

Various views of Jesus Christ in new religious movements

- A typological outline

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The aim of this article is to give a survey of some predominant conceptions of Jesus Christ which are common in new religious movements. It is convenient, it seems, to expose the different aspects in the following order: (i) Jesus - a Christ; (ii) Jesus - the Essene; (iii) Jesus' travels to the East; (iv) Jesus - a master of meditation; (v) Jesus - a prophet; (vi) Jesus - a healer and a magician.

1 Jesus - a Christ

It is of basic significance, according to the new religions, to distinguish between «Jesus» and «Christ». Those two concepts have quite different connotations. The most disastrous failure done by traditional church was «the fatal identification of the Christ with Jesus» (Leadbeater 1917:29). Jesus was an advanced historical person within the limits of time, whereas «Christ» means *a state of consciousness*, the one-ness with the eternal divine principle. This divine principle is to be experienced within the soul of any human who prepares for it. Jesus realized the «Christ within», as did Buddha, as did all great saints of all religions. You may call this inner enlightenment «Christhood» or «Buddhahood» (Eidhamar 1985) or whatever. The reality which is experienced is exactly the same: the universal oneness of your being, your supreme identity, your «Christ Self». This is, according to them, an experience of universal salvation, as preached by Jesus the Christ (Creme 1980:71).

This viewpoint is often combined with that of a «holy tradition», that is, a belief in certain «masters» throughout history who have facilitated man's spiritual enlightenment. Every age has had its great Master, as we have ours. The present Master is frequently identified as the very founder or leader of the movement in question. Viewpoints like this are found in Transcendental Meditation, Divine Light Mission, Rajneesh-movement, Tara Community and Summit Lighthouse.

The leader sometimes claims to have a similar mission in today's world as Jesus had 2000 years ago. Most wellknown of such modern christs (or «messiahs») is Mr. Sun Myung Moon (Unification Church). Similar figures in late 19th century were Baha'u'llah (Bahai) and Ghulam Ahmad (Ahmadiyya).

Theosophy is based on belief in a brotherhood of masters – «adepts» – in the higher spiritual realms, constantly supervising the world's spiritual evolution. In the preface to «Isis Unveiled» (Vol I 1877), Blavatsky states that the origin of the Theosophic movement is due to her own contact with those adepts. Being an adept is *an earned state*, only for those who have attained the highest stage of initiation and who know the «omnipotence of man's own immortal Self», she says. They are everywhere, but known only to a few. They meet once a week.

The Theosophic Society claims that Jesus is one of these adepts. During his lifetime he was a Cabbalist, a Gnostic, an Esse-ne priest. He had – as all living adepts – perfect mental and bodily health and perfect consciousness. All advanced saints of any tradition, be it Buddhist, Egyptian, Caldean, Persian or Jewish, are adepts. And their teachings «were identical from the beginning» (Blavatsky 1877: 142–153). The word «Christ», as a description of Jesus, does not mean a person, but is an «embodied idea» (p. 574). «Every good individual, therefore, may find Christ in his inner man whether he be Jew, Hindu or Christian» (Blavatsky 1892:84). This is exactly the way most new religions draw their pictures of Jesus Christ. It is denoted «*Christ syncretism*» in this exposition.

In some other movements one might find a slightly different view of Jesus' Christhood, which is rooted in the Eastern conception of the «avatars». The famous passages of Bhagavadgita chapter 4 are often referred to:

«For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I assume a body in every age».

This conception points out, more clearly than the adept theory, that it is the supreme godhead who incarnates himself – on his own initiative – periodically, whenever time is ripe. The two theories are very often combined.

In neo-hinduic movements new masters are added to the «clas-

sic» list of the avatars consisting of e.g. Rama, Krishna and Buddha. This corresponds to the conception of a «holy tradition» mentioned above. Among those new additions is Jesus Christ or some great religious leader of a new religious movement, such as Sathya Sai Baba, Guru Maharaj Ji etc. . To insert Jesus into the list of avatars is no fundamental change of hinduic tradition, then.

The originator of the Jesus Avatar idea in the West, *Vivekananda*, combined this conception with a strong attack on traditional Christianity. There is no «only begotten» son of God. There is a plurality of avatars, there are many «sons of God». God has incarnated himself several times. This is the pivotal point in the encounter of Eastern spirituality and Western narrowmindedness. Christians maintain that the «Lord can manifest himself only once: there lies the whole mistake» (Vivekananda 1953:720).

The Occult and the Eastern views of Christ converge, then, in the conception of periodically appearing «saviours». Christ is not unique. In occult terminology he is one adept among adepts, one Christ among Christs. In Eastern terminology he is one avatar among avatars.

The Occult authors stress *Jesus' prototypical significance*. His Christ experience – through baptism, death and resurrection – was not primarily something which happened in history. It's greatest significance was that of *initiation* (Besant 1906:183–191; Creme 1980:46; Crowley 1974:187; Shure 1970:246). Through partaking in specific rituals of initiation you will be able to taste the same timeless eternity within your own Self. Actually, this higher Self of yours is identical with the all-pervading divine Christ Self of Jesus.

This twofold conception, the distinguishing between «Jesus» and «Christ», and the prototypical – and gnostic – understanding of Jesus who «became» Christ, is beyond doubt the most widespread conception of Jesus Christ within the new religious wave.

«Christ is not a man! Jesus was the man . . . becoming the Christ. . . . The power, then, is the Christ. The pattern is Jesus» (Edgar Cayce's . . . 1968:173–174).

«Look to the Christ within, who shall be formed in everyone of you, as he is formed in me (i.e. Jesus)» (Aquarian Gospel, chapter. 68:13).

«Christs and Buddhas are simply occasions upon which to objectify our own inner powers» (Vivekananda . . . 1953:557).

This viewpoint is almost omnipresent within the new religions, in occult movements (Blavatsky 1877:574), in neo-hinduic movements (Yogananda 1976:112) and in the so-called New Age Spirituality (Sprangler 1981:129). It is reflected in the very titles of new religious books on this topic, such as *Being a Christ* (Meyer 1983), *Christs of the New Age* (1971), *Christ in you* (1983), *The Universal Christ. A New Age Portrait of Jesus of Nazareth* (Ilon 1983), *The Mystical Christ* (Hall 1951), *The Manifestations of Christ Universal* (Rolt-Wheeler 1968), *Christ, Krishna and You* (Venkatesananda 1983) and others.

It is also significant that in all these cases the Inner Christ conception is combined with a certain syncretistic frame of reference. Sometimes this topic is elaborated as a kind of «universal religion», e.g. by Paramananda (1912) and – especially – by Bahai (Backwell 1972:20). Sometimes this viewpoint is just presupposed. But it is always there. This corresponds to the fact that the new religious wave, as a whole, is a syncretistic one, as pointed out by most analysts of the new religious consciousness (Roszak 1975:207; Raschke 1980:201; Groothuis 1986:28).

Therefore, we might conclude, the new religious consciousness considers itself to be a «Christ consciousness». A New Age is dawning where Jesus' real message, so long hidden by the Church, is now revealed. The gospel is – as put by the Californian *Teaching of the Inner Christ* (Meyer 1983:106) – that «Your own Christ Self is your saviour».

2 Jesus the Essene

How did Jesus attain the Christhood of his? One answer, among others, given by the new occult movements, is this: he was trained by and initiated into the Essenes from his 12 to 30 years of age. This mysterious monastic community by the shore of Dead Sea, has become a symbol of higher knowledge (gnosis), renunciation from worldly affairs, vegetarianism and secret rituals of initiation.

The historical background of this conception, is closely connected to the tradition of esoteric brotherhoods (as found in Rosicrucianism and freemasonry). At this point our main concern is to show how this theory is promoted in recent religious movements. The findings of manuscripts in Qumran in 1947 has obviously given a new impetus to this 18th century theory, and has probably re-

vitalized today's Essene churches and societies of which there is a great number, especially in the U.S. .

The basic features of the Essene theory is mentioned and accepted by many movements (e.g. Vivekananda 1953:112; Prajnana-nanda 1984:60; Jesus teacher . . . 1985:136; Hodson et al.), but elaborated by rather a few of them. It goes like this:

The Essene community had several monasteries both in Palestine and Egypt a long time before the appearance of Jesus. This community is the purest container in the world of eternal truth, and, according to some of them, is linked with the invisible «Great White Brotherhood» of Egypt, «from which every great religion has its founder» (Besant 1906:129; cf. Lewis 1929:292; Cayce 1968:119). According to others, it has existed for several millenniums, and was founded by Enoch. Jesus was one of the many periodically appearing spokesmen for the Essene gospel of vegetarianism and love, as was Zarathustra, Moses and Buddha, according to Szekely (1977:5). His movement (The «Edenite Society» or The «International Biogenic Society») claims to have sold «The Essene gospel of peace» in several hundred thousand copies (Szekely 1981). And he states that «if it were not for the Essenes, we would have no gospel whatsoever today» (Essene . . . 1978:12).

According to Theosophy and Antroposophy, Esseneism originated from a rabbi born 105 B. C. (Besant 1906:128; cf. Did Jesus . . .) His name was Jeshu ben Pandira. He was a successor of Buddha, born for the enlightenement of mankind, and was the very founder of the society of the Essenes. The Essene mystery initiations were patterns for the life story of Jesus and prepared his coming. Steiner emphasizes, though, that the historical happenings, are very important, as such, being the fulfillment of the «prophetic» initiation ceremonies of the Essene brotherhood. This emphasis on history is due to Steiners definite claim of uniqueness of the Jesus history, which is an a-typical view within the various branches of occultism. (Steiner 1984:114). The Antroposophic «Christ syncretism» is thus a symbiosis of Buddhism and Christianity, maintained within a framework of what is considered as an Essenian concept of initiation. This view is also clearly expressed in Steiner's contention of the two Jesus-children (reincarnations of Buddha and Zarathustra) who were born simultaneously in Bethlehem. They were united into one person at twelve years of age, and received the Cosmic Christ Spirit at 30 years of age. This initiation

took place in Jordan, performed by John, who was an Essene prophet (Steiner 1984:133; cf. Steiner 1978).

A viewpoint often stated – e.g. by *the Crucifixion by an Eyewitness* – is that Jesus survived the crucifixion. According to AMORC (a Rosicrucian organisation) he met with his disciples every sabbath afterwards. This took place at an Essene monastery at Mt. Carmel, to which he had secretly retired. He instructed his disciples of the higher knowledge, for which the world was not yet prepared. He had nothing to do with the organizing of the Christian Church. (Lewis 1929:289).

About 1940 the Essene theory was strongly supported by the most well-known spiritualist medium of USA in this century, Edgar Cayce. During his sleeping seances (prophesizing in a somnibulant state) he gave detailed descriptions of the Essene life of Jesus (Edgar Cayce's . . . 1968:117–141), corresponding – to a certain extent – to the picture given some year before by Annie Besant and Spencer H. Lewis. The voice of another prophet, however, Jeane Dixon, rejects the Essene theory all through. «Essene rigidity, their fasting, their isolation from women, their obsession with the Law, Jesus could not accept, for Our Saviour taught that man was meant to be happy», she says. (Dixon 1972:71).

There are also some other disagreements between the prophets. Cayce rejects the antroposophic doctrine of the two Jesus-children, maintaining that Adam was reincarnated in Enoch, Melkisedek, Zend (Zoroaster's father), Joshua and, then, in Jesus. He also questions the Rosicrucian and Theosophic tendency to make Egypt the core of Essenic wisdom (Edgar Cayce's . . . 1968:23, 119; cf. Blavatsky 1877:305, 548).

The Szekely movement (i.e. «First Christian Essene Church») also maintains that Egypt is the true cradle of Essenism and Christianity. What became known as the Christian religion, «was not new at all, but ancient, for all that was Christian in Jesus' day, was in fact already in existence in the purest Essene tradition thousands of years before». (Edenite creed . . . 1979:40).

3 Jesus' travels to the east

The so-called «lost years» of Jesus, from his 12 to 30 years of age, of which there are no accounts in the Bible, have stimulated and fascinated the imagination and creativity of several authors during

the last century. Some stick with the Essene theory, as we have seen, others claim that Jesus spent most of those years in India, Tibet, Egypt or Japan. The originating of this theory hundred years ago through the writings of N. Notovitch, is exposed later on. Our concern here is plainly to give a sketch of this theory in order to show how Jesus is pictured.

There are several stories, though. Some versions maintain that his travels to the East took place after his survival of the crucifixion. Though, the usual conception is that Jesus travelled in order to prepare for his public service in Palestine. The various versions also differ as for what kind of syncretism is in scope. Most commonly you find a unification of Eastern and Western traditions, but sometimes Jesus is criticizing basic aspects of Eastern beliefs, as well.

These traditions are widely accepted in today's new religious movements, stressing the syncretistic significance of Jesus going East. Jesus is the great Unifier of religions, knowing all of them out of his own experience.

The two versions of this theory which are most commonly quoted in today's new religions are «*The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*» (1890) by Nicholas Notovitch and «*The Aguarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*» (1908) by Levi (= Leo W. Dowling). Besides, there is a third version, «*The Gospel of the Holy Twelve*» by G. J. R. Ouseley, probably influenced by the former and giving impulses to the latter. And there is a fourth version, as well, «*Known and Unknown Life of Jesus the Christ*» by Jane Aikman Welch (1924), inspired from Cabbalism.

3.1 Notovitch and Levi

Although the pattern is similar, the scope is rather different by Notovitch and Levi. Notovitch, a Russian born Jew, holds a very limited kind of syncretism on Judaic premises, whereas Levi represents a mystical, esoteric kind of syncretism. Notovitch pictures a glorious, divine prophet chosen by God to fight idolatry, sun-worship and magic wherever it occurs (5:26; 8:6-9). Levi describes a profound mystic, a great teacher, who, at last, attains the great illumination and becomes the Christ.

The main scope of Notovitch is to call for sympathy with the Righteous One who became a martyr (1:2; 14:2-3). On the other hand, the climax of Levi's story is Jesus' initiation into the seventh

grade of the Egyptian brotherhood: «You are a neophyte no more, but now a master mind . . . THE CHRIST» (55.6–12). Here, in Egypt, he finally found what he had been searching for in India, Nepal, Tibet, Persia, Assyria and Greece. He was now prepared for his service, which was to take place in Palestine during the last three years of his life. He fulfilled this task, through his healing ministry, teaching, crucifixion and resurrection. And afterwards he materialized himself several times for his disciples (in a spiritualistic sense).

This crescendo towards fulfillment is totally lacking in Notovitch' story. He pictures a man, in which God was manifested, but who was rejected and crucified. His concept of God has a slight taste of Cabbalism, but this feature is never elaborated. Notovitch's main issue is the tragic history of Jesus, who was the manifestation of the Mysterious God. Jesus was not risen from the death, he asserts, but secretly removed from the grave by Roman soldiers.

One significant common feature in both versions is the hostile attitude towards established religious traditions of any kind. This corresponds to the anti-church attitude found in most new religions. Jesus' controversies with Brahmanic or Zoroastrian priesthood is pictured like the controversies with the scribes in the New Testament (Notovitch 1980:34; Aquarian 1960:59).

3.2 Truth or forgery?

Some further words need to be said about the kinds of syncretism found in those two stories. Strange enough, the kind of syncretism promoted by Notovitch is quite the opposite of what is commonly found in new religions. Notovitch claims a limited approach, picturing Jesus as an Old Testament (or perhaps also Islamic inspired) prophet, who learns and accepts «Buddhism» (4:13), and even use Buddha as a name of the Creator God (6:4). The name of Jesus, «Issa», might have been borrowed from Islam. At the same time, Jesus attacks the Vedas, where the truth is «perverted» (5:26). But what is really confusing, then, is that the «Buddhism» advocated has nothing to do with real Buddhism. It is a «Buddhism» with a jealous Creator-God who is the great Judge, who punishes or forgives sins (2.1) and who is opposed to «pagan idols» (3:9).

Considering that this manuscript is introduced by the author as a Buddhistic one, found by himself in a Tibetan monastery (Noto-

vitch 1980:10), there is only one possible comment from the viewpoint of comparative religion: this must be a forgery. One absolute condition for having the stamp of genuineness is consistency between what a manuscript pretends to be and what it is. «Issa» is the propagator of a Buddhism which does not exist. And the «syncretism» described in it is, in fact, merely a mixture of Judaic and Christian motifs. This manuscript is, according to its contents, a scorn and a renouncement of Buddhism. What it preaches, actually, is a slightly Cabbalistic Judaism.

3.3 The spread of Notovitch's story

The Notovitch story has been accepted by several new religious notabilities, e.g. Manly P. Hall (1938:7) and Elisabeth Clare Prophet (1984:83). Indian gurus advocates it, such as Yogananda of the Self-Realization Fellowship, Abheananda of the Ramakrishna Movement (Prajnanananda 1984:126), Bhaktivedanta of the Hare Krishna movement (Christus . . . 1975). And the most popular guru in today's India, Sathya Sai Baba, acknowledges it, too. The latter claims to be the godhead himself (Baba 1982:130), the one who sent Jesus. He has direct knowledge, then, of Jesus' travels.

Some of Baba's foremost spokesmen in the West, Janet and Richard Bock, have produced a book («The Jesus Mystery») and a movie («The lost years») on this subject, stating that Notovitch's theory is verified through the direct knowledge of other gurus, such as Sivananda and Chidananda (Bock 1980:189). It is obvious then, that this theory is today becoming very widely accepted among the neo-hinduic movements.

This theory was never mentioned in the theosophic writings of late 19th century. Their explanation of the «lost years» was the Essene theory. During the first half of our century a change has taken place. Sometimes combined with the Essene theory, the going-east-theory has gained increasing acceptance within occultism. This is mostly due to the occult-styled gospel of Levi.

In addition to this there are several spiritual revelations in our century which hold the Jesus going East theory. E. Cayce maintained that an Essene teacher sent Jesus to the East in order to study astrology. He even named those teachers he got in Persia, India and Egypt (which do not match with the names given by Levi). Cayce also states Jesus' initiation in Egypt (Edgar Cayce's 1968:170).

But all these different versions of the Jesus-going- East theory might be traced back to one single source: Nicholas Notovitch.

3.4 Jesus' travels from a Cabbalistic and Astrological viewpoint

Rather similar to the «Aquarian Gospel» of Levi is «Known and Unknown Life of Jesus the Christ» by J. A. Welch. It explicitly refers both to Levi and Notovitch (Welch 1924:62, 165). Astrological, numerical and magical viewpoints, which reminds of cabbalism, is very predominant here, applied systematically on the life of Jesus. It gives credit to Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry as those institutions which hold the truth of Jesus today. And it traces their origin back to an unidentified secret brotherhood of Sages at the time of Jesus (Welch 1924:24, 36). According to this story,

Jesus, «born as an Aries», stayed in Egypt till seven years of age, then in Nazareth until twelve years of age. After his victory over several temptations (especially from women) he went to Egypt, Persia, India, Tibet, China and back to Palestine. He then received the baptism in Jordan, after which he spent forty days of trance in the desert (Welch 1924:36–72). Later he went to Egypt again, to China (learning astrology), Italy, Spain, Africa and Asia Minor. By soultravelling he also went to the remotest areas of the world, e.g. to the most northern peak of Norway («Nordkapp»). He also gathered four wise men «from the ends of the earth», one from Africa, one from China, one (Indian) from America and one from Norway. «Could the universality of the mission of the Christ be more fully expressed than was done here?» (Welch 1924:307–309).

3.5 Jesus in Japan

A new religion of Japan, Mahikari, gaining increasing acceptance in the West, also advocates the Jesus-going-east theory, on their own terms. Making reference to E. Cayce's prophecies and to a certain Japanese legend, «kirisuto», Mahikari states that the following account of the life of Jesus is the most likely one. It goes like this:

After having visited India and China, Jesus came to Japan at the age of twentyone. He studied shintoism for almost ten years. He then went back to Palestine in order to teach this wisdom. Je-

Jesus was never crucified, but a brother of his, named Isukiri, was. At the age of thirtyseven Jesus came back to Japan, was married and had four children. More than a hundred years old he died, and his grave is located in Shingo of northern Japan. Thus, Jesus was a Japanese and his teaching was Mahikari (Tebecis 1982:355).

3.6 Jesus: a legitimation for Eastern wholism in Western society

Definitely, there appears to be a profound need among the Eastern religions to realize that Jesus is theirs. Actually, he was an Asiatic, they say, a gift from Asia to the West, which is in lack of spiritual wisdom. This is the basic idea behind the guruism of our century, an idea stated already in 1893 at the famous World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago: «The star rose in the East» (Vivekananda 1953:111, 193).

Simultaneously, there is an urgent need among the desintegrated modern man in Western pluralism to get a new conception of wholeness. It is likely to consider the growth of the Jesus-in-the-East-theory in our century as a response to both of these needs. An employee at the Sathya Sai Baba Center in Hollywood explained it this way to me: «Christ is universal, you see. He went to India. Baba tells this. Baba is over Jesus. «I sent Jesus» he says. Through Baba I have got a much greater view of Christ! He does not only belong to the Christians». Jesus is theirs.

It seems, then, in the merging of cultures of the modern world, that the Eastern need for legitimation and the Western need for wholeness both are reflected in the conception of Jesus going East. This is summed up by Yogananda (quoted in Bock 1980:141) stating that «God made Jesus Christ an Oriental in order to bring East and West together».

4 Jesus – a master of meditation

«Suffering Though likest not.
It does not belong to Thee.
It does not belong to Thy
Merciful and Almighty Nature.
It does not belong to
Thy Kingdom of Heaven.
Suffering is foreign to Thee».

These passages written by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1973:39–40), reflects the Eastern conception of an enlightened master, a yogi. Jesus, here being described as such a master, bypassed the limits of any sensations of pleasure or suffering. On the cross, like an Indian fakir, he demonstrated that he had attained that bliss of detached consciousness which cannot be disturbed. He never suffered, not even when he was tortured.

This advanced state of consciousness was attained through Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi claims, which Jesus practiced intensively during his forty days in the desert. He resisted any temptation through the use of the word «that proceeds from the mouth of God» (Matt. 4.4). This holy word is the mantra, the key instrument for meditation, which is constantly repeated during the meditation practice.

4.1 Salvation through sound

It is important to keep in mind that Eastern ways of salvation used to be sound techniques, performed by chanting, recitation, murmuring or as a pure mental activity. The vibrations of the mantra sound is identical with the divine power, the godhead. This «Sound Essence» of the Universe is identical with «the secret Word of Power within every human being». This inner power might be invoked through different names. Chanting the names of God does work anyhow, whether you use «Krishna», «Christ» or whatever mantra you find convenient, e.g. «Om», «Amen» etc. . . «Krishna or Christ . . . you simply chant the name of God found in your own scriptures», the Hare Krishna people says (Chant . . . 1983:96).

In his book «Jesus Christ and Yoga», quoting John 1:1, the head of the Goswami Institute affirms that this mantra sound is behind all creation. «In the beginning was the Word», is very commonly quoted by gurus in news religious movements. Through this mystic sound man is saved from reincarnation, realizing his oneness with God. The mantra is thus understood as the essence of Jesus' teaching, referring particularly to his teaching of prayer. (p. 113–127).

4.2 The Lord's Prayer

One recent, but growing group, «Dances of Universal Peace», focusses all its training on an aramaic version of the Lords prayer.

«Abwoon d'bashmaya . . . Nit kaddash shmuoch . . . Teete malkoo-tach» etc. The very sound seems to be the most important thing, automatically tuning the user into the right «vibration». The meaning of the prayer is to awake inner awareness, to become attuned to the divine vibration on earth as it is in heaven, «for ever and ever»: «L'olam almeen. Amen». (Rendered from pamphlets received from their Center in Fairfax, Cal.). The whole prayer is considered as a mantra. The prayer itself – as it sounds on aramaic – is the very means of salvation. And no other «Saviour» is needed. The prayer gives you – directly – the same divine experience of the inner Christ as Jesus had (Errico 1984:14,25).

An occult understanding of the Lord's prayer is developed by Rudolf Steiner. It is, according to him, means to realize man's divine nature, «to feel God within oneself». The seven prayers correspond to the seven-fold nature of man. The original meaning of prayer is the feeling of meditation, he states, and to be free from materialistic feelings. Most authors of new religious movements comment positively on the Lord's prayer, then, using it, more or less, as a technique. Sometimes there are rendered versions which are quite different, based on gnostic materials.

4.3 Praying to the Mother-God

There is a strong tendency within the new religious consciousness to regard God not only as Father (Abba), but also as Mother (Amma). This conception is also predominant in the writings of Ouseley. Today, gnostic and occult traditions merge with slightly similar Eastern conceptions of the feminine godhead. This aspect is, for instance, very much emphasized by Vivekananda even stating that Jesus did not pay enough heed to womanhood (1953:177,556).

Prayers within New Age Spirituality are often directed to the «Father-Mother God». God as Mother designates the divinity of Earth. Thomas Irwin Thompson and other spokesmen for «ecological salvation» in the New Age connect their message to the concept of «Gaia», which is an Earth Goddess from the ancient religion of the Greeks.

The aspect of the Divine Mother is emphasized even more by various health-food movements. Szekely, for instance, holds that Jesus, according to «The Essene Gospel of Peace», originally suggested two Lord's prayers: one for the Father and one for the Mother.

The prayer to the Mother goes like this:

«Our Mother which art upon earth,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
and thy will be done in us as it is in thee.
As thou sendest every day thy angeles,
send them to us also.
Forgive us our sins, as we atone all our sins
against thee.
And lead us not into sickness,
but deliver us from all evil,
for thine is the earth, the body and the health.
Amen.» (Szekely 1981:43).

4.4 Jesus Yogi

Strangely enough, Jesus is not thought of as a yogi in any of those stories mentioned above of his going East (although he often is painted in yoga-postures on the front piece of recent editions). He did not go very deep into the Eastern schools of meditation. This might perhaps be explained from the fact that all those authors were Westerners, not too well acquainted with the Eastern spirituality. The «highest teaching» delivered by Jesus is basically Western, although sometimes supposed to be Eastern by the editors. In those narratives Jesus does not exceed the picture of a monotheistic prophet (Notovitch), an occult initiate (Levi), or a God-Man in terms of christianized astrology (Welch).

One most influential English occultist of early 20th century, Aleister Crowley, held that Jesus was a typical example of the «holy man» found in all religious traditions. «Yogi Jesus» matches perfectly into the picture of a yogi drawn by Patanjali in his Yoga Suttaras, he claims, a man of non-attachment, no sorrows, who performed a lot of miracles (Crowley 1974:150).

The picture of Jesus as a master of meditation and yoga is frequently drawn by Eastern authors. Their picture of Jesus Yogi is like that of any other master of yoga. He is completely detached from the world. The test-stone of a true yoga master is renunciation (Vivekananda 1953:719). Jesus was so free from material bounds that he was not affected, neither by the pleasure nor pain of this wordly existence.

5 Jesus – a prophet

In a broad sense you will find Jesus pictured as a «prophet» in any new religious tradition. For instance, the traditions of his going east give such a picture, especially as found by Notovitch.

Making this a separate topic of our typological overview, we have the Islamic concept of prophethood in mind. According to Islam, being a prophet is the most advanced spiritual state attainable for a human being. Dealing with this subject, we leave the basic monistic framework for the understanding of most new religions and merge into the monotheism of Islam. It should be realized though, that even the new religions of Islamic background might have a slight tendency towards monism, partly due to mystic traditions within Islam, and partly due to the tendency towards syncretism within most new religions.

Rather close to traditional Islam is the *Ahmadiyya-movement*, which originated in 1891 by Ghulam Ahmad of Northern India. It is spread in most Western countries today. Ahmadiyya pictures Jesus as one of the prophets in a purely Islamic sense. He is not God, not son of God. He is born by Mary the virgin, but still God's creation, not of divine nature. He is not a Saviour either, just a messenger from Allah, one among the many great witnesses of truth. So far, this is the traditional Islamic picture.

However, Ghulam Ahmad added to this picture a new conception of Jesus' life story. Jesus was not ascended to heaven, as maintained in traditional Islam. He died in Kashmir. The whole theory was launched in his Urdu book of 1899 (A later English translation exists: *Jesus in India*, publ. by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Foreign Missions, Rabwah, Pakistan, 1962).

Ghulam Ahmad had declared himself to be the «Messiah», the «Prophet» and the «Avatar» of our age. So saying, he employed the highest titles of the three great world religions on his own person, which designates a certain syncretistic tendency. This «syncretism», though, is kept rather tight within the framework of an Islamic world view.

Ahmad's story of Jesus going East was published nine years after the first edition of Notovitch's work, on which it obviously depends. Notovitch's version of 1890 advocated for the very first time the idea of Jesus to the East. This motif is combined, by Ahmad, with a motif from the «Letter to the Essenes» according to which Jesus survived the crucifixion.

The traditions behind the Ahmadiyya theory is thoroughly discussed by a Swedish scholar, providing all the main references on this issue (Beskow 1981). Having pointed at those two traditions behind which are not explicitly mentioned in Ahmad's version (Notovitch and The Letter to the Essenes), he investigates the traditions mentioned by Ahmad himself, e.g. the Gospel of Barnabas, the Legend of Yuz Asaf, the Acts of Thomas and Bhavishya Purana. He concludes that there is no evidence for the theory of Jesus going east in any of those traditions. He finds, though, that Jesus is mentioned in the hinduic Bhavishya Purana (about 700 A.D.). Like in a vision, «The Son of God», «Messiah», presents himself as the great teacher of the religion of the barbarians. However, this is more likely to be understood as a mere reflection of the presence of the Christian religion in India at that time. The Purana also mentions Muhammes as another great teacher of the barbarians, and also gives credit to Persian religion. There is no accounts of any travels to the East, except for the invasion of foreign peoples. Rather, this syncretistic outlook reflects a typical feature of Hinduism through the ages, the tendency to include any religious tradition into its own. Thus, the idea of the prophet Jesus going East is not older than about one hundred years.

Through the mission of the Ahmadiyya movement and the writings of Andreas Faber-Kaiser (1978) this picture of Christ has got a very widespread acceptance in today's Western Europe. According to Ahmadiyya, Jesus was basically a prophet to the twelve tribes of Israel. Before his crucifixion he only had witnessed to the two tribes located in Palestine. Surviving the crucifixion, he started off eastwards, accompanied by his disciple Thomas. He searched for the ten lost tribes of Israel in Afganistan and India. In Shrinagar, Kashmir, he died, 120 years old, after having fulfilled his prophetic task.

There is nothing in this narrative which describes Jesus as an propagator of Eastern mysticism, or of any kind of syncretistic occultism. He is merely a messenger to the «lost tribes» of Israel, a prophet within the frames of semitic religious thought. It is beyond doubt, though, that the Ahmadiyyas have contributed considerably to the enormously rapid spreading of the very idea of Jesus in the East among new religious movements, which has taken place within a period of less than a hundred years. This astonishing fact is due to Ahmadiyya's missionary efforts, understanding itself as

a missionary branch of Islam (although neglected as such by The World Council of Mosques in 1979). In spite of the fact that the Ahmadiyya message is neither strongly syncretistic nor strongly Christ-centered, the spread of their story of Jesus to India has contributed very much, indirectly, to the idea of Christ syncretism in the new religious consciousness.

Through another new religion of the 19th century, Bahai, the unification of religions has become a main viewpoint. Bahai preceded the new religious wave by stating that all religions are essentially one, that all prophets are sent from the true God, Jesus as well. The concept of prophethood is very high in Bahai, even higher than in Islam. Jesus, then, is regarded as a Saviour, a spiritual Son of God, a revelation of God, as is Buddha, as is Muhammed. But none of them are considered as incarnations of God. That thought appears to be blasphemous within an Islamic frame of reference. Jesus was divine, though, he manifested God. He suffered the death of a martyr, and was resurrected from the death, not bodily, but spiritually.

According to Bahai, «Christ» is not primarily a person, but the office, the Messianic task of any prophet. The Christ syncretism of Bahai, then, states that truth is revealed progressively through prophet after prophet corresponding to the spiritual needs of various cultures. There is a development in religion: Buddha, to whom the significance of God was not known; Jesus and Muhammed who revealed the love and one-ness of God, and Baha'u'llah (1817-1892) who fulfilled the longings for an eschatological Saviour of all religions. He is Christ returned to Earth. This is the highest stage of religious development, so far. According to the syncretism of Bahai, then, the Christ task is fulfilled by many prophets, and Jesus from Nazareth was one of them.

Another branch of the new religious wave which owes its origin to Islam, is Sufism. Hereby we enter into the realm of mysticism and a tendency towards monism, which is more in accordance with the basic world view of the New Age Spirituality. Hence, it also strongly emphasizes syncretism. The originator of its western branch was Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), one of the early «gurus» from the East to the West. During their service of worship they burn six candles, one for each of the great religions of truth.

A particular branch of sufism, was originated by an Indonesian Muslim, Mohammad Subuh. His movement, called Subud, main-

tains that the religious experiences of all religions are identical. These strong experiences, which they get through certain exercise, «latihan», might be interpreted within the framework of any religion, and is seen as a Christ experience, as well.

This kind of Christ syncretism is very interesting. It is, I think, the basic pattern of new religious syncretism, reflecting at the same time the subjetivistic and existensialistic orientation of modern man.

Corresponding to the inwardliness of the new religious wave there is a general emphasis on feelings, experiences and consciousness. To modern man, facing the confusion of outer society with its numerous religious bodies, *the only way out is in*. It is appropriate, according to Subud, to seek this inner experience through some of the traditional religions using them as «vehicles», though, it seems, the semitic religions have priority. Subud states that Muhammed represents the male, whereas Jesus represents the female principle of prophethood. Jesus, then, was one of the greatest prophets from God to mankind, one of those who pointed at the significance of inner religious experience. Thus, Jesus on the cross represents the sublime surrender and submission to God, as a prototype for all mankind.

6 Jesus – a healer and a magician

The fact that Jesus performed healings is accepted all over by the new religious wave, although those miracles might be interpreted in different ways. His wonders are sometimes associated with some sort of magic. It is commonly held that Egypt kept great secrets of magic, with which Moses was well acquainted, and so was Jesus. This hidden knowledge is the secret behind his powerful performances. This viewpoint is sometimes reflected in editions of magical manuals such as the Cabbalistic «Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses». This manual has been widespread in Europe through centuries and has also been edited several times in the States.

Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), wellknown – and feared – for his so-called «magick», refers to Matt. 11,2–8 stating that Jesus considered his miraculous powers as «the sole and sufficient reason for accepting him and his mission». If one removes the miracles and prohecies from Christianity «nothing is left but a little doctrine, much of it contradictory», he says (Crowley 1974:55,58).

According to Theosophy, an «adept» – as Jesus was – might perform magic, but he never practices sorcery or black magic. True magic is a science of mind, an application of spiritual laws, and not «miracles». That category does not exist in the Theosophic world view (Blavatsky 1877:589). The great master of magic was Appollinus of Tyana (Blavatsky 1982:26) who is commonly thought of among occultists as a reincarnation of Jesus.

«Christianity should not have hated magic» states the Scottish rite of Freemasonry, because «at the bottom of magic, nevertheless, was science». The newborn Jesus was greeted by three Magicians, and the books of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse are documents of Cabbalistic magic (Morals and . . . 1906:730–731).

This strong emphasis on Cabbalistic-magical traditions in 19th century esotericism might have something to do with the publication of some old Jewish apochrypha in Western languages for the first time: Book of Enoch in 1821, Book of Jubilees in 1850 etc. . This is an interesting topic not seriously dealt with by anybody yet.

However, the concept of magic is not the most frequently associated with Jesus' healing ministry. The most common viewpoint is that he performed his healings as an expression of his pure state of mind.

Most consistently this theory was elaborated by Christian Science, the movement which claimed «the nothingness of evil». Jesus' great achievement was that he demonstrated the perfect consciousness, the Christ-consciousness. «The Christ is as unconscious of sin, disease or death as is God». He demonstrated that Christ is man's spiritual selfhood. Nothing exists except Christ, which is God, which is (your) Mind. All problems are mere problems of mind, then. Realizing the allness of Christ, is realizing the illusion of suffering (Jesus and . . . 1980:23). This is the wellknown pattern of monism all over. It is not always found very elaborated, but – more or less – the pattern will be similar in most new religions. «Teaching of the Inner Christ», from California, declares that everything that exists is perfect, it only seems to be imperfect. The real state of being is, according to them, «*perfection everywhere now*». The healing service, then, as taught by Jesus, is to cure your mind from illusions of imperfection. This change of mind takes place through the realizing of the Inner Christ.

«Since my thoughts and beliefs have created my problem, I can heal it by changing my thoughts and beliefs . . . No one's problems are ever caused by anyone else . . . and all problems are mental ones, being simply the manifestations of false thinking» (Meyer 1975:159).

White Eagle Lodge, which holds the Theosophic idea of a «Great White Brotherhood», of masters who supervise mankind, asserts that Master Jesus is the one in charge of supervising the healing ministry. He might be called upon for any assistance. «Have no fear, just confide in your heart in your gentle white brother, Jesus» (Jesus Teacher 1985:64–65)

A combination of healing and vegetarianism is applied to Jesus in a modern widespread apocryphic manuscript called «*The Essene Gospel of Peace*», (Szekely 1981). This script will be further commented upon later on. Here we only look for its picture of Jesus as healer. The main issue of this 20th century apocryphal is to tell why people suffer. According to the world view of this gospel, suffering is not plainly rejected as reality as found in those movements mentioned above. On the contrary, suffering is dramatically described as satanic. All diseases on Earth is caused by «gluttony» – the desire for flesh, and is normally dispelled through the exorcism of baptism. Jesus recommended baptism as a healing ritual to be repeated daily during periods of fasting, according to *The Essene Gospel of Peace*.

I have only found one single exception from the omnipresence of Jesus Healer in new religious traditions. According to Notovitch's story of Jesus in the East, he refused to do miracles or healings, referring to God's creation as the one great miracle (Notovitch 1980:36,40). On the other hand, *The Aquarian Gospel* repeatedly pictures Jesus as a great healer who knows – like the occultists – how to «control the spirits of the air, the fire, the water and the earth» (37:8).

7 «Who do men say that the Son of man is?»

There were numerous conceptions of Jesus already among his contemporaries (Matt. 16:14). Beyond doubt, no other person in history has contributed more to the religious beliefs and practices of mankind than Jesus has. Thus, in order to understand the inter-

mingeling of traditions taking place in today's religious syncretism of the West, the exposition of the christologies of new religions is an urgent task. The new religions simply do what most postchristian religions have always done, be it Gnosticism (Manicheism), Islam, or reformed Hinduism: they state that Jesus is not to be neglected when you deal with the question of salvific truth, and they claim him as a spokesman of theirs, corresponding to the spiritual and cultural situation of that time. It is true, then, that any conception of «Jesus the Christ», found in a culture, might reveal more about that culture than it reveals about Jesus.

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