, the awe-full terrible encounter with the Divine.

It is interesting to note the actual manifestation. How two cultures articulate the awe-full Divine encounter. In one the whirlwind is bound up in the absolute authoritative Divine Word. In the Gita it is the visually and experientially spectacular, the terrifying implicate vision of the destructive creative Divine Form.

Theophany in the Gita brings clarity to Arjun in his engaging of Divine pattern and purpose in his own radical praxis, dharma. Theophany in Job renders it all opaque. The universe is not only dangerous it could be outright deadly and inexplicably so. The Divine only promises presence in

all the mystery and power. And even this may be in the form of absence. We encounter the God or perhaps more appropriately the Goddess of the whirlwind, of the Void. And of course in Hinduism all-consuming and birthing Time is a Woman.

Here is our experience in what has been referred to as the “Caribbean”.

Theophany also reveals the Divine order-pattern-energy-power as transcendence and immanence.

The Bhagavad Gita stands alongside the Book of Job as perhaps the two greatest religious poems. Whereas one gives understanding into the Divine workings of the Cosmos the other says there is none. Up to now Job gets no explanation.

While indeed evil, suffering, death are real and tangible in traditional cultures there are a range of understandings that themselves cut across traditions even as they function within the different problematics. And again it calls to be addressed in our own context. The dance that is our ownmost reality.

Indeed here in the midst of violence, suffering, death, disruption we encounter our idea of the holy.

*Closing thoughts.*

But let us close this section by considering the essence of the experience of the Divine in terms of the mystical.

The great 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein says this in his famous *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* –

*The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling...*

*We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all. Of course there is then no question left, and just this is the answer.*

*The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem...*

*There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical.*

*(6.45b, .52-.5212a, .522)*

The “mystical” thus inheres in the patterning vitality that is reality itself. Thus the Divine is what shows itself in the world as a whole when we run out of words. When all answers have been given and the questions themselves vanish we encounter the Mystery.

We can say that all “orthodoxy” in so far as it is not rooted in such encounter counts as “hearsay” knowledge of the Divine. Not a matter of information not a matter of data true knowledge comes in the encounter itself. In the absence of this orthodoxies are propaganda and ideology, worse, they are lying and oppressive.

It is this the inner essence that Bonhoeffer is after in his own search for a “religionless Christianity”. And in this he presents the truest insight of the Protestant, Monastic and Platonic project. It is perhaps the oppressive superficial religious “hearsay” that secularism rightly exposes. Perhaps the Divine needs to be stripped of its present cultural trappings so It may be born again. So even as we struggle for justice as true material architecture let us seek after the God/ess of the Dark Night.

## **X. Our Context**

So let's ask some philosophy of religion questions of our own context. And to understand the approach it may help to see it in concentric circles. Beginning here in our space in Trinidad-and-Tobago, Caribbean, Latin America, the Hemisphere, universal...

The answers I give are my own. Of course here, as elsewhere, you are free to disagree.

### *The Idea of the Holy.*

Well there has certainly been in our context enough terror to go around. Not only do our different traditions have such spiritual insight, indeed a range of insights into this but the colonizers were quite adept at inflicting terror of their own often in the name of a loving God.

But is this the "holy terror" of God? It is the terror of our reality and our thesis is that it is the very immanence of our reality that articulates our culture's disclosure of the Divine. Put simply, here we encounter God.

Holiness is indeed the utter transcendence of Godhead. It is also the immanent illumination (and concealing) of the Source as the centre of this our reality in all its violent ambiguity even as we struggle toward liberating community. Such community is that which is termed "nature". It is our humanity in all its aspects, Manichean hang-ups notwithstanding this includes the sexual, here is the Holy Divine revealed.

### *Duality.*

Christianity was articulated in a field of and framed defined by duality. But let us not fall into a similar trap.

We may do this if we continue to throw around the label evil, if we naively engage in demonization of the violent structures and patterns imposed on us. Our purpose is not to demonize our world but to change it.

The violence and hierarchy imposed on us involves a morphing from distorted relation to isolation, this is the Modern worldview whose violence flows from the alienated individual.

But the reality that thus shows itself cannot be therefore dismissed as evil. The world is always better and worse than it could have been. The violence imposed is Manichee but we would be wrong to similarly define our space in Manichean terms.

Rather our space is an intersection ambiguous and rich. Here is born possibility. Indeed we do not expect to realize Utopia but we struggle toward it in this realization of possibility.

To do so we must engage all the complexities of and at the intersection.

Dualism may thus dissolve in this our creative vortex of possibility.

### *What of Scripture and Myth?*

Peoples utter the vital creative vibration/word this as poetry, narrative, reflection and so forth. The word is here constitutive of community. It is often viewed as “Scripture”. Such word is often seen as written but perhaps it is better understood as primordially uttered. As vitally fluid patterning.

The Vedas are described as *sruti* – that which is heard. The Yoruba Ifa oracle is recited. The uttering reveals creative vibration and the word itself is only sustained as it is so uttered by and in the very community it sustains. Scripture then is not text as “fossilized”.

Even when seen as written such scripture is to be communally recited/read and heard by the community as in Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim worship. If the written word is not so sustained it is only random markings on a page.

And here in our space the vibrations converge. Not only is there present the Scriptures and other related material of our intersecting traditions but we have living oral dancing vital traditions that may even be articulated as popular culture as in calypso. These our peoples traditions provide the basis for our literary practice including the work of our great Caribbean writers.

### *Evil... Violence...Death...Hell...*

There is a curious impulse in modernity this in the midst of its own fundamental violence to demonize violence. Yet our ancestors knew that the pattern and beauty of Cosmos is as it were intertwined with violence.

And here is the paradox. On the one hand evil is to be defined in terms of violence. On the other violence discloses possibility.

In our land, region and Hemisphere we well understand that violence discloses the process of transformation. That creation is the flip side of destruction. This is Krishna’s teaching in the Bhagavad Gita. It is disclosed in the Mystery of the Divine Mother Herself.

And violence has indeed defined our space fundamentally. We may describe our societies as coming into being out of unfolding systemic evil... genocide, slavery, indentureship... the overarching all defining colonialism that is the still Modern world. Here we have been on the receiving end of its violent technology. At the risk of sounding Manichean we may safely assert that our society is founded on and functions on premises of evil. Yet paradoxically this very process is our vortex of creation, creation that we may participate in bringing about.

So the question might be asked – Can violence be good? Not in itself but it is very much inherent to the process. We may even say in a real sense that in our space violence is creation.

This even as we seek to transform this violence into love.

Liberation theology engages traditional Christian just war theory in terms of possible violent revolution directed against an oppressive state. In what situation may we engage in such action? Can a political and or social and or economic situation itself be so violent and oppressive that it calls for the deployment of justified violent resistance?



But of course our understanding of violence ought not be limited to this area. Everything in our space bears the marks of violence in the way things are done, in our very language and cultural/social expressions, our movement and dance. Violence is revealed in our expression such as our alcohol consuming culture.

Then our Trinidad Carnival is such a swirling space of gloriously aesthetic violence. Seen in the warrior

stance of calypsonian or the steelband clash in days of yore. There are the traditional characters of intimidation, raw energy, elemental mud, molasses and fire... Here is the African cradle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Canboulay that creates this Carnival space that cherishes and frames the duelling “kalenda” or stickfight whose purpose has often been the “buss head” that elicits the copious flowing of blood.

Present among these Carnival characters are representations of devils. Thus we can play with the Devil and even play the Devil...

And yes our violent reality knows suffering and death... and hell. This the abode of the Devil. For us hell is not otherworldly and spiritualized but material reality the very substance of our history. This even as the Devils splash and splatter their molasses, paint, mud and whips on the road at Carnival.

We here honour the multitudes of oppressed who know the whip who through this our history of unspeakable violence struggled and continue to struggle. Here living their lives not only for personal survival but for the survival of those they love and the sustaining of community. Here we give respect and honour to our Mothers who in a fundamentally matrifocal communal pattern carry this burden. We give honour and respect to those who have struggled to keep our traditions alive. Traditions that were often banned and criminalized by the colonial oppressors. Let it be noted that such colonization may have changed in manifestation but continues intact.

Needless to say our people of this region and Hemisphere know well the mystery of innocent suffering and dying a good death. This our existential reality of violence reveals death as the very process of life.

Our pragmatic approach to good and evil also more of the “metaphysics” will be discussed below.

*A note on the secularization of evil.*

There is here an aspect of evil that perhaps needs to be further engaged. Indeed our societies in this Age have indeed been formed at its receiving end.

So we may speak of the praxis of evil, including political praxis. And it is indeed astounding the monstrous acts “religious man” was capable of, wars, infanticide, genocide, the oppression of the marginalized etc.

However such praxis is now framed in the Modern and such evil is here thriving this in the face of modernity’s claims of “progress”.

So here is the Modern secularization of evil. Sad to say we know this well and the list goes on and on... the shocking acts of criminality and psycho pathology, war and terrorism, capitalist plunder, social dislocation, disease, famine... and of course ongoing imperial domination...

Such modernization may even be religious as in Jihad, versions of Hindutva or the imperialist slaughter of supposed Islamic evil doers in part propelled by Christian religious fundamentalism. We note the rise of rigid religious fundamentalisms in various traditions. In particular the ongoing deployment of Christianity as a colonizing tool of Empire. Here American “born againism” in its disruption of our peoples’ ancestral cultural fabric represents an old imperialist tradition.

There is the destructive nature of technology that frames the capitalist machine, the dehumanization of living in such a society, ecological exploitation and annihilation, nuclear weapons...

Our present day Caribbean was created by these processes. This revealed in colonization, genocide, slavery, indentureship, industrialization, globalization and so forth.

Here is the basis of our bankrupt political system and in today’s Trinidad we know well the chaos caused by capitalism the destruction of community, criminality, Americanization (including its alienating religion) etc.

And of course we know well this banality of evil in our very constituting bureaucracy and the technology that structures our society.

In this frame us natives are othered as the Cartesian objects that will actually benefit from subjugation, we embody the violent chaotic will of Schpoenhauer... exotic, different, dangerous if not outright evil... savages or children in need of the Christianizing and civilizing that is the whiteman’s burden... This framed of course by the Western exclusivist vision of reality.

Revealed in all this are dimensions of the “problem of evil” that require engaging. And a question arises – Is modernity evil?

Perhaps evil is not so secular after all.

### *On humanism and the ecocentric*

The monotheist traditions possess this understanding of what may be termed human privilege. “Man” is created in God’s image and likeness. And there is the Greek philosophical view fully articulated by Aristotle of Man being the “rational” animal. Here then is a disclosure of Western humanism. Indeed profound humanist orientations are to be found in Africa, India and China. For instance in Hinduism the human body is a critical bridge to achieve *moksha*.

However in these traditions the understanding is different. The defining Western humanism is anthropocentric (and androcentric). We can in general fairly describe the cosmologies of animist and animist oriented peoples as “ecocentric”. Here there is no understanding of “human privilege”. It may thus be questioned whether the term “humanism” is appropriate at all.

So when one speaks of traditional “African humanism” the understanding is quite different. There is no human privilege, no exclusive *imago Dei*. Yes the Divine is at the centre of the human as it is of everything else (the animist insight). Human beings inhabit a Cosmos where everything is alive vital and intelligent, there is no Western separation of animate and inanimate. Thus, the humanism of the so-called religious system is to here enable humans to navigate this Cosmos that

is so full of beauty and danger. This so they may achieve the beneficial results of authentic relation or alignment.

### *The Body*

So what of our hemispheric body? We are a radically embodied people.

The West has placed this as distinct and all too often in opposition to the realm of spirit, soul, mind. In Hinduism we detect different perspectives. Here the material realm is viewed vitally as energy. In Vedanta the body as all matter is ultimately immutable spirit a manifestation of *Brahman*. There is also the above mentioned insight that the body is a bridge to liberation, to be human means having a human body that may so realize “Self”.

Our Hemispheric body is at the intersection of all our traditions. In addition we mention the African and First Nation animist insight of material vitality here there is a celebration of embodiment. Our Hemispheric body is itself the intersection of all these ancestral strands in the field of modernity in our living space. Tradition itself continues and is sustained in the embodied community. This is so in all the violence and fracture.

And how well we know the fracture. The pain, brokenness, disruption that is our material unfolding... colonization, genocide, enslavement, indentureship, fake independence, capitalism, the entire bureaucratic technological complex and so forth... All the violence inscribed in the very patterning intersecting ancestral vitality that are our living bodies, our struggling unfolding communal possibility.

This embodiment is disclosed in our material topography, in the relation that is our total landscape, our grounding in Mother Earth and Sea, our communion in all life and the elements. This the very structure of our space represents not a disembodied consciousness rather this space in its fullness is a radically embodied architecture and materially unfolding possibility. Thus we do not accept the domination and colonization of matter by spirit.

Here is the vital Spirit of our People. Here is our living body articulating our dancing possibility.

### *Leela... work... obeah...*

The fluid patterning body is thus the dance-play-obeah that is Cosmos itself.

This the Divine process of creation is work and play, crafting and dance.

The play of the Goddess is the dance that is Cosmos – Leela.

And as this the dancing feminine explodes in mad chaotic creativity the very foundations tremble.

This is the living patterning of our community. It is our actualizing ritual that discloses such pattern as tangibly real – obeah.

In our space obeah is disclosed as spiritual work – “wuk”. “Obeah” this in all its dreadful meanings is our people’s creative crafting ritual energy.

Such “hard wuk” also speaks to our people’s reality of enforced labour, toil, oppression, struggle.

Such terminology may also refer to sex – putting down wuk. Or the sexual dancing gyrating we call – wining.

Work is thus our pain-full fractured vital chaotic creative dancing play where we create ourselves.

In Trinidadian culture it is this that similarly explodes in Carnival.

The mad dance of Kali.

Here is the living vital vibration that is creative Word. What some term “scripture”. This disclosed in our very dancing crafting that is community. Word is always this lived praxis of community or else it would be random noise or markings on a page.

Yet the “mad dance” is relation.

### *Continuity and Relation.*

Leela articulates the animist continuity energy-consciousness, vital patterning. We propose that such continuity is relation.

Relation discloses such continuity as the unity of “specificities”.

Here we draw on the monotheist insight. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber understands the God of Israel as the “Eternal You”. This is the transcendent immanently involved “Other”. Israel’s relation with this Other is the Covenant. It is the very relation articulated in the community of “you” the embodied unity of the People of Israel Herself.

Greek philosophy also wrestles with specificity. Showing itself in its very comportment of othering reality in its dialectical analytical engagement.

Platonic “form” is demarcated specificity showing itself in continuity. Plato’s soul discloses such specificity continuing from body to body even as it orbits – as do all the forms – the Primary “Form of the Good”. This akin to the monotheist God. Are the soul and forms to be here absorbed?

Aristotle’s hylomorphism discloses form as disclosed in material specificity. Yet this mysterious specificity of matter cannot be defined.

It was up to the Christian philosophers (as we saw) at the intersection of Semitic monotheism and Greek philosophy to properly articulate specificity as individuating subsistence – person.

But this “individuating subsistence” becomes the fractured individual. But we may have to contradict ourselves and describe the individual not as an emergence from person but as a changeling. This as the mystical “spiritualized” Platonic soul becomes the disembodied Cartesian mind. For whom God becomes a problem.

But in our own intersection in our ownmost Hemispheric space we may articulate person as vital relation, liberated from the imperialist cosmology of individual fracture, freed from hierarchical oppression. Relation disclosed as the original animist continuity. Person itself the play the dance the leela of the One that is community.

Our Peoplehood.

This is Leela the patterning unfolding that is Time Herself.

### *Time and Eternity.*

We have received from our traditions the ancestral insight into the oneness of Time. This the understanding that Time returns to the Source. Thus mystical Eternity is historical temporality in its materiality.

From our spiritual traditions we learn that Eternity is inherent to temporality itself. Moreover from our First Peoples as well as the Hindu and African traditions we understand that the ancestral Divine metaphysical foundation is “timeful” material occurrence. So this the happening moment that is our immediate material livity is so grounded in Eternity that is the fullness of Time.

So what of the understanding of myth and history? There is Modern critical history that fits events into the Cartesian grid. And there is “our history”. Here as we live the fullness of Time where our traditions intersect the insight, truth and power of our mythologies may come to life. Thus may our history be the telling of the liberative myth.

Thus it is the liberative understanding of history. I propose that Eternity reveals the very structure of Time. Time is a perduring continuing structuring instant, it is presence, an ever occurring NOW.

This the *Kairos* moment where the liberating God of history is revealed. Goddess revealed in the messiness of history. What do we understand by *Kairos*?

The Greek New Testament uses this word instead of the standard Greek word for Time “*Chronos*”. *Kairos* seeks to render an ancestral Hebrew understanding. Time as ongoing occurrence... present continuous... revealing the Divine Name and Essence.

Yes, the Divine defines its very Essence in terms of Time!

In Christianity this is the eschatological moment revealed in and revealing the Christ that fulfils, not abolishes, Time. Yet this moment is occurring presence.

This does not eliminate the Total metaphysics of Time and Eternity that our intersecting traditions teach. On the contrary it is here revealed.

I am/I will be. The Divine’s very Name its very essence is that presence which is with us. The God who is revealed as the very structure of history, that is vital presence that is occurring life. Thus we cannot speak of a God that is outside vital patterning materiality. As Aquinas teaches Divine simplicity is all or nothing and this is the ALL.

Hence the real question is – God.

### *Beauty.*

What do we mean by “beauty”? Remember the visual is a very Greek and Western sense. As “seen” in art and in philosophy concerned with “form”. That which is visualized. Hence the resurrected messiah who appeared and showed himself (1 Corinthians 15:5ff) becomes key in the Hellenization of the Gospel and the articulation of Western Christianity as the very word

“Christianity” implies – Christocentricity. The visualized resurrected Lord connected first to the Hellenized Jews and then to the Greeks in a culture where lords and gods abounded (1Corinthians 8:5). Thus the Divine itself comes to be understood in such terms, as in “Beatific Vision”.

This focus on the visual is to have fateful consequences for a modernity that articulates and is defined by the printing press.

Metaphysically Christianity understands beauty in all its visual meanings as a transcendental characteristic of God Himself ... like Truth. And we may mount aesthetic arguments for the existence of God. Phenomenologically we engage beauty along with truth, value, love, meaning... as inherent in the very architecture of reality. They would be meaningless if there were not anchored in and derived from some manner of metaphysical reality that has been referred to as God.

This is very much the texture of our Caribbean and Hemispheric reality. We do phenomenologically engage and realize this total metaphysical architecture that includes beauty. It comes alive in the cultural intersecting nature of our space. Yet for us beauty is not primarily visual as it has been generally in the West. Rather in our intersection it engages the full range of our senses and indeed our totality. Of course various specific strands/spaces have various emphases but we do need to note this all-embracing engagement and realization. We may say that ours is not the exclusive fixation with the visual.

In this intersection this as it were multi-sensuous engagement is evident in our First Peoples. It is evident as well in our African and Indian traditions this as a textural engagement and an implicate visuality. And here the intersecting is key as it permits us to draw on insight from a range of traditions and explore beauty in manifold ways. And so define a rich multidimensional encounter with the Divine.

Our aesthetic pulses in the creativity of our people in our re-creation of our very reality through the chaos of our history. In our traditions this aesthetic is “danced”.

This aesthetic explodes in our Music, spirituality religiosity, in sport... our re-constituted broad familial relations and social expressions such as the rich range of relational communal activities covered by the Trinidadian term “lime”. The aesthetic actually inheres in the architectural re-articulation of community.

In Trinidad this is notably revealed in Carnival.

We have already here spoken of this in relation to the kalenda or stickfight. Here the beauty and violence of our spiritual energy is revealed in its driving drumming, music and dance. This achieving a certain climax in the space of the gayelle as zone of combat and blood-letting. Aesthetically arresting and yes... beautiful.

Thus for us beauty is “felt”.

### *Our mythic response.*

This aesthetic reveals our own architecture of relation and spirit that represents our response to Modern Western secular cosmology, scientific-technological mythology, the dominating liberal democratic political capitalist system. Although we are violently fixed in this colonizing enframing we affirm our intersecting ancestral cosmologies – obeah – as space thick with spirits. Alive with

Spirit. And even here we may assimilate what is good in our oppressor's magic. Even here all may intersect and find a home. As our own Aime Cesaire put it – there is room for all at the *rendezvous* of victory.

## **XI. People's Piety**

### *Intersection.*

Juxtaposing and colliding cosmologies are framed by the secular state. Yet this secularism is the imperialistic imposed cosmology.

They like to call this “pluralism”. The discourse of pluralism being the Western notion of irreducible difference akin to its individual.

How does this relate to our space?

What there is, is intersection.

Intersection – here everything we have been discussing in this course flows into and is present in our context in Trinidad and Tobago, into the Caribbean, the Hemisphere. So I need not repeat myself.

In our Hemisphere there is our foundational First People animism but this met with the colonizing Christian religious imposition.

So there is the discussion on “popular piety”. The Church and people’s popular piety that here comes up particularly in the Catholic setting.

On the one hand there is the formalized official practice of the “Church hierarchical” on the other there are practices articulated, formulated and carried out by the masses of people. From the point of view of officialdom some of this popular practice is orthodox, some ambiguous and some aspects outright syncretic... or worse .

Now a fundamental problem is the above mentioned positioning of the official Church. The orthodox hierarchical structure comes hardwired to the very structures of historical ongoing imposition and colonization.

This as masculine dominates and Spirit colonizes matter.

Western Christianity to find its proper place in the intersection must address and in a real sense renounce its historical trajectory and this it has refused to do. Of course we can all learn from the Christian message even as it needs to learn from the range of traditions. Better yet let us all realize that we are in this together.

We will say “People’s piety”. And this does not only refer to a set of marginalized practices but the entire intersecting cosmology that is our space this as it is engaged, negotiated, articulated and defined by our People.

It is our earthed spirituality that constitutes our community and indeed reveals and constitutes “our God”. We will hopefully plunge more fully into the philosophy in our final chapter but let us here take a look at some of the patterns and expressions.

These expressions may carry certain official labels like “Christian”... “Hindu”... “Muslim”... “African Traditional”... “Amerindian”... or they may not... and then words like “syncretism” are thrown around... but we propose that they may all be viewed as the constituting patterning of a unitive and diverse architecture that is the intersection. Our intersection.

There is an extensive range of Hindu and “folk Indian” religious practice including chanting and dramatization of the myths, healing, astrology, offerings (even blood offering like to “Dee”



the Land Master before building), spirit possession etc. Some of this earthed practice now comes under the umbrella of the worship of the Mother Goddess Kali (this includes blood sacrifice). Here there is intersection and sharing with African spiritual expression. In all this we may see the specific enunciation of a living “Caribbean Hinduism”.

It has often been the case that African and First Peoples spirituality intersect with and has often been suppressed by the imposed structurally dominant Christianity. Nevertheless these traditional ancestral patterns express themselves through the colonial imposed forms. Even as all the traditions intersect with each other.

There is First People articulation through the old Spanish Catholicism. This is very much the case in Latin America. Trinidad, where Catholicism has been religiously structurally dominant, participates in this complex. Here there is the devotion to and Festival of Santa Rosa in the town of Arima that is the major centre of recognized Indigenous presence in the island. This is also evident in the Trinidadian religious-based Christmas music of *parang* that is sang in Spanish.

The same with African spirituality. Here the Catholic cluster of, elements, symbols, ritual may channel “*obeah*” the vital and at times dreadful energy of the universe. Our people have made use of Catholic prayers and devotions, like novenas, calling on the Saints, holy water, candles, even the Mass itself to access and channel this energy in a decisively African worldview.

Both African and Indigenous have so engaged Catholicism. And of course each other.

#### *Rites of passage and spiritual unfoldings.*

There are rites of passage.

One such involves naming ceremonies for the new born, initiating the child into the community. This takes place in Hinduism, Islam, Traditional African and Christianity. But because Christianity and African spirituality is often enmeshed the “christening” is an articulation of the African naming ceremony and communal receiving of the child. We note a First Peoples presence as well in this and other “folk Catholic” expression.

Ritual and practice concerning death is key in such communal rites of passage. In our landscape the nexus with the ancestors, the proper elevation of the dead so they may find their proper place in this ancestral realm and bring benefits to the community is present in African Traditional Spirituality, Hinduism as well as Catholicism.

In the intersection African spirituality accesses Christian especially Catholic practice to so elevate the dead and seek blessings as in the observance of All Saints and All Souls, utilizing devotions and the Mass. In Trinidad there is a definable shared Afro-Indo “folk” spiritual space and death rituals are prominent from the complex rites of Hinduism to Afro and Afro oriented wake and related rituals, nine days, forty days and one year observance. These patternings are widely shared in the intersection. Such African rituals relating to the dead are to be found throughout the Caribbean.

African rituals for the dead involving music, song and dance have been key cultural forms such as the bongo, *saraka*/nation dance and *bele/belair*, the reel and so forth, this with drumming and beating of bamboo. These have played a pivotal role in defining the total culture space.

Disclosed here is a comprehensive space of spirit, dance, vibration, music, embodied movement, ritual, a complex that defines the folk communal traditions. This disclosed, for instance, in the offering of rum for the spirits and in stickfighting with its vital music and movement.

In Trinidad, such traditions feed into the African articulation of Canboulay unfolding on the street this the pivot that goes on to redefine and reconstitute the received French Carnival articulating the present Trinidadian phenomenon. Carnival is here disclosed as space of cultural and spiritual intersection where the masses of all traditions participate. Our People's spirituality is the foundation.

Here the dancing vibration is the living Word, a People's scripture and philosophy born of the street disclosing our material reality – calypso.

There is an African-Catholic continuum of popular spiritual practice. The Catholic often involves an African base the latter present as a hidden (or not so hidden) code. Orisha worship, once popularly called “Shango”, reveals the overt Afro end of this spiritual spectrum. It is today fully and openly articulated as the “Orisha Faith”.

There is as well the spectacular Trinidadian intersection of La Divina Pastora of the southern town of Siparia. Here are present at least four traditions First Peoples, Catholic, Hindu and African Traditional. A shared Hemispheric space of Amerindian female presence, Goddesses, Black Madonnas, Mothers, Obeah and Orisha.

We are not dealing here with empty or fragmented folk practices but a vital cosmology, a dancing Spirit energy and articulation of the Divine this in an animistic worldview involving African Traditional, Hinduism, Folk Catholicism, Islam and the grounding Spirit and presence of the First Peoples.

However it must be pointed out that the old folk communal mode of manifestation is being eroded even as there is ever present morphing and transformation.

In terms of vital intersection we may witness Islam and Christianity unfolding in the context of Indian animism disclosed in Hinduism.

Then there is the widespread Spiritual Baptist presence common in our region. The “Baptists” are rooted in an African cosmology yet this expresses itself as a Protestant Christian church. In Trinidad they often include Catholic, Orisha, Hindu, magical and other patterns. Articulated here is an animist inclusive appropriation of monotheism.

Thus we may speak of an African appropriation of Christianity. Even as it has appropriated Western derived magical practices as well. The Orisha People refer to this last as “Kabbalah”.

Years ago Clifford Payne asked, what would a “Caribbean Christ” look like? There is the Christ of Western Christocentricity but there is also the inclusive Christ of our People's piety that our People have been articulating... at the intersection.

So we may speak of the Holy Caribbean Spirit.

### *Good or Evil?*

In the context of this discussion we may interrogate the issue of good and evil. Our various traditions have insight into good and evil. It is here to be noted that the different cosmologies understand that there are spiritual agents that may be broadly understood as negative. However the West has opposed these terms dualistically. And here good has come to convey moral, often abstract moralistic, meanings.

But there is another meaning of the word “good”. This very much enmeshed in the messiness of our People’s reality. Some years ago in Jamaica I was in conversation with a young man seeking spiritual assistance. He in effect told me he did not care whether the ritualist who would help him morally practiced good or bad, once he was “good”. While we hope this attitude is in the minority it does teach us something of how our Caribbean context works. Our people are well aware of the harsh ambiguity of their reality. There is a saying that “good and evil walk side by side...” Here we seek to navigate a potentially and often actually treacherous space in order to survive and thrive. Hence we note a certain “spiritual pragmatism”. It may thus in this sense be appropriate to speak not of “good or evil” but “better or worse”. Life is a matter of negotiation and yes sometimes difficult even grim decisions have to be made. It is out of such pragmatism in the struggle for the “better” they seek assistance from spiritual practitioners and forces who are “good” i.e. effective.

But at the same time our people are marked by a profound and genuine spiritual commitment. A real sense of community based on love. And even before the merciless onslaught of a cold uncaring individual based capitalist system and colonizing cosmology that is Modern reality they still struggle for such authentic community based on love. Here there is real awareness that there is an absolute grounding of good. That many call “God”.

God has no opposite and this means in absolute metaphysical terms good has no opposite. But in day to day functioning our People engage good and evil as a matter of practicality. It is here our People seek return to their God, as does everything in this living Cosmos.

We also engage the good as mastery of craft, of living. Marxist class analysis views elites as presiding over the structure of oppression but we may also use the word elite in relation to levels of the mastery of craft. Here is the positive role of political structure according to Aristotle. This indicates the place of education and respect of and learning from Elders. Here we may perceive patterns of the traditional community as seen in the Caribbean village. There is as well the role of organic intellectuals and popular revolutionary leaders in the struggle for transformation.

But there is still that matter of the hierarchical slave society that readily infects even necessary structures.

Such is our People’s piety revealing the pragmatic Caribbean/Hemispheric spirituality of the intersection. But this discussion of “good” raises the question of the potentially (and often actually) dangerous spiritual expressions – High science and metaphysics.

The word “Obeah” insofar as it refers to our vital spiritual energy ought to be viewed as positive. Yet in the region the word has been pejorative being used to describe spiritual practice seen as “evil”. Obeah is popularly understood as spiritual violence and spiritual intimidation. Yet

in our inherently and radically violent reality such obeah is understandable and often seen as necessary.

African spirituality in the region has been so radically concerned with material survival and well-being. Also patterns of violence have been internalized and can be so spiritually channelled.

There is as well here the engaging of the Devil. We have seen such spiritual ambiguity and violence play itself out in Carnival, in the mas', but what is really revealed here is a vital texturing spirituality.

But there is in this spirituality, one that grounds Carnival itself, the engaging of a range of "energies", many ambiguous. And we use this last word and not "demonic" because we are not articulating here a cosmology of simplistic good/evil dualism. Though this too is to be found in the intersection. Spirits are as morally ambiguous and often as morally depraved as human beings. It is this spiritual terrain our People engage in seeking to navigate toward their very practical ends. Thus we witness such ambiguous intersecting spiritual practices – European, African, Indian, First Nation.

But we may also adopt the Christian language and enquire into the demonic nature of colonialism and genocide, and the poverty and existential pain in which masses of our people live. Because truly the radical violence has been visited upon us.

*And it is good.*

Carnival in the Trinidadian context does so reveal itself as rooted in the People's spirituality in its rich intersection. It may be viewed as truly our comprehensive popular piety. This in its creativity/violence... exploding on the streets or as we put it ...on the road... dance and play that is our vital Music... our living vibration... that brings into being New Creation. Indeed Carnival provides a frame of dancing often disruptive energy that defines our reality as a whole

All this even as it is distorted by the commercial capitalist machine. But as we have seen this is all inherent to the vortex itself. It must be engaged, as the calypsonian says... Yuh cyah 'fraid it...

But perhaps in the present state of fracturedness even this sustaining Carnival paradigm now seeks and is to feed into new possibilities.

This is our raw yet crafted animist vibration, the intersection of Africa, India, Europe... and the grounding First Peoples of the Americas. Indeed the total intersection that has been referred to in terms of "globalization" is to be located here in our context.

This our People's spirituality disclosed in our communal context this along with ongoing modernization and communal disruption. Here in the name of progress a great deal of our People's communal substance is being disrupted and apparently eroded.

We have largely discussed the Trinidadian disclosure of the intersection which for this enquiry represents our point of departure. The "Tobago" in Trinidad-and-Tobago shares in this space but is nevertheless quite distinct with its powerful African root. However we hope that even the focus on Trinidad, with all its limitations, will give us some real indication of the possibility and possibilities inherent in our rich Hemispheric space.

As said this our “people’s piety” is a vital cosmology not a fragmented “mish mash”. It is an embodied philosophical articulation this in all its richness, indeed in all our peoples pain and experience of disruption.

I propose that this our People’s piety reveals our own articulation of the Divine. But still to be asked is – What manner of “God” is here revealed? We have to face the inescapable “God question”.

## **XII. Our Goddess**

Goddess is community.

*A Theology of liberation.*

But encounter is a two-way street. And like Job we have hard questions to ask God.

*...We as a people have unholy questions to ask of God: Where hast Thou been in our history? Why this long silence in the face of such evil? Didst Thou not care? What meaning can there be to all this – genocide, slavery, indentured labour, poverty, colonialism? Why, Why, Why? (Idris Hamid, In Search of New Perspectives, pg. 7).*

Patriarchy is indeed a structure that oppresses women. And when we examine its emergence its metaphysical foundation in terms of the dominance of the masculine we recognize that patriarchy is at the root of hierarchical oppressive society. We see this unfolding in forms of animism and the establishing of monotheism. It is this that unfolds as gender, class and race oppression at the foundation of the establishing of Modern societies, at the very root of our reality in the Caribbean and Americas. In reality this constitutes a single structure of oppression. At the core this structure is hegemonic colonizing Modern Western cosmology. Here are really revealed the gods one does or does not believe in.

And at the core of such patriarchy is the articulated hegemony of the male God.

Ancient monotheism itself institutionalizes the hierarchical animist idea of Divine Kingship. That the king is an incarnation of a god. And one cannot fully read Messianic Psalms without a healthy sense of suppressed terror. Thus does King David that dreadful exterminating warrior of Yahweh provide the Messianic template for Christ, Son of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This finding a theological fulfilment in Christian “Christocentricity”. And it has also been understood as political praxis.

Of course we must acknowledge the powerful spiritual insight of the Christian message. But its Modern history in our Hemisphere has not been and is not a happy one.

Liberation theology views the political as the key. “Divine Kingship” leading to the Messiah who is God discloses the structure of the problematic. Male sky God, male King, hierarchical patriarchy. And here hangs the tale, not only in Christianity or monotheism but going back to the hierarchical animism. This indeed seems to characterize complex civilizational structure in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

But the Modern fracture of the isolated individual brings it to its logical conclusion. The dislocated individual enmeshed in and wielding the oppressive mechanical bureaucratic hierarchy constitutes the ontological core of the violence that makes the Modern world. This now defines our Hemisphere and constitutes our context.

So we propose that this ancient patriarchal imbalance of the dominant masculine that arose in what we may term later hierarchical animism that continues to unfold in monotheism has reached its as it were high point in modernity in the fractured individual framework. But this patriarchal

system is the very class and race oppression characteristic of modernity that not only cripples the West but was unleashed throughout the global South and in our Hemisphere.

Western Christianity came to our Hemisphere entangled in this colonial process. It was, and is, inherent to it. This colonial God is a hierarchical imperialist imposition.

*God is really foreign to us. In the religious imagination of our people he is a benign white foreigner – “an expatriate.” Even the categories of our religious experience are imports which do not reflect our*

*cultural and native experiences. We experience God as an outsider in the bad sense of that encounter.*

*He is not the God in our history and of our destiny. In fact He has not been the God for us, but against us.*

(Idris Hamid, *In Search of New Perspectives*, pg. 8).

Liberation theology also correctly points out that ontology is praxis. This means to say that as ontological structure God is political. And this grounded context must be the radical point of departure for all “God talk”. Indeed whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, it is context that constitutes the ontological grounding for ALL reflection and articulation. The real question is whether we are to affirm the Truth of our context.

Liberation theology thus claims and affirms the insight of ancient Israel concerning the immanence of Yahweh as radical historical presence. This as a journey of liberation.

Just as the Prophets, like Amos, challenged the hierarchical class oppression in Israel. So does liberation theology challenge the patriarchal classist and racist ongoing colonial oppression. Indeed all forms of political evil. And here reveals Christianity’s participation in new possibility.

Such possibility discloses a space of intersection. This involves a new conception of the Divine.

What then is our problematic? How does it work? What does it require of us? How do we understand the workings of our reality, our context. Here I propose the pivotal point of crisis involves not original sin but “original violence”. The violence that is our material reality.

We have also been using the word “history”. Now the term can refer to the contrived Modern academic discipline. But liberation theology uses the word as engaging this materiality of context. Thus does it view the original monotheism of Yahweh as radically revealing that “the God who is” is revealed in historical commitment. The God who takes sides. Who commands the “preferential option for the poor” that God is radically and decisively on the side of the poor against the rich and powerful – The prayer of Mary. The Mother of God.

*He has shown the power of his arm,*

*he has routed the proud of heart.*

*He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly*

*The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. (Luke1:51-53).*

Such materiality thus affirms the human body and its material struggle. It also affirms our Mothers who kept and keep our communities alive.

So we may inquire as to what then is idolatry? As false and strange alien gods have been foisted on us.

Gods we ought not believe in. Many of them dwelling under the Christian label.

Thus in terms of our own philosophy of religion I propose that it is not an abstract question concerning the Divine. It is not – Does God exist? But, as the liberation theologians put it – Which God exists? If we ask the wrong question we can only end up with the wrong answer. I further propose the right question is – Does our God exist?

Thus we will cease to worship foreign and strange gods and only bow down before “we God”.

Our God! We God!

And God is good. Absolute good as this is the very God who is committed to liberation who is revealed in genuine community. The God who propels history toward its authentic telos.

### *In the Modern frame.*

As we indicated a great deal of our traditional communal structure as we once knew it that grounded our People’s spirituality has been and is being eroded. This in the name of being “Modern”. Such modernity has indeed been the defining field that constitutes colonization itself. This supposedly leading to a full blown Modern contemporary society propelled by the myth of “progress”.

Modern societies articulating and framing the individual involve us in alienation, from nature, from community, from “self”. Here is posed the radical existential question.

Modern violence thus reveals a range of aspects. Here we note this reality of the individual who has been oppressed and fractured. The Modern individual has been here wrenched away from community.

This is “psychological man” framed in the loneliness and alienation that is the individual fracture.

In our present context we see the destruction of our family structure, poverty, urban deprivation, the empty dehumanizing pursuit of capitalist detritus – bling. A dislocated mass.

We note the banality of evil in our oppressing public institutions such as the state bureaucracy, our cultures of dependency, everpresent commercialization, dehumanizing work both manual labour and in the respectable office etc., poverty, mediocrity, self-contempt. This as we do not believe in ourselves.

And one can write volumes on the bankruptcy of our “politics” and political system.

But this is not the whole picture, our people have exhibited creativity and courage, and a capacity to excel. But in terms of our own space we need to ask ourselves whether we have been on the whole channelling this to our own advantage.



Here we need to be cautious with discourses of strength. The strength of the oppressor is the weakness of the oppressed. Yet our People possess an unsuspected strength. Here we may find the Spirit within.

We also reject good/evil dualism as ours is the arena of possibility and community... in the chaos...

We are subject to, oppressed by, yet engage Modern technology and popular culture. We are all too often propelled by empty quests for intimacy and connection. We find ourselves trapped in the machine of industrial society, or aimlessly wandering a wasteland of virtual non-reality.

So we see ourselves completely and utterly stripped of meaning and Spirit. This is secularism, religionlessness in the worst meaning of the term. The absence of relation, the metaphysical isolation of the individual.

Yet even here in all this our People create.

So how do we articulate communal relation in this encounter with the cosmology the problematic that is the Modern project? The West has its answers science, rationality, individual self creation, radical choice, liberal democracy and fascism. Yet in this field we create our own community ethos, relation affirms itself. This has political dimensions as in the primeval Haitian Revolution, as in approaches to socialism, we note the Cuban Revolution and the more recent Hemispheric Bolivarian Revolution. We also note the violence of imperialist response. One that has indeed crushed many attempted revolutions.

Haiti is a key centre of the vital African religious presence. Haiti where our freedom begins. This is the pact that inaugurated the glorious Haitian revolution.

*... The God who created the sun which gives light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our God calls upon us to do good works. Our God who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all.*

C.L.R. James adds –

*The symbol of the god of the whites was the cross which, as Catholics, they wore round their necks.*

*(The Black Jacobins).*

So the question comes back – which God do we believe in?

*Our embodied praxis*

The encounter is framed in violence. Yet here is the presence of the Mystery, “Our God”. But this God is a praxis. “Proof” is in praxis.

This is revealed in the Rastafarian term, “livity”. It is indeed our animist vitality. It is a task of grounding in our livity our cultural intersection rooted in our First Peoples. We locate “our God” within this horizonless void.

We locate our Goddess

Thus liberation theology is a liberating theology of our “culture”.

Here is articulated our praxis as reflected action and active reflection in our Modern, contextual, existential reality.

This is the animist continuity, the vital relation that is community itself. Human and eco reality. And this is as it were the very material structure of Goddess.

Thus we propose that community is itself the theophany where we encounter “Our Goddess” at the intersection.

We often think of faith as a matter of doctrines, as inward, intellectual, or psychological, or mystical, as a matter of belief or trust etc. These may be legitimate aspects but what is being proposed is that Faith is action, it is vital praxis that creates vital community. The telos that is the ethical life, community, the “polis”. It is radically ecocentric, continuity and relation, the structure of Godhead itself.

Aquinas says that many things in the universe have no inherent intelligence yet they “seek” their end, find their purpose, fulfil their design. But what if the universe and all in it discloses intelligence and is propelled by vitality. Cosmos disclosed as vital patterning that reveals the inhering Divine? Immanent and Transcendent. Is not this an even more telling proof from design that there is a Source and Purpose?

The Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out that ethics cannot begin with abstract theorizing but with living community defined by the focus on human thriving. It is out of such living praxis we may formulate ethical political vision. I want to suggest that the same is revealed in metaphysics. True metaphysical vision is not abstract but is so articulated by living community. And not only human but reality in its fullness as defined by relation grounds metaphysics and brings to light living cosmology. So I am suggesting that metaphysics itself discloses an ethical/political/communal grounding.

We have what we may term the original insight our human action as a continuation of the pattern of Cosmos. It is a theory of action spelt out by Krishna – dharma. Fundamental ethical orientation is ontologically hard-wired. This disclosed in how we are to embody in our humanity and its very social structuring the archetypal patterning of Cosmos that we here see as the Orisha. This is ancestrally constituted.

Aristotle gives the humanist turn in his theory of action. Action is to accord with the metaphysical order but it is human habitual articulation of virtue. Yet we continue the ancestral insight that our action sustains Cosmos. Even as we here engage in a radical human crafting.

Yet our Cosmos our worldhood our humanity has been ruptured. We simply cannot naively replicate what was before. Even as we weave these traditions into wholeness we articulate action out of the very violence that defines the fabric that is our vital being.

This is an embodied intersecting. And we mean this literally. The body is itself the intersection. Body being the material community in its very specific person-al bodies.

Here the living vibration that is our ancestral traditions disclose such materiality of our vital embodiment.

In the Greek philosophical vision God cannot materially experience the world. The God possessing no senses cannot feel and experience. The Divine is thus for Aristotle pure consciousness conscious of consciousness. A long way from the historically involved God of Israel that begins monotheism.

At our intersection we articulate the Divine in terms of our embodiment. Thus as living landscape in our very bodies God experiences the world.

The Divine occurs in our very body as the living dancing vibrations that is Orisha. That is the Leela of the gods. It is a dance that embraces our entire humanity from the sexual to the political. It is the very dance that is nature. This is our Goddess.

In terms of such embodiment we may ask, what manner of God exists? And in the very process seek to analyse the language we are using.

We may propose an approach to the language of God not constrained by analogy. We have seen that analogy can be insightful but it also at some point involves distortion.

Moderns have invented a “God problem” reifying him into an object, debating his existence, providing an ideological superstructure for oppression. Marx exposes this and proposes that for the masses trapped in this systemic oppressive frame God in reality functions as an escapist drug.

We propose that God is precisely such immediate embodied communal praxis. A profound insight of liberation theology.

The Divine is revealed in the vital engagement of our praxis and reflection. Goddess, the material architecture of our life our community our vital history. In this struggle we affirm our own insight into Divinity in suffering and strength.

Thus instead of analogy we may language Goddess directly in terms of such immediacy, as the very living material architecture of our existence. Our Relation.

### *The intersection – Relation.*

Yet here we are in this field and fame that is the global Modern world that we have been describing. Its latest imperial overlords being the American Empire. We face this problematic of isolation and violence where we may rightly speak of evil. The cosmology of the individual.

Yet the Modern discloses a field of intersecting violence as possibility. Modernity, perhaps we may say “our modernity” is that of process of creative engagement.

So we may once again ask, exactly what do we mean by evil?

Aristotelian exclusive logic is characteristic of the West this converges with its exclusive monotheism and imperialist mandate. All disclosed in the Graeco-Roman matrix. This unfolds in the Modern field.

The exclusivity of monotheism has henotheist roots – Our God is the One God so you must do things our way. An exclusive henotheist mentality reigns giving an exclusive monotheism.

But can we now have a specific animist henotheism that leads to an inclusive “animist monotheism”? Our Goddess is really and truly and radically ours but we recognize that this is the One Source, the Divine revealed in all traditions/communities. Thus in our henotheist diversity we may be one People at the intersection.

Unity not imposed but participatory

Truth is so revealed in all cosmologies yet it is not that “anything goes” rather we are to seek this truth and are compelled to serve it.... At the intersection

So we have the henotheist range of gods each community revealing its own disclosure of Divinity. Yet here is the One God/ess Transcendent and Immanent. Source, creatrix, purpose. The Godhead is itself community this is the Trinity – animist dancing feminine/masculine principles born of and birthing the Source.

And how do we understand our problematic?

There is no nature/supernature dichotomy. Rather it is new creation out of chaos. This is the moment that is occurring Time that is pure creativity. Indeed the chaos is itself pure creativity.

We come back to the anthropological question and seek to affirm the goodness of and inherent possibility that is human nature. This is the praxis of creation in its fullness, the all-inclusive community. Moreover this our own inherent Divinity need not feed off human weakness and sinfulness to claim legitimacy. Our Goddess is creative of human freedom, strength and beauty even as She is with us in our pain and brokenness.

What then is salvation or liberation? How does the Caribbean problematic resolve itself? What terminology should we even use?

It is a path of praxis of engaging all our rich intersecting traditions. Given the violence that is our ongoing history it is a path of struggle. And because we are committed to radical transformation it is the praxis of revolution. It is a process of new creation, the birthing of new community.

Of course there is here no matter/spirit dualism. The profound spiritual aspirations of our People as revealed in our traditions is a task of the historical realization of authentic relationship.

We are here at the intersecting of profound insights of animism and monotheism. The former in its understanding of reality as the dance of energy and pattern the flow of continuity bringing harmony and balance. The latter understanding of this reality as the relationship of persons.

But such relationship involves the world in all its aspects. It is not merely humanist but eco-centred. This is to say the total community. The animist insight enables us to understand this mystery of consciousness and agency that constitutes personhood as flowing through the Cosmos in its fullness.

It is this vital dance that we live in our own embodiment. In our own pain and celebration. In our daily joys and struggles. This as we respect the vital embodiment that is nature all around us. Person is embodied relation. This is the theophany of community.

Thus we are not speaking of monism where all is reduced to one metaphysical substance. Rather a community of diverse embodiment disclosing the fundamental continuity that is love, the Shakti that is the Divine Mother.

In engaging this theophany that is community we are articulating the architecture that is the Godhead.

It is only in such real tangible vital relational encounter we may speak of “Our Goddess”. Failing this we are engaging in religious propaganda. This Goddess, transcendent and immanent, is at the vital active centre of our communal “Self”. Thus it is not a matter of awaiting an apocalyptic interruption but of our engaging an historical task of liberation, born of encounter.

What then of hell? Let us be clear that a Goddess who is love does not send people to hell. Hell is total isolation. It is that state of radical estrangement from the Divine who is love itself. Yet if freedom is to have any meaning hell must remain as a possibility. However the possibility of “*apocatastasis*” unfolds at this intersection of irresistible love and pure freedom.

Thus community means in essence this return of all to the Source. As one spiritual leader remarked to me – They have nowhere else to go.

But this is not fatalistically pre-determined. Rather return to the Source is realized in our agency and consciousness disclosed in this our very existential struggle. Our response to and participation in the “Theophany”. This we conduct as we – the People – face these the material challenges of our space. To here sustain Relation.

Metaphysical patriarchy is unfolding Modern cosmological oppression. This has been our existential experience of Evil.

So we may legitimately speak of this Modern Evil visited upon us. Yet it may not be helpful to so demonize modernity. Rather the evil violent disruption must be laid bare confronted and creatively engaged. And in the process put an end to the Manichee.

This process this apocatastasis where all may return to Relation to the Source involves forgiveness. And always remember there is room for all at the rendezvous of victory.

It is a rendezvous where all intersect.

In this the intersection of our space we encounter – Our Goddess.

The theophany is community.

The Source is Relation.

*Goddess.*

The Trinidadian calypsonian chantuelle David Rudder in the very midst of this the Modern frame in all its violence sings of “Mr Music”.<sup>(4)</sup> The vital patterning “living vibration” that constitutes our People and our world. “Living vibration” is of course quite simply and literally spirit. It is Dance Music energy the complex yet simple animist philosophical articulation of our

People in the joy and pain of their daily living. This the Divine as the living energy – Shakti – disclosed in our various spiritual traditions. It is Orisha, and here in Trinidad we along with Brazil and Cuba are one of the traditional hubs of this Yoruba spirituality and practice in this Hemisphere.

And it is in this living embodied praxis we engage questioning of the Divine.

Some may want to ask, is God evil? But which God? We reify God particularly in monotheism. The West has made God a problem. One speaks of the God of the Bible and the God of the philosophers. But in reality God is our architecture. The Goddess is our living all-embracing creative patterning energy – Obeah.

The animist disclosure of Divinity is creative fluidity. It is the patterning energy revealed in the Goddess – Shakti.

The First Peoples of the Americas disclose this animist trajectory grounded in our Hemispheric Earth.

This the Divine Mother revealed in the Indian tradition as “Kali”.

Here is the terrifying theophany that is Time Herself. Kali all consuming all generating. The Mother that is Divine presence in our suffering, experience, praxis, struggle. The One for whom we long. Here in our Hemisphere we may witness the return of the Goddess. The feminine principle that may bring balance.

This is the ancestral worldview of animist continuity of Africa, India and the First Peoples.

The animist worldview is rooted in the First Peoples who ground the locus of this new community, here in Trinidad-Tobago, the Caribbean and the Hemispheric. This enquiry departs from our local space as such shared intersection and possibility. Here seeking the articulation of wider peoplehood.

Yet in the multiple spaces that constitute our Hemispheric space there are intersecting traditions and ancestral communities. We may note convergence and conflict. Moreover we are framed by a Modern Western vision that readily views such ethnic affirmation in terms of the irrational.

A course such as this one touches in a fundamental manner on the articulation of an understanding of the Divine, of a religious philosophical framework. But this can never be an abstract academic exercise. What I am proposing is that this is very much a historical question of our own Peoplehood.

Yet in this our Hemispheric space of intersection this involves a range of communities in what is really a range of spaces. Moreover we are framed by a Western discourse that readily demonizes such radical “ethnic” concerns. Yet it is precisely such communal reality that by absolute necessity defines any and all “God talk”.

And what of a theological response? There was once an attempt to articulate a Caribbean liberation theology here in the 1970s. This was in large measure a response to calls for liberation in terms of “Black Power”.

But this has been largely forgotten by the Christian churches of the region who have gone back to the business as usual of the *status quo*. Perhaps some will say we have passed that stage that the times are now different and the old discourses of resistance and liberation are no longer relevant.

But this is a delusion that fatally fails to understand the very structure of Time. Our failure to remember so-called “past” oppression and struggles is really the same failure to recognize how this oppression continues in our supposedly hyper-modern 21<sup>st</sup> century reality. The stark reality is that the churches have gone “backward”.

On the other hand we may now be in a better position to see that the struggle involves all our spiritual/religious traditions. However the burden falls on a faithful “remnant”.

Metaphysical patriarchy is this the domination of the masculine. One that so defines the very structure of oppression. Thus the critical analysis of race, class and gender really speaks to a metaphysical overarching architecture of oppression. A cosmological “world condition” that is in need of the Divine Feminine.

It is her Time hence do we propose this journey from our God to our Goddess.

The metaphysical imbalance of masculine domination that has unfolded as the cosmological-cultural worldview that is patriarchy is at the root of all hierarchical oppression. It frames the very nature of oppressive society. And we have mapped this through hierarchical animism, problematics of liberation/salvation, monotheism and the Modern.

We say that hierarchy, so understood, is oppression. Yet we are not denying the need for societal structuring.

But this dismantling of a metaphysical hierarchical structure does mean the deconstruction of a certain kind of God. And it is the dismantling of this patriarchal imbalance at the root of all structures of oppression. Here is our insight into the Divine as feminine and masculine. Godhead itself is the community that we are seeking to realize. This is the glorious and terrifying theophany that is the decisive Divine-Self-revealing. And we are called to participate.

In our time space and condition this means the return of the Goddess. Our Goddess. She is this intersection of beauty and terror. We propose it is through this feminine lens we are now called to so engage the Divine itself. This “time” (Kairos) of the Goddess will restore balance.

Moreover when we speak of a “metaphysical patriarchy” or a metaphysical balance of female-male we are not talking of an *a priori* imposed metaphysical causality. The metaphysical is the physical, it is the material structuring of community itself. This is our struggle.

The struggle reveals the living creative vortex that indeed overcomes the old dualisms.

So we are saying patriarchy is hierarchy is oppression.

But what of the great philosophical enterprise? While this Project of analysis was born of the original animist Wisdom it has unfolded in this patriarchal frame. Yet here at this intersection we can reclaim the great philosophical enterprise as we celebrate Dame Wisdom in articulating our People’s philosophy.

In this our intellectual enterprise we seek to painstakingly engage Truth. This as praxis.

This is our Truth. And we are not at all saying Truth is “relative”. It is grounded vital real and... ours!

So our Goddess emerges engaging and overcoming the framework of the domination and demonization of the feminine, the frame of Her containment, of fallen nature and tainted matter, of existential bondage. Our Goddess emerges. In our space of creative ambiguity – possibility – we draw on the insight of all our traditions as we declare our ownmost animism.

*In closing.*

Thus does the vortex confront us.

I remember my teacher Henry Charles likening the Middle Passage to the mystical journey of the Dark Night of the soul. The familiar ancestral Land that we know and love disappears as we are drawn into the watery abyss, the unspeakable violence and suffering. Yet do our ancestors through the pure violence of the enslaving colonial reality inflicted upon us, yet do they open a path of possibility that comes to birth out of the Black Water.

In the Cloud of Unknowing we may forget to remember but according to the old Buddhist logic our forgetting may be a remembering. Here the very structure of Time (Goddess) Herself where we encounter the ancestors in the now of occurrence.

The VOID! The Caribbean intersection. Death that is the possibility of life. We encounter our Hemispheric Goddess.

And here we encounter the Spirit that constitutes our People. Spirit revealed as alive in our People's vital material reality. This is indeed our Caribbean quest. The quest of "Our America". We need not view modernity as evil but as OUR creative process.

As a colleague pointed out to me – creation is destruction. Or as the Venezuelans say, we create or we err. Let us then not wait for the wave of chaos to break but let us get to work.

We can prove nature exists. Thus may we "prove" the reality of Goddess. Whether we are animists or monotheists, Orisha worshippers or Presbyterians, we need to realize that nature our community – the world of which we are an intrinsic aspect – is inherently Divine. Thus the problem then is not in the failure of our proofs rather the question is that of our capacity to so engage, see, feel, experience and actualize our World in its living immediacy. The Goddess as she simply – is.

*Burton Sankeralli*  
*September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020*



## ENDNOTES

1. I understand the distinction was first made by Avicenna.
2. I had the opportunity to hear him speak at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine some years ago.
3. Karl Stern in his chapter of Schopenhauer. (See bibliography).
4. *Permission to Mash up the Place* in his *Calypso Music* album, 1986.

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### A Note of Sources.

*A great deal of this material may be seen to have roots in the lectures I received in my theology degree programme at the Seminary of St John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs 1982-1986 and my association with that institution into the early 1990s. Here I may mention such teachers as Fr. Henry Charles, Fr Austin Milner OP, Sr. Diane Jagdeo OP, and Fr. Knolly Clarke among others.*

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