

# THE REAL ZOROASTRIAN DILEMMA<sup>1</sup>

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If the sheer antiquity of a religion can impart a sense of identity to a community in spite of the many disruptive conditions of modern urban life, then Zoroastrians — in India, Iran and around the world — may take pride in that they can claim to belong to a tradition founded upon a revelation older than that of any other living faith, stretching back to Zoroaster in the 2nd millennium B.C. Iran, which is still seen as the 'homeland' of the tradition, has long been at the junction of imperial, cultural and mercantile exchanges. In the religious domain also one would expect syncretization and the hybrid to be the norm, continuous tradition to be impossible. The traumas of repeated invasions and conquests which Greeks, Arabs, Mongols and, latterly, Europeans imposed on the Iranian people would surely have destroyed any continuous tradition from ancient Iran, just as they decimated texts, temples and populations, one might have thought. However, there is ample evidence to show that Zoroastrian doctrines, rituals, observances, ethics and eschatology are genuinely ancient and derive from the prophet Zoroaster himself and his world.<sup>2</sup>

A historical continuity can thus be traced extending back over three thousand years; yet this fact may remain merely theoretical if the great majority of modern Zoroastrians no longer experience that continuity and if they do not wish to maintain it. The Zoroastrian identity, in India particularly, is still very distinctive, for the Parsis are, as Paul Axelrod found, an exclusive community who have a strong self-image, holding, as they do, a position outside the caste system: "On the one hand, they see themselves as somehow nobler than other Indians; on the other, they recognize that their minority status requires a good deal of tolerance, respect, and even diplomacy" (162).

Although Zoroastrians are now one of the world's smallest religious communities, with only ca. 130,000 members in all, their interpretations of the religion vary enormously. Since the last century, many Zoroastrians have sought to find an "original" Zoroastrianism which they can translate into modern terms to answer contemporary needs — an endeavour in which they have often felt free to purge the religion, so to speak, of what they see as useless archaism and medieval accretion. Western scholarly interest in translating all available texts has had the effect of publicising traditional teachings which have their place in the theological context but which appear to create difficulties for the reformist, who would have a rational, practical religion for now and the future.

One such difficulty is the dualism of Zoroastrian theology. This is not a controversial matter of the magnitude of the major issue on which the worldwide Zoroastrian community is now divided, namely, conversion (whether or not to allow non-Zoroastrians formally to enter the faith and community). For two principal reasons, however, this latter issue has not been taken as the subject of this paper, although superficially it might seem to be more relevant to the Congress theme of "Religion and Identity". First, the conversion issue is very complex and is not compatible with a brief paper, lacking as we do a full historical/sociological study of the issue. Second, the question of dualism is possibly more representative of the uncertainty manifested in the traditionalist-reformist split in the community: it discloses the factors which

have caused the contemporary anxiety and may be seen as a litmus test of acceptance or rejection of the traditional teachings of Zoroastrianism and the boundaries of Zoroastrian identity.

The most ancient source for the religion is the prophet Zoroaster's own words recorded in the *Gāthās*, composed in the Gāthic Avestan language, dated late second millennium B.C. Although other, later texts are theologically more explicit, because they were written to be doctrinally definitive, it is to the sublime, yet often cryptic, verses of the *Gāthās* that the religious practitioner and enquiring scholar turn to establish the first principles of Zoroastrianism. As prophetic revelation, the *Gāthās* do not disappoint, for they are at once resounding, numinous utterances, and also veiled, symbolic, even obscure. Zoroaster's teaching is perfectly clear in depicting his vision of God, Ahura Mazda, and his message is couched in dialogue with, and praise and exhortation of, the one, good God. Zoroastrianism has long been regarded by "outsiders" as "dualistic",<sup>3</sup> and so enquirers have tried to establish finally from the *Gāthās* alone whether Zoroaster taught that there are two first principles in the universe or just one. Opinion among modern Zoroastrians is divided, with the ranks of reformists and traditionalists in confusion, and today the majority are, to a greater or lesser extent, embarrassed by the description "dualist" and shun it.<sup>4</sup>

It is necessary to venture into the history of Iranian religious ideas to understand what has happened to the doctrine in the modern period. We may identify three reasons for the rejection of traditional doctrine in sections of the modern community: (1) the increase of education among the laity, and their business success in urban Bombay which gave them (a) an independence from the traditional community identity and (b) access to religious doctrine now in the form of printed texts, which access formerly had been restricted to priests (they had been guardians of an oral tradition which was regarded as superior to written texts); (2) 19th century Christian missionary activity which forced Parsis into a defensive position so that they were constrained to explain and justify their faith in the terms used by the aggressor, i.e., a "biblical" style of exegesis in which it is expected that doctrines can be established as metaphysical propositions derived from the sacred text. The sacred text is viewed as the "word of God", therefore self-existent and free from the contextuality of history and the religious tradition of devotion, observance and learning which has enshrined and transmitted the "sacred word"; and (3) the existence of a precedent for the homogenization of Zoroastrian dualism into a vague monotheism in the Zurvanite heresy. This had originated in Achaemenian times (early 4th century B.C.) as a result of influence from Near Eastern religions which tended towards monism and fatalism.<sup>5</sup> Most significantly the development of this heresy "can be seen as being ... linked to an Iranian response to the intellectually exciting scientific advances made by Babylonian astronomers in the fifth century B.C." (Boyce 1982:241).

In relation to (1)(a) above it may be suggested that the structure of Zoroastrian society had changed very radically in the 19th century and religious changes may be seen as merely symptomatic of those structural changes. It is worthwhile pausing to reflect on Max Weber's brief comments on the nature of Zoroastrian religion which he saw as exceptional in devolving on the ideal of the peasant:

Only rarely does the peasantry serve as the carrier of any other sort of religion than their original magic. Yet the prophecy of Zoroaster apparently appealed to the (relative) rationalism of peasants who, having learned to work in an orderly fashion and to raise cattle, were struggling against the orgiastic religion of the false prophets, which entailed the torture of animals ... In the religion of the Parsees, only the cultivated soil was regarded as pure from the magical point of view, and therefore only agriculture was absolutely pleasing

to God. Consequently, even after the pattern of the religion established by the original prophecy had undergone considerable transformations as a result of its adaptations to the needs of everyday life, it retained a distinctive agrarian pattern, and consequently a characteristically anti-urban tendency in its doctrines of social ethics. (1978:470)

Though such an ideal may be true for a bygone age and may be the root of the distinctive work ethic of Zoroastrianism which has been compared with Weber's Protestant variety,<sup>6</sup> Weber does not acknowledge the effects urbanization and westernization have had upon the Zoroastrian community in the last century. He does, however, explain that, generally, in contrast to the religious propensities of peasantry and nobility, there is, with the rise of a petty bourgeoisie and artisan class, a definite tendency towards congregational religion, and an increase in the diversity of religious attitudes. The new social identity gives rise to a new religious perspective: "In the Occident particularly, the congregational type of religion has been intimately connected with the urban middle classes of both the upper and lower levels. This was a natural consequence of the relative recession in the importance of blood groupings, particularly of the clan, within the occidental city. The urban dweller finds a substitute for blood groupings in both occupational organizations, which in the Occident as everywhere had a cultic significance, although no longer associated with taboos, and in freely created religious associations" (1978:482). Such a shift from agrarian based traditionalist identity to a congregational religious propensity and diversification in the urban environment is clearly an oversimplification of the complex reality, and it merely remains frustrating to us that Weber gave no fuller consideration to Parsi society. In Axelrod's essay on Parsi self-image and the rivalry between priestly and lay identities, the author concludes: "If the Parsis 'internal' charter for their distinctiveness as a community is provided by their religion, it is marked 'externally' primarily by social and economic considerations" (164). These latter are as complex as those of any modern community.

In the remainder of this paper the two other reasons given above will be examined in relation to the history and nature of the traditional identity. The combined effect of Christian missionary influence and Western scholarly emphasis on text and *urtext* in the 19th century brought about an attempt to fathom the *Gāthās* as metaphysics, without reference to the general religious context of Zoroaster's revelation, his *Weltanschauung*, and the long tradition which is descended from him. As long ago as 1913, J.H. Moulton pointed out: "There is nothing to prove that Zarathushtra wasted on metaphysics time that he needed for practical teaching" (133). Only direct quotation of a key passage in the *Gāthās* (*Yasna* 30.3-6), will serve to present the foundations of thought which are the subject of the rest of this discussion. Here, in archaic, poetic language, which is evocative rather than speculative in purpose, the prophet warns man of the all-important choice and responsibility:

3. Yes, there are two fundamental spirits, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two: the good and the bad. And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen, not the maleficent.

4. Furthermore, when these two spirits first came together, they created life and death, and how, at the end, the worse existence shall be for the deceitful but the best thinking for the truthful person.

5. Of these two spirits, the deceitful one chose to bring to realization the worst things. (But) the very virtuous spirit, who is clothed in the hardest stones, chose the truth; and (so shall those) who shall satisfy the Wise Lord continuously with true actions.

6. The gods did not at all choose correctly between these two, since the deceptive one approached them as they were deliberating. Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury with which they have afflicted the world and mankind (translated S. Insler:33).<sup>7</sup>

These are the two spirits, the very virtuous spirit and the deceitful spirit, who are personifications of Ahurā Mazda (Pahlavi Ohrmazd), “the Lord of Wisdom”, and Angra Mainyu (Pahlavi Ahreman) “the Hostile Spirit”. In the fully developed tradition of exegesis and translation (*zand*) of Avestan and Pahlavi scriptures the structure of religious dualism is drawn out in doctrine, ethics, ritual and mythology in quite unambiguous terms. This dualistic structure has its origins, in general designs and in many details, in the Avesta and even the *Gāthās*. In brief, the picture of the world as given in the Pahlavi books is as follows: there is one good God, Ohrmazd, who is creator of all the good creation, comprising the blessed immortals (*amahasrands*) and other beings worthy of worship (*yazads*), spirits of the blessed (*frawahrs*) and the seven physical creations (sky, earth, water, plants, beneficent animals, mankind, fire). This created world has been invaded by a hostile, evil spirit, Ahreman, whose will is to destroy everything. He has no physical existence of his own but, with his demonic miscreations, he insinuates himself, parasitically, into the good world, bringing suffering, wrongdoing, injustice and death. Ohrmazd has been always aware of his presence from eternity, and knows that the ultimate banishment of Ahreman can only be effected if he is engaged in battle in this world, in limited time. Man has chosen to help Ohrmazd in this struggle. Zoroaster showed man how to carry out his mission through truth, goodness, worship and praise of Ohrmazd.

Original to the prophet’s message is the doctrine of heaven and hell, emphasizing man’s responsibility for his own personal, as well as societal and cosmic, well-being. Already in the *Gāthās* we see a profound eschatological vision — one which was to be adopted by the Western faiths, particularly Christianity and Islam. Zoroaster’s teaching hinges on the act of choosing, exemplified in the *Gāthic* passage above, and indeed, although his hymns address and invoke God, his appeal is to man to act in accordance with the law of divine truth and cosmic order (Av. *aša*, Ved. *ṛta*), to smite the forces of untruth (Av. *drug*). Zoroaster’s passionate concern is with the realization of his cosmic, social and personal responsibility to uphold *aša*. S. Insler has summed up the distinctiveness of the message as “the extraordinary contribution of Zarathustra in the profound realization that man can both serve and honor God more meaningfully in the enactment of the lordly principles of truth and good thinking among his fellow men than in the awesome reverence founded upon fear and dread” (22). This does not mean that religious commitment and devotion are lacking but that in Zoroastrianism these things are motivated by mankind’s recognition of the beauty of God’s order and truth.

Here we come to an important point that will deliver this paper from merely theological curiosities. The Zoroastrian tradition has been a flowering and development of an original prophetic message in which, by the ascendancy of a priestly class (appropriately, since Zoroaster was himself a priest), the primary modes of expression and perpetuation of religious identity have been theological and liturgical. The originally ethical, dynamic and non-speculative teachings of the prophet were codified and propagated in both priestly forms (doctrine, ritual, purity laws) and popular forms (devotional practice, mythology, legend). To some the assertion that the tradition has been faithful to the prophet’s message seems to be a distortion of truth (since the Pahlavi books abound in genres of writing which are lacking in the *Gāthās*, e.g. philosophy, scholasticism, science, mythology etc.). In fact it is no different from any other religion where tradition has developed and expanded the original prophetic message.

Yet, in a profound respect, this tradition is faithful to Zoroaster's fundamental vision that the world is held in a state of opposition and conflict: life is a struggle because existence is opposed by non-existence, order by chaos, creation by destruction. Only when the perspective of opposition or, as we shall call it, *dialectic*, is established in mind, can the principle of order be distinguished from the chaos which has invaded that order. This dialectical structure is seen to be present throughout the universe, and originates from the ultimate opposition of irreconcilable principles. As the *Gāthās* put it "Yes, I shall speak of the two fundamental spirits of existence, of which the virtuous one would have thus spoken to the evil one: 'Neither our thoughts nor teachings nor intentions, neither our preferences nor words, neither our actions nor conceptions nor our souls are in accord'".<sup>8</sup> Here Zoroaster emphasises that the opposition of good and evil (and thus the act of choosing) is one which obtains at the highest level of reality (i.e. divine). The dialectical structure of this world is a result of the evil spirit having succeeded in corrupting the perfect creation of God. Man, however, is still capable of actively participating in the divine struggle against evil, the maintenance of life and restoration of perfection to the physical world. So far from being caught in the sense of determinism or existential despair inculcated by the dialectics of some modern philosophy, Zoroastrianism is fully optimistic as it aspires to an eventual rehabilitation of the universe through the triumph of wisdom, order and goodness over chaos, destruction and injustice.

In modern times a large number of Zoroastrians believe that the "dualism", as they understand it from what they know of the tradition, is a blatant misrepresentation of the Avestan texts and is a result of malevolent Greeks', Romans', Arabs', and, especially, scholastic Middle Persian priestly theologians' tampering with Scripture. Modern alternative reinterpretations of Zoroastrianism are patently modelled upon Christian, Vedāntic and other theological, even occultist, understandings.<sup>9</sup> It will be suggested here that the need which has been felt for such alternative representations of the religion is symptomatic of a crisis in the religious identity, in fact, another dilemma for the Zoroastrians.

First, to examine the dialectical structure of the traditional identity of Zoroastrianism we turn to an anonymous text from early 10th century A.D. Iran. Now called *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*,<sup>10</sup> the text is largely a compilation, by a priest, of earlier traditional material, for the purposes of reassuring and guiding a community who were then under direct physical and psychological threat from the majority religion, Islam. The text has been regarded as an anthology, and thus as having no central unity, being a miscellany of sixty-five chapters of very unequal length and varied material. However, although it does not reveal the thought of *one* Zoroastrian mind, it may, in its highly traditional content and structure, indeed disclose certain distinctive features of *the* Zoroastrian mind, i.e. of the traditional identity. *The Pahlavi Rivāyat* is a title dubbed on by comparison with later Zoroastrian texts, in New Persian, called *rivāyats* 'communiqués', which were written by Iranian priests to their Indian co-religionists from the 15th century onwards.<sup>11</sup> These later *rivāyats* range over a wide area of life, for the practical ritual observances in respect of maintaining orthodoxy and ritual purity extended very widely. It is a mistake to regard the earlier *Pahlavi Rivāyat* as similar to those texts, however, as the compiler, working in 10th century Muslim Iran was addressing a community who, unlike the later, exiled, Parsi Zoroastrians living in religious freedom in India, were besieged in their own land by the dominant religion. In the earlier text the large number of problems, some perennial, some particular to the time, are characterised as stemming from the fact of worldly existence (Pahl. *gūmezišn*, lit. "mixture") in the state of *gētīg*, i.e. "the world" conceived as the locus of forces of opposition of Ahreman against the creations of Ohrmazd. The dialectical structure

is perceived in all aspects of life, personal, public and spiritual. It may be seen that a common element in this anthology is the fundamental apprehension of the world as a *dialectical process*, and the basic aspiration that religion provides for all circumstances the *resolution* and synthesis. The actualities of life, individual and collective, are regarded as intrinsically good, yet they are besieged by danger of one form or another. The text deals with a large number of these actualities, and each chapter has one or more of the dualities as its theme. In most cases the writer attempts to resolve the problem either explicitly in doctrinal or ritual prescriptions from the orthodox tradition, or more allusively, in legendary narrative, cosmological symbolism or religious mythology. The idea of resolution of a dialectic through human enterprise and, in the widest sense, "cultivation" is in accordance with the grand eschatological vision of *wizānšn* "resolution" of the present state of mixture (*gumēzišn*) of opposites in strife (*peyāragōmandih*). Some examples of these oppositions will suffice to demonstrate the importance of the dialectical approach to the world:

— a house is an abode and refuge, but when evil enters (e.g. death) it becomes a trap: the problem is resolved by ritual observance and purity (ch. 2).

— Trade (and profit) is a wholesome activity, but its opposite, greed (and meanness), poses a problem: this is resolved by the giving of righteous charity, i.e. to a priest (ch. 42.2).

— Sexual relations in marriage are wholesome, but the demonically originating menstrual processes of woman are heavily polluting: the problem is resolved by a purity code and by the procreation of children — a productive and doubly meritorious act, because it stops menstruation (ch.43).

— Food is essential and life-giving, but can be ritually polluted so that it is a poison: resolved by strict regulations (ch. 2).

— The Good Religion (Zoroastrianism) is opposed by Evil Religion, and contamination and attrition from contact with the latter are difficult to avoid: *xwēdōdah* "next of kin marriage" minimises such contact (ch.8) as does abstaining from trade with outsiders (ch.30).

— Beneficent animals are considered holy, but men eat their meat: righteousness resolves the problem, for the wicked suffer punishment for the sins of the animal they eat, as well as their own (ch.14).

The resolutions which are provided in nearly all cases are not merely descriptions of practices and rites, nor, importantly, are they theological, pertaining to the nature of God, his grace and action in the world. They are rather normative religious ideals and dramatizations of doctrine, for the purpose of the text is to persuade the reader to apply the normative resolutions to the problems posed. In this text the dominant resolutions (in order of their frequency of occurrence) are righteousness, practical observance, retribution and reward, wisdom, eschatological optimism. In all of these it is clear that emphasis is placed upon human endeavour to win the harmony that is promised in the eschatological vision.

The Zoroastrian, priest and laymen, is exhorted to smite evil by ordering the world through ritual action and virtuous behaviour, and by establishing the boundaries of self and community so that all alien elements (e.g. irreligion, hostile forces and wickedness) are excluded. This ethic is derived from the fundamental assumption that man and creation are intrinsically good, because they derive solely from the good Creator. Thus the dialectical structure (what is seen as theological dualism) is essential in order to

a) define the goals of the religion,

- b) organise the religious endeavour in a hierarchy of values, and
- c) objectify the nature and source of imperfection and disorder which abound in this world.

For example, abhorrence of contact with Muslims is an anxiety which pervades much of this text; it is dramatized not only in terms of the opposition, Good Religion/ Evil Religion, but in many others also e.g. marriage/homosexuality, good divinities/demons, Ohrmazd/Ahremen, beneficent animals/noxious creatures, fire/the extinguishing, pollution of fire, etc. Islamic oppression only compounded the difficulties of a world already under attack from evil. The resolutions of the problems fall roughly into two types 1) of righteousness (purity) and 2) of eschatological hope. Both put the evils of the day into a greater perspective and thus urge that triumph over mundane, ordinary problems is symbolic of, and will result in, "victory", i.e. in the revitalization of tradition, the consolidation of the boundaries of Zoroastrian identity and eventually the attainment of *Frašegird*, the final rehabilitation of the world and resurrection of the dead. Righteousness is the most effective means of resolving conflict, whether it is enacted liturgically or in practical moral and spiritual virtue; for righteousness, and other resolutions, serve to *seal off the community* from outside influence and thus to minimize the effects of oppression and scarcity. Eschatological hope is also fundamental as a socially cohesive ideal, and is expressed both explicitly in soteriology and apocalyptic, but also frequently as a general attitude.<sup>12</sup>

In 10th century Iran, Zoroastrianism was suffering two problems which are still with the Parsi community: conversion to other religions (then to Islam, now to materialism, agnosticism, and other faiths), and, second, attrition and impoverishment of the priesthood. From a brief look at an old, traditional text we see the dialectical structure of Zoroastrian religious apprehension is as appropriate for the modern problems as it was in the past. It derives not from the specific social-historical situation of Sassanian or early Islamic Iran but rather from an original Zoroastrian religious attitude towards the state of worldly existence and the nature and integrity of human endeavour.<sup>13</sup>

Presented in its full theological form Zoroastrianism contrasts dramatically with other religions. Such a comparison of religions originated not in the university but from the Christian missionary presence among the Bombay Parsis from the early 19th century. The most articulate voice to preach was the Church of Scotland missionary John Wilson, who had unfortunately discerned from his reading of classical and oriental texts not the orthodox version of Zoroastrianism, but rather the Zurvanite heresy. This latter doctrine perverted the dialectically structured religious optimism of Zoroastrianism into a fatalistic ditheism of Ohrmazd the good god and Ahremen the evil god,<sup>14</sup> both born of a high god Zurvan, "time". Wilson was, presumably, unaware that his attacks on Zoroastrianism in fact applied to a heresy which had been extirpated from text and tradition by the 9th century A.D. However, Wilson failed utterly to realise the hope to convert all the Parsis (expressed in the introduction to his notorious polemical work),<sup>15</sup> for the Parsis were not willing to foresake their community. They were, however, severely shaken by Wilson's onslaught, and the confusion he caused only served to destabilize further the rapidly changing state of Parsi society.<sup>16</sup> For some of the laity the traditional religion had indeed become irrelevant and for lay reformists, such as Dosabhoy Framjee, a Christian style of monotheism, though lacking altogether in rituals, was preferable, for they required a modernized religion compatible with European tastes and notions of science and progress.

The basis for a thoroughgoing rethinking of Zoroastrianism was provided not by such reformists but by another European, the German philologist Martin Haug.

Haug had worked on the difficult Avestan scriptures and in the 1860's took up a position as a university teacher in Poona, and his theories on the religion were, and are still, widely known in India. He rejected all but the *Gāthās* as the authentic teaching of Zoroaster, and provided the reformists "with exactly what they had been seeking, namely, scholarly justification for rejecting everything in the faith which did not accord with nineteenth century enlightenment" (Boyce, 1979:203). He seems also to have been attempting to reconcile the Zoroastrian scriptures with Christian monotheism, yet in so doing he was actually drawing towards the fatalistic monism of the Zurvanite heresy by positing the two spirits as co-equals under a higher omnipotent divinity, thus making evil both a necessary part in a divine plan, and also as originating from the one source.<sup>17</sup> In this twisted form of the religion the dialectical structure of orthodox Zoroastrianism is destroyed, leaving a vague monism interrupted by a crude ditheism. Some modern Christian writers<sup>18</sup> still mistake this for Zoroastrianism.

Such a drift towards an undistinguished monotheism has been reinforced by the influx of ideas from Indian religions. With the 19th century revival of Hinduism and the publication of the classical scriptures such as the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, Parsi savants were attracted by Vedantic philosophy and attempted to interpret their own scriptures accordingly.<sup>19</sup> For Parsis, recourse to the ocean of Indian spirituality and religious philosophy, and to the syncretic approach of Indian teachers may have been taken in response to their increasing exposure to the religiously pluralistic environment of the Indian city, after the walls of identity of their own religious establishment had been ransacked. Theosophists, Vedāntins, Sūfis and other groups could easily absorb the Zoroastrians, for was not Zoroaster another *avatar* of the all-embracing totality of God? Is not Zoroastrianism part of the *sanātana dharma*, "eternal truth", of Hindu teaching? Cannot the supposed dualism simply be a medieval misunderstanding of ancient sublime truth? Such questions strike a very discordant note for most Parsis, just as Parsis do not, generally, identify with Indian culture and values, preferring to look Westwards. Indeed, Zoroastrianism has more in common with traditional Judaism and Christianity than with Hinduism or Buddhism.

In concluding we would reflect upon the role of historians of religions as they seek to assemble the patterns of tradition and development, mindful that a modern community has a vital need to reinterpret the past for the future. As has been said before, the variety of reinterpretations of Zoroastrianism is enormous as the traditional identity has fragmented. In this case, however, academics and theologians have not been mere bystanders, for as Boyce puts it "the blame for the confusion lies largely with the West, and the ruthless self-confidence of nineteenth century scholars and missionaries" (1979:225). The identity crisis in the community in the late 20th century is perhaps worsening, as Zoroastrians have now been geographically fragmented across the world to the centres of business and commerce.

In California or London, Sydney or Singapore, their work ethic, sense of history and racial identity are still sufficient to keep the Zoroastrians in search of what they have only recently lost. It is here tentatively suggested that the suppression of the dualistic structure and other elements of the religion, which are seen as archaic and obsolete, is symptomatic of a form of self-suppression. Both in British and independent India, in post-revolutionary Iran, and now abroad in Western countries, Zoroastrians are constrained to accept more and more the identity of the host culture and to suppress their own identity. When, in the past, the Zoroastrians were strongly self-possessed and self-contained (for different reasons in Iran and India) they maintained their identity not *in spite* of the external world being alien but *because* it was alien — for such was, as we have seen from a traditional source, their dialectical structure of thought: life is struggle, religion is resolution.



Hans Mol's four mechanisms of the sacralization process were working at full power it would seem, only a century and a half ago in the Zoroastrian community. The mechanism of objectification he describes (Mol: 202 ff.) was fully operative in the projection of a dualism of transcendental forces (not to mention the objectification of space as two worlds — physical and spiritual — and of time as a vivid, linear eschatological plan). The mechanisms of commitment (216 ff.) and ritual (233 ff.) were efficient and exact, especially in the elaborate dramas of sacrifice and liturgy and in the rigorous purity code. Lastly, the mechanism of myth (246 ff.), whose power is perhaps least capable of objective analysis, was abundant in texts, oral traditions and throughout all elements of the religious life. The deterioration of such mechanisms would seem to be attributable to two main causes:

- 1) the scientific-rational worldview, which both relativizes objectification, and debunks (or psychologizes) myth, theology and religious symbolism
- 2) the laicization of the religion and lowering of the status of the priesthood which has brought the decline of both commitment and ritual.

It is likely that 2) is a direct effect of 1). As Mol wams, however, sacralization processes do not grind to a halt, for though they may be interrupted and prevented from maturing "they appear to be as viable as ever" (7).

The social problems and community strife over controversial issues such as intermarriage, conversion and rituals are not to be solved merely by getting the doctrinal theology right. Nevertheless, perhaps the theology is symbolic of attitudes, priorities and above all solidarity (or the lack of it) in the community. Zoroastrians face what is after all the original dilemma announced by their prophet: to choose between a decision for existence, identity and truth or a decision for oblivion — yet there is no agreement on which decision leads where.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful for the opportunity to present this paper to the I.A.H.R. Congress; the subject requires more introduction than space allowed, and I therefore apologize for obscurities which remain.
2. This has been most fully demonstrated by Mary Boyce, who has published two volumes (1975, 1982) to date of her *History of Zoroastrianism*. The first volume is particularly useful for the comparative religionist, as it includes a detailed account of Zoroastrian religious thought. This history has already superseded previous standard works on the subject (e.g. Zaehner, 1961; Duchesne-Guillemin, 1962). Valuable for the general reader is her one-volume history, 1979. See 1977 for bibliography of articles by Boyce.
3. Plutarch gives a summary of the dualistic teachings of Zoroaster the Magus in what is perhaps the most important of all fragments on Zoroastrianism extant from Greek antiquity, *De Iside et Osiride* 45-47, 369D-370D; this, and many other sources from the ancient world on Zoroastrianism, is given in Bidez & Cumont, II.
4. The study of Zoroastrianism was for a long time impeded by theological assumptions of western scholars. The following is an example: "... this idea of the coexistence of the two eternal principles, distinct from each other, is more repugnant to the human mind than polytheism itself. Sooner or later the mind will push further its theories in order to repose in an original unity of principles" (Casartelli 3-5). Max Weber too suggests an explanation for the demise of dualism which, surprisingly, is frankly theological: "Zoroastrianism was the prophetic religiousness which realized this conception (dualism) most consistently ... It involved renouncing the omnipotence of a god whose power was indeed limited by the existence of a great antagonist. The contemporary followers (the Parsees) have actually given up this belief because they could not endure this limitation of divine power" (1948:358).
5. On Zurvanism see Boyce, 1982:231-242; Zaehner, 1955 is monumental but eccentric and unreliable.

6. See especially Kennedy.
7. For a discussion of this passage and on Zoroaster's thought generally, see Boyce, 1975:192-4; chs.8 and 9.
8. Yasna 45.2; transl. Insler:75.
9. For a discussion of reinterpretations of dualism see Williams, 1985.
10. This is the subject of an unpublished PhD. dissertation, Williams, 1984.
11. Text (Unvala; transl. Dhabhar.
12. E.g. a work ethic in which accumulation is seen as preferable to consumption; see Kennedy: 15f.
13. Cf. the social psychologist John J. Ray's findings on Parsi behaviour and economic enterprise, and his conclusion that "Zoroastrianism . . . is very strongly concerned with the struggle between the forces of light and darkness. That an acceptance of the need for struggle could lead to economic enterprise is therefore easy to see" (178).
14. Ahreman is never considered a god in traditional orthodoxy.
15. "The Parsi community is daily rising in intelligence and enterprise, and . . . we cannot but look forward for its ultimate, and probably speedy, approach to God through Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (18).
16. On events in this period affecting the community in India and Iran see Boyce, 1979: ch.13.
17. Haug:302-4.
18. E.g., Küng: 428; Hick:25.
19. A notable example is Taraporewala, whose work reflects Indian influence even in the title, reminiscent as it is of Kṛṣṇa's own "Divine Song".

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See under Williams, Alan (above)