

Prologue

IN THE BEGINNING at the heart of every religious movement, there is a core spiritual experience of 'The Divine', not only in the life of the founder but also subsequently in the lives of many followers and new converts. The new converts are buoyed up with enthusiasm and wonder by their new experiences but also a little lost, as I was initially, looking for an interpretation of the new spiritual element in their lives. Therefore, a whole system of beliefs, doctrines and rules is developed to explain that experience and fill that void. Then an institution is created out of the community of believers, in order to protect and secure that system of beliefs explaining that original experience.

Unfortunately that support system of beliefs, so good and helpful in its origins, eventually takes on a greater importance than the original experience of the Divine and even comes to supplant it as time passes. Ironically, the very institution created to impart the message then becomes a stumbling block that prevents the very liberation and openness for which the original experience held such promise. It erects a wall of rigid dogmas to keep the support system frozen and unchangeable in the face of new truths, new interpretations or 'new knowledge'. Waves of 'new knowledge' break against the immovable walls of prior belief to no avail as the institution fights to protect its power and authority.

This unfortunate development occurs despite apt warnings in the teachings of the original founders. For example, the founder of Christianity taught that the Spirit of Truth would lead His disciples into all truth (John 16:13), but this warning was never fully heeded over the years. For example, the Christian Church often resisted what most people agree now to be the obvious leading of the Spirit in both the abolition of the slave trade and the granting of equality to women.

After I had my first experience of 'the Divine' at an evangelistic crusade at the age of twenty one, I was referred to a conservative student group at the university that I was attending. I was on a spiritual high but I had not been raised in the church so I had a few fresh ideas of my own. However, I soon found that this group regarded my ideas as 'heretical' and unacceptable. I was grateful for the pastoral support from this group as a new 'born

again' Christian but, as time went on, my attempts to point out inconsistencies in their doctrines or contradictions in their Scriptures were not appreciated. After a few failed attempts to 'breach the wall' of dogma I left the group and searched for a more liberal, mainline denominational church, only to run into similar problems further down the track as I widened my own perspective.

Many believers over the years experience this conflict between new insights and prior beliefs. Some of them are forced to renounce their 'heretical' views, some leave the institution altogether if they are allowed, and some continue to live their lives in separate compartments – like the scientist who holds one view on evolution in the laboratory and a contrary view in the fellowship of his church. Some, with a personality type that needs to adopt a holistic view of things, strive to reconcile their new insights with their old beliefs to form a new, revised tradition. I am one of these and this is the story of my striving.

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