

THE NEO-COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

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We are all familiar with the story of Copernicus and his revolutionary sixteenth century theory of a heliocentric solar system. Prior to the publication of his *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*) in 1543, everyone living in the world believed in the geocentric astronomical theory, that all the planetary bodies seen in the sky revolved, not around the Sun, but around the earth.

When Copernicus showed astronomical evidence that all the planets, including the earth, actually revolve around the Sun, few were able to believe it. Centuries of religiously based tradition were not easily overturned, and people were bitterly reluctant to give up their habitual beliefs. In fact, the heliocentric system became accepted only after the passage of many years, not because thousands of people read Copernicus' work, but because the new vision of the solar system became acknowledged as valid throughout the scientific community and then eventually filtered down as established fact to the lay religious populace.

Today, the people of the world are in an historical period similar to that which preceded the Copernican revolution. Currently, throughout the world, the people of all the many nations hold fast to their long-held belief in their own regional religious traditions in which one or another historical person is considered to be an icon of that religious tradition, represented as a divine prophet, messenger or progeny of God. But I believe that we are in the latter stages of that prolonged historical period in which the people strongly believe in their multiple regionally based religious mythologies. What is needed now is *a revolution in thought* similar to the scientific revolution that followed the revelations of Copernicus, but this time *a spiritual revolution* that would establish a universally accurate empirical theory embracing and applying to *every* religious tradition, just as Copernicus' heliocentric theory included and applied to every planet.

Enter the evidence of the seers, the mystics—men and women of every spiritual or religious tradition throughout the centuries—who report having experienced a common subjective phenomenon which they describe as “a

union of the soul with God.” The empirical evidence, accumulated over more than thirty centuries, clearly shows that, not only those who are religious icons, but many ordinary people also, have purportedly experienced intimate contact with their ultimate Source and have told of that experience in various degrees of detail. In nearly every instance of such ‘mystical’ experience or vision, several common features are noted:

1. Mystical experience reveals to the one experiencing it that the universal Reality is an integrated Mind-born continuum of Consciousness in which all beings exist, and whose identity is both eternal (as the One Mind) and transient (as the phenomenal universe containing individual objects and individual embodied souls). The fact that all individual souls are contained in and consist of that all-inclusive continuum of Consciousness ensures the consciousness of each individual soul and its interconnection to the entire continuum as well as to its Source. Each individual soul is therefore as capable as any other of being graciously uplifted to an experience of union with the Divine Source (referred to by Jesus as “the Father”).

2. That unitive experience, which appears to be divinely initiated and facilitated, is a transient one, but while that experience lasts, the individual soul experiencing that “union” is absorbed in and made “one with” the One Mind, knowing itself no longer as an individual soul, but as the One Mind in whom all is contained. It is reported that in that experience of “union,” the duality of “I” and “Thou,” of soul and Father, no longer exists, and the experiencer perceives and knows ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me. I and the Father are one.’

3. Also, in that experience of “union” or “unity,” the dualities such as ‘life’ and ‘death,’ ‘time’ and ‘space,’ ‘mind’ and ‘body,’ no longer exist; nor do the dualities normally framed in the individual human mind, such as ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ ‘love’ and ‘hatred,’ ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly,’ ‘happy’ and ‘sad,’ etc. These dualities are merely conceptual or emotional and are exclusive to the individual ego/mind in which they exist. With the vanishing of the ego (the sense of an individual ‘I’), those opposites are gone; the eternal One is alone and is experienced as one’s only Self.

The fact that over the centuries multiple individuals have experienced this mystical “union” with their eternal Source strongly suggests that the early stories portraying those who experienced that “union” as divinely appointed ‘saviors,’ ‘messengers,’ or ‘messiahs’ are simply examples of the zealous

misinterpretation of the unitive mystical experiences that occurred in various individuals in the past. Such misinterpretations commonly occur in societies of people who are ignorant of the perennial occurrence of the unitive spiritual experience—societies such as those existing in the time of Jesus¹ or al-Hallaj, or today, for example.

If, in accordance with God's will, such a modern Copernicus was to appear and provide the explanation to the people that the region's favorite prophet, messenger, or progeny of God was in fact simply someone who had a profound mystical experience, momentarily experiencing his oneness with God, and that such mystical experiences are a regular feature of God's activity in rewarding pure souls, might not such an explanation provide a meaningful alternative to the diverse religious narratives existing today?

Such a hypothetical Copernicus might well support his narrative with the overwhelming experiential evidence provided by the recorded testimonials of the mystics. He might even issue a *History of Mysticism*² to show the recurrence throughout the ages of mystical experience along with the unanimous testimonials of the many mystics of all religious traditions. In this way, he could formulate a convincing historical narrative and initiate a basis for a lasting revolution in the spiritual understanding of all the peoples of the earth.

It would also be helpful if that modern Copernicus were himself a mystic.³ That way he would have personal experiential knowledge of his subject, and he would thereby possess the requisite understanding and passion of certainty required to convince the public of the truth of his observations. A universal revolution in spiritual understanding would not develop immediately, however. As in the case of the 16th century revolution, it would require an initial cadre of credible advocates, and, even so, the revolution would likely spread only slowly at first.

But, in time, as the old die-hard partisans of multiple regional religious traditions eventually died off, the many well-known occurrences of mystical experience throughout the ages would become acknowledged, and the universal capability of all people to experience such mystical vision would gradually become universally accepted. We may even dare to hope that, with the elimination of multiple false religious traditions, bigotry as we now know it would disappear from this world, and all people would at last come to know the joy of the Eternal in their own lives.

And that, of course, is the Divine objective to be attained. Mystical experience shows to the recipient the truth that we all exist in God, that we are all evolving within God, and that our very own nature is God. God is infinite Existence, Consciousness, Freedom and Bliss; and to know Him as our eternal Self is to partake of that nature and to share in His gifts. To know God is to know a security, contentment, imperturbability, intelligence and serenity that you never dreamed was possible for you. Having known God as your own divine Self, you will urgently wish that divine happiness for everyone, and you will sing His name ever in your heart.

REFERENCES:

1. See Swami Abhayananda, "Enlightened Christianity: The Story of Jesus, The Mystic." This is an article specifically designed for the Christians among us. It is available in PDF format as a free download at www.themysticsvision.com.
2. See Swami Abhayananda, *History of Mysticism*, Atma Books, Fallsburg, N.Y., 1987. This book introduces the reader to the Great Mystical Tradition and the brilliant mystics who have comprised its ranks from ancient times to the present. It is available in PDF format as a free download at www.themysticsvision.com.
3. See Swami Abhayananda, *The Supreme Self*, Atma Books, Fallsburg, N.Y., 1984. This is an autobiographical work, containing my own mystical experience, written as it occurred. This book is available in PDF format as a free download at www.themysticsvision.com.

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