Finding Truth Essay, Research Paper

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In almost all major religions, there abounds the undertone of the spiritual battle that takes place inside someone regarding the succumbation to sin or earthly desires and the like. Also ever present in the soul’s journey through life is the search for a prize; an ultimate Truth, especially in the early Middle Ages when religions where beginning to mature and take power in society. Though the doctrine theoretically differs greatly, Christian and Islamic faith as one body contextually share the same ideals and foci on the issues pertaining to the soul. This is made evident when analyzing the works of Christian mystic, Margery Kempe, and Sufi poet, Jalal al-Din Rumi, who despite the difference in gender and culture, shed light on the meaning of Truth through acts and words of devotion and love for a common God.

Margery Kempe, who did not consider herself a mystic, led a normal life until a traumatic event thrust her into a life-long sojourn for truth and holiness. This event yielded a strikingly emotional union between herself and God, which sometimes consisted of visions that she was speaking with Jesus Christ. Kempe refers to Jesus as her lover in The Book of Margery Kempe, an autobiography which was written later in her life. Kempe’s devotion encompassed her life so even to the point that she asked her husband to take a vow of chastity with her. Jalal al-Din Rumi, a member of the mystic sect of Muslims called Sufi, wrote several poems in his lifetime. Sufis placed a large emphasis on the sensory aspects of worship: music, poetry and dance.

Earthly pleasure is seen by many religions as no more than a vice; a wall in between oneself and God. Therefore, the only reasonable path to an Answer would be to eliminate desire and clear the pathway toward Truth. In “Exmpty the Glass of Desire”, Rumi urges his readers to “empty the glass of desire so that you won’t be disgraced” (Fiero, 54). To Rumi, this glass of desire holds all of the disgraces of the world such as lust and greed. In order to achieve the Truth and become one with God, one must remove desire from his life. In the final stanza of the same poem, Rumi sheds some light on the Islamic mystic’s view of the world as under a constant state of bondage due to worldly objects and desire for them. He directs his fellow truthseekers to “abandon life and the world, and find the life of the world” (54). “Life and the world” represent all of the problems and things that stand in the way of the devout soul. In order to clear the view of the Truth, all distractions and temptation must be removed. In another display of abstination from worldly desire, Margery Kempe discusses in her autobiography, The Book of Margery Kempe, the struggles she has with things regarding lust and sexual oriented matters. After a traumatic moment in her life, Kempe attempted to devote her life to Christ despite all odds and ridicule. Even after totally ignoring Kempe’s desire to remain abstinent for the rest of her life, her husband still forces himself upon her. To this, she replies, “I may not deny you my body, but all the love and affection of my heart is withdrawn from all earthly creatures and set on God alone” (Kempe, 140). It is simply human to desire sex, yet Kempe’s union with God and her yearning for the Truth is so strong that she will not allow herself to succumb to him. Heartbroken, she wept during sexual intercourse with her husband. However, he too later took a vow of chastity despite his previous actions. Kempe reveals her extreme devotion to God in her defiance of her husband’s lusty feelings. Though she recognized her status as servile because of her marriage, she stood firm and retracted her lust. The Truth comes by way of extreme focus on it as a goal and a prize; therefore, all human desires are simply misleading paths to worldly pleasure and can never result in any possible eternal reward. However, with this yearning for the Truth comes the need for extreme devotion to your God and no hesitance to obey His will.

Any goal requires devotion and in certain instances love, especially spirtitual ones. During this period of history, the world was not that great of a place. Therefore, there was a focus on a happier, eternal life after this one and most people would do just about anything to achieve it. Also, there was a change in the way that humans saw their Creator. God was seen as more than just a looming figurehead out to punish them. He was seen as merciful and illuminating. However, the answer to spending eternity with God was extreme devotion during this lifetime on Earth. In his poem, “The One True Light”, Rumi orders followers to, “Fix thy gaze upon the Light, and thou art delivered from the dualism inherent in the finite body” (Fiero, 54). The Light is symbollic of the love of God, or God himself. When one fixes their gaze upon it, they are showing their total reverence for Him. The result is deliverance from the plight of this world and the end of suffering in a “finite body”. This shows the reason why devotion to God and reverence was so pinnacle in a quest for Truth. The end result was the Truth itself; ultimate union with God for the rest of eternity. Margery Kempe, however, revealed a different facet to loving God. Kempe revered Jesus Christ as her lover, abstaining from human sexual acts due to her love and adoration of God. In her autobiography, she further exemplifies her disturbing vision of the savior as her lover. She is written to say, “Ah, Blessed Lord, I wish I knew in what I might best love and please you; and that my love were as sweet to you as I think your love is to me” (Kempe, 141). This seems very typical of a courtly romance of the time, not a prayer to God. Though bizarre, Margery Kempe still reveals that devotion is the secret to finding Truth as she lived a very holy life.

Truth is the answer to all of our questions and the search for it finds many outlets depending on religion,ethnicity and culture. The Muslim and Christian beliefs expressed here show that despite cultural differences, our human goals and aspirations are still basically the Finding Truth

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