



New York College
Societas Rosicruciana
In Civitatibus Foederatis
fall 2022



From the Chief Adept
R. Curtiss Montgomery IX^o et Philologus Zelator

Fratres, ego salutant vos.

I am an optimist, or perhaps an example of the old maxim, “what a man sees depends more on what is behind his eyes than what is before them.” Today in Buffalo is what I think of as a perfect day in mid-winter: The sky is blue, the sun is shining for the first time in a while, and the roads are clear and dry. Admittedly, the temperature is pretty low with a wind chill of 15-20 below zero. But on a macro level (i.e., statistically) more than half of the season’s snowfall is behind us, the coldest day of the year was last week, and daylight is increasing at an accelerating rate. Can spring be far behind?

The articles below from our Celebrant and Secretary clearly outline all the good things going on in New York College. I urge your attention to the several topics covered which I will not recapitulate here. Our college is fortunate indeed to have energetic and committed fratres acting in many roles and we all thank them for their continuing contributions. Particularly, RW Bruce Renner, IX^o, Past Junior Deputy Supreme Magus, for continuing the publication of this outstanding newsletter, which over its many past and current issues constitutes a veritable handbook and resource of Rosicrucian thought. Our Celebrant, RW Rick Powell, VIII^o, is the leader of our College’s programs and continues to plan and lead interesting and educational Convocations. Our Secretary, RW Deputat, VIII^o, continues to bring modern technology to the smooth operations of the College. Equally important are all the Fratres who present, discuss, study, and attend. It’s a great team effort.

I wish each and every frater wherever he may be and in whatever circumstances, a thoughtful and reflective winter and spring season. I look forward to seeing you on April 29th.

LVX,

Curt



From the Celebrant RW Richard Powell VIII° et Philologus Theoricus

Cari Fratres!

I hope this newsletter finds you & yours healthy & happy.

As we are now fully into 2023, I thought that I would lay out our year ahead...

Convocations:

Saturday, April 29, 2023 10:00 AM

Saturday, July 29, 2023 10:00 AM

Saturday, September 30, 2023 10:00 AM

All remaining Convocations this year will be at our usual Valley of Buffalo location.

SRICF High Council - November 10-11, 2023, in Louisville, KY

With regard to our convocations, we are always looking for new Fratres to join our College. At the present time, I am not aware of any recommendations for membership, but we are always open for more. If you have someone you would like to recommend, please reach out to the Secretary or myself for the proper form. Once we have a few in hand, we will begin a new class for the Grades. If we don't have a class established before the April Convocation, then we will hold presentations at that meeting and begin the Grades in July.

If you have an idea for a presentation/paper or a practicum, by all means reach out to me and let me know. We would like to hear from all the Fratres where this is concerned. Fratres Cook and Deputat are brilliant and always have something of interest to put before us, but they need breaks as well and enjoy learning from others. So, let's give them a break and step up.

The SRICF High Council will once again be in Louisville, KY, from November 10-11. Here's your advanced notice! Consider going! It is a great time with a whole weekend of esotericism and a chance to meet Fratres from around the world. You will not be disappointed! Mark it on your calendar and save up some money to go.

A few years ago, we had a study group that was working on the SRIA Study Guide that you can purchase from the High Council. It used that Guide and one of Halevi's Kabbalah books as texts. If there is interest, we can start it up again as a Zoom Group, We could start over from the beginning to accommodate some new members or we could even find a new topic and do a deep dive. Let me know if you are interested and if so, what you are interested in.

That's all for now. Email me at rjpowell@arsmasonica.com

Sapere Aude...

Rick



From the Secretary

RW Myron J. Deputat, VIII^o et Philologus Adeptus Minor

Cari Fratres,

I send you warm greetings from the secretary's desk, even though we are experiencing quite the freeze here in Buffalo! We are on the verge of completing our electronic payment system through PayPal. This will be ready as soon as PayPal verifies our tax information. Once this is complete, you will be receiving dues notices with a PayPal link to send payment, though we will still be accepting checks.

Additionally, orders can be placed through the secretary's desk for items on the High Council Website.

The following is a list of items available:

First & Second Order Jewel – Grades I thru VII (Green) \$20.00 ea

Third Order Jewel – Grade VIII (Gold) \$20.00 each

Third Order Jewel – Grade IX (Red) \$20.00 each

Lapel Pins \$ 5.00 each

Rosicrucian Neck Ties \$25.00 each (Red and Gold)

First Order (grades 1-4) Rituals \$ 5.00 each

Second Order (grades 5-7) Rituals \$ 5.00 each

Combined First & Second Order Rituals (grades 1-7) \$10.00 each

The Rose Petal (The 1883 Meyer rituals for the S.R.I.C.F.) \$5.00 each

New member certificates Grades 1-7 \$ 5.00 each

The Art and Science of Alchemy & Lecture Guide \$40.00 each

SRIA Grade Notes for Grades 1 through 7 available \$5.00 each (Select Grades and number)

Package of Grade notes for all 7 Grades - \$25.00 each package

5 Packages of Grade Notes for all 7 grades - \$100 (\$20 each package)

Finally, we will be migrating to google docs and future emails will come from our new college email address: secretary.nysricf@gmail.com

I look forward to seeing you all at our spring convocation!

LVX,

Myron



From the Editor

RW W. Bruce Renner, IX^o, KGC, PJDSM et Philologus Adeptus Exemptus

When I was growing up in the 50's and 60's it seemed like there was a church on every other street corner. The local Masonic Lodge was next to my Junior High School (perhaps you know the place!). On the occasions when these organizations were in session, parking lots were full (except for the Lodge which had no parking lot, and thus filled nearby streets much to the chagrin of the locals). Their presence was a comfort and seemed an integral part of warp and woof society. By the time I received my Entered Apprentice Degree in 1969, however, Freemasonry had already seen more than a decade of membership losses. Still, another decade would pass before it became obvious it was no passing thing.

It was, of course, not the only time that membership had declined. In prior occurrences, however, it was easy to trace to a single cause; the Great Depression, for example. This time around the reason was not obvious, much less the solution. My own research in the history of the Scottish Rite in New York has led me to the conclusion that, although Masons might have taken some better steps to mitigate the decline, the underlying cause came from without. Society changed dramatically in the post World War II years.

Churches were slower to notice, perhaps due to their far larger share of the general population, and slower still to admit their own membership and attendance losses. Polls still fail to hit the problem head on. One thing is clear: it is a worldwide phenomena. Today the numbers of the non-religious make it the third largest group after Christianity and Islam.

In our continuing series of essays on the world's major religions, we example the phenomena in detail, and hopefully gain a few epiphanies to add to our collection.

Elsewhere in our newsletter our Assistant Editor continues his series on the foundational literature of the West with regard to its esoteric symbolism. This time around, it's *The Labors of Herakles (Hercules)*. Although the origins of the original story are lost to history, there are many references to it from ancient times to the present, and many retellings. If you have always thought of it as just another adventure story, Frater Cook's essay will be eye opening.

We also offer a few more contemporary book reviews, our usual College Happenings column and messages from our Chief Adept, Celebrant, and Secretary. Note the Celebrant's listing of the 2023 Convocation dates. Be sure to add them to your calendar!

Stay your Path, and, especially now, stay healthy!

Scire! Velle! Audere,! Tacere!
To Know, To Will, To Dare, To Remain Silent

LVX,

Bruce



College Happenings

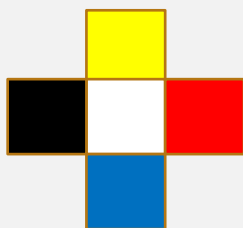
While the pandemic caused a lot of disruption to our day-to-day lives, we have acquired a new tool that should have a long-term positive effect on our College. I speak, of course, about virtual meetings via Zoom. Although we will continue to meet four times a year, our Winter Convocation will be via Zoom. In addition to freeing us from the challenges and uncertainty of weather, we can also invite other Colleges to visit us.

This year our virtual convocation was held on, Saturday, January 7th. There were some 40 Fratres in attendance, including MW Jeffrey Nelson, IX^o, KGC our Supreme Magus. Attendees were treated to two outstanding papers: *No, really, Do androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by **RW Walter E. Cook, IV, VIII^o** and *Magick in the Matrix* by **RW Myron J. Deputat, VIII^o**.

We are appreciative of Fratres Deputat's and Cook's continued contributions to the life of the College but want to remind our Fratres that we are always looking for new presenters. Have an esoteric interest? Consider sharing your explorations with a presentation or an article for our newsletter. It will earn you a place in our Societas Philologi!



Frater Deputat



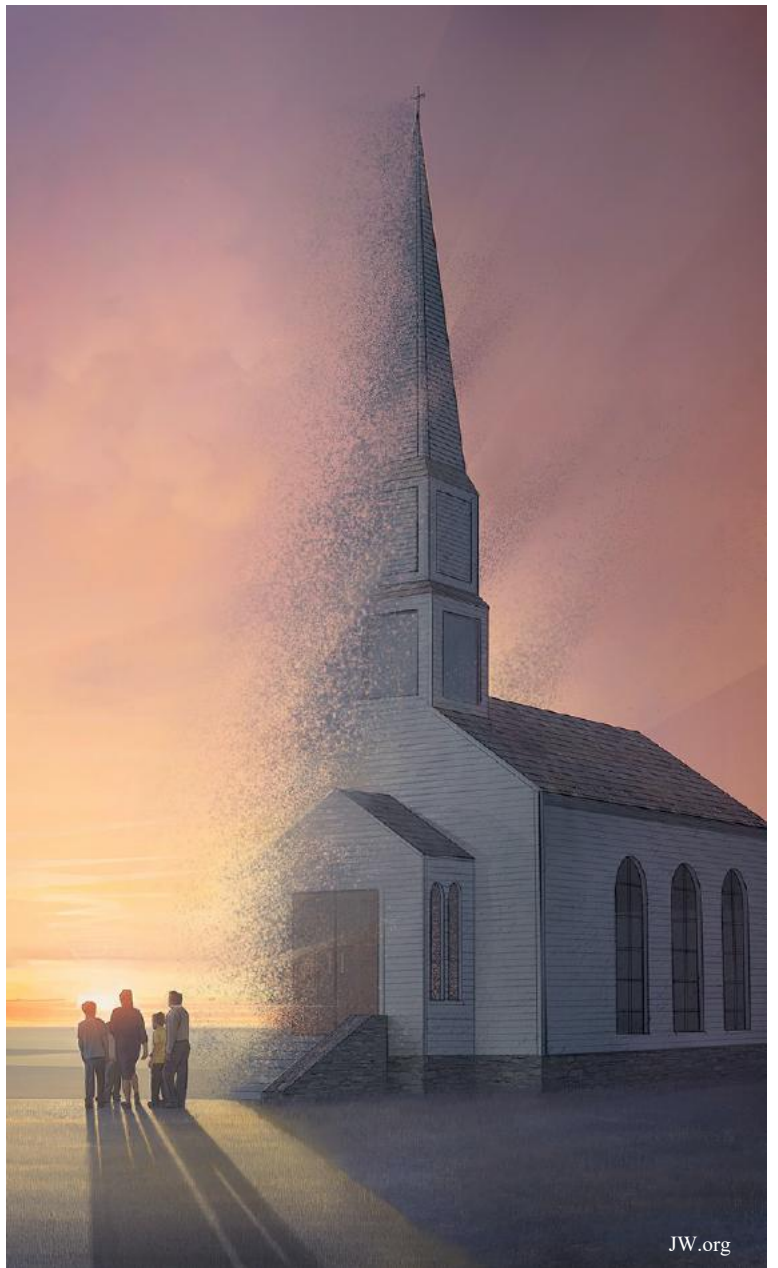
Frater Cook

A Cure for Winter Blahs?

As we put the finishing touches on the Newsletter, we have had our first sunny day since the day after Christmas! Lack of sunlight has different effects on different people, but many suffer from a lack of energy and feel emotionally down. One remedy you can try is meditation. Like physical exercise, it can help compensate for dark winter days. You might even try visualizing a summer day in the park for awhile!

Remember that meditation isn't a competitive sport. Rather than trying to make fabulous things happen, just let your mind relax and run free a bit. Try to sit a little while when you first get up in the morning. You can think about the day ahead, or the one behind or just let your mind wonder. For the more ambitious, try to quiet the mind by counting and slowing your breaths.

There are many great books and apps available to give you ideas on how to go about it. Try some things until you find something that agrees with you. Like physical exercise, some like yoga, and some like racquetball! Either is fine. And when you like what you're doing, it's easier to develop the daily habit...and one day something fabulous just might happen!



JW.org

The Non-religious

Introduction

In the course of our exploration of world religions, we have had occasion to mention the relative size of each. It might be recalled that Christianity remains the largest faith with over 2 billion practitioners. In second place is Islam, the fastest growing religion; so fast, in fact, that many believe it will overtake Christianity sometime between 2050-2075. In a distant third place is Hinduism with just over a billion worshipers, mostly confined to the country of India.

All of the above is true so far as it goes, but between Islam and Hinduism, there is actually a third group variously titled the unchurched, the irreligious, the non-religious, or just the nones. While many would provide another label – atheist – this group actually represents only a small part - about 5% - of the world's people. The remaining people which fall into this category are a diverse group but hold in common one trait – a rejection of organized religion. Many consider themselves spiritual and hold to a belief in God and the divine. Agnostics, often conflated incorrectly with atheists, have no opinion on the subject. Others such as Secular Humanists believe that one can lead a virtuous life without the aid of a higher power basing their actions on humanistic principles of morality.

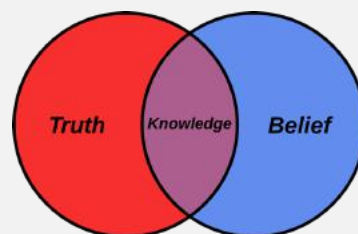
In the United States, the non-religious account for 25%-30% of the population. Only mainstream Protestants have a larger base, although much of the increase in the non-religious come from a declining interest in this group. Mainstream Catholics at 21% are third. Evangelists, who by their nature are highly vociferous about their religion (and thereby are more in news cycles seeming to make their numbers greater) make up about 10%. Among minority religions, about half of the world's population of Jews live in the United States, perhaps as many as 8 million. Muslims and Hindus are a vanishing small part of the present US population.

It is interesting to note that much of the writing concerning the phenomena of the non-religious comes from the religious communities, and, in particular, Christianity. One reason for this is that much of the worlds non-religious come from former Christians, who dominate many first world countries. There is a direct correlation between broader and higher levels of education and financial security, and a disinterest in traditional religious practices. Some of Europe, for example, is now 80%-90% secular despite its historical role in the growth of Christianity. There are several countries, of course, where religion is actively suppressed such as Russia and especially China.

Another related issue is in-name-only members who identify with a religion but participate very little. It is very difficult to accurately capture this number (in addition to the actual number of non-religious) on polls and surveys because often people want to appear religious and want to appear to participate. Therefore, estimates run from a participation rate of 40%-60%. If all this sounds familiar, we have struggle with the same issues – declining membership and participation - in Freemasonry. Our numbers, it might be noted show considerably less participation, on the order of 10%-15%. Like Freemasonry, attempts are being made to address the decline by mainline religions internally, but there is increasingly a recognition that societal forces are at work that may be difficult to overcome.

Investigation into the phenomena has led to some interesting data. For example, many people attend church who have limited interest in the deeper theological issues. For them, the social and charitable, as well as, just fitting in, are the most important reasons. On this basis, some polls suggest that even 20%-25% of atheists attend church on a fairly frequent basis!

In this essay we'll take a look at some of these alternatives views of worship (or lack of worship). However, to start is let's explore what it means to believe.



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Belief>

Belief

Humans have a predisposition to believe. When humans first became self-aware and intellectually curious, the world was a mysterious and magical place. It remained that way for most of human history. Developing beliefs were a way of putting sense to one's existence. All the major religions of the world have a long history, and their beliefs have had centuries and sometimes millenniums to become deeply ingrained. Such beliefs were accepted without proof.

Scientific inquiry, which emerged in earnest in the 17th century, also put forth a type of belief called a hypothesis. The concept of hypothesis, however, went one step further, in that it was

subject to proof. In fact, a hypothesis must always be subject to proof either affirming or disproving its assertion. Notwithstanding, many hypotheses stand a long time before proof can be found. However, a hypothesis usually deals with something where there is at least hope of proof by actions we can take in the physical world. We have no such hope in our pursuit of the divine.

We might ask at this point, why atheists lack this predisposition to believe. Although it must be granted that the common definition of an atheist is, “someone who doesn’t believe in the existence of God,” I would suggest that a more appropriate definition would be, “someone who believes in the non-existence of God.” This is more than a play on words, as both positions are offered without proof.

This is not for a lack of trying, as long before the age of scientific inquiry philosophers have tried to prove the existence or non-existence of God without success. Although people report encounters with the divine all the time, unlike the foundational texts such as the Christian Bible which describe divine interaction with many witnessing people, these are personal encounters which can’t be repeated on demand and/or shared with the rest of us. This apparent lack of God’s active involvement in the world supports the claim of *Deists* who, while holding to the idea of a creator God, believe that God has since departed this world and we are free running. This position was one of the first responses to the challenge of reconciling the scientific and religious worldviews.

What exactly is religion?

By some estimates there have been over a 100,000 religions throughout history, and possibly 4,000 that are practiced in some form today. Most of these have a very small number of practitioners, of course, but one necessary criterion of a religion is that it is a group expression of the belief in a higher power. If we start

from that one simple premise of a belief in God, then religion is a response to the question, “How are we to conduct our relationship with God?” It is not, however, the only response, and a goodly portion of our non-religious designation would consider themselves spiritual, but don’t find the expression of their spirituality through organized religion satisfactory.

In our exploration of religions so far, we have noted some common characteristics. Religions proscribe forms and ceremonies for devotional expression, contain foundational texts often consider to be divinely inspired, and often have a messianic type figure as an initiator/progenitor e.g. Jesus, Muhammad, Siddhartha Gautama. Further, religions have a moral code which adherents are expected to follow to be in good standing. Some of these are quite general, but others are very obtrusive, and blur the lines between religion, society, and government. The major religions are very old, in most cases millennia old, but certainly centuries, as, for example, Islam, the youngest. As such they have continued to evolve and have invariably picked up baggage. The more there is added to the canon, the more likely individuals will have difficulty embracing the whole. This has led to sectarian fragmentation.



In reviewing the literature around this topic, I have found that much of the criticism is focused not only on the question of God’s existence, but on the validity of religious expression. There is, for example, the age old question of which is the true religion, over which millions have lost their lives. Modern analysis has questioned the authenticity of divine texts, and we have been given numerous examples that religions are, in the end, human organizations, with all the flaws of other human enterprises.

Apologists, however, have pointed out that religious expression has been more often a force for good, and that religion serves to bring both a comfort and a mitigating behavior factor toward a virtuous society. For many, perhaps, most people, religion is a process of delegation. It provides a framework for devotional behavior that most of us have little time, interest, and often ability, to develop independently. It gives a sense of being part of something greater than ourselves. In addition, as various polls and surveys indicate, religion brings people together in a congenial setting - one that even induces otherwise non-religious people to participate.

The spectrum of belief

In reviewing the various polls on religious behavior, I have come away thinking they are asking the wrong questions in the wrong way. It must be granted that this is a difficult area to broach with people, as it asks them to reveal, even anonymously, an intimate aspect of their lives, and to face up to what they may come to feel are shortcomings between their idealized behavior and actual behavior.

Taken as a whole, however, these polls paint an interesting and sometimes counterintuitive spectrum of spiritual practice.

This table illustrates my findings against three broad criteria:

Type	Spiritual	Religious	Active
Churched	x	x	x
Affiliate	x	x	
Unchurched/Active	x		x
Unchurched/Passive	x		
Social		x	x
Conformist		x	
Atheist/Agnostic/Passive			
Atheist/Agnostic/Active			x

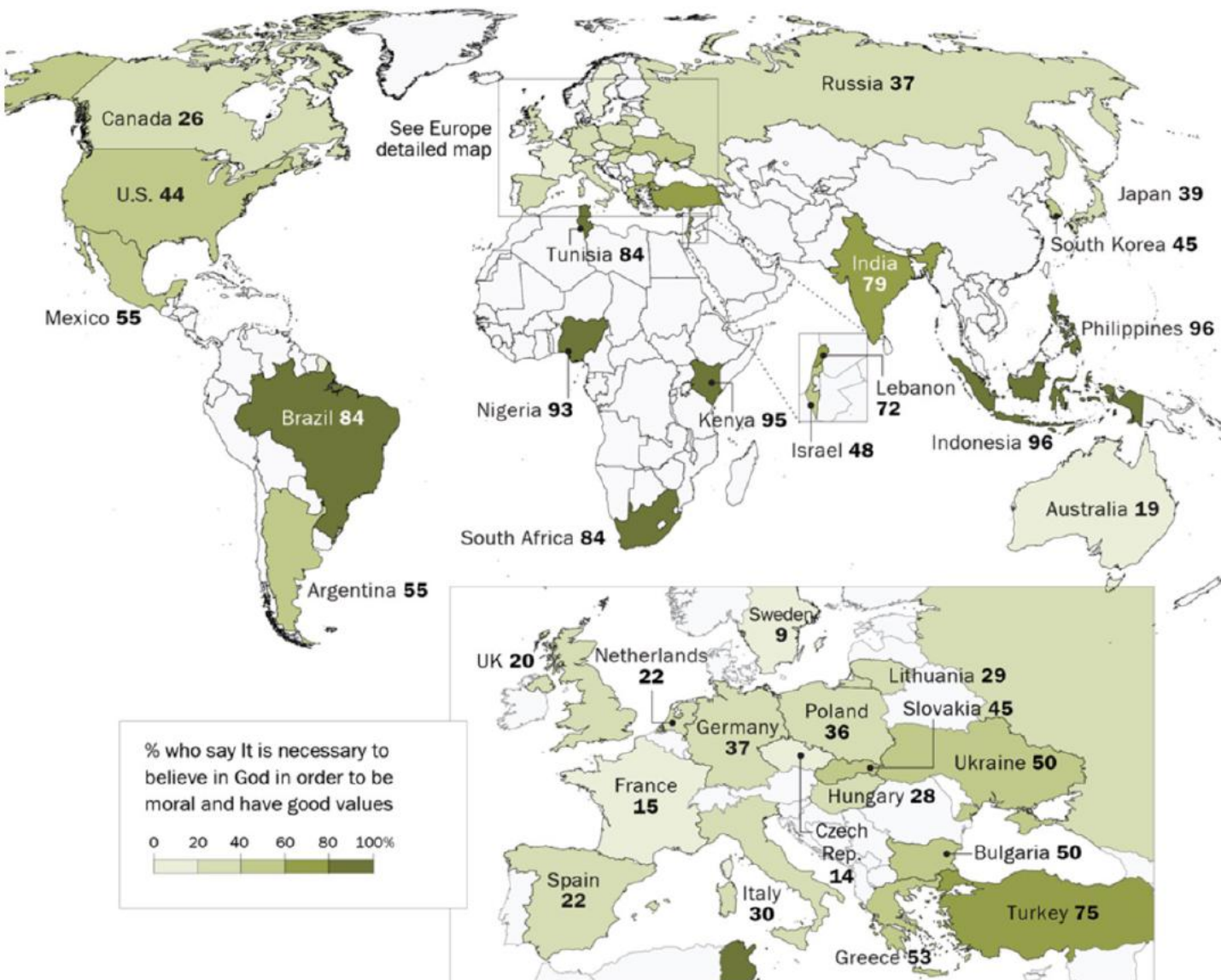
An individual is considered *Churched* (at least for the purposes of this essay – use varies) if they believe in a divine principle that includes a monotheistic or polytheistic belief in God. They are also affiliated with a religion, i.e. identify with a formal expression of faith shared by a group. Finally, they are active participants in the work of the church including personal worship e.g. prayer. Churched individuals are at minimum frequent attenders at religious services but may often donate much of their time and money to the support of their church. However, it is also true that many parishioners attend without giving much thought to spiritual issues beyond a passive acceptance.

A recent Gallup poll showed that 81% of the participants answers yes to the question, “Do you believe in God?” This is down from 87% as recently as 2017, and from 98% in the 50’s and 60’s. However, when a range of choices was provided as in 2017 poll 64% expressed absolute certainty, while 21% thought that God probably existed. People who exhibit a certainty of God would be termed strong *Theists*. Those less certain but nonetheless think God probably exists exhibit a weaker form of Theism. Theists also perceive God as a supernatural entity.

There is an interesting Wikipedia article on Church attendance which shows a wide difference in church attendance by country, and within the USA, by state. The article claims a 57% attendance rate overall for the USA, but this is based on self-reporting surveys which have questionable accuracy. Other polls show numbers between 40% and 60%. You might want to compare this to your own experience. I personally think it’s high.

Majorities in emerging economies connect belief in God and morality

% who say it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Q30.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

An *Affiliate* believes in the divine and identifies with a religion but isn't an active participant. This doesn't mean they don't attend a religious service on occasion and are likely to for life transitions such as marriage. While we know as Masons that it is common to disparage "ring Masons," anyone who has held leadership positions knows that we are highly dependent on them for financial support, and it is better to have people affiliated with us and speaking well of us, than not.

The *Unchurched/Active* has a belief in the divine but isn't affiliated with a religious tradition. They do, however, have an active, although personal spiritual life, and often engage in activities such as meditation, contemplation, study on spiritual subjects, and prayer – to name a few. They often attempt to live a virtuous life in keeping with tenets of various religions. They may also associate themselves with a religious tradition but are unaffiliated with a specific congregation. They may seek a foundational (sometimes referred to as primitive) form of the religion unassociated with what they consider unnecessary embellishments.

The *Unchurched/Passive* have a spiritual outlook, but don't spend a significant amount of time in spiritual practices. A good example is a Deist who believes in a creator God that is not actively involved in the world and, therefore, doesn't require attention. Here it might be appropriate to mention an additional precept of Deism. Some Deists believe in panentheism, a belief that God is greater than the universe and includes and interpenetrates it. This belief is also held by some Theists, including Christians. The difference is that Deists believe that this version of God is passive and uninvolved in our world in any sort of controlling way. The Theist believes this is an active relationship.

A *Social* doesn't have strong belief or may outright reject the notion of a spiritual principle, but finds religious affiliation beneficial for any of a number of reasons including a view of good works done by religious groups, a belief in the need for organized moral or virtuous behavior, a need for socialization, or just a desire to fit in. They often can be considered Churched on that basis and are conflated in the demographics of the overall Churched.

A *Conformist* declares a religious affiliation in order to conform to a perceived expected behavior of their social circle but doesn't actively participate. Like many other designations in this table, they may attend on occasion for a variety of reasons. Their demographics are conflated with affiliates.

The *Atheist/Agnostic/Passive* either outright doesn't believe in the existence of a divine principle (atheist) or reasons they don't have sufficient information to make an informed decision (agnostic). In their purest form, neither would be inclined to be religious, but may attend for reasons similar to those in the *Social* and the *Conformist* category. For the most part, having reached their conclusion, they go on with their lives without much further consideration.

The *Atheist/Agnostic/Active* are actively engaged in a continuous study, dialogue, and sometimes organization involvement in their beliefs. *Secular humanists* fall into this category. They may also engage in some of the same practices as spiritual folks such as meditation.

The *Secular Humanists* deserve a bit more elaboration. In broad brush, they maintain that there is no need for a supernatural or divine agency and that one should endeavor to live life based on human intelligence and capability.

Among other principles:

1. A strong commitment to reason and science
2. A strong commitment to an open, pluralistic, and democratic society
3. A strong commitment to the separation of church and state
4. A strong commitment to education
5. A rejection of artificial divisions of humanity based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, nationality, creed, and class, in support of a cooperative good
6. A strong commitment to live in the here and now

It is interesting to note that a large Secular Humanist center can be found in Amherst, New York, named the *Center for Inquiry*.

Proof?

No essay of this type would be complete without addressing the many attempts at proving the existence or non-existence of God over human history. A very high-level executive summary is that if any had been offered without equally valid refuting arguments it would receive a great deal of public notice!

It is not my intention to review all of the arguments pro or con in this section. You may readily find good summaries in various encyclopedias. I do want to discuss some overlying issues with proofs in general, and why I believe that such proofs are doomed to failure. These are problems of methodology which appear to me to be unremovable with the current state of our progress to understanding.

One of the major problems with any proofs offered is they rely on evidence other than direct observation and repeatability. In this regard, scientific methods are useless. Arguments pro and con are then attempts to derive convincing arguments by logical methods alone. One can point to the marvels of the universe and also the flaws depending on your preference and then infer an implication of divine presence. This just doesn't work, although such arguments may provide a confirmational bias to our predisposition to believe. Science, of course, has many questions for which the scientific method provides little support. We are getting ever closer to the observation of the moment of the big bang, but will we ever see before it? Despite many years of research, we are far from understanding what makes something conscious and self-aware.

The concept of a divine creator appears, as we have seen in our overview of various religions in this series, across world cultures. It might be argued, certainly by Jung, that the concept of divine is built into the human mind (Jung was a believer in God, by the way). One additional trait that is found across all religions is the representation of deities in human terms. In Christian art, God is

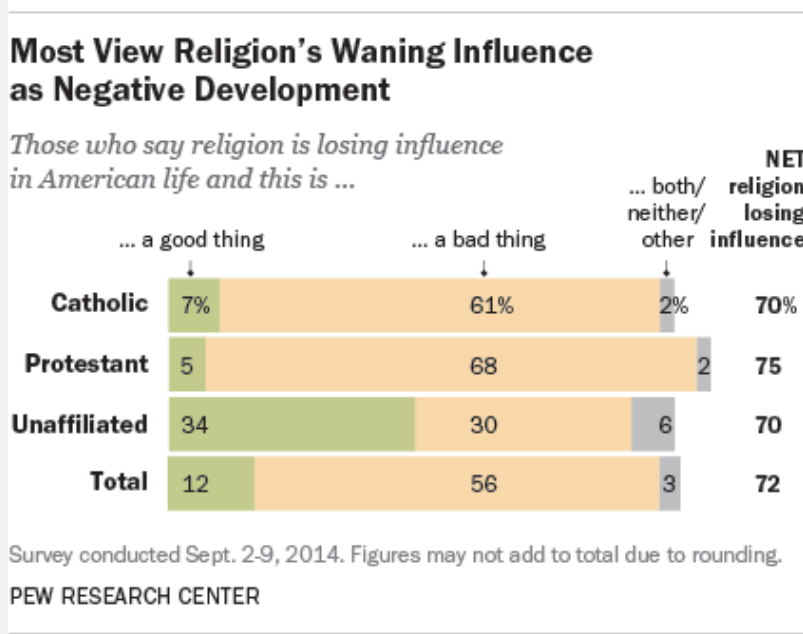


Paul Kurtz, a significant modern voice in modern Secular Humanism, was instrumental in establishing the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY

often an old bearded man and angels are human beings with wings and halos. In some cultures, Hindu and Egyptian, for example, human forms are mixed with animals or possess extra arms and legs to represent deities. Is this really the appearance of God(s) and angels? One line of thought is that we are unable to perceive the true nature of God, which would be incomprehensible to our human perspective, so God deliberately communicates with us in human terms. Thus Jesus, for example, appears as a man so we can relate. From a methodology point of view, however, this reduces our ability to mount any argument for or against, as we don't even know what the divine really is, just our idea of it.

This line of thought goes beyond appearances, it also works against any arguments based on action. Does God permit evil for reasons we don't understand or does the presence of evil prove there is no God? What is clear is we live in an imperfect world. The ancient Egyptians were unbothered by this. They believed that we all pass through the Hall of Judgment at our physical death and our soul weighed. Come up wanting and you would be consigned to their version of Hell, but if found acceptable you would pass to a delightful afterlife. Key, though, is that no one was found perfectly good or evil. One should carefully walk a middle path in life, attempting to meet this final test in a somewhat, but not absolutely, positive fashion. Trying to describe good without recourse to a comparison of something not good is impossible in our dualistic world. This leads us to the conclusion that divine world of an absolutely good God is beyond our powers to understand.

If one can be dispassionate about it, the literature and debates between apologists and critics can be very interesting, but one should realize from the onset that we simply don't have sufficient methods to establish a clear truth on the subject. Belief, then, is our only recourse, and a decision for each individual on a personal basis.



Is religion still viable?

Religion is legitimized by its connection to a deity. This can be through sacred texts originating with the divine (often by way of an intermediary through visions or dreams) such as the Bible or the Koran or through the direct teachings of a person e.g. Jesus, Mohammad, the Buddha, or both. Even in the youngest of the major religions, Islam, this happened centuries ago. Religious

critics then ask the question what if the divine mandate didn't really exist (one proof offered is where has God been since?). If religion was entirely a human institution, as with all the rest of our institutions, there is ample room for criticism.

The real question is necessity. Although religious apologists can point to good works and critics to failings, religion without the divine mandate is just a methodology. The non-religious, but nevertheless spiritual, may find a religious tradition, although not a church, an effective method for expressing their faith. Increasingly though, especially among well-educated and financially secure first world countries, many are seeking their own expression of faith. This may be just striving to be virtuous or intense personal practice and study in the hopes of experiencing the divine on a personal basis.

A Perennial perspective

As you begin (hopefully) to read this essay, you may have had doubts that we could add any new perennial ideas to our collection. To the contrary though, the designation of "non" opens up brand new and rich food for thought.

To begin with, we have gained a more neutral view of religion, that one comes to going from the specific to the general. In the general sense then, religion is an expression of our humanity in answer to the question, "How do we best connect to God?"

We have learned that both the religious and the atheist can't produce a reasoned proof of their position. Both are, therefore, a matter of belief alone, and belief is something each of us is entitled to arrive at ourselves. Many people, of course, don't reason their belief in this fashion, and many don't pick their religion consciously, but inherit it from their family traditions. Because churches offer many things beside deep pondering on theology, many who, if pressed, aren't quite sure, still attend, as do, surprisingly, the quite sure agnostics and atheists on occasion. There is, however, increasingly, the phenomena of those that though they believe in God, aren't religious. Do their own spiritual life, directly conceived of by them, constitute a religion, albeit a personal one?

We have also found some different views of God, from the deistic idea of a divine creator who subsequently is uninvolved, to the challenge of our inability to really know the nature of the divine. In response to the latter, God is often reduced to an anthropomorphic being. The question is: by God's design or ours?

Further reading

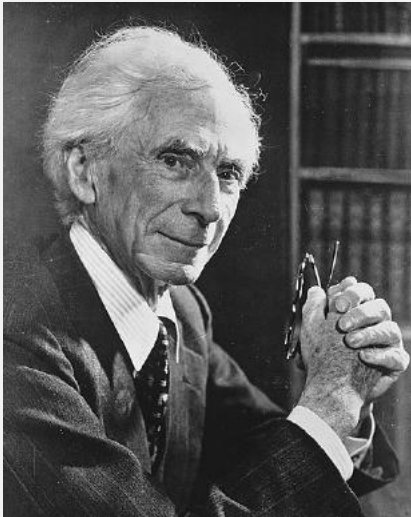
Since we are Christians by nature of our Rosicrucian outlook, all this might seem a bit distressing. For those seeking further information, however, consider the following.

In reviewing the literature on the subject, I found that a majority of writing on the unchurched nones largely came by the Christian clergy. Representative, is Ryan P. Burge's, *The Nones*. I might point out that it is difficult to find commentary by non-Christian writers, at least in English.

You can find good overviews of the various arguments for and against the existence of God in various encyclopedias.

Looking up atheism on Amazon will provide a long list of available texts by those supporting and critical of the position. You might check out the *Center for Inquiry* website, as well. Their magazine, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, is a major source for Secular Humanism.

A classic case for the atheistic viewpoint is *Why I'm not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell while Richard Dawkins is a more contemporary exponent.

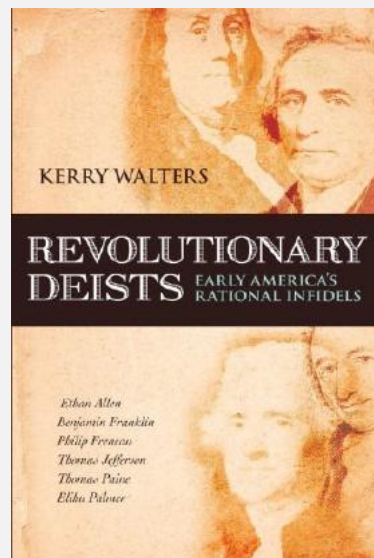


Bertrand Russell



Richard Dawkins

Those who are interested in American founding fathers may be interested to know that many were Deists. Here *The Revolutionary Deist: Early America's Rational Infidels* by Kerry Walters may be enlightening.



The subject of Pantheism is a bit more elusive. I've read some on it, but have yet to find anything recommendable. Don't get confused between Pantheism and Pantheistism. The former is the idea of God manifested as nature, while the latter is God manifested in both the natural world and everything beyond.

In bibliothecam

The Labors of Herakles

By RW Walter E. Cook, IV, VIII°

Before I begin, I would like to address my reason for including, *The Labors of Herakles*, in this column. It has much to do with an innate stubbornness on my part.

My intention with this series of book reports was to trace the paradigms of thought through Western civilization. Beginning with Ancient Egypt and *The Book of Coming Forth by Day*, things were off to a great start. It was mysterious, allegorical, and inspiring. It hit all the notes that I hoped to touch upon.

I was greatly anticipating Ancient Greece, and reading two great works that had been part of a classical education since the term was invented. I imagined that I would find

the same inspiration and allegorical mystery that was previously encountered. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* however left me feeling quite disillusioned. Both of them detailed the exploits of gods and heroes, where so many instances of some basic restraint or cooler reflection could have made situations better for all parties involved. Instead, all too often, violence and trickery are lionized.

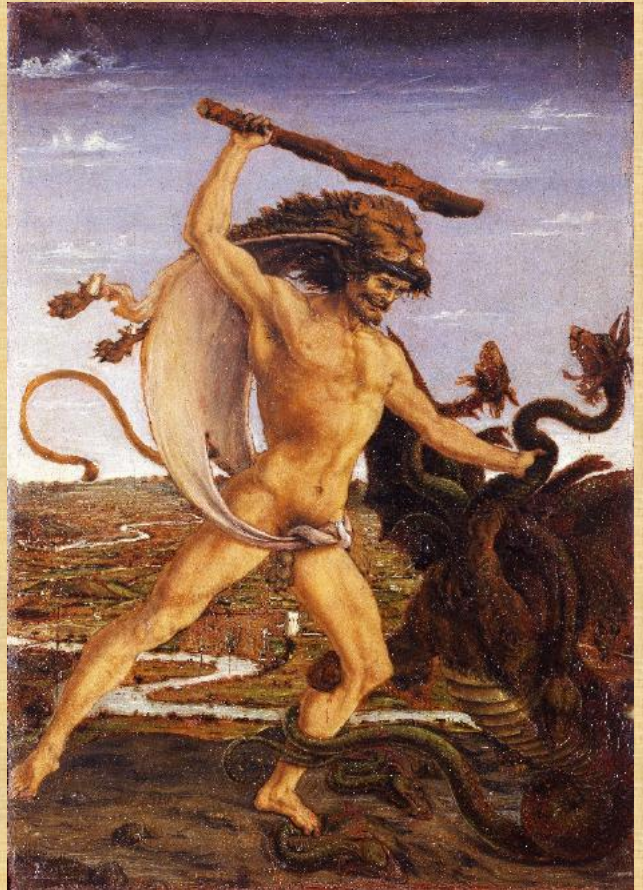
I would suppose that having Ancient Greece displaying such base behavior in its mythic identity would demonstrate that over time Western Civilization has indeed been civilizing! But... Ancient Egypt had beaten them to the punch. While Egypt and its several dynasties dealt with the rigors of more primitive technology, its ethics appealed to the higher parts of the human spirit.

Perhaps Rosicrucian inspiration and reflection would have been better served by researching the handful of Ancient Greek mystery traditions that we have evidence of from ancient times. This pursuit however technically lands outside the purview of this survey of popular thought.

Deeper dives into ancient mystery cults is a good idea though... Perhaps something to revisit in the future.

For now, we return to my parting shot at the ancient Greek world with Herakles and his Labors.

Herakles (Romanized to Hercules) was a demigod born of Zeus, king of the gods and Alcmena a



human woman. He grew to be the strongest of all the Greek heroes, despite Hera (Zeus' wife) constantly causing him strife. This revenge was motivated by Zeus' many infidelities – being unable to take revenge on Zeus himself, Hera often made the Zeus' half-divine offspring suffer her wrath.

Herakles' demigod nature has a certain rhyme with Masonic praxis. Herakles was part human and part divine, which was raised or sublimated through his heroic deeds. Similarly, not just anyone is suppose to be able to become a Mason. We “make good men better.” We do not make men good. Herakles involvement with the mythic world is not unlike a Mason's relationship with the inner world, where he contends with his inner ruffians to win the nobility of Hiram's example. Something to think about.

After his early life being plagued by Hera's lethal diversions, Herakles went to the Oracle of Delphi to seek a way to escape his predicament. Apollo spoke through the oracle and told Herakles to serve Eurystheus for 10 years where he would accomplish a series of difficult feats.

Herakles had doubts about this, as Eurystheus was known to be a weak man and king, but he persevered. Again, there is a dichotomy of earth and spirit, strength and weakness at play in this tale. Indeed, Eurystheus was so weak of character he had a brass vase or pot created so that he had a hiding place ready for when Herakles was in attendance.

The labors were as follows:

1. Slay the Nemean Lion.

The Nemean Lion was so ferocious that its hide was impenetrable to any weapon. Herakles overcame the beast by stunning it with his club and strangling it to death. He afterwards wore its pelt as his personal garb. One supposes this might instruct one to cloak oneself in strength, or “to have a thick skin.”

2. Slay the nine-headed Lernaean Hydra.

Herakles with the help of his nephew Ialous drew the Hydra from its lair and attempted to slay the beast via several decapitations. When the heads re-grew, Ialous had the idea to cauterize the stump after each beheading to prevent regeneration. This being done, the beast was (eventually) slain. The use of fire to prevent the recurrence of a source of watery poison is doubtlessly significant, but I am at a loss as to explain the symbolism of the Hydra's venom. My guess would be poisonous slander or gossip. The use of fire then may be indicative of the Ancient Greek hero's tendency towards impassioned violence. I'm not sure this is a lesson we should take to heart as gentlemen.

3. Capture the Ceryneian Hind.

Herakles chased the Hind over the course of an entire year before finally capturing it and bringing it back to Eurystheus. He received the blessing of Artemis (who had dominion over hunting), after promising to return it to the wild upon delivery to the king. Eurystheus wanted to keep the Hind in his personal zoo but to keep his word to Artemis, Herakles called Eurystheus to take the Hind from his hands. When the Hind escaped Herakles was able to blame its departure on the king's own clumsiness. One supposes the lesson here could be to pursue one's ambitions doggedly, and to never forget to be intelligent when beset with unexpected challenges.

4. Capture the Erymanthian Boar.

On the way to Mount Erymanthos to bring the Boar back alive, Herakles stayed with his friend Pholus, a centaur. Pholus was convinced by Herakles to open a bottle of wine made by Dionysus, the god of wine himself. At the smell of it, a large group of centaurs appeared to partake in the drink. Centaurs however, are uncivilized, and did not know that wine was meant to be mixed with water before being consumed. This led to the newcomers becoming so drunk they attacked Herakles. Defending himself, Herakles fired arrows dipped in the poison of the Hydra from his second labor. There is a side-story here about Chiron the civilized centaur, famous for healing, but for brevity I will skip it. Suffice to say Herakles was successful in obtaining the Boar by driving it into thick snow to immobilize it.

There is an obvious prescription here for sobriety, and the predominance of a thoughtfulness over inebriation. The virtues of this again are obvious now but perhaps not universally acknowledged then. One wonders what Dionysus would think of this moral lesson.

5. Clean the Augean stables in a single day.

The Augean stables housed immortal livestock that had amassed an amount of dung of truly mythic proportions. King Augeas, it was noted, had not seen fit to have the stables cleaned in over 30 years. Herakles was given the task to clean the stables in a single night. He did this by diverting two rivers that washed the stables spotless.

It is said the cleanliness is next to godliness. I suppose that phrase may have some amount of irony at this tale in mind given the divine nature of the livestock. The importance of hygiene and regular personal care may be the lesson to be found here. There are further details about the miserliness of King Augeas and re-negotiation of payment to Herakles after the fact. I will point out that death usually follows an irate Greek hero. It did not end well for King Augeas. The importance of fair dealings are possibly intimated here.

6. Slay the Stymphalian Birds.

When tracking these monstrous birds to their nesting grounds, Herakles found he could not traverse the swamp necessary to finish the journey. He was, however, given a rattle by Athena made by Hephaestus. This scattered the birds at a distance which were then shot with arrows. I am at a loss to find a moral here. Perhaps the details have been lost to time. It may be important to note that the birds were sacred to Ares, the god of war. It seems that Ares is more forgiving than Hera as there were seemingly no direct consequences of this slight.

7. Capture the Cretan Bull.

The monstrous bull had been menacing the countryside. Herakles throttled the Bull to unconsciousness and brought it to Eurystheus. Eurystheus wanted to sacrifice the bull to Hera, but she refused the sacrifice. It was eventually let go and hazarded Marathon until Theseus later got the better of it.

This bull is not to be confused with the myth of the Minotaur, which was the offspring of the Cretan Bull. With regards to the unusual parentage of the Minotaur (its mother was the queen

of Crete), there is an indication to ensure one's pleasure is taken in wholesome and nourishing means, lest there be monstrous consequences.

With regards to the labor itself, there seems scarcity of detail to comment on. Herakles encounter with the Bull having come after the conception of the Minotaur and done in an expeditious manner seems to say in the words of Nancy Reagan, "Just say no," when considering, "going out of due bounds," to put it Masonically.

8. Steal the Mares of Diomedes.

The Mares of Diomedes were famed for their madness and consumption of human flesh at the behest of King Diomedes. Here it seems that there wasn't much to do with the mares after they were stolen, and in most versions of the story they're left to their own devices. One commonality in all versions seems to be that the mares are calmed by eating human flesh. From a strictly personal level, it seems to say that our vices in this case can be better calmed by the occasional indulgence (though obviously there are limits, and consuming human flesh is outside of those to be sure). In one version the mares after the all the excitement become entirely docile, so perhaps it can be said that the animal instincts must be given license to obey their nature, lest they become toxic and monstrous.

In some versions of this story, the mares were driven up a hill or mountain and secured there by a moat dug by Heracles and his assistants. This could also be an indication of raising or sublimating one's baser elements to a higher rarefied plane.

9. Obtain the Girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazon.

In this labor, Herakles is sent to retrieve the girdle of the Amazonian Queen. He is, unfortunately, forced to kill Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, after Hera caused such distrust that the Amazons attacked him. Here may be a warning against rumor-mongering, but that seems to be a stretch. Keeping in mind that the Queen of the Gods herself was the source of this misfortune.

10. Obtain the Cattle of Geryon.

On the way to completing this labor, Herakles crossed the Libyan desert. In frustration at the heat, he shot an arrow at the sun. Apollo was so impressed by this that he gave Herakles the golden cup Apollo used to sail from west to east each night.

Herakles then killed the herdsman of the cattle and his two headed dog, before finally slaying Geryon himself (a giant with three heads, who carried three shields and three spears) with an arrow shot through his forehead.

In some versions, a giant named Cacus stole some of the cattle which were later retrieved by Herakles, sometimes with the help of Cacus' sister Caca. Predictably, Herakles killed Cacus for the trouble.

To finish off this labor, Hera sent a gadfly to irritate the cattle which scattered them. Herakles spent a year retrieving the herd only to have Hera raise a river's water level to make the trek impossible. Herakles solved this by throwing stones in the river to create a path of shallow depth for the cattle.

No morals readily come to mind with this one. I'm sure whatever lore there is could be derived from the supernumerary body parts of Geryon, but three is typically seen as a good number in my travels.

11. Steal three of the Golden Apples of the Hesperides.

The first of the "two extra" Labors, Eurytheus' claimed that slaying the Hydra did not count as Iolaus helped, and neither did Augean stables. In the latter case it is for the reason that either the river did the work, or Herakles was paid for the job.

To learn where the Garden of Hesperides was located Herakles had to capture a shape-shifting god of the sea and extort the information from him. On the way he performed two minor feats that I will skip for brevity.

In one version, Herakles gets Atlas to retrieve the apples for him, as Atlas was father to the Hesperides, in exchange for temporarily relieving Atlas of his punishment of holding up the heavens. Atlas later decides that he would rather not go back to his sentence but is convinced to hold the heavens again for a moment so Herakles could comport himself more comfortably. Herakles then comes to a similar conclusion as Atlas and walks away with the apples.

In another version, Herakles slew the dragon Ladon who was guarding the apples.

Here again the labor is straightforward and while fantastic, I see no further meaning.

12. Capture and bring back Cerberus.

Finally, Herakles was to capture Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding the gates of the underworld. It is interesting to note that first Herakles travelled to Eleusis to be initiated into the famous Eleusinian Mysteries.

After arriving in the underworld, he meets with Hades who condones the task, providing that Cerberus be subdued without the use of weapons. Herakles does this and carries Cerberus to King Eurystheus on his back. So fearsome was Cerberus that Eurystheus promised to conclude the labors if Cerberus would go back to his master.

Accounts vary concerning Herakles' life outside of the Labors. Central, however, is that he is driven momentarily insane by the gods and murders his wife and family. Some place this before his Labors. Indeed, in this rendition, the event induces him to seek the advice from the Oracle. Other place it after.

In some accounts he remarries, and also has other adventures.

Regardless of whether the insanity-fueled murder of his wife and child occurred before or after the labors, Herakles eventually builds a funeral pyre and immolates himself. After climbing on, his mortal half is burned away, leaving only the immortal aspect remaining to rise to Olympus as he dies.

There is a lot to consider here in the broader circumstances of the Labors. Consider, for example, Herakles concern at serving a lesser man. Eurystheus is portrayed as a cowardly but royal foil to the strength and rugged qualities of Herakles. Eurystheus as a king of an earthly, lesser realm is then contrasted to Herakles who is a citizen of both the earth and the greater, divine, Olympus.

The Labors were intended to be ten in number, which were extended to twelve based on objections Eurystheus had to Herakles' work on two. One was that he had help, and the other that he accepted

payment. The numbers ten and twelve usually ping the mind of someone with an interest in numerology and Qabalah. In fact, on the outset of this report I was convinced I would easily be able to relate the labors to the Signs of the Zodiac. As I dimly recall from my years of esoteric research and practice, there are some who do this very thing. I, however, after giving the actual tale more scrutiny, find that the correspondence of Labor to Sign to ring more of shoe-horning rather than a true insight. While the labors do point to moral lessons, I do not see that they have a clean one-to-one relationship with the four ancient elements and modalities of cardinal/fixed/mutable. These concepts are foundational to current and Hellenistic astrological thought, so I must abandon the notion.

On the whole the Labors of Herakles show a dichotomy between weakness and vulgarity versus strength and divinity. The final grisly moments of his life do paint a picture of one being released from the fetters and limitations of earthly life, and finally being wholly composed of his divine half. I often reflect on the nature of the human condition, and question what we lose upon death: the value of a corporeal vessel and the sensations of life, or the limitations of the confined human experience? These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but we no longer have a vehicle of matter to call our own. In all our lives, Herakles' included, we are beset by trials aplenty. It seems to be that the proper perspective and attitude to take in all of these is: through confrontation with difficulty do we have the capacity to refine ourselves and overcome our inner failures of strength in whatever arena of life they may be. Only then can we prove ourselves possessed of the divine strength that overcomes earthly limitation.

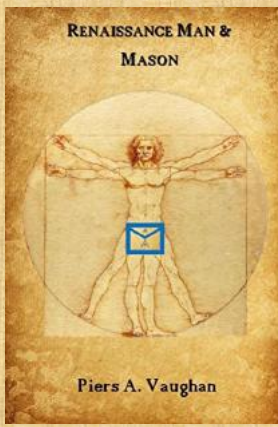
In hindsight, and to return to comparing *The Book of Coming Forth by Day* to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* may be an "apples to oranges" comparison. The material from Egypt is after all, a collection of funerary prayers that came from the private rituals of the Pharaohs, which eventually seeped into the lower ranks of society. There was no appeal to being memorable or relatable. *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and now *The Labors of Herakles* were popular stories that appealed to the masses, not a collection of spells or even rites of esoteric practice. The difference in tone between the two could be compared to our grade ceremonies vs. Broadway stage plays. Both instances of drama are plays but have utterly divergent intentions. One exalts, the other merely entertains.

Hesiod's *Theogony* was closer to what I had hoped for but was more of a family tree of the gods, and origin of their myths rather than myths themselves. That being the case, to me it came across as a bit "outside of moral instruction," since my concerns (and I would suppose at least the majority of those reading this) are those of a man in the modern world, not a god creating or running a cosmos.

To conclude, we are tracing thought through the Western World over time. I did not expect to uncover a difference between the vulgar and divine here, and especially not so soon. It just goes to show you that life can be surprising, and that true education can be strange, presenting us with unexpected turns.

Next time we depart Ancient Greece for our roots in monotheism with the Pentateuch of the Judaic faith.

Editor's note: If you are looking for the book, *The Labors of Herakles*, you will be in for some disappointment. Rather the mythology of Herakles, or the more familiar, Hercules, was developed over a long period of time by many different writers. Some of the original sources are lost. There are many commentaries available, and you may find versions of the story in books on Greek mythology. As for more detail on the Labors themselves, a quick internet search will provide ample commentary.



Renaissance Man & Mason And Enlightenment Man & Mason By Piers A. Vaughan

Reviewed by RW W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC

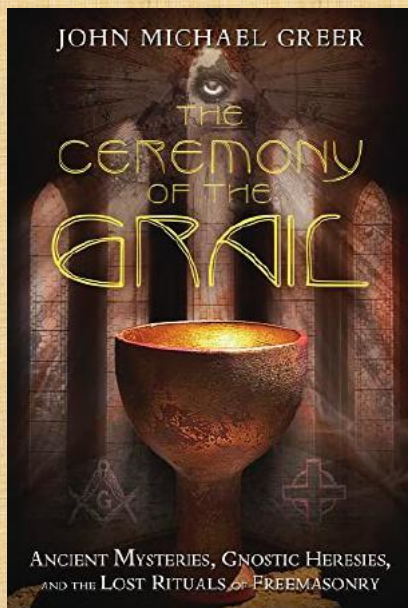
I fancy that future esoteric inclined Masons will most fondly remember Frater Vaughan as one who made Martinism more widely accessible to English readers through his translations of St. Martin's and others' works. Those of us lucky enough to be his contemporaries, know him to be far more eclectic, as these books clearly indicate. Each contain in essay form a collection of lectures given by Frater Vaughan over the pass few decades. Here you will find insights into the traditions and history of Freemasonry, the ideals of Rosicrucianism, and the magic of the Golden Dawn, in addition, to a thorough introduction to the Christian mysticism of Martinism, with, I might add, side visits to such topics as Gnosticism and Alchemy.

Unlike his translations that can be tough, though rewarding, reading for the modern reader, these books present clear, concise, and effortless trips through various esoteric topics, with just a dash of droll British humor. Where required there is evidence of dedicated research, but I, for one, found the speculative ruminations the most rewarding for Frater Vaughan has the ability to make us look beyond. Case in point is the very first essay in *Renaissance Man & Mason*, concerning the seven liberal arts and sciences. Later we have a very interesting taking on the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross, one far remove from its outward, at times, burlesques appearance.

I can honestly say I benefited in some way from each essay, but I do have a few favorites. Several years ago, Frater Vaughan gave a presentation at the annual High Council session of the SRICF on the Kabbalah, which had my rap attention, despite the sleepiness usually attendant at the first presentation after lunch. To this day, I find it the best short introduction to the subject I've ever run across. It can be found in *Enlightenment Man & Mason*, along with a similarly engaging introduction of Enochian.

Quite a bit of *Enlightenment Man & Mason* is devoted to Martinism. Compared to Freemasonry, Martinism's early history is well documented (what a difference a century or two makes!), but it is still incredibly convoluted. Here Frater Vaughan makes a significant contribution by putting some structure in place and, I might add, with the same conciseness he brings to the Kabbalah and Enochian.

Highly recommended!



The Ceremony of the Grail By John Michael Greer

Reviewed by RW W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC

John Michael Greer has been a prolific writer on esoteric subjects since the early '90s, and no doubt familiar to many reading this review. Anyone who has the slightest interest in esoteric matters should own a copy of his *Encyclopedia of the Occult*, a well research guidebook with an extensive bibliography. I'm less enthused about this book.

I have been unable to find much of a biography on Greer, but in addition to being listed as a 32° Freemason, he has been highly involved in the modern Druid tradition, serving as Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America for 12 years. Druidry, of course, is a tradition of ancient Britain, and Greer has written extensively on various esoterica of the British Isles, usually referred to as Celtic, although, as Greer works show, actually includes many different groups over the centuries. The Grail tradition then is a natural part of this work.

There are several themes that run through this book. Greer, has become increasingly concerned about environmental issues over the years, I'm sure due in large part from his work in Druidry. He has written several political/social commentaries on the subject, and there is a touch of that here and there in this book.

Greer has always been one to search out what he refers to as lost or rejected knowledge. Anyone who is interested in the Western Esoteric Tradition has certainly been aware that many parts of the esoteric are not generally held as factual. For many years, I thought that Greer was referring to this rejection of such things as magic and mysticism, but it is apparent from this book that he also seeks out information from little known or academically questionable sources. In this case, much of the Grail theories that are expounded rely on the work of Jessie Weston, a turn of the 20th century Arthurian scholar, whose theories have been challenged by later research.

Finally, Greer is a Pagan and there is, I think, a rightful criticism of the Christian highjacking of the Grail tradition, that is also a theme in the book. His discussion of A. E. Waite and his circle in regard to this issue is particularly interesting.

Thanks to Kindle's tracking feature I can say with confidence that the first 70% has little to do directly with the Grail. Instead, it's a discussion of ancient cultures in the British Isles (admittedly important to the understanding of the Grail), discussion of Freemasonry and

Rosicrucianism (which aren't generally associated with the Grail), and the Knights Templar who generally (and largely fancifully) are associated with everything esoteric. Much of this discussion is stretching credibility to the utmost. Let us take the Rose Croix as an example.

The Rose Croix is an old degree, saved from obscurity by the Scottish Rite which incorporated it into their degree system. The Rose Croix in the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction has undergone a variety of changes, which in the opinion of many Masons, including me, has been highly detrimental to degree. The original form of the degree retained, I believe, in other jurisdictions call for three stage settings. Greer makes the case that there are a similar set of three events in the Grail stories. Does that mean the two have some unknown esoteric connection? I think this is highly unlikely. The story of the spiritual quest is after all a common trope going back far further than the Grail legend. Is it not more likely that the two are just two different takes on the spiritual quest motif?

Were this the only speculative stretch we might find it an interesting discussion, but this is one of many, many such leaps that taken as a whole, make the overall premise virtually impossible. This then becomes reminiscent of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and various "what-if" histories presented on the Discover and History channels.

As to the Gail Ceremony itself, Greer presents a case that an ancient Grail ceremony was preserved and conferred as late as the early years of the 20th century, by a group call, The Company of the Grail. Central to this group was the minor occult figure of G.R.S. Mead, and perhaps Jessie Weston. After the build up though, the sad fact is that the ceremony is yet to be found. Instead, Greer has concocted a ceremony of his own based on the collected fragments presented in the rest of the book. The ritual closely follows the story of the Grail quest, placing the candidate in the role of a Grail knight. It is a straightforward Masonic type ritual which might be fun to exemplify. For Masons, though this might be a challenge, as one of the four speaking parts is the Grail Maiden!

There is an extensive bibliography in keeping with many of Greer's other works, and he has obviously done a significant amount of research. However, despite the occasional insight, I can't recommend this book. If you do take the plunge, be sure to turn off your happy ears, and turn on healthy skepticism.

Have you read an esoteric book lately? Why not write a book review?

We are always looking for material for the Newsletters. Most of the time, the same few people contribute. New voices mean new insights and equally important contribute to the Newsletter's and College's long-term continuity.

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** Not now a member

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**Next College Convocation
Saturday, April 29th
Valley of Buffalo**

**See
Celebrant's message for additional details**