Essay

True Religion

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Abstract

The quest for answers about the meaning of life and the purpose of human existence has gone on for at least as long as there were humans to contemplate the question. It is likely that others who lived before humans came on the scene also marveled at the wonder of their existence and pondered if there might be a greater being who gave living things a purpose beyond existence alone, or some overarching principle that gives rise to sentient beings like ourselves within a universe of physical form. The idea that we can connect with the highest to learn the meaning of life and the purpose of our human existence is the reason for religion, and it has taken many forms over the span of centuries. The question of what constitutes true religion has fueled many conflicts over the ages, but the answer is surprisingly simple; true religion is a set of beliefs and practices that allow us to connect with the transcendent and aspire to a higher purpose.

Keywords: Religion, science, mathematics, meaning of life, higher purpose, search for truth.

While the founders of the world's great religions agree on many of the ideals and principles that lead people to a unified view of a reality which is transcendent beyond the mundane world, their followers tend to fixate on differences between the great teachers and teachings in the belief that there can be only one true religion among them. The truth of what constitutes true religion, however, stands *in contrast* to the beliefs that would divide and separate us. What makes religion true is its power to bring transcendent qualities to life in our human existence. If we trace the word 'religion' back to its roots, we find that it is all about connecting to a transcendent ideal or higher reality that exists apart from us, and from which we can draw inspiration and strength. The problem is that it's hard to describe or to share the transcendent with others, because any words or symbols we use are a limited representation of that ideal, applicable only within a particular context. A similar problem arises in Science and Mathematics as in Religion, where the same concept can be expressed by two authors in terms so different that only someone knowledgeable about several disciplines could recognize that the two authors are describing exactly the same thing! So true religion involves learning to see the common truths uniting the different pathways to understanding.

Where some see competing theories of quantum gravity, I see explorations of various valid ways to explain something that is too deep and too rich with detail for our current understanding to handle. In a similar way, all our descriptions of God from the world's great religions fall short of the true greatness of the Divine and divinity's true nature, based on my own religious

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experiences and understanding. A part of the problem is that a word like 'God' has a connotation that conjures up limited images of what God must be, based on what we are taught about who the Divine is, and what our relationship to divinity must be. As shown in the book and movie "The DaVinci Code," for example, there appears to be a conscious effort on the part of society and religions to leave out the understanding that there must be a divine feminine or Goddess aspect to divinity, for God to manifest. This dual aspect of the Divine makes sense of reality for me. Otherwise, it is like saying time unfolds without space to manifest action and form in, which makes no sense. There must be both a birthplace – a womb of creation or arena for action – *and* a creative identity or creator, for expression of or by the Divine to happen. But like Physics, you don't need to believe in it for that to be real. The point I'm making is that there is always another side to the story, something hidden which will be real and true regardless of what importance you give it, or if you acknowledge its reality at all.

In the arena of Physics, I see that 'competing' theories provide different viewpoints by exploring various facets of a problem like quantum gravity, and affirm the idea some problems *are* multi-faceted; so why look for one true theory when multiple ideas explain things equally well? In Religion, I see a similar story where every enlightened teacher spoke to the context of the time they lived in and the conditions of the people and places around them. There is a diversity of thought and ongoing debate over who was the greatest teacher and why that is so. And yet; all of the great souls who founded the world's great religions taught about the same universal truths! This implies there *is* a universal and transcendent reality we can *all* learn about and tap into, once we grasp its essence or learn enough about it to put it to use. So the notion of a true religion is not so much about what cloth our journey is woven into as it is about our own moral fiber and the kind of person our religion makes us become. If our beliefs connect us with a greater reality or higher truth and make us want to be a better person, then we are practicing true religion. So, one can have almost any faith, or have no religious beliefs to speak of, and still do what is right. But we must be wary of false beliefs – or false gods and false religion – in the world around us, if we want to stay on the path that leads to enlightenment.

There are many reasons why someone might want to convince you of a falsehood or have you believe in lies, if they can gain an advantage over you through trickery. It isn't even necessary for them to gain anything tangible, if they get pleasure from convincing others. So people use religious beliefs and teachings to mislead or control others, and figures throughout history have depicted themselves in god-like terms to assert their superiority. We should assume this is true of other-worldly beings as well. True religion leads individuals to their salvation, or liberation, and brings them closer to knowing the transcendent truths of life and our higher purpose, which helps them become a better person. This is how I distinguish whether someone's religion is true. It is difficult to know we are being led astray, however, when we are told a cause is for the greater good and a higher purpose, or even that it is our duty to God to fight for that cause. It is often true there *is* a higher purpose involved, but too often 'noble' causes involve material gains

for some person or group of people – which will not please God or brings us closer to higher truths. So, what should we strive for? What *would* please God and/or bring us closer to the transcendent and higher or ideal reality we all seek?

To my understanding, God is by necessity and by nature impartial, and would prefer to simply accord us and all living beings our free will. But this impartiality facilitates *a higher purpose* of assisting the evolution and development of consciousness and creativity in sentient beings. **This** is the transcendent ideal I see as the meaning of life or higher purpose to which we are all called. Life evolved us to be conscious and creative so we can help facilitate that process in ourselves and others. Living beings are evolving toward *higher* consciousness and *greater* forms of creativity that bring us *closer* to the core knowledge of what creation is. This puts us in touch with life and lets us become attuned to and aware of our relationship to the cosmos, the infinite, the invisible, and the ideal, which is reflected in our personal growth. Some talk about connecting with Spirit or getting closer to God, while others speak of achieving Enlightenment, or learning the Truth, and these are all valid ways to think about this process. An essential part of being human is our capability to learn and adapt, combined with awareness and the capability to create things, giving us ways to connect to a higher nature or higher power if we are open to that possibility. So which human causes are worthy of our devotion, in this light? If the cause is just, and it is worth fighting for, fight on. But realize that God's purpose for us is the awakening of our spiritual faculties and nobility of character, and our establishment of the good.

If true religion is a set of beliefs and practices that brings one closer to God, or to an enlightenment that does not give holy names to the oneness but serves the same higher purpose we ascribe to divinity, then false religion is faith that is subverted to serve a lower purpose instead. True religion fosters a connection with and an understanding of the purpose of existence, the meaning of life, and the higher power behind it all. It is a search for the truth, or some essential part of reality that is not visible on the surface but is as real as anything we can see. Albert Einstein was fascinated by a compass he was given as a child, because it revealed the existence of an invisible magnetic field around the Earth. So the compass became for him a gateway to discovering God's hidden plan for the universe, and Physics was his path to true religion. In this regard, true religion is about discovering what is real and learning how to discern truth from falsehoods. There is plenty of dogma in both Science and Religion, so we must be careful if we want to have beliefs at all to avoid blinding ourselves from seeing other truths or realities by clinging to rigid beliefs about what is real and true. True religion therefore involves admitting that what is real is greater than we can now comprehend or express, given our human limitations. But, we *can* aspire to learn more, to grow, and then apply what we learn to understand the unseen reality even better.

And so it was for all of the great sages, the saints and saviors of various cultures, as well as for the scholars and philosophers throughout time. Every teacher must deal with the limitations of

what can be expressed in the words and symbols of a given place, time, or culture. Even for a perfect vessel with a true understanding of the infinite and the ways of the Divine, there is only so much that can be shared with other individuals or communicated to them in ways they can comprehend, remember, and share with others. Putting some insights into shareable words and symbols is a great challenge, bordering on the impossible. What any one person knows is hard to explain to someone who already understands things differently, or has experiences that suggest things are otherwise. But there are what can only be called universal truths, which have a particular nature regardless of who is exploring them or how they understand things. There is a single immutable and transcendent reality that exists outside of time, where any aspect we can describe is only a single puzzle piece of a vast but unified whole. This explains *why* the various religious teachings on the planet have so much in common, among them, but so many differences; they all speak about *aspects* of the same transcendent reality to people in a particular place and time. The search for that transcendent ideal is what unites people of all religions and fuels the explorations of mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers, as well.

My personal experiences forced me to investigate many paths, during my life, and allowed me to forge links between Math, Science, and Religion, to reveal how these very different ways to search for the truth merge and blend. From early childhood on, I wanted to know how things work and had an interest in Science. I disliked Arithmetic, because it involved too much memorization, and I tolerated Algebra, but once Math became Geometry and Calculus I excelled. I was drawn to Physics because it combines things I liked from an early age and was good at. But during that same time, people noticed I had a loud voice and was good at Music, and also a better than average dancer and actor, so I appeared in musical ensembles and plays, from elementary school through College and continuing at a slower pace later on. I was brought up Lutheran and taught that Jesus had forged a new covenant with God where we should follow the law of Love and tolerance, freed from the strict rules of the Old Testament. But I was unprepared for the experiences and discoveries that came after I graduated High School. My first out of body experience involved stepping outside of time, which I later learned also happened to Nikola Tesla and Carlo Rovelli. But it took years of study before I attained any skill with inner or extra-dimensional travels. However, in 1987 I discovered a mathematical relation relating to Physics and Cosmology, while seeking shortcuts to calculate the Mandelbrot Set, and this discovery forced me to make my search for truth and meaning very broad.

Advances in pure Mathematics and Computing now allow us to faithfully represent certain mathematical absolutes – or archetypal ideals – including two of the most complex objects known, the largest exceptional Lie group E_8 and the Mandelbrot Set. The close packing of spheres, one of the oldest problems in Math, is now proved to be solved in 8-d by the E_8 lattice, where the densest possible packing displays what is called optimal universality! It is well-known that the Mandelbrot Set also displays universality, and I have demonstrated it has connections to Physics. These examples illustrate a transcendent reality beyond physical existence, which can

be proved and is not limited to what mystics and sages can learn through direct knowledge or contemplation of the ideal. While some think this intricate mathematical structure is all a product of the human imagination, mathematicians believe they are discovering things that are unavoidably real. Both the simplest and most complex figures *mathematically* possible set limits on what is *physically* real or possible. This does not imply, though, that mathematically ideal forms are exactly reproduced in nature. Instead, we see that nature *seldom* adheres precisely to the elegant formulas we use to describe it, and is full of surprises. It inspired Benoit Mandelbrot to observe that nature does not conform to straight lines and smooth curves or contain perfect right angles, and to search for Maths that are a better fit to what we see. For Ben, Math and Science played together to reveal aspects of a higher truth he knew was real already.

I guess you have figured out, by this point, that I don't think true religion is about whether someone is a Christian, Jew, Muslim, or Buddhist, or perhaps a Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Taoist, Confucian, Baha'i, or Unitarian Universalist who seeks to find meaning in their life and to discover a deeper truth or higher purpose. Any of these believers can experience a connection with a higher spiritual reality because what we call God is all-pervasive or encompassing! But I can't exclude those who have Indigenous or Pagan beliefs from those who validly practice true religion either. Nor is true religion exclusively possible for only believers of some faith, because one can engage the search for truth through Math, Science, or Philosophy, as well as organized Religion. While not all mathematicians and scientists feel the wonder, there are certainly many who feel that what they are discovering is transcendent or divinely inspired, which even gives us insights into the mind of God. This appears to be especially true for those doing theoretical physics, especially exploring the origins of space, time, and the cosmos, but almost everyone doing advanced work in Science has felt, at some point, that they are tuning into something transcendently real, beyond the mundane, superficial, or clinical knowledge of things, to find a deeper reality. So both Science and Religion can inspire people to aim higher and dig deeper in search of the greater reality that pervades all things and all beings.

This pervasive nature is in fact the essence of what makes the reality of the Divine such a special and unique thing. Oneness is, and we are each a mirror of that identity. The unbroken wholeness that existed before the appearance of separate forms at the dawn of the cosmos never went away. It is still here and lives in the midst of us. When God tells us its name is "I am" this means God is the part of us that we regard as our self and think of as I, the part that is conscious and has the power to create. Seen in this way, our ability to know and our power to create and choose what to create are from the same source that created the universe and everything in it. One teacher explained that we don't need to search for something outside ourselves to find the Divine, but instead we should work to discover or uncover the divine nature within us. Each of us is already an example or expression of the One, which is true regardless of whether we are aware of it consciously, but we must train ourselves *wisely* to be an example of godly nature. Another of my teachers said that he was simultaneously God and the Devil, where his choices –

including every word that came out of his mouth – determined which of these two aspects of himself came to be realized. We all face choices that will either help or hinder our spiritual progress, in terms of the person we become by virtue of our actions.

It takes repeated virtuous acts, over a period of time, for right action to become a part of our character. After several deliberate attempts and a few failures, doing the right thing becomes a matter of personal integrity and with luck a cornerstone of our personality. So true religion's goal is to encourage right action and fair treatment of others, and support activities that build character. The alternative is that by repeating unkind and unfair acts over time we make that pattern normal for us instead, and we get used to being that way. This makes finding lost souls, and helping them find a way out of darkness to the light, yet another goal of true religion. If we want to live in a society that is functional, this aspect of religion is helpful for maintaining orderly and lawful relations between people, and it also makes some people functioning members of society who would otherwise be outcasts or troublemakers. Of course, there will always be people who seize the opportunity to use lost souls as a workforce of troublemakers to commit unlawful or immoral acts, which is **not** true religion – even in the name of a righteous religious cause. Here again, the distinction between true and false religion comes down to what kind of person you will become, if you follow that path. The thing is, it's not about what other people think but rather about how our activities relate to immutable laws, whether it is the law of human nature or another natural law whose boundaries we are testing – including Divine law. Whatever we do unavoidably shapes our character – the person we will become.

If we follow the law of Love, it will bring us to the highest and lead us to discover our own higher nature. This means we should put the 'golden rule' into practice as well as "love thy neighbor," and over time make those practices part of our core identity. People are unaware that these ideas have a long history, but the message has evolved over time. Confucius said that we should *not* do to others what we would *not* want them to do to us, and Jesus later turned this adage around, saying we should "do unto others" as we *would* want them to do to us. This marks a change from laws of behavior that forbid doing what is wrong to a kind of prescription for right action. This flavor of interpretation is what we need for the modern age; to affirm or establish the good is *vastly superior* to fighting or refraining from evil. "First do no harm" begins the Hippocratic oath, but it also says we should not invite or create harm by failing to provide aid where it is needed. So this then becomes "always do the right thing," which was historically said by Marcus Aurelius, but they remain words to live by today. And that boils down to having an open heart, in many cases, because courage and compassion come from the same place! Hatred doesn't live in the heart, but the gut is hard to satisfy under the best of conditions and it can be downright demanding if our fears are great enough. So, it's often challenging to be open-hearted during these troubling times. However, qualities like courage, compassion, and benevolence, are needed most when things get rough.

This makes a case for yet another function of Religion in people's lives, where being part of a community of like-minded people helps many people face the challenges of life and advance on their path toward a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Sometimes, all that is needed to have an open heart is finding a safe place where we can open up or loosen up enough to feel the connection and express the love that's already inside us all, or hearing and learning about other people's trials and how they overcame adversity. Every one of us serves the love for something, but we don't all define what it means to love or to serve the same way. If you open up a dictionary, it gives great latitude that allows love service to be many unkind things. This is why some things people do in the name of love aren't loving in the eyes of others, or in the larger sense of things. There have been too many victims for us to imagine good behavior is guaranteed if people are acting in service of what or whom they love. Instead, we see that questions of a higher or lower purpose arise, and the kind of person our actions make us become tends to define right action. So ultimately; what defines true religion is the fruit of its efforts to guide people in their lives. Does what you believe, the community or institution you are a part of, and the person or people leading it, help people to live better lives and become better human beings? If so, you may have already found true religion in that community.

However, the path to the heart of God or the fullest expression of Enlightenment is an endless one. Just because you have found valid truths, you should not assume that another person's truth is somehow lesser or wrong. It is likely both you and they have erroneous beliefs, but you might already believe many of the same things they do and not know it! If we only look at the surface reality of things, and don't compare notes, we won't discover that others learned the same eternal truths from a different teacher or through another means entirely. So each of us must be humble enough to open our hearts to the many different paths to divine knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. As my Buddhist friends like to point out, one does not have to think of it as divine or believe in God to achieve an enlightened state of connectedness with life and the universe, and with everything people attribute to the Divine. There is what is called the 'always so' which mathematicians, scientists, philosophers, and others can all learn about in different ways. But Religion has a unique place in the lives of countless human beings and it has provided many ways we can cultivate our higher nature. This piece is the test of true religion, in my opinion. If your beliefs and community help you cultivate traits that make you a better person over time, and make you aspire to have a higher purpose in your life, then you are practicing true religion. The goal then is to awaken, or become aware of, the oneness that is you already.

The way to achieve this is through balance. By this I mean that both sides or polarities are useful, if each is tempered by the other in some way. Taoists refer to Yin and Yang, the receptive and projective or feminine and masculine aspect of creation, and as I said before, there needs to be a womb of creation as well as the power of creative expression for creative acts to take place. So, the two qualities need each other, both in the Cosmos' origin and in our own lives. So it is not just a Taoist notion; it is a universal truth or eternal ideal! Aristotle taught that virtue or right

action is revealed by finding a balance between two wrongs – one the excess and the other a defect or deficiency of some quality or attribute. In the case of courage, being recklessly bold leads to actions like rushing into battle unprepared to fight and dying needlessly, while being too timid or slow to act results in losing the opportunity to advance or aid in the fight. It is wrong to be foolhardy *or* overly fearful. Accordingly, courage is found at the point of balance where one advances boldly at exactly the right time to do the most good.

In practice, true religion is found in the balance between the ideal and the real, or between sacred observances and practical ways to deal with the problems of life. If we do not aspire to realize our higher or best self, life is missing something important, so if we find that missing piece in our search for the Divine it is worthwhile. But those of us who have had experiences or come to know God shouldn't imagine we have something others do not. People who devote their lives to Math, Science, or Philosophy have every bit as good a chance of finding that higher reality we all seek as those who follow the path of Religion in some form or other. Enlightenment or salvation is not reserved for believers only, and every believer should know that God loves all living creatures – not just the ones who believe in Him. Perhaps people who worship mother nature and believe in Her are the smart ones after all. But the Divine is also beyond and before male and female or yang and yin attributes. Taoists call it Wuji – neither light nor dark, hot nor cold, or great nor small. Mathematicians talk about non-commutative algebras. In both cases, the primal undivided state evolves, and this evolutive property is what I see as the pervasive or omnipresent aspect of the Divine. Heraclitus said the only constant is change, and I believe this *tendency to evolve* is the primal nature of Spirit. Over the years, many paths to the Divine have been offered but human society has continued to evolve as well. Through all those changes, the One within **all** invites and aids ***each*** of us to join in the awakening.