

## **Online Appendix A, Supplement 7**

### **Why So Hard on Love Incarnate?**

*Love and Hate When the Oceanic is Subordinated to the Personal: Jesus of the Gospels*

In the name of calling ‘em like I see ‘em, and full disclosure, and providing a completist account of how things look from over here, I will start here with some personal feelings about this topic, although no one asked. What do I love about Christianity? Almost everything, with only two exceptions. I love the Trinitarian theologies, both orthodox and heterodox—an extended world-historical exercise in speculative thinking of the highest order, carried on with amazing focus and continuity by generation after generation, compelled by both finely-tuned spiritual instincts and heroic commitment to follow through on them to the last consequence, and driven forward by extraordinary constraints and handicaps derived from both its conceptual and scriptural resources, to make some of the greatest advances possible under those conditions to break the back of the one-many dichotomy that crippled half the earth or more thitherto. I love the related but quite distinct Christological speculations, that under similarly crippling preconditions tried valiantly to overcome, albeit for one being only rather than for all, the single-essence assumption—a heroic revolt against the idea that one entity has exactly one identity, the exclusion-by-definition of the impossibility of being simultaneously more than one thing, or two opposed things, which had been baked into the languages and concomitant theorizings in terms of which this extraordinary mental work was done. I love the almost obscenely virtuous mind-dancing and buffoonish grace of St. Paul—his psychological subtlety, his casual flashes of mystical brilliance, his lightning-strike discovery of a way to love one’s hatred of oneself enough to both embrace and transform the dividedness of any self, and his shameless chutzpah, reporting on an experienced paradigm-shift that one might have thought too delicate, idiosyncratic and personal to communicate to any other person, but which he managed to make easily accessible and instantly recognizable to anyone who hears it and cares to try it on, through a poetic genius for unexpected but immediately inevitable-seeming table-turning that rivals the instincts of the

greatest artists. I love the impudent brazenness of this religion, the collective decision to boldly assent to, and back-up with powerful mythological and dialectical machinery, the most naively cherished hopes of the unreflective human heart (and we are all unreflective ignoramuses most of the time): our eternity not in some mystical sense of the already transpersonal and eternal aspect of oneself, but a crashingly literal-minded immortality of ourselves as we imagine ourselves in our shallowest moments, as simple conscious intentional beings, full of little memories, sentiments, hopes and dreams: not reborn in another form in another life and forgetting all this ephemera, but the immortality of you as you recognize yourself when you are completely without insight, you as your conscious mind, and indeed even your *body*, resurrected intact after physical death! And as an even more tailor-made treat for the unregenerate man we all mostly are, eternal post-mortem bliss *only for us*, not for anyone who refuses to join our club and do what we say should be done. Staunchly they threw all their force behind a too-good-to-be-true idea that they knew full well would reek of bad faith pandering and wishful thinking to any savvy observer; but they stood by it, doubling down with deadpan bravado, and found a way to make it fly. What badasses and spiritual adventurers these guys were! And the Church Fathers! What a murderer's row of great souls, the sainted and the unsainted, the Greek and the Latin both! I don't at all share Nietzsche's view of these men as twisted decadents and weaklings; these are powerful and daring spirits who stretched every nerve to plumb the depths of their premises, at whatever cost, undaunted by the seeming absurdities and mysteries into which they were thus driven.<sup>1</sup>

I recognize these dangerous and profound men as brothers, as fellow-travelers, as distant doppelgangers—but somewhat in the spirit in which, on the contrary, Nietzsche recognized Ralph Waldo Emerson: what rare contemplative talent, what deep and agile spirits, what a resource of intellectual and mystical vision was wasted here! Nietzsche's lament over his lost philosopher focused on what he saw as Emerson's lack of intellectual conscience, his dearth of

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<sup>1</sup> It should go without saying that a similar paean of praise, *mutatis mutandis*, is owed to each of the other two Abrahamic monotheisms. What riches, what heroes, what great souls! What daring subtle ideas! What defiance, what perseverance, what resourcefulness! What virtuosic inventions and nimble discoveries! And all of it brought to naught, to less than naught, turned into poison by the same thing, the central thing: God. And to the extent that, like Jesus Christ, the Torah and the Quran are saturated with the idea of God, these too are poisoned. But lots of other stuff in these traditions is great!

disciplined philosophical training, which seduced a being with such profound and subtle great-souled instincts and powers to bumble his way into incoherence and sentimentality at all the most crucial moments.

But the problem in the case before us here is different in a decisive way. “God is Love”—great! But what makes it always turn out to be so hateful? What was it, from where I sit, that in spite of all these mighty yearnings to overcome the inherited dichotomies of sin and law, of divine and human, of transcendent and immanent, of ineffability and expression, of submission and triumph, of life and death, with such an arsenal of intellectual talents, spiritual instincts, contrarian courage and innovative will at their disposal, made it all not only come to naught, but indeed reverse into the worst possible dichotomies, in every case merely kicking the can down the road into an even worse dichotomy—between the flesh and the spirit, between human and divine, between the elect and the damned, between good and evil, between order and disorder, between freedom and bondage, between obedience and defiance, between love and hate, between heaven and hell, between us and them, between one and many, between identity and difference? What without fail made each attempted anti-dualist advance end up creating and enforcing exponentially even more nonnegotiable and unprecedentedly violent dichotomies at a higher and ever more inescapable levels?

Just those two additional elements, which unfortunately are the premises that run through everything else, the very founding pillars of the entire system. What are they, the only two bad things about Christianity, that shipwreck and reverse and ruin everything else in it? They are these: God and Jesus Christ.

The first of these is just the old *Noûs as Arché* idea, finally given full play—God. But the second problem is the main guy: the star of the show, the figure at the focal point of these profound instincts, the one figure chosen to take on the role of the threefold divine unity, of the double-identified man-god, of the slain conquerer, of the criminal redeemer. Those were all superb ideas. It’s just that the character they found (or created) for the role that such structures required was himself thoroughly saturated with that same God idea, and this theistic context undid and reversed all the implications of each and every one of these brilliant ideas, both in his teachings and in the teachings about him.

I'm aware that my dim view of this character is a minority opinion, and I too formerly of held a far different view, much closer to the general ultra-positive consensus. Some further full disclosure may provide some context. To put it in the coy manner of that just-mentioned master of mind-dancing and buffoonish grace (see 2 Corinthians 12), "I knew a young man" who in his college years, quite by chance, came across a book by Count Leo Tolstoy called *A Confession*, by which he was deeply impressed, deeply inspired, deeply shaken. This led him to Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief*, which is where he got his introduction to the Gospels, a set of texts with which he had little to no familiarity up to that point. Tolstoy's work is somewhat similar to Jefferson's Bible, where a humane reader selects out only the loving and inspiring bits and leaves out all the stuff that he regards as mean-spirited superstition. Tolstoy's justification for this is ingenious. He says he only retains the parts that he *understands* (given his own religious realizations, which included the conviction that orthodox beliefs in things like a post-mortem heaven and hell and an apocalyptic Last Judgment were deeply immoral and irrational), whereas he leaves out all the stuff that makes no sense to him (precisely the threats and promises of postmortem heaven and hell!). This of course meant that the non-violence and passive resistance he was applying as a standard had to be derived from some source other than the text, but that didn't register with our eager young man at the time. This was how this "young man I know" got to know Jesus, and he loved this Jesus. Who wouldn't? This Jesus was not only deeply humane, but also brilliant, poetic, courageous, witty, mystical, heroic.... At that time nothing in the world around him, or indeed in all of world history, really interested this young man much except these very rare sources of breakthrough insight he thought he could dimly perceive coming from this mysterious ancient figure and one or two others he had stumbled upon—for example, the ones he would have referred to back then as "Lao-tse" and "Buddha"—the great enlightened beings of ancient times who guided his own gropings toward a spiritual life: renegades all, each in his own culture, great heroes who overturned the irrational and cruel conventions of their respective cultural environments with a message of wisdom and love....

And then, one fateful day, he happened to read the actual Gospels, the canonical ones, the ones in the Bible. What a blow! What a disappointment! The Jesus he met in those pages was a very different figure. It was perhaps the shock of the contrast that made it impossible to ignore

what the reader was actually being asked to accept here: certain not only transparently fanciful but also unabashedly bloodthirsty beliefs, on which the pronouncements of tolerance and love were *explicitly* premised (the eschatological expectation, the division of the elect from the damned, the creator who demands and watches and judges). Hand in hand with this went the exaltation of the main character, a menacing and easily angered preacher who was presented as not only finding these flimsy but violent beliefs to be plausible, convincing, acceptable, but even finding them to be worthy of approval and propagation, to be fitting representatives of divine love and justice. What sort of divinity is imagined here, and what kind of person finds this divinity not only unobjectionable, but even worthy of praise and obedience? It was only the juxtaposition of the whitewashed Jesus presented by Tolstoy and the very different Jesus of the Gospels that allowed the glaring contrast between them to become discernible, and indeed unignorable. It then occurred to the young man that if he had never bothered to read the Gospels, he would to this day believe that Jesus Christ was the supreme symbol of self-sacrificing love. And he also imagined another scenario: what if he *had* read the Gospels, but he had never had the good fortune to encounter any *other* teachings and exemplars of all-embracing love, ones that did *not* depend on these imperious commands and jarring threats of delayed decimation of enemies? In that case, the result of reading the Gospels would have been to make him add “imperious commands and jarring threats of delayed decimation of enemies” to his concept of what such love must be like—that is, he would have supposed that this demand for absolute obedience and promises to ultimately judge and punish all one’s naysayers is a necessary entailment of any all-embracing love, the high-water mark of possible ways of loving. This consideration evoked a very bleak picture of the devastating psychological costs such a conception of love would have inflicted on him—and was still likely to inflict on unsuspecting others in the future. If a pronounced note of shrill contrarian insistence that can be detected in what that disillusioned former fan now feels impelled to say on this topic, this is probably why.

Some things are hard to see precisely because they are so ever-present, because they have prevailed so spectacularly, because we have become so thoroughly saturated by them. The consequences of the monotheistic conception of God—the way it seems to tweak into a particular shape any and every impulse which come into its zone of influence, even the most

benign, even if we give the greatest possible benefit of the doubt to the goodwill of those under its sway—is arguably a strong example. This is one reason cross-cultural studies are especially illuminating; we can start to trace what religious feeling outside of this rubric might be like. But this is not always easy to do. When Bibles are introduced into previously monotheism-free parts of the world, the figure of Jesus—like that of Santa Claus—can be slotted into a pre-existing good-man or sage-hero category, and often receives a warm welcome into existing pantheons, Trojan-horse style. Sometimes missionaries take advantage of the short attention spans and busy schedules of their marks by getting a foot in the door with pamphlets presenting only some of the nicer sounder bits from the Sermon on the Mount or the Psalms or Paul’s charming wedding-vow-friendly effusions about love. The casual magic fetish enthusiast and exotic spiritual thrill seeker in these unsuspecting communities, as well as pop culture impresarios, have no time or disposition to make a thorough investigation of *why* these things are said. They are more than happy to put Jesus or Santa Claus into the local rotation of gods: hence we find Jesus as Hindu avatar and as Japanese *manga* hipster, as well as middle-brow Asian intellectuals and tweeting talk-show hosts showing their internationalism and human breadth by making favorable references to Jesus as a kind of general emblem of altruism and love. Without familiarity with what is really entailed in monotheism, the kind of context and premise it forces on even the most apparently harmless and warm-hearted sentiment, there would certainly be nothing particularly oppressive about such general gestures of open-handedness. Unfortunately, the nice polytheist Santa and Jesus and St. Peter at the Pearly Gates and Adam and Eve in the garden can all too easily serve as gateway drugs: sooner or later someone gets curious about what it’s all about, or concomitant modes of valuation and analysis creep in on the heels of the symbols extracted from monotheist culture and begin to spread invisibly. The premises of monotheism then come to seem intuitive and already well-entrenched in everyone’s common sense by the time anyone finds out explicitly what they are. By then one has already accepted the assumption that it must be something quite benign and non-outrageous, an accepted and therefore acceptable part of world culture. And then one learns to make excuses and reverse-engineer reasons to justify monotheistic sentiments and intuitions as if they were universal. Non-monotheistic forms of thought become more and more difficult even to remember, to recover, to understand.

There are, however, exceptions—people raised in non-monotheist cultures and with a deep and vital interest in religious matters, who also have reason and wherewithal to read the Bible seriously and thoroughly rather than superficially, with keen interest and concern to understand it. An instructive example of this is the renowned Chinese Buddhist scholar-monk Yinshun (1906-2005), who in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century offered one of the most unguarded responses to the very idea of monotheism, a fairly close and clear-eyed read of the Bible as a new thing to get to know, to take the measure of, reading its scriptures seriously, as a whole, with a genuine religious motive to understand what exactly is being proposed here. Though Yinshun’s polemical intent is clear, and he can be as cutting and sardonic a village atheist as Voltaire or Nietzsche when he wants to be, the newness of the encounter gives a relatively clean read of how the Bible, how monotheism itself, might look to fresh and religiously sensitive eyes. Even if we grant that Yinshun’s defense of his own religious market provides an unignorable background motivation for his conclusions, we must recognize the significance for our present topic of the specific points of attack he has chosen for this purpose, particularly in light of the careful documentation he offers for his interpretation of Christian sacred texts, quoting them extensively, chapter and verse. What does he see when he looks at the Bible, motivated to critique it not as a secularist opposed to religion, not as a modernist opposed to backwards superstition that obstructs rational progress, and not as a nationalist opposed to foreign ideas, but as a person who had devoted his life to resuscitating an ancient religion, Buddhism--indeed from a Chinese point of view still a somewhat “foreign religion”?

In Yinshun’s view, to put it bluntly, the Bible is above all about the “master-slave” relationship between God and man. That is the central thread that unifies everything, as he sees it, in the religious consciousness and ethics of the biblical monotheist, which seems to him to define the entire enterprise from beginning to end.<sup>2</sup> Especially noteworthy in this context is Yinshun’s insistence that this applied at least as much to the Jesus of the New Testament as to

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that of course this does not mean every person throughout history, or in modern times, who self-identifies as a Christian or a monotheist shares this point of view, or that this is the only possible way such people have and can determine their religious experience. There is much more in Judaism, Christianity and Islam than the points of view contained in their root scriptures and founding figures. The claim is only that this is what we find in those scriptures themselves when read with minimal hermeneutic assumptions, and that believers embrace these perspectives only to whatever degree they conform to these founding figures as depicted there, and read in that hermeneutic perspective.

the Yahweh of the Old Testament. What Yinshun points out here, against those who see in Jesus a softening and humanizing, perhaps even an ethicizing or Buddhification, of the harsh dictatorial Old Testament judge-god, is that Jesus is equally dictatorial and equally harsh—indeed, if closely read, perhaps even more so--and that the entire justification and structure of his teaching continues to rest squarely on the monotheistic master-slave relationship between God and humanity, where recognition of, submission to, and obedience to God’s authority remains the ultimate criterion of goodness, and the sole legitimate determinant of one’s prospects and standing in the universe. Yinshun emphasizes that, read purely in terms of their own explicitly stated claims, the ethical teachings of both the Old and the New Testaments are incoherent without this premise.

And this is supremely important, because there are enormous consequences to trying to make sense of the ethical pronouncements of familiar biblical figures in the absence of the premises under which they were uttered, for then an attempt is made to see these attitudes as ethical *in themselves*, and that requires the reverse-engineered creation of *other* premises, no longer wildly superstitious but still highly questionable, to make the math work out, as it were. That’s when monotheistic premises get truly entrenched. In other words, if you don’t believe in heaven and hell, and yet have come to accept as an obvious truism that Jesus was a great guy, you have to explain why he said there was a heaven and hell.<sup>3</sup> And to do that you have to conclude that the real world, though not possessing a literal heaven and hell, is such that nuance-free absolute moral demands are a good thing, that either-or dilemmas where the only options are either total sacrifice of self-interest or complete evil are the most representative type of human experience, that black and white classifications of human actions and even people is something that really does correspond to reality in some deep way, that non-negotiable demonization of

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<sup>3</sup> Or, if you prefer, everlasting life as opposed to mere everlasting annihilation, as some modern interpreters will insist, trying to get Jesus off the hook for inflicting the doctrine of hell on the world. These interpreters suggest that the “eternal fires” of Gehenna means an annihilating fire, where it is only the fire that is eternal, not the pain it might inflict, and the “eternal punishment” of Matthew 25 means that getting annihilated, missing out on the chance for eternal life and communion with God, is punishment enough, and this is never revoked. I am far from convinced by these arguments. But even if we were to grant them, it would make little difference for what matters here. The important thing for our purposes is not whether Jesus meant that what awaited the damned was hell as eternal torment or merely eternal annihilation in fires that never go out; the important thing is that he clearly preached some kind of dichotomous postmortem fate, with something really great for those who did what he told them to and something really horrible for those who didn’t.



certain people or certain deeds is something commendable and that some persons are worthy of no-holds-barred condemnation. We end up with stealth-monotheism, camouflage-monotheism, the consequences of monotheism even when its explicit form has been removed.

In this view of the matter, we are taking to heart a brilliant point made by the great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.<sup>4</sup>

We agree wholeheartedly with Lewis: the lazy modern humanistic idea that Jesus was somehow a great moral teacher, though not God or son of God or literal messenger of God, is completely insupportable, and actually extremely pernicious. Indeed, even if we remove the most contentious aspect of the case—whether Jesus *is* God—we can say the same thing for the question of whether *there is* a God: if there is a God of the kind Jesus claims exists, even if it is not Jesus himself, Jesus might perhaps be a fine fellow. But if God does not exist (and *a fortiori* therefore the God Jesus believes in does not exist), we must agree with Lewis that

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<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, London: Collins, 1952, pp. 54–56.

Jesus is not a fine fellow at all, not even a decent fellow. For everything changes if we remove the monotheist premise: what is good for humans to do and think in that context simply is not good without it. Indeed, to push this one step further, we can imagine some justification for the claim, in sharp contrast to Lewis, that the personality of Jesus would be a huge problem, even more of an objection, even if he *were* God: this kind of swaggering intolerance of dissent and self-aggrandizing behavior would be even less becoming from God. But really that's just a way of saying that the idea of God, the behavior of God per se is unbecoming for *any sentient being*. Anyone who acts in the manner appropriate to the monotheist God, any personality that was *the* sole ultimate personality, would ipso facto be insufferable, an affront to our personhood and even to our interpersonal relations, to personhood and to love as such, not to mention to the impersonal cosmos beyond the personal and beyond personal love. It would not only make a mockery of all our interpersonal relations; the alleged personal relation with Him would be the most objectionable relationship of all. (As Nietzsche's Zarathustra says: "if there were God, how could I stand not to be God?" That is more than just a glib atheist joke: it speaks to one of the most offensive aspects of the idea of God: by definition he is *someone*, but at the same time he is *not you*.) Yahweh was pretty bad, probably not the kind of fellow you'd want to hang out with, but since he was usually up in the clouds it didn't feel quite as despicable; the Demiurge in *Timaeus* was horrible, but it all felt like a tentatively proposed myth; God the Father is intolerable, but he's sort of abstract. What would make the personality of Jesus especially horrible if he really were a God would just be God-the-Person taken literally, palpably, concretely as a Person. The horribleness of this person is really just the horribleness of the very idea of the personhood of God, which it forces us to take seriously and literally and thus finally to confront face to face, unblinkingly.

What is it exactly that makes the divine person in a monotheism, however he might be imagined, so distinctively and unavoidably abrasive, even if—maybe even *especially* if—there is an attempt to also make such a God an advocate of "love"? A later Buddhist writer, Shengyan, attentive to the issues previously raised by Yinshun but re-examining Christian monotheism from a more abstract perspective, coined a suggestive phrase for its general structure: he called it a

“dichotomizing monism” 一元論的二分法。<sup>5</sup> What these new readers found in the Christian scriptures was a mixture of love rhetoric and hate rhetoric, of forgiveness and judgment, of inclusion and exclusion. With distance and the freshness of a first contact with a new idea, they asked: which was ultimate and which was merely instrumental, given the total story and the premise of God? What is the real goal? The answer was immediately clear. For these readers of the Bible, all the love talk in the New Testament must be understood in its context. An unbiased reexamination of that text after this issue is raised allows one to see their point. In our terms, this means as long as there is belief in God anywhere in the background, *inclusion is used as a means to arrive at exclusion, acceptance used to reach rejection, love used as a means to hate, forgiveness is used as a means to judgment.*

Behind this characterization of Shengyan’s is an overall theory about “the goal of religions” in general which offers a look at the basic structure of Buddhism and, as we shall see, atheist religious systems general, as seen from several steps distance, which we can provide an interesting second approach to some of the issues that will resurface in the accounts of Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bataille in Part 2 of this book. Religions, on this view, are seeking a liberation from some kind of “constraints” of present realities, often described in terms of “sin” or “karma,” in order to advance to a state that is free of these constraints. Using traditional terms, this is described by Shengyan as a process of advancing from the level of phenomena (現象 *xianxiang*) to an experience of the fundamental essence of things (本體 *benti*). But crucially, this is specified precisely as “advancing from contradiction (矛盾 *maodun*) to unity (統一 *tongyi*).<sup>6</sup> The constraints of the phenomenal world are thus identified with “contradiction.” Contradiction is premised on the idea of multiple existent things or beings which are mutually exclusive to one another. So this term “contradiction” covers also, by implication, everything to do with ontological multiplicity, conditionality, finitude, dichotomy—the mutually exclusive existence of distinct separate beings. This definition is thus extremely broad, taking in all aspects of experience that are premised on the assumption of the existence of multiple genuinely distinct entities in the world—anything *short of* monism. Indeed, it implies almost everything we

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<sup>5</sup> Shengyan, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

generally care about, for it is implicit to the very structure of care. It includes all morality (valorizing one form of behavior over another), since this presupposes a real difference between one thing (i.e., a particular kind of behavior) and another. It would also include all notions of personal or social progress, the passing from one state to another, for this presupposes the real difference between one state and another. It also includes all effort, the *endeavor* to move from one state to another, for the same reason. It would also include all hierarchy, which likewise presupposes the real difference between one rank and another. Without the contradictions involved in the existence of really distinct phenomena, none of these can exist. To get free of these contradictions means transcending dualism and conditionality in general. It is this, rather than any single positive unified being, that writers of this stripe seem to actually mean by “absolute unity.” The real problem of religion is how to advance into this non-dual “absolute unity,” conceived as the undivided totality of whatever might exist, without thereby denying the status of the individual, the existence of which seems *prima facie* to depend on precisely these dualistic contradictions.<sup>7</sup>

As such, many unresolved problems cling to Shengyan’s schema. But precisely its extreme generality brings to light an important tension in all religions, each of which must somehow navigate the relationship between these two poles. It seems inevitable that all ideologies involve both of these dimensions in some form or another, combined in various complex ways. We can expect to find both wherever we look. These are the two elements, then, that every religion must balance, according to this theory: 1) dichotomy, individuality, multiplicity, opposition, as opposed to 2) unity, resolution, holism and harmony. More simply, every religion will, on this theory, be expected to contain both a dualistic side, making use of division, preferences, hierarchies, separate states and beings, and a non-dual side, in which all of these are left behind. We can then expect to find both of these elements somehow combined in all religions. The question is how they are in each case related to one another.

The “relations” between these two that I find most revealing are the relation between “ends” and “means,” or, stated another way, between “temporary and provisional” and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Shengyan does not here address the meta-level problem that this distinction between the levels must belong to the sphere of “contradictions,” for the same reason.

“ultimate.” Our thesis is thus that all religions, political theories, philosophies and other ideologies can be fruitfully analyzed in light of the following question: “What is the ends-means relation between the undifferentiated and the differentiated, the inclusive and the exclusive, the receptive and the divisive, the value-free and the valuing, the oceanic and the personal, in this theory?” The issue is which is means and which is end, which is temporary and which is ultimate, which is derivative and which is fundamental. Monotheism means that the personal, that is, *Noûs as Arché*, that is dichotomy, that is thing-self-ends-means as separate things, the world of separate things and separate selves, is the ultimate. Atheism means that the personal, the dichotomous, the distinguishable, is embedded in, surrounded by, derived from, leading to, what is beyond the personal, beyond purpose, beyond dichotomy. Atheist religion tends toward the view that the non-dichotomous state is the ultimate goal, which however must be careful to find some way, different in each case, to give due consideration to the diversity and indeed oppositions that fill the empirical world. The challenge faced by non-dichotomy is to find some way to follow through consistently to the end, to attain a non-dichotomy also of the dichotomy and the non-dichotomy, of goal and goallessness, of personal and impersonal. That is what is required when non-dichotomy is considered ultimate. The goal of monotheism, in contrast, is the final exclusion of the non-dichotomous, of the non-separate, of the impersonal, even if it is unavoidable as a temporary expedient. That is what is required when the personal is considered ultimate (i.e., in monotheism): either/or is the final word, even if both/and, perhaps regrettably, has a temporary role to play.

### *Monism and Dualism in the Bible*

We will find both of these two elements—dichotomy and non-dichotomy—also prominently displayed, mixed together, in Christianity as well, but that they have exactly the opposite structure of that found in Buddhism and atheist religions generally. For Christianity is, as Shengyan says, a system of “a dichotomizing monism.” This means that its ultimate goal, ethically, and its ultimate principle, metaphysically, is a deeply dichotomizing dualism: as our Buddhist writers point out, the key features of Christian thinking are “dichotomy between God and the world,” “between creator and created, between heaven and hell, between believers and

infidels, between the elect and the damned.”<sup>8</sup> It is “monistic” because God is the one creator of all things, but “dichotomizing” because God is the one creator of all things, absolutely ontologically distinct from them, due to a concept of creation which requires that the creator must be prior to, and therefore entirely independent of, its creations. So the unity of God becomes a marker for the uniqueness of his position, his separation from creatures and their complete unilateral subordination to him alone and none other, foreclosing any possible reciprocity between the two positions: the unity actually only serves to enable and further exacerbate, rather than relieve, the dichotomizations.

The monism is evident in the Old Testament emphasis on God as creator of all things, which perhaps comes to be emphasized in the post-exilic parts of the Hebrew Bible as a polemical response against the Zoroastrian dualism that allegedly attributes two sources to things, one for the good and one for the evil. Against this, the Hebrew creator god is presented as the source of all things without exception, including both the good and the evil, including both love and judgment, including both life and death. But this is of course at the same time a polemical stance in the service of an endeavor of “separation,” of holiness and sacredness as a separation of the pure from the impure, of those loyal and obedient to the one source and those not loyal and obedient to that source.

In the New Testament, this unity of God-as-creator and this separation of the obedient and non-obedient remains the premise. A new wrinkle is added, however, which greatly exacerbates *both* the unity *and* the dichotomy, and thus indeed the tension between them, but combined in a new structure which greatly changes their implications. Ethically, the “unification” comes specifically in the New Testament to be associated with extreme, uncompromising teachings of love, non-resistance, inclusion, exceptionless forgiveness and acceptance and tender care for others, those lovely sentiments which many people find so uplifting and moving. These are the seemingly “monistic” or “non-dual” parts of the Christian teaching, an ethical application of the idea of removing all distinctions, even the distinction between oneself and others: for example, loving even thy enemy as thyself, just as God’s sunlight and rain descend on all alike, good and evil, saint and sinner (Matthew 5:45). It would

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

seem, however, that this uplifting effect is entirely dependent on taking these sentiments of love out of their context, out of their relation with the opposite tendency, the exclusive impulse of anger and condemnation and rejection which is also so much in evidence throughout the Gospels, and in bewildering close proximity to the teachings of love. Our claim here, however, is that an unbiased reading of these texts actually suggests that “dualistic” or “dichotomizing” teachings of hatred, exclusion and judgment are the *sole and explicit* justification for, and actual goal to be attained by, the allegedly uplifting teachings of inclusion and love.

To understand more concretely just what this means, let us look at the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>9</sup> We have already taken up some of these points in another context, in online appendix A, supplement 2, concerning the “backfiring” mechanism of monotheist piety, but it is worth revisiting the key texts here in a more generalized way. Anyone spending some time with these texts will find many many examples of both *extreme hate* (exclusion, dualism, dichotomy, conditionality) and *extreme love* (inclusion, non-dualism, monism, unconditionality). On the one hand, we find Jesus describing certain human beings in a highly vituperative way, as “hypocrites” (Matthew 6:5, 6:16, 23:13-15, Luke 12:1-2, 12:54-56), and “vipers” (Matthew 3:7, 23:33, Luke 3:7) and “whited sepulchers” (Matthew 23:27) and “the dead” (Luke 9:60) and “children of the devil” (John: 8:44), and so on. Traditional emic explanations necessarily regard this sort of behavior as not only justified but even exemplary: Jesus is courageously and firmly repudiating evil men—probably government or religious authorities or other demonic forces who mean us all harm, leading us astray and blocking the way to God. The targets of these fierce attacks deserve it—they *must* deserve it, for otherwise this exemplary divine being would not be

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<sup>9</sup>I stress again that I am speaking here only of Jesus as represented in those texts; if there was or is another Jesus who is not like this, not of what is said here applies to him. I am treating the Gospels en masse here, even though they are four very disparate and heterogeneous texts, written at different times and with discernibly different agendas which construct discernibly different characters for their protagonist. My low-bar claim to justify this approach is simply that the four Gospels read en masse are what constitute the character of Jesus as presented by orthodox Christian tradition, and thus “Jesus” as a cultural marker signifies at the very least and primarily the protagonist of all four of these texts considered together, on the ideal reader’s (probably false) presupposition that they are four views on an actual person/deity. This entitles us to read the unresolved conflicts in all four Gospels as resolved by the explicit resolutions of these tensions in any of them. The explicit resolution, i.e., the apocalyptic combination of inclusive love as means and exclusive judgment as ultimate goal, occurs in Matthew and Luke most clearly. But the same structure is discernible also in Mark and John. The high-bar claim would be that each gospel individually can also be best understood, and indeed is only coherent, on this premise of this “dichotomizing monistic,” though with varying emphases and degrees of explicit apocalypticism; but this claim would take more time to demonstrate than is available here.

so vociferously opposed to them. But if we take a step back from the viewpoint of someone already won over to the agenda of the text and instead try to identify exactly when these outbursts occur, who their targets are and what the text itself actually shows and tells us about those targets, there is really only one identifiable feature that all those subjected to this violently exclusionary attitude share: this is how Jesus responds to whoever and whatever he deems resistant to, or even just not *swiftly* submissive to, his own program. We may bracket the question of what exactly the content of that program is--and indeed, there is massive disagreement about just what concrete views and behaviors Jesus is advocating, even among his followers, both those depicted in the text itself and those reading that text in the centuries since. What is certain is that he seems to have *some* program, and that this is the way he responds to anyone who even momentarily opposes it, expresses doubt about it, questions it. Indeed, his own unassailable authority in ethical and spiritual matters is clearly at least one of the tenets, if not the main tenet, of the program being proposed, for it would seem that each and every human being who does not instantly show deference to him or his views is immediately and harshly repudiated in this way. Anyone not submissive to Jesus and his pronouncements, with or without good reasons, is simply *defined* as ethically repulsive, and is to be treated with policies analogized unblinkingly to “taking my enemies and slay[ing] them before me” (Luke 19:27) since after all “those who are not with me are against me,” (Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23).<sup>10</sup> Of those who are for whatever reason unreceptive to his claims, or even merely *not interested*, he tells us that “it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment” (Mark 6:11, Matthew 10:15, cf. Luke 10:12)—that is, there will ferocious wrath and destruction visited upon them as a result. What Jesus demands in these passages seems to be an extirpation of whatever fails to immediately fall in line with him and his agenda, all of which is ultimately to be completely

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<sup>10</sup> It is of course true that we find this dictum precisely the other way around in Mark (9:40): “Whoever is not against us is for us.” That may seem to be an improvement—but is it really? The black-and-white thinking, the marked and seeming willful blindness to the very concept of nuance, gray area, ambiguity, complexity, which we see everywhere in the Gospels, is just as much in evidence here as in the reverse dictum. And it is equally coercive, invoking the privilege of unilateral judgment: you may think you are indifferent to me—but I say that means you are against me (Matthew, Luke) or that you are for me (Mark). In either case, one is not permitted to be neutral, to suspend judgment, to have a complex or nuanced position or to abstain from taking a position. Only “for” and “against” exist. Is this a deep insight into an existential reality, or a fanatical superstition typical of aspiring cult leaders who see all reality only in terms of the one issue with which they are obsessed: their own status and authority?



purged from the world, a black-and-white structure of extreme exclusion and division also evident in shockingly bloody-minded injunctions like “if your hand/eye offends you, pluck it out; for it is better to enter the Kingdom of Heaven maimed than to be thrown intact into hell” (Mark 9:43-45, Matthew 5:29-30),” “hate your mother and father and brother and sister” (Luke: 14:26), and so on.

Again and again in these passages, we see a violently dualistic cast of mind, which sees absolutely nothing of value in the opposite viewpoints and deems it righteous to exterminate them without remainder, an attitude that is allergic to compromise, dialogue, moderation, tolerance and indeed *nuance* in expressing a relation to an opposing view, devoid of even minimal respect, even ritually, for one’s ideological enemies. Anything other than the bluntly uninflected mutual exclusivity of positions, a black-and-white yes or no, is immediately repudiated as absolute evil.<sup>11</sup> A perhaps even more illustrative though less eye-catching

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<sup>11</sup>This attitude is conveniently encapsulated in Matthew 5:37, though only as an incidental summation of different point. Nevertheless, the attitude of mind underlying the above ear-stinging snarls of hate and exclusion is here laid bare, for we have here a less directly confrontational but equally revealing instance of this exclusionary black-and-white attitude toward contrary views, this violent allergy to nuance, almost summing it up in a formula: “Let your speech be ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no.’ Anything else comes from evil.” The context of this pronouncement is to promote a stirringly radical bit of Compensatory Theism: Jesus says to swear no oaths, to make no vows about what one will do. This discouragement of making commitments and planning one’s actions in advance is consistent with the charge to take no thought for tomorrow (Matthew 6:34): God is in control of everything, so much so that you should not presume to say what you will or won’t be able to do in the future--a sentiment similar to the modern Islamic “inshallah” added after any statement about the future: “if God wills it.” Commonsensical secularists of course dislike this sort of Compensatory Atheist radicalism—it seems to them to be a way to evade responsibility for one’s own actions, to reserve the right to default on one’s own commitments, or to be completely noncommittal, some kind of hippie refusal to make any promises about what one would do, and if taken seriously, they understandably feel, this kind of attitude would make all human institutions, contracts and society in general literally impossible. I don’t share this outrage at the irresponsibility of this sort of religious sentiment: I applaud the instinct in this kind of Compensatory letting-go, an exemplar halfway step toward *wuwei*, toward overcoming the obsession with control--though as we’ve repeatedly argued in this book, one that backfires by consolidating the control-mania in another (divine) locus. But what is relevant here is the way Jesus chooses to sum this idea up, which reveals something quite distinctive about the kind of mind we are dealing with here, the nuance-free dualism that is his first instinct: he presents the position of one who has renounced any future vows, any presumption to know or resist the will of God, as amounting to a black-and-white yes versus no, allowing no qualifications, no uncertainty, no ambiguities, no ambivalences, no middle ground, no conditionals (not even “if God wills it”), no shadings, no grey areas, no considered weighing of pros and cons. Not “I’d prefer this, but what do I know?” No “I’m hoping to do it this way, but God alone knows whether this can or should succeed.” No “I’m still not sure, I haven’t yet thought it through, it’s still not clear—let’s find out more, let’s wait and see.” Not “I can see some good reasons for yes and some other good reasons for no.” Not even “I don’t have a dog in this fight; I’m neutral.” None of that: just “yes” or “no.” What is more, everything that is not sharply black-and-white is not simply dropped out or ignored: we get a further black-and-white dualism in how he describes whatever is not black-and-white: it all comes from *evil*—no possibility that anything like this might come from confusion, from distractedness, from overeagerness, from a solicitousness to give assurance to the other, from an attempt to express one’s avidly sincere intentions, to calm someone’s anxieties:

illustration of this attitude can be seen in Jesus’s outburst at Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” (Matthew 16:23). The “Satan” in this case is just someone, in this case his own disciple, momentarily expressing a religious opinion of which Jesus disapproves, an arguably non-crazy viewpoint which Jesus instantly and mercilessly repudiates, without further discussion, as proof positive that Peter is completely wrongheaded about God and man, which is sufficient grounds to judge Peter not merely as misinformed or confused or neglectful or temporarily caught off guard, but as a thoroughly evil being, the most evil one can be, a judgment of not only this thought or this statement but of the man himself as a whole. For not immediately agreeing, he is not merely chided for a wrongheaded idea or even merely sternly repudiated for having a satanic thought, or for having some as yet unconquered satanic opinions or tendencies, but is rather *identified* as Satan himself, the full noun attached to the person himself rather than an adjectival description that may coexist to other mitigating factors. But of course all this Satan has to do is submit to Jesus later and the judgment immediately reverses: he becomes the rock on which the church shall be built. The absolutely dichotomous and nuance-free judgment of the whole person as *either* absolutely holy *or* absolutely evil, worthy of the greatest possible glory or the greatest possible wrath, is made on the basis of the sole standard of agreement or disagreement with Jesus, whether or not any reasons are given, no matter what the temporary circumstance may be. I am aware that traditional defenders of passages like this prefer to focus not on the formal character of this exchange but on the *content* of the topic in question: it is a lively and emphatic way of stressing just how important it is to turn away from things of this world, represented by Peter’s idea that it would be beneath the dignity of the messiah to be executed as a criminal, and to turn instead toward the things of God, which are being announced here, i.e., that true godly exaltation comes only with first enduring total humiliation in this world, to be exemplified soon in the blood sacrifice of the Son of God for the remissions of sins which is being foretold here, the salvation of the world—surely a matter of supreme cosmic importance, and thus worthy of the strongest possible rhetorical presentation. The questions we wish to raise here, by focusing

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no, anything other than yes or no, black and white, exactly two mutually exclusive options, is just evil. In other words, anything not absolutely dichotomous is to be absolutely rejected, and the relations between dichotomy and non-dichotomy is again dichotomous and exclusionary. We get a further black-and-white between what is black-and-white and what is not black-and-white. Acceptance and rejection are to be sharply and absolutely opposed, with no middle ground; and whatever does not do this should be again completely rejected, with no middle ground.

rather on the *form* of this response, are first, whether in fact this is the only or best way to communicate such an idea, second, whether it is a necessary concomitant of precisely that doctrine, and third, if so, what we should conclude about a doctrine that does justify or even necessitate such an attitude of hatred toward non-adopters. However we may answer these questions, this “get away from me, you are pure evil” attitude is, I think, appropriately labeled a kind of extreme hatred. Certain people, people who do certain things (perhaps nothing more than not immediately agreeing with Jesus) are to be absolutely rejected and excluded.

In contrast to all of this black-and-white rejection and exclusion, we also find this same Jesus issuing equally striking and exaggeratedly accepting and inclusive injunctions to “love your enemies” (Luke 6:25, Matthew 5:44) and “judge not” (Luke 6:37, Matthew 7:1) and “turn the other cheek” (Luke 6:29, Matthew 5:39) and “give all you have to the poor” (Matthew 19:21), and occasional invocations of a non-discriminating view and equal treatment of all, the just and the unjust, like the all-embracing bounty of the sun and rain (Matthew 5:45)—all the hallmarks of the loving and all-accepting Jesus of popular imagination. All of that is really there too, check and jowl with the violently exclusionary stuff. The contrast is bewildering, and rather fascinating. The question is: what is the relation between these wildly contrasted sentiments? Do they form part of a single coherent system of thought? What is the structure that fits them coherently together?

### *The Rosetta Stone for Interpreting the Gospels*

We find the answer in the few places where the text *explicitly* relates the two tendencies, where in a single dictum or parable it combines extreme vindictiveness with extreme inclusiveness. It is here that the text tells us how to read itself, provides its own master key, the Rosetta Stone of the Gospels. My claim, extending Shengyan’s insight into the basic structure here, is that our best hermeneutic strategy for dealing with the apparent tensions in the text is to privilege these few places where the two opposed tendencies are directly combined, and given an explicit explanation, rather than any of the parts of the text where only one of these tendencies is displayed separately; the passages where either of the two threads is expressed separately are to be interpreted in terms of those in which they are explicitly combined and related to one another.

Perhaps the clearest example of such a “master key” passage is the “Parable of the Tares,” spoken by Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:24-30, and then *interpreted by Jesus himself* to his innermost disciples in Matthew 13:37-43, revealing its esoteric meaning in perfectly explicit terms:

- <sup>24</sup> Another parable put he [Jesus] forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:
- <sup>25</sup> But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.
- <sup>26</sup> But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.
- <sup>27</sup> So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?
- <sup>28</sup> He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?
- <sup>29</sup> But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.
- <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.....
- <sup>36</sup> Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.
- <sup>37</sup> He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;
- <sup>38</sup> The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*;
- <sup>39</sup> The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.
- <sup>40</sup> As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the

end of this world.

<sup>41</sup> The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

<sup>42</sup> And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>43</sup> Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (King James Version)

Here we have the two opposed trends in their starkest form, but also combined in a single idea that is perfectly clear and intelligible: it tells us quite explicitly and unambiguously which is end and which is means, which is the goal and which is a mere temporary method of getting to that goal. Hatred for these evil people, spawn of the devil, is the ultimate truth, for God hates them so much that He is planning to destroy them. Tolerance of them is a *regrettable but unavoidable temporary measure*. Good people and evil people, in this story from the mouth of Jesus, come from two absolutely different sources, have nothing in common except for the fact that they are temporarily mixed together in this world. We are told *not* to destroy the evil tares *yet*, lest the wheat be destroyed too. That's explicitly so that the two can be more clearly separated *later*, so that the tares can be *destroyed*. The allowing of the inclusion of the two is a means, a temporary measure: in the end, there is to be absolute separation.

The full implications of this for the Christian teaching of "love" is perhaps better appreciated by considering another prediction of final separation of human beings into two types, the good and the evil: the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, spoken by Jesus in Matthew 25:32-46:

<sup>31</sup> When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

<sup>32</sup> And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

<sup>33</sup> And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

- <sup>34</sup> Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
- <sup>35</sup> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
- <sup>36</sup> Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.
- <sup>37</sup> Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?
- <sup>38</sup> When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*?
- <sup>39</sup> Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
- <sup>40</sup> And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.
- <sup>41</sup> Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
- <sup>42</sup> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:
- <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.
- <sup>44</sup> Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?
- <sup>45</sup> Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.
- <sup>46</sup> And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (KJV)

This is a beautiful, chilling, and striking passage, not least perhaps because of its complex blend of flavors, meshing extreme love and extreme hate in closely intertwined proximity. These two sides, all-inclusive acceptance and murderously divisive vengeance, are given an intriguing and revealing structure in this passage, which tells us a bit more of how to construe the relation between them. A reader steeped in Buddhist literature might think here of the concept of a bodhisattva: a being whose commitment to liberating both himself and all other beings requires an ability to create and inhabit an infinite variety of bodies, identities, personas. With such a conception in mind, one would perhaps be tempted to interpret this as suggesting that, parallel to the claim that beggars are really this kind of compassionate shape-shifting bodhisattvas in disguise, found in Mahāyāna texts like *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, these outcasts and beggars are *really* Jesus himself in disguise, so that however one treats them is really, literally, how one has treated the Judge who judges one at the Last Judgment. This would open very interesting opportunities for comparative theology, as well as providing a Mahāyāna reading of the demand that people must “believe in me”: if how one treats the beggars counts as how one treats “me,” the Son of Man, then one could say that to believe in the beggars is to believe in Jesus—even if one has never heard of Jesus. This would still leave the structural centrality and ultimacy of *judgment* in the story untouched, and that is our main focus here, but it would at least provide for some interesting possibilities to soften some of the exclusionary implications of the focus on one particular savior with an identity that excludes all other identities.

However, the text doesn’t seem to allow for this reading if taken as stated: there is no actual exchange of identities spoken of here, because a specific unchanging relation between the Judge and these needy beings is posited: they are specified as his “brethren.” If that noun were left out, and we had simply, “Whatever you’ve done to those needy beggars you have actually, it turns out, done to me!” we could perhaps justify reading this as a full-on case of disguised identity or double identity or identity switch. An ingenious theologian could perhaps work out a way, Trinity-style, to keep the distinct identities and *also* claim some form of identity between them—the brethren, while remaining brethren, might also be the Judge in the same way that the Son, while remaining Son and not Father, remains also God. This would perhaps be an unorthodox reading, but an appealing one, though in the end, perhaps even more chilling with

respect to our main concern: the importation of the ultimacy of judgment and exclusion to all aspects of existence.

But the most literal reading does nothing to undermine the mutually exclusive identities in their usual Christian absolute separation: it suggests only an assertion that whatever is done to these “his brethren” will *count* as having been done to Jesus himself. Again we could perhaps apply the same to belief, although of course that is not stated: “Insofar as one has believed in one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast believed in me.” That is, it will *count* in the Last Judgment as if one had done so, although in this scenario (as opposed to the prior full-on Mahāyāna identity switch or god-in-disguise scenario) the idea would be that though this is not what has actually happened, it will be *judged* equivalently—again stressing the point that Judgment is all that really matters, which is actually what most worries us here. The point seems to be that Jesus will have their back, and count anything done to any of these his brethren *as if* it had happened to him.

Even on this reading, much depends on how we interpret the reference to “my brethren” here. The least charitable meaning, although one that has rather strong contextual support, would be that “brethren” (*adelphoi*) means only believers here, for this seems to be the dominant usage of this term in the New Testament: not blood siblings, not “all men” or anything like that, but a specific form of address that believers use for each other (for example, Paul in Galatians 2:4 refers to “false believers” as *pseuoadelphoi*, “fake brothers,” which clearly indicates that the term is not a global inclusive term but a specific designation of members of the in-group of believers), the others who have also become “sons of God,” honorary little brothers of Jesus or members of the body of Christ, the head of which is Jesus. This would seem to square with the picture of two groups separated by their respective origins, one family of spawn of God and one family of spawn of the devil, which we saw in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: “brethren” would refer to those who traced their source to the good farmer, while those who grew from seeds cast by “the enemy” would not be brothers belonging to that family. That would mean that Jesus “has the back” only of those beggars and outcasts who were also believers, and amounts to an in-group protection scheme: don’t touch any of my guys, even when they’re down and out, or I’ll make you pay for it. This is perhaps the way a contemporaneous reader would



have taken this passage: as an encouragement to become a believer, a “brother,” for that would mean that Christ would avenge you on the Last Day for anything anyone does to you, no matter how lowly and defenseless you may presently be.

But since the meaning is at least ambiguous, let’s adopt a more charitable reading, and see what that would tell us about the love-hate intertwining that still remains. Thus applying the principle of charity, then, let us try to read “my brethren” as applying to all human beings, believers and non-believers, virtuous and vicious alike, and read the “one of the least” as implying that each and every one of them is under the protection of this threat to bring retribution for mistreatment. The message is then, whatever you do to any human being I will view as if it had been done to me personally, and will reward or punish you for it just as if you had treated the Final Judge himself this way. This would strike many as a rather lovely idea, at first blush. Christians adopting this reading can certainly point to this as an encouragement to “judge not, lest you be judged.” The threat of judgment is being used here as a goad to encourage universal love, is it not? Is this perhaps a reversal of the ends/means structure? Do we perhaps see a way to read love as ultimate, instead of judgment? Is judgment the means and love the end here, finally?

That may well have been the intent. But even if we grant this most charitable reading, where we are to regard the lowly as possibly the actual Judge himself in disguise, we might already note with some unease that the teaching still divides all people into two mutually exclusive groups: 1) those good people who love as Jesus commands them to, accepting and welcoming all, who love and fear Jesus enough to think he might be lurking secretly anywhere, and thus treat the apparently lowly as if they were Jesus himself, and thus pamper and fear these lowly ones just as they would do to Jesus; and 2) those who do not love as Jesus commands, the evil people who treat others according to their own feelings and assessments about those specific people, i.e., people who are kind to some and unkind to others. The principle of Last Judgment is twisted back into the principle of inclusion: those who love me, it turns out, are those who love, or at least behave as if they love, all the lowliest people. But with growing unease we might go on to note a strange structural feature here: if this applied to people who were *genuinely* loving toward the lowliest people, it would be self-subverting; revealing that there will be a reward for

this love is presented in the text itself as the true and only valid reason for the love, i.e., the fear that those people might turn out to be Jesus himself, not the lowest but rather the most powerful personage in the universe, the final judge, in disguise. If what was valued were genuine love of lowly persons, the Gospel should *not* have revealed that they might be the King in disguise, a prospect which would surely be expected to provide an entirely different motivation for such actions. It is the most highly ranked, the King, whom one is actually ordered to love: Him and no one else.

Here is a pretty decent, rather Mahāyāna-tinged response a Christian might make to a carping criticism of this kind: What other way is there to motivate love for the lowly, this Christian might ask, than to show that they are in fact *deceptive forms* of the majestic, i.e., of something one already values? Given that the unenlightened sinful person already loves power, glory, highly respected Lordship, adoring and submitting only to total mastery and control, and thus loves God the almighty King of the Universe, Jesus is showing that what you took to be the antithesis of all that, these lowly beggars, are really another form in which glorious Kingship can appear. He is showing that lowly beggardsom is not so lacking in majesty as we had first supposed, for it *can* be the vessel of Godhood. In doing so he is also showing that Kingship, Godhood, is not what we'd first taken it to be: it is also something that can appear as beggarliness, out of mercy and compassion. So we should love both beggars and God: beggars because they are a form in which God can appear, God because he's God. In loving God we love his power to appear in all forms, and in that sense love all the forms in which he appears, including beggars.

Thus far we would have a fine, almost Tiantai Buddhist reading of the Gospel, where God behaves like a bodhisattva. But the reason this interpretation falls apart in the Christian case is simply because of the monotheism at the base of it, where personality, purpose, exclusion *must* be the ultimate point of everything. What is *finally* revealed about the nature of Godhood through this bodhisattvaesque play is not compassion and acceptance, but vengeance and judgment. This undercover move teaches us to replace our previous understanding--in which the nature of God was to be powerful, noble, respected, and thus to be loved and feared, while the nature of beggars was to be lowly, disgusting, worthless failures, and thus to be hated and despised--with a

new understanding, in which beggars are possible vessels containing Godhood, and Godhood is capable of protecting beggars by means of a sort of sting operation, the divine purpose of which is still as before to later make a final division between the righteous and the unrighteous, the good and the evil, the sheep and the goats. So the oneness between God and beggar is once again a means to a division between on the one hand God and his in-group of the righteous, those who obey and love him in all his multifarious forms, and on the other hand the unrighteous, who do not. The beggar may be loveable, and even beggarliness as such may be loveable insofar as it is now seen to be a possible vessel for divinity, but we can never really be sure if any particular beggar is himself worthy of love: since there exists a category of persons who will in the end turn out to be genuinely unworthy of love, as we can infer from the fact that God will *justly* consign them to hell, this particular beggar may turn out to be not loveable after all, even though it is not his beggarliness that makes him unworthy of our love, but something else: namely, his non-subordinated mind, his own loving and hating on the basis of anything other than obedience to the will of God. To put it only slightly jokingly, he is loveable only as long as he remains a beggar not in external conditions, but internally as well, not only outwardly poor but “poor in spirit,” a beggar in his mind; if he is one of that devil seed type who just love what strikes them as loveable and hate what strikes them as despicable, who have emotional responses to things based on their own judgment of what is valuable, he is ipso facto worthy of hatred and damnation, and neither his beggarliness nor whatever majesty he may have are of any ultimate value. What is being recommended here is thus in no way actually love of him per se.

Notice that this is just the same structure as we find in the Matthew 5:45, cited above, from the Sermon on the Mount: there too we are told to love our enemies, to treat all equally, whether they are good or evil, just as God’s bounty of sunlight and rain descend on all impartially. But though at first this is justified as an imitation of the impartiality of God, it is *immediately* followed by an alternate justification: do this so as to get greater “*reward*” than “others,” than “the pagans,” the “tax-collectors” (Matthew: 5:46-47). We are to cease to differentiate between types of people *so that God will differentiate between us and others*: we are to regard all as equal *so that we will be better than others*. To put this strange and bluntly self-contradictory idea into a formula, the teaching of Jesus here seems to be this: *Those who do not*

*love all people, as God does, are rightfully hated by God!* This means we must rethink the claim that God loves all, or at least the meaning of the word “love” in this context. Again, the teaching divides all people into two groups, i.e., 1) those people who obey the command to love and care for all people, out of either love or fear of Jesus, or even (the most charitable reading) because they see that this lowliness is itself a way in which Christliness can appear, modeled on the Passion, and 2) those who do not. The problem is that this division cuts through not only the people doing the treating, but also the people being so treated. They might also be those who would, if not downtrodden but empowered, treat other downtrodden people lovingly; or they might be themselves devil-seed, “tares,” who are to be tolerated now but smoked out and justly tortured (or destroyed) by God at the end of time. In the latter case, we are still told to treat them lovingly, indeed, to treat them as if they were Christ himself—*for the time being*. But we are also to remember that it might turn out in the end that they are not worthy of love—that God will damn them, and justly so. We may try to love the sinner and hate the sin, but that can only make sense until God reveals which side they are ultimately fall on, and the point here is that, since judgment and division of the person (not the sin) are what are ultimate, they must ultimately fall on one side or the other, either saved or damned. Each person is in the end judged *either* obedient to God and loving of God and faithful to God, seeing God in all things, seeing Christ in his abasement and glory in the most abased of people—*or* not. Dichotomy wins in the end. After the point when God makes his judgment, it would be presumptuous or even blasphemous of us, to love the sinner more than God does, when he is damning and punishing them.

It is crucial to add here that the notion of eternal punishment is part and parcel of this ultimacy of dichotomy: non-eternal punishment could still conceivably be construed as loving in the sense that it is meant to improve or rehabilitate, to help the punished become better out of love for something in them still worth saving. But *eternal* punishment completely changes the meaning of punishment. It then becomes a travesty to speak of love for the sinner once already condemned for all eternity by the infinite wisdom of God. And it should not be overlooked, again, that eternal punishment is a new feature of the New Testament, completely lacking in the Old, preached for the first time (at least in the texts of what most sects regard as the canonical Bible) by none other than Jesus Christ. That is the big innovation, the “good news,” that is

inextricable from the teaching of “universal love.” The attempt to transcend the preference for one group of people over another, the perceived bigotry of a certain people especially beloved by God, backfires into a further consolidation, even an intensification, of the divide between the elect and the damned.

Thus it is that some modern readers may detect in themselves a quite understandable intuition that, if actual love is valued, it seems blatantly self-defeating to preach it with the promise of final rewards distributed by a monotheistic God with absolute power--for then, we may well feel, what is being preached is ultimately not love but the recommendation to pretend to love, or to redirect the expression of a favored slave’s (sincere) love and fear for his master, “Lord” Jesus, as the (insincere) love for other people, not because those people are found lovable, but purely in obedience to the command of the (beloved and/or feared) master. But even if we adopt a still more generous reading, where love of other human beings is supposed to be motivated not by fear of one’s own punishment, but (say) by love of the image of God in them, now revealed as Christlike in its glory-to-abasement-to-glory structure, it remains true that they, those presently abased helpless persons, will be subject to judgment on the basis of their ability to love in just this way. About those people themselves, like all people in this mixed pre-eschatological world, one is being told, at the very least, to remain suspicious—after all, in themselves these people might be evil, those children of the devil, those tares, by which is meant that they are not loving, meaning that they are not people who love Jesus and his image or even presence in all persons, as oneself does: that is, they are not people who obediently act as if they love everyone else who might be Jesus in disguise, as commanded, or have learned to see the Christlike image of God in all people and therefore love them. On this maximally charitable reading, I am indeed commanded to show care and good treatment to any down-and-out person I see, seeing in them the image of the Lord, and I will be made blessed by my works of love and the recognition of Christ implied by them. But those down-and-out persons I am treating in this loving way may still be pure evil, if they in fact are not loving to other down-and-out people, and do not recognize God. In that case, I *should* not find them lovable, though I should still treat them in a loving manner. Such people ultimately deserve no love, we are taught, and God will be sure to show this eventually. They are to be treated well, surrendered to with great caution and

wariness, even ostentatiously obeyed and served, but not respected. I may find loveable in them the fact that they are creations of God, and thus in some way express the Divine Will. But the eschatological setting, rooted in the bivalent judgment structure endemic to *Noûs as Arché*, means that there will always necessarily be something more about them than the fact of their being created by God (e.g., their use or misuse of the free will—itsself a divine creation, and hence absolutely worthy of love—with which God endowed them; their free will is a divine creation and thus worthy of love, but their misuse of it is not), and it is this something extra which determines their worth in God’s eyes, their fate, and how justly loveable they actually are. Given the premise of God’s real existence, dichotomy is still unavoidably the ultimate truth, the real good. Tolerance and inclusion and love are merely a temporary tactic by which that goal of exclusion and dichotomization can be achieved.<sup>12</sup>

Some of these unworthy of love may be granted God’s love at the end anyway, by grace. Indeed, some interpreters sympathetic to Christianity but disturbed by these implications of the doctrine of eternal punishment—very few ancient ones, but lo and behold a great many more modern ones—try to soften the blow with the proposition that all this is a sinister ancient misinterpretation of the teachings of Jesus, which really preach not eternal punishment for the damned, but merely annihilation (as in the ancient Egyptian religion, a possible proximate source of the idea of a postmortem court of moral judgment of individual souls<sup>13</sup>). The textual

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<sup>12</sup>We may here bring to mind a point made long ago by Rousseau: “It is a mistake, in my view, to distinguish between civil and theological intolerance. The two are inseparable. It is impossible to live in peace with people whom one believes to be damned: to show them brotherly love would mean hating God, who is punishing them; one has an absolute duty to convert them or to prosecute them. Wherever theological intolerance is allowed it necessarily has some civil effect: and as soon as it has, the sovereign is no longer the sovereign, even in the secular domain; from then on the priests are the true masters, and kings no more than their officers.” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, in *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*, translated by Christopher Betts, Oxford University Press, 2008.p. 167.)

<sup>13</sup>This motif of the postmortem law court is not found in the canonical Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”), but does appear vividly in later Jewish or Jewish-Christian texts written in Greek, like the apocryphal *Testament of Abraham*. Some kind of immediate postmortem judgment of souls is suggested but not explicitly described in a few places in the New Testament as well (Luke 16:19-31, Luke 23:43, Hebrews 9:27). But in both the *Testament of Abraham* and in Luke, the negative judgment leads to punishment, not annihilation, whereas in the Egyptian afterlife the matter to be decided is between glorification and continued survival of the soul on the one hand and its annihilation on the other. The thumbs-up/thumbs-down dichotomy is indeed present in this polytheist case, insofar as there as an either/or relation between life and death. But the implication that this is precisely what the world was created to do, that the entire point of human existence is to separate the good souls from the bad souls, is removed without the monotheistic premise; the postmortem judge is merely the executor and not the source of the punitive law. The individual soul understandably may regard that immortal life to be the most important thing, and faces a yes/no at

arguments for this strike me as wildly implausible, but even if we were to grant this, the dichotomy between the saved and the damned remains equally stark, if not even starker, and the definition of love equally compromised. Willing to destroy something is generally considered a sign that one hates it, not loves it. The exception would be so-called “mercy-killing,” or the putting down of a beloved pet, putting it out of its misery. But of course these acts of murderous love presuppose that the criterion is the suffering (not moral turpitude) of the victim, and that the killer does not have it in her power to alleviate that suffering in any other way. Obviously none of that applies to an omnipotent God. An even more textually weak case has sometimes been made for what traditional normative Christianity has anathematized as the heresy of universalism: that all shall be saved in the end. But even this position requires that the salvation can come only after the souls in question renounce their own inclinations and judgments and finally acquiesce to the dichotomous value dualism both intrinsic to and explicitly endorsed by the holy God—perhaps after many eons of postmortem time to reconsider, either through reincarnation or spiritual existence after death. Still there seems to be no way around it: you *must* come to love, like, respect or at least accept the personality and teachings of the character at the center of the four Gospels, Jesus Christ; any feeling that such a personality is repellent, or even that he is simply *not one’s cup of tea*—for any and all reasons of the kind we’ve been exploring here, or due to any other idiosyncratic personality quirk of one’s own—have to be seen as maximally pernicious, in fact downright satanic. All the heavy machinery brought to bear on the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity seem to be designed almost deliberately to exclude the possibility of simply saying, “OK, maybe he had to be sort of abrasive in that particular time and place, but that’s just one of an infinite number of possible personalities that can represent the divine; at other times and places he might present in a form more palatable to a person like me.” No: the way he was back in Palestine is the way he is, always was, always will be. You must learn to like it, or face *rightful* eternal perdition.

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the hands of the powers that be, so moral and ritual goodness, facing a judgment at the hands of a divine being, may be for some the primary concern of life. But that meaning is bestowed by his own desire to life forever, and the discovery that there is a way to achieve this by moral behavior and ritual correctness; it is the individual’s own ambitious project to achieve eternal life. The force of such a dichotomy will thus be very different from the dichotomy that arises where deciding who gets to be in the group of survivors and who not is the reason the world was created, the only reason humans exist in the first place, as in the monotheistic version (even if this involves only the dichotomy between annihilation and survival, and not that between eternal bliss and eternal punishment).

Perhaps it could be argued (though this would be an even harder sell in terms of the available scriptures) that God’s will is so truly inscrutable that he may just decide for incomprehensible reasons to save some people for no recognizable reason, or maybe even decide to save all of them, for the same no-reason—as Calvin bluntly says, “because he wants to.” But whether or not God decides to save them in spite of their not deserving it, we are certainly never asked in the New Testament to respect everything without exception about them, and even my love of them (in some ways a lower bar than actual respect) is always infected with the ulterior motive of loving God, who is the one deciding who does and does not *deserve* love. If it is objected that “God is love,” as 1 John says, we must obviously conclude that this is a very selective kind of love reserved only for those who please one through obedience to one’s own purposes (as Jesus says in John 15:13: “You are my friends if you do everything that I command you.”), or if it is love for all, then it is the kind of love that somehow involves the ability to either eternally torture or to destroy some of those that it loves. God shines his light impartially on all *temporarily*, so as to let them show what they are, the better to be finally judged and separated, so that some may ultimately be deprived of that life-giving light, so that some who are now temporarily being nourished may be ultimately destroyed. God’s impartial bounty of all-embracing tolerance is a temporary means, a sting operation, the better to execute the real goal: total partiality, total preference for some over others, absolute judgment in the end.<sup>14</sup>

If this is love, we have to radically rethink what love means. And I don’t mean to dismiss completely out of hand the daring and interesting take on “love” that this would force upon us. Perhaps this idea of love as folding in a kind of murderously destructive rage driving toward absolute dichotomization would be a good, complex and insightful definition of what love is, and perhaps not. However much it may offend our modern moral intuitions, there is always room for debate on matters like these, and the convolutions of logic required to make a case for this kind of love may indeed end up being quite fruitful and stimulating, whatever their immediate moral costs. But in either case, acceptance of the cultural glamor of the Jesus figure of the New

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<sup>14</sup>And, as has often been pointed out, since few people feel they are able to love all equally, this will of course lead most people to feel that are rightfully hated by God—an unpayable guilt. That’s the whole point, according to Luther and others: the Sermon on the Mount is meant to show you how sinful you are and always will be, how far from the mark of justifiability in God’s eyes—and this is a way of showing how much you need the expiatory sacrifice of Christ’s crucifixion to save you.



Testament often compels readers to reverse-engineer *bad* reasons for having to conclude that it is in fact a right and proper conception of what love is. Indeed, the moral intuitions that have grown up under the sway of precisely these traditions may incline some readers to have the opposite response at this point, exclaiming, “What’s the problem? *Of course* some behaviors and attitudes have to be deemed undesirable, of course some things have to be judged better than others--to have any ethics at all it is necessary to draw the line somewhere, to make some judgment, to exclude some traits and include others! Ethics is necessarily on some level a matter of exclusion, or at least preference of some things at the expense of others. The Final Judgment may indeed be a particularly extreme and absolute form of this black-and-white bivalence and exclusion, but we can derive a much more ennobling form of ethical exclusion from the principles enunciated in that ancient context: you must choose, so choose love not hate, choose life not death!” But our point here is that this intuition of necessary bivalence itself is a remnant of the very inheritance we are putting under scrutiny here: the assumption that ultimately, on some level, exclusion is the only possible way forward, and, more importantly, that it actually succeeds in advancing the desired end rather than undermining it. It is alternatives to this intuition of fundamental ethical bivalence, of moral dualism, that we explore at length in Part 2 and online appendix B of this book.

For it is at this point, when these structural convergences of the text press themselves upon us, that we might find ourselves thinking of well-intentioned new readers of this material, particularly those hitherto unexposed to monotheist ways of thinking--new believers or merely guileless open-minded universalists and perennialists who are inclined to think this might be a place to look for insight into the meaning of life, or guidance in how to be a better human being, or ways to develop and express the spiritual nature of man, or paths toward tasting the beatitude of religious love, the eternal glory of transcendent *agápē*. We try to imagine what it would feel like for someone with a blank slate to take these teachings to heart, what it would mean to learn to “love” human beings within the doctrinal horizon set up here. It seems pretty straightforwardly, even reading with maximum charity, to go something like this: my love for humans is to be derivative of my love and fear of God, my true master, who as my sole creator and judge has absolute claims to my unquestioning obedience, and who, ideally, has moved me

to my soul through his voluntary abasement for my sake. But his abasement is a means to the final goal, guaranteed from the beginning, of his later glory—that’s precisely what is so awesome about it, and what is to inspire my love for the immensity of the abasement: someone that high was willing to go that low for me, which is what makes him finally even higher. When I meet any human being, I am ordered to show him love and care, whether he is a lowly needy person, as in the parable of the Sheep and Goats, or my enemy who is physically abusing me, as in the Sermon on the Mount. Now we must ask, why should I love him, and what would the nature of this love be under these conditions? My attitude, according to these two teachings from the Gospels, should apparently be as follows: I should be unsure of this person’s identity and ultimate worth in the view of God; this person was created by God for the sole purpose of obeying and loving his creator, but may have gone over to the other side, making him a member of the devil’s party, metaphorically if not literally “a child of the devil.” For any other view of life or attitude toward the world that he may have adopted, anything other than the love and obedience of God for which purpose he was created, is *ipso facto* evil—for that is the very definition of evil in this context. I should think of this person I am to treat lovingly as quite *possibly* a child of the devil, rightfully to be judged by God as unredeemable and destined for absolutely justified eternal torture at God’s hand, but also as *possibly* someone who is beloved of God, a child of God, the elect of God, maybe even God himself in disguise. He might be a poor beggar in imitation of Christ, and I might see the image of glory-in-abasement there, which I love because I love Christ. But he might not. Then I can still love the image of Christ in him, but I cannot, indeed I must not, love him full stop. The point is that the image of Christ is by definition detachable from any particular instance of human abasement, and further that things are structured so that the detachment of the two identities must win out in the end. Anyone could be either an elect child of light destined for glory or else a demonic being—the latter defined here as the kind of being who, although created as part of God’s perfect creation, made in God’s image and thus originally of supreme value, has subsequently squandered this great privilege by being disobedient to God’s command to love Him and his neighbor and his enemy, a being who has selfishly turned away from God and who does not take care of and love strangers and sufferers. The tares and wheat are mixed together in this world, impossible to tell apart: we are

told to tend and care for them all, “bring them to harvest,” so that they can be sorted out in the end. For our imagined new aspirant taking the explicit premises of the New Testament into account, the result seems to be a command to express love to you, my fellow human being, unconditionally, but to do so in a state of mind that is all but inevitably characterized by profound suspicion, cunning, obsequiousness, insincerity, and histrionics. Suspicion: you might be a demonic being not only to be rightfully hated by me if I knew more about you, but objectively hateful, hateful to God for failing to be inspired by God’s love to love others as I do, deeply heartless and corrupt and dead in your soul, someone whom it would be entirely justifiable to despise, whom I will have a duty to hate as an enemy of God once your true character is revealed at the end of the world: I am provisionally being nice to you until I find out whether you are in the class of beings I have been commanded not just to pity but also to regard with horror and detestation: a hater of God. Cunning: by treating you with exaggerated solicitude, even when you are repellent to me or harmful to me, I am ingratiating myself to the Judge who is always watching me; in effect, I am laying up treasure for myself in Heaven (Matthew 6:20). Obsequiousness: I don’t know anything about how you really are, whether what you have done with the goodness of God’s gift of existence has any value in His eyes, whether I even would like or love you if I knew you, in fact I’m told that I could never know that until the end of the world when God reveals it, in the harvest; but I am afraid of getting it wrong and accidentally being callous to the most powerful being in the universe, Jesus in disguise, so to cover my tracks I make sure I am ostentatiously nice to you. Insincerity: the gentle smile on my face, the kiss to your feet, the plate of food I put before you express the precise opposite of what I’m actually feeling toward you, which is only what is right to feel toward you based on the information about the actual structure of the universe as here revealed: suspicion that God might be furious at you as He rightfully would if you are anything but obedient to Him, if you are not willing to love all, fear that you might be that avenging God in disguise, greed for an opportunity to flatter my master. Histrionics: I am modeling for you how people should act, essentially trying to be a “fisher of men”; my kindness is meant to be *seen*, not only by the invisible surveillance of the Judge, but by the recipient, who is supposed to be moved by it—that’s the real kindness I can do him, after all, to “bring him to the Lord”; and this of course will win me big points with the

Judge. So it is crucial that I make the self-sacrificing gesture big, even if it is quiet and subtle: it must be shockingly counterintuitive and painful to my own animal self, something that will make an impression on either God or the prospective conversion mark or both. Even prayer, which unlike acts of ostentatious self-sacrifice should be done in secret, is still done to be seen: by “thy Father who seeth in secret”—and who will of course then “reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6). The big gesture of self-sacrifice, the renunciation of one’s desire for glory and and power and comfort and reputation, is to be seen—and rewarded, openly, so as to be seen: to make visible the glory of God, and of his elect.

*What is Commanded When “Love” is Commanded*

Love one another—or else! We have already invoked, tongue only partially in cheek, the child pornographer and the utopian Communist dictator as unignorable undertones bubbling up through this way of thinking about love. It is perhaps hard to take the full measure of the bitter conclusion that seems to be emerging here, once we take into account the *structure* of the ends-means relation between the monistic and the dualistic elements built into this teaching: “love,” in the mouth of Jesus Christ, is hard to distinguish from a particular combination of suspicion, fear, greed and lies. This can be a very disconcerting result when we remember all the other conceptions of what “love” might mean, all the missed opportunities that are forever foreclosed by the esteem given to this Jesusist way of conceiving the nature of love. It is after all not that difficult to imagine other implications and constructions of the concept of love, it could after all have been presented as meaning many other things: perhaps something like empathizing with someone else’s suffering because of its analogy to my own suffering, from solidarity with the other as a fellow sufferer; or something like a spontaneous outflow of admiration and delight in your intrinsic worth and in the interest and ontic weight of your own thoughts, actions, being; or some sense that you being specifically the way you are and doing specifically what you do encourages me, opens me up, brightens me, inspires me to be what I am, or evokes in me a way to interact with you in more unexpected and novel ways, ways which expand the range of possible actions for us both, revealing to us both further unseen aspects of the universe we’re living in. I am suggesting that these broader meanings of love depend on a *non-monotheistic*

*context*. In particular, they depend on the premise of personhood as *non-ultimate*, of ends-means tool-using exclusive onenesses (i.e., “persons”) as something that are always embedded in and surrounded by non-personhood, by uncharted worlds and by their own bodies, by things that are controlled and caused by neither their own minds nor by any other minds. That is an actual *precondition* for interpersonal love understood in these alternate ways. None of that seems to be at all relevant, or indeed possible, here in the monotheistic world of the New Testament. Instead, suspicion, greed, fear and display, combined in what looks unavoidably like a hysterical cocktail of apocalyptic vindictiveness and self-righteousness, onto which we have a rather preposterous label pinned: “love.”

This is an extreme development of one small trend in the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”), one of many ways in which that older set of texts combines the monistic and the dichotomizing aspects that are intrinsic to monotheism. Indeed, it is perhaps the most extreme combination of the two, taking up, we might feel, some of the least appealing available aspects of the Old Testament. The entire New Testament teaching of Jesus, as combining the monistic and the dichotomous as means and ends in the fiery apocalypticism exemplified in Jesus’ words above, seem to be an expansion of the depressing logic found occasionally but unmistakably in the Old Testament, as in Proverbs 25: 21-22:

<sup>21</sup> If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:

<sup>22</sup> For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.

The cause-and-effect sequence is a little ambiguous here, but it is clear that somehow treating your enemy nicely will actually cause your enemy pain, just like you actually wanted to do all along. This might be simply because it will intrinsically shame him, or else it might be, more disturbingly, because God will step in and mess him up. In either case, God will reward *you*, which in itself might be enough to drive your enemy crazy, so one way or another, it is clear that a good way to harm your enemies is to be really nice to them. The New Testament authors

take this hateful little turn of thought—kindness as tactical dissembling, so as to triumph in the end—to be the real essence of the tradition, choosing it out from all the other available hermeneutic options<sup>15</sup> exaggerating it, dramatizing it, hystericizing it, and combining the two extremes so created specifically as *means* and *ends*. Hence we find St. Paul summing up the Christian teaching to his Romans (Romans 12:9-20) by quoting precisely this line from Proverbs. Here is how Paul says Christians on the one hand ought to love everyone, including both how they ought to love “one another” (which in context of the contrast made immediately afterwards can really only mean not all humans but rather the in-group, the “saints,”), but also how they ought to love others, their enemies (the out-group), (and dear reader, please notice how gorgeously the heart-strings are played by the beautifully unashamed mawkishness of the first section and its unembarrassed—some might say histrionic—moral effusiveness):

<sup>9</sup> *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.*

<sup>10</sup> *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;*

<sup>11</sup> *Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;*

<sup>12</sup> *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;*

<sup>13</sup> *Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.*

<sup>14</sup> *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.*

<sup>15</sup> *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

<sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend*

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<sup>15</sup>Amplly illustrated by the other sects of the same period—the much-maligned Pharisees and Saducees of the New Testament—who were bound to the same holy scripture but did not conclude from it any such ends-means doctrine of cartoonishly mawkish inclusion as a tool for final, and cartoonishly brutal exclusion, love as a tool for hate, i.e., the doctrines of eternal heaven and eternal hell which are so central to the Gospels. The latter ideas seem to be, though not the ex nihilo invention of Jesus or the NT writers (for they appear in an equally brutal form in some other non-canonized relics of Second Temple apocrypha, most notably in *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Book of Enoch*), at least an idea that was newly made central and developed as the lynchpin for a new form of religious consciousness. What seems to be really new in Jesus is the idea of ethics *entirely* subordinated to post-mortem reward and punishment, so that the *sole* value of actions is found in their after-death valence, which was the opposite of their pre-death valence. Hence, the distinctively Jesusian structure of love as a tool for hatred, acceptance as a tool for judgment, self-abnegation as a tool for self-exaltation, and so on.

to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

<sup>17</sup> Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

<sup>18</sup> If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

<sup>19</sup> Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

To “each other” and to “the saints” and “thy brethren”—i.e., to fellow Christians—we have the injunction to love and “give all.” The New Testament shows us pretty unmistakably, in Acts 5, how the early Christian community felt about those who did not “distribute to the necessity of saints,” which means, in plain English, those who refuse to release all their wealth and belongings into the coffers of the Christian community (sometimes also called “the Poor,” i.e., the “Ebionites”), in the story of the unfortunate new converts Ananias and Sapphira, who are rebuked by Peter for giving *some but not all* of their wealth to the Christian authorities: they straightaway *drop dead*, and the text presents this as a fine example of God’s great power and righteousness, and of His protection of the Christian community. So Christians are definitely required to love “each other,” also referred to as “the Brethren” or “My Friends, that is, those who do all that I command of them” (John 15: 13)—a definition of “friend” that is again very revealing about the early Christian notion of what “love” means: a gloss, perhaps, on the dichotomous dictum of Jesus at Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23: “He who is not with me is against me.”

As to “enemies,” i.e., those who are not members of the Christian community, one is indeed required to “love” them as well. There it is: that inclusion and overcoming of distinctions on the ethical level, the famous Christian teaching of universal love, the “monism.” But Paul leaves no doubt about the meaning and justification for this moving invocation of extreme love and charity to your enemy: *in so doing* you’ll be heaping coals of fire on his head. Apparently, that’s how you should feel while you’re helping him out: take that, sucker! Here again we see

clearly the structure of ends-and-means which pervades the New Testament teaching from beginning to end, the inseparability of a nuance-free extremism of love, holding nothing back in its lurching solicitousness, bewilderingly juxtaposed to an equally passionate vindictiveness and hatred, to the lusty savoring of the coming torture of the enemy. Indeed, there is something deeply fascinating and compelling in this bewildering juxtaposition—even more so, perhaps, though in a different sense, when bewilderment gives way to astonishment at the ultimate subordination of love to hate which appears in the Bible as the *sole* justification offered by the text for such extremities of love. (As Nietzsche says, Christian morality is refuted by its “fors,” the *reasons* it offers for doing what it tells one to do.)

*The “Now-Versus-Then” Structure of Early Christian Eschatology as Ends-Means Relation Between Monism and Dichotomy, Between the Oceanic and the Personal*

For we are now in a position to understand the great contribution made by any attention to the *necessary* connection between the love and the hate that are both so starkly on display in the teachings of Jesus, which have confused and, indeed, fascinated so many, with sometimes catastrophic results. As we’ve seen, the New Testament enjoins *both* extreme love *and* extreme hate; the question is how and why this can be so. Most readers quickly notice that, as compared even with the Old Testament, the inclusive tendency and the exclusive tendencies are *both* wildly exacerbated in the New Testament. The more fanatical version of exceptionless inclusion comes hand in hand with a more fanatical version of radical separation, dichotomy, dualism: namely, the *new* doctrine of eternal heaven and hell, completely unknown in the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”). How are the extreme monism and the extreme dichotomization combined? What is the underlying thought here? The most convincing answer is still, in my view, that proposed by the great Albert Schweitzer, who has argued a position<sup>16</sup> that more and more biblical scholars are gradually coming to confirm: the key to Jesus’ *ethical* teachings is a thoroughgoing *eschatology*, the belief that the world is going to end very soon, to be followed by a Last Judgment which will once and for all separate the good from the evil, the obedient from the disobedient, forever. As Schweitzer says, Jesus’ ethic is from beginning to end an “interim ethic”: the teachings of love

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<sup>16</sup>See Albert Schweitzer, *The Secret of the Kingdom of God* and *The Search for the Historical Jesus*.



and inclusion are meant as temporary measures, *extremely* temporary measures, to be enacted before the imminently coming (“before some who are standing here have tasted death” Mark: 9:1, Luke 9:27, Matthew 16:28) end of the world. The whole point of those loving teaching is that they are *of exactly the opposite character* of the real state of things to be revealed when the apocalypse arrives. The Christian teaching of love is this “interim ethic”: that is, its *sole* justification, as given in the Gospels from the mouth of Jesus, is that this extreme and theatrically exaggerated display of inclusion and love is something that will be *rewarded*—and quite soon—*by a reversal*. By accepting all, you will soon be able to reject all; by letting all your opponents live and thrive, you will soon be able to destroy all those opponents. One abases oneself as a servant to all, and judges no one—in order to later “judge the world” (1 Corinthians 6:2) as a reward from God for one’s absolute display of obedience when the apocalypse comes. One displays rather ludicrously dramatized and extreme forgiveness and submission and giving, forgiving one’s enemies “seventy times seven times” (Matthew 18:22) and other injunctions which seem to be some exciting suspension of or even war against the very ideas of *nuance* and *moderation*—because one is thereby, as St. Paul says, really “pouring coals on the head” of one’s enemy, for *God* will be the one who takes revenge for you, because “vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.” In short, the Christian teaching displays a heady and often confusing mix of both extreme love and extreme anger, extreme forms of both inclusion and exclusion, but in a very specific temporal and instrumental relationship: inclusion (i.e., love, forgiveness, self-denial) is a temporary *means* to the real goal, which is eternal separation, self-glorification and dominion over one’s enemies, final and total dichotomy.

It is instructive to work one’s way through the entire teaching of Jesus in the Gospels with this structure in mind. For once we note this, the captivating illusion of seemingly deep teachings based on some undisclosed insight into ethical truths instantly evaporates, and we discover, somewhat to our astonishment, that the most notable “love” teachings are actually presenting exactly this eschatological structure of love-as-means-to-final-hate, acceptance-as-a-means-to-separation, unconditionality-as-means-to-conditional-dualism, seemingly “hidden in plain sight.” Consider the Beatitudes, often cited as Jesus most representative and profoundly loving teaching, the centerpiece of the Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” and Luke’s “Sermon

on the Plain.” Our Rosetta Stone enables us to understand without difficulty the seemingly mysterious contrast of “blessed are X *now*, for they *shall* be in just the opposite position—and conversely.” As Schweitzer points out, the “now versus then” structure saturates all these ethical teachings, the menacing threat of the imminent Last Judgment being the unspoken premise throughout; the means-end structure of that projection to that imminent future is the *reason* given for the teaching. Be meek, loving, peace-making, hungry for righteousness, non-judgmental, pure in spirit, last of all and a servant to all *now*, for those who are *shall* then be rulers of the earth, see God, be filled, be first, judge the world, etc. Similarly, those who laugh now will weep *then*, and so on. Those enemies we do kindness for *now* will have coals heaped on their heads *then*.

The eschatological context insisted upon by Schweitzer thus helps explain why it is that, as we have seen, in Jesus’s teaching, monism, acceptance, non-dualism, love, are not the goal, but the means. The goal is rather absolute dichotomy, absolute dualism, the final judgment that separates good from evil. But whatever the etiology of this teaching, this structure is what stands out, especially when comparing it to other, superficially similar teachings that combine harsh and gentle elements. The key structural feature of this dichotomizing monism, again, is that it combines two apparently sharply opposed tendencies: 1) the tendency toward inclusiveness, as seen in the teaching of universal love, and self-denial as a cancellation of the dualism between self and other and 2) the tendency toward aggressive self-assertion and extreme exclusivity, linked to the fervent demonization of one’s ideological enemies, where the dichotomy between self and other is brought to a much higher pitch than even in ordinary deluded life. What is crucial however is that 1) is the *means*, while 2) is the *end, the goal*. What is really valued here is dichotomization; temporary non-dichotomy is just a method by which to attain it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> We have an excellent modern example of this structure in the “Hundred Flowers” program instituted by Mao Zedong in the 1950s, perhaps showing Mao to be deeply influenced by the Bible, consciously or unconsciously, through the medium of its profound influence on Leninism. For the structure is chillingly similar to the Christian picture of the very nature of human life on this planet: a testing ground of temporary freedom in which to demonstrate who is sincerely obedient to the ruler and who is not, to smoke them out and find out who deserves punishment and who reward. Mao lifted all strictures on criticism and free expression temporarily, as a means to the exact opposite: let there be “free will” for awhile so we can see who really loves me and who’s just pretending. Then we will know what to do with them.

If we can grasp the inner connection between these two seemingly incompatible trends in the most basic premises of the Gospels' religious vision, and how they necessarily go together on those premises, many broader cultural problems are also immediately clarified. This structure of demonizing one's ideological enemies, pitting in-group against out-group, where the in-group is at the same time identified with the principle of *universal* inclusion, with *love*, with all-inclusiveness, is a tactic seemingly invented or at least perfected by the Jesus of the Gospels, one which remains influential and, due to its association with Christian prestige, has even come to be defended as morally and spiritually legitimate. Purely on a structural level, there is surely something of this detectable in some of the more virulent modern forms of racism, fascism, and Bolshevism (whether Leninist, Stalinist, or Maoist), all of which go beyond the usual in-group/out-group antagonism that we find almost everywhere in human culture to something more extreme and all-consuming, giving distinction-dissolving affirmation of unity with one hand while simultaneously building this in-group solidarity on the basis of a vociferous condemnation of an out-group, making the exclusivity morally appealing and palatable by linking it to the self-sacrificing ideology of in-group inclusivity—a structural peculiarity we might dub “Jesusism.” But of course this structure is in reality just a further consequence of the basic logic of Monotheism: the inclusive as a means to reach the exclusive, the oceanic as a means toward the ultimate goal of the personal, oneness as a weapon which divides, the purposeless subordinated to purpose. Readers are asked to look and see for themselves whether this structure is noticeably more prevalent in Jesus-influenced cultures than in others, past and present, where this figure has no comparable level of glamor; it seems so to me, but this is a question where the data is hugely complex and no doubt susceptible to multiple readings. I should add that I suggest the name “Jesusism” for such phenomena not to endorse the absurd claim that Jesus-veneration is the *sole* cause of such tendencies—there are no *sole* causes of anything—nor even necessarily the dominant cause of them. Indeed, the causal story, whatever it turns out to be, is not the main point: this moniker is a convenient way to identify the structural peculiarities of this strain of ideological construction, noting some similarities across seemingly disparate types, by association with the name of its most prominent historical exemplar, the noting of which as such has some secondary benefits to be discussed below. The name seems

preferable to other possibilities floated at various times for similar phenomena. Nietzsche, for example, singles out the historical Zarathustra as the inventor of the idea of baking an absolute moral dualism into the metaphysical structure of the world (which is why he gives this name to his fictionalized immoralist hero: the first one to make the error would be the first one to overcome it); others have used the term Manicheism, after the religion of Mani, as a blanket term for black-and-white moral dualism in general. But the Zoroastrian teachings, in all their historical permutations, seem not to include any teaching of an eternal hell, instead promising eventual universal salvation for all human souls, albeit after an ordeal of purgative suffering. The world does exist here as a battleground between good and evil, and the purpose of life is indeed to separate these two once and for all; this involves a constant struggle to distinguish what comes from the good creator and what from the destructive counter-creations coming from a purely evil source, and to affiliate oneself always with the good. But all human souls as such belong irrevocably to the side of good, being creations of the good creator; their task is to extricate themselves from their subsequent entanglements with the temptations produced by the destructive evil counter-creator. In the end, though, good triumphs and all souls are restored to their original goodness. The purpose of the universe is not to finally divide good human souls from evil human souls, the wheat from the tares, as in the teaching of Jesus. Manichaeism, already profoundly and explicitly influenced by Jesus since its inception and emphatically dualistic, posits a postmortem paradise for the saved but only continued reincarnation for the vast majority of unsaved, repeated until eventually they can purge their souls of evil and make it to paradise; it does, however, seem to leave room for eternal damnation for the irredeemably evil even at the end of the story, and here we can perhaps see the influence of the Jesusism modifying the original dualism inspired by Zoroastrian sources. Indeed, in the Manichean story it is specifically Jesus himself who has the role of inflicting the final judgment and dividing the elect from the damned. So it seems fair to consider this aspect of Manichaeism, like the later Islamic doctrine of final judgment and eternal damnation for non-believers (a scenario in which Jesus is again enlisted to personally appear in a key role) to be Jesusist in inspiration. Despite some complications, we would have to consider Zoroastrianism to be a monotheism in our sense, following the basic pattern of *Noûs as Arché*, tracing all existence to a prior intentional mind,

and saturating the world therefore with a single purpose. As such, it is subject to the same objections we have raised elsewhere in this work toward such systems: the exclusive oneness intrinsic to such a notion spells the monomaniacal endeavor to exclude and eliminate many aspects of the world and of human life. The focus when comparing monotheist systems thus becomes a question of where the line is drawn, which elements in particular are singled out for exclusion. It seems significant that the two monotheisms (or at least quasi-monotheisms) that do not canonize Jesus—Zoroastrianism and normative rabbinical Judaism—are also the ones that do not seem to insist on a doctrine of eternal damnation, of absolute exclusion at the level of human souls. Their mania for exclusion is directed elsewhere, arguably also to greatly problematic effect, but the final line between the included and the excluded is not drawn between some human souls and other human souls. The fervor of a truly absolute us-versus-them moral dualism in the relevant sense comes not from the metaphysical quasi-dualism of the Persian system, nor from the ethnic chauvinism of the “chosen,” but from the total all-or-nothing eschatology of Jesus (and some other non-canonical Second Temple Jewish sectarians). It is here that we get something really new under the sun: the idea that the ultimate goal of all existence, the reason the universe was created, was to accomplish an absolute, ultimate, final us-versus-them ingroup/outgroup separation. The world exists to winnow out some human beings from eternal salvation, to divide the sheep from the goats once and for all. We may ask why the obsession with the all-powerful universal Good source of all, in spite of its necessarily exclusivist structure, took this turn in Jesusism, while the same premise evidently leads to such a different conclusion in Zoroastrianism; in the Jesusist version, the triumph of the (exclusivist) good means the exclusion of evil (disobedient, ungrateful) souls, while in the Zoroastrian case, the triumph of the universal (though exclusivist) good meant the exclusion of all destructive material and spiritual forces, and hence of all that is destructive to human souls, and hence ends in the salvation of *all* human souls. The intense eschatological setting at the core of Jesusism seems to be the main culprit here. But there is perhaps another element which is crucial: the raising to an exponential level of the “personalism” that is implicitly or explicitly at the heart of the monotheist idea to begin with--the ultimacy of personhood and purpose--in the much vaunted “full humanity” of Jesus (as a specific personality, and as *this* specific personality, as seen in the Gospels) might

serve as another key factor in this difference. Precisely because the Good is now a concrete personality, the Logos made Flesh, the exclusivity endemic to all purposive personhood operates directly and intensely at the level of person-to-person relations. It now seems a *personal slight* to reject the offer of the Good, for it has become the rejection of a specific person—which then can feel *justly* repaid by the subsequent exclusion of (the rejecting) person qua person. The intrinsic vindictiveness that comes with the personification of the absolute Good in the form of an invisible personal deity, such as we have in all the prophetic religions, already makes personal affront, anger, intersubjective recrimination a key factor in ethics; but the airy sky-gods, even when they speak, are perhaps still diffuse and insubstantial enough to keep this from becoming the central motif of religious consciousness. In the case of Jesus, however, the personalization rises to a new fever pitch: here he is, standing there in a specific time and place, offering you total love and acceptance, exemplifying pure sacrifice, face to face telling you to follow him, to obey his command for universal love, imploring with his soulful eyes, meek and mild—and yet you say no, you slam the door in his face. How could you! You deserve whatever you get after that slap in the face of this most gentle and loving of all human faces.... Merely turning away from an abstract Goodness just doesn't generate the same kind of heat, the same kind of limbic vendetta response: as they say in action movie trailers, "this time it's personal." It is only when the exclusive Goodness is at the same time the absolute universal, symbolized by a *personification* of all-inclusive love, that a truly thoroughgoing sheep-and-goats dualism is applied to the souls of persons themselves, to individual human beings. Our question is then what to make of the possibility that it is *this* form of dualism—thoroughgoing dualism in the name of an ontologically thoroughgoing all-inclusive and *personalized* oneness—that we see in the modern manifestations of fanatically murderous do-gooding, both in their personality cults and in the similarly-structured machinery that continues to operate independently of those cults.

I suggest this here as a particularly relevant theme for further research, since these 20<sup>th</sup> century disasters are so often invoked by both sides of the religion/atheism culture wars: religious conservatives will point to, say, Nazism and Bolshevism as examples of the deadly consequences of atheism, while atheists will insist that these two movements became deadly precisely because of their religious elements, i.e., that they were essentially of a religious

character, in spite of their avowed atheism and anti-Christianity, for example in their demands for absolute faith and obedience. The question before us is whether this question isn't better resolved by focusing not on God or religion or secularism per se, but on Jesusism in particular. The issue then is not merely faith and obedience, nor even merely *absolute and unquestioning* faith and obedience; it is also absolute and unquestioning faith and obedience *premised on a demonizing dichotimization*, which locates all possible value only on one side, identifying that one side with universal Goodness, where the opposing side is not merely to be snubbed, ignored, pitied, ridiculed, disparaged, enslaved, or disenfranchised (as might be the case with absolute faith and obedience in non-Jesusist contexts), but actually tortured and/or destroyed. But there is more than even dichotomization and the complete negation of the enemies value that must be present for a structure to count as truly Jesusist. For it is not just a question of an unblinking willingness to destroy the designated enemy, in the manner that one might exterminate vermin or anaesthetize a rabid dog. These can happen in cases where the enemy is thoroughly dehumanized and some project requires their elimination, with no more reservations than one has in calling the exterminator to deal with a case of house infestation. This is certainly bad enough, but what we're talking about here is something much more severe. It is not merely a case of looking on the extermination as something that must be done, and can be done in good conscience without a second thought. It is rather as if one considered exterminating vermin not merely a thoroughly justifiable tactic in the face of a difficult situation, but as the actual *meaning of life*. It is not just that one feels justified in doing it without no qualms of conscience, as when one calls the exterminator and then goes on with one's day doing other things; it is rather that it is *the main thing* that life is all about, the reason the world was created, the ultimate meaning of human existence, the purpose of the universe. The absolute and eternal separation of the good humans from the evil humans (defined, say, as those who are obedient to God's universal command to love all and those who are not; or as those who accept Jesus' role and authority and sacrifice and those who do not, etc.), and the absolute and eternal exclusion, punishment and/or destruction of this enemy, is literally God's *main project* for human life, the single most important thing there is to do, indeed the only thing that really matters. It will be noted that the same structure is often deployed when advancing Reason, or Civilization, or Tolerance, or

Liberty, or Equality, or Strength, or any other value endorsed as representing the universal as an exclusive oneness, where the antivalue's exclusion or destruction is not only endorsed in fully good conscience, but is made the most important of all activities, the sole meaning of life on earth, the one thing that really matters: a dichotomizing monism.<sup>18</sup> That is where we must locate the distinctive structure of what we're calling Jesusism.

### *Metaphorical?*

When it is pointed out that the only *explicit* reason given for the remarkable moral injunctions advocating reversals of worldly values—in favor of meekness, non-resistance, love for enemies—found in the synoptic Gospels is the eschatological threat of punishment for all opponents and the promise of reward for the elect, advocating the absolute division of human souls between the saved and the damned, it is sometimes suggested that this is not meant literally but only metaphorically. The idea is that there was a person two thousand years ago of deep mystical insight into profound and spiritual truths—through his own extraordinary realization or through some sort of initiation into ancient mysteries—who discovered that violence is bad and worldly standards of success are illusory, that true imperishable bliss lay not in dominating others or political power or fame or wealth but in the deep peace of soul and union with eternity that come from abandoning such things and instead embodying selfless love for all, even willingly dying for others and renouncing all one has without regret. On this account, all the eschatological threats are either something the preacher had to use simply as an easily-understood metaphorical rendering of this amazing and unheard-of moral reversal, as if to say, Be willing to die for love and surrender willingly to your enemies, and the resultant bliss will be

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<sup>18</sup> Comparing the ideological structure of National Socialism to that of Bolshevism, it seems that the former more obviously mirrors the Jesusist structure, i.e., unity as a means to achieve absolute dichotomy. The world is to be brought under the dominion of a single ruler, but the purpose of this unification is to absolutely exclude from this unity, i.e., to annihilate, a certain group of people after the unification is accomplished. Bolshevism, at first blush, seems to have the reverse structure: absolute division (class struggle), including ruthless exterminations, are used as a means to achieve a future unification from which none will be excluded. But because of the mortality of human souls under materialism as understood within Marxism, this “temporary” exclusion of some persons from the future unity—by killing them, say—ends up being a final and total exclusion. On this premise, the ultimate goal of existence, including all present gestures of solidarity and inclusiveness, remains the Jesusist principle of absolute and final exclusion of some humans (i.e., those liquidated in the name of the universal good), and the inclusion of others, the temporary measure of universal unity used to accomplish the absolute us-versus-them ingroup/outgroup separation.



*as if* one has been raised from the dead, *like* a great victory after seeming total defeat, *just as blissful* as an immoral man might feel if he got the chance to win in the end and slaughter all his enemies. Regrettably, on this view, these were the only terms comprehensible within the spiritual milieu of his listeners, and thus he had to adopt this awkward *upāya*. Another variant of this interpretive strategy suggests that he never preached any such thing at all, but that his teaching that “losing is the true winning” was understood this way by his ignorant listeners, blinkered by their narrow cultural context, precisely because they had no other way to make sense of this bold new teaching, and thus translated it into their own conceptual terms of eschatological threat and promise. A further possibility is that even the followers understood that this was not the real teaching, but these words were cynically put into the master’s mouth for propaganda purposes, as the only way to ensure that this beautiful teaching could flourish after the master’s disappointing death.

We might even see something of this process of bracketing the eschatological setting already taking place in the Gospel of John, which eliminates most of the explicit eschatological content and instead frames the teaching in terms of a less concrete invocation of incarnated Logos, light, love, a living vine the union with which equals rebirth into true eternal life.

But even if for the sake of argument we were to grant this unlikely scenario, regarding all the talk of postmortem judgment and even the physical resurrection as simply artful metaphorical renderings of a deeper teaching, this deeper teaching itself remains structured in entirely the same way: the dichotomy dividing not only good from evil, life from death, light from darkness, but even human souls between the haves and the have-nots, now not in terms of material wealth and status but in terms of this new standard of spiritual realization, remains in force, now even more alarming in that it is transferred wholesale to the “spiritual” realities represented rather than to their mere external mechanisms or metaphors. If this is really about spiritual insight rather than a bloody eschaton, the spiritual realm is now structured eschatologically, that is, as a matter of dividing wheat from chaff, as the absolute dichotomization between realization and non-realization, between union with the living light of love and non-union with it, between material failure which is really spiritual success and plain old material success which is really spiritual failure. The dichotomy between failure and success is just as sharp and unbridgeable, only with

the terms reversed. But it was this dichotomy itself that was the actual spiritual problem. And it is this problem, this dichotomy, that we have traced to the monotheistic premise, *Noûs as Arché*, the dichotomization endemic to purposivity, which has been made ontologically ultimate and unsurpassable. Even if all talk of a literal eschaton or resurrection or post-mortem reward is regarded as a merely metaphorical window-dressing, the dichotomization intrinsic to monotheism, far from being overcome, is only further exacerbated, now seeping in even to the structure of spirituality, of life, of love itself.

### *Consequences and Takeaways*

We may propose a useful general methodological principle derived from this set of considerations, to be applied when confronted with any religion, any philosophy, any ideology, any point of view. The real question that reveals the deep structure and ultimate character of any doctrine is always, not what is being proposed or recommended or commanded, but *how does it relate to whatever is the opposite of what is being proposed, to whatever its recommended morality excludes*. That is, concomitant with any assertion that X is so or X is good, what attitude is being simultaneously proposed for whatever is non-X, or anti-X? If X is “love,” what attitude is being proposed or displayed concerning “hate” or “those who hate”? If X is “obedience,” what attitude is being displayed concerning “disobedience” or “the disobedient”? If X is “ritual propriety,” what attitude is being proposed or displayed concerning “impropriety”? If X is “non-attachment,” what attitude is being proposed or displayed concerning “attachment” and those who display it? If X is “truth,” how is falsehood treated? If X is “empirical evidence and sound reasoning,” how are superstition and baseless speculation treated? This, more than the ostensible content of the X, will tell us what the real character of any teaching is. The Christian teaching of “love” and “non-violence” and “repentance of sin” shows its real character through its attitude toward the non-loving and the violent and the unrepentant. It would be too simplistic to say merely that it violently hates them. But if we can say that the desire to violently torture and/or destroy someone or something may be taken as reasonable standard for what counts as “hate,” as I think it can, the Christian must believe that the non-loving and the violent and the unrepentant are at least *worthy of* violent hate, insofar as *God* wants to *destroy* the sins now and eternally

punish the unrepentant (nonsubmissive) sinners themselves later. If the Christians themselves are enjoined while living to “hate the sin and not the sinner,” and even to now, temporarily, show the sinner love, the premise remains that this is a temporary measure premised only on the command of the very Being who does want to destroy sin (now) and torture unrepentant sinners (later), a command to be obeyed either out of fear of punishment from this unbeatable commander, or, in the best case scenario, out of love of him. What matters first and foremost is one’s attitude to the commander, the *attempt* to love, as an expression of obedience to this command, whether or not one succeeds in doing so. If obedience to the command to love other humans does, as in the best scenario, come not from fear of God but from love of God (not from love of humans itself), we must then ask about *this* love to assess the meaning of this attitude. Love of God is love of what? The love of the one who hates the sin and unrepentant sinner, and eventually wants to destroy and/or torture both. Love of such a being implies an evaluative stance: the *approval* of the will to torture and destroy the enemy, the exaltation of this attitude as the very definition of the Good, the absolutization of dichotomy. In this specific form, it also means the ultimacy of personhood and agency, endemic to the God idea, is applied directly to the criterion of membership in the unhated or non-excluded group: we have an open invitation to join the party of love, so that it can be determined by one’s free choice. One’s value and membership are decided by one’s conscious beliefs, choices and allegiance. Once that choice is made, the dichotomy is ruthlessly exclusionary. For this to work, a delayed structure is required, distributing the monism and the dichotomy into a temporal sequence, fitted perfectly to eschatology: what must come first is a free invitation to all, loving openness, non-judgment, acceptance; then the purpose-oriented dimension of each invitee is activated to make a choice or show character; then a ruthlessly exclusionary dichotomous judgment is made. X is chosen to represent the universal; as such all are invited in. Any who happen not to respond (and since after all this alleged universal is--because determinate--really a particular, there are bound to be infinite reasons why it will not suit everyone’s inclinations, commitments, values, preferences) the full force of the universal—construed as *exclusive oneness* because intrinsically purposive and personal—is deployed to torture, to destroy, to hate.

We have already suggested that attention to this deep structural tendency in the earliest Christian teachings brings out certain features that we may begin to notice in nearly all products of Christian cultures, raising the question of to what extent this tendency is inextricably embedded in the premises of those products, which under the right conditions powerfully facilitate their replication. Indeed, an insight into the nature of this core structure of Christianity, at the very center of the teachings attributed in scripture to Jesus and Paul, would perhaps rightfully make us wary of all products of European and Islamic cultures, as well as Hindu and Jewish cultures to the extent that they have taken Jesus aboard, and modern secular cultures to the extent that, when asked, they consider Jesus an exemplar of virtue. Insofar as over the last few centuries all world culture has been transformed by a modernity that is itself so structured, perhaps all of the modern world would have to fall into the category of cultural complexes in which this structural feature has become all but inextricable. Would it not be reasonable to predict that, given what is encoded in the root scriptures serving to determine and symbolize their highest ideals, these Jesus-friendly cultures will be prone—to a degree proportional to their degree of engagement with the Jesus of the Gospels (and the Isa of the Quran)—to a conditioning that tilts the view of virtue, the view of love, the view of truth into a particular shape? Shengyan’s coinage “dichotomizing monism” is an excellent term for this shape. To review: virtue in this shape will be synonymous not only with passionate bias for some one thing standing as a symbol of biaslessness—a standard trope for almost all moralists, to some extent—but, because of the way the universal versus particular opposition is configured here, the non-negotiable dichotomization of this opposition, construed as the ultimate purpose of the creation of the universe and of all human life: a black-and-white all-or-nothing devotion to that one thing, concomitant with an uninflected total destructive will aimed against some other thing, and thereby the hatred of and desire for the final destruction of anyone who does not join one’s party of “universal love.” This is accompanied not only with a good conscience but with a feeling of utmost self-sacrificing righteousness on one’s own part, for it is here the actual meaning of life, the very reason that the cosmos exists. But it here takes the form of a temporary delay where the universal love is put on flamboyant display, serving as an “offer you can’t refuse” to get in on the ground floor of the winning team, amounting to a kind of weaponized shaming technique, a

signal of unassailable virtue, and a thinly veiled threat. The undefeatable massive force and black-and-white thinking of the almighty Judge that stands behind this universal love (confirmed by the same attitude in his earthly representatives)—a personal being with power, preferences and purpose—makes virtue something that is in its essence something watched, judged and rewarded; this cannot but bake the dimensions of *exclusivity*, *display* and *threat* into the very nature of the love itself. This is not reduced but actually exacerbated when the eschatological bait-and-test premise requires these to be presented temporarily as their opposites, as inclusivity and acceptance and non-display: even these are on display for the judging eye that sees the heart and lies in wait to divide the wheat from the tares in the final analysis. We can spot Jesusism wherever we see a certain kind of self-effacing and self-sacrificing histrionics displayed as an open invitation to all to join the movement, illustrating that there is no requirement except one: total willingness to completely devote oneself to the program. Birth, background, skills, knowledge—all the lineaments of other kinds of membership—are brushed aside: “universality” is presented as requiring only one thing: personal commitment powered by and prioritizing the purpose-oriented dimension of the person, willingness to serve the cause, obedience to the universal. *After* that standard has been applied, however, the sides are determined according to this sole criterion of commitment to the cause, made a function of one’s assumed identity as a single-purposed conscious being capable of total obedience to a particular (“universal”) program and purpose. One is now not only entitled but even required to demonize one’s ideological enemy to the point of uncompromising dualism. This dualism does not stop at regarding the opponent in any dispute as the enemy of God or truth or justice itself rather than one’s personal adversary, in the ordinary manner of a garden variety moral bigot. It goes further, absolutizing this opposition, seen in the bloodthirsty seriousness with which matters of love and virtue and truth are treated, the idea that being on the wrong side of these issues is a matter of ontological danger, where all value lies in being on the right side and to be on the wrong side is to be worthy of literal or figurative destruction, where one approves and embraces the divine wish that the opposite of oneself to be tortured if not destroyed, not in the name of one’s country or party or whim or personal advantage, but in the name of God or Goodness or Truth defined precisely as self-sacrifice or self-abnegation or biaslessness or all-inclusion, finding meaning from

anticipating this destruction of whatever is being defined as “non-Good” or the “non-True”—that is what I think we can pinpoint as specifically Jesusist. It is the idea that you are required to love and to love being loved, to accept being accepted, to sacrifice and be sacrificed for, but that this is all set up to serve as a criterion about who is to be consigned to *not* be loved and accepted, but rather to be tortured and destroyed, and what’s more, tortured and destroyed *rightly*, not by some one party but by the ground of universal being itself—and that all this division is the actual meaning of the existence of the universe. By being mistaken about or even merely indifferent to something defined as all-embracing, or by hating or even merely disliking of love, or by rejecting or even being merely blasé about the offer of acceptance, you are actually disconnected from the source of all being, the ultimate reality becomes furious at you, the very innermost fiber of the universe itself hates you and rightfully tortures and/or destroys you.

This is so deeply embedded in so many diverse cultural forms that it may seem confusing even to mention it this way: of course one should consider being wrong wrong! But there are other possible ways one could regard those who disagree with one, or who don’t love one, who don’t share one’s intuitions and methods, or who are even indifferent to one’s cause, or of two minds about it. Light irony, friendly dismissal, benevolent indifference, suspension of judgment—these “unserious options” are all alternatives. The last point is of special note; for we must contrast the true suspension of judgment to the Christian suspension of judgment of the Parable of the Tares and the Sermon on the Mount (“Judge not, lest ye be judged”!). Both a skeptic and a Jesusist can say, “I don’t know if you’re right or wrong, or indeed whether I’m right or wrong”—a similarity already noted by Hegel in this linking of the development of Christianity to the advent of Skepticism in ancient Rome. But the Christian makes of this suspension of judgment a postponement and a threat. Instead of “no one knows, and no one will ever know,” the Christian says, “But God does know, and eventually we will know too! And then there will be hell to pay!” Tolerance here again becomes a deceptive appearance of vindictive expectation of triumph.

This is where those comparative considerations, such as emerge in the first contacts of disparate cultures, can prove illuminating. Shengyan suggests that this ultimate valuation of a sharp us-them dichotomy, the ultimate dualism, far from being an accidental or occasional

feature, is the essence of Jesus' teaching as depicted in the New Testament, the "one thread" of its deepest principle which alone really explains everything else in the doctrine. Noting the "attachment to self" (我執 *wozhi*) of the Old Testament God Yahweh, Shengyan goes on to remark, "Even in the character of Jesus Christ in the Four Gospels of the New Testament, this 'attachment to self' mentality is extremely strong and intense," adding with considerable irony that this attachment to self that is so jarring in Jesus Christ "is something we should forgive and empathize with, just as we should forgive ourselves and empathize with ourselves for the same tendency."<sup>19</sup> On this view, Jesus applies the inclusive, forgiving tendency, the call to transcend the dichotomy between nationalities and between saint and sinner, only to Christians, i.e., only to those who accept his authority and pledge themselves to absolute obedience. This goes hand in hand with the opposite tendency, to demonize and condemn anyone who does not accept this condition of obedience, i.e., all non-Christians. The two are correlative to one another, and the extremism of the love is mirrored by the extremism of the hate. Shengyan exemplifies how someone outside the sphere of influence of Jesusist ideas might view an ideological enemy, i.e., in traditional Buddhist fashion: the outgroup person, Jesus, who exemplifies the traits considered undesirable by his in-group, Buddhists (i.e., exemplifying the core Buddhist vices of attachment to self, extremism and dichotomizing monism) is here brought into the inclusive regard of a consideration that cancels the dichotomy, transcends it. Shengyan recommends a forgiving and empathetic attitude toward this egoistic immoral tendency in Jesus, just as we empathize with the same kind of egoism in ourselves. The opposition to the out-group here is a reminder that we are also non-dichotomously implicated in those same traits, and thus the out-group is to be regarded as we regard the in-group, that is, as always both in and out, non-dichotomously. If this seems similar to the Jesus method of "forgiving enemies," we are not reading carefully enough. For on the contrary, this is a perfect example of the opposite of dichotomizing monism: namely, what we might call a dedichotomizing pluralism.

It is true that here too we find the same two elements, the dualistic and the non-dual. But the relation between them is reversed. The two elements are here organized in terms of the Buddhist doctrine of Two Truths, which are themselves modeled on the "raft parable" of early

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Buddhism. Here too the structure is “dichotomy” (morality, judgment, discipline, authoritarianism, hierarchy) as a means by which to transcend dichotomy (the other shore of Emptiness, beyond any either/or, beyond the mutual exclusivity of “this” and “that”). But this is, again, precisely the opposite of the structure in Christianity. In comparing all these inevitable AB combinations, the question is always whether we have A-B-A or B-A-B. In more complex ways, classical Confucianism and Daoism each in their own way involve both a deliberate, dualistic, judgment-making dimension, and a spontaneous, non-dual all-embracing dimension: in classical terms, both *youwei* and *wuwei*. Confucius says: “At 15, I set my aspiration on learning. At 30, I took my stand. At 40, I was no longer confused. At 50, I understood what is required by Heaven. At 60, my ears were attuned and compliant to it. At 70, I could follow whatever my heart desired and never overstep the proper measure.” (*Analects* 2:4) This model moves from “dualism” (right versus wrong, choosing one course over another) to “non-dualism” (spontaneous inclusion of all impulses, no longer choosing), at least subjectively. Daoist cultivation often involves a similar structure, from *youwei* to *wuwei*.<sup>20</sup> The danger of not understanding the structure of dichotomy and monism in Christianity is that a superficial observer notes that Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism all involve both a “harsh” side and a “soft” side, an exclusive side and an inclusive side, a rejecting side and an accepting side, an authoritarian side and a libertarian side, just like Christianity, and thus it is assumed that these systems are all compatible, or that all religions somehow teach the same truths or the same morals--or else, if one is a religious skeptic, that all are equally ideological ruses. What is neglected here is that they have exactly the opposite structure: generally speaking, what is mere temporary means in Christianity is final goal and ultimate value in the Chinese traditions, what is mere temporary means in these traditions is final goal and ultimate value in Christianity. Their ultimate values are thus diametrically opposed. The end result, though, is that in modern discussions these traditions are assimilated to Christianity rather than vice-versa. We lose what is truly distinctive, what could provide the rarest thing in the world, a genuine alternative to Christianity, about these traditions, as they come to be read

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<sup>20</sup> The Daoism of the *Daodejing*, the founding document of what I am referring to as Daoism here, is a bit more complex: it uses *wuwei* to attain many alternate *youwei*, and also uses *youwei* to attain *wuwei*, crisscrossed in complex ways. But this can only be adequately clarified with a more detailed and expansive analysis. See my *Ironies of Oneness and Difference* and online supplement to my *Daodejing* translation, “The Minimally Discernible Position.”



more and more as ultimately promoting a moral and epistemological dualism, using their non-dualism only as a means, only therapeutically.

From this point of view we begin to understand also the uncanny appeal of Christianity. For it is taken for profound, it moves souls, because of the juxtaposition of vociferously extreme love and vociferously extreme hate, radical conditionality and radical unconditionality. If one neglects the simple and unparadoxical eschatological structure that binds these together as ends and means, masking a straightforward dichotomization of the most cruel and depressing kind, one can get the mistaken impression of being in the presence of a genuine paradox, a paradox commensurate with the paradox which is our own existence, in which we live and move and have our being. The real convergence of radical conditionality and radical unconditionality has been attempted here and there in human history—the most unmistakable example of which I am aware is called Tiantai. Christianity is to that kind of truth what fake X is to real X: it is parasitic on the demand for real X, but it also ruins the appetite for it by filling the same ecological niche. As Confucius said (according to Mencius):

“孔子曰：『惡似而非者：惡莠，恐其亂苗也；惡佞，恐其亂義也；惡利口，恐其亂信也；惡鄭聲，恐其亂樂也；惡紫，恐其亂朱也；惡鄉原，恐其亂德也。』”

Confucius said, “I hate a semblance which is not the reality. I hate the tares, lest they be confounded with the wheat. I hate flattery, lest it be confounded with righteousness. I hate eloquence, lest it be confounded with sincerity. I hate the noise they make in Zheng, lest it be confounded with music. I hate the reddish blue, lest it be confounded with vermilion. I hate your good careful men of the villages, lest they be confounded with the truly virtuous.”

The reference to wheat and tares here provides a good example of the dangers of misrecognition of Jesusism, in several senses. Those who are by now culturally inundated with Jesusist tendencies (statistically speaking, almost all living persons!) will be inclined to read this line as parallel to Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares, perhaps even confirming the wisdom of it, or standing as proof of the universality of this way of thinking. For there it is again: because of love for something, something else is hated! It’s that same structure all over again, isn’t it? Not at all. Hence again the importance of distinguishing them. Why hate, when hate, how hate—these matter. Why does Confucius hate the tares? Not because they are intrinsically bad, and not

even because they are starving the wheat. Rather, because they might be *mistaken for* the wheat. What to do about that? Distinguish them clearly, if you want wheat rather than tares. Does this mean wheat is better than tares? No, it means, quite reasonably, that if one wants wheat oneself—not because God prefers wheat to tares, nor because wheat is objectively better than tares, but because it happens to be edible to a creature like oneself and one is hungry—one needs to be able to distinguish wheat from tares, in spite of their superficial resemblance. Indeed, it is another lamentable consequence of Christianity and post-Christian philosophy that readers of a statement like this in Confucius, whether approving his deep moral insight or decrying his ideological trickery, will almost always assume that of course this talk of “hating” tares means that Confucius thinks God or Heaven hates them, or the moral order of the universe excludes them, or that they’re objectively bad, or that we should all hate them all the time—after all, that’s the kind of thing ethicists claim, and Confucius, these people believe, is an ethicist. But this notion of what ethics are, or of what ideologies are, is itself completely saturated with Jesusist assumptions. Mencius is here saying Confucius hated certain things, and why—and Mencius has just told us quite a lot about hating and loving things, which he consistently compares to his own feelings about tasty roast meat and other edible delicacies like bear-paw (*Mencius* 6A7, 6A10). We have absolutely no reason to assume any other model of what bestows value here. Does Confucius’ hatred of tares imply that he is recommending destroying the tares? That is not at all said, nor implied, given the parallel instances in the quotation. The meaning is clear: the noble person should learn to pick the wheat and avoid the tares, and train others to do the same. As Zhu Xi says, “The good careful men of the village are neither overly self-assertive nor overly cautious, so everyone thinks they are ‘good.’ They resemble the Way of the Mean but are actually completely different. Thus Confucius fears that they will be confused with those of real Virtue.”<sup>21</sup> The moral here is that if we are looking for exemplars on which to model our own ethical growth, we must be careful not to take the behavior of these lukewarm goody-goodies of the village as worth aspiring to. If their growth does interfere with the growth of the wheat, however, then there would be reason to clear the tares out now, not at the harvest time, as in Jesus’ apocalyptic parable. So there would be rational grounds for either clearing out the weeds

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<sup>21</sup> 鄉原不狂不獇，人皆以為善，有似乎中道而實非也，故恐其亂德。

or learning to avoid the weeds and not take them for wheat—but not for cunningly ignoring the weeds as a means to later clear them out, as Jesus recommends. In fact, however, Confucius does not recommend “clearing out” the weeds<sup>22</sup>—for in this case, the real reference of the metaphor is to the “good careful men of the village” (*xiangyuan* 鄉原). Rather they are to be *ignored*—not violently condemned, not ridiculed, barely even mentioned. Above all, they are not hated because they are creations of an ontologically separate and opposed source from us, they are not “children of the devil,” seeds sown by our Father’s “enemy,” as Jesus’s tares are, which deserve only destruction. They are not hated for what they are, for anything about themselves at all. In themselves they are quite harmless, even well-intentioned, and not to be condemned. Like an inert lump in the body, in itself it is harmless. It is objected to if and only if it spreads. In the present case, “spreading” would occur only through the logic of false admiration and subsequent emulation. The sole objectionable point of the *xiangyuan* then lies not in themselves but in the foolishness of others who might, seeing them, mistake their behavior for real virtue and emulate it, thus missing out on the more heroic virtues promulgated by Confucius, Mencius and their ancient paragons. As long as we are alerted to this possibility, those good careful men, those tares, are harmless, perhaps even doing some small good in limited ways, within the limited scope of their villages. It is only when they are raised up from that context and made into exemplars—taken for “wheat”—that they are dangerous.

The further irony here, however, is that Jesusism is itself the weed, the tare: it superficially resembles the both-and love and hate of the (very few remaining) non-Christian systems, the copresence of inclusion and exclusion, though in its deep structure it is the precise reverse of them, and thus it is mistaken for them. Increasingly, in modern times, the tares are growing, the wheat is starving. As Shengyan suggested, speaking in accordance with Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas, a person full of egoism and hatred, as he understandably views the Jesus depicted in the New Testament to be, would be entitled to our compassion, just like all the other beings embroiled in egoism and hatred, including ourselves. But that would apply to the person Jesus, considered in himself, just as it would apply to the “good careful men of the village,”

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<sup>22</sup> It might be possible to argue that some later representatives of the Confucian tradition, e.g., Xunzi, do recommend clearing out at least some of the “tares.” But a full treatment of this question, and its application at each weighing station within the history of Confucian traditions will require a more extensive discussion at a later time.

considered solely in themselves. In terms of effects on others, “hating” Christianity and Jesus in this way, if that is what we now must do, does not make Shengyan, or any other hater of Jesus, “just as bad” as a Christian, and hence a hypocrite. Even if we recognize Jesus (real or fictional) as a twisted hate-mongering superstitious fanatic of a person, we would not consider him a child of demons, the spawn of evil forces unbridgeably other to ourselves; we would not hate him in the vociferous way he hated those whom he opposed, or hated even anyone who was unimpressed by, indifferent to or skeptical of him, anyone who dared so much as ask for why he should be believed. We do not think he deserves to be destroyed by God. We do not hate Jesus as Jesus hated us (“whoever is not with me is against me” Matthew 12:30). We hate his influence, the results of the moral prestige misattributed to him. We hate what the continued spread of such teachings do when they are confused with superficially similar but actually structurally deeply different and opposed teachings, which are being crowded out of global human culture by growing Christianity almost to the point of extinction. We hate Jesus as Confucius hated tares, not as Jesus hated tares.

#### *Importance of the Critique Specifically of Jesus*

For that is the real point of taking so much time on this topic. Why read so carefully, we might wonder? When it comes to a figure so venerated by so many generations of great human beings throughout history, and by so many of one’s contemporaries, shouldn’t one simply step back and respect their right to enjoy their own faith in their own way, live and let live, not try to ruin what for them is a beautiful and essential thing? What would be wrong with turning a blind eye to this dark underbelly and just accentuating the positive, the superficial resemblance to a non-hate-saturated form of forgiveness and loving acceptance, so as to help spread that attitude in the world? Why keep one’s eye fixed on the substructure of hatred supporting the injunctions to love?

My answer, again, is that failure to note the exact relation between the extreme love and the extreme hate in the New Testament, and their strictly proportional inseparability, tends to lead to several misunderstandings of the teaching that have had some pretty questionable implications in the history of the human race so far. Let us return to the dire results of the idea

that Lewis repudiated, the idea that Jesus is an exemplary person and a great moral teacher, whether or not his God exists. The failure to critique the teachings of Jesus, or the harboring of some residual respect for them, or the impulse to divert critical attention from Jesus only to the larger issue of “God” or “religion,” runs the following risks, at a minimum:

1) Aiding and abetting the spread of Christianity. Christianity is spreading at an alarming rate in the modern world, particularly in Asia and Africa, communities whose social infrastructures have first been decimated by colonial Christian modernity over the past several hundred years. Like Starbucks, McDonald’s and tobacco, it seems to be enthusiastically welcomed wherever it is introduced, its spread unstoppable. Perhaps it is conceivable that rapid spread of something might be a good thing, even an indication of a deep demand for that thing, the very definition of success. This would be true for things which can accommodate or include or nourish other things. But the spread of something which is *in essence exclusive*, which is all about exclusivity, which defines itself through the negation and destruction and starving off of other things rather than their inclusion and transformation and reinterpretation, is different, whatever its value in and of itself might be. I have been arguing here that monotheism is precisely exclusive and negating of otherness rather than transformative of it. Anything of this kind that spreads in this way, even if it is not intrinsically harmful, is potentially very dangerous. To pick up on the previous analogy, a lump in one’s body may be innocuous, perhaps even beautiful in its own way; but if the same lump begins spreading and metastasizing rapidly, killing all cells that are non-lump, that lump is cancer. What makes it cancer is not the lumpiness, not anything about the lump itself considered at a single moment in time, but the spread of it, and what it does to the things around it when it spreads, i.e., the way it deprives them of nutrition and life. While Christians and some neutral parties may find Christian expansionism unobjectionable, or perhaps even delightful, from a world culture perspective, even if Christianity were a good thing in some sense (which we are obviously far from assuming here), it would be a bad thing for the pluralism of world value systems for its continued spread to go unchecked, as it has a demonstrated

tendency, seen throughout its history, to destroy (through demonizing, monopolization, propaganda, poisoning the wells) all alternate cultures and value-systems.

2) The claim that only the “love” part is the genuine Jesus—the rest is added by wicked or stupid disciples (even Nietzsche sometimes went for this ridiculous and insupportable trope<sup>23</sup>). But this preserves the glamor of the figure of Jesus as a symbol of love; he ends up being imaginatively reconstructed on the barest bones of the archetype, absorbing all the goodwill of some genuinely admirable figures: a martyr for his vision of truth like Socrates, a mighty avenger of injustice for the downtrodden like Spartacus, a Capraesque defender of the weak and powerless, a big-brother stepping in to fend off the bullies, a John Wayne giving his life to save his brothers on the battlefield, a satirist of prigs and bureaucrats like Oscar Wilde—“Jesus” comes to be a symbol that wraps all these tasty heroes into one, creating a cocktail of irresistible charm. But that means that when future readers, already convinced by their culture since childhood that Jesus equals love and romantic cool and heroism, go and look at the actual text of the Bible to find out about him, they will either have to be sharply disillusioned or, much worse, take what he *actually* says there as new and important information about the nature of love, about coolness, about heroism: for the results of this, see the next few items.

3) Ethical Rationalizing and Reverse Engineering: One convinces oneself that the claims and attitudes embodied by Jesus are somehow ethically reasonable in their own right, because one has decided to take no account of the extremely bizarre and already disproved superstition which is the sole basis of Jesus’ ethical position—i.e., the belief in the promised end-of-world judgment which Jesus explicitly states will arrive “before all standing here have tasted death” (Luke 9:27, Matthew 16:28), where those who are presently suffering will be exalted and those who are presently enjoying themselves will be tortured or destroyed. These bizarre claims, freed from this factually incorrect superstitious premise, exercise a powerful attraction due to their combination of extreme

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<sup>23</sup> See his comments on Jesus in *The Anti-Christ*, and in some of his posthumously published notes collected in *The Will to Power*.

love joined to extreme hate, and their enticingly paradoxical juxtaposition, which fascinate in their demand for an alternate, “deep” explanation.

4) One type of “deep” explanation that springs to mind: the claim that love is what it’s really all about, but the hate which is also found to be obviously really there must be an appropriate response to the failure of others to respond to this love: one concludes that real love is something which very justly requires one to hate when the love is not reciprocated. Hence one is forced to conclude that it is “good” to be like Jesus was, which means it is good *to preach love of one’s enemies while hating the enemies of the idea of loving one’s enemies*. Following the example of Jesus means that it is reasonable to hate anyone who is unimpressed by, indifferent to or skeptical of one’s claims about oneself or about one’s displays of love, it is good to make deliberately offensive and grating claims about oneself, about the world, and about all rival systems of valuation and then to explode in wrath at anyone who dares so much as ask *why* any of one’s outlandish claims should be believed or obeyed, for this is what we see Jesus doing again and again in the Gospels. All that is now considered exemplary of love, of virtue, of how “truth” speaks. In short, love hates those who do not accept its love. Love destroys those who refuse the offer of love—and this is itself now to be regarded as legitimate, holy, admirable, exemplary behavior. One may perhaps be forgiven for wondering again whether the strong parallelism with some of the ostensibly post-Christian ideologies energetically pressed upon mankind by certain figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its instinctive appeal to many otherwise intelligent people, is not more than coincidence.

5) The universal—love, non-dualism, inclusiveness—is represented by a particular exclusivist party which is viewed as entirely within its rights, and behaving in a holy way, when it destroys all those who are against this universal love, when it hates all those who don’t love or stand in the way of this universal love it is proffering. Those who do not support the universal brotherhood must be destroyed. All human beings are brothers—so whoever refuses to be my brother (or rather: whoever *I judge* to be refusing to be my brother, due to his non-participation in or indifference to my all-men-are-brothers movement) is no longer a human being, and can be eliminated without regret—

and this is the best and most important thing any human being can do, the only thing that gives meaning to life, the reason we all exist. One again wonders about parallels to recent iterations of similarly righteous universalist vanguard movements in this context.

6) The idea takes hold that Jesus was the most perfectly loving being of all time—just look at his preaching of extreme uncompromising love! But then one must conclude that, if even he, nonetheless, was driven to the point of hating anyone, those people he hated must have been so bad that even the most loving being of all time couldn't keep from hating them: they must *really* deserve to be hated. Anyone who rejects Jesus thus really deserves to be hated, is worthy of destruction, is ontologically beyond redemption. Perhaps the most general name used by the New Testament Jesus for those who are offered his teaching but remain uninterested or unmoved by it is the one found endlessly repeated in the Gospel of John: “the Jews,” those “hypocrites” and “liars” and “children of the Devil.” A mythology is built around making a specific historical group of people, still present in the world and easy to identify, into the symbol of universal evil; some group of people is born into a situation where they are singled out, by virtue of their alleged metaphysical nature as members of that group, and equated by some other people as the cause and embodiment of *all* that is wrong with the world—or more strictly, all that is wrong with the *universe*. (When similar ethical prestige is given to the New Testament as a whole, the parallel authority of St. Paul makes a cosmic evil of similar proportions any particular behavior he happens to excoriate--e.g., homosexuality or female assertiveness: if someone as emphatically inclusive and permissive as Paul still found something so repulsive that it must be excluded, it must be *really* repulsive and need to be *really* excluded.) They become breathing symbols of the universal evil, living carriers of the obstruction to progress. The demonizing structure here is the flipside of the previous one: it focuses not on identifying oneself with the universal good, but on identifying the hated Other with the universal evil. In this case, though it is awkward to say, one has to wonder a little about the parallels with the transfer of the same paradigmatic structure onto *any* specific group, i.e., all the specifically European and post-European forms of racism. There are of course other forms of racism in non-



Christian cultures, but this should not blind us to the differences in structure, intensity and thoroughgoingness in these various forms of fascism, racism and genocide, and what it might be that makes them more or less *sustainably* genocidal. Some sort of in-group/out-group distinction is found almost everywhere. What distinguishes the Jesusist turn in monotheism, the full development of the personalism implicit in the structure of monotheism itself, is the mutual exclusivity, the black and white absoluteness of the distinction, and the ultimate ontological weight given to this distinction, making it the purpose and standard of all existence. This is true even in this case, where the criterion is something involuntary and pre-personal like race. As we have argued that the mechanistic conception of causality among mutually exclusive things is as much a by-product of the ultimacy of purposivity as is its apparent opposite (teleological causality), the racial form of vilification in the name of a particularistic group here appears together with the opposite case of universalist movements: in both cases, the thread we are tracing is the *mutual exclusivity* of the categories. This is easy to recognize in the forms of self-identification with the universal good as described above, but the same structure applies in reverse where the exclusivity takes the form of identification instead of the out-group with the universal evil: we have again the idea of the universal as specifically embodied. This is of course paradoxical-sounding: the universal is just what is supposed to eliminate the whole in-group/out-group structure. But this is not what happens, as long as the universal is modeled on monotheist premises, as something specific, something “particular,” what Bataille would call a “thing,” i.e., something that excludes otherness, rather than expressing itself as otherness. The monotheist turn in particular makes of this something that cannot express itself in or be an expression of alternate forms, which confronts otherness *ultimately* as necessarily external to it rather than as something as its disguises, its masks, its consequences, its alternate expressions—or even, its partial forms, its incomplete versions. Our claim is this structural peculiarity has its roots in the idea of God, i.e., of conceiving of the universal as a person, insofar as that points to a unified being which is free, i.e., which has no *necessary* relation to what is not it, that being the basic structure of personhood—even when that structure is applied to

something besides personhood as such, for example, to an abstract universality as something that excludes particulars, or as an autonomy that excludes heteronomy, or a rationality that excludes sensation, givenness, intuition, instinct, or a biological race. It is this all-or-nothing structure we continue to see in post-Christian forms again and again, even when they are trying to transcend the irrational aspects of Christian myth. We might think here even of Kant's view of rationality, which determines his criterion of what is specifically human: "ability to freely set ends." We have moral obligations only to those we recognize as rational, and rational is defined as free, which is an all or nothing structure derived from the prioritization of personhood. We must treat as more than a mere tool, "not merely as a means," only those who we recognize as being able to treat things as tools, and to do so freely, i.e., not as tools themselves: that is, we must treat as more than mere tools only those who treat some things as mere tools and other things (e.g., at the very least, themselves) as also more than mere tools: we must treat (only) rational free beings like ourselves as more than tools. This simultaneous positing of tools and the user of tools as the definer of worth derives directly from the idea of God. The case is quite different with, say, Confucianism, which does take a domineering and condescending attitude toward what it designates as its outgroup, but incrementally: what defines the ethical community there is rooted in a part/whole structure, where the in-group (Chinese Confucian male humans, perhaps) have the completest expression or manifestation of the universal Principle, but all humans and even all living creatures and all entities have it in some degree, albeit more partially, one-sidedly, distortedly. This can produce plenty of unpleasantness, but not the sharp cut of total instrumentalization of an out-group community. Nor is the Kantian in-group of the Rational structured like Buddhism's inclusive criterion of the ethical community, membership in which requires merely a truly universal and unpersonalizable quality shared by all living being: "susceptibility to suffering." In these cases, it is perfectly possible to abuse and dominate others, judging their claims to be lesser than one's own; it is easy enough to justify oppression by claiming that it is the lesser of two evils, that the flourishing of the "more-complete" trumps that of the "less-complete," or that the alleviation of "more suffering"

trumps the alleviation of “less suffering.” But can these more-or-less models actually sustain the same kind of full-court colonialism and genocide that monotheist all-or-nothing models can? I leave this as an open question for impartial historians to address on an empirical level; it cannot be entirely resolved on theoretical grounds alone. But it does seem that there is at least a broadened arsenal of rationales available to the all-or-nothing monotheist ideologies to encourage us to feel we are perfectly correct, perhaps even serving the universal good, for progress, when we treat animals, women, children, savages, non-Western peoples (who are committed to their old traditions rather than autonomously establishing their own free ends, and hence are not rational) as tools or (the flipside of tool-consciousness and purpose-mania) even mere obstacles to progress that need to be eliminated. Such a conception allows us to do so not only in good conscience but even with the sense that this is our very reason for existing, that this is what existence is *for*, the reason the world was created—a re-application of the Jesusist tenet that the purpose of the universe is to finally divide the good human beings from the bad ones (whatever definition of good and bad we might have adopted). We are thus enlisted to the role of individual agents deputized by the source of all goodness and all truth and all real being to destroy a universal evil (whether that evil is identified as godlessness, or irrationality, or obstructing progress, or unnaturalness, or naturalness, or self-interest, or whatever). Again, I’m sure there is plenty of room for highly destructive behaviors in devotion also to a specific non-universal cause (one’s nation, one’s family, one’s preferences), or a universal cause that has a less dichotomous attitude toward the non-universal elements it endeavors to negate or transcend or transform, but the sustainability over time, the intensity, and the broadness of application may differ profoundly from the same outlets for human thuggishness when these are supercharged by a belief that one is acting in the service of a universal good engaged in a cosmic all-or-nothing war with absolute evil, an endeavor other than which nothing else has any real value.

7) This is *easily confused with* seeming appeals to an all-pervasive universal by particular agents in non-Jesusist systems, when some specific group or doctrine claims to speak for the whole; they are believed to have the same structure. These are then

interpreted as no more than exotic and underdeveloped version of that same old story, and the world no longer has any access to any alternative. But everything changes when the all-pervasive universal (Dao in Daoism, Dharmakāya in Buddhism, “Heavenly Principle” or Cosmic Coherence in Confucianism) is an *inclusive* oneness rather than the *exclusive* oneness of monotheism rooted in the *Noûs as Arché* structure—as we argue at length in the body of this book.