

— In SERVICE TO RELIGION since 1992 —

Misinformed Assumptions

A pervasive and deep-rooted myopia infects institutional religion today and contributes to the infliction of catastrophic (claustrophobic) injury upon itself and upon humankind; except this disease is diagnosed and remedied, institutional religion will continue to inflict hurt.

This is an ancient disease of cultural inheritance, a myopic disease best captured perhaps in the phrase “Static World View” (SWV). This disease perniciously invades everyday language, from *the rising of the sun until the sun’s setting*. [See: <http://www.secondenlightenment.org/Thinking%20Global.pdf>, “Religious Paralysis Syndrome”, at page 58]

Since Galileo’s (Copernican) time the world came to know that the rotation of the Earth causes day/ night cycles, and that the sun is essentially static in its relation to the Earth. However, SWV language still persists even though every school child is taught that the sun does not “rise” and does not “set”. We live enclosed in a world defined and narrowly cultured by insular experience and belief.

Prevalent language and vocabulary are rooted in the deep past of primitive experience, the thought and terminology of SWV. And in our own time, theological distinctions and presumptions are still cast in the language and distinctions of SWV whose anachronistic and erroneous presumptions underlie and aggravate the global predicament infecting all life on Earth.

There is an important principle needing consideration here, which is, that mental distinctions too often take on forms of real divisions, and become, therefore, agents of potential deception, for, distinctions are predicated on prevailing thought, and prevailing thought is predicated on incomplete and sometimes erroneous thinking. For example, “religious” is generally perceived to be distinct from “secular”, even as humans are perceived to be distinct from and superior to the interdependent networks of Earth life. The rationalized separation of the “religious” world from the “secular” world is perhaps the consequence of the same SWV thinking that puts humankind above and apart from the rest of material creation. This observation addresses the very roots of prevailing social schizophrenia and personal alienation that so prevail in the modern world—but especially in Western cultures. (1).

Evolutionary World View (EWV)

There is a need to recast theological understandings in the light of new cosmology, that is, of contemporary knowledge of particle-science (quantum physics), allowing the ongoing processes of human physiology and psychology. In point of fact, that the origin and continuation of Earth-substance and life are subject to the laws of particle dynamics gives particular relevance to the theological dictum “grace builds on/in Nature”.

The term SWV refers to a static cosmology, as might be derived from a literal reading of the creation account in Genesis, whereas, the term EWV includes understandings that derive from the modern science of quantum physics. Particle-science recognizes that the Cosmos is characterized by dynamics of continuous transformation, which go back to the first moments of the “Big Bang” and continue now and on into the future; and, that humans originate from, are sustained in, and continue to have a future in the open-ended dynamic of Creation. (2). Everything in the Cosmos is made up of the same big-bang residues that come to be transformed into ever changing symmetries by interactive evolution-in-process; everything is therefore related to everything else and all is subject to interactively dependent transformation.

The Creation that we are part of is not static as may be concluded from the seven-day Creation Story given in the Book of Genesis; rather, it is always “in process” and, therefore, is continually evolving. This is the meaning contained in the phrase “Evolutionary Worldview”. Contrary to the static dogma of religion long cultured, humankind is inseparable from and is dependent upon the evolving reality of the Cosmos. (3).

Religion’s Burden

“Religion” is a term loaded with centuries of accumulated social and personal baggage that originates in cultured thought-distinctions in SWV. Both the cultured meaning of the word *religion* and its practice are characterized in the misinformed presumptions of SWV, so that present day understandings of religion are not compatible with EWV.

The future well-being of humans on Earth, indeed, the well-being of all life on Earth, critically depends on the ability of humans to desist from self-destructive presumptions of the past, and on their ability to enter seriously the task of transforming religion on knowledge premises that are radically different from the old ones. The advice to start all over again on premises of new science has been suggested by prophetic thinkers, including, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox.

When theology comes to be cast in the new, open-ended vision of ongoing Creation, and when humans are put in true relationship with evolving Creation, then, religion may come to be renewed and may occasion the real possibility of renewing humankind in authentic exercise of religious practice. And surely the healing of cultured alienation and schizophrenia can happen only with such transformation, namely, with rooting religion not in the erroneous, fixed presumptions of SWV but in the dynamic open-ended reality of EWV.

Marketplace Church

The details may be argued, but institutional church in SWV is what it set out to be, that is, competitively successful in the market; Church’s marketplace strategies have come to be imitated by all manner of succeeding marketplace institutions (or is it the other way around?). Every market manager knows that market success requires clever, convincing packaging and production. Church in SWV excelled in both counts. Its primary “package”, around which all its other commodities are packaged, is its male-imagined, static-world god. Its other packages are in wrappers that are psychologically persuasive to the church’s institutional objectives, and include, heaven, hell, purgatory, sin, grace, angels, devils, indulgences, etc., all of which come to preoccupy the “religious” market for centuries, as is evidenced in the art, architecture, drama, politics, wars and histories of the times.

Consumerism became church’s “growth industry” and that of other social institutions. As secularized consumerism came to enjoy church sanction it flowered into the industrial revolution. It is for this and future generations to deal with the violent consequences of consumerism.

With secular institutions as with church, the accumulation of wealth fueled expansive ventures (colonialism) that accrued land and personal riches for the institutional power brokers. Institutions received from government sanction of legal person that came even to be substituted for woman’s person and place. Religiously, males enthroned themselves personally alongside their static-world god above the “sordid” material of the “sinful” world (and women), which in their minds justified church implication in the (dominion) exploitation of earth-resources, and the alienation of women from places of authority.

Institutional mindsets (male) that prevail today will not be replaced unless and until the fictional (male) static-world god, upon which mindsets are still premised, is replaced with “process” God, whose “Godhead” includes equal consideration of woman and identifies with the real, evolutionary world of ongoing Creation.

Dead-End Deity

A worldview that fixes itself in a static god, qualified by absolutes, is one without vision except within the myopia of its own fiction. Inevitably, the god of this exclusionary world must come to be perceived as dead-end, and so must the theological rationale defining such a god. Since “revelation” in the theology of such god is closed, such god is above and disconnected from human implication in the spiritual process; such a theology reduces Sacrament to irrelevancy in people’s everyday lives.

The exclusion of woman from godhead consideration eliminates from cosmic understanding essential, vital polarity and vitiates the social dynamics of Trinitarian process and authentic Godhead consciousness; except for polarities and communal dynamics, conscious life is deprived of its essential female/ male dialog/ dialectic.

In EWV, essential female/ male polarity is envisioned in communal, Godhead dynamic, so that the infinite possibilities of vitality become real again in human purpose; and, service to Sacrament in Priesthood opens to unlimited, exciting potentials. In such service, humans come to new experience of Godhead in the Providential reliability of the Sacraments of Nature (water/ soil/ air), and come themselves to participate in the expanding revelation of Godhead in the Sacraments of Nurture (confession/ confirmation/ priesthood). In symbiotic process, woman/ man come to experience personal Eucharist, the communal processing of Grace that is empowered to provide for individual deficits and to bring individual person to the experience of personal majesty and equality.

Religion Defined

“Religion” probably has as many definitions as there are people; but unless and until it acquires some universal, consensus understanding in its essentials, arbitrary contentiousness will abound and the healing benefits of communal religious practice will not be experienced, and societies will continue to foment frictions and self-degradation.

Simply stated, “religion” embodies the culture of authentic relationships, that is, relationships, which advance the sustainability and enrichment of Earth’s living networks, including the physical and psychological qualities of functional networks. Necessary to authentic religion is the continuing exercise of human rationality, which seeks to understand more profoundly and particularly the working of authentic relationships.

“Service to Religion in the Third Millennium” must be characterized in the universal consciousness of communal culture and authentic relationship and by the public celebration of rituals that explicate and reinforce knowledge of and faith in authentic relationships. [See RELIGION & CIVILITY, www.authorhouse.com, pp 277-286]

Where is God?

God is in and is revealed in Creation. The revelation of God is open-ended even as Creation itself is open-ended. The manifestation of God in the phenomena of Nature pertains also to natural uncertainties, including the free choices of humans that put in motion unknowable and unintended consequences. The informed and intentional decision-making of humans is the “ex opere operantis” component of Nurtural Sacrament.

Worship of God is authentic when all aspects of human conduct are in conscionable conformity with divine law imprinted in Creation. This Natural Law puts the destinies

of all living creatures, of all Creation, in a bonded relationship for being composed of common, cosmic substances which are interactively dynamic, and whose symmetries can irrevocably be trashed by ignorance and arrogance.

The psychic component of reflective Creation (spirituality) projects the Trinitarian dynamic of spirit, namely, of communication (faith), of consciousness (hope), and of conscience (love); this same Trinitarian dynamic characterizes Creation also in its phenomenal (material) dynamic. Thus, in EWV, the revelation of God, like that of all Creation, is characterized as “being in process”, and is not static, unchanging or “absolute”. The Trinitarian dynamic in EWV gives ever new and open-ended conceptualization to Divine Trinity, as experienced in the ongoing processes of Sacrament, which makes intelligible the human/ divine relationship in living laws (DNA) that function reflexly “ex opere operato” and intentionally “ex opere operantis”.

Religion is authentically practiced in life that is lived faithful to the Natural Laws of Creation; whereupon, the bringing of people to know and to live lives conformed to Natural Laws is fundamentally “service to religion”.

Religion in EWV

Institutional Catholicism, its hierarchy and the communities of celibate women and men (Religious Orders) are generally understood to be the professionals who provide service to religion. Thus, “the faithful”, the lay public, does not consider theology a matter of its business. In practice, religion (theology) is a world unto itself, and “secular” pursuit is a world unto itself. The culture of SWV puts people in a linear, serial relationship to theology, to religion, to church and to clergy.

However, *religion* in the real world consciousness of EWV, that is, in the world in which informed consciousness motivates all intentional relationship, does not distinguish between religious and secular, lay and clerical, but it sees all on equal footing in the human/ divine priesthood of service that morally compels all to act conscientiously. (4).

Except institutional priesthood is grounded in *natural*, “universal” priesthood, conscientiously obliging on every person, it is flawed in its vision. Universal priesthood obliges everyone personally to conscientious living and to bringing others to conscientious, personal living. Priesthood in service to a dead-end deity is dead-end priesthood. Perhaps the experience today of frustration in the Catholic Priesthood links directly to a worldview yet fixated in a static-world god of male pretense.

Theology is *conscience in constant dialog*, continually informing human consciousness by connecting newly acquired knowledge with the brought forward Wisdom of the Ages. Wisdom, like knowledge, is not static, absolute, nor is religion, rather, both are processes of consciousness that oblige all persons equally, as authentic, interdependent, rationally conscious Earth organisms.

All life on Earth is in parallel relationship, that is, multi-faceted and informed in many parallel linkages, old and new, and not just linear, hierarchical, from the top down. In parallel relationships, all life is a linked network of interdependent relationship in which individuals take from and give back to the network; vital sustainability is a reciprocal necessity of give-and-take, wherein the network experiences a net gain, not loss, from individual participation. The maintenance of physical, spiritual well-being is part and parcel of everyday living. The casting of religious understanding, outside the subsidiarity context (the relationship of co-dependent mutuality, individuality and authenticity) of Natural Law, outside the context of everyday relationships and/ or the doing of theology by some few elect, is socially unworkable and destructive of network wellness. Male elitism, self-electionism has no parallel in Nature and is a violent, arrogant usurpation. The super-arrogation of religion/ theology in “other-world versus this-world” polarity

deceives religion and theology, for the arrogation of self over and above the Laws of Nature is fraudulent.

Religious professionals, who, as a select group of insiders isolated from the real world, exercise an exclusionary spirituality that expects the secular public to provide for them materially do not function authentically in EWW. Service to Religion in the Third Millennium requires the doing of theology by all (how else can the *sensus fidelium* be obtained?) people “where they are” in the “secular” world, and mutually supportive of each other in all relationships.

It is a given, a fundamental of theological instruction, that people from their childhood and throughout their lives should dialog in a way that enables them to function authentically in whatever profession they are in, that is, in a way that keeps them always accountable for the impacts of their everyday activities on all the networks of life. No one group should arrogate unto itself a relationship with others by which it presumes a gratuitous, superior right at the expense of others.

Community of Life

The diverse networks of flora and fauna constituting specific bioregions at different geographical locations qualify the sustainable, biological circumstance of that region. People must learn to function in a sustaining relationship with the established network of the bioregion in which they live.

Toward such sustainable relationship people must be instructed, that is, they need to acquire a working knowledge of the natural economics of the bioregion and of the natural resource base of life they share, and they need to contain their use of resources within limits of what is necessary to sustain the network.

It is a fundamental act of service to religion to inform people of their personal, moral obligation to understand and to conform personal living to natural constraints of their particular bioregion.

It is wholesome and necessary that people celebrate and instruct with regard to the uniqueness of their bioregion so as to exemplify and edify one another in the preservation of natural providence.

Religious Community

People who devote themselves in enabling communities to celebrate, to use and to preserve living resources are people engaged in service to religion. People in such work should come from all ages, female and male, celibate and non-celibate, and be studious in the pursuit of deeper understandings of the unique, living interdependencies operative where they are. Such people may or may not live in special communities, but they need to interpenetrate all fields of spiritual and material pursuits, and they need to interpret by instructional liturgies, by formal study and teaching, the meaningful events and relationships of daily living; birth, growth, health, death, etc. In short, religious profession needs to serve by enlightening the community in all engagements of and in Sacrament.

Renewal

The expectation is that if prevailing Religious Communities can rewrite, redirect and renew the focus of their Order's mission in context of EWW, they will experience spiritual revitalization and will again become attractive to ever greater numbers of men and women who are sensitive to the communal and personal values of EWW, both in the short term and in the long term.

On the other hand, Religious Communities which adhere to the misinformed presumptions of SWV can expect to come to ever greater disconnection and disregard because of public loss of faith in anachronisms that foment alienation.

An overriding task of modern Church, of all institutions of religion, is to identify cultured inauthenticities of SWV and their counter-productive consequences, and to replace these with understandings that inform process awareness of EWV.

Trinity/ Sacrament

The attributions of TRINITY of Persons and of PROVIDENCE in Nature to God-head are sacred beliefs of Christian Tradition. Nor will Christian Faith easily allow a paradigm change that defrauds these hallowed traditions of belief. Truth is that both sacred beliefs have greater credibility and understanding in EWV than in SWV. Thus, the renewal of Christian Religion in EWV cannot proceed except also with the reconciled understanding of Trinity/ Sacrament to the real world of particle physics.

The successful return of Church to the "marketplace" in EWV will not happen on presumption of repackaging Trinity/ Sacrament in the wrappings of fictional male SWV. However, it can happen with the opening of all people to the real presence and potential of open-ended Trinity, which is part and parcel of all our very selves and of ongoing Creation in which all are dynamically embedded.

Personal consciousness awakens to the joined religious/ secular personality, which perceives fulfillment of self-interest in the fulfillment of common wellbeing. Religious/ secular realities are inseparable in real life. The sacrilegizing of one sacrileges both; the sacralizing of one cannot happen except both are sacralized. *Service to Religion in the Third Millennium* means to sacralize all life, in consciousness and in fact, in Word (grace) and in Work (sign).

Captive Education

Church schools, especially primary and secondary, are weighted in presumptions of SWV; psychological estrangement from evolutionary reality happens early in people's lives, and becomes thereby profoundly imprinted, so that liberation from estrangement happens only with the great effort, if at all.

The origin of colleges and universities is closely connected to the Monastic Orders of the Middle Ages and to institutions of religion committed to theologies of SWV; these citadels of SWV continue to advance mindsets of SWV. So, it is easy to understand why colleges and universities of today are not helpful in bridging the divide between SWV and EWV. Thomas Berry has suggested how colleges and universities might bring students to a liberated vision of evolutionary consciousness, also with respect to religious consciousness, namely, by recognizing that in the evolutionary history of life on Earth, Nature is the sacred scripture that precedes all other scriptures of human writing. (5).

Toward the specific objective of enabling the liberation of students from the obfuscating inhibitions of SWV, this writer has written a trilogy of "New Genesis" poems whose intent and content mean to confront static-world mindsets and their consequences, so as to exercise students in critical thinking by putting in dialog ideas that seek out communal well-being. (6). It is for elders to prepare youth to inherit the Earth. (30 July 1992)

References:

1. Joseph Gremillion, presented by, "The Gospel of Peace and Justice", *Gaudium et spes*, copyright 1976, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY. 10545, pg. 247 L1, 5 & 6.

“...Man painstakingly searches for a better world, without working with equal zeal for the betterment of his own spirit...”

2. Ibid. Pg. 247, L1, 36 & 37.

“...Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis...” (Introductory statement, No. 5, para 4.)

3. Ephesians I, 9-10.

“...(God) has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth...”

4. I Peter I, 9

“...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light...”

5. Thomas Berry, “The DREAM of the EARTH”, 1988 copyright, Sierra Club Books, paperback edition, 1990, 730 Polk Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.

“...Professional education should be based on awareness that Earth is itself primary physician, primary lawgiver, primary revelation of the divine, primary scientist, primary technologist, primary commercial venture, primary artist, primary educator and primary agent in whatever activity we find human affairs...(pg 107)

“...Within this context the American college could understand in some depth its role in creating a future worthy of that larger universal community of beings out of which the human community finds its proper fulfillment...” (Pg 108)

6. Ibid. No 1 above, Pg. 299. L1, 11-16.

“...Through a sharing of resources and points of view, let all who teach in seminaries, colleges and universities try to collaborate with men well versed in other sciences. Theological inquiry should seek a profound understanding of revealed truth without neglecting close contact with its own time. As a result it will be able to help those men skilled in various fields of knowledge to gain a better understanding of the faith...”

August 5, 1992.

On this day “Service to Religion” was sent to Monsignor C. Sepe, Assessor, Secretariat of State, First Section, General Affairs, Vatican City, Rome ITALY

“Very Reverend and Dear Monsignor Sepe:

“Not in conceit do I write but with inner compulsion. My worry is how others respond to the words I write. However, faithful to Conscience, I must leave other’s response to Grace within them.

“Please express my gratefulness to His Holiness Pope John Paul II for his kind attention. (See your letter of October 3, 1991) Assure him my prayers for good health, and I request you on my behalf to proffer him this published version of “New Genesis Poems.”

“Thank you for the courtesy.

Sincerely,
(Signed, Sylvester L. Steffen
Enclosed: “Service to Religion in the Third Millennium”

August 9, 1992.

On this day, a response to “Service to Religion” was received from Thomas Berry:

“Please excuse this brief response. I wish I could elaborate more fully. You have indeed set forth the fundamental vision needed for effective entry into the future. The quotes you use from my book I fully approve. I do hope that your vision will become effective on a broad scale throughout our society.

Sincerely, Thomas Berry