

The History Of Exalted Figures

February 8, 2020 Category: Religion

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Let's define a panjandrum as a charismatic leader who has amassed a cult following, and employed demagoguery as a tool for ensuring sycophancy. In assaying the occurrence of panjandra throughout history, in different cultures around the world, it is important to recognize the ubiquity of the phenomena.

It is not difficult to find illustrations of the phenomenon today. Sometimes circulated in New York City is a pamphlet entitled "Moshiach [Messiah] Is Here". It reads as follows: "The Rebbe, M. Schneerson, King Messiah, is the world-renown spiritual leader of our generation. A proven prophet, his impact on millions of lives and his orchestrating of a worldwide spiritual revolution identify him as the genuine King Messiah. The real Bible clearly indicates that this is so. Bestowed with eternal life, the [spirit of] Rebbe King Messiah resides at his headquarters [in Brooklyn]."

While the late Menachem Mendel Schneerson was reluctant to take on the mantle of Prophet, his Lubavitch followers insist that he was the Abrahamic Messiah...even as he himself often downplayed the claim. In hearing of this, one can't help but wonder: What's going on here? More to the point: What, exactly, was Schneerson doing? I hope to show that he wasn't doing anything that hundreds of men (and a few women) hadn't done before him.

To illustrate the point, we might begin with one of the best-known instances of the phenomenon: Islam's "Khatam an-Nabiyyin" [Seal of the Prophets]. According to Mohammedan legend: In 610 A.D., a 40-year old man from the Quraysh tribe in Mecca decided to visit a cave in a nearby rocky hill (dubbed "Hira") to meditate. Later, this Bedouin (alternately referred to as "H-M-D" / "Mu-H-M-D" and "Bashir" / "Mu-Bashir") claimed that the Abrahamic deity had spoken to him—via a celestial emissary named "Jibreel" (the arch-angel, Gabriel). Over the course of the following 23 years, the angel proceeded to deliver (in strategically-timed installments) the final revelation to this man in private...at times and places in which nobody else could hear or see.

A prudent inquiry is: What separated this Hijazi merchant from the countless other men during that era who had made the same claim ("God chose ME to convey his last message to mankind")? The short answer: Nothing...except for the fact that, by some fluke of circumstance (like many before him and many after him), the story of Mohammed (as the fabled Bedouin came to be known) managed to "catch on"; and subsequently accrue a substantial following.

In a reminder that history is written by the victors, we might note other aspiring prophets in Arabia at the time: a "nabi" / "rasul" sent to Earth to deliver the Final Revelation. Four of the most notable:

- Saf ibn Sayyad of Yathrib
- Musaylima[h] ibn Habib of Yamama (a.k.a. "Ibn Habib al-Hanifi"; of the Banu Hanifa tribe in Najd {6})
- Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid ibn Nawfal (of the Banu As[s]ad, which was already Abrahamic; and already had its own pilgrimage tradition to the Meccan cube)
- Habbar ibn al-Aswad ibn Ka'b al-Ansi of Najran (a.k.a. "Abhala ibn Ka'b")

The key difference between Mohammed of Mecca and these men: The former was stupendously successful in his campaign; the others eventually failed in theirs.

Incidentally, Mohammed had three of the above claimants executed, thereby eliminating his competition. (Rather than die, Saf ibn Sayyad opted to repent and convert. He was subsequently referred to as “Abdullah ibn Sa’id”.) Also notable was an Arabian prophetess known as Sajah bint al-Harith ibn Suayd (of the Banu Tamim), who ended up allying with Musaylima...and so perished by his side. In the Koran, there are tales of a Midianite prophet named Shu’ayb of Midian / Uz (who may correspond to the Biblical “Jethro”, who also hailed from Midian). There is mention of Saleh of Thamud [the Hijaz] and Hud of Ad [Yemen] as well.

So it came to pass that, by accident of history, one particular person is now known as the “rasul Allah”. But had any of the other contenders triumphed instead of Mohammed, we would now be hearing about THEM rather than about Mohammed. And it is Mohammed, not them, who would have subsequently been tarred as a “false prophet.” That’s how history works. {5}

Suffice to say: Mohammed was neither the first nor the last man to put forth the claim that he was god’s proxy on Earth (or, more generally, the representative of some cosmic super-being). Soon after the death of the “Last Prophet”, an Ali’d imam named Mohammed ibn al-Hanafiyya [ibn Ali] (a.k.a. “Abu’l Qasim”) would claim to be the “mahdi”. And about a century after Mohammed’s ministry, an ambitious Berber named Salih ibn Tarif declared himself to be the NEW “Last Prophet” (i.e. the divinely-appointed successor to Mohammed) and thus the “mahdi”. {4}

Tarif’s evangelical campaign was quite successful. He soon became king of the Berghouata [alt. “Barghawata”] Empire in northwest Africa. His version of Islam endured for over three centuries...before it was finally eradicated by the Almoravid dynasty. Tarif’s routine was a familiar one; and would continue to be fashionable to the present day. Why? Because it is so stupendously useful. “I’m doing god’s work” might be called the king of all rationalizations: the ultimate trump card. For it can be used to rationalize, well, ANYTHING.

“It’s god’s will.” Such a simplistic omni-rationalization can come in handy for those who seek to justify their (otherwise dubious) actions. With the imprimatur of the godhead, anything goes. Hence we encounter some version of “führerprinzip”: the leader’s word takes precedence over anything that comes from normal men; as he is above all that is worldly. (The normal rules do not apply to HIM.) Since HIS “logos” is a reflection of THE “logos”, whatever he says is unimpeachable. {52}

In its standard form, the gimmick amounts to the following: “I am uniquely positioned to know MASSIVELY important things. And I’m doing everyone a huge favor by letting them in on it. So if you want to be ‘in the loop’, you should trust everything I say.” Charismatic leaders have used this ruse since time immemorial...usually to staggering aplomb. Indeed, the routine is ubiquitous throughout human history. And when mantic in nature, the leader invariably ends up forming a cult following. The most credulous followers, mesmerized by the figure’s larger-than-life persona, end up drowning in their own servility. Of course, they don’t see it this way: They construe their subservience as a means of empowerment. The hoodwink takes the form: emancipation through subjugation.

As it turns out, there is an embarrassment of riches when it comes to case-studies of this phenomenon. In 1926, the founders of the Cao-Dai Faith (there was one patriarch plus three disciples) claimed to have received direct communications from the godhead...who gave them explicit instructions for establishing a new monotheistic religion. The scam was astoundingly successful. Today, Cao-Dai has as many as 10 million followers—more than there are doctrinal practitioners of Judaism.

The time-honored schtick includes all kinds of charismatic leaders; especially Messianic figures. Hero-worship takes many different forms; but here I am concerned with cynosures who were the touchstones of some kind of cult activity. The salient feature of such figures is the ability to subordinate a credulous flock through sheer strength of personality. This is often accomplished by exploiting insecurity while fomenting false hope. What we find, then, is shepherds fleecing their flocks instead of protecting them. (Usually, it not a wolf in sheep's clothing that the flock should worry about; it's a wolf gussied up as a shepherd.) This can be especially effective when the myrmidon claims to have preternatural abilities (nay, magical powers).

It should be noted that all the charismatic leaders listed here were—in one way or another—CELEBRITIES. {3} This means that, if nothing else, they were extremely savvy at self-promotion. To wit: Every one of the figures enumerated above had prodigious gumption and gravitas. In modern parlance: every one of them was excellent at BRANDING—a skill which involves things like image-engineering and hype-generation (that is: savvy marketing).

There is a long list of charismatic leaders that have accrued cult followings by making outlandish claims about themselves. Insisting that he was the embodiment of the Holy Ghost, Anglican reverend Henry Prince started the “Agapemone” church. His successor, John Hugh Smyth-Pigott, claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus. As we'll see, this is not an unheard-of occurrence; the phenomenon is ubiquitous.

Self-proclaimed prophethood is a theme as old as recorded history. The best-known case in “the West” is, of course, Jesus of Nazareth (a.k.a. the “Kristos”) who's followers claimed him to be god incarnate (though it is arguable whether he himself ever made such a claim). Christian lore borrowed from the Zoroastrian idea of “Sraosha”: the godhead LITERALLY incarnated in human form. As we'll see, this was a motif that would prove popular in later centuries.

Arguably, the first major cult leader in recorded history was Amenhotep (early 16th century B.C.), who established the “Asauru” (later Hellenized to “Osirica”) in the Valley of the Kings. Later, the Egyptian Pharaoh, Amenhotep IV (a.k.a. “Akhenaten”) founded the first monotheism (“Atenism”) in the 14th century B.C.

At some point in the Iron Age, Zarathustra Spitama of Airyanem Vaejah (a.k.a. “Zoroaster”) claimed to be the messenger / representative of the Persian godhead, Ahura Mazda. “Zoroastrianism” (as it would be codified during the Achaemenid era) would be the first religion to posit the notion of a coming Messiah...who would wipe away the world's evils and usher in a Golden Age. The awaited savior was referred to as the “Saoshyant”. Later, post-Macedonian King Seleucus Nicator fashioned himself as a divinely appointed leader. He was said to be the “son of god” in the empire's folklore. Here are 48 more examples of the phenomenon—from incarnations of deities to their elected spokesmen:

1. Vardhamana of Bihar (a.k.a. “Mahavira”): **the 24th and last “Tirthan-kara”**
2. Tavl Tarchunus / Pava Tarchies [son of Tarchon / Tarchuna] (a.k.a. “Tages”): **son of the sky-god, Jove; prophet of the Etruscans**
3. Yeshua ben Yussef of Nazareth (a.k.a. the “Kristos”; “King of the Jews”): **Abrahamic Messiah, and physical incarnation of the godhead; alt. “son of god”**
4. Simeon bar Kosevah of Judea (a.k.a. “Simon bar Kokhba”): **Abrahamic Messiah**
5. Nissim ben Abraham of Avila [Castile]: **Abrahamic Messiah**
6. Mahavatar Babaji: **“Great Avatar” of the Buddha**
7. Mazdak “the Younger”: **messenger of “Ahura Mazda”; prophet of the Mazdaeans and Khurramites {7}**
8. Mani of Ctesiphon / Seleucia: **the Last Abrahamic Prophet (the “Paraclete”)**
9. Mena[c]hem al-Ruhi of Amadiya (David the Shepherd; alt. “David Alroy”): **Judaic Messiah**

10. Sephardic Kabbalist, Sabbatai Zevi of Smyrna (a.k.a. “King of the Jews”): **Abrahamic Messiah** {8}
11. Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (a.k.a. “Mansur”): **proclaimed by Ad-Darazi to be god incarnate**
12. Dasni (Yazidi) prophet, “Shaykh” Adi ibn Musafir al-Umawi of Beqaa: **Avatar of Tawuse Melek?, emanation of the godhead**
13. Syed Muhammad Mahdi Mau’ood of Jaunpur: **the “Mahdi”**
14. Siyyid Ali Mohammad of Shiraz (a.k.a. the “Bab” [“Representative”]): **the “Mahdi”**
15. Ghanshyam Pande (a.k.a. “Nilkanth Varni”; “Sahajanand Swami”; “Swami-Narayan(a)”): **the incarnation of the supreme being: the “Purushottama” aspect of Vishnu**
16. Telugu sage, Vallabha of Andhra (a.k.a. “Sri-pad Sri Vallabha”): **incarnation of Datta-treya**
17. Arnold Potter (a.k.a. “Potter Christ”): **as Abrahamic Messiah**
18. Joseph Smith: **Abrahamic messenger** {9}
19. Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (a.k.a. “Baha’u’llah” [Glory of God]): **Abrahamic messenger**
20. Sudanese “samaniyya” [prophet], Muhammad Ahmad of Dongola: **the “Mahdi”**
21. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (a.k.a. the “Mu-Jaddid”): **Abrahamic Messiah; the “Mahdi”** {10}
22. Jakub Lejbowicz (a.k.a. “Jacob Frank”): **reincarnation of the Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi; and/or of Jacob; and/or King David**
23. Nakayama Miki (a.k.a. “Oyasama”): **Abrahamic messenger**
24. Hakka savior, Hong Huoxiu [alt. “Renkun”] of Guangdong (a.k.a. “Hung Xiuquan”): **“Heavenly King”, “brother” of Jesus Christ**
25. Rishi Kuthumi (a.k.a. “Koot Hoomi”): **the “Mahatma”**
26. Kim Il-Sung (a.k.a. “Eternal Leader”): **deified potentate of the Choson** {56}
27. Sun Myung Moon (a.k.a. the “True Parent”): **quasi-Messiah**
28. Jung Myung Seok (a.k.a. “Setsuri” / “Joshua”): **quasi-Messiah**
29. Cyrus Reed Teed (a.k.a. “Koresh”): **Abrahamic Messiah**
30. Kurdish sultan, Sahak (a.k.a. prophet of “Bayabas-e Pirdiwari”): **messenger of “Haqiqat” (ergo of “Ahl-e Haqq” / “Yarsan”)**
31. Simon Kimbangu (a.k.a. “special envoy of Jesus Christ”): **embodiment of the Holy Spirit**
32. Ariffin Mohammed (a.k.a. “Ayah Pin” of the “Kerajaan Langit” [Sky Kingdom]): **the Malay reincarnation of Shiva, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed; the “Mahdi”**
33. Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi (a.k.a. “Kalki Avatar”): **Abrahamic Messiah; the “Mahdi”**
34. Hue Dang Trinh (a.k.a. “Ching Hai”): **the “Supreme Master” / “Suma”**
35. Sathya Narayana Raju (a.k.a. “Sai Baba”): **the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi**
36. Chizuo Matsumoto (a.k.a. “Shoko Asahara”): **the “Christ”** {11}
37. Mahagandare Weikzado Apwegyoke (a.k.a. “Bodaw-his”, leader of the Burmese messianic buddhist cult, “Gaing”): **the “Maitreya”**
38. “Ahn” Sahng-hong (a.k.a. “Prophet Elijah”): **incarnation of Jesus Christ** {12}
39. “Zahng” Gil-jah: **Heavenly Mother of the New Jerusalem** {12}
40. Merwan Sheriar Irani of Pune (a.k.a. “Meher Baba”): **Avatar of god**
41. Hulon Mitchell, Jr. (a.k.a. “Yahweh ben Yahweh”): **prophet for the Nation of Yahweh**
42. Ethiopian cynosure, Haile Selassie (a.k.a. “Janhoy”; a.k.a. “Ras Tafari”): **quasi-Abrahamic Messiah**
43. Hong Xiu-quan: **incarnated “brother” of Jesus Christ** (founder of the “God-worshipping Society”)
44. George Baker (a.k.a. Reverend “Major” Morgan Jealous Divine; a.k.a. “The Messenger”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
45. Jacob Paul Twitchell (a.k.a. “Peddar Zaskq”): **the “Mahanta”**
46. “Moses” David Berg (a.k.a. “King David”): **Abrahamic messenger / Last Prophet** (founder of “The Family International”)
47. José Luis de Jesus Miranda (a.k.a. “Melchizedek”): **Abrahamic prophet, for Creciendo en Gracia**
48. Sergey Anatolyevitch Torop (a.k.a. “Vissarion”): **the reincarnation of Jesus of Nazareth; the second coming of “Christ”**

What we often find is cult activity that is centered around a charismatic figure who commands a high degree of devotion—nay obsession—amongst his followers. As is plain to see here, this phenomenon has occurred around the world, throughout history. In every case, we find the same KIND of thing: An idolized—even deified—leader surrounded by fawning acolytes. In the above list, 34 of the 50 were in the Abrahamic tradition. ALL of these figures couched their prophet-ness in the same vein as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Job, et. al. {13} And like myriad contemporaries of Jesus of Nazareth during the pre-Christian Roman Empire. One cannot fully understand ANY ONE religious movement—be it Christianity or Islam or anything else—without a rudimentary understanding of what all these figures have in common.

We might bear in mind that the term “Messiah” derives from the Old Semitic term for “anointed one”: “Mashia[c]h”. In Babylonian Aramaic and Mishnaic / Classical Hebrew, this was simply another way of saying “melekh” [“king”]. Therefore, in Judaic tradition, it was an alternate appellation for the (earthly) king of the Jews. Even the Persian king, Cyrus, was once referred to as “mashiah” when he agreed sanction the construction of a temple for the Jews in the city of David. (King of the Jews rendered in Koine Greek was “Basileus ton Ioudaion”. In Vulgar Latin, it was rendered “Rex Iudaeorum”.) Here’s the catch: When rendered in Koine Greek as “Kristos”, the Semitic moniker took on supernatural connotations. Consequently, for Pauline Christians, the transition to “god incarnate” was not an unsurmountable taxonomic hurdle to make. {14}

The Abrahamic tradition has a long history of positing a coming Messiah, who will inaugurate the “eschaton” (End Times). Most notable were the fabled “four craftsmen”: Messiah ben David, Messiah ben Joseph, Elijah, and the so-called “Righteous King” [a reprise of “Melchizedek”]. Various candidates have been equated with one or another of these prophesied figures...who, it is supposed, will be the one who—at long last—builds the third temple in Jerusalem.

The phenomenon continues apace around the world, in myriad traditions. Note, for example, the Sudanese “mahdi”, Mohammed Ahmad in the late 19th century. Today, more than 3,000 “Mahdi” claimants are imprisoned in Iran. (Suffice to say, they were all unsuccessful in accruing a significant following.) Note that one of the better known contemporary “Mahdi” claimants was the Shia fanatic, Dia Abdul Zahra Kadim (a.k.a. “Ali bin Ali bin Abi Talib”), imprisoned in Iraq until his death in 2007. Also note the Persian mystic, Mahm[o]ud Pasikhani of Gilan, who not only claimed to be the “mahdi”, but the very reincarnation of Mohammed HIMSELF. {4}

A full catalogue of all of history’s Messianic figures would be a massive undertaking. The question is: ON WHAT BASIS are we justified in categorizing the likes of Joseph Smith (the Church of Latter-Day Saints), Sun Myung Moon (Tongil-gyo; a.k.a. the “Church of Unification”), and L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology) scam artists...yet refrain from calling more “mainstream” religious figures scam artists? (After all, a religion is a cult with widespread sanction; and a cult is a religion without widespread sanction.)

Let’s look at another example. A collection of verse (entitled the “Ofudesaki”) purported to be composed by the one true god (“Tenri-O-No-Mikoto”) was transmitted to the world via a designated mouth-piece. In this case, the “messenger” was a Japanese woman named Nakayama Miki (re-christened “Oyasama”) in the 19th century. The book is now the foundational sacred scripture of the “Tenrikyo” religion. “Oyasama” currently has well over TWO MILLION followers.

To reiterate: These were not just obscure crackpots making outlandish claims. For each and every figure listed here, and appreciable number of people BELIEVED them. The attribution of Messiah-hood (i.e. “anointed one”) happens to this day—sometimes in vain, sometimes to resounding success. Note, for example, Sergey Torop (“Vissarion” mentioned above), considered by the Church of the Last Testament to

be the second coming of Christ. He has accumulated over ten thousand followers. Such numbers are unsurprising. After all, Harlemitte Reverend “Jealous Divine” would accumulate MILLIONS “Peace Mission” followers over the course of the 1930’s, 40’s, 50’s, and into the 60’s. That it is so obvious to the rest of us that such demagogues are frauds is a moot point to their fawning disciples.

As we saw earlier, Mohammed of Mecca pulled the same kind of stunt in Yathrib-cum-Medina in the 7th century (where his numbers eventually swelled to the tens of thousands). He was doing nothing novel when he said what he said; and his immediate followers were doing nothing new when they caricatured him as they did. As we’ve seen, the phenomenon has been commonplace throughout recorded history.

Indeed, the pantheon of professed “prophets” is endless. In each case, we encounter some variation on the claim: “I have the inside scoop.” It’s an old game that has worked for millennia, and will most likely continue to work into the foreseeable future. For, so long as there are existentially disoriented mobs looking for a beacon, there will always be opportunity for exploitation.

To pull off this stunt, the con-man does not even have to proclaim him/herself a full-fledged prophet. Simply claiming that one is uniquely-positioned to bestow secret wisdom upon mankind will often do the trick. This can be done with an inherited tradition—as with, say, Gerald Gardner: impresario of “Ordo Templi Orientis”.

The evangelist, Saul of Tarsus (a.k.a. “Saint Paul”) is the most well-known case in point. In his era, he almost single-handedly inaugurated the movement that would eventually become “Christianity”. Saul was not the first to pull off this stunt, though; and he was certainly not the last. Consider what Zhang Tao-Ling of Jiangsu did to Taoism in the 2nd century. He proclaimed himself “Celestial Master” and turned Tao-ism (founded as a philosophy in the 6th century B.C.) into a religion. He then established his own scripture and effectively instituted a Sichuan theocracy. In other words: Zhang Tao-Ling appropriated a non-dogmatic spiritual tradition and rendered it a hyper-dogmatic, authoritarian system. The routine is a familiar one (as anyone knows who juxtaposes the ACTUAL teachings of Jesus of Nazareth with the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church).

Here are 48 MORE infamous instances of figures who commanded cult followings:

1. Malki [t]Zedek of Salem (a.k.a. “Melchizedek”): **High Priest of El Elyon, the first Abrahamic Prophet**
2. Azar Hooshang of Iran (a.k.a. “Mahabad”): **pre-Zoroastrian prophet**
3. Y’hez’qel of Anathoth (a.k.a. “Ezekiel”): **Hebrew Prophet of the New Jerusalem**
4. Montanus of Phrygia / Mysia: **Christian Prophet of the New Jerusalem**
5. Zhang Daoling of Jiangsu (a.k.a. “Ancestral Celestial Master”): **messenger of Lao-Tzu (deified as “Taishang Laojun”)**; founder of the “Way of the Celestial Masters”
6. John of Patmos (often conflated with “John the Apostle”): **Abrahamic Prophet**; author of the “Book of Revelation”
7. Zhang Jue / Jiao of Eastern Han (a.k.a. the “Great Teacher”): **the “General of Heaven”** {15}
8. Linji Yixuan (a.k.a. “Rinzai Gigen”) [Japanese rendering within the Chan school]: **divinely-appointed Zen Master**
9. Akiva ben Joseph (a.k.a. “Rosh la-Chachamim”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
10. Yehudah ha-Nasi (a.k.a. “Judah the Prince”; “Rabbeinu ha-Qadosh”): **Abrahamic messenger**; author of the Mishnah
11. Yitzhak Saggi Nehor (a.k.a. “Isaac the Blind”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
12. Moshe ben Nahman [Girondi] (a.k.a. “Nachmanides”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
13. Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad of Khorason: **deliverer** {16}

14. Mohammad ibn Ismail Nashtakin ad-Darazi of Bukhara: **deliverer** {16}
15. Abu Isa of Isfahan (a.k.a. “Ovadiyah”; whose followers were known as the “Isawiyya”): **Abrahamic Messiah**
16. Abu Shu’ayb Muhammad ibn Nusayr (a.k.a. the “Bab” [representative]): **proxy for the Mahdi** {17}
17. Sikh guru, Nanak of Punjab: **quasi-Abrahamic Prophet**
18. Pothuluru Veerabrahmendra of Andhra Pradesh (a.k.a. “Srimadhviraat”): **Telugu prophet**
19. Michel of Nostredame (a.k.a. “Nostradamus”): **medieval French reprise of the Oracle at Delphi**
20. Moshe ben Shem-Tov (a.k.a. “Moses of Leon”): **Abrahamic Prophet** {18}
21. Shimon bar Yochai of Meron: **Abrahamic Prophet**
22. Yisro-El ben Eliezer of Podolia (a.k.a. “Baal Shem Tov”): **Abrahamic Prophet** {19}
23. Jehan Cauvin (a.k.a. “John Calvin”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
24. Hazreti Hunkar “Haji” Bektash Veli of Anatolia: **Abrahamic Prophet**
25. Choe Je-u of Seorabeol / Gyeongju (a.k.a. “Su-un”): **Abrahamic prophet** {20}
26. Lee Man-hee of Cheongdo: **Abrahamic messenger** {21}
27. Kondratii Selivanov of Oryol (a.k.a. “God of Gods and King of Kings”): **Abrahamic prophet** {22}
28. Yang Xiang-bin of Henan (a.k.a. “Lightning Deng”): **Abrahamic Messiah** {23}
29. Shyama Charan Lahiri (a.k.a. “Mahasaya”): **messenger of Maha-avatar Babaji**
30. “Mother” Ann Lee (as “The Word”): **Abrahamic messenger**
31. Bernhard Müller (a.k.a. “Count de Leon”; the “Lion of Judah”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
32. Joseph Bates [and his protege, Ellen G. White]: **quasi-Prophet**; promulgator of Remnant theology (founder of Sabbatarian Adventism; later dubbed “**Seventh Day Adventism**”)
33. Edward Alexander Crowley (a.k.a. “Aleister Crowley”): **Messenger of the “Aeon of Horus”**
34. Samuel Morris (a.k.a. “Father Jehovia”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
35. Lafayette Ronald Hubbard (a.k.a. the “Commodore”): **as deliverer**; founder of Scientology
36. Franklin Albert Jones (a.k.a. “Adi Da Samraj” / “Da Avabhasa”): **“Avadhoota”; avatar of “Amrita Nadi”**
37. Zulu (Nazarite / Zionist) prophet, Isaiah Shembe: **Abrahamic messenger**
38. Elijah Robert Poole (a.k.a. “Fard Muhammad”): **deliverer** (for African Americans)
39. Credonia Mwerinde and Joseph Kibweteere: **deliverers**
40. Jim Jones (a.k.a. “Father of all”): **deliverer** {24}
41. Temitope Balogun (a.k.a. “T.B. Joshua”): **Abrahamic Prophet**
42. Claude Maurice Marcel Vorilhon (a.k.a. “Raël”): **Messenger of the Elohim** {25}
43. Marshall Applewhite (a.k.a. “Do”): **deliverer**
44. Vernon Howell (a.k.a. “David Koresh”): **deliverer**
45. Mukunda Lal Ghosh (a.k.a. “Paramahansa Yogananda”): **divinely-anointed “Kriya Yogi” master**
46. Chandra Mohan Jain (a.k.a. “Bhagwan Rajneesh”, later known as “Osho”): **the “Acharya” of Buddha**
47. Abhay Charan De (a.k.a. A.C. Bhaktivedanta “swami” Prabhupada): **the “Acharya” of Vishnu / Krishna** {26}
48. Menachem Mendel Schneerson (a.k.a. the “Rebbe” / “King Messiah”): **Abrahamic Prophet**

Whether proxies for the godhead or divinely-appointed deliverers: same shtick, different brands. (Once again, 34 of the 50 were a Judeo-Christian offshoot.) Every one of these impresarios of cult activity—charismatic, self-aggrandizing, exploitative—were essentially the Jim Bakkers of Antiquity. The modern technology at the disposal of the televangelist only alters the mode of presentation.

NONE of the figures listed thus far are recorded of having said an intelligent thing during their tenure as demagogue. Indeed, the vast majority seem to have never once articulated even a single profound insight over the course of their entire lifetime. Most never did even one significant deed worthy of plaudits. Time

after time, we find that a savvy leader needn't say or do anything estimable to accrue prodigious amounts of prestige. Idolatry is rarely—if ever—based on merit.

A full survey of so-called “prophets” in the broader sense would include figures from antiquity such as:

- Zarathustra Spitama of Airyanem Vaejah (a.k.a. “Zoroaster”)
- Siddhartha Gautama of Lumbini (a.k.a. the “Buddha”)
- Li Er of Chu (a.k.a. “Lao-Tzu” / “Lao-zi”)
- Kong Qui of Zou / Lu [alt. Kong-zi of Qufu] (a.k.a. “Confucius”)
- Gaius Julius Caesar (deified progenitor of the Roman Empire)

Now that we've surveyed over a hundred examples, we can adduce certain things about what is broadly defined as demagoguery; and see how Mohammed of Mecca is but one instance of a ubiquitous phenomenon.

Mohammed of Mecca—as messenger of the Abrahamic deity—was just another in a long list of exalted paladins. In each instance, we see a charismatic figure revered by fawning acolytes. In each instance, the person effectively said: “I—and I alone—have the inside scoop.” (“And so I alone hold all the answers.”) The question is not how that Hijazi merchant was different from these figures. (That's easy to answer.) The question is: How are they SIMILAR? Even as each is sui generis, it is prudent to ask: What is the common thread? In the end, every demagogue claims: “I alone can solve all that ails you.” The schtick is the same whether one is an illiterate Bedouin from the Dark Ages or an urbane popinjay from last week.

There can be little doubt that most of the figures enumerated in the present essay were very impressed with themselves. Certainly, some of them KNEW they were full of shit; while others may have sincerely believed their own balderdash. But whether they were con-men or deluded is rather beside the point. For either way, they had legions of ardent followers who were eating out of the palms of their hands.

The present survey is instructive. For each and every one of these men are instances of the same phenomenon—a phenomenon of which mainstream “religions” are a (more successful, more widely accepted) manifestation. There countless case-studies in what amounts—at root—to the SAME PHENOMENON.

In modern times, there have been innumerable traffickers in esoterica who have inaugurated their own cult movement—as with Irish cleric, Laurence Dermott and Scottish cleric, James Anderson—who sought to revive Freemasonry. Here are FORTY MORE examples (of widely varying degrees of success, prevalence, and malignancy) from around the world, across myriad cultures:

1. Persian mystic, Azar Kayvan of Estakhr / Fars (a.k.a. “Zu'l-Olum”): Ishraqiyah (a.k.a. **“Illumination-ism”**) {27}
2. Persian mystic, Mansur al-Hallaj of Fars: **heterodox Sufism** {28}
3. Persian mystic, Najmuddin Kubra of Urgench / Khwarezm: **Kubrawiyya Sufism**. {29}
4. Sephardic (Aragonese / Navarrese) Judaic mystic, Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia: **Prophetic Kabbalah**
5. Bavarian (Judaic) preacher, Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg: bellwether for **[c]Hasidei Ashkenaz** (Hassidism)
6. Palestinian (Judaic) mystic, Isaac Luria ben Shlomo of Safed / Galilee (a.k.a. “Ha-ARI”): **Lurianic Kabbalah** {30}
7. Bohemian rabbis, Isaiah HaLevi Horowitz (a.k.a. the “Shelah”) and Judah he-Hasid Segal ha-Levi: **Levite mysticism; bellwethers for Hassidism**

8. Polish rabbi, Yisroel ben Eliezer (a.k.a. “Baal Shem Tov”): **bellwether for Hassidism** {31}
9. Greek revolutionary / mystic, Theophilos Kairis of Andros: **Theosebism**
10. Armenian mystic, Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff: **The Fourth Way** {32}
11. Bulgarian evangelist, Victor T. Houteff: **“Davidian” Seventh Day Adventism**
12. Israeli (Satmar / Hassidic) cleric, Erez Shlomo Elbarnes: **Lev Tahor**
13. Palestinian (Christian) evangelist, Toufik Benedictus “Benny” Hinn: **Miracle Crusades** {33}
14. Swiss-German occultist, Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (a.k.a. “Paracelsus”): **Hermetic “Paracelsian-ism”**
15. German prophet, Melchior Hofmann: **apocalyptic Anabaptism** {34}
16. Thuringian (German) occultist, Christian Rosenkreuz: **Rosicrucianism**
17. Bavarian (German) sage, Johann Adam Weishaupt: **the Illuminati**
18. German (Catholic) cleric, Heinrich Walpot of Bassenheim: Ordo Domus Sanctae Mariae Theutonicorum Hierosolymitanorum (a.k.a. **the “Teutonic Order”**)
19. German occultist, Walter Nauhaus: **Thule Society**
20. German / Bohemian neo-pagan, Franz Sattler (a.k.a. “Doctor Musalam”): **Adon-ism**
21. Austrian occultist, Guido von List: **Arman-ism** {35}
22. Russian Judeo-Supremacist, Vladimir Yevgenyevich Zhabotinski of Odessa (a.k.a. “Ze’ev Jabotinsky”): **Bellwether for Revisionist Zionism**
23. Russian occultist, “Madam” Helena Blavatsky: **Theosophy; Agni Yoga**
24. Russian mystic, Grigori Rasputin: **Marian occultism**
25. Russian prophetess, Marina Tsvigun (a.k.a. “Maria Devi Christos”): **the Great White Brotherhood** (a.k.a. “YUSMALOS”)
26. Russian (Hassidic) cleric, Shneur Zalman of Liady: **[c]Habad-Lubavitch**
27. Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg: **the New Church**
28. French (fascistic) cynosure, Maximilien Robespierre: **Cult of the Supreme Being**
29. Czech mystic, Ivo A. Benda: the Universe People (a.k.a. **“Cosmic People of Light Powers”**)
30. British (Christian) panjandrum, Richard Brothers: **British Israel-ism**
31. British “Avatar” / “Cosmic Master”, George King: **Aetherius Society**
32. British Wiccan, Alex Sanders (a.k.a. “King of the Witches): **neo-Wicca**
33. South African con-man, Bernard Poolman: **Desteni** {36}
34. German-Chilean panjandrum, Paul Schäfer Schneider: **Colonia Dignidad** [Colony of Dignity; later renamed “Villa Baviera”]
35. Bolivian sage, Oscar Ichazo: **Arica**
36. Korean sage, Lee Seung-heun (a.k.a. “Ilchi”): **Dahn-hak**
37. Vietnamese messengers, Pham Cong Tac, Cao Quynh Cu, and Cao Hoai Sang: **Cao-Dai**
38. Japanese sage, Mokichi Okada: **Sekai Kyusei-Kyo** [Church of World Messianism]
39. Japanese (Shinto) mystic, Kawate Bunji-ro (a.k.a. “Akazawa Bunji”): **Konko-kyo** {37}
40. Japanese (Shinto) mystics, Deguchi Nao and Deguchi Onisaburo: **Kinmei Reigakkai** (now “Oomoto-Kyo”)

The proliferation of pseudo-Christian sects in Asia (especially in Korea and China / Taiwan) is jaw-dropping. Most of it is simply a money-making scheme—as with evangelical businessman, Yoo Byung-eun’s notorious “Salvation Sect”; and Filipino pastor, Apollo Quibuloy of Davao (who has made a fortune claiming to be the second coming of Christ). There are even nationalistic religions, such as the quasi-fascist Korean movements like Na Cheol’s “Daejong-kyo” (a.k.a. “Dangun-ism”). {56}

The emergence (and proliferation) of quasi-Christian cults in China is largely due to the government’s suppression of religious activity. Five notable examples:

- Xu Wenku’s “Three Grades of Servants”
- Xu Yongze’s “All Ranges Church”
- Zuo Kun’s “Bloody Holy Spirit”
- Li Sanbao’s “The Disciple Society”
- Li Changshou’s “Living Stream Ministry” (and it’s offshoot, Zhao Weishan’s “Almighty God” sect)

...etc. All of these “churches” are shams; yet they each attract a significant following—as they operate in a country starved for spiritual alternatives to the stale idolatry of Maoism.

Elsewhere in the Far East, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh mystics have spawned a plethora of sects. Here are fifty:

1. Kagyu[d] (Buddhist) sage, Nagar-juna; and his disciple, Sabara (a.k.a. “Shavaripa”): **Madhya-maka**
2. Madhya-maka (Buddhist) sage, Santi-deva: **Avaivartika Sangha**
3. Vajrayana (Buddhist) sage, Drogon Tsang-pa Gyare of Ralung: **Druk-pa**
4. Loka-yata (Buddhist) sage, Ajita Kesa-kambali: **Charvaka**
5. Sikh “sat-guru”, Ravidas “Ji” of Varanasi: **Ravidassia** (neo-Sikhism)
6. Vaishnava (Hindu) sage, Ramananda: **Rama-nandi Sampra-daya**
7. Hindu sage, Ayya Vaikundar of Kanniya-kumari [Tamil Nadu]: **Ayyavazhi**
8. Hindu “swami”, Vishnu Tirtha: (Shakti-pat based) **Siddha-yoga**
9. Bengali sage, Atisha of Bikram-pur [Pala]: progenitor of **“Kadam”** (Tibetan) Buddhism
10. Bengali sage, Tilopa; followed by his disciple, Naropa: **Anuttara-yoga Tantra**
11. Bengali sage, Gadadhar Chattopadhyay (a.k.a. “Rama-krishna Para-mahansa”) [who claimed to have been visited by Kali; then by Lakshmi’s avatar, Sita]: **Advaita Vedanta**
12. Bengali “raja”, Ram Mohan Roy: **Brahmo-ism** (alt. “Brahmo Samaj”; “Divine Society”)
13. Bengali sage, Vishvambhar Mishra (a.k.a. “Chaitanya Maha-prabhu”; “Gauranga”): **Gaudiya Vaishnavism**
14. Tamil sage, Yadava Prakasha and his student, Rama-nuja: (non-Alvar) **Vaishnavism**
15. Vajrayana (Buddhist) sages, Sukha-siddhi and Nigu-ma / Nigupta: **Shang-pa Nagyu**
16. Gujarati (Hindu) “swami”, Mulshankar Karasandas Tiwari (a.k.a. “Dayanand[a] Saraswati”): **Arya Samaj**
17. Hindu sage, Nirmala “Sri-Vastava” Salve (a.k.a. “Sri Mataji Nirmala Devi”): **Sahaja Yoga** {38}
18. Vedanta (Hindu) “acharya”, Madhva of Karnataka (a.k.a. “Purna Prajna”; “Ananda Teertha”): **Tattva-vada**
19. Indian “Dada”, Lekhraj Khubchand Kripalani of Hyderabad (a.k.a. “Brahma Baba”): **Brahma Kumaris**
20. Indian sage, Makkhali Gosala (5th century B.C.): **Ajivika** [alt. “Ajivik-ism”]
21. Thai monk, Sodh Mikaewnoi (a.k.a. “Sodh Candasaro”; “Phra” Mongkhonthepmuni): **Dhamma-kaya** {39}
22. Indian (Buddhist) sage, Mahesh Prasad Varma of Jabalpur (a.k.a. “Maharishi”): **Transcendental Meditation**
23. Gelug-pa (Buddhist) sage, Lob-sang Chupon-pa of Tibet (a.k.a. “Kel-sang Gyatso”): the **New Kadampa** sect
24. Tibetan sage, Lo-sang Drak-pa (né Künga Nyingpo) of Tsongkha / Amdo (a.k.a. “Je Tsongkha-pa”; “Je Rin-po-che”): the **“Guleg”** sect [of Tibetan Buddhism]
25. Tibetan sage, Gendun Drup: inaugurating the line of Dalai Lamas in **Tibetan Buddhism**
26. Tibetan sage, Dromtön (disciple of “Atisha”): Tibetan **“Kadam”** Buddhism
27. Hindu-Sikh “sat-guru”, Shiv Dayal Seth / Singh of Agra (a.k.a. “Soami-ji Maharaj”): Radha-swami (a.k.a. **“Sant Mat”**) {40}

28. Shaivi yogi, Matsyendranath[a] / Macchindranath[a] of Kamarupa: the **“Nath”** sect
29. Advaita Vedanta [Tamil] sage, Adi Shankara of Kerala[m]: **Dashanami Sampradaya** (with Shaivi, Vaishnavi, Shakti variants)
30. Vaidiki [Telugu] sage, Vallabha-Acharya of Brij: the **“Pushti-marg”** sect of Vaishnava
31. Sikh guru, Gobind Singh [Ji] and “Baba” Deep Singh of Amritsar: **Damdami Taksal “Jatha”** {41}
32. Shaiva sage, “Baba” Siddharth[a] Guatam[a] Ram[a] [Ji] (putative reincarnation of Baba Keenaram of Varanasi): the Vaishnavi **“Aghora”** sect
33. Korean panjandrum, Gan Il-sun (a.k.a. “Kang Jeung-san”): **Jeung-san-kyo** [alt. “Jeung-san-Do”]
34. Korean nationalist, Choe Je-u (a.k.a. “Su-un”): **Cheon-Do-kyo** [a.k.a. “Donghak”]
35. Chinese sage, Li Xiu-yuan of Hang-zhou (a.k.a. “Ji Gong”): **Tung Cheng Yuen**
36. Chinese sage, Mo-Di [alternately referred to as “Mo-zi”, the name of his magnum opus] (5th century B.C.): **Mohism**
37. Chinese sage, Wang Sen: **Wen-xiang-chiao** [incense-smelling sect of Messianic Buddhism] {42}
38. Chinese (Qi-gong) sage, Li Hong-zhi of Jilin: **Falun Gong**
39. Chinese patriarch, Kui Sheng of Shan-dong (a.k.a. “Zhang Tian-ran”; reincarnation of Ji Gong): **Yi-kuan-Tao** {43}
40. Chinese sage, Wang Jueyi of Qing-zhou / Shandong: **Yi-kuan-Tao** [a.k.a. “Zhen-li Tian-Tao”] {43}
41. Chinese sage, Zhang Jiao / Jue: **Tian-Tao [Way of Heaven]** {43}
42. Chinese patriarch, Duan Qirui: **Sheng-Tao [Holy Way]** {43} {44}
43. Taiwanese sage, Yu-Xia Chen: **Chen-Tao [True Way]** {45}
44. Taiwanese (Tendai) sage, “Grand Master” Lu Sheng-Yen (a.k.a. “Living Buddha Lian Sheng”): **True Buddha School**
45. Taiwanese mage, Sung Chi-li: **Dharma-kaya**
46. Japanese (Shakyamuni) mystic, Zennichimaro (a.k.a. “Nichiren”; as reincarnation of “Visista-charitra”): **Nichiren Buddhism**
47. Japanese panjandrum, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi of Hokkaido: **Soka [Kyoiku] Gakkai**
48. Japanese panjandrum, Kawase Kayo: **Tenchi Seikyo** {46}
49. Japanese panjandrum, Takashi Nakagawa (a.k.a. “Ryuhō Okawa”): **Kofuku-no-Kagaku [Happy Science]**
50. Japanese sage, Yoshikazu Okada (a.k.a. “Kotama”): **Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyodan** (a.k.a. “Ma-Hikari”; True Light) {47}

Each case is a reminder that before one is willing to buy the snake-oil, one must first become smitten with its salesman. {54} Note, though, that not all mystics are demagogues—as explicated in the Appendix below.

Here’s the problem. Once people are entranced by a charismatic leader, it is difficult to break the spell. Put another way: It’s much easier to fool people than to convince people who have been fooled that they’ve been fooled. After all, nobody wants to wind up being the dupe. So after having been hoodwinked, people will often commit to the hoodwink purely as a matter of course. Consequently, attempts to expose the hoodwink will be held in contempt.

In America alone, there have been a plethora of charismatic leaders. {48} In addition to those already listed (Joseph Smith, L. Ron Hubbard, Fard Muhammad, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Marshall Applewhite, Mendel Schneerson, Osho, etc.), there have been countless other demagogues. Indeed, the “free marketplace” of religion in the United States has served as a veritable petri dish for cult activity. Most notoriously, Jonathan Edwards was the patriarch of **Puritanism**, a legacy pioneered by the likes of Cotton Mather and John Winthrop.

Here are thirty more worth noting:

1. Dutch Theologian, Cornelius Jansen: **Jansenism** (a neo-Calvinist sect characterized by Augustine-fetishism, which was the basis for various Anabaptist sects in America)
2. Charles Fox Parham: **Pentecostalism**
3. William Miller: **apocalyptic Millenarianism**
4. Charles Taze Russell: **[Zion] Watchtower Society**
5. Mary Baker Eddy: **Christian Science**
6. Guy Ballard: **“I AM”** (a.k.a. the “Saint Germain” movement)
7. Herbert W. Armstrong (a.k.a. “Elijah”): **Worldwide Church of God**
8. William Joseph Seymour: **Azusa Street Revival**
9. Edward Lion: **Zion Apostolic Faith Mission**
10. John Ballou Newbrough: **Land of Shalam** [Salem] (a.k.a. “Faith-ism”)
11. Anthony Delevin (a.k.a. “Gabriel of Urantia”): **Global Community Communications Alliance**
12. Frederick McLaren Charles Adams II: **Fellowship of Hesperides** (later re-named “Feraferia”)
13. Timothy Zell (a.k.a. “Oberon Zell-Ravenheart”); who spoke on behalf of the Earth Mother, Gaea): **Church of All Worlds**
14. Stephen Anthony McNallen: **Asatru Free Assembly**
15. Dwight D. York: **Nuwaubian Nation**
16. Howard Stanton Levey (a.k.a. “Anton Szandor LaVey”): **Satanism**
17. Pierre Arnold Bernard (a.k.a. “The Great / Omniscient Oom”): **Nava-Tantra**
18. Mark Lyle and Elizabeth Clare Prophet: **Summit Lighthouse** (a.k.a. “Church Universal and Triumphant”)
19. Victor Paul Wierwille: **The Way**
20. Russian-American Neo-pagan, Gleb Yevgenyevich Botkin: **Church of Aphrodite**
21. Aimee Semple McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman: **Foursquare Gospel Church** and **“I Believe In Miracles”** (respectively)
22. Rogelio Alcides Straughn (a.k.a. “Ra Un Nefer Amen”): **Ausar Auset Society**
23. Kemetic / Voodoo priestess, Tamara Siuda (a.k.a. “Mambo Chita Tann”): **House of Netjer Temple**
24. Jaime Gomez (a.k.a. Guru “Michel”; as the deified “Teacher” of Buddha Land): **Buddha Field** {49}
25. Polish mystic, Faustina Kowalska: **Divine Mercy**
26. Heredi rabbi, Shlomo Erez Helbrans: **Lev Tahor** [alt. the Pure Hearts]
27. Andrew Cohen: **EnlightenNext** [alt. Evolutionary Enlightenment]
28. Richard Kelly Hoskins: **Phineas Priesthood** [alt. the Vigilantes of Christendom]
29. William Saunders Crowdy: **Black Hebrew Israelites** [alt. the Church of God and Saints of Christ]
30. Norwegian-American evangelist, Abraham Vereide: **The Family** {50}

Some followings take the form of self-help cults—the most infamous of which was founded by the con-man, John Paul Rosenberg (a.k.a. “Werner Hans Erhard”): **“est”**...later re-named “The Forum”; then re-branded **“Landmark Worldwide”**. {51}

There are have been countless other examples around the world (see Appendix).

“They ‘trust me’. Dumb fucks.” –Mark Zuckerberg (in an e-mail re: the first users of [The]Facebook)

As we’ve seen, much cult activity surrounds (and proceeds from) a panjandrum who claims to have privileged access to hidden truths—often a mystic claiming to be in a unique position to provide esoterica to which the rest of us are not privy.

Such “theophany” dates back to the Bronze Age. The notion of god’s representative on Earth (a chosen one) could be found with the Sumerian “en-si”, the ruling priesthood centered at Ur in the 3rd millennium B.C.

In the 8th century B.C., the Akkadian writer, Kabti-ilani Marduk penned an epic about the god of chaos, Erra, which he claimed was dictated to him by Erra himself. This may be one of the earliest instances of revealed text. In the book are magical incantations that were believed to ward off nefarious forces (e.g. plagues and famines). Why, exactly, this deity chose HIM—and ONLY him—to deliver this importune message, Kabti-ilani never said. It was he who was selected; and that's all there was to it. (The rest of the world was not privy to this nebulous source of information. Everyone just had to take his word for it. And so they did.)

In Ancient Antiquity, the schtick continued. The Paphlagonian (Greek) prophet, Alexander of Abonoteichus, founded the cult of Glycon based on the claim that he was speaking on behalf of the gods. Thereafter, there emerged myriad mystery cults and hero cults throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Insofar as a charismatic leader can make followers feel special, feel as though they MATTER, can get them to see a point to their existence, he can manipulate (nay, control) them. The upshot is that each follower's SELF-esteem is tied to the esteem accorded to their leader.

When seeking to captivate an audience, one quickly realizes that one's enterprise is about presentation rather than about substance. In other words, its success is primarily determined by the DELIVERY (read: the show that one puts on). This is more a matter of exuding a mesmerizing air of sagacity than of being ACTUALLY sagacious. After all, gravitas is rarely predicated on merit; it is more a manufactured pathos than a dependable gauge of credibility. Refer to the panjandra enumerated above, and one will find that, regardless of what each of them said, they ALL projected unassailable air of authority when they said it.

As with any "motivational speaker", the credence of what is said has minimal import; what matters is the confidence with which it is said, and the ability to convey a superficial plausibility of the claims being touted. Thus: How COMPELLING the speaker manages to be is what determines the credence that his pronouncements are accorded. The key, then, is to resonate with the audience (to "push all the right buttons", to "strike a chord", and to "hit a nerve"). At the end of the day, it's the appeal of the vision, not the merit of the vision, that counts. And the appeal is invariably a function of the intensity and conviction with which the material is presented.

The efficacy of this approach is largely predicated on the demagogue's charisma. But we should bear in mind that "prophets" are like "magic": "real prophets" don't actually exist; and actual "prophets" are not really prophets. As Lee Siegel once put it in his book about professional magicians: REAL MAGIC refers to the magic that is not real, while the magic that is real (that can actually be done) is NOT REAL MAGIC.

As has been demonstrated time after time: By sewing neurosis while fostering delusion, a savvy demagogue can have acolytes eating out of the palm of his hand. If the ruse is well-orchestrated, the charismatic leader can recruit a large entourage of fawning proselytes, eager to evangelize on behalf of their leader. Oftentimes, followers are willing to die for the cause (doing so in the belief that, after death, they will be magically transported to a wonderful place).

Again, the schtick is a familiar one: "I have access to certain information to which nobody else in the world has access. This is information, might I add, that is crucial to mankind." The scam is especially effective if one can convince the audience that the information is very, very, very important. This was used in Judaic lore—most notably in the Book of Daniel (chapt. 7), where the eponymous prophet receives a dream-vision about the eschaton from the godhead.

As is the case with any other gimmickry, the more people believe them, the more panjandra are egged on. By the time the Book of Daniel was written, the schtick was nothing new in the Abrahamic tradition. Who

else claimed to be relaying messages from the Abrahamic deity? Hosea, Elisha, Ezekiel, and Ezra all claimed to have been commissioned by the godhead to pass along some propitious communicate to Beth Israel. Such men were no different from “channelers” who claim to be relaying messages from the spirit realm...or shamans claiming to be relaying messages from deceased ancestors...or any other huckster claiming to have powers of divination.

Interestingly, in Judaic lore, there is no difference between the concept of angel and a messenger—as the term in Classical Hebrew, “malakh” can mean both. (These beings are variously referred to as “malakh elohim” [messengers of god] and “bene elohim” [sons of god].)

A demagogue needs to rationalize his self-aggrandizement. If one is to be warden of the entire planet, potentate of all mankind, one needs to offer an extremely compelling reason for the appointment. In most cases, one claims to be the mouth-piece of (messenger for) the deity-in-question. In the more extreme cases, one claims to be the literal incarnation of the deity.

Pleas like “Many people claim to have witnessed his miracles!” and “Many people were willing to die in his name!” are de rigueur; and so are seen to hold no water for ANY GIVEN case. These two convictions are not unrelated; as many people would SWEAR ON THEIR LIVES that the revered figure was who he said he was.

Indeed, we find that in virtually ALL cases, acolytes (a.k.a. “disciples”) provide testimony of preternatural deeds, and were OFTEN willing to die for something that—in reality—was fraudulent. Not only are such things not unheard of, they are COMMONPLACE. One needn’t cite recent events like mass suicides of the **People’s Temple** or **Heaven’s Gate**; for supplicants are TYPICALLY willing to sacrifice their lives for “the cause”.

The “catch”, of course, is that for SUBSEQUENT True Believers, such testimonials / martyrdoms provide airtight confirmation of the veracity of their claims. They are blissfully unaware of the fact that myriad other groups are engaged in a similar program of self-deception...based on THE SAME RATIONAL.

The story, we find, is roughly the same in all cases. Insofar as he is seen as a conduit for the divine, the holy figure is esteemed for the ability to invoke powers and/or to furnish insight. Magic and/or divination are his bailiwick. The term “priest” seems to encompass a wide variety of phenomena; so I will use it as a general term for holy figures in the context of an institutional structure.

A priest’s social status derives from the fact that he makes important things happen and/or is a source of propitious insights. Here’s the thing: It’s a short leap between priest as wonder-worker (i.e. MAGE; as in a witch-doctor, faith-healer, or sooth-sayer) to priest as proprietor of wisdom (i.e. SAGE; as in a guru or lam[a]). An intercessor is a cross between the two—as with those who claim the capacity to influence the god(s) AND the ability to procure special insight (as with shamans). Most priests wear two hats; as going back and forth between sorcery and sacerdotalism, magic and dispensation, allows him to serve two useful purposes.

Each and every vatic figure enumerated here claimed to be what is called in Classical Arabic the “mustafa” (the chosen one). “Messiah” means “anointed one”. The Messianic leitmotif often works like a charm—as it is captivating, enchanting, and—when the demagogue is especially charismatic—utterly enthralling.

And so it goes: “I am uniquely positioned to proffer crucial insights to which nobody else is privy. Hence you need to listen to ME.” The subtext is clear: “If you listen to everything I tell you, then your life might actually begin to mean something—and the future will hold wonderful things in store for you. However, if

you decline my invitation, then you'll be sorry." There is no better way to stir up Messianic fervor.

The sales-pitch is can be highly persuasive—as the combination of apocalyptic foreboding and the anticipation of a “Shangri La” yields an intoxicating cocktail of fear and hope. “An ominous future lurks just over the horizon; yet a fantastical destination awaits those who sign up for this special program.” Put another way: “Wonderful things are in store for you...IF you play your cards right. Otherwise, you'll be sorry.” This compelling narrative can be extremely seductive—even hypnotic; which is precisely why we find it all over the world.

Unsurprisingly, the result is usually a flock of glassy-eyed, timorous votaries deluded into thinking that euphoria lies just around the corner...if, that is, they are sufficiently penitent. In the meantime, they will grovel in submission, and do as they're told.

The success of the scam depends on the degree to which the scam-ARTIST can exploit credulity and/or insecurity. Even better if he can offer something that satiates everyone's yearning for something to look forward to. With the right cocktail of fear and false hope concocted, sycophancy is easily engendered in those willing to “believe”.

In his 1922 “Sociology of Religion”, Max Weber noted that “there can be no priesthood without a cult” (though he allowed for the possibility that there to be a cult without a formal priesthood). { 1 }

Insofar as the priest is part of an institution, he is effectively a functionary (barring instances in which he is seen as the potentate). That is to say: His charge is to ensure the continuous operation of the cultic enterprise. In such a case, he is merely a “cleric” (as with the Buddhist “bonze”). { 2 } Clerics exist for the maintenance of the institution—which, in turn, endows them with the stature they enjoy. Intercessional ritual ensures the facade is upheld. For when laity are convinced that they can only implore their deities via a worldly proxy, who claim to conduct affairs on behalf of the (putative) celestial powers, formidable social powers are arrogated to these vicars.

Insofar as a person claims to act on behalf of the god(s), he effectively fashions himself as a divine plenipotentiary—as in a prophet who claims to have the power to channel vital messages (Zoroaster, Moses, Mani of Ctesiphon, Mohammed of Mecca, Joseph Smith). That is: He is a praxis for the divine. In the event that he becomes the impresario of cultic activity (i.e. a panjandrum), the mage is rendered a mystagogue; the sage a demagogue. (Both might be subsumed under the rubric “demagogue”, as the modern sense of the term intimates the demagoguery characteristic of charismatic leaders.)

Otherwise, we are dealing with a sage in the vein of Siddhartha Gautama, Lao Tzu, or Jesus of Nazareth—who did not seek to found a cult. The degree to which a following becomes institutionalized varies. When sages form guilds, the beginnings of institutionalization can be observed—as with the various Hellenic “mystery cults” (of Dionysus, Isis, Mithras, etc.) or with the Hindu “gosains”. To the degree that a mystical practice becomes ritualized, and the dogmatism systematized, the following becomes a congregation and the proprietors an institution. Ritual tends to include holy rites (as with Hindu “yajnas” and Christian “sacraments”). With a higher degree of institutionalization, the more ceremonial the practices become.

The hawking of special insight is only the beginning. One of the hallmarks of a prophet are, of course, the making of predictions. Prophets are, after all, supposed to be prophetic (i.e. prescient in some preternatural way). EVERYONE finds themselves wondering, “What's going to happen next?” Insofar as a figure claims to be able to make prophecies, he / she will command our attention. This is how fortune-tellers stay in business: People want to know what the future holds in store for them; because nobody enjoys

interminable uncertainty. There is something tremendously unsatisfying about the response, “Well, that remains to be seen.” It’s hard to accumulate an avid audience with a series of “to be determined”. And one is unlikely to develop a following by saying, “You have access to the same evidence that I do; so see for yourself.”

Hence demagogues (qua prophets) have a proclivity to fashion themselves as oracles, and thus FORETELL pending events that their followers might care about. Most (though not all) of the demagogues listed in this endnote are seen not only as channelers of divine wisdom, but as MANTIC...which usually entails pretending to have a hotline to the divine.

This means having the inside scoop not only regarding the way the world works, but regarding WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT. Part of having privileged access to the secrets of the universe is being privy to FATE. So most prophets deign to predict things-to-come...and are inevitably proven wrong. When Messianic / apocalyptic, the prophet’s prognostications typically regard the Last Day (a.k.a. the “End Days”). Those who claim to have privileged access to this vital information are invariably going to be held in high esteem by those hankering for it. (“What’s around the corner? I’m dying to know. If you know, PLEASE tell me.”)

Such purported clairvoyance makes someone extremely valuable—for the same reason that witch doctors and seers tend to command a vaunted status in shamanistic traditions. After all, what’s a prophet without the powers of divination? Since the earliest days of Ancient Egypt and Sumer, one of the most exalted positions in society was that of the “high priest”, who was usually the right-hand man / woman of the ruler. (“Want to know what’s going to happen? Consult the oracle!”) Insofar as people believe the oracle has such power, he / she will be seen as extremely valuable. When the leader is HIMSELF the oracle, then all the better. Who’s going to question a potentate who claims that he’s “had a vision” or “seen a sign” or “received a revelation”?

In sum: To be FATIDIC is, in part, to be ORACULAR (to be able to provide answers to pressing questions that nobody else can provide). To (SEEM TO) be in a unique position to provide answers that people desperately want to have (yet can’t seem to find themselves) is to accord oneself tremendous prestige. Once one can persuade everyone that one possesses such wondrous capabilities, the arrogation of power to oneself is much easier. {52}

The point can’t be emphasized enough: In order to be persuasive, one doesn’t have to say anything that is true. One only needs to CONVINCe people that what one says is true. The game is about getting people to believe in X. This largely depends on having a great sales-pitch. If X “rings true” to the audience; and one has a commanding presence, then the game is won.

The tactics usually the same: proffering some combination of carrots and sticks (that is: peddling hope while stoking fear). Concoct (the impression of) a dire illness; then offer a (purported) cure. After all, one must create the fog before offering the beacon. Give the audience something to believe in; something to look forward to. It is so much easier to control people when one claims to be notifying them of their “destiny”.

The goal, after all, is to get people—en masse—to do whatever one wishes. Once a flock has been convinced that X is their destiny (be it claiming a particular piece of real estate for the chosen group...or drinking cyanide-laced Flavor-Ade so as to meet their maker more expeditiously), they will do whatever they can to fulfilling X. {53}

In the most extreme scenarios, followers will dedicate their lives to the cause. It is no wonder, then, that this schtick is often employed by (despotic) heads of State. {56}

Demagogy (i.e. cults of personality) can even be operative in the context of BUSINESS—as with, say, Ryuho Okawa (**Institute For Research In Human Happiness**), Lewis Bostwick (**Church of Divine Man**; Berkeley Psychic Institute), and Richard M. DeVos (**Amway**; re-named “Quixtar”). {51} The sales-pitch is simple: There is some hidden cosmic power for you to tap into...but if only you sign up for MY program. The burgeoning self-improvement industry has parlayed this gimmick into a bonanza by garnishing “secrets to success” with a sprinkling of New Age mysticism. “YOU TOO can be a super-star...if you use our brand of hocus-pocus.” Also note:

- **NXIVM** (a.k.a. “Nexium”) founded by Keith Raniere (a.k.a. “Vanguard”)
- **MOBE** (My Online Business Empire; where “Empire” was later changed to “Education”) founded by Matt Lloyd

Both used a similar shtick as “Landmark”. Since then, myriad “secrets to success” and “get rich quick” schemes have proliferated.

Middle management at Wal-Mart is steeped in a cult-like atmosphere. At one point, there was even a quasi-cult surrounding Steve Jobs at Apple Inc. Indeed, corporate executives often command their own cult of personality through the sheer power of celebrity. Note the likes of Jeff Bezos of Amazon and Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates—who are demi-gods to flocks of fawning acolytes, each of whom dutifully recites the sacred creed composed by their dear leader. The examples of this are endless.

Charismatic leaders are charismatic leaders; acolytes are acolytes; regardless of the context. In the final analysis, though, it's the same gimmick with different window dressing. So we might ask: What is the difference between, say, T.B. Joshua (of “**SCOAN**”) and “Osho” (of **Rajneesh-puram**)? What is the difference between, say, Paul Twitchel (of “**Eckankar**”) and David Berg (of the “**Family International**”)?) What is the difference between Marshall Applewhite (of “**Heaven's Gate**”) and, well, ANY of the other charismatic leaders enumerated above? In every case, we find a loyal flock of delusive acolytes—each of whom would bet his life on the lofty claims of the charismatic leader.

Make no mistake: The particular creeds of the movements vary widely, as does the malignancy / benignancy. In that sense, each demagogue is sui generis. But while the superficial differences are quite glaring, these charismatic leaders are all manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon.

A demagogue does not have to found his own cult in order to rise to prominence. Some demagogues are content with accumulating a following under the aegis of an existing cult. The notorious Father Charles Coughlin (of the “**Shrine of the Little Flower**”) was a prime example. Coughlin was a fanatical Roman Catholic radio orator who served as a bellwether for broadcast Christian evangelism. His rabid anti-communist fervor, his militant hyper-nationalism, his virulent anti-Semitism, and his ultra-conservative Catholicism were the ideal recipe for fascist demagogy.

Other examples of subordinates “taking the torch” and going their own way have ranged from the heinous [Heinrich Himmler, impresario of Nazism's occult aspects] to mixed [Saul of Tarsus, impresario of Pauline Christianity] to the relatively benign [Kirpal Singh and Daisaku Ikeda of “Soka Gakkai”]. {55} We might also note virtually any mega-church pastor who operates under the aegis of “Christianity”, even as the operation is entirely about self-aggrandizement.

Suffice to say, anyone who claims to be uniquely positioned to relay privileged information is almost certainly a bullshit artist. (The successful ones are invariably terrific performers.) A man who purports to be bestowing upon the world messages from an ultimate source of wisdom (e.g. the Creator Of The Universe) is either completely deluded or a con man. Either way, such a person is not to be trusted...on anything...ever. (It is no secret that one must be quite full of himself—not to mention delusional—to tout the claim that “I have been chosen”.)

The “profile” of every one of the figures listed above is roughly the same—at least when it comes to salient features (charismatic, confident, and extremely shrewd). Cunning and creativity help. The prepossessing character of cult leaders enable them to enthrall their audiences without really needing provide much genuine wisdom. There can be no doubt that L. Ron Hubbard had an amazing (and inordinately active) imagination. For decades, his vocation was concocting outlandish stories for science fiction periodicals. He became an expert at making stuff up...and doing so in a way that captivated an audience (so that they would keep coming back for more). Translating this skill from publication to demagoguery was logical.

It is no coincidence that Hubbard (like Ayn Rand, who also boasted a cult following) wound up in L.A. After all, starting and maintaining a cult is a form of show-biz. Had, say, Maximilian Robespierre been afforded the opportunity—by availing himself of a time machine—to go to modern-day Hollywood, he may well have jumped at the chance...as would have any one of the spiritual frauds listed in this essay. For spectacle, Robespierre had to make do with a parade dedicated to the cult of the Supreme Being.

Note that demagogues don’t always make themselves the star of the show. Though theatrics is invariably involved, sometimes impresarios of cult activity act behind the scenes (as with James Anderson and Laurence Dermott, codifiers of Freemason doctrine). Typically, though, charismatic leaders want to be the focus of attention...and so will be found, as it were, “on stage”, in the limelight, preening before their swooning fans.

A good story-teller can have the audience eating out of the palm of his hand—be he a mere entertainer or a bona fide scam artist (or, for that matter, a politician). EVERY ONE of the figures listed above were able to weave an enthralling yarn, and keep their audience rapt. Their stories varied (and some were far more malign than others); but the underlying phenomenon was the same.

As successful con-men will attest: It’s all about the presentation. Whatever their differences, every one of the figures listed above had a fantastic presentation. Indeed, each of them was both a savvy impresario and a great performer. Put on a good show, and people will come—as has been demonstrated countless times by celebrity televangelists and “pastors” at any of the world’s high-budget mega-churches.

Assessing each of these self-appointed, self-righteous, self-absorbed personages, one finds a common thread: narcissistic personality disorder coupled with bountiful charm. As with virtually any cult leader, Mohammed of Mecca can be best understood in these terms. Once trust is sewn, the leader can proceed however he sees fit. Note that one of the monikers of Mohammed of Mecca was “al-Sadiq al-Amin”: He who is the most honest and trustworthy. His followers TRUSTED him.

Typically, each member of the zealous flock hangs on the demagogue’s every word, treating each utterance—no matter how inane—as jaw-droppingly sagacious. Any statement is summarily deemed “i’jaz” (inimitable); and thus unimpeachable. The figure is seen as inexplicably remarkable and beyond reproach. Those who have the temerity to impugn said figure are held in contempt by the more zealous followers—a sign of their undying devotion to the anointed one.

For each, we encounter gushing encomia from truckling acolytes. In the final analysis, there was nothing unique about Mohammed of Mecca...other than, perhaps, the staggering magnitude of his legacy (which was based just as much on historical contingencies as on his own canny maneuvering). Thing thing with accidents of history: they tend not to announce themselves AS accidents of history. Demagogues typically fashion themselves as inevitable—the anointed stewards of everyone’s destiny.

And so it goes: When we hear anyone declare, “I shall bestow upon the world information to which ONLY I have access!” ...we would be well-advised to disregard anything that person said ever again. Why? Because that’s not how the universe works. And it is certainly not how genuine wisdom is gleaned. Any purported mouthpiece of the divine can be seen for the nonsensical concept that it is the moment a coherent definition of “the divine” is established.

Alas, the human capacity for credulity seems to know no bounds. When people are searching in desperation for something solid to hold on to, they will often believe almost anything that seems to “do the trick” / “fit the bill”. When people are looking for hope in trying times, they will sign on to whatever “hits the right buttons” / “strikes a nerve”. For, at the end of the day, memes are consumer products; and humans are notoriously irrational consumers. Ironically, under such circumstances, the more outlandish and provocative the claims, the more enthralling (read: hypnotic) those claims become. After all, people would much rather be enchanted than edified.

As demagogues have learned, the key is to ensure that the claims are both enthralling and easily digestible. Simplistic yet provocative usually does the trick. (A veneer of mesmerizing profundity never hurts. How quickly some are bedazzled by contrived mysteriousness. There’s another term for “false prophet”. “Prophet”. To be a self-proclaimed “prophet” is—ipso facto—to be a scam artist. There are no “real” prophets; there are just people who claim to be prophets. (And many of them are, in the words of Matthew 7:15, ravening wolves disguised as sheep.) {5}

The leitmotif is shown to be fatuous once we spell it out: At one point in history (e.g. the early 7th century), the Creator of the Universe surveyed the homo sapiens of planet Earth and decided to deliver his most important message ever to JUST ONE of them. According to this hypothesis, he figured that—of the more than 200 MILLION individuals alive at the time—making a single person privy to this crucial missive would suffice. Presumably, he expected (hoped?) that the designated figure would effectively spread the word to the rest of the world.

Would this be the optimal way to make mankind aware of such vital information? Of course not. Nevertheless, the prospect of a “chosen one” seems to capture the imagination of most humans. Ergo the success—to varying degrees—of the 120+ figures mentioned above. Each of these procurers of deliverance were able to persuade acolytes of his / her preternatural abilities.

Even if people aren’t necessarily looking for a savior figure, they are often seeking someone who might have a proprietary “hot-line” to the divine—and thereby be in a position to relay profound, esoteric “truths” (crucial insights to which the rest of us don’t have access). Presumably, the idea is that we should ALL be privy to such “truths”...and recourse to such privileged intercessors might be the only way.

On the other hand, the Koran makes it quite clear that its divine protagonist is perfectly happy with only a (pre-determined) segment of the human race “getting it”. This affords him the opportunity to torture the rest for eternity in the hereafter—a prospect from which he derives immense satisfaction. He makes no secret of this satisfaction—as, with most mentions of the punishment meted out to the damned, he spends much of his time gloating.

The distinction between spiritual leader and demagogue is often blurred; yet it often becomes evident after simply assessing the degree to which the figure personally benefits (e.g. financially) from the activities-in-question. When it comes to dubious motives, avarice (self-aggrandizement and material gain) is usually a dead-giveaway. Another red flag is the degree to which a charismatic leader demands conformity (complete submission to his will; strict compliance with his edicts). Insofar as an authority figure cultivates a culture of obeisance (read: discourages autonomy), some form of cult activity is invariably afoot. Other red flags include mention of “ancient” or “secret” knowledge / wisdom, opacity in the administration of the organization, hierarchies of status, and (invidious) demarcation of insiders vs. outsiders. No legitimate organization has anything to hide. The existence of proprietary (a.k.a. “insider”) information is usually indicative of insularity. Spirituality does not require secrecy.

How can we know such figures are (or are NOT) completely full of shit? We can never know for sure. (Indeed, sometimes they swallow their own bullshit; which means they’re not deliberately trying to bamboozle their audience.) For those who decide to “believe”, all they can do is close their eyes, hold their breath, and make a leap of faith.

To conclude: We homo sapiens are all suckers for a good story. So a narrative that is sufficiently captivating usually serves as the best vehicle for the promulgation of an ideology. A well-crafted narrative effectively serves as a memplex-delivery mechanism. Every religion depends on some sort of compelling narrative vehicle to “work”. In this respect, the provocative, simple-minded narrative offered in the Koran (and, by implication, by Mohammed of Mecca himself) works extremely well.

Footnotes:

{1 We might also recall Thomas Jefferson’s observation that there would never have been an infidel if there had never been a priest.}

{2 Roman Catholicism has an extensive hierarchy—replete with “vicars”, “abbots” / “abbesses”, and “priests”. Higher offices include [arch]bishops and cardinals; while lower level functionaries include chaplains, pastors, deacons, friars, et. al. Communal stations include monks / nuns.}

{3 Celebrity and a cult of personality typically go hand in hand. One feeds off of—and conversely, fuels—the other. It is possible to be a celebrity (i.e. command fame) without generating a cult of personality; but it is not possible to generate a cult of personality without some kind of celebrity. In either case, one amasses a loyal following of epigones (i.e. acolytes; a.k.a. disciples).}

{4 The Imami (a.k.a. “Twelver”) Shia version of the “Mahdi” is the (pending) 12th imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Husayn ibn Ali “al-Muntazar”...who is believed to currently be in a state of suspended animation at the bottom of a well. Meanwhile, Isma’ilis (e.g. the “Qarmatians” of Bahrain from the 10th century) await the arrival of Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Jafar al-Sadiq. Over the centuries, various political leaders have invoked the exalted mantle of “ordained imam” to legitimize their movement—as with, say, Berber (Barghouata) ruler, Salih ibn Tarif, who claimed to be the Mahdi in the 8th century...and Abd (alt. Ubayd) Allah “al-Mahdi”, founder of the Fatimid Empire in the early 10th century...and “shah” Ismail, the leader of the “qizil-bash” [red-heads], who founded the Safavid dynasty in the late 15th century.}

{5 Saying “false prophet” is like saying “fake fortune-teller” or “phony quack”. One may as well say “artificial astroturf”. Is there a NON-deceptive scam? (Must we also inquire about “duplicitous con-men”?) Some things are fraudulent by definition. Hucksters are hucksters; and balderdash is balderdash...no matter how well-packaged. There is a reason we needn’t specify “non-scientific

astrology”.}

{6 Musaylima’s campaign for prophet-hood failed, while Mohammed’s succeeded. What exactly explains this difference? We can only speculate. Musaylima may not have been quite as phenomenally charismatic as was Mohammed. Certainly, one of the former’s mis-steps was to pursue CO-prophet-hood (with Mohammed), whereas Mohammed was adamant about being the SOLE prophet. Unsurprisingly, the bolder claim (from the far more audacious demagogue) ultimately prevailed. Indeed, most of Mohammed’s followers would most likely have been impressed by just about anything...so long as it was confidently stated and hit the right nerves. This was a reminder: Bold messages—delivered with confidence by charismatic figures commanding prodigious gravitas—tend to be more compelling. In any case, we are left with scant solid evidence for the exact details of what transpired. The surviving accounts of the life of Mohammed (the Hadith) are highly dubious, as they were composed / compiled centuries after his death. Indeed, the Hadith are a veritable smorgasbord of tall tales. For the reason, I provide the best account I can of this dubious hagiography in the Addendum to the present book.}

{7 This Persian prophet lived in the late 5th / early 6th century. His followers were referred to as Mazdakites; and later as the “Khurramiyya” [Khurramites]. Other key prophets in this tradition was the Karenid figure, Sunpadh of Nishapur and the Sogdian figure, Hashim of Balkh (a.k.a. “Al-Muqanna”), both of whom lived in the 8th century. The Faith seems to have been a synthesis of Zoroastrianism and Islam.}

{8 It was figures like Nathan of Gaza and the Krymchak preacher, Abraham ha-Yakini who proclaimed Sabbatai Zevi to be the Messiah, thereby inaugurating the Sabbatean movement. Ironically, he eventually converted to Islam.}

{9 There were fundamentalist offshoots of the Church of Latter-day Saints—such as those founded by John Wickersham Woolley and Charles William Kingston. Joseph White Musser and Rulon Clark Allred founded a sect called the Apostolic United Brethren.}

{10 His followers still exist. There are between 10 and 20 million “Ahmadiyya” [Ahmadi Muslims] worldwide; testament to the fact that one can be Muslim and believe in rather outlandish things that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Faith as it originally existed. Felicitously, Ahmadi Muslims tend to be the most liberal denizens of Dar al-Islam.}

{11 He also fashioned himself the “Lamb of God”. His cult, “Aum Shinrikyo”, was essentially a crude, Messianic hybridization of Abrahamic lore and Vajrayana Buddhism.}

{12 Founders of the World Mission Society, Church of God.}

{13 5 were Judaic in nature, 18 were some variant of Christian, and 10 were a Mohammedan derivative—including Islam itself. (That’s in addition to the four Arabian prophets mentioned prior to the list.) Another one of the 50 was syncretic—incorporating elements of Abrahamic lore. In the Jewish tradition, there were several auspicious figures who claimed to be Messianic in a certain sense (that is: mantic in nature), including Bar Kokhba.}

{14 The “catch” for Christians—especially after the Nicene creed was established—was to explain away Jesus’ ignominious death by prognosticating his coming back to Earth as the coming eschaton. (This required rationalizing his being executed by the Roman authorities by positing vicarious atonement; as if his martyrdom had been the plan all along.) Thus, in the Nicene tradition, “Messiah” equated with JoN as SAVIOR, who’s eventual return would usher in the End Times. The Kingdom NOW was thereby re-conceptualized as the pending Kingdom COME. For Jews, rather than a worldly place that WAS promised,

what was offered was an otherworldly place that HELD promise. }

{ 15 Zhang Jue was the leader of the Yellow Scarf Rebellion and of the “Taiping Tao” [“Way of Heaven”]. His gimmick should sound familiar in a few respects. He claimed to have found (or to have been given by the godhead, “Huang-Lao”) a holy book called the “Tai-ping Yao-shu” [“Crucial Keys to the Way of Peace”]; thereby giving him unique access to the deity’s will. He fashioned himself a sorcerer, performing miracles like faith-healing (which, in order to work, required people to confess their sins). His social philosophy resembled socialism. }

{ 16 Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad of Khorasan was founder of the Druze, which is technically not Islamic. Both he and the aforesaid Ad-Darazi proclaimed the Fatimid heir, Abu Ali Mansur as the incarnation of god. As the Fatimid caliph, he was anointed “Hakim bi-Amir Allah” [Ruler by God’s Command] like his father, Al-Aziz Billah. As with, say, the Baha’i Faith, the Druze Faith incorporates many other Faiths (including Kabbalah, Gnosticism, and even Hinduism) into its repertoire, even as it originated as an offshoot of Islam. Druze effectively resulted from the integration of elements from Ismaili Islam and neo-Platonism (along with Christian mysticism; i.e. Gnosticism). }

{ 17 Founder of the Alawi sect of Shiism. Another example of such a “bab” was Abu Yaqub Ishaq, also in the 9th century. Shia Muslims believe in 5, 7, or 12 total imams, the last of which shall be the savior of mankind (the “mahdi”, the arrival of whom is pending). For “Imamiyyah” Shiites like the Alawites, the latest imam—the 11th—was Hasan ibn Ali ibn Muhammad of Samarra (a.k.a. “al-Askari”). }

{ 18 This rabbi was actually part of a fabled lineage, starting with Eliyahu Baal Shem of Worms, then Yoel Baal Shem of Zamosc, then Adam Baal Shem of Ropczyce (alt. David Moshe Abraham of Troyes), then Yisro-El ben Eliezer (a.k.a. “Baal Shem Tov”). }

{ 19 Baal Shem Tov’s great-grandson, Na[c]hman of Beslov [Podolia], inspired his own heterodox sect of “Breslover” Hassidim. }

{ 20 Founder of “Donghak”; later re-named “Cheon-dogyo”. }

{ 21 Founder of “Shin-cheon-ji”; a.k.a. “Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony”. }

{ 22 He was the bellwether for the Russian “Skoptsy” cult. }

{ 23 Founder of the “Eastern Lightning” cult (a.k.a. “Church of the Almighty God”). }

{ 24 The People’s Temple is perhaps the most notorious cult in modern history. However, it is not nearly as extraordinary as some make it out to be. In fact, it was a prototypical example of cult activity—what might be called a “textbook case”. }

{ 25 Vorilhon actually first claimed to have received a message from Yahweh before tweaking his narrative to be about advanced alien beings. }

{ 26 Bhakti-vedanta, a practitioner of Gaudiva Vaishnavism, was founder of the (faux Hindu) “Hare Krishna” sect. One of his disciples, a yoga teacher from Hawaii named Chris Butler (a.k.a. “Jagad Guru”; “Siddha-Swarup-Ananda”; “Para-Mahamsa”) ended up forming his own cult: the “Science Of Identity”—later affiliated with a political party called the “Independents For Godly Government”. }

{ 27 We might also note Reactionary Zoroastrian priests [moa-bad / mo-bed]: Karter and Zaradusht of the 3rd century. Azar Kayvan was a Zoroastrian high priest who lived in the late 16th century. He mustn’t be

confused with the famed 12th-century Persian philosopher who founded the Ishraqiyyah movement [a.k.a. “Hikmat al-Ishraq”; “Wisdom of Illuminism”]: “Shahab ad-Din”, Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak of Sohrevard (a.k.a. “Suhrawardi”; a.k.a. “Shaikh al-Ishraq”).}

{28 He was known for claiming, “I am the Truth.” Sufi cynosure, Abu Said ibn Abi al-Khayr (of the late 10th / early 11th century) was a disciple.}

{29 One of his disciples, Sayyid Muhammad Noorbakhsh, himself became the founder of a new sect.}

{30 Isaac Luria is an interesting case-study—in that he is an example of (alleged) divine ordinance. As the story goes, “Eliyahu HaNavi” (a.k.a. the angel of the prophet, Elijah) visited his father, Shlomo [“Solomon”], delivering a message that he would sire a special child. And so it went.}

{31 He was followed by such epigones as “Maggid” Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezeritch; and later “Rebbe” Israel Friedman of Ruzhyn.}

{32 Oriented around the “Enneagram of Personality” popularized by Oscar Ichazo (founder of “Arica”) and Claudio Benjamin Naranjo Cohen (founder of “Seekers After Truth”). We find that dogmatism systems are interconnected, and feed off of one another.}

{33 It is reported that—during his heyday—Hinn earned tens of millions of dollars EACH YEAR perpetrating his hoax. He claimed to be conduit for god’s power (via what he called “the anointing”). As with miscellaneous celebrity televangelists, he contends to be capable of performing miracles. The most miraculous thing about scams like these is that such an astonishingly large number of people insist that they have personally witnessed the miracles first-hand. Both Sathya Sai Baba (also listed) and Hinn boast countless eye-witness accounts of their astonishing, preternatural feats. The accounts are provided by loyal followers who are thoroughly convinced of their own testimony. (Benny Hinn’s partner in the “LoveWorld” ministries is the infamous Nigerian pastor, Chris Oyakhilome.) Such popinjays are case-studies in how even the most flagrant con-men can accumulate a bevy of die-hard, wall-eyed acolytes.}

{34 His disciple, Jan Matthias of Haarlem, is probably more infamous. Matthias was the (militant) self-proclaimed prophet of the New Jerusalem...designated as Münster, Germany. In other words, Westphalia was the New Zion. He was then followed by yet ANOTHER self-proclaimed prophet, HIS disciple, Jan van Leiden [John of Leiden]; who eventually anointed himself monarch of a New Zion. Anabaptism began as a fanatical movement—its earliest leaders as delusional as most other demagogues. We should bear in mind: When it comes to cult activity, fanaticism comes in very handy. Memetically-speaking, insofar as a charismatic leader is able to parlay his own delusion / obsession onto his followers, fanaticism can be stupendously effective. (Groupthink ensures all will remain in lockstep conformity, intoxication ensures people will remain both deluded and addicted.) So it goes with ALL the charismatic leaders listed in this endnote.}

{35 An offshoot of this was “Ariosophy”, founded by Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels.}

{36 The groundwork for his scam was first laid by a Zulu demagogue named Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa. He was inspired by the writings of British mystic, David Icke. If we venture further back to the late 19th century, there was the Boer prophet, Niklaas van Rensburg (a.k.a. “Siener”).}

{37 Konko-kyo has something interesting in common with the Vietnamese monotheistic religion, Cao-Dai. They both posit an androgynous godhead that is considered a cosmic parent of mankind. The former posits “Tenchi Kane No Kami” while the latter posits “Duc Cao-Dai”.}

{38 For good measure, she also claimed to be the Maitreya AND the Mahdi. }

{39 He was followed by Chaibul Sutthipol (a.k.a. “Phra” Thepyanmahamuni). }

{40 He claimed to be the incarnation of Supreme Being, “Radha-soami Sahab”. So his followers often referred to themselves as the “Radha-swami” movement. A more recent leader of the sect was “Maharshi” Mehi Paramhans. “Sant Mat” means the “True Word”; though “Sant” is a common term for a person who has grasped the essence of Reality. }

{41 An offshoot of this is the (Sikh) “Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha”, founded by “Baba” Puran Singh[-ji] (a.k.a. “Kericho wala Bapuji”). }

{42 There have been various messianic Buddhist cults throughout history. Most notable is the White Lotus sect, founded by Mao Tzu-yuan c. 1100; inspired by the teachings of the 4th-century buddhist monk, Hui-yuan. (The White Lotus Society inspired the so-called “Red Turbans” of the 14th century.) Also during the 4th century, “Pure Land” buddhism was founded by Tao-an (himself a disciple of Kuchean monk, Fotu-deng). Various sects have associated themselves with the bodhisattva, “Avalokitesvara” (rendered “Guan[-shi-]yin” in Chinese Buddhism). More recently, in the early 19th century, Yang Shou-i claimed to be the reincarnation of the Chinese goddess, Kuan Yin; and is purported by followers to have written the so-called “True Scripture”. }

{43 This was an offshoot of “Xian-Tian-Tao”, a religion from Jiang-xi which began during the Qing era as neo-Luo-Tao (a newfangled version of “Wu-wei-ism”). It is essentially an awkward syncretism of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. }

{44 “Yan-sheng-Tao” [Way of the Holy Word] was a spin-off of this sect. }

{45 Later re-named the “Chinese Soul Light Research Association”; then re-named “God’s Salvation Church” under Hon-Ming Chen. }

{46 Strangely, this Japanese (millenarian) messianic buddhist cult eventually merged with the Korean neo-Christian “Unification Church” in 1988. Kawase Kayo was a Japanese woman who fashioned herself a shaman. She claimed to be a medium who foretold the coming of the Maitreya. This merger occurred after a schism in the Unification Church in 1980, whereby Jung Myung-seok (a.k.a. “Joshua”) created his own sect, the Ae-chun Church—now variously known as the International Christian Association, [Jesus] Morning Star (in Taiwan), Bright Moon (in Hong Kong), Providence [“Setsuri”] (in Japan), and Christian Gospel Mission (for ex-pats). As it turned out, Jung Myung-seok’s operation was largely about giving him access to sex with fawning female supplicants. Such an arrangement is far from unusual when cult activity is afoot. }

{47 It was spun off of another cult movement, “Sekai Kyusei Kyo” [Church of World Messianism]. An offshoot of this is “Sukyo Mahikari”, founded by Okada Keishu. }

{48 This may be attributed to the indomitable entrepreneurial verve of America. Evangelism has been a hallmark of American culture since the “Awakenings” of the 18th and 19th centuries. Other notable examples include John Graham Lake’s “Apostolic Faith Mission” and John Alexander Dowie’s “Zionist” (Christian) movement (both primarily focused in South Africa). One of the most successful domestically has been Charles Ward Smith’s “Cavalry Chapel” movement. More recent examples include the evangelical movements of Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Rick Warren: savvy performers with an eager, ecstatic flock. }

{49 The name of his Californian cult was “Buddha-Field”; discussed in the 2016 documentary, “Holy Hell”. This is not to be confused with OTHER cults that have operated under the same moniker (derived from the Mahayana Buddhist term for “Pure Land”). Notable is the cult based on “Shyalpa” Tenzin Rinpoche in Kathmandu, Nepal (leaders of which were subsequently dubbed “Kyabgon”); as well as the Kagyu (Vajrayana) cult centered on “Kyabgon” Traleg Rinpoche.}

{50 This is actually the un-spoken name of the ultra-right-wing cabal on C Street in Washington D.C. It was a moniker coined by Vereide’s successor, Douglas Coe. Vereide was a Christian fundamentalist and fascist sympathizer (as with Henry Kissinger, a vigorous Suharto supporter). He first became known for an operation he called “Goodwill Industries” before founding the “International Christian Leadership Council” / “Fellowship Foundation”—an organization predicated on Social Darwinism (power is a reflection of merit / virtue; god favors the strong; the strong shall inherit the Earth; etc.) The cult is deeply involved in the military-industrial complex, and has been an active supporter of dictators around the world—from Siad Barre of Somalia to Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. As an ardent corporatist, Vereide inaugurated the “Presidential Prayer Breakfast”—a highly-publicized, annual ritual now known as the “National Prayer Breakfast”.}

{51 This shows how organizations re-brand themselves after falling into disrepute. Call it the “Amway-to-Quixtar” phenomenon—famously done by Philip-Morris cum “Altria”; and most recently exemplified by “Blackwater” cum “Xe” cum “Academi”. “Landmark” is a self-help scam that marries free-market fundamentalism with trans-personal psychology and neuro-linguistic programming. Since time immemorial, con men (e.g. priests and shamans) have been persuading credulous audiences that THEY, and THEY ALONE, have privileged access to X (where X can be ancestors, a deity, or the deepest secrets of the universe). This scam goes back many millennia. The notion that a particular person has a private hot-line to the inner workings of the cosmos is extremely enticing.}

{52 To the query, “But how do you know?” a prophet need only respond: “Because god told me. And he talks to ME, not to YOU; so you’d be well advised to heed whatever I say.” End of discussion. The quality of being unimpeachable is endemic to prophet-hood; as one need “look no further” than the ultimate source. Such sacrosanctity also accounts for the appeal of holy books: No need to read anything else; just refer to THIS.}

{53 There is no need to fear death if one is certain that paradise is held in store for oneself in an after-death “life”. For a recent (disturbing) explication of divinely assigned purpose-to-one’s-life (DAP), see Rick Warren’s “The Purpose Driven Life”. This mindset accounts for ideological agendas from Nazism and Revisionist Zionism to that of Salafis and Christian Quiver-fulls. We encounter elements of this in any kind of ardent evangelism (read: fanaticism). Such Providentialism (which is effectively collective DAP) is made manifest in its ethno-nationalistic form, whereby adherents are convinced that they are doing god’s work.}

{54 Under certain circumstances, human credulity seems to know no bounds. We might recall that snake-oil has taken many forms: from rhino-horn powder and magic crystals to homeopathy and Paltrow’s “Goop”. When hankering for solutions to (imagined) problems, people are willing to believe the darndest things...especially when they are entranced by confident declarations of magic. For a great book on this topic, see Michael Shermer’s “How We Believe”.}

{55 This peculiar yet mostly anodyne cult is an offshoot of Nichiren Buddhism. They specialize in the mindless repetition of chants; and are highly secretive.}

{56 Demagogy is largely about generating mass-mania / mass-hysteria through some sort of agit-prop. It comes as no surprise, then, that in the political realm, fantastical claims are often used for sheerly

propagandistic purposes. Chinese Empress, Wu Zetian proclaimed herself the **“Maitreya”** (sent from heaven) in the late 7th century. She did so in order to consolidate her power under the aegis of Buddhism. The gambit worked like a charm. She ended up pioneering a Chinese form of fascism that presaged Maoism by twelve and a half centuries. It is no secret that there have been a plethora of Christian zealots who parlayed their stature into political power—many of them accorded saint-hood. Perhaps the most infamous was John Calvin (listed above), who temporarily established a (fascistic) Protestant Christian theocracy in Geneva, Switzerland. During the modern era, the most notorious of Messianic political figures have been Adolph Hitler (**Nazism**), Kim Il-Sung (**Juche**), and Mao Tse-Tung (**the Great Leap Forward**). One of the most virulent cases of cult activity in the political sphere was the **“Khmer Rouge”**, founded in Cambodia by Saloth Sar of Kampong Thom (a.k.a. “Pol Pot”)...who envisioned a return to the golden age of Angkor; and himself as the divinely-appointed deliverer. In a sense, MOST political leaders present themselves as savior-figures to some degree, in one way or another. After all, if one is not charismatic and making big promises, it is that much more difficult to drum up fervor, and galvanize a following. This is why intellectuals (especially those who are utterly un-interested in self-aggrandizement) almost never enter politics; and if they do, they rarely fare well. When it comes to POLITICAL cults, Switzerland, Germany, North Korea, China, and Cambodia were not alone. Cults of personality have also occurred in Russia (Lenin, then Stalin). In Japan, Mitsuo Matayoshi anointed himself “The Only God, Jesus Christ”. The fascist cynosure, Hakuun Yasutani was the founder of the Soto / Linji (alt. “Cao-dong Rinzai” hybrid)—a variation of Japanese Zen known as “Sanbo Kyodan” (later re-branded **“Sanbo-Zen International”**). In India, Tamil (Shakti) cynosure, Venkataraman Iyer (a.k.a. “Bhagavan Sri” / “Rama-Swami” Ramana Maharshi) fashioned himself the avatar of Shakti when promoting the cultic **“Quit India”** movement. Cult activity is cult activity, irrespective of the context. (See footnote 57 below.) In this sense, leaders of fanatical POLITICAL movements are no different from the religious figures listed above. }

{57 The dictator of Haiti, “Papa Doc” Francois Duvalier, claimed to be the reincarnation of “Baron Samedi” (the spirit of death in Voodoo lore). The dictator of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, anointed himself “Turkmen-bashi” (Father of the Turkic people)...and even composed a holy book, the “Ruhnama” [Book of the Soul]. The gold medal for overwrought monikers goes to the dictator of Zaire (eastern Congo): Joseph-Desiré Mobutu. He christened himself “Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga”: “Warrior who knows no defeat [because of his endurance and resolute will]; and who is all-powerful, [leaving fire in his wake as he goes from conquest to conquest]”. In America, the nexus of demagoguery and showmanship was illustrated by the campaign and election of Donald Trump for president of the United States in 2016. In effect, any ambitious politician is obliged to fashion himself as a quasi-Messianic figure—replete with a cult of personality—in order to be sufficiently successful to become head of State. To illustrate this, one could reference any politician who’s managed to amass a fanatical following. In the political realm as in the religious realm, charisma almost always trumps merit. It comes as little surprise that those who create a cult of personality around themselves tend to be tyrannical. Such figures are often paranoid (Stalin), often blithering idiots (Turkmen-bashi), and sometimes BOTH (Mao). Tragically, the tradition of “Juche” continues to the present day in North Korea—through Kim’s progeny: Jong-Il followed by Jong-Un. }

APPENDIX:

In this survey, religious leaders are counted not merely because they were significant. To qualify, they need to have founded a cult. Nor do I count founders of new denominations just because they founded new denominations. Such figures may have garnered followings, but they were not prophetic in nature. That is to say: While they were seen as uniquely special by acolytes, they did not claim to be MANTIC. In other words: Not all founders of new sects have been con-men.

Take Christianity. Most notable was George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (a.k.a. the “Quakers”). Fox was—arguably—the antithesis of a demagogue. Since the earliest days of Christianity, various reformers have garnered support without being the impresarios of cult activity. For example, Jesus’ brother, James of Jerusalem (alt. “James the Just”) was the touchstone for the **Ebionite** and **Elkasaite** sects; say nothing of the neo-Judaic **Essenes** and so-called “Nazarenes”. Yet he was hardly the founder of a distinct new cult (being, as he was, in the shadow of his deified brother).

Basilides of Alexandria promoted Gnostic Christianity, thereby inaugurating his own “Basilidian” sect of Gnosticism in the 2nd century; yet he did not fashion himself a prophet. The same goes for other figures in Alexandria—including Cerinthus, Carpocrates, Valentinus, and—most famously—Origen Adamantius.

This had also been the case with Syriac theologians like Theodore of Antioch [Mopsuestia], Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Ibas of Edessa. In fact, there have been many theologians who inaugurated their own denominations, yet were not themselves demagogic. Forty others of note:

1. Anatolian monk, Serapion of Antioch: promulgator of the **Docetist** sect
2. Samaritan mage, Simon “Magus”: founder of the **Simonian** sect
3. Galatian theologian, Marcion of Sinope / Pontus: founder of the **Marcionite** sect
4. Phrygian theologian, Montanus: founder the **Montanist** sect
5. Anatolian monk, Julian of Halicarnassus: founder of the (anti-Chalcedonian) **Aphthartodocetae** sect
6. Syriac monk, Nestorius of Germanikeia: founder of the **Nestorian** sect
7. Syriac monk, Saul of Samosata: founder of the **Paulician** [alt. “Paulian(-ist)"] sect
8. Syriac monk, Moroun of Taurus / Cyrrhus [a.k.a. “Maron”]: founder of the **Maronite** sect
9. Syriac monk, Jacob bar Addai of Constantina (a.k.a. “Jacob Baradaeus”): founder of the **Jacobin** sect
10. Syriac (gnostic) scholar, Bar Daisan of Edessa (Latinized as “Bardesanes”): founder of the **Bardaisanite** sect (and who’s preaching later inspired the prophet, Mani of Ctesiphon).
11. Syriac monk, Alcibiades of Apameia: founder of the **Elkasaite** sect
12. Syriac theologian, Nikolas of Antioch: founder of the **Nicolaite** sect
13. Syriac theologian, Apollinaris of Laodicea: founder of the **Apollinarian** sect
14. Syriac theologian, Aëtius of Antioch: founder of the **Anomoean** sect (so named, as it was associated with Eunomius of Cyzicus)
15. Roman theologian, Cerinthus of Asiana: icon of neo-Platonic **Gnosticism**
16. Roman presbyter, Hippolytus of Rome: founder of the **Ophite** sect
17. Roman theologian, Pelagius of Britannia: founder of the **Pelagian** sect
18. Egyptian sage, Marcus of Memphis (followed by Roman bishop, Priscillian of Avila / Hispania): founder of the (Manichaean-Gnostic) **Priscillian** sect
19. Berber / Coptic theologian, Arius of Cyrenaica [Libya]: founder of the **Arian** sect
20. Berber / Numidian theologian, Donatus of Carthage [“Casae Nigrae”]: founder of the **Donatist** sect
21. Bulgarian / Thracian theologian, Bogomil of Macedonia: founder of a dualist **neo-Gnostic** sect
22. Lombard monk, Arnold of Brescia: leader of the **Commune of Rome**
23. Italian monk, Fra Dolcino of Novara: founder of the **Dulcinian** sect (inspired by Francis of Assisi and Joachim of Fiore)
24. French theologian, Peter Waldo of Lyons: founder of the (Vaudois) **Waldensian** sect
25. French (Begaine) mystic, Marguerite Porete of Hainaut: touchstone for the (anti-clerical) **Free Spirit** movement
26. Spanish theologian, Miguel Serveto of Aragon: protestant reformer
27. Bohemian preacher, Petr Chelcicky: founder of **Unitas Fratrum**; bellwether for **Anabaptism**
28. Bohemian reformer, Jan of Husinec (a.k.a. “Jan Hus”): founder of the **Hussite** sect (and bellwether for the Christian Reformation)

29. Saxon (German) preacher, Nikolaus Ludwig, count of Zinzendorf: founder of “Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine” (a.k.a. the **Moravian** church)
30. Silesian (German) theologian, Kaspar Schwenkfeld of Ossig: inspiration for Christian Protestantism (i.e. the Reformation)
31. German minister, Alexander Mack of Westphalia / the Rhineland: the **Schwarzenau Brethren**
32. German theologian, Martin Luther of Saxony: catalyst for Christian Protestantism (i.e. the Reformation); founder of the **Lutheran** denomination
33. Dutch theologian, Jakob[us] Hermanszoon (a.k.a. “Arminius”): founder of the **Arminian** sect (a.k.a. the “Remonstrants”)
34. Italian theologian, Fausto Paolo Sozzini of Siena: founder of the **Socinian** sect of the Polish Reform Church.
35. Indian bishop, “Valiya” Mar Thoma[s] of Kerala: founder of the **Malankara** denomination
36. Scottish minister, John Knox: founder of the **Presbyterian** denomination
37. English theologian, John Wycliffe: reformer who inspired the **Lollard** movement
38. English minister, John Smyth of Nottinghamshire: founder of the **Baptist** denomination
39. English minister, John Wesley of Lincolnshire: founder of the **Methodist** denomination
40. English activist, Gerrard Winstanley: founder of the **Diggers** (an offshoot of which were the so-called “Levellers”)

During Classical Antiquity, there also existed the **Alogian**, **Eustathian**, **Naassene**, **Chaldaean**, and **Mandaean** (alt. Nazarene; Sabian) sects. During the Renaissance, there emerged the (Albigensian) **Cathars**. None had a singular figure that could be characterized as a cult leader.

Founders of monastic orders are another story, as such men started their own institutions. For example, the Coptic monk, Anthony of Thebes inaugurated monasticism as the first (Egyptian) “Desert Father”. Then Coptic monk, Pakhomius of Thebes founded the **Cenobitic** monastic Order. Meanwhile, Italian monk, Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone of Assisi (a.k.a. “Francesco” / “Francis”) founded the **Franciscan** Order; Italian monk, Benedetto of Norcia (a.k.a. “Benedict of Nursia”) founded the **Benedictine** Order; Castilian monk, Dominic of Caleruega / Osma (a.k.a. “Domingo Felix de Guzman”) founded the **Dominican** Order; and German monk, Bruno of Cologne founded the **Carthusian** Order. And the **Cistercian** (a.k.a. “Bernadine”) Order, which began in Citeaux, was named after its patriarch: Bernard of Clairvaux.

There have been countless sages who started their own Hindu and Buddhist sects over the centuries. Not all of them were looking to start a cult with themselves as figureheads. Invariably, there have also been borderline cases—as with, say:

- Bengali yogi, Gadadhar Chattopadhyay of Kamarpukur (a.k.a. “Rama-krishna Para-mahamsa”)
- Bengali yogi, Aurobindo Ghose (a.k.a. “Sri Aurobindo”); and his cohort, Mirra Alfassa (a.k.a. “The Mother”)
- Tamil cynosure, “Jagad-guru” Sri Chandra-sekharendra Sara-swati Swami-gal (“Maha-periyava”; the “great sage of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham”): Avatar of the aforementioned (Advaita Vedanta) patriarch, Adi Shankara
- Indian mystic, Syed Muhammad Azeem Barkhiyya (a.k.a. “Qalandar Baba Auliya”)
- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (a.k.a. “Baba Saheb”); founder of the Navayana Buddhist movement to empower the Dalit caste)
- Dravidian actress / politician, Jayaram Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu (a.k.a. “Amma”)

Sects in ALL the world’s major religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) have proliferated over the centuries...to the point where it is sometimes difficult to discern whether or not the “founder” of a new sect qualifies as the panjandrum of a cultic movement. This is especially the case when

it comes to the ramification of Sufism. There have been a panoply of mystics—many of whom founded their own Sufi orders. Thirty of the most notable figures in Dar al-Islam who don't qualify as demagogic:

- Persian mystic, Abu Said abi al-Hasan Yasar of Basra (late 7th / early 8th century)
- Persian mystic, Abu Abd Allah Muhammed ibn Karram of Khorasan (9th century)
- Persian mystic, Abu al-Qasim ibn Muhammed al-Junayd of Baghdad (late 9th / early 10th century)
- Persian mystic, “Hazrat Sheikh” Abu Ismail [alt. “Khajah”] Abdullah al-Herawi al-Ansari of Herat [Khorasan] (11th century)
- Persian mystic, “Muhyi ad-Din” Abu Muhammad ibn Abu Saleh of Rasht / Gilan [a.k.a. “Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani”] (late 11th / early 12th century)
- Persian mystic, Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak of Sohrevard [a.k.a. “Shahab ad-Din Yahya ibn Habash Surawardi”] (12th century)
- Arab mystic, Ahmed al-Rifa’i of Wasit (12th century)
- Maghrebi mystic, Abu Madyan Shu’ayb ibn al-Hussein “al-Ansari” [alt. “al-Ghawth”] (12th century)
- Persian (Chishti) mystic, Mu’in ud-Din Hasan Sijzi of Sistan; and his disciple, the Punjabi mystic, Farid ud-Din Masud Ganj-i Shakar of Multan (12th / 13th century)
- Andalusian mystic, Ibn Arabi al-Hatimi of Taifa / Murcia [a.k.a. “Shaykh al-Akbar”; Greatest Master] (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Berber mystic, Abd as-Salam ibn Mashish of Jabal al-Alam (a.k.a. “Al-Alami”) and his disciple, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili of the Banu Yafrah [Rif]. Also note the rival prophet, Muhammed ibn Abi Tawajin el-Kutami (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Persian mystic, Abu Hamid ibn Abu Bakr Ibrahim of Nishapur [a.k.a. “Attar”; “Farid ud-Din”] (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Yemeni mystic, Muhammad al-Faqih al-Muqaddam (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Persian (Ishik Alevi) mystic, “Haji” Bektash Wali” [a.k.a. “Dervish of Dervishes”; “Sultan of Hearts”] (13th century)
- Bengali mystic, Alaul Haq of Pandava (13th century)
- Anatolian mystic, Baba Ishaq (13th century)
- Syrian mystic, Ahmad al-Badawi (13th century)
- Berber mystic, Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili (13th century)
- Andalusian mystic, Shahab al-Din Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Umar ibn Mohammad al-Ansari of Murcia (13th century)
- Persian mystic (and founder of Sufism), Taj ad-Din Ibrahim ibn Rushan Amir al-Kurdi Sanjani of Lahijan / Gilan [a.k.a. “Zahid Gilani”] (13th century)
- Kurdish mystic, Safi ad-Din Ishaq of Ardabil (late 13th / early 14th century)
- Persian mystic, Baha ud-Din Naqshband of Bukhara (14th century)
- Azeri mystic, Seyid Yahya Bakuvi of Shirvan (15th century)
- Berber mystic, Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Sulayman ibn Abu Bakr al-Jazuli al-Simlali of Marrakesh (15th century)
- Sanhaja (Berber) mystic, Mohamed ben Issa of Meknes (late 15th / early 16th century)
- Turkish mystic, Aziz Mahmud Hudayi of Ankara (late 16th / early 17th century)
- Punjabi mystic, Sultan Bahu (17th century)

This continued up to the 19th century—as with the Bengali mystic, Ahmed Ullah of Maizbhander. There have been innumerable Sufi mystics who amassed followings since the inception of Islam—each offering his own angle on the ultimate “tariq” [path]. There was invariably a degree of cult activity around each one of these figures; yet they do not qualify as cult leaders.

Such figures are often concomitant with syncretic activity—as with the self-proclaimed Messiah, Abu Isa of Isfahan (a.k.a. “Ovadiyah”), whose movement was effectively Judeo-Shiite. (His followers were known as the “Isawiyya”.)

Extensive syncretism occurred in the Far East. In the 15th century, “Satpanth” integrated elements of Ismaili Islam with Hinduism. In the 16th century, Akbar the Great incorporated elements of Islam and Hinduism into the syncretic “Din-i Ilahi” (Persian for “religion of god”), centered at the “Ibadat Khana” at Fatehpur Sikri in Agra. He even created a new holy book: the “Allah Upanishad”. He also opted to include elements from Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

The hybridization of Zen Buddhism and Taoism (a syncretic Faith referred to as “Chan”) began with Tang sage, Mazu Daoyi (a.k.a. “Bao Doi-tsu”) in the 8th century. It passed to Bai-zhang Hua-i-hai, then to Huang-bo Xi-yun and Gui-yang Ling-you, then to Lin-ji Yi-xuan...any one of which could be considered a charismatic leader. There was also Yun-yan Tan-sheng, who’s disciple was Dongshan Liangjie (of Caodong fame). There was also De-shan Xuan-jian, who’s disciple was Xue-feng Yicun (who’s teachings led to Yunmen and Fayuan).

Today, there are some figures who are shams, yet fall short of being demagogues—such as self-help “guru” Swami Parthasarathy (a.k.a. “Swami-ji”) and uber-charlatan, Deepak Chopra. There have been other figures who are spiritual leaders yet not necessarily con-men. In the Eastern spiritual traditions, there were such cynosures as Padma-sambhava (a.k.a. “Guru Rinpoche”), Adi Shankara, (founder of “Puru-savada”; alt. “Advaita Vedanta”), Balakrishna Menon (a.k.a. “Swami Chin-maya-nanda Saraswati”), Natarajan (a.k.a. “Swami Daya-nanda Saraswati”), and the Tibetan Dalai Lamas.

In the Ashkenazi Judaic spiritual tradition, there have been significant figures like Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus of Worms (a.k.a. the “Rokeach”)...as well as Eliezer ben Joel ha-Levi of Bonn (a.k.a. “Ra’avyah”) and his student, Isaac ben Moses of Vienna (a.k.a. the “Riaz”, who penned the “Or Zarua”). Such men commanded significant followings, yet rarely resorted to demagoguery.