

No religion but mine: Reflections on contingency

Timothy Scott, Bendigo, 2011

‘If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).’ (*Yusufali* 3:85)

At the heart of each religion, if it is truly such, is the submission of one’s self to God. Anyone who claims a religion but is not willing to submit to God—consciously or not—does not know that religion and is thus “lost.” This goes for those who claim Islam by their mouth but are not willing to submit to Allah in the heart; in these cases *islām* (submission) is but an empty word. Submission is all; this is the easiest and the hardest thing in the world. Now this can be virtual, as in the beginning of the journey, or realised, as at the time of Return. Virtual submission may begin with the spoken intention but it is struck dead if one “desires” in the heart “a religion other than submission (*islām*).”



‘Those who deny Allah and His messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: “We believe in some but reject others”: And (those who) wish to take a course midway, They are in truth (equally) unbelievers; and we have prepared for unbelievers a humiliating punishment.’ (*Yusufali* 4:150-151)

Those who deny Allah and His messengers. Here we find those who reject God and His Messengers: that is to say, unbelievers.

Those who wish to separate Allah from His messengers. Here we find those who wish to separate God from His Revelations and holy messengers, which is to say, from all authority and guarantee. In their desire to find a “higher power” freed from the strictures of religion they reject the protective framework of orthodoxy and tradition only to create idols. Some claim God as their own but reject His Revelations

and holy messengers, which is simply to say that the god they claim is of their own making

Those who wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: “We believe in some but reject others.” Here we find those who say: ‘We believe in some but reject others,’ but how could God be with one and not another, for ‘Wherever you turn, there is the face of God.’ As Ibn al-‘Arabi says in the *Fusus* (chapter on Noah): ‘the reality never withdraws from the forms of the cosmos in any fundamental sense ... all things are the “tongues” of Reality’. Now this means that those who believe in some but reject others, do not understand the nature of the one Reality, so that their belief in their “some” cannot in fact be a belief in the God to Whom that religion leads, rather it is a god of their making in which they believe; thus they are “unbelievers” in the sense that they do not believe in the one Reality.

In his book, *Peaks and Lamas*, Marco Pallis recalls his first meetings with some Buddhist lamas who remarked that one could not convert to Buddhism. Initially, Pallis took this to indicate an exclusivist nature in Buddhism. However the lamas explained that what they meant by this was that if someone took Buddhism to contain a truth that their own religion did not, then they obviously did not understand either their own religion, nor Buddhism for that matter, and that any “conversion” would be in name only, as not understanding Buddhism they could not convert to it in any real sense. This does not mean that one can not “convert” from one religion to another in light of the recognition of one’s spiritual predisposition, as in fact Pallis “converted” from Christianity to Buddhism. But it does mean precisely that one will have to start at the “beginning” of the religion, which is the same as saying that one will have to start at the beginning of one’s life again.

Those who wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: “We believe in some but reject others.” On the one hand, one may believe that their religion is the only path left to man and that all other religions are “wrong,” so to speak; this, in itself, is a perfectly acceptable, and in many cases necessary, attitude to have. This, is what Frithjof Schuon refers to as the “relative Absolute” in religions. On the other hand, one may recognize the “transcendental unity of religions,” which is to believe in the veracity of all the revealed religions, while living one. But one cannot “believe in some but reject others” for this implies three misjudgements. Firstly, an error in being unable to recognize the

Messengers of God; for the truth of the Messenger is the truth of God, and if one says I accept this messenger but not this messenger then it can only be because they, in their ego, prefer one vessel to the other, being unable to taste the water which is the same in both. Secondly, an error of metaphysical understanding which means one does not know the nature of religion, and thus they are an “unbeliever.” Thirdly, and similar to our first point, it involves a prejudice or even a bigotry that resides in the believer and not the religion, which is thus a manifestation of ego—‘Judge not lest ye be judged.’ Of course this is not to speak of the need for legitimate discrimination, but here it would be a question of Revelation, orthodoxy, adherence to metaphysical principles, and the measure of the intellect.

And (those who) wish to take a course midway. Here we find many. There are those who Dante says, ‘know not day or night’ (Inferno 3.29)—‘To God no loyalty, on themselves intent’ (Inferno 3:39); they do not deny God, but neither do they believe—for them God is meaningless. Then there are those who feel that they have reached great insight because they recognise that there is truth in each religion; but here they fall prey to either of two snares. For some, their pride leads them to think that this means that they have themselves transcended religions or that theirs is an *uber*-religion; for others, their weakness leads them to endlessly being drawn from the one religion to the next: endlessly condemned to “a course midway”; these people recognise God and His messengers but do not have the self awareness nor courage to “reject” all other religions in following one.