

# THE CONCEPT OF THE MAGIAN SOUL IN OSWALD SPENGLER'S

## Decline of the West: **An Evaluation**

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Spengler holds that one of the important attributes of the Magian Soul is that for it "the civil and the ecclesiastical are identical". He further holds that as a civil and religious authority, consensus is a cultural characteristic of the Magian Soul. Identification of the religious and secular and the institution of consensus (idjma) in Islam were consequently treated by him as sufficient indications of the Magian nature of Islam. We shall discuss his contention by taking up the problem of consensus in the West as well as in Islam.

Consensus, in one form or the other, has been operative not only in the history of Europe but of the world. It was consensus that expelled James II from England; consensus too it was that resulted in the Religious Peace of Augusburg (1555 A.D.) based on *cujus regis ejus regis* ("he who rules a region prescribes its religion"). Might one not say that this is the European equivalent of what Spengler says of the Magian culture? The punishment of Catholics in Lutheran areas and of the latter in Catholic areas through banishment, usually in the community of like-minded believers, further strengthens this suspicion. In the event,

consensus operated in Europe till the Age of Reformation and immediately afterwards, and from the time of the Battle of Lutzen there have been no religious wars in Europe.

Since during the Sassanid period the original Zoroastrian base was decorated with and almost hidden by the filigree work of alien philosophies, the Sassanids too had to entail compromises. Both Mani and Mazdak, in turn, were victims to the turning wheel of fortune. If Spengler contends that in the Magian culture, "civil and ecclesiastical are identical", it was a feature of Europe down to the Reformation period too. About St. Augustine, one of the founder fathers of Western Christianity, Spengler remarks: "With him there was not and could not be any question of an infallible Papal ego or of any sort of authority, to settle dogmatic truths; that would completely destroy the Magian concept of consensus."<sup>126</sup> This means that St. Augustine Was a Magian.

In Islam consensus is prescribed for juristic purposes, to be used on the basis of the Qur'ān and hadith. It is, finally, because of the legal thoroughness of the fiqh, that an infallible religious authority like the Pope in Roman Catholicism is not theoretically necessary in Islam. Spengler relates consensus to the negation of individual ego in the Magian culture. According to him, it believes in one *Pneuma* which entails that the individual ego is buried under the avalanche of the collective ego. In Judaism, there is in the ultimate sense little or no individual ego. The halaka which

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<sup>126</sup> D.W., 11, p. 243.

determines the Jews' existence is mainly collectivistic and the history of Israel during the period of the Judges amply exemplifies this collective spirit. With Christianity the situation is rather peculiar. St. Paul postulates two kinds of men: the pneumatic (spiritual) man and the sarkical or psychical man. According to the Pauline view, a non-Christian man, however high his moral and intellectual attainments, would all the same remain within the boundary of the human; but by receiving the unction of the Spirit of God or *Pneuma* on embracing Christianity, he becomes fully conscious of the inspiration vouchsafed to him: in effect, he is born again. Applied to the Christian concept of the ego, Spengler has said something very correct; but in Islam which lays constant stress on *ijtihad* (the progression of the individual ego), individual and the collective egos supplement and qualify each other: each would be impossible without the other.

Another aspect of one single *Pneuma* is that both Islam and Christianity embrace diverse people so that in both the *Pneuma* should be one and multiple. In Judaism, on the other hand, the people and the ethnic identity of these people are identical to a degree rare in the history of any people, so that their *Pneuma* should converge on to the point of self-preservation as a race. The Pauline concept, on the other hand, transposed the original one *Pneuma* concept from a community of the like-minded people of a race to a community of like-minded believers of different races. Islam carries the idea further by emphasizing and enjoining the spirit of *ijtihad* on the believers, so that their individual ego may keep them away from becoming a drag on the society.

Reverting now to the question of idjma in the sense postulated by Spengler, the pas in this case should be given to Judaism in which since the days of Judges (ca., B.C. 1425), with the ex-communication of the tribe of Benjamin from the fold of the believers, the emphasis on ethnic purity has become a virtual desideratum;... for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, 'Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin'" (Judges, 21: 18).

Thus in Judaism race and religion, as in the Sassanid Zoroastrian exiles from Iran after the fall of the Sassanids, became one. What applies to the Sassanid Zoroastrian exiles from Iran, applies more or less, to the Jews in diaspora. Islam and Christianity, on the other hand, as world religions, cannot wed religion and race, and therefore Spengler's contention en regard *Pneuma* as a Magian characteristic could perhaps justifiably apply to the earliest stage of Christianity prior to the appearance of St. Paul on the scene with his formulation of the sarkical-*Pneumatic*-man concept. Such a concept obviously has to do away with the identification of race with religion which the other Apostles had inherited from Judaism.

It is now worth examining whether civilization which Spengler adumbrates as an entirely new culture arising during the Augustan period was really a new culture or whether it was a continuation of an older civilization having undergone modifications in the wake of epoch-shaking changes. Dawson's observation is:"...certainly the new elements in later Hellenistic civilization may be explained as due to Oriental influences, but

these influences came, not from the budding energies of a new People, but from older people whose cultural development was even older than that of the Hellenes.”<sup>127</sup>

Toynbee extends his support to Dawson's view that "the Gospels and primitive Christianity belong rather to the last stage of the Judaeo-Aramaen culture — a culture which expressed its ' heroic ' phase a thousand years earlier in the sage of Samson, of Deborah of Gideon, and the like.”<sup>128</sup> He therefore concludes that " Islam, Christianity, and the several civilizations that these two regions have mothered, are all products, either direct or indirect, of an identical compost consisting of both Syriac and Hellenic elements.”<sup>129</sup>

Muhammad, the Prophet of God (blessings on him), represents an uninterrupted line of prophets, of which the Qur'ān as revealed to him represents culmination. From the Muslim point of view, of course, the link with the Israelite prophets is unquestionable.

There are, in addition, other civilizations in the classification of which Spengler departs from his own thesis. One such instance is that of Carthage, which normally he should have, on his analogy, clan. sifted as Magian. It is true that Carthage, though Semitic through and through in origin, ultimately emerged as

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<sup>127</sup> Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*, p. 382.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>129</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, XII, 458.

Hellenic during the time of Hannibal; but, then, might not one be justified in ascribing to it a pseudomorphotic transfiguration?

The reasons which Spengler advances for assigning Carthage the Apollonian orientation are: "...Their ship-building was in Roman times more classical than Phoenician, their state was organized as a polis, and their educated people, like Hannibal, were familiar with Greek."<sup>130</sup> In assigning to the Carthaginian culture the Classical orientation, Spengler is contradicting his own otherwise remarkable hypothesis of pseudomorphosis on the basis of which he explains the revolt of the Syriac against the alien classical culture shortly after the emergence of Islam. Carthage was close to Egypt which was fast becoming Hellenic, not merely by the momentum generated by pseudomorphosis but also by the immigration of Greeks into it, and in the north loomed large a state that was becoming very powerful, Rome. If Carthage really was Hellenized as Spengler claims, it became so, not so much by choice as through necessity. According to Spengler, one of the principal features of the Classical man was his contact with the immediate and the absence of memory in the sense that we understand it, but the Carthaginians maintained close contacts with Tyre, whence they had migrated between 1200 and 1000 B. C. If the Carthaginian ship-building was Classical, its warfare was not. Elephants were something new for the Romans, and contributed in no small measure to their early reverses. Similarly, the Carthaginian pantheon was also Semitic, with Baal-Amon, the

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<sup>130</sup> D.W., H. n., p. 323.

god, and Tan'ith, the goddess. It also continued with the Syriac practice of human immolation. In sum Carthage (or Kart-hadasht or "New Town") was the transplanted child of a Semite parent culture. It was a polis, too, not in the sense that Athens and Rome were, even though it was an oligarchic republic; it was a city-state with wilderness as its hinterland. Nor do its works of art reflect the proportion and chiseling of the Classical works of art: they are essentially vulgar, the handicraft of a trading community. The Hellenic influence on Carthage thus can only be explained on the basis of pseudomorphosis. And why, to stretch the point further, should Hannibal who knew Greek be regarded as classical, but Plotinus who wrote good Greek and wrote *Enneads* be regarded as Magian? On Eunapius' authority Plotinus hailed *Enneads* from Lyco (i.e., probably Lycopolis in Upper Egypt, the modern Assiut), but Spengler in spite of the slenderest of evidences on Plotinus' birth, but not his ethnic origin, regards him as a Magian, despite his Roman name.

Hughes contends that "Spengler's concept of pseudomorphosis is, if anything, too imaginative."<sup>131</sup> Be that as it may, there is little doubt that the hypothesis can unlock many a Gordian knot of history. It could, for example, explain the encrustation of Islam and Christianity by Magianism and animism, the configuration of the Sassanid Iran, and the orientation of the Syriac culture during Classical domination. One would however hardly agree with Spengler's view of Russia since

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<sup>131</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate*, p. 74.

the time of Peter the Great, since which time in his opinion Russia has been under Faustian influence through pseudomorphosis.<sup>132</sup> Here his Central European mind fails utterly to grasp the broad humanism of the giants of Russian literature, Turgenev Dostoievski, Tolstoi, and Berdayev,

A comparative study of the religions in the periods both immediately preceding and following the Christian era would, however, show that, although the concept of a universal order governing the whole course of nature finds its fullest expression in the Greek philosophy, other cultures also shared a similar approach. Confucius, for instance, taught "that the law of social life must be a reflection and a participation in the universal divine order which rules the universe, and which is manifested primarily in the stars."<sup>133</sup> Hsuntze's Book (IX, 11, translated by H. Dubbs) also says:

“The Superior Man brings Heaven and Earth into order; the Superior Man forms a triad with Heaven and Earth; he is the controller of all things, the father and mother of the people.”

With certain reservations, however, one might justifiably state that such an approach approximates to the early anthropomorphic Hebrew approach towards the understanding of a Supreme Godhead. The religious literature of China also abounds in views verging on the latter-day Vedantic and Platonic portrayals of the

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<sup>132</sup> D.W., II, 192-4.

<sup>133</sup> Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, p. 105.



existence of One and illusive nature of the external world. Says Kien-Wenn, the Chinese emperor of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.:

Do I sleep? Do I wake?

Does that which I love exist?...

Am I not myself part of the great Seer,

Of the great Dreamer, who in the long night,

Dreams the great dream?<sup>134</sup>

This is not very different from Sankara's concept of maya. Unlike the Semitic and Iranian cultures, China's was a more insular culture, and the correspondences which such ideas share with the Classical and Hindu religious views can presumably be ascribed to independent thinking and not to subsumption. Whether such thinking characterized the whole of the Chinese civilization as the "absolute metaphysical view of life" characterized Hinduism too after the decline of Buddhism is a different story; but it is, nevertheless, there. Such a correspondence of thinking should tell on Spengler's hypothesis that each culture has, because of its individual characteristics, its own individual soul. How, for instance, would Spengler explain the Chinese civilization on the terms of reference which he has adopted for the Magian, Classical, and Faustian civilizations? Even his theory of pseudomorphosis would serve to explain such parallelisms only to a very limited degree; the only answer is to be found, in spite of the individual

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<sup>134</sup> Tr. Welger, *La Chire a travers les ages*, p. 166.

differences inherent in each culture, in the effort of each culture to cope with the expanding and changing world-vision which it has to face.

Hughes has criticized Spengler on the score of the two charts which the latter has appended at the end of Volume I of the Decline. It is not the intention of this author to question whether Spengler's contention that the ethical socialism of the West today constitutes the "spread of a final world-sentiment" and that "the extinction of spiritual active force" is correct: such questionings lie beyond the purview of this essay. But his view that since 1000 A.D. after the age of Al-Khwarizimi, Ibn-i Qurra, and Al-Biruni, the creative force in the Muslim world, has been on the wane is entirely correct and cogent, however pejorative and however pessimistic such a view might appear to us. And the history of the Muslim world since that period has been substantiating Spengler's contention that any civilization that yields to the benumbing invasion of the softer emotional data of life (which in turn enmesh man into the net of escapism from the realities of life; and life is paved with gold only for those that have earned it with the sweat of their brow, and which remains one of the hadith of Muhammad, the Prophet of God, on the Arab poet, Antara) by living

in the world of the "lyrical" instead of the "technical," in the realm of the "paint-brush" than the "sea", in the world of witticisms and fancies than induction and ratiocination, in the world of the brown study and phantasy than that of ijthad,

unconsciously earmarks itself to be waylaid into the bye-ways of history. The Muslims, overcome by a succession of upsets surrendered scientific rationalism and took to empiricism, forswearing experimentation. And the goals of empiricism, it is quite clear, are limited. Forgotten is the corpus of the work bequeathed to us by giants like Al-Razi, Abu Ali Sina, and Ibn-i Haitham, and other Muslim masters. Surprising though it might seem to us in this age, our forefathers had even gone so far as to have formulated the concept of "lock and key" in body metabolism, a concept which was seized upon by the German chemotherapist, Paul Ehrlich, towards the end of the last century, and who converted it into the full-fledged science of chemotherapy.

There is little doubt, however, that Spengler's *Decline* is aimed at the eulogization of the greatness of the Fautian culture. We have also in part refuted his formulation of the Magian civilization, and will refute it further in this essay; but an examination of Spengler's view that the Muslim culture has been virtually stagnant, in spite of a few empires flowering for a while here and there, is essentially correct.

Another Magian characteristic which Spengler adduces in favour of his formulation of the Magian civilization's existence is that of paradosis (elevation) in the writing of religious literature. As an extreme example of this style he cites St. Paul's Galatians (4: 24-6):

24. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants: the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is mother of us all.

But the technique employed by St. Paul is only in part based on paradises; it is substantially Greco-Latin too. The Greco-Latin rhetorical technique depends upon the three techniques of ethos (establishment of the speaker's on the writer's character as being sufficiently trustworthy to impart authority to his works), pathos (arousal of feelings in the audience or the readers), and logos (by depending upon the apparent proof of his position through the power of words). The rhetorical arrangement or sequence generally comprises: exordium (preface), partitio (statement of the problem and establishment thereof through elaboration via the medium of description), partitio (division of narration into stages), confirmatio (the burden of discussion), suasio (persuasion), and peroratio (peroration). Other very powerful tools in the hands of men like Cicero and St. Paul are those which make the readers or audience benevolens (favorably disposed), attentus (attentive), and docile (willing to listen or to read).

St. Paul's technique, as exemplified by Galatians, has almost all of these characteristics, particularly those of the ethos and

pathos."Which things are an allegory" is the equivalent of the exordium, while "for these are the two covenants" represents narratio and partitio."But Jerusalem which is above" is peroratory and enthymematic—that is to say, one of the propositions is implied but not stated. Thus, the whole style (with of course the acicular Aramaean mind of St. Paul everywhere in evidence) is cast in the Greco-Latin mould. The literary style of the Qur'an, on the other hand, is unique; the impact of the images and statements is direct and telling. No peroration is needed when the words are from God. When directness is the overpowering force, no rhetorical techniques are needed; nor are any disputations to be settled. The method of the Qur'ān is something entirely different from the technique of paradosis employed by St. Paul who had to carry Christian message beyond Tarsus to the Greeks and the slaves of Rome. One of the principal attributes of prophethood is tadhkia (purification of the audience through contact with the prophet). This is everywhere in evidence in the New Testament, but in the Qur'an with the finality of prophethood, the process of tadhkia has reached its ultima Thule in sublimation and mental purgation. Iqbal's view, therefore, that Spengler was just not aware of the significance of the finality of prophethood in Islam and therefore of the meaning of Islam is entirely correct and just. Moreover, St. Paul, in spite of his Hebrew heritage, was in many ways more of a Roman. He realized that the approach of St. Peter as Judaism manque would only succeed in making it into another sect of the Jews. The Pauline Epistles, Corinthians, and Ephesians, all abound in controversia, the rhetorical means

whereby the writer or the speaker can plead for public support. This style, Greco-Latin in the main, has been transmitted to Cardinal Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* and John Milton's *Defensio pro se*.

To elaborate further on Spengler's contention that *paradosis* as a style could lead us further on the spoor of the detection of a Magian unit, discernible even in spite of the several components comprising it, one cannot, perhaps, dispute the fact that there is bound to be some resemblance between the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic languages. In the *Qur'ān* however, whatever these resemblances be in the works besides the *Qur'ān*, the departure is sharply obvious from any previous works in these languages, with rhetorics replaced by statement, exordium by awe, and the human' ethos by the assertion of the sovereignty of the Godhead.

We have seen for ourselves that Spengler's approach is rather far-fetched insofar as his concept of a unitary Magian civilization is concerned. It has already been shown that according to Spengler, when the Magian culture flashed forth in world history during the Augustan period, it contained in it elements older than those of the Hellenic civilization. Neither on ethnic, linguistic, and intellectual grounds is it reasonable to class the Sassanid-Iranian civilization with the Semitic, nor the Carthaginian with the Classical, when both these civilizations could have been approached through Spengler's own brilliant hypothesis of pseudomorphosis. Even otherwise also one would not be justified in grouping the Sassanid-Iranian civilization with the Semitic-

Israelite and Semitic-Arab civilizations, whose intuitive-visionary works constitute the most unique record in the religious experiences of man.

Let us, for a single moment, admit ourselves into Spengler's analogy that a culture has a feel of its own into which several and manifold factors have coalesced, and that the mere existence of a people as a biological community without contributing anything substantial or creative does not confer upon them the entitlement of a culture, as correct. Now, Spengler has tried to show that the spirit of Euiope has been anti-classical in the main, down from 1000 A.D. The period that precedes the Faustian civilization he calls the, culture period", as an example of which he cites the Merovingian pre-Carolingian Era (500-900 A.D.).<sup>135</sup> But with all his justifications in this direction, the weakest link in the Spenglerian argument remains, and this weak link might equally be applied to the birth of the Magian civilization and the period preceding it. Spengler has not been able to cogently account for the evolution of the Faustian culture-soul in which infinite space and time predominate, in which the will remains no longer subject to a blind Ananke but spirals upwards, in which introspection becomes more pronounced than in any other culture, in which music becomes contrapuntal and symphonic, and, finally, which, amongst other things, pictures life in alternating light and shade, from the Classical civilization. In other words, the author of the Decline has not been able to show to us whether the many of the

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<sup>135</sup> D.W., I, Table II, "Contemporary" Cultural Epoch.

characteristics which we associate with Faustian culture were resident in the latter-day Classical-Roman world, albeit in their embryonic form. It is this chrysalid which has metamorphozed itself into the Faustian adult, and on the same analogy one might establish that the Magian civilization also represents uninterrupted growth since its birth several thousand years ago in the areas known to us as the Fertile Crescent and Arabia.

It would be a futile exercise on our present purposes to discuss whether Rome should be grouped with Greece to constitute one Classical culture-unit. In spite of the many differences which Rome displays--its pragmatic approach, emphasis on the imposition of a juristic pattern on the people, and so on—Toynbee is one with Spengler on this score at least.<sup>136</sup> What is, however, more important for our immediate purposes is to note that the world-vision of Rome was undergoing rapid expansion. Syrian (particularly during the reigns of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus), Hellenic, Zoroastrian (as attested by the Migration of the god, Mithra, from Iran to Rome as Mithras), and Aramaean influences made themselves increasingly felt by Rome, and made the Empire of Rome something very different from the early Roman Republic, which, at least in spirit, was at best a city-state. Many of the Empire's notable figures were ethnically non-Roman. Among the most prominent are Vespasian (Etruscan); Trajan, Hadrian, and Seneca (Spaniards); and Constantine and Diocletian (Illyrian). The

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<sup>136</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, XII, 377.



Empire of Rome after Augustus thus became a very complex affair, and more so with ethnic dilution from its provinces and the influx of denizens from far-flung areas.

But even otherwise also, aside from outside influences, the glimmer of complexity is already visible in Virgil's *Aeneid*. It would rather alone suffice to show that the art of myth making—with the disappearance of circumstances that lent themselves to this art—came with considerable difficulty to the poet, and in the result the emphasis has now shifted from plot to thought. Gone is the Homeric delight and spontaneity in telling a good story; the gulf between thought and myth had become for less easily bridgeable. The natural in Homer would thus naturally become artificial in Virgil, and the latter therefore at times almost strikes as being the blind poet's epigone. Fate is, no doubt, still there; but it is no longer the blind Ananke of the Attic tragedy; the Schicksal or Destiny has now been transformed into the destiny of Rome, outbidding, consciously or unconsciously, the hand of fate. Virgil has finally taken away its sting. His hero displays a will-power that is Faustian in proportions, and is bent on just one purpose, the founding of Rome. And the gods, too, have almost embarked on their departure towards the haven of allegory, being at best pale, shadowy figures.

Dido is even more than a tragic figure; she almost symbolizes obstruction through her pathetic widowhood, sincerity and love for Aeneas, and determined enmity through her curse. In symbolizing all these, she, primitively at least, anticipates the

roundness of characters in the modern European fiction and drama.

Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), accelerates the speed with which Rome is moving towards the modern European world. Abolishing the gods, he ushers in a mechanistic vision which one can discern beneath the overlay of his Stoicism:

For him, as truly as for any Christian believer, faith is the evidence of things not seen. He must always be telling that the dark principle of this world is invisible. Its elements, secret and viewless, lurk beneath, behind. They are far beyond the range of the senses,...'Truth for him is a hidden thing not palpable except to searching reasons'<sup>137</sup>.

Death, for Lucretius, should hold no terrors for man in its train, because beyond his earthly span of life nothing awaits him. This is not something equivalent to the Classical man's concept of concern with the present, with the bodily only, which Spengler emphasizes time and again in the *Decline*, but a revolt. There may be something unseen but it is not the will of the gods."World fear"has been transfigured into resignation, something not very different from, say, Matthew Arnold's resignation:

This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,  
Nor sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,

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<sup>137</sup> Mark Von Dorbe, *Great Poems of Western Literature*, p. 133.

Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
But only Nature's aspect and her law.