



New York College
Societas Rosicruciana
In Civitatibus Foederatis
Summer 2021



From the Chief Adept

R. Curtiss Montgomery IX^o et Philologus Zelator

Fratres, ego salutant vos.

This time of year is a time of change, changing of seasons, changing our clocks, and stepping up our Masonic activities. Upstate New York has two primary seasons: the physically active time of the warmer months in which we emphasize the life of the body, and the cooler (let's face it – colder) months in which we tend to be indoors more and emphasize the life of the mind.

It is the transitions every spring and fall upon which I have been reflecting. I usually take some introspective time to look back at the last six months and forward to the next six. Looking back, this is time to reflect and review, to finish, get closure, and mothball the things of the active season, leaving them in a state to be reactivated in the spring. Conversely, when that is accomplished, it is with joy that we look forward to reopening and restarting more indoor activities, those activities of the mind that we had so carefully put aside in the spring. We get out our long-sleeved shirts, our ties and jackets, and our tuxes. We start attending Masonic and College events more frequently and enjoy the fellowship of the Mystic Circle and the Chain of Union at New York College.

It is with this in mind that we look forward to greeting each other at our October 30th Convocation at our regular home at the Buffalo Scottish Rite Center. As we have several aspirants in waiting, we will confer the last two grades of the First Order, Practicus and Philosophus, catch up, and enjoy the usual banter around the lunch table.

I look forward to seeing each of you then.

L VX,
Curt

L VX,
Curt



The New York College SRICF will hold an in-person convocation at **10:15 AM on Saturday, October 30th**. As always, we will meet at the Valley of Buffalo's facility at **2379 Union Rd., Cheektowaga, NY 14227**

Cast members are asked to arrive by 9:30 AM for a quick run-through of the Grades before the College opens.

Agenda (times are approximate)

- 9:00 AM** Set Up and Grade Rehearsal: all welcome, casts should arrive about 9:30 AM. Candidates may not view rehearsal.
- 10:15 AM** College is open on the Grade of Zelator.
- 10:20 AM** Practicus Grade Conferral
- 10:50 AM** Brief Pause to Switch over for the Philosophus Grade
- 11:00 AM** Philosophus Grade Conferral
- 11:40 AM** Brief Business Meeting: Messages from Secretary, Chief Adept & Junior Deputy Supreme Magus
- 12:00 PM** Close, Lunch, Depart

From the Celebrant

RW Richard Powell VIII° et Philologus Theoricus

Cari Fratres,

I recently took my son and two of his friends to a local Table Lodge event as they were thinking of petitioning. While there, I was introduced to a few people who had been told they should talk to me as I am, apparently, known as an esoterist amongst our Brethren here. What I learned from talking to these Brethren is that not everyone has the same interpretation of the word "esoteric". To many of those I spoke with, their real interests lay with Masonic history rather than anything you or I might consider esoteric.

I decided to refresh my memory with the definition of esoteric...

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines it as "very unusual and understood or liked by only a small number of people, especially those with special knowledge."

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary also defines it as "designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone."

The first definition could, I suppose, be used for those interested in Masonic history but the second is usually the definition that I would be thinking of when speaking of something "esoteric." In that definition, though, just being an initiated Freemason could be considered esoteric. Freemasonry as an exoteric society certainly has its esoteric bits but most of the brethren within its ranks know or care nothing about anything beyond the dinners, charities, occasional degrees and social time. And that's fine. When asked about Freemasonry, I usually say that it's many things for many people and there's a place for all those interests.

For those who want to go deeper, many find their way to the Rosicrucians, whether through the SRICF, AMORC or some other order. How could they not? There are Rosicrucian elements in many Masonic orders - the Scottish Rite and the Royal Order of Scotland just to name a couple. The Masonic Rosicrucian societies were involved in the formation of magical orders such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Martinism, a form of Christian mysticism, certainly has its own Rosicrucian & Masonic connections, as it was established as a high-degree Masonic system in 18th Century France. This is what I think of when I think of the word esoteric.

"designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone"

As fratres of the SRICF, we are those "specially initiated." The seven grades of our order are full of esoteric symbolism pertaining to the ancient mysteries. the elements, Hermeticism, alchemy, etc. But we must go deeper. If initiation into the SRICF hasn't inspired you to dig at least a little deeper in what's presented in those grades or a conversation with a frater following a convocation hasn't inspired you to "Google" something when you get home, I would be terribly surprised. And perhaps, a bit disappointed...

I travel two and a half hours to come to a New York College Convocation because our quarterly meetings with the grade conferrals, presentations and side conversations inspire me. I belong to a lot of different Masonic organizations and enjoy each for what it is, but not all inspire me. When I leave a gathering of Fratres, I am fired up! I am inspired!

I hope that you are as well.

Coming up, we have the conferral of the Practicus & Philosophus Grades on Saturday, October 30. Both will be conferred in the morning with lunch after. The building is booked for later in the day, so we will depart after lunch.

I will see some of you in Louisville, KY for the High Council Session in November. It has been two years since it last met in person, and I am very excited about going. If you are not going, consider making the trip next year. It's a great experience.

Our January Convocation will be a Zoom session on the 29th. This will include a presentation or two along with a recap of the High Council Session. If you have something you would like to present, please let me know.

Sapere Aude,

Rick



From the Secretary

RW Myron J. Deputat, VIII^o et Philologus Practicus

Si vales bene est ego valeo.

We are back on track with our convocations and grades. As you may have read in our Acta Collegium (ie. minutes) of our last convocation, we welcomed 5 new fraters into the New York College! Congratulations to fraters Timothy P. Korytko, John C. Newmann, Jr, Keith Poppendeck, Terry A. Byard and John I. Morse!!

You should be receiving the Ad Lucem and *Fama* shortly along with dues notices. Our dues have increased from \$40 to \$50 per year to make up for rising costs and fees. Please follow up with dues promptly. I look forward to meeting with all in person! Please stay healthy and safe!

LVX,

Myron



From the Junior Deputy Supreme Magus RW W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC et Philologus Adeptus Exemptus

Latin is used extensively in the Western Esoteric Tradition especially in Christian orders and societies such as ours. Latin was once a standard part of high school and college curriculums but is less frequently taught today. I, for one, never took Latin in school and have always had trouble with pronouncing Latin phrases. Below is some guidance I picked up over the years for Latin usage in the College.

THEORICUS

Benedictus Benedicat nos ad finem / Benay-dik-toos benay-dee-cat no*-ss ad fee-nem (*'no' as in opposite of 'yes')

PRACTICUS

Pax domini vosibcum / Pax domini vo-bee-scoom

PHILOSOPHUS

Ostende nobis Domine, misericordiam tuam, et salutatem tuam da nobis / Ostend-ay no-beese domin-ay miseri-cor-dee-am too-am, et sa-loo-tah-tem too-am dah no-beese

ALL ADEPT GRADES

Benedictus Dominus Deus Noster per sæcula sæculorum / Benay-dik-toos Domin-ooos Day-ooos Nos-tair per say-coo-lah say-coo-lor-oom

ADEPTUS EXEMPTUS

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritai Sanco. Sicut erat in principio, et nunci et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum / Glory-ah Pat-ree et Fee-lee-oh, et -spiri-ooee sanc-toh. See-coot erat een prik-sip-ee-oh, et noo-nk et sem-pair, et een say-coo-lah say-coo-lor-oom

A bit more:

Frater (frah'-ter) Brother

Fratres (frah'-tras) Brothers

The Latin word *Frater* is probably the most used in our Society, and demonstrates how, with best intentions, our Latin fails us. Part of the issue is that most of us, even those who strenuously endeavor to learn another language, almost always bleed rules of pronunciation, accent and grammar we learned in English into the other language. In modern languages we might overcome this by immersive learning in an area where it is regularly spoken, but there is no place like that for ancient, classical, or dead languages. On inquiry, Frater Piers Vaughn, IX°, KGC suggests the following:

Not Fratter (a sounding like the "a" in ladder)

Not Frayduh (a sounding like freighter)

But Frahter (the mid-a doesn't really exist American English but sounds more like pronouncing the letter 'R').

In written correspondence use:

Care (kah'-ray) Frater: Dear Frater

Cari (kah'-ree) Fratres: Dear Fratres

To include a title:

Care et (W, RW, or MW) Frater

Cari et (W, RW, or MW) Fratres

And finally, a closing I frequently use:

Gratias tibi et LVX: Thank you, and Light. Note the actual word is LUX pronounced “Lukes”. The V is substituted for U in esoteric usage.

If you are interested in learning more of the esoteric use of language, I recommend David Allen Hulse’s two volume set, *The Eastern Mysteries and the Western Mysteries: An Encyclopedic Guide to the Sacred Languages & Magical Systems of the World* and *Magic, and Power, Language, and Symbol: A Magician’s Exploration of Linguistics* by Patrick Dunn

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

Saturday, September 29th was our first face-to-face College convocation in over a year, and we all were really excited and focused on the work of the day. In fact, we were so focused that we completely forgot to take pictures! Hopefully, we will correct that next time, and have some High Council pictures, as well!

While we had a lot of great Zoom events, one thing we couldn’t do was confer grades. We have some pent-up demand, and we were able to initiate 5 aspirants into the Zelator in the morning and advance them to Theoricus in the afternoon. They are Fr. Timothy P. Korytko, Fr. John C. Newmann, Jr., Fr. Keith Poppendeck , Fr. Terry A. Byard, and Fr. John I. Morse.

R.:W.: R. Curtiss Montgomery IX, Chief Adept New York College SRICF, inducted V.:W.: Frank Rice as a Zelator into the Societas Philologi, advanced R.:W.: Myron Deputat to Practicus, R.:W.: Richard Powell to Theoricus, and V.:W.: Walter Cook IV to Philosophus. Thanks to all who continue to support the Great Work of New York College.

Rounding out the day was a practicum that including some four-fold breathing, and a Middle Pillar.

Our usual lunch of pizza, salad, and cookies was enjoyed by all over good conversation.

Be sure to attend our next convocation on October 30st!



<https://www.factretriever.com/islam-facts>

The Religion of Islam

By RW W. Bruce Renner, IX^o, KGC

Introduction

In our last issue, we discussed Hinduism considered to be the oldest living religion. In this issue we will explore Islam, the youngest. However, it can be argued that Islam is the one religion, other than their own, that Christians should make an effort to understand. Although Christianity remains the largest world religion and is likely to stay in that position for several more decades, Islam is the fastest growing religion and, all things being equal, will surpass Christianity by 2075. Both Christianity and Islam come from the same axial Judaic tradition of Abraham (another religion Christian should prioritize in their studies) and has the same geography of genesis. For this reason, they have much in common, but also much contention.

A follower of Islam is referred to as a *Muslim*. The term Muhammadism used extensively until fairly recently, particularly in the west, is considered offensive to Muslims, because unlike Christ, Muhammad is considered a prophet and a messenger, not a divine being. In the west, we associate Islam with the Middle Eastern Arab cultures, but in fact only about 20% of the total Muslim population is Arab. The remaining Muslims are largely found in Asia and Africa. In fact, the top 5 Muslim countries are Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. There are about 3.4 million Muslims in the United States, a million less than the United Arab Emirates.

Among the tenets held in common with Christians are: a belief in a monotheistic, transcendent God (termed *Allah* in the Islam faith), angels, Satan, prophets, revelation, moral accountability and responsibility, divine judgment, and eternal reward and punishment. For Muslims, Islam is the fulfillment and completion of earlier revelations, and the Quran (the Islamic holy book) and the teachings of Muhammad an extension and completion of the Bible. That is not to say that significant differences don't also exist.

The term *Islam* means "submission" or "surrender." A Muslim seeks to follow and actualize God's will in history, both as an individual and a member of a world-wide faith. As Jews and Christians trace their genealogy to Abraham through Sarah and their son Isaac, Muslims trace their descent from Abraham's son Ismail, by Sarah's handmaid, Hagar.

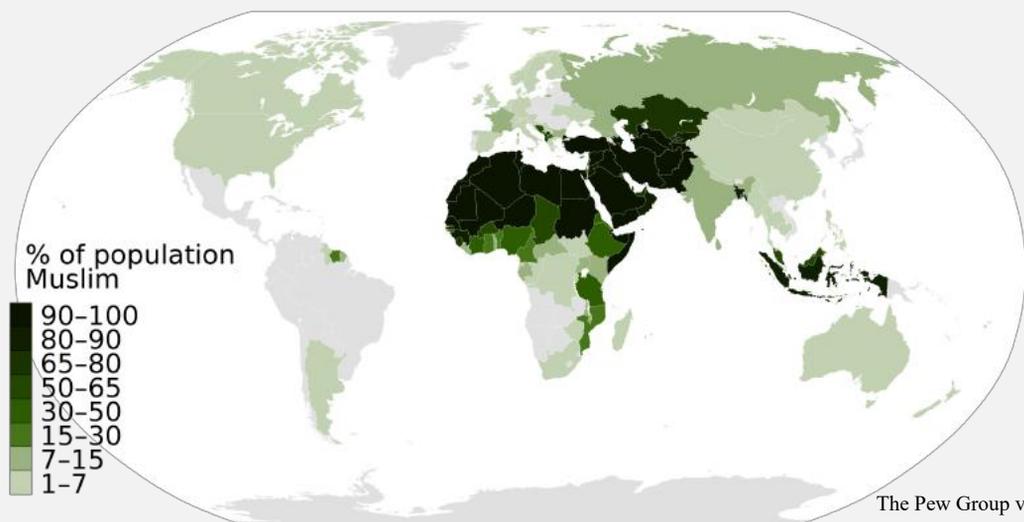
Like other religions, Islam is far from monolithic in that it has many different interpretations and sects, although like other religions there are basics to which all adhere. These different interpretations can cause conflicts interior to the religion.

Because of the circumstances of the modern world, it is almost impossible not to compare Christianity and Islam as both have become intertwined with the affairs of the mundane world in which they exist. The question that individual practitioners continually must grapple with is, “How may I live according to my faith, if society as a whole doesn’t.” Thus, Muslims and Christians continue to try to fit their religious practices to the realities of life. In countries where one or the other dominate, and even within countries that espouse to freedom of religion and a separation of church and state, acts of intolerance by the dominate faith are all too common.

The Five Pillars of Islam + one

Although there are diverse interpretations in the practice of Islam, all Muslims practice five simple observances prescribed in the Quran. These practices involve the whole man – mind, body, time, energy, and wealth, and distinguish Islam from other religions.

The first of these is a *declaration of faith*. To become a Muslim is to testify that, “there is no god but God (*Allah*) and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” It affirms an absolute monotheism, the uncompromising belief in the oneness or unity of God (*tawhid*). Association of anything else with God is considered idolatry and is the one unforgivable sin. For this reason, you will find no depiction of God in *mosques* (Islamic places of group worship). Instead, you will find intricate geometric designs and passages of scripture from the Quran.



The Pew Group via Wikipedia

Before exploring the tenets of Islam in more detail, a brief note concerning the role of women in Islam. We have seen that Hinduism has been less than kind to women throughout most of its history, and Islam has been accused of the same. All living religions of significance today have a genesis in times when male physical prowess governed society. In an age where this has pragmatically become irrelevant, males still dominate, if by nothing else than inertia and nepotism. This is increasingly being challenged in first world countries, and how the religions of the world respond may well decide their future viability.

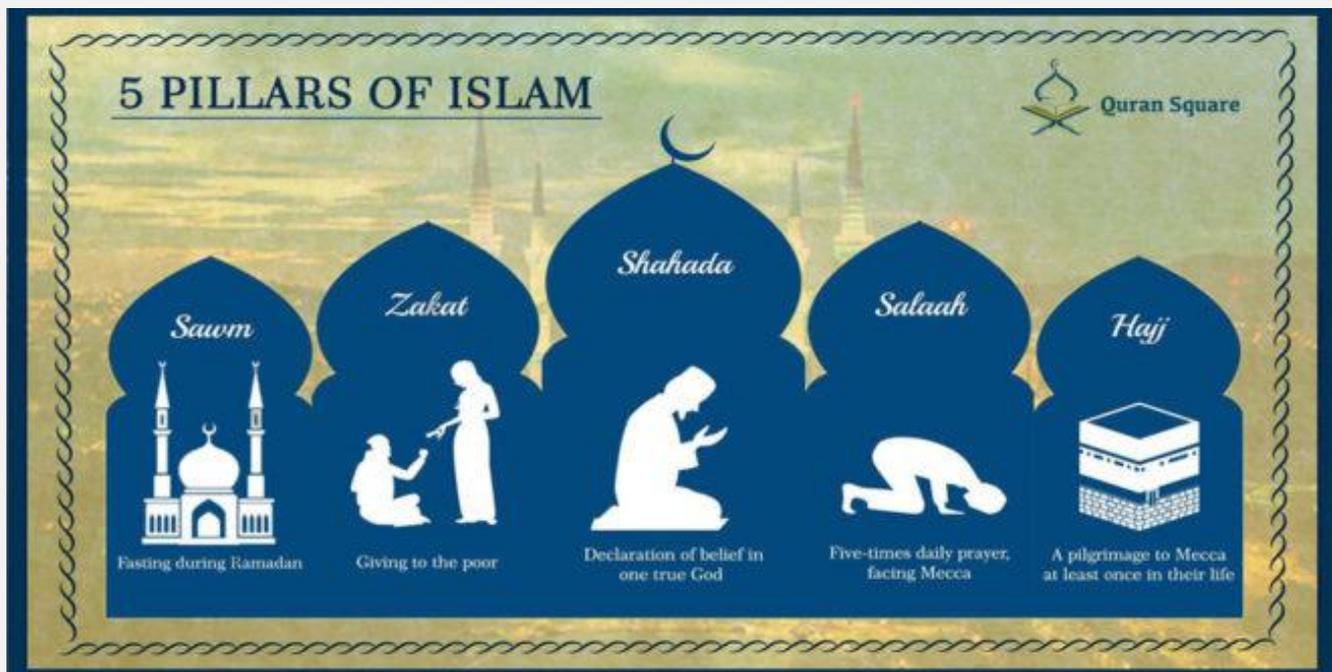
The second pillar of Islam is *prayer (salat)*. Muslims worship five times a day: at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Prayer involves recitations from the Quran in Arabic, in a variety of postures: standing, bowing, kneeling, and touching the ground with one’s forehead. This can be done in any clean environment, alone or within a group, although a group setting is always preferred. When praying Muslims face the direction of the city of Mecca where the *Kaaba* (the house of God believed to have been built by Abraham and his son Ismail). Once a week on Friday

(the Muslim equivalent of the Sabbath), the noon prayer is to be conducted in a group setting in a mosque.

The third pillar is *zakat* (purification) and the tithe that all Muslims must contribute to the community for the benefit of those less fortunate. This contribution is 2.5 percent of an individual's net worth, not just annual income.

The fourth pillar is the *fast of Ramadan* (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar). During this period a Muslim abstains from food, drink, and sexual activity from dawn to sunset. This is an exercise in the reflection of the frailty of humanity and our dependence on God. The end of Ramadan is celebrated by the Feast of Breaking the Fast (*Eid al-Fitr*).

The fifth Pillar is *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca. At least once in a Muslim's lifetime, health and finance permitting, he or she is required to make this pilgrimage, becoming a pilgrim totally in God's service. The second major Muslim holiday (Feast of Sacrifice or *Eid al-Adha*) occurs toward the end of the *hajj*.



Quran Square

Jihad (to strive, struggle or exert) is sometimes referred to as the sixth pillar, although it has no such official status. It refers to the individual Muslim's need to live a virtuous life, to spread Islam, and when necessary, defend it. As conceived, it supports only defensive warfare, but this is historically not always the case.

Muhammad

At the turn of the 7th century Arabia was tribal and polytheistic, although there was a conception of one god above all others, *Allah*, but one largely uninvolved in humanity or daily life. Although the great Axial Age concept of monotheism arose in the Middle east, it should be noted that no religion is really purely monotheistic in the sense that, for example, Judaism and Christianity, have a plethora of divine entities e.g., angels, in addition to the one true god.

Muhammad (570-632) was born into one of the wealthier of these tribes, the *Quraysh*, in Mecca. Although his parents died at an early age, he was fortunate to be adopted by an equally wealthy and powerful uncle, Abu Talib. He became a man known for good character and a perchance for taking long, contemplative walks in the desert. For the first two-thirds of his life he was quite ordinary. He worked as a business manager for the caravans of a wealthy widow named, Khadija, whom he eventually married.

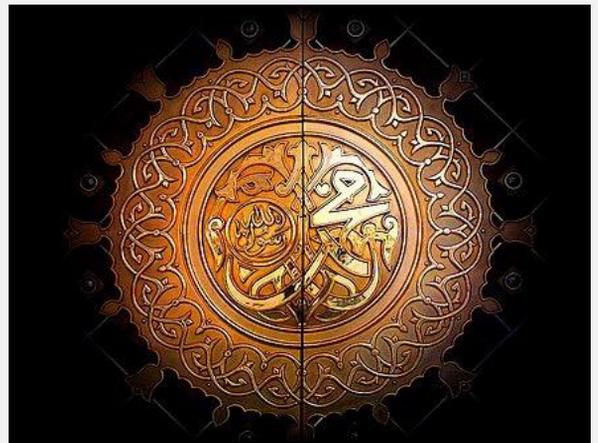
According to Islamic tradition in the year 610, on the Night of Power and Excellence, he was called to be a prophet and messenger of God. He would receive many messages from God (*Allah*) through the intermediary of the angel, Gabriel. He was commanded to recite these revelations to the people. These were later compiled into the Quran.

These revelations were met with resistance as it threatens the existing power structure of the various tribes. One of the central points of Islam was to challenge the hubris of current religions that had drifted away from the core tenets of faith. In particular, it challenged the status quo and called for social justice for the poor, particularly women, children, and orphans.

For the first 10 years of Muhammad's *jihad* (struggle) this resistance limited the growth of Islam. Eventually Muhammad, his wife (his first convert, who in fact, encouraged him to follow his visions), and about 200 followers, were force out of Mecca. This event was called the *hijira* (to emigrate), and marks the first year in the Muslim calendar and the establishment of the first Islamic community, but it was established about 250 miles away in the

city of Medina. From this point on Muhammad added to his role as prophet, by becoming a political ruler, military commander, and law giver. In Medina, the nascent Islamic faith flourished, and among other things established a social structure that allowed Muslims and people of other faiths to co-exist providing they remained loyal and paid a poll tax (*jizya*) to support the social justice programs envisioned by Islam.

Having established a viable and increasingly powerful community of followers, several military actions were taken that ultimately secure Islam throughout Arabia, including the important city of Mecca. In doing so, conflict arose with Jewish interests, mostly around political, military, and economic issues, rather than theological ones.



Muhammad the Messenger of God inscribed on the gates of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (Wikipedia)

More about the Quran

When I began this essay, I stated that Islam was the newest of current world religions, but Muhammad taught a different view, one shared by Muslims today. Although they recognize People of the Book (Christians and Jews) as kindred believers, they believe that these religions have drifted away from their core beliefs. Islam, in correcting this hubris, is, therefore, in their minds the oldest of monotheistic faiths, representing as it does the original and final revelation of God.

The Quran is seen as a correction rather than a replacement for the Torah and New Testament. It is composed of 114 chapters and 6,000 verses which is shorter than the New Testament. Muslims believe that Arabic is the language of God. Therefore, all Muslims, regardless of their native language, are required to memorize and recite from the Quran in Arabic. Recitations from the Quran form the basis for the 5 daily prayers, and there are even recitation competitions.

Allah (the God and Creator) appears more than 2500 times in the Quran. Islam is absolutely monotheistic. There is no Trinity, as in Christianity, and Jesus is recognized as a prophet, not as God's son. Muslims consider artistic representations of God by human beings to be idolatry, and mosques, therefore, are decorated with Arabic calligraphy, as well as, geometric and floral designs. *Allah* is portrayed as more merciful and compassionate than the God of the Old Testament.



Medina and Mecca are two important cities in the early history of Islam. They are about 200 miles apart. (<https://www.aljazeera.com>)

The Quranic universe consists of heaven, earth, and hell, in which there are humans and spirits (angels, *jinns*, and devils). The

Quran teaches that Earth was given to man as a trust, and they are to be an instrument of his will. There is no doctrine of original sin, and no believe in vicarious suffering or atonement for all of humankind. Sinners need to repent, though there is no emphasis on shame, disgrace, or guilt. There is the concept of struggle (*jihad*) to do what is right and just. All believers are considered equal before God. There is also an emphasis on addressing poverty and to work toward social justice.

It may surprise many that in the Quran men and women are seen as equal and complementary. Pluralism and tolerance are also stressed. Despite actions by radical groups such as the Taliban, historically Islam has a fair record of tolerance, and can't be regarded as evangelistic. Quranic verses also underscore that peace, not violence and warfare, is to be the norm, and there is no advocacy of terrorism.

Early History after Mohammad

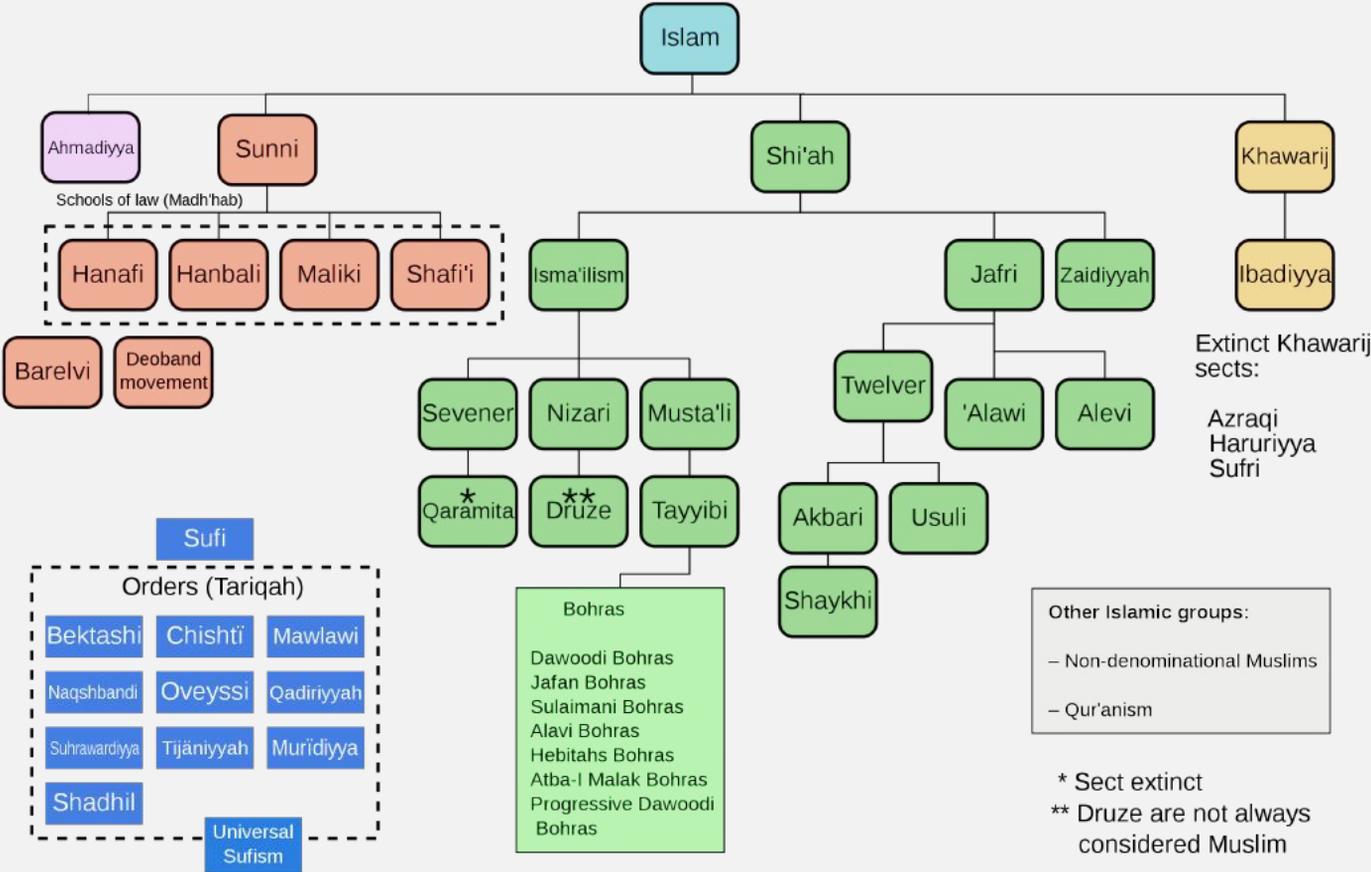
Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. was traumatic, largely over the issue of succession. The vast majority of Muslims became *Sunnis*. They supported the idea that succession should be based on the best available candidate, rather than hereditary. Today 85% of Muslims identify as *Sunnis*. They selected Abu Bakr a close companion, trusted advisor, and father-in-law to be *caliph* (successor, deputy).

The minority community are called the *Shiis*. They believed that Ali, Muhammad's first cousin and closest living male relative should succeed him and become *imam* (leader). Ali was passed over 3 times before becoming caliph some 35 years after the death of Muhammad. He was assassinated a few years later. His son Hussein and his followers were overwhelmed by a Sunni army and massacred in an event called the tragedy of Karbala and the martyrdom of Hussein.

The difference between *Sunnis* and *Shiis* are over politics not religion. Both believed in the same religious fundamentals set down by Muhammad in the Quran. Within a century of Muhammad's passing Islam had extend its empire from North Africa to Southeast Asia, a territory larger than the Roman empire. From the beginning, Islam rejected the idea of a separation of church and state. In their view, if religion was indeed the moral center of individuals, it should also be integrated into every aspect of daily life. Therefore, from the beginning, Islam informed all state institutions under its rule including the caliphate, law, education, military, and social services. It supported the idea of the rich having a responsibility to relieve the distress of the poor and unfortunate.

In most cases Muslim rule replace more autocratic systems, and was generally well received. It was tolerant of other religions, offering three choices to conquered peoples. One could convert to Islam, one could remain in the faith of their choice (*dhimmi* – protected class) providing they paid a poll tax, or they could meet Islam on the field of battle.

From 632-661, four successive caliph's ruled Islam. This period ended with the assassination of Ali. Power was seized by Muawiyah, who founded the Umayyad Dynasty, moving the capital to Damascus. Rule was now characterized by an absolute hereditary monarchy dominated by an Arab military aristocracy. The Umayyad Dynasty persisted until 750, and continued expansion of Islam's influence. This dynasty met with considerable opposition. In 750 it was overthrown after a revolt led by an Abbasid slave. This led to the establishment of an Abbasid caliphate which lasted from 750-1258. This rule saw continued growth of the Islamic community whose wealth, political power, and cultural accomplishment coincided with developments in Islamic scholarship and disciplines and the building of mosques and schools. Significant creative contributions were made to world knowledge by Islamic scholars in this period. Islam also preserved knowledge lost to Europe during the Middle Ages. As Europe emerged, this knowledge was gradually re-transmitted. Although a true golden age of Islam, it was not without opposition.



A major inflection point in Islamic history was the Crusades (1095-1453) launched by Christian Europe who increasingly saw Islam as a threat, particularly as Islam interest began to invade countries such as Spain and Italy.

Eventually, Istanbul would become the seat of the Ottoman empire. This event marked the end of the Crusades. Although the history of the Crusades as taught in the West often portrays Muslim as blood thirsty barbarians, the Crusaders had much to be ashamed of in this period, as well. On the whole, one must acknowledge that both Islamic and Christian interests behaved in a very non-religious fashion.

The Abbasid caliphate was replaced by a series of sultanates. During their rule Islam was again expanded by the traders and the Sufi brotherhoods (which we will discuss shortly.) The power of these sultanates declined beginning in the 18th century, coinciding with the industrial revolution in the West and the era of European colonialism that challenge Islamic rule and expansion.

The Crusades brought Islam and Christianity into violence conflict. In the end, although Islam won militarily, Christianity greatly benefited, and Islam did not



By anonymus - <http://classes.bnf.fr/ema/images/3/chrono/7-1.jpg>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10195562>

Reformation of sorts

It can be considered a perennial truth, and a very pragmatic one, that religions begin simply and move to complexity. This complexity breeds any number of issues, sometimes even corrupting the original message. This challenge happened faster with Islam for a few reasons. Like several other world faiths, it began with a single person. In the case of Islam this person was Muhammad. During his lifetime, he was the final and only authority, but he lived as this central figure for only 32 years. Upon his death, there was immediate contention as we have seen. This was first over succession. As time went on, the successors made additions and changes to the canon of Islam. It must be acknowledged, however, that the basic precepts, such as the Five Pillars were kept intact.

Another corrupting factor, was Islam's rapid expansion, which brought Muslims in to close contact with many other cultures. Because Islam was from the start concerned with secular governance, as well as, spirituality, there was ample opportunity to drift from the original message. For example, in cases of warfare, it was difficult to subjugate a foe, and then tolerate the same foe's religious preferences. The Crusades, in particular, were highly challenging to the Islamic principle of religious tolerant.

Under such circumstances, reform came quickly, and in two forms. One addressed exoteric orthopraxy or correct practice and the other, esoteric orthodoxy, or correct belief. Both arose because of abuses of the Umayyad rule.

Reformists reflected not so much a return to principles of the past, as an attempt to keep Islam relevant and viable in an ever-changing secular world, while remaining true to its core principles. This certainly wasn't and isn't embraced by all Muslims and, fundamentalists, in particular, reject the idea of *any* changes to Islam.

The Islamic law movement was the exoteric response. It reflected a belief in right practice as a natural response to correct belief. It is based on the Quran's teaching that Muslims must struggle (*jihad*) in their spiritual path (*Shariah*). These terms have been misused by both anti-Muslims factions and Muslim extremists. *Jihad*, for example, in this context, is the struggle one has to exhibit for correct action, i.e., to do the right thing, not in the more pejorative sense of a holy war against others.

Shariah refers to divine law, for in Islam, God is the only true lawgiver. It is, however, limited by interpretation and understanding (*fiqh*). The development of Islamic law was then given to religious scholars, not government officials. Still few governments of Islamic countries have been willing to replace Islamic law and be accused of abrogating "god's law."

There are two main divisions. First is a Muslim's duty to God and second is one's duties to others. This later evolved to include regulations governing public life, as well as, family laws involving, for example, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. It should be noted that there is considerable variance in the diversity of legal opinions or interpretations (*fatwas*) rendered by legal experts (*muftis*) who advise judges and litigants.

Sunni Muslims recognized four official sources of Islamic law: the Quran, the Sunnah (observations from Muhammad's life), analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) used when no direct principle can be applied, and finally consensus (*ijma*) of the community (although this was in practice restricted to religious scholars). It reflects a precept of Muhammad, "My community will never agree on an error."

Shii Muslims have slightly different sources. In addition to the *Quran* and Sunnah, they include traditions introduced by Ali and other prominent leaders (*imans*).

The second reformist path is Islamic mysticism or Sufism. Sufism represents a belief that a strict focus of practice concerning laws, rules, duties and rights was spiritually lacking. They sought an ascetic, interior path of the purity and the simplicity of the time of Muhammad. They believe that this path connected one to a direct, personal experience with God.

In this they were perhaps a bit more of the fundamentalist worldview. They often resisted the colonial powers, for example. Yet Sufis, who were instrumental in spreading Islam through their missionary work, had a tendency to adopt and adapt local non-Islamic customs. To these they added their own strong devotional and emotional practices. This brought them into conflict with advocates

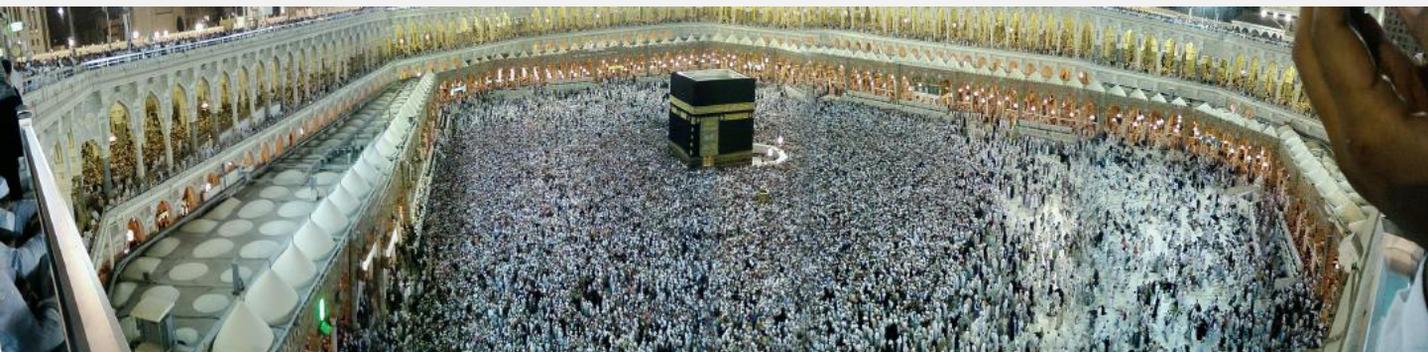


Although the Sufis have many traditional forms of spiritual practice, the whirling dervish is unique to them (public domain via Wikipedia)

of Islamic law discussed above. Eventually these issues were resolved through a process of synthesizing and reconciliation based on the teachings of Abu Hamid al Ghazali (1058-1111) called the Renewer of Islam.

In practice, Sufis resemble mystic orders in other religions and enjoy great influence both spiritual and material. They have the same types of monasteries, distinctive garb, ascetic practices, litanies, and saints as other mystics. The Whirling Dervishes is one of their distinctive practices, but they also engage in meditation and contemplation, and various devotional exercises such as fasting and periods of silence.

Sufism continues to be a vibrant tradition in the modern world and is still attracting many converts to Islam. However, it has received a great deal of persecution at the hand of fellow Muslims (chiefly those in authoritative states.)



By Bluemangoa2z at Malayalam Wikipedia, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8058857>

Panorama of the [al-Masjid al-Haram](#), also known as the Grand Mosque of Mecca, during the Hajj pilgrimage

The first thousand years and into the second

Although Islam expanded rapidly in its first millennium, the very pace of that expansion fueled a non-cohesion of Muslim interest, as various groups and local customs modified Islam in different ways. At times, the Islamic world saw great power and prosperity across its domains, but by the end of its first millennium it was largely in disarray. Political disintegration, as well as, social and moral decline set in.

Prior to the 17th century, the period of the Crusades was the most important clash of European Christian interests with the vastly larger and more civilized Muslim world. At the time of the crusades, Christian Europe was slumbering in the Dark Ages. The Islam civilization was more advanced and learned. In the Crusades, they also enjoyed home field advantage. Ultimately, and despite a great deal of back and forth, Muslim interests prevailed. The average Muslim, for his part, considered the Crusaders to be barbarian invaders, but were nevertheless initially surprised at their prowess in warfare. As with all prolonged wars, there are stories of magnanimous and barbaric behavior on both sides. The crusades ended in part because of the reduced power of the Catholic Church through the reformation, and in part with Muslim dominance in the final crusades.

The lasting effect for Islam was a of one distrust, and other than repelling the invaders, they gained little from the struggle. Europe, on the other hand, gained significantly. They were able to push back Muslim interests in Europe, and acquired significant knowledge in their interactions in the Middle East. As with all wars, there were advances in logistics that lasted into more peaceful times. Overall, the crusades helped Europe regain its place in the civilized world.

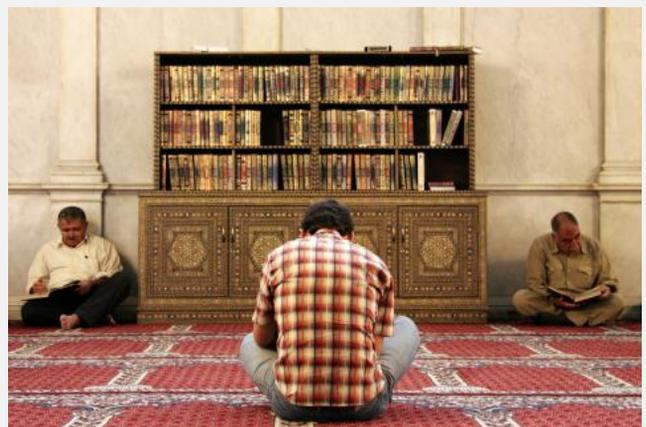
When next the Muslim and Christian worlds met, the Islam world, if not quite descended into a period like the European Middle Ages, was far from its peak. Meanwhile, Christian Europe had emerged into the Renaissance, and was moving into the Enlightenment. While the emergence and eventual dominance of the scientific worldview posed a threat to Christianity, the two coincided more effectively than science and religion in the Muslim world.

The Enlightenment ushered in a period of massive colonial expansion, and where the economic interests went, so too did the Christian missionaries intent on converting the world. Muslim countries viewed this incursion with alarm, of course, which led to a period of self-criticism and reflections on the causes of their decline.

Again, revivalist interests emerged, not just intellectually, but with regionally adding local flavor throughout the Muslim Empire. Conservative fundamentalism rejected modernity and advocated a return to the core beliefs of Islam. Modernists sought to reinterpret Islam to demonstrate its compatibility with modern Western science and thought to meet the changing circumstances of Muslim life through legal, educational, political, and social reforms. A central position rejecting these two extremes were advocates of religious reform coupled with social activism. This central position gained popular support by addressing issues directly concerning a cross-section of society: colonialism, dependance on the West, religious identity, poverty, illiteracy, economic exploitation, education, and healthcare. Involvement with the material world and the pursuit of social justice by political and social activism were critical components of the neo-revivalist message. They did not simply propagate religion but called on Muslims to become better and more involved in society.



Muslim men **prostrating** in prayer, at the **Umayyad Mosque, Damascus**.



Muslim men reading the Quran

By Antonio Melina/Agência Brasil - Agência Brasil by Antonio Melina/Agência Brasil. 01.Dec.2003 as 11605.jpg, from where it was downloaded, cropped, and resized by Hajor., CC BY 3.0 br, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=171458>

By Erik Albers - Own work, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45423744>

The 20th Century

The first half of the 20th century saw vast changes to the geopolitical landscape. Four major events, all catastrophically negative, informed this period. The First World War and the 1918 pandemic together accounted for 100 million to 150 million deaths worldwide. They were followed by the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Between the two wars two less noticed events greatly affected the Muslim world.

As we have seen, the once great Islamic Empire and sultanates had already fallen into decline. These were largely obliterated and replaced by modern i.e., Western nation-states, by the colonial powers. Between the wars there was the gradual withdrawal of colonialism. In the Middle East, countries had literally been reconfigured under colonial rule. Therefore, when they were divested and local rulers and government structures took over, they were largely creations of the departing colonial powers. Jordan, Syria, and Iraq are examples. The new rulers were still dependent on colonial support. Rulers also rooted their legitimacy in an authoritarian state with a strong military-security apparatus, rather than indigenous culture, political participation, and electoral politics. Although Muslims followed some religious prescriptions in these countries, they tended to adopt a Western secular path. These countries were seen on the world stage as more modern, because they appeared more Western. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf States, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan were considered more traditionally religious, and thus, backward.

Increasingly, in the years following WWII, these structures began to unravel. Those following the Western model engaged in military conflicts that resulted in crippling defeats. Particularly crushing were conflicts with the relatively small state of Israel that resulted in a quick and decisive defeat of Muslim interests. The loss of Jerusalem in 1967 was a very traumatic experience.



Abdülmecid II was the last Caliph of Islam from the **Ottoman dynasty**.

By Jean Pascal Sébah - Library of Congress, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25190758>

Countries that followed the more traditional Muslim model fared little better. Although Muslim ideals as set out in the Quran and other core religious documents were the official position, in reality poverty, illiteracy, failed economies, high unemployment, and malapportionment of wealth brought into question the viability of Muslim rule.

The disillusionment facing Islamic peoples took two paths. One was the positive search for a model of revitalization and the establishment of a path to recapture self-esteem, self-identity, and greater authenticity in Islamic culture. The other was unfortunately the rise of negative, militant, and eventually terrorist activity, which has led the non-Islamic world to increasingly view Islam as a danger to world peace and security.

Central to both positions was a continuing belief in the necessity of a successful integration of the Islamic faith into both

society and politics. The failure of Muslim societies was increasingly tied to the mismatch of Islamic core values and Western secularism which separated religion from politics. The thinking then followed that Western laws should be replaced by Islamic law, for example.

As the 20th century wound down and the 21st century begins, both the progressive and radical agendas have evolved. In countries where Muslim populations are the minority, they face the universal discrimination of all minorities. In the case of Muslims, terrorist attacks by radical Muslim groups have made majorities negatively hypersensitive to Islam and Muslim populations and impeded efforts of the vast majority of peaceful Muslims to blend in. Nevertheless, Muslims continue to make progress in the professional and political arenas of these countries.

In countries where Muslims are the majority, there has been less overall progress. The autocratic nature of many of the governments of these countries continues to be a corrupting influence. However, in some countries, more democratic governments are beginning to emerge. Elections where Muslim candidates support Islam's core values have enjoyed considerable success. Still, there are instances of regression such as in Turkey. Oil wealth continues to be inequitably distributed. Tension between various Islamic interests, as well as, between Islam and non-Islamic interests are exhibited on the broader world stage. The recent removal of an American military presence in Afghanistan, and the return of the Taliban, will serve as an interesting case study. Will militant radicals form a stable government, establish a viable society, and a good relationship with global neighbors?

Islam today

Many of the issues that have confronted Islam in the past confront it today. At the heart of this is the struggle for the soul of Islam between conservatives and reformers. The two major questions that remain are: *who* has the authority to interpret Islam, and *what* are the relevant and acceptable interpretations of Islam in today's world. Embedded in these two questions are more specific issues such as the relationship of religion to society, the role of Islamic law, the status of women and non-Muslims, the compatibility of Islam and democracy, and relations with the West. As in the past, both the *ulama* (religious scholars) and Muslim rulers continue to assert their right to protect, defend, and promote Islam. The result is a broad range of interpretations from conservative to revolutionary.

Other monotheistic religions have opted to accept the idea that monotheism doesn't equate to monolithic religious organizational structure where there is only one correct brand of the accepted faith. Christianity is foremost in this where there exists relatively good relation between different sects and opinions, providing one accepts core fundamentals. Islam has historically struggled with this, in part because it has the strictest of monotheistic outlooks.



Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest man-made structure located in Dubai

By Donaldytong - commons:File:Burj Khalifa.jpg, originally from the author as noted below. Deleted from Commons by admin King of Hearts 5 November 2012., CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37469604>

Muslims also struggle, as we have seen, with the relationship of religion to society in general, often maintaining that they must be integrated to make faith relevant.

Muslim experiments run the gamut from conservative monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia, to radical approaches in Libya, Sudan, and Iran. Islamic activism sometimes works within society (creating schools, hospitals, social services, and democratic style elections) to violent revolutions that try to topple governments and impose authoritarian versions of Islamic rule.

The role of women in Islam

The three religions with the most adherents – Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism – have much to offer the spiritual seeker. That said, none are without faults. One fault they all have in common is their historically poor treatment of women, a fault that unfortunately persists today. Islam, in particular, has been in the world's eye on this issue over the last several decades, chiefly through the bad behavior of its radical extremists. They, however, hardly represent the totality of Islam. As we have seen, the practice of Islam varies considerably in its communities. In Taliban controlled Afghanistan and parts of Africa, extreme patriarchy prevents women from having any say in the governance of society, of receiving education, or holding any form of public or professional office. Disobedience often leads to extreme forms of punishment.

In other Muslim dominated countries, women's rights are no less than found in their non-Muslim counterpart throughout the world. In Western cultures, where Muslim are a minority, they may continue to set themselves apart by wearing traditional dress such as the head covering or *hijab*, but otherwise have the same freedoms as non-Muslims. However, it should be recognized that Islam is highly governed by individual practice, and certainly some households may enforce a more limited role for their women.

There are four general Muslim orientations that can be identified today:

- **Secularists believe that religion is a personal matter and should be excluded from politics and public life.**
- **Conservatives (mostly ulama and their followers) emphasize following *taqlid* (past traditions) and are wary of any change, which they often view as *bida* (deviation, the equivalent of Christian heresy)**
- **Mainstream Islamic activists (who are lay, not clerical) respect classical formulations of law but aren't wedded to them. They emphasize a return to fundamentals (Quran and Sunnah) and a reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islamic belief and institutions**
- **Modern reformers get at the core issue, the relationship of the divine to the human in Islamic law, and *fiqh* (understanding), and human interpretation and application that is historically conditioned. They go further than fundamentalist in their acceptance of the degree to which enshrined classical formulations of Islamic law may be changed**



Muslim women, for their part, are not completely against all aspects of Muslim traditional behavior concerning their role. For example, while many deplore the wearing of traditional clothes, others find it liberating when compared to the uncomfortable and overly revealing dress of the average non-Muslim Western woman.

Does the Quran have anything to say on the subject of equality of the sexes? The answer is bit inconclusive. There are certainly passages that suggest a more equal place for women, but there is no overt statement as such. Like the Ten Commandments, the Five Pillars of Islam make no mention of the equality of the sexes. This leads to a thorny question of theology, and not only for Islam. It is clear that the equality of the sexes wasn't a popular idea for most of human history. It is still far from being universally accepted.

Some would argue that if the divine is all knowing then gender equality would have been included the revelations given to sages such as Mohammad. There is certainly a strong case to be made that Mohammad had a predisposition toward equality in the sexes. His wife, for example, was his closest advisor. Yet it would also be clear to someone with as much situational awareness as Mohammad that such an idea would meet very high resistance, perhaps derailing his entire effort to establish the new religion of Islam.

Some would argue then that not all his insights were divinely inspired, but a product of his considerable intellect, imagination, and spiritual contemplation, couple with a pragmatic view of his society.

Others would argue that God would expect man to evolve and as we moved increasing to an information-based society, rather than one based on physical labor, men and women would naturally become more equal. In other words, God started man from scratch, provided free will, and then sat back to see what would happen.

Of course, fundamentalists in all religions take the third position that women are, and will continue to be, inferior to men.

The larger, perennial question is this: does religion exist because of a self-aware creature's need to make sense of and give a greater purpose to its brief existence, or is it truly divinely communicated?

Islam in the West

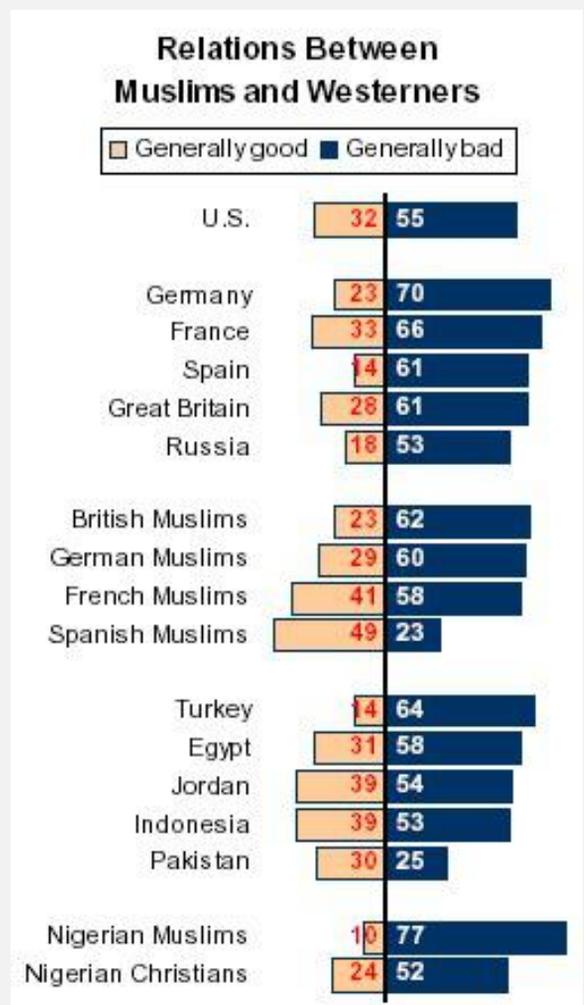
There is a tendency in the West to view Islam as an exotic and, increasingly, as a dangerous religion. Certainly, throughout history, Western Christianity has often found itself in conflict with Islam. As we have learned in this essay, however, Christianity and Islam emerged from the same Judaical Abrahamian tradition, so Islam is less exotic than superficial appearances might suggest. However, the diaspora of Islam and Christianity did largely go in opposite directions.

In the true Western hemisphere composed of North, South, and Central America, Islam is a very small religious minority, and suffers all the disadvantages of minorities everywhere - the tribalistic prejudices inherent in our species. This is also true of Europe and Australia, two other traditionally Christian lands. In the United States, Muslims represent about 1% of the population, while in Canada the number is over 3%. By contrast, Islam is virtually non-existent in Central and South America. In Europe the number is higher (About 6% - 7%), perhaps due to its proximity to traditional Muslim countries and the increasing number of immigrants fleeing conflicts in the Middle East. In Australia, meanwhile, the number is about 2.6%.

The first Muslims in what is now the United States arrived from the time of Columbus, largely from enclaves of Muslims in Europe. Between the 16th and 19th centuries 14% to 20% of African slaves were Muslim although they were forced, at least publicly, to convert to Christianity. Indians and Arabs who weren't slaves also immigrated to the United States during this period. Muslim immigrants increased steadily beginning in the 19th century, and significantly because of the disruptions to their homelands caused by the two world wars. More recently, many Muslim students have come to study, and some have remained.

For most of their history, Muslims succeeded in integrating themselves into western society. Although they had customs that identified them as a bit different, they were similar to American Jewish population who kept to their old traditions. In recent decades this has been upended, largely by terrorist activity by Muslim extremists and unrest in Middle East. The Judeo-Christian majority, who never had a good understanding of Islam or their Muslim neighbor's history and traditions, increasingly viewed them as a dangerous "other."

One other area which has contributed to Muslims going from nearly invisible to negative standouts is conversion. Religious conversion is a process fraught with issues. Ideally, religious conversion comes from a long process of contemplation and is



Based on *Pew Research* polls the majority Muslims and non-Muslims view each other with mis-trust

made entirely because of a spiritual affinity with a different religion. Many conversions, however, are made for other reasons that have little to do with the actual religion itself. We have seen, for example, that African slaves were forced to convert to Christianity. Voluntary conversions are sometimes sought because of a desire to, on one hand fit in, and on the other, to rebel.

There are two types of conversion that have occurred in the USA in recent decades that have negatively affect the Muslim community. One is the conversion of African-Americans to Islam. There are certainly many African-Americans who have converted to Islam after serious reflection, but several movements beginning in the early 20th century, such as the Nation of Islam, have weaponized conversion as a rebuke to racism exhibited by Christians majorities. Such groups often adopted the name, but not the practices, of Islam. This has connected the prejudice against Muslims with the continuing prejudice against African-Americans.

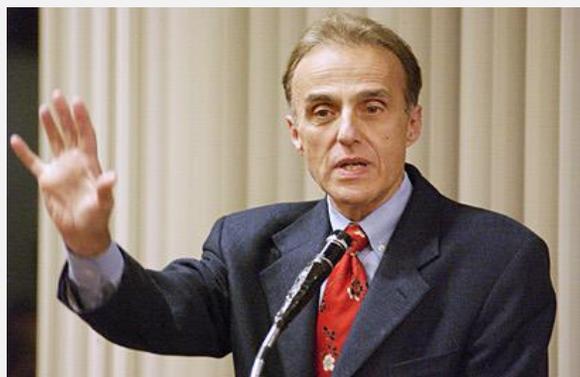
A second conversion issue is radicalization by Muslim extremists (and let's be clear that they are a very small minority) via social media.

Despite these very real obstacles, everyday Muslims are a part of western society, and have increasingly integrated themselves into western social, political, and professional life. Muslims in the west have developed their own traditions and continue to work to make their culture successful in western societies.

The final thoughts and the future of Islam

Islam is by far the fastest growing religion in the world. Much of this growth comes from traditional Muslim held areas in Asia and Africa. It is worth noting, however, that many analysts predict that Islam will be the majority religion in Europe by 2150, and a world majority by 2175. We have seen in this essay that Islam has had bright and dark moments, but as a perennial truth that will become obvious as we explore more of the world religions, *all* religions do. The question we should look to answer now is: why is Islam so popular compared to other religions?

As with my essay on Hinduism, I admit to largely one source of information. That is, in this case, a 6-hour course on Islam offered by Wondrium and given by John L. Esposito, Ph.D., Professor of Religion and International Affairs, Islamic Studies, at Georgetown University.



Georgetown University Professor John Esposito gave the inaugural lecture Monday for the newly established Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies. "It's not that Islam is incompatible [with democracy, pluralism and human rights]; it's that many Muslim regimes are, but we don't draw that distinction," ...

Furthermore, while post-Cold War U.S. administrations promoted democracy in many parts of the world, such efforts were not extended to the Middle East. "It didn't seem to be in our interest with regards to access to oil and influence," Esposito said. "Regrettably, so many of those regimes have been, and continue to be, supported by Western powers. It tells you why anti-Americanism is so widespread. [Muslims] see America as arrogant, unilateral."

<https://news.stanford.edu/news/2003/november/19/islam-1119.html>

Esposito said. Photo: L.A. Cicero

There is an extensive study guide provided, as with all Wondrium (formally the Great Courses) courses. For anyone who wishes to go deeper, I highly recommend viewing this course. Consider this essay an executive summary.

Allah in Arabic

By File:Allah.svg -
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An early comparison of Christianity and Islam in Professor Esposito's lectures gives one possible reason for Islam's popularity. Islam has a focus on personal practice not found in Christianity, where the emphasis is on belief, and congregational centric worship, not personal practice. (Please understand that this is a broad generality. There are certainly highly devoted Christians that give over a great deal of their personal life to their faith, but this is not built into the standard model of Christianity.) This personal practice keeps their faith in the forefront of their daily lives. Although we have seen that Hinduism is also personal practice centric, among strictly monotheistic religions, Islam stands out in this regard.

A second aspect is Islam's focus on social justice. You will recall that one of the Five Pillars of Islam concerns the sharing of wealth – every Muslim is required to provide a tithe of 2.5% of their wealth – not income - for the care of the less fortunate. Since there are many more poor people than rich people in the world, this has a wide appeal.

The extension of religion into the social and political structures of countries, as well as, personal wealth, has been a double-edged sword for Islam. Believers point out that it is hypocritical to avow a faith, but then act in a non-religious fashion in our daily life. Therefore, society ought to operate in accordance with God's will expressed through faith. However, a sociality integration of the secular and the divine is not in line with the reality of first world countries.

Two major obstacles, one old, and one new are challenging Islam's continual growth. The old is Islam's historic internal struggle to balance tradition with reform, and develop a workable model that is successful and attractive to the world community. Among the questions here are Islam compatible with democracy, capitalism, and can it move past misogyny? In each case, there are Muslims on both sides of the issues.

The new issue is the rise of Islam terrorism. Muslim and non-Muslim cultures have often clashed across the centuries. In recent years this has increasingly led non-Muslims to view Muslim culture to be underdeveloped, authoritarian, extremist and prone to terrorism. The September 11th attack on the United States was a major setback for the vast majority of Muslims seeking an equitable place in world culture. As distressing as the loss of life was as a result of this attack, it is even more distressing to note that a handful of individuals could negatively change the course of billions of people. To be clear, terrorist has no place in traditional Muslim culture, and is not supported by the Quran.

As a last note, and perhaps as a thought question going forward: If Islam recognized Jesus as the son of God, would Islam be viewed as just another variation of Christian practice? This essay and indeed the course it is based on is largely about the place of Islam in history, rather than its theology. The reason for this is quite simple: Christians know most of Islam's theology from their understanding of their own theology.



A widely used symbol for Islam first used by the Ottoman Empire

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Homer's Iliad



Introduction

In this newsletter the *Iliad* is reviewed against the background of our previous installments of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead/The Book of Coming Forth by Day* and *Theogony*. *Iliad*'s plot will be sketched out, followed by a brief reflection on its esoteric impact, and the *Iliad*'s motivations reflected in our modern-day norms.

Plot

The story begins with an invocation to the Muses, and the Grecian war with Troy supposedly ending. The Greek King Agamemnon has taken a young woman named Chryseis as a captive as part of his spoils of war. Chryseis' father happens to be a priest of Apollo, who offers tribute to Agamemnon in exchange for returning his daughter. Agamemnon refuses, prompting the priest to petition Apollo to force the issue. Apollo promptly obliges sending a plague upon the Greeks.

Agamemnon is forced to release Chryseis to her father's care or lose his warriors to Apollo's plague. To balm his wounded pride at being bested by a priest and his god, Agamemnon decides to replace Chryseis. He then claims Briseis who happens to be the woman-via-spoils of his strongest champion and a demigod, Achilles.

This was a bad idea.

Achilles unsurprisingly takes issue with this, and storms off taking his warriors with him.

The tension set up between Agamemnon (who in the course of this tale swiftly gains tally marks for poor decision making) and Achilles drives the rest of the plot forward. If not for Agamemnon's casual disregard for anything other than his pride and Achilles' feelings of wounded honor, the rest of the poem would not have occurred. This will be discussed later in this review but suffice to say it was at this point where I found it difficult to submerge myself into the story. The main characters behave in a manner which shows a total lack of sensitivity and awareness for their comrades. The motivation behind the ensuing battles is due

to abstracts such as “honor” besmirched or otherwise, or “glory of battle” i.e., bloodlust. I often times found myself smiling at the wisdom of the priest who secured the safety of his daughter, and promptly left the story to avoid the predictable nonsense to come. But I digress...

Following the “annexation” of Briseis, Achilles asks his mother Thetis (a sea nymph) to help him in his plight. She promptly secures the aid of Zeus who “helps” by convincing Agamemnon through a dream to attack Troy. Zeus expects that the ensuing conflict will require Agamemnon to obtain Achilles’ aid via restoration of Briseis. This plan would have worked if not for Agamemnon’s talent for warfare.

Following the dream sent from Zeus, Agamemnon tests his forces against their desire to return home (at this time, the war has lasted for nearly a decade). His men with few exceptions rejoice at the notion of ending the war however Agamemnon’s generals possessed a talent for speechcraft and convince the troops to stay and continue the fight.

As the war continues a who’s-who list of the Greek pantheon gets involved with the conflict, including Hera, Aphrodite, Ares, Hermes, Athena, and Poseidon. Many heroes on both sides die despite a number of the warriors being warned of their impending doom by cooler heads. Notably the death of Patroclus who was extremely close to Achilles as friend and confidant (though there is debate as to the exact nature of their relationship). The death of Patroclus caused Achilles great sorrow through the tale, which was tragically avoidable. This brings Achilles back into the war.

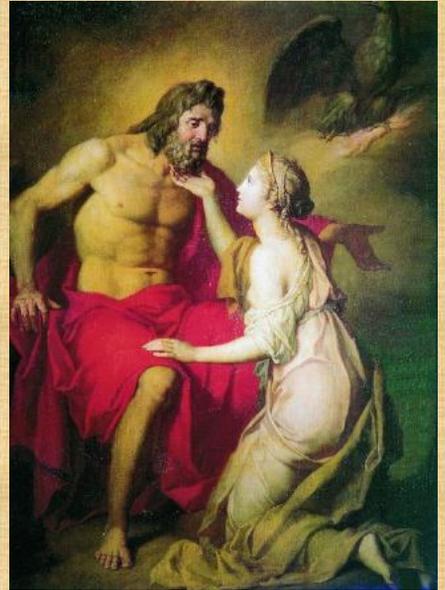
In revenge for the death of Patroclus, Achilles kills the Trojan warrior and prince Hector, whose body was then desecrated in dramatic and grisly fashion by being paraded around Troy dragged behind a speeding chariot. This in turn caused equally great sorrow to Hector’s relatives, being the ruling family of Troy.

The plot of *Iliad* is that of war waged based on the passions of a few individuals in charge of the conflict. The loss of life on both sides provides a backdrop of tragedy to the drama of personality in the foreground. One questions in such circumstances, why tragedy on this scale is allowed to happen, particularly when the gods are known to involve themselves in the world of Man. The pantheon in the end, does discuss how terrible even their behavior has been, and seek to resolve the conflict. They send Thetis to Achilles with the command from Zeus that Hector’s body be returned. This ends the plot of the *Iliad*.

It should be noted that the end of the Trojan war concludes via the sacking of Troy via the stratagem of the famous Trojan Horse. Achilles dies in battle via an arrow wound to his heel. Odysseus/Ulysses means to return home to Ithaca, and his journey will be reviewed the next article in this series.

Esoteric Impact (or Lack Thereof)

Unlike the previous two entries in this series, there is relatively little that can be used to esoteric/philosophical ends. There is no allegory for the soul's journey after death, nor a hierarchical description of the gods or their counterparts in the outer universe. The experience of *Iliad* is however enriched with an understanding of *Theogony*. There are no explanatory notes detailing how the gods fit into the worldview of the intended audience of this poem, that of the ancient Greeks.



The little that does exist to the benefit of our current readers, is in the actions of the gods. The behavior of the gods does point out to the practicing theurgist, that working with the Greek pantheon would be particularly effective if one is concerned with issues these gods are known to care for. We can look to the broad material of the Ancient Greek Mythos for these examples. However, do note, that the gods may indeed arrive with their own opinions as to how whatever matter is best dispensed with, regardless of the wishes of those who invoke them!

With regards to *Iliad* in particular, the gods get involved in contests derived from personal glory in battle. This is not currently something of great renown, however later in this review it will be discussed that this thrust did not vanish, but rather adapted to our current age. In *Iliad* the gods behave as little more than mortals with supernatural powers, and less as representatives of a higher, more divine reality. For example, Apollo's answering of his priest's petition was so rapid you'd think he was merely responding to a modern-day text message. There were no stanzas put aside by Homer explaining Apollo's thinking on the matter, or any fore-knowledge that the god of Delphic Oracle may possess. If this were written today, I would expect that there be a method the author used to convey the motive of the god of oracles. Apollo joins the fray later on, after the other gods and their motivations were given explanation with their own scenes.

This does however raise the question of where in fact, the philosophers that shaped our cultural mindset came up with the ideas of democracy, and ideal forms? The gods in *Iliad* do not indicate a universe populated with abstractions. The examples set forth by the gods in *Iliad* would dictate the behavior of men and women was to participate in bloodshed, and to throw mortal lives away away for the sake of “glory” or “honor”. Perhaps when cross-pollinated with the Egyptian concept of the Akh detailed in *The Book of Coming Forth by Day*, did the philosophers begin an offshoot of thought towards something more rarified. Unlike the Greek gods, the Egyptian deities behaved in a way that was akin to algebra, having diverse functions and titles. For example: Sekhmet was a goddess of bloody conflict, but when tricked by Ra into drinking beer dyed to resemble blood she becomes Hathor goddess of motherhood, queenship, and joy.

Our Rosicrucian process of personal study and spiritual refinement as an approach to Deity bear out that the concept of personal effort having an effect on a personal apotheosis has persisted through the majority of recorded history. There is a disagreement in some aspects of Christianity as to whether admittance to paradise is through works, or being one of the “elect”. To borrow from Roald Dahl, being one of the elects essentially means at or before birth you were assigned a golden ticket to Deity’s chocolate factory. There is not much effort required, as one already possesses the stamp of approval. The admittance via works is closer to our traditions, as it is by dint of effort, study, and acts of faith that you win your way into a glorious immortality. In other words, there is a deific or god-like potential within man, that must be quickened through our effort to earn a residence in a benevolent afterlife.

When considering influence of the ancients on our modern world, and seeing evidence clear as day that such influence is alive and well one may become lost in a sea of questions: “Is my religious perspective merely cultural? How do I know I am connected to the divine? What can I do to refine whatever I am into whatever I am meant to be?” In my personal spiritual journey, I test whatever philosophy, practice, or aphorism by the following – “Is it wholesome?” No matter what the issue is, with due consideration any advancement of the spirit will be a positive influence on myself, my family, and my community. It is to the credit of masonry that we explain this via the virtues of strength, wisdom, and beauty. Whatever anyone’s approach to deity or to self-improvement, in the ancient world or modern, due consideration and reflection is the best guide. This above any other practice will “prevent the soiling of clothes with untempered mortar.”

Joseph Campbell's work titled *The Heroes' Journey* details an archetypal cycle that heroes go through routinely in myths passed down from a variety of cultures. It describes process of education and maturation, eventually resulting in the growth of the hero from a youth to a man of enriched character. This motif has been largely adopted by Hollywood as a blueprint to set the details of blockbuster action movies, especially those of superheroes. It is with this expectation in mind that it may seem obvious judge harshly the decisions made in *Iliad* by its characters, but this is because we have the benefit of nearly three millennia of thought refine the dross of tragedy to philosophic gold of wisdom.

Cultural Reflections

As a whole, our culture does bear the imprint of major themes present in *Iliad*. The bombastic drive to triumph in bloody conquest at the root of *Iliad* was decided by modern man to generally be another "bad idea".



While the implementation of this drive has changed from hacking one's opponent to bits, it nevertheless persists in a sublimated state. There is little imagination necessary to shift a scene *Iliad* battles to modern strategy games, or from epic personal duels to current sports arenas. The drive to compete and conquer is the same, and in some cases the same outcome – money, fame, and social authority.

It is fair to suppose that more than the drive to win and conquer, mere pride was at the source of *Iliad*'s drama and loss of life. Agamemnon's pride, and its wounding was the instigating event that prompted all the events to follow. Achilles is little better, as his pride brought about the dream that inspired Agamemnon to attack. Pride is alive and well today, and just as prevalent as it was in the ancient world. The damage that can be done by this combination of ego and personal integrity brings to mind lessons from our third degree. A wise brother once explained to me that it is best to "think about what needs to be done, not about what one deserves". This lesson is perhaps more urgently necessary in today's world, with the expansion of human power to a level undreamt of by our ancestors. Should we eschew "what needs to be done" for "what do I deserve/want", the threat of consequence looms a shadow more dire.

How different would *Iliad* have been with more scrupulous actors? It would be a heck of a lot shorter, at least! Conflict is the heart of drama, and conflict in the heart of man more than any other. Our study as Masons and Rosicrucians does prescribe for us a less explosive existence, but a longer, more pleasant one I would say. To be fair to the ancient Greeks, not all mortals, heroes, and gods acted without forethought, and they did eventually end the conflict. (Though perhaps if Zeus has not chained Prometheus (literally “forethought”) to his rock, the various missteps would have been avoided!)

The last major thread to point out may have been more obvious to those in the ancient world, particularly to those who travelled. Today we can cross continents in a matter of days by car, and hours by airplane. Our world has shrunk so swiftly that only a few years ago the now common “Zoom chat” with people from across the world did not exist in our cultural lexicon. In the times of *Iliad* leaving home meant long absences without any means of communication. The Trojan war itself lasted for roughly a decade, and only Zeus knew what was going on at home! The homesickness evidenced early in *Iliad* by Agamemnon’s forces will carry through into *The Odyssey*.

This experience is still present today by those who have to spent long periods of time away from home, and is memorialized in pop culture by such songs as “Country Road” by John Denver, “Our House” by Madness, and “Mama I’m Comin Home” by Ozzy Osbourne. As a professional grade home-body, I can only appreciate this mindset as an abstraction. From my involvement in our fraternity, I do from time-to-time travel, but only for short periods of time and I have a mounting grumpiness all the while. I wonder, looking at the changes still ongoing in our world if this experience will begin to wither from our zeitgeist entirely. Automation of aspects of our cultural prosecution through the world such as shipping, both over land and sea, warfare with drones, and the heretofore ubiquitous office space with work-from-home jobs may leave this “nostos” in the conceptual graveyard. However, the increasing prevalence of “nostalgia”, a word derived from “nostos” may indicate another cultural sublimation at work, similar to that mentioned above.

Conclusion

When I chose *Iliad* to be included in this series, it was with the assumption that I had encountered something similar to its overall scheme before, either in works of similar scope such as a sci-fi space opera, or in cultural relevance such as the works of Shakespeare. As I began to dive into it, I was met with a feeling of distaste – it did not have any characters that could neatly fit into “good guy” or “bad guy” boxes. It did not fit the modern styling of an “anti-hero” of a flawed character

triumphing over villainous evil-doers. It did not have the benefit of any moral clarity of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* or even Shakespeare's "Scottish Play". What I saw at first was a wide cast of characters in generally making one foolish decision after another.

The benefit of this work to the modern reader did not begin to dawn on me until close to the writing of this review – that it illuminates the mindset of the ancient world, and through contrast, our own. This fit very nicely within the intended scope of this series – that of showing the drift of esoteric thought from ancient times to today. A prayer, in whatever religion, to its deity, is always set in an unspoken context of the world experienced by the supplicant. One who prays, assumes that who or what they are praying to exists in and interacts with their own world, with all the associated baggage for good or ill. By examining the context around a religious practice, the practice is made more intelligible to those who seek to learn.

That being said, I do look forward to *The Odyssey* to be a bit of a return to something more familiar. I have long loved the myths of the Ancient Greeks and will relish escaping into Odysseus' quest to return home.

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A fictional read for fun...and perhaps a few insights

The Secrets of Doctor Tavener and The Sea Priestess By Dion Fortune (12/6/1890-1/6/1946)

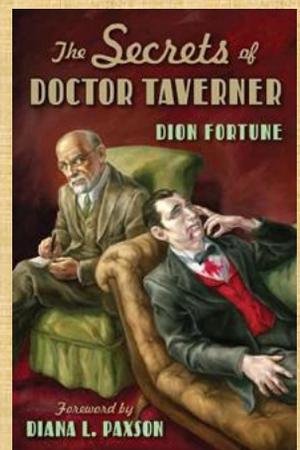
Reviewed by RW W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC et Philologus
Adeptus Exemptus

Those of you who read my four part essay on the Grail Tradition will be familiar with the name Dion Fortune, but for the sake of review, consider the following.

Dion Fortune is a pen name taken from the motto she used in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (*Deo non Fortuna*, By God, not fortune). She was born Violet Mary Firth, in Wales, in 1890, making her a child of the turn of the 20th Century, which historians often refer to by the French *fin de siècle*, literally the end of the century. This was a heady time for the esoterically inclined, although by the time she was an adult, she would have to be considered second generation. Into these waters Dion Fortune swam effortlessly. She became a member of both the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society, taking much of their methods to later form her own groups. Her Christian Science upbringing also informed her later esoteric development. Her head strong nature would not let her be a mere member for long in anything, and she eventually had a falling out with both groups. Unlike many of her contemporaries (Waite and Mathers come to mind) she had a pleasant and lucid writing style, lending itself to both fictional and non-fictional works.

Although she had an active, intelligent mind, she was not entirely an intellectual esoterist. From the age of four, she claimed to be a medium. A review of Dion Fortune's life gives little indication that she didn't honestly believe in her mediumistic abilities. Such an ability would, of course, promote her standing in the esoteric community of the time, but setting that aside, there might be other explanations. However, we might also set aside another obvious conclusion that she was in some way mentally impaired or delusional, as there is no evidence of this being the case, and her writing, in particular, would argue the contrary.

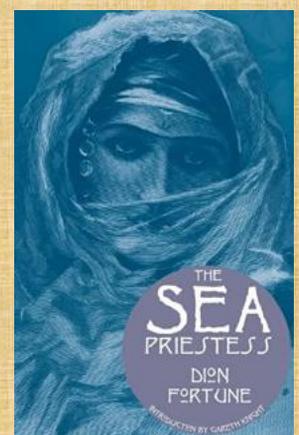
What is more likely is that she was blessed with a highly developed ability to visualize and imagine. It is also likely that the barrier between her conscious and unconscious mind was thin. For most of us, this barrier recedes only in sleep, and manifests in dreams, but for some lucid dreaming occurs, sometimes spontaneously.



Amazon



<https://www.onthisday.com/people/dion-fortune>



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However, as with most of channeled knowledge, the more distance we have from it, the more apparent that it is more a product of the imagination of the practitioner, than intelligence from hidden masters. Evidence of this in Fortune's reports are that they are laced with beliefs contemporary to her life, such as existence of an Atlantis civilization that she incorporated into some of her Arthurian output as historical fact, which is now discredited. Certainly, a channeled master would be more knowledgeable of the true situation!

The two books I review here represent her first and (almost) last efforts at fiction. Both have occult themes, and it is clear that was her focus as the stories otherwise were fairly simple and, particularly in the case of *The Secrets of Doctor Tavener*, derivative. Her description of magic ceremonies and such borrow heavily on her Golden Dawn experience, but it is clear that she has an enhanced vision of such things. This again suggests that her mediumistic abilities were driven by an active imagination that was vividly visualized.

The Secrets of Dr Tavener is really a number of short stories. Tavener is a Sherlock Holmes variation, who is both a psychologist (the old term alienist shows up on occasion) and a member of a fictionalized Golden Dawn type organization. He takes on cases with his assistant, Dr. Rhodes, who is pretty much Dr. Watson, even to being portrayed as a retired and slightly PTSD military doctor. Like Watson, Rhodes is more than a bit doubtful of Tavener's methods and the occult in general. Of course, he eventually gets won over.

Tavener's cases are far from ordinary and all the stories involve supernatural detective work. They also introduce the concept of the hunting lodges, fictionalized esoteric groups that band together to prevent the improper use of magic. This theme will be familiar to readers of *The Adept* series by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris. The *Tavener* stories are pleasant and easy reads, with an occasional insight into the esoteric, but may be a bit too simple for modern readers.

The Sea Priestess was her last novel (*Moon Magic* was left uncompleted at her death and later completed by others). Here we have a more developed occult-based theme and better writing, reflective of Fortune's development over the intervening ten years. The story begins with asthmatic Wilfred Maxwell who has an unsatisfactory life managing his deceased father's real estate business. Then a mysterious woman, Vivien Le Fay Morgan (oh, my!), enters his life. She purchases an old military facility on the coast, and Max sets about refurbishing it into a homestead for her. They gradually develop a deep, though platonic, relationship. He is able to paint fantastical sea scenes on the wall for her (how isn't well explained) and gradually gets pulled into a life altering magical experience. There is a bit of Fortune's obsession with Atlantean themes, as well.

Fortune's descriptions of the various magical ceremonies are much finer wrought than the Tavener stories, and her descriptions of the English coast paint excellent imagery for the reader. Still much of the rest of the novel seems to be an inconvenient necessity to wrap around the magic.

Both these books are pleasant and fast reads, but don't score a "don't miss." If intrigued, and you purchase them as eBooks, I strongly suggest you examine any samples provided to ensure a good proofing. One copy of the *Sea Priestess* I found on Apple's iBook ran all the paragraphs together and contain many scanning errors and typos.

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VW Frater Joseph F. Oelgoetz, VII° et
Philologus Theoricus**
VW Frater Philip G. Beith, VII° et Philologus
Theoricus **
RW Frater Gerald T. Coleman, VIII° et
Philologus Theoricus
RW Frater W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC et
Philologus Adeptus Exemptus
VW Frater Marlon Gayadeen, VII° et
Philologus Zelator
VW Frater John Comstock, VII°
et Philologus Zelator *
VW Frater Charles Hancock, VII°
et Philologus Theoricus
RW Frater Robert S. Finley, IX°, KGC et
Philologus Adeptus Exemptus *
RW Frater Richard J. Powell, VIII° et
Philologus Theoricus
RW Frater Paul Barrera VIII° et Philologus
Zelator
VW Frater Clyde Card, VII° et Philologus
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Philologus Zelator
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Zelator
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Philologus Zelator*
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et Philologus Magus (Honorary)
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Philologus Philosophus
VW Frater Caleb Haines, VII° et Philologus
Zelator
VW Frater William M. Hodwitz, VII° et
Philologus Zelator
RW Frater Myron J. Deputat, VIII° et
Philologus Philosophus
VW Frater Frank Rice, VII° et Philologus
Zelator

IN WAITING

VW Frater Clint Lewey, VII° (to Zelator)
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** Not now a member

Have a need to communicate?

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS! UPCOMING 2021-22 CONVOCATIONS

October 30th in person
High Council November 5th-6th,
Louisville, KY
January 29th via Zoom