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## DEISM AND THE REVEALED RELIGIONS

I have always been fascinated and have been interested in Thomas Jefferson especially because of his stand on the rights of the individual. In 1789 Jefferson said, "What is true of every member of the society, individually, is true of them all collectively; since the rights of the whole can be no more than the sum of the rights of the individuals."

I first became aware of Deism when I found out that Thomas Jefferson was a Deist. According to the World Union of Deists, "A Deist is one who believes in the existence of God or Supreme Being but denies revealed religion, basing his belief on the light of nature and reason." The word "*Deism*" is derived from the Latin word for God: "*Deus*." Deism involves the belief in the existence of God, on purely rational grounds, without any reliance on revealed religion or religious authority.

Deism encompasses a wide range of views on the nature of God, particularly on whether or not God intervenes in the world. The classical view is that the universe was created by a God. God then makes no further intervention in its affairs but does govern by Providence. Deists believe that Christianity is a revealed religion like many others such as Islam and Judaism.

Many of the US Founding Fathers were Deists; the list included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Thomas Paine. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine were the most outspoken. They criticized the clergy for using religion to promote their own personal gains.

The following are several quotations from Jefferson; "I have examined all the known superstitions of the World, and I do not find in our particular superstition of Christianity one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded on fables and mythology. Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined and imprisoned. What has been the effect of this coercion? To make one half the world fools and the other half hypocrites; to support roguery and error all over the world; the clergy converted the simple teachings of Jesus into an engine for enslaving mankind . . . to filch wealth and power to themselves. They in fact constitute the real Anti-Christ."

“In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.”

“Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him [Jesus] by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others again of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism, and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being.”

And finally, I find this last quotation from Jefferson disturbingly harsh:

“The Christian god can easily be pictured as virtually the same god as the many ancient gods of past civilizations. The Christian god is a three headed monster; cruel, vengeful and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes; fools and hypocrites. To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.”

Jefferson rewrote the Bible. His purpose was to present a code of morals suitable for instruction in ordinary living, not a code of religious dogmas and supernatural beliefs. He was also very much influenced by John Locke (1632 – 1704). Jefferson drew heavily on the doctrines concerning the general principles of liberty and the rights of man which Locke set forth in his essays on civil government.

According to Franklin Steiner, Abraham Lincoln, seemingly a Deist, did not profess to be a Christian; he subscribed to no creed and joined no organization of Christian disciples. “In 1846, when he was a candidate for Congress against a Methodist minister, the Rev. Peter Cartwright, his opponent openly accused him of being an unbeliever, and Lincoln never denied it. A story is told of Mr. Cartwright's holding a revival meeting while the campaign was in progress, during which Lincoln stepped into one of his meetings. When Cartwright asked the audience, “Will all who want to go to heaven stand up?” all arose except Lincoln. When he asked, “Now, will all who want to go to hell stand up?” Lincoln still remained in his seat. Mr. Cartwright then said, “All have stood up for one place or the other except Mr. Lincoln, and we would like to know where he expects to go.” Lincoln arose and quietly said, “I am going to Congress,” and there he went. “

Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) stated, “My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. . I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own - a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. “

Sigmund Freud (1871 – 1939) thought that religion is a mass neurosis and exists as a response to deep emotional conflicts and weaknesses. According to Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) religions are social institutions which are dependant upon material and economic realities in a given society.

Among the European Enlightenment philosophers: David Hume (1711 – 1776) was considered an enemy of organized religion. His *Dialogues*, published posthumously, offer an extended treatment of the intellectual interchanges among orthodoxy, natural theology, and philosophical skepticism.

Isaac Newton (1642 – 1727) was militantly hostile to the idea of the Trinity. He believed that certain passages from the New Testament were corrupted and interpolated in the fifth century.

Voltaire (1694 - 1778) in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* defined the ideal religion – it would teach very little dogma but much morality.

The following are three quotations from Thomas Paine:

“As priestcraft was always the enemy of knowledge, because priestcraft supports itself by keeping people in delusion and ignorance, it was consistent with its policy to make the acquisition of knowledge a real sin.”

“The nations who never heard of such books, nor of such people as Jews, Christians, or Mohammedans, believe the existence of a God as fully as we do, because it is self-evident. The work of man's hands is a proof of the existence of man as fully as his personal appearance would be.”

“The Persian shows the Zend-Avesta of Zoroaster, the lawgiver of Persia, and calls it the divine law; the Brahmin shows the Shaster, revealed, he says, by God to Brahma, and given to him out of a cloud; the Jew shows what he calls the law of Moses, given, he says, by God, on the Mount Sinai; the Christian shows a collection of books and epistles, written by nobody knows who, and called the New Testament; and the Mohammedan shows the Koran, given, he says, by God to Mahomet: each of these calls itself revealed religion, and the only true Word of God, and this the followers of each profess to believe from the habit of education, and each believes the others are imposed upon.”

Deists do not accept the belief of most religions that God revealed himself to humanity through the writings of the Bible, the Koran, or other religious texts. They believe that revealed religions become dangerous when they cross over the philosophical line into politics. This notion becomes very pertinent to our times considering the endless turmoil we are witnessing in the world today. Historically, religions have often been abused and misinterpreted. There have always been so many, the so-called religious, who have professed that their beliefs are the only correct ones and that they are the ones who represent God's

will. But blind belief *could* be very dangerous. Consider the “suicide bomber” who kills a large number of innocent people believing that for his actions he will be rewarded abundantly in the hereafter. It is ironic that Hitler in his *Mein Kampf* stated: “Hence today I believe I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator.” He followed this statement with the vilest diatribe and the ugliest profanity ever disgorged against an entire nation. Think about it, and imagine, *Hitler doing the will of the Almighty Creator*.

Deists claim that over the years there are some passages in the Bible that have been changed many times. They question the existence of mythological creatures mentioned in the Bible such as ‘satyrs’ and ‘cockatrices.’ However, the Deists also believe that these holy books contain wisdom and should not be discarded but viewed with Reason.

There is no question that historically the Church has been wrong on several occasions. One famous example is the persecution of Galileo Galilei by the Catholic Church. Robert Bellarmine, Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and the foremost Vatican theologian of the seventeenth century, decreed: "But to affirm that the Sun is really fixed in the center of the heavens and that the Earth revolves very swiftly around the Sun is a dangerous thing, not only irritating the theologians and philosophers, but injuring our holy faith and making the sacred scriptures false." On June 22, 1633, Galileo had to recant his beliefs under threat of torture and death.

In an article entitled *The Covenant of Circumcision*, Michael Nekora states: “The subject of circumcision is first mentioned in Genesis 17. God speaks to Abram and tells him he is entering into a covenant relationship with him. He changes Abram’s name to Abraham and promises all the land of Canaan to him and his seed after him for an “everlasting possession.” As a proof or token of this special covenant relationship between God, Abraham, and Abraham’s seed, God required that 99-year-old Abraham be circumcised, and that every male in his house, whether a member of the family or a slave, also be circumcised. From that point forward all who entered Abraham’s family, or that of his children, or his children’s children, forever were to follow this ceremony showing that they were a part of this covenant arrangement. The procedure was not optional: To quote the Bible, “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:14). Ishmael was thirteen years old when he and his father were circumcised. Because of this, Arabs who trace their lineage to Abraham through Ishmael still circumcise their males at age thirteen. However, God said from that point forward, circumcision was to occur when a male was eight days old. Thus when Isaac was born a year later, he was circumcised on the eighth day.” In Exodus 4:24 we read, “And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. 25. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. 26. So he let him go.”

In recent times medical science has taken an opposing stance and is in opposition to male and female circumcision. "Doctors Opposing Circumcision is an organization of physicians, and others who are opposed to non-therapeutic neonatal circumcision. D.O.C. has members in 50 States, 12 Canadian Provinces and Territories, and in nations on six continents. These doctors recognize that no one has the right to forcibly remove sexual body parts from another individual. They also believe that doctors should have no role in this painful, unnecessary procedure inflicted on the newborn." We read in the 'Case Against Circumcision' by Paul M. Fleiss, MD - "Circumcision started in America during the masturbation hysteria of the Victorian Era, when a few American doctors circumcised boys to punish them for masturbating. ... Evolution has determined that mammals' genitals should be sheathed in protective, responsive, multipurpose foreskin. In females, it protects the glans of the clitoris; in males it protects the glans of the penis. Thus, the foreskin is an essential part of human anatomy."

The Deists believe that the books that are said to have come from God, such as the Bible, the Koran or the Gita, were written down by man and should be viewed as such. "Since humans make mistakes, the books are errant and contain contradictions and are not the "word of God'." Those who argue the opposing side claim that the sacred books are divinely inspired. Still, it is highly unlikely that the traditionally relayed spoken word over many centuries could retain its original meaning. Consider the process in the "whispering game" in which children, sitting in a row, would relay a word to each other in succession, in a long line, and discover that by the time the word had reached the last person the meaning had been completely altered.

A case could be made that those who wrote down the sacred books must have belonged to the male species of the human race. They must have incorporated their own anti-woman prejudices into the texts they were writing down. We read in Genesis that God thought of creating woman only as an afterthought; woman was made only because man needed a companion. God did not think of creating woman until he had created the gardens and the rivers and "every beast of the field and every fowl of the air." Besides, woman was created in the most undignified manner. "And the Rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." (Genesis 3:22). Woman is then debased and disgraced for conniving with the serpent.

Confucius said: "One hundred girls are not worth as much as one boy." We find negative statements about the position of women in almost every sacred book. There are derogatory statements against women in many sections of the Hadith. In Islam the Hadith collections are regarded as important tools for determining the Sunnah, or Muslim way of life. They were compiled by many including:

Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), Abu Daud (d. 888), Tirmithi (d. 892) Ibn Maja (d. 886) and Al-Nas'i (d. 915). All of these authors contributed their work more than 200 years after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. How can we be sure that the text they wrote down was the Prophet's words exactly? Some of the statements in the Hadith claim that the Prophet Muhammad ordered the burning of women alive and that he considered two women to be the equivalent of one man. As an aside, there are those who claim that Christian dogmas originated from St. Paul and not from Jesus.

Dr. Iniyen Elango speaks of the evil practices of Hinduism which are still prevalent in many parts of India: "Burning brides for dowry, killing people for caste bigotry, sanctioning inequality and segregation in the name of God, preventing widows from marrying, burning widows in the funeral pyre of their husbands, allowing slavery of Dalits and tribals in the form of bonded labor, female infanticide, forcing women into prostitution at temples in the name of serving God (Devadasis)." Jogini are women forced into prostitution by a religious custom known as *devadasi* in India. Young girls are married to a local deity and afterwards it becomes their religious duty to provide sexual favors to the local men, usually those of the higher castes.

'The Laws of Manu', one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to teach, has the following instruction to an Orthodox Hindu wife: "A woman is never to be independent. She must not attempt to free herself from her father, husband, or sons. Leaving them, she would make both her own and her husband's families contemptible."

This sounds very similar to the justification of honor killings, the type of murder I witnessed personally in Baghdad in 1957. Syed Kamran Mirza in an article entitled "Honor Killing": Is it Islamic? States - "Honor killing is the bone chilling horrific cruelty committed by the family members - father, mother, brothers, and brother-in-laws, even in some cases own sisters also. In this terrible episode the victim is always the daughter, sister or other blood related young women who get killed. Family honor is one of the core values of Arab society. Justification for the killing would be anything from speaking with an unrelated man, to rumored pre-marital loss of virginity. The killers mainly defend their act of murder by referring to the Koran and Islam."

It is not the fault of religions that in the name of religion so much evil has been and is being perpetrated against humanity. The fault is with those who interpret the written words and edit them to suit their own ends and benefit from that process.