

Authority and Christianity

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The esoteric tenets seem to me as natural as breathing. While recognising the many religions as different ways to the same state of enlightenment, adding an esoteric way of viewing life provides a possible key to understanding both the purpose of religion generally and Christianity specifically. God no longer is the bearded man on a cloud. On the contrary, in God *we live and move and have our being* – the transcendent Trinity. In every human being the Christ Light shines – God immanent. From this sprouts a far greater duality –that of God transcendent versus God immanent- than all the other dualities, such as the duality in the flesh between masculine and feminine. All very good and well, but what are the implications? Especially regarding the aspect of authority the ramifications are profound. I will attempt to uncover some of these issues in this article.

Starting from the point that God is transcendent as well as immanent, the word religion takes on a different meaning. Its Latin root means 'binding back' - or connecting that inner source with the source within which it lives and moves and has its being. The reconnection is the dissolving of the Great Duality, the AtOneMent, enlightenment or initiation. How you choose to come to such initiation is just that: A choice. By ritual, by meditation or by study, to name a few examples. The bottom line is that it is not the activity as such that initiates, but the experience as viewed by "the observer" within that activity. For example, a good meditation may lead to some or other wonderful insight. The meditation does not enlighten, the observer experiencing the "aha" does. The meditation is a vehicle, the insight is what it is about. The insight transforms or changes the way you see life, generally changing the way you lead your life. Saying it slightly differently: The process of observing leading to insight is the reconnection of the "individual self" with the "universal self".

For myself, I am rather drawn to using ritual as a vehicle. Ritual is symbol to me and symbol represents a dynamic truth that cannot effectively be captured in words. Being a part of, or better still taking an active role in a ritual gives me the feeling of connection with that symbol and its underlying truth. In short, the symbolism of the Christian tradition and its representation in the church year, the Eucharist and the sacraments evoke an experience within me. Searching within that experience is for me the true initiation.

I suppose the first important point is that truly undergoing the process of Seeking the Light changes the way you think, the way you feel and the way you live. Not that you somehow find 'the' Light, as the Light becomes ever less a destination and ever more a journey as the process of seeking it progresses. To put it another way, the emphasis lies on *seeking* it and seeking it is an on-going process. The ramifications of changing your attitude towards life, the universe, etc., naturally spills over into all aspects of your life. You start to notice the discrepancy between what is preached in various

(spiritual) organisations and how the individuals within those organisations deal with one another. These observations are often the beginning of a new phase in one's life, a phase in which you cease to be a follower and gradually start to take responsibility for the insights you have had the good fortune to receive.

The funny thing is that you stop trying to change the existing. I suppose you could say that you rather set up something new, you change yourself. In stead of the environment living your life for you (i.e., you react), you start living your own life (i.e., you act) and your environment reacts. Let us reduce the scope a little: Organisations in general exist in order to facilitate some particular goal. However, the energy that is available is often usurped by the process of keeping that organisation alive, leaving little for the goal for which the organisation was originally constituted. People (i.e. their status) become important, power struggles and political gaming take the place of doing the work itself. The system becomes rigid and replicates itself in such a way that only those willing to tow the line become its new leaders. Many a free-thinking spirit walks away from an in principle inspired organisation disillusioned, but the system trudges on. Unfortunately the same principle often applies to communities and organised religion.

Individuals who recognise this phenomenon stop trying to change the environment. They change themselves, the way they interact with their environment. The (spiritual) relevancy of what they do has less to do with what they do on a Sunday morning, for example. It has more to do with translating the Sunday morning experience into how they function during every single moment of this earthly existence. This leads on to the subject of this article:

What about authority?

Perhaps the boldest thing an individual can do is limit his or her authority to matters that concern his or her *own* experience. If it is this "transformation" –or change- that is the essential element to reach enlightenment, who then is in a position to dictate how to bring about this change? What is the role of a spiritual "leader"? It is a well-known principle in psychological practice that the therapist cannot change his or her client. The client can only change himself or herself and will only do that if he or she *wants to* change. A spiritual leader claiming authority and attempting to impose his or her way on others will sooner or later be disappointed with his or her followers. Followers. If your goal is to enlighten people, how in God's name can you enlighten them *if they are followers*? The idea is paradoxical to the extent that it is unworkable! A spiritual *leader* becomes a contradiction in terms. The first conclusion that can be drawn is that we are rather more benefitted by spiritual *teachers* than by spiritual leaders who claim authority.

Working this idea out a little further: A brain scan of a person looking at an object is almost identical to the brain scan of the same person imagining seeing that same object – to the brain there is no difference between what you *actually* see and what you *imagine* you see. So, objects do not give rise to experience, awareness does. Therefore the only surety I have in this life, is that I am aware that I experience. I cannot prove

that you, the reader of these words, actually exist. Even if you tell me that you exist and that you too are aware that you experience, how do I know –how can I prove- that this is so and I am not just creating an experience of you telling me this in my own mind? So, if I know that my experience is my reality and I know that what I am experiencing is exactly that –my experience- who am I then to tell you what you *should* be experiencing? The conclusion is both obvious and logical: Each individual is an authority on his or her own experience. This does not mean we cannot share our experiences with one another. Yet the ultimate authority on experience lies with the individual himself or herself.

This means rethinking the role of the spiritual teacher. The priest in the Catholic tradition is not there to play intermediary between the individual and God, or be the authority on matters spiritual, but to help people make their own connection, to empower them. The priest's first and foremost task is to make himself or herself redundant!

One could argue that this view on authority is an excuse to *laissez faire*. Yes, one should let individuals decide for themselves what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. Funnily enough, despite all one's efforts, this is what actually happens anyway. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the individual is an isolated island. Others do have a role to play by their influence and via their interaction. When it comes to responsibility, it is a matter of taking it for your own part in whatever it is that you are busy with – in this case your influence and your part in the interaction. To others we should give the freedom of choice, even if we are of the opinion that by their choice they are making a mistake. By all means give information. Keep in mind how thin the line can be between giving information and making a judgment about the one receiving the information.

Placing authority on the individual does not mean that there are no boundaries. Conditions or preconditions to interaction may be imposed and as long as they are clearly stated up front, they need not be a problem. The abstract term "society" or "community" refers to this ideal. What it does mean is that having stated realistic conditions and preconditions, no one other than the individual himself or herself is in a position to judge whether or not to make use of the offer that is made. Whether the individual chooses or another imposes, either way the consequences are for the individual, so why not empower the individual by giving him or her both the choice and the responsibility for that choice?

Limiting the discussion to Esoteric Christianity: If the role of the priest is no longer the performance of ritual and being an intermediary, what could it be?. Perhaps that of a spiritual teacher. The lessons learnt in the ritual affect the *way* the individual lives his or her life. It leads to the recognition that awareness of your own inner experience is the best vehicle towards knowledge – or development, even enlightenment, etc. This means that the priest no longer *tells* people how to lead their lives, but follows Christ's example and *lives* his or her life according to Christ's pattern. Teaching by example is far more effective than teaching by giving instructions and laying down prohibitions. A

literal interpretation of the scriptures or the Catholic tradition would make this manner of working untenable. Not the letter, but the spirit of the Word becomes the guideline. Without wishing to devalue the entirety of the scriptures by a single iota, the radical message of Christianity to me can surely be summarised in : "*Love thy neighbour as thyself*". This is an inspiring command stated in a positive sense. It underlines the theme of this article. When you are able to take the responsibility for your own experience, you become an authority unto yourself. You are then in a position to let your neighbour take responsibility for his or her own experience - even to help them if they ask for assistance- and in turn become an authority unto themselves too. You and your life become a source of inspiration for others, just as the lives of the Great Ones, who have by their manner inspired so many.

In conclusion, I believe that every individual is seeking self-fulfillment. What I hope to achieve is to inspire. True inspiration frees the mind and lays the emphasis on what you *want* to do, rather than on what you think you *have* to do. Some people want to be followers. If someone consciously chooses to be a follower, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that choice and they should be commended for making this choice. The spiritual teacher could help those as yet unaware to realise that they *do* have a choice. Yet another category of individuals already want to embrace their own choice, their own responsibility and their own authority more fully in their lives. There are many paths to the summit and this summit is the birthright of every human being. Be an authority unto yourself. So shall God's blessing rest upon us and Peace for evermore.