

The G_d Cycle and the Kingdom of G_d

The Kingdom of G_d was Jesus' core message. In progressive Christian circles it is widely interpreted, thanks to modern scholarship and the brilliance of John Dominic Crossan as a subversive political metaphor. Caesar's Kingdom, his domination system, peace through violence is replaced by peace through justice, embodied in Jesus. I agree with this and I have written about it myself.



My only concern is that it becomes too easy to turn the KG into our favourite political ideology. There are political implications, absolutely, of orienting from this realm. But the KG is primarily a *way of seeing and experiencing reality. It is actual. Not a metaphor.* When we see reality clearly we stand a far greater chance of acting in congruence with this vision.

The KG is always, already present. But we can only experience it, phenomenologically, in a deep state of relaxation. That is, when we feel safe and secure. When we feel this, we naturally trust. Trust is the precondition of surrender. And surrender is the key that opens the door to the KG. This is the G_d Cycle.

My experience is that this feeling of deep and profound safety is rare in our culture. Our adrenal systems are on high alert, stoked by caffeine and numbed by alcohol, and various other addictions. We live in a condition of personal, historical, and cultural trauma. This is the Matrix, which is a condition of the wounded feminine, which has been traumatized by the

failed masculine of patriarchy. The feminine has been degraded, denigrated, and traumatized for literally thousands of years by the domination system of patriarchy. This trauma gets passed down generation after generation. It is insidious, the air we breathe. We end up literally not knowing that we live in the Matrix. To say we are "wired" captures it very aptly. This gets at the technological dimension of contemporary life, which tips over into and reflects a dehumanization. This technopoly not only contributes to the overtaxing of our cortisol system, it is a reflection of the state of the world soul.

We are not relaxed enough to see and experience what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. When Jesus taught that the pure of heart are blessed because only the pure of heart can see G_d he meant this, I believe, on all levels—purity at physical, emotional, mental levels. When we purify at these levels, a natural spiritual vision comes on line. This is why every serious spiritual path is marked by purgation—being released from, and participating in the release of all influences that make us impure. It requires strong medicine. Church, which has been co-opted by the Matrix, has stopped delivering on the potential to truly transcend this world (be in the world but not of it). The medicine has been watered down, in my opinion.

Impurity manifests as any habit, substance, or way of being that prevents the G_d Cycle from being realized in our lives.

Physical impurity is caused today by eating processed foods, too much sugar, fat, and salt, overconsumption of alcohol, caffeine, and recreational drugs. These substances are often introduced as a strategy for making us feel safe. They fill the void temporarily. Thereby we teach our bodies that we need these substances, and our bodies naturally call for them in desperation. This creates anxiety, and the cycle continues.

Mental impurity is caused by our own mental activity. Our thoughts and beliefs mostly operate outside of our conscious

control. What we often don't realize is that negative thought processes (such as cynicism, pessimism, excessive doubt, critical judgement of self and others, sarcasm are energetic systems that actually create a condition of darkness within us, which we then project on to the world, and then see only darkness – not realizing that much of the darkness is self-generated. When our minds are in control they are in service to trauma and keep us in a karmic loop. We cannot enter the cycle of relaxation, trust, surrender. In fact, the explicit mandate of all our mental activity is to keep us from this cycle.

Emotional impurity is caused by unintegrated trauma, from an early age, war experiences, etc. Early trauma, which is always a failure of love, gives rise to our personalities as elaborate compensation systems. The compensation system usually breaks down in situations of deep intimacy, when the stakes are high enough and we're being invited to a condition of trusting the other. This invitation, in all its various forms, is profoundly, but unconsciously threatening to the personality system. It brings us shame, rage, desperation, loneliness – all the feelings we did not know what to do with and there was no space for in our earliest years. To open to love later in life is inevitably to be triggered by those earlier failures of love. This is why so few marriages are thriving. We either make a deep, courageous commitment to becoming conscious – which is the gift of intimacy – or we unconsciously recapitulate all the trauma. In the vernacular this becomes a shit-show. Again, without integrating this emotional trauma the G_d Cycle of relaxation, trust, surrender, is not possible.

All these systems need to be cleansed in order to “enter the KG” as Jesus put it. Ever noticed how Jesus associated entering the KG with releasing? Attachment to wealth, one's own family, even your own life? This is because all of these easily become sources of addiction, what we use to keep us

from the “narrow path” of purifying our lives. If money, family, and your own life are dedicated to the perpetuation of the Matrix, what Jesus called “this world” to distinguish it from the True World or G_d’s world, then they need to be purged from our lives before we can enter the KG.

What is the KG like? My experience is that it is characterized by clear-seeing (clairvoyance). You see through the Matrix. You see all the suffering. You see the source of the suffering. When Jesus said “my Kingdom is not of this world”, it’s truly not. We are called to be fully “in” this world, but not “of” it.

It is characterized by deep compassion. You feel all the suffering caused by the refusal to walk the path of the pure-hearted. You feel all the trauma. Your heart expands to hold it all, but it’s all held in a love that is Ultimate.

It is eternal. You feel that this condition of Love is the true Matrix, it is the Mother that births universes. It is the womb from which all emerges. It holds all, including evil, suffering, and violence. It is always, already present waiting for us to enter at any moment.

It is joyful. You see and feel all the beauty. There is nothing more beautiful than witnessing a courageous soul release their fear and return to a condition of trust. Nothing.

It is strengthening. You feel your inner warrior rise up. You are initiated into the order of the pure hearted, and it is your mission to defend this order, both within yourself and in the world. The warrior sees clearly the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, dark and light, and he wields his/sword in defence of the KG. “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

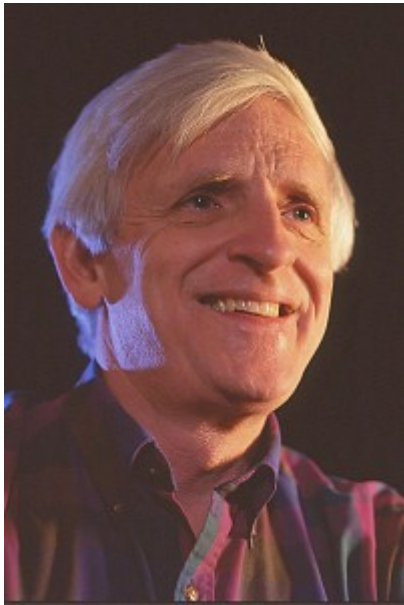
It is, as Jesus said, “very near”. It is as close, in truth, as the present moment. It is Presence. The challenge is that

only the pure of heart can be present. We mostly live in time because of the above trauma. We live in and out of the past. Or we are ruminating about the future. But it's all here. Right now. As close as our breath. As a pure breath, without distraction.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has become increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get information that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned some about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other problem we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medical reviews found that up to three quarters of men on such preparation experience side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual malfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your associate and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this therapy. Talk to your soundness care producer to see if it's sure to make the switch.

**Matthew Fox's Autobiography:
The Making of A Post-**

Denominational Priest



When I was in the second year of seminary, word got back to my systematic theology professor that I had shared my statement of faith at a meeting of Presbytery, and that it contained a lot of “creation-centered” spirituality. One morning I got word that the good professor wished an audience with me. I walked up four flights of stairs to his office where I found him sitting behind his large oak desk, smoking his pipe, and reading my statement of faith. He looked up at me and solemnly pronounced that if I continued down this road I would never make it to seminary because I would be constantly stopping in front of every tree and bowing before it! I told him that if it was a choice between being in a devotional relationship with a tree and being part of a society that saw them as nothing more than “resources” for human consumption, I would happily bow before every tree.

Emmanuel college had been infiltrated by the Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, and the neo-Barthians were not impressed or pleased. By the time of my mini-inquisition I had read a couple of this heretic’s books, namely, *Whee! We, Wee, All the Way Home* and *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*. Because of these books, and Matthew Fox’s mentorship I had made the shift from a redemption-centered paradigm to a creation-centered paradigm. And everything changed.

When Matthew’s people invited me to blog about his new, revised autobiography, *Confessions: The Making of a Post-Denominational Priest*, I felt honoured and called to do so. My own confession is that I’ve only read 300 of this over 500 page book. But I found those three hundred pages extremely interesting. To read the story of Matthew Fox is to track the

major cultural events of the world from the 1960's to the present day. Such is his commitment to the necessity of cultural engagement, and his deep sense that culture – the arts, science, the humanities, and the major events of our lives are the arena of Spirit.

His is a ministry of prophetic engagement, but engagement that is grounded in the mystical. Not the mysticism of a neo-Platonic Hellenistic dualism, but one that is more grounded in Judaism and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen. I invited Matthew to speak at the church where I was the lead minister in Vancouver on three different occasions. As well, a small team of people, led by a woman who had taken a master's course in creation spirituality from Matthew's university, ICCS, brought the Cosmic Mass to Vancouver. I was privileged to be part of the planning team for this radical ("getting to the roots") form of liturgy, as we moved through Fox's four ways of Positiva, Negative, Creativa, and Transformativa.

I confess that while I had always known Matthew's deep commitment to justice based in a spirituality of compassion, I was always less certain about his mysticism, his felt sense of the presence of G_d in his life. His autobiography was so refreshing to me because he tells the story of his deep spiritual yearning for G_d, and his sense of how the numinous animated his life. This is from his personal journal:

I am convinced that my greatest mistake all my life long has been in not trusting God enough. This trip, with its possibly portentous outcome, has taught me this trust. I now know that Christ, who brought me here, loves each of us personally and watches all we do and hears all we wish for. Oh God! Give yourself to souls. It is all people wish for!

I learned about his out-of-body experience, observing himself speaking from a chandelier in the ceiling, during a lecture.

And how, during his year of being silenced by Rome, he found himself in an indigenous sit-out/vision quest, experiencing visions of animals, masks, saints, and learning in his bones that was not not alone in his suffering. I enjoyed hearing about Matthew's piety. To be honest, when I had listened to Matthew speak, it was mostly his passion for justice mixed with an understandable smattering of bitterness at the systemic intransigence and collusion in evil of the institutional church. But he allows us to see this deep well of spirit in this autobiography.

A short list of stuff I didn't know

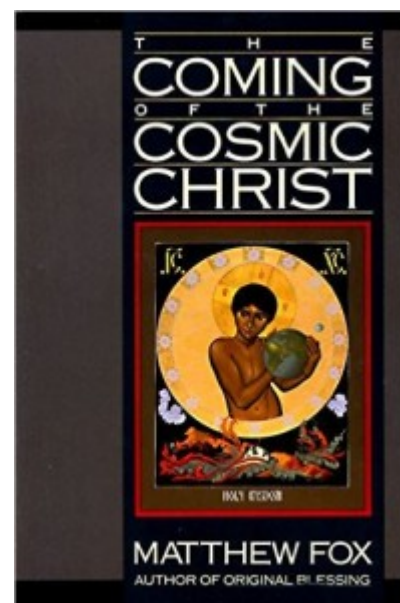
There are many things I did not know about Matthew including: Hugh Hefner, (yes of the Playboy Empire) invited him to lunch, complete with Playboy bunnies) after reading a piece Matthew wrote about the trivialization of sex in American culture. Hefner loved it and reprinted the article; I didn't know that Matthew received the idea of the distinction between creation-spirituality and redemption-centered spirituality from one of his professors when he was studying in Paris, a man named Chenu.

Chenu named the two spiritual traditions: that of "fall/redemption" and that of "creation-centered spirituality." Scales fell from my eyes; I was bumped from my horse! The most pressing question I had brought with me to Paris—how do mysticism and social justice relate (if at all)?—now had a context! So did the issues of dualism and the demeaning of body and matter. Creation spirituality would bring it all together for me: the scriptural and Jewish spirituality (for it was the oldest tradition in the Bible, that of the Yahwist author of the ninth or tenth century before Christ); science and spirituality; politics and prayer; body and spirit; science and religion; Christianity and other world religions. It would be my task to study creation spirituality more deeply and to begin a cultural translation of it. This task would prove to be a process in

its own right with unforeseen consequences.

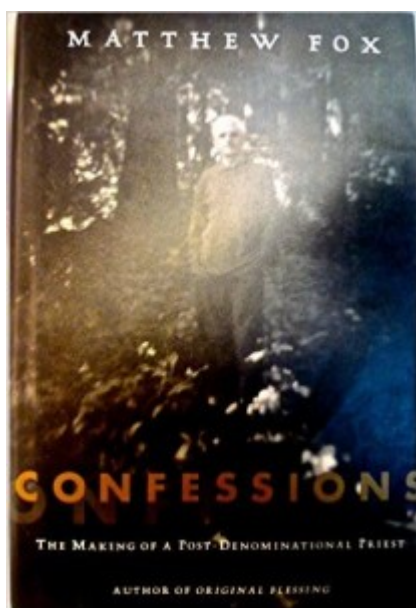
I didn't know that Thomas Merton exchanged letters with Matthew encouraging his interest in mystical theology and encouraging him to study in Paris; I didn't know the depths of Matthew's scholarship. He graduated with his Phd. from University in Paris with a "maxima" – the equivalent of a summa cum laude in North America. The last person to receive this distinction was theologian Karl Rahner 15 years previously; I didn't know that he was inspired by Abraham Lincoln at a very early age; I didn't know that reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was pivotal to his spiritual journey; I didn't know that he suffered from polio as a boy, or that he subsequently was a good athlete; I didn't know that he had a love relationship with his dog, Tristan, whom Matthew regarded as a wisdom teacher; I didn't know that he was in a serious car accident that left him in excruciating pain, until he found a holistic chiropractor.

Matthew was the first person to introduce me to the idea of the Cosmic Christ. At the time, I knew he got this right, but to be honest I didn't totally grock it. I was not surprised to hear of his early relationship with Dr. Brian Swimme, physicist and cosmologist, who is also one of my intellectual mentors. Brian too has a deep sense of the numinosity of the Great Story of the evolutionary process, and it is not a far theological step to appreciating that the Christ, who animated Jesus of Nazareth, is present in every atom and molecule. I was not surprised to learn that Teilhard de Chardin is one of Matthew's mentors, who more than anyone else (Teilhard) grasped the cosmic dimensions of the Christ story.



Like all true prophets, Matthew was silenced and then expelled

from the Dominican Order. To read the background of the story is to feel righteous rage for the likes of Ratzinger, the cardinal who headed up Rome's persecution of Fox, and deep disappointment in his order for reversing their support of him, and expelling him from the order. Their loss was the world's gain. And this is the story of the post-denominational mystic/prophet, Matthew Fox.



Matthew is a true Human, an exemplar of what the world can make us if we engage it with courage, conviction, piety, and profound compassion. The fact that he is still going strong is a gift to the world. I salute you, Matthew, honour you, and thank you for being the spiritual warrior that you are. [Get the book](#). It's a great trip through the mind and heart of a great man.

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Blessed are the Pure of Heart



"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8)

I have preached many sermons on the theme of Jesus challenging the purity codes of his own religion. That is, he challenged dietary laws, the rituals of hand-washing, the rules around touching others who were unclean, who you could eat with, etc. These were all externalized expressions of a deeper longing for purity. And Jesus said that they missed the point, which was a pure heart, an internal purity. When this exclusive focus on externals had the effect of masking the impure condition of the heart, Jesus called it out.

But I think that to the extent liberal Christians dismissed the category of purity/impurity as it relates to the spiritual journey we excluded a critical phenomenological religious sensibility: the loss of a pure heart is one of the most profound losses we can experience. This is because impurity, as it relates to the heart, cuts us off from our natural capacity to "see" G0d, as the beatitudes put it. Conversely,

when our hearts are cleansed, this spiritual vision comes back on line.

I recently experienced, in my body, mind, and soul, the deep grief of my heart being stained by trauma in my life. Another way of saying this is that I lost my innocence. Not innocence as naivete, but rather innocence as the experience of being able to deeply trust that the universe is good, nourishing, and trustworthy. This left a stain on my soul. I could no longer relax and be carried by life. I developed a certain vigilance. I needed to be wary, always one eye out for danger. I was in danger of being taken from, fed on when I should have been nourished. Disgust enters the picture, a deep sense that something is very, very wrong. And with this, a profound, if unconscious sadness. This sadness would be buried because as a child it was too overwhelming to integrate. But the vigilance, the grief, and the sadness would operate from the unconscious in subtle and not so subtle ways. You might call this an existential fall from grace.

But it is not inevitable. In truth, it should not happen to any of us. But it happens to the vast majority of us. And what is taken from us, along with the loss of innocence is our capacity to see God.

The work of the spiritual journey is primarily regaining this lost purity. This requires much grief – grief as spiritual practice. It demands a facing of the disgust, and an expulsion of the poison that has lodged itself at a cellular level. It is literally nauseating to face this. The recovering of our lost purity demands that we bring to light all the darkness, all the darkness, all the trauma, all the deep disappointment that we were not loved unconditionally, that in truth we were taken from. This being taken from issues in the felt sense that life is too much for us to bear, we carry too much responsibility, because we did when we didn't know what to do with it.

This is shadow work, and it is virtually absent in the mainline, liberal Christianity as a practice. This is why there is typically so much conflict and so much wasted energy on interpersonal issues. The community becomes a cauldron of shadows unconsciously acting out pain, disappointment, failures of love. When trauma is not integrated consciously, we end up with drama, dramas that are re-enacted again and again. Nothing new actually happens. The furniture of our lives may change, but it is the same drama.

When I think of the misery that ISIS is enacting upon the world in the name of religious purity I get very sad. These young men are being ideologically brainwashed to believe that everybody else who does not believe as they believe are impure. As such, these unwashed deserve to die as divine punishment for impurity. But this is the kind of purity that Jesus warned against. Their violence is their own unconscious grief at having lost their impurity. But they cannot own it, or rather, they choose not to own it because it is too painful. It becomes their shadow, and it is projected onto the rest of the world. We – the others – become the great unwashed, deserving of death. This is religious purity that is disconnected from love, precisely because to feel deep love is impossible without feeling the loss of innocence, all the ways that love has failed them in the past, and then consciously reintegrating this suffering into our lives.

The pure of heart see God, because, cleansed of the violence and the poison that was enacted against them, they feel love—for themselves and for others. This directly felt experience of love is the feeling of being one with all, including God. And when the pure of heart look out at the world, it is God looking through their eyes, and they feel it. This is not theology. This is the actual experience of recovered innocence, of a heart that is wide-open, surrendered in trust to life and to Spirit, in deep reverence for all that is arising moment by moment. It is the direct experience of

beauty, because God is beauty itself. It is the experience of weeping in the presence of such beauty, and of a deep longing to somehow help all those who are suffering to know how loved they are, and that is okay, it's okay just to be your true self, before the trauma stole their vision.

I feel like the church should stop everything else and simply focus on helping people to find their pure heart. We devote massive resources to almost everything, but this one thing could be a game changer. It could give the church back its fundamental footing, the ground from which all else arises, and that is the capacity to see God.

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Born of the Spirit



It came to me that what it means to be born of the Spirit is glaringly obvious. And that however obvious it may be, living it is difficult. And it is difficult because it requires a level of trust that is rare. It is rare because for most of us in the Western world that trust has been broken. The break is not only in our personal lives. It is passed down to us from an entire ancestry. This ancestry, including, our own histories

is in need of healing.

The basis of living in Spirit is the embodied sense that we are being supported by creation, Earth, Spirit. This is in contrast to what Paul talks about as “sarx”, which is translated as the flesh. But he doesn’t mean the physical body, which he calls soma. The flesh is the cluster of drivers that are focused exclusively on security, status, and sustenance. There is nothing wrong with these drivers, in and of themselves. Without them we couldn’t survive.

But an essential human experience of awakening is that we can trust that we will be provided for, that the universe is “rigged in our favour” (Rumi). When we have experienced secure attachment as children, and when that period of secure attachment is followed up by successive environments (family, school, university, work, social communities, political institutions, etc.) that are motivated by a deep love of humanness, creation, and of the sacred intelligence in which each is participating, we are liberated to follow what is in

our heart, what is our soul's calling. Which is to say that we are able to transcend the drivers of the flesh, awaken to the dimension of Spirit, and live in trust.

At a feeling level, the alternative to trust in creation, Earth, Spirit, is anxiety—a crippling sense that I am not safe, that I must be vigilant in getting my needs met, that I can't depend on anyone or anything outside myself. In this state of anxiety I become a net taker, hoarding to myself and my family what I believe is necessary for survival. Other people, institutions, Earth, and even Spirit, becomes little more than resources – means to the all-consuming end of making sure I'm safe and cared for. You can tell from this description that I have just described the vast majority of our social, political, and economic institutions. At a personal level, my career, my spouse, my friends, all end up serving “the flesh”, the realm and organizing principle of anxiety.

The journey back to living from Spirit (which is always, already present and always, already supporting us) involves take a good, long, and hard look at our “trust issues”. And this means being willing to make all the trauma in our lives conscious. Trauma here just means those experiences in our life that have triggered the condition of anxiety, and our compensation patterns, such as hyper-vigilance, fear of intimacy, separating soul and career, doing what's expected of us rather than living from soul, all the ways that we disassociate or disappear under stress—effectively, all the ways we live in fear.

The challenge is that we are all mesmerized by what Charles Tart called “the consensus trance”.



Diego Rivera, "Chester Dale," 1945, oil on canvas. "From Impressionism to Modernism: The Chester Dale Collection" will be at the National Gallery of Art from January 31, 2010-July 31, 2011.

We have normalized our various compensation patterns, at a personal level, but also the ways these patterns are embedded in the social institutions. But as Bruce Cockburn puts it, "The trouble with normal is it always gets worse".

Think of North American politics, wherein a politician can be elected simply on the basis of claiming to deliver more economic security, lower taxes, etc. Everybody just blithely accepts the mantra, made famous by Clinton, "it's the economy, stupid". This is a politics of anxiety. Or think of how universities increasingly are seeing themselves vocational institutions, serving the needs of the economy, rather than seeing themselves humanizers of humanity. Here in Canada, the [University of Calgary](#) is under investigation for being influenced by the financial support of Enbridge. The University President is receiving \$130,000.00/year to sit on the board of Enbridge.



But this is merely a symptom of this larger issue of having an entire society organized around the “concerns of the flesh”.

The underlying anxiety that is driving us, personally and collectively is fuelled by an addiction to caffeine, which supports an unnatural pace of

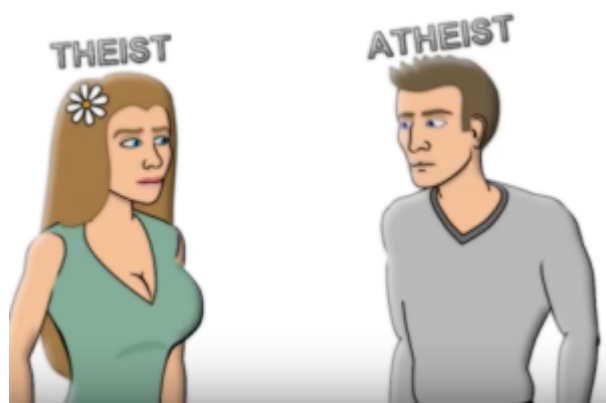
life. We live at anxiety’s pace, not the soul’s pace. Again, we have normalized this collective addiction. We legalize alcohol, which anaesthetizes us to this anti-soul way of life. But we ban various sacred plant medicines, which can actually have the power to build new societies of love.

And this is what it ultimately means to be born of the Spirit, to stabilize in an orientation of love, for creation, for each other, and Love itself. The deep peace that comes from loving Love in all ways and in all circumstances, to be with others who are share this yearning and this experience of being suffused by Love. And then, choosing this moment by moment. Dropping into a resting and a trusting that this Love has got our back. It’s a matter in the beginning of “dropping out” of the cultures of anxiety, and subsequently discovering that you can “drop in” to the Spirit at any time. And it does requires a surrender, in order to allow Love to completely reorganize your life, inside and out. This comes from the realization that nothing else really matters so much. And that it isn’t a sacrifice of life as you know it so much as it is re-mem-bering of life as it could be.

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[Do You Know God?](#)



This video is making the rounds on Facebook. Watch the video and then I'll discuss below. You can skip the last couple of minutes which is promoting a skeptic's website. Or not. Your call.

https://youtu.be/P0A_iF1B3k0

Okay, it's pretty funny. I especially get a kick out of the Pentecostal guy speaking in tongues. It's set up as The Atheist versus the Theists. The atheist is human. The other guys are religious. The implication is that their religion is blinding them to the fact that what unites them all is that they are all humans first. The theists include a bunch of different kinds of Christians, and then some other faith

groups. The atheist is the rational guy, the religious guys are superstitious bozos.

What interests me is that this video pursues the same strategy as other popular contemporary atheists like Richard Dawkins. You aim your criticism at traditional religious believers. What's not mentioned is that what unites all the believers, from whatever denomination and whatever faith is that each is expressing a level of religious intelligence called Traditional or in Spiral Dynamics, "Truth Force". G_d reveals the Truth. We better accept the truth, or else. And, of course, sometimes this is backed up by a warrior consciousness, which is humorously depicted in the video. (Not so funny in real life).

The cluster of values, assumptions about the nature of reality, and importantly *how* we think about the problems that beset us, trump particular religious ideologies.

The video would never work if you set the atheist up against a theist like Catholic theologian, John Haught, or a panentheist process theologian, like John Haught. Or biologist and theist, Rupert Sheldrake. Each of these men believe in God but have transcended, yet included, the modernist rationalism of the atheist.

So, it's a cheap shot. It wants us to believe that if the theists would just put down their religion all the problems of the world would be solved and we could get on with just being Human.

The corollary is that rational humans are the answer to world peace. Are we to believe that non-theistic, rational modernists, like Mao Tse Tung, Lenin, Vladimir Putin are the answer to world peace? Or the scientists that developed nuclear weapons? Karen Armstrong has done a good job at exploding the belief that the violence of the last century was primarily religiously motivated. It was motivated by politics,

and rationalist politicians. Also this:

In their comprehensive Encyclopedia of Wars, Phillips and Axelrod document the recorded history of warfare. Of the 1,763 wars presented, a mere 7% involved a religious cause. When Islam is subtracted from the equation, that number drops to 3.2%.

In terms of casualties, religious wars account for only 2% of all people killed by warfare. This pales in comparison to the number of people who have been killed by secular dictators in the 20th century alone.

Here's an evolutionary take on religion:

Religion as Truth Force becomes a religion *about* its leader and founder.

Religion as Modernist Rationalist (often atheist) becomes a historical and contextual deconstruction of that religion's doctrines and beliefs.

Religion as Postmodernist Empathic becomes an enactment of justice and inclusivity. It's not what you believe, but how you act in the world.

Religion as Integral becomes an identification with animating intelligence and love of the religion's founder. You become that which was animating your religion's founder—a mystic. ("It is no longer me, but Christ in me"). The significance and deep meaning of the tradition comes back on line, along with a trans-rational appreciation, even devotion for, the founder of the lineage.

My point here is that as religious intelligence continues to evolve, we become more and more human. Religion can be humanizing if it is allowed to evolve. The video assumes that all religion got frozen at the Traditional stage of development.

It also assumes that an evidence-based, mathematical worldview is what transforms us from religious fools and fanatics into human beings. That was the hope of modernism certainly. What it did do was to add a new epistemology (how we get at truth)- one that is rational and empirical. Which is in itself good.

But then modernism is contextualized by postmodernism (which the atheist guy expresses when he says that all truth is contextual and perspectival). So there arises yet a more nuanced view of "truth", yet another epistemology.

Postmodernism itself is contextualized by yet a more nuanced perspective on truth, one that can embrace all of these truths – of animism, traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism. Call this integral.

My point is that to be Human you can't stop at modernist rationalism. To be human is to continue to evolve. My other point is that there are expressions of theism that reflect traditional, modernist, postmodernist and integral intelligence. The video is successful in pointing out the shortcomings and potential violence of a traditionalist religious worldview. But religion itself is not the problem. It's religion (and rationalists) who refuse to evolve.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has get increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get data that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned something about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other matter we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medical reviews found that up to three quarters of humanity on such preparation experience side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your partner and physician. Today, there are many options for men

who suffer from erectile malfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this curing. Talk to your health care provider to see if it's sure to make the switch.

Heaven Knows

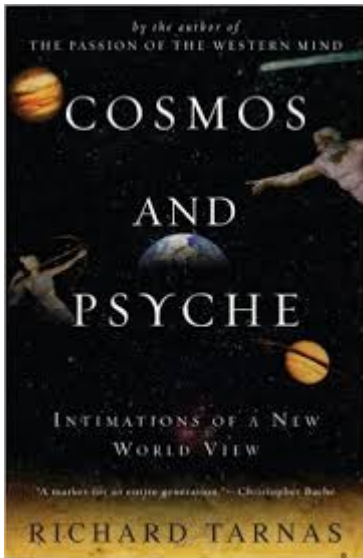


I'll begin with a strange question. How many of you read your horoscope? Or at least check them out from time to time in the Saturday paper? Most of us have a vague sense that if you are a Christian, there is something not quite right about taking horoscopes seriously. We may not be quite sure what it is, but we know we shouldn't take it seriously. If we are a conservative or fundamentalist Christian, we might have been taught that it is of the devil.

Still, we're pretty interested aren't we? How many of you believe that the way the planets aligned at the date and time of your birth could influence your life? Do you find it as interesting as I do this level of interest in the alignment of the stars and the planets? No, we don't really *believe in* horoscopes, do we? But yes, we check them out.

I remember reading historian, Richard Tarnas' book, *The Passion of the Western World*, highly acclaimed among academics, for his lucid account of the history of ideas. He's a serious scholar. I highly recommend the book if you want to trace the seminal ideas of the last 2500 years that still influence our thinking today.

So when his next book came out, *Cosmos and Psyche*, I did not hesitate. The first hundred pages or so I found riveting. He describes how the modernist worldview systematically voided the universe of meaning and purpose. Space, including the stars and the planets, we were taught to be mostly inert, balls of gas and hunks of dead matter. By the time we arrived in the 21st century, late postmodernist philosophy deepened the belief that space was mere emptiness, that there was no intrinsic meaning in the universe, excepting the meaning and purpose which humans ascribed to the universe—and added to the deadening of the cosmos that even these meanings are arbitrary and relative constructions.



Good stuff!

Then suddenly the book takes a surprising turn. He starts to write about astrology. He cites carefully researched correlations between periods of great upheaval and transformation in human history, and the planetary alignment of Pluto and Uranus.

For example, these two planets were in conjunction in the 1960's, at the time of the Protestant Revolution, the French Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, and for the period known as the rise of Romanticism.

Keep in mind that Richard Tarnas is no fool. As I said he is a highly respected historian, and his book, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, is destined to be a classic. I found my own reaction interesting. I started questioning his credibility. He himself admits that belief in astrology is "the gold standard for superstition".

So I ask myself, where did I learn to be so deeply suspicious

of astrology? Where did I learn to so vociferously defend against the possibility that the heavens and the planetary bodies expressed a deep patterning, what religious people have called the mind of G_d. Where did my suspicion of synchronicity between the heavens, Earth, and the human come from?

I don't think it was my religious upbringing. After all, this is the United Church of Canada, where everything is acceptable.

Somehow, by the time I got to seminary, I just knew that the starry skies might be beautiful on a clear night sky, but at the end of the day, they represented a whole bunch of gas and matter, signifying nothing. I might agree that their beauty reflected the work of a Creator. But the possibility that the stars and the planets themselves participated in, and were participated by a pervasive Wisdom, was off the table completely.

We hear the psalmist declare:

"19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;19:4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun

And notice the organic transition from the deep patterning of the cosmos to the deep patterning that is reflected in the moral code of the day. Morality that participates in the same wisdom that is animating the heavens and Earth is trustworthy. The statutes and ordinances and laws reflect this Wisdom.

Despite the ancient Jewish suspicion of the nature gods of surrounding cultures, along with their so-called idols, the

psalmist is poetic enough to feel in his bones and in his heart that the heavens are not inert. They are not voiceless. They have a story to tell.

Earth is not yet the dead, inert object that the modernist, rationalists declare it to be: The firmament *proclaims* G_d's handiwork.

The night is believed to have "knowledge". What does the night know? Well, certainly not particle physics. The night doesn't know *about*. The night *knows*, by participating directly in the reality of G_d. The night, along with the revelation each day brings, is that part of creation which presences the Whole. Or you could call this G_d. Or you could call it Health. Or you could call it Wisdom. It doesn't matter what you call it.

But what does matter is that we don't forever lose the feeling for it. All creation is being lived by a Wholeness or by the primordial Health. And this Wholeness is biased toward...you guessed it, wholeness. The wholeness is what is living you. And what does the Wholeness want? It wants you to fully experience and manifest your own unique wholeness.

Because like the stars, the constellations, and the planets, you are also synchronized to the Wholeness out of which a universe emerges and continues to emerge—with this bias to have this Originating Wholeness manifest and uniquely expressed. Where? In you. In us collectively.

The challenge is for those of us unconsciously steeped in rationalism (and that includes most United Church folk) is that we are that part of creation—the modern human being—who suffers under the profound illusion that we are separate from the universe.

Physicist, Henri Bortoft, asserts that the universe is holographic. Every part of creation is the place for the presencing of the whole. But if we believe that we are separate from the stars and the planets, if we believe that

the movement of the stars and the planets are not animated by the same Wholeness that animates us, then we become that part of creation, that is *not* for the presencing of the Whole.

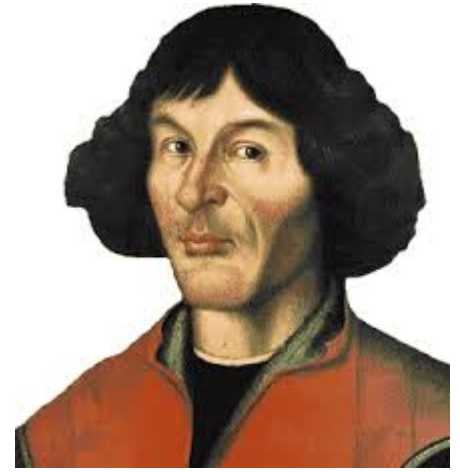
What are we for then? Well, I can tell you what we are *headed* for if we do not regain this felt sense that the whole of the universe, every star, every planet, every grain of sand, every amoeba, and every human is being lived by a Wisdom that is biased to bring about Health and Wholeness. We are headed for destruction. Without this felt sense that we are participating, along with the heavens and Earth, in the realization (making real) of the Originating and Ongoing Wholeness that is living us, our souls contract. We become, not expressions of the Whole, but egos and personalities, out to get what we can, take what we can, while the getting is good.

Which is, I don't need to tell any of you, what we're doing to our planet. Not because we're bad. We're not bad. We may just be the crowning achievement of a 14 billion year evolutionary process. We're that part of creation that can give voice to the beauty, the wonder, the awe of what we're involved with. We can be the voice of the stars, and put into language the story that they tell in their simple radiance. And when we do, the heavens rejoice.

Paul intuited that all of creation was waiting with eager longing for the arrival of the children of G_d – the human ones! Creation gave birth to us so that we might consciously awaken to the gift of life, consciously express gratitude, consciously love all creation. We're not bad. But we are living foolishly. That is, without the wisdom that tells us of the deep patterning and synchronicity that is living us.

I recently was doing a bit of reading about Copernicus. You

remember that is the 16th century, Polish astronomer who came up with the ground-breaking insight that Earth and the planets circled the sun, and not the other way around. Typically, when we hear the story, we are told that he discovered this, as though he looked through a telescope and saw it all happening. In fact, he didn't see anything that anybody else couldn't see, including the Ptolemy, the mathematician responsible for the Earth-centered view of the universe that Copernicus' replaced.



But Copernicus didn't discover anything. At the time, people were not concerned with "truth" as fact the way we are. It took a couple more centuries for us to actually discover that the universe worked the way Copernicus suggested—that is, that he got the facts right.

But Copernicus simply didn't like Ptolemy's math. It wasn't elegant enough. It was too chopped up. Listen to his reasoning for changing the math:

"Nor have they been able thereby to discern or deduce the principle thing—namely the shape of the Universe and the unchangeable symmetry of its parts. With them it is as though an artist were to gather the hands, feet, head, and other members for his images from diverse models, each part excellently drawn, but not related to a single body, and since they in no way match each other, the result would be monster rather than man."

Copernicus intuited that the universe was a single, living organism, and that you couldn't divide it up into parts without becoming monstrous. Ptolemy's math was too hodge-podge for him. Copernicus intuitively felt that by having Earth circling the sun there was more synchronicity and more

wholeness.

He tapped into the *wisdom of the Whole*. That's how he did his science and his math. He literally moved heaven and earth, through his equations, to effect a harmony that he felt. He left it to other scientists to work out the evidence. The Pope at the time accepted his equations for practical purposes. He needed a new calendar.

Bortoft claims that the way Copernicus did his science was the way all of science works, that is, it is filtered through an organizing idea. Many of the big ideas, including Darwin's theory of evolution (in the particular way it was expressed) were what Hubner calls "spontaneous acts"—there was nothing which compels or determines the choice which is made. As Bortoft puts it in relation to Copernicus' discovery.

"Copernicus's choice of a Sun-centered cosmos enabled him to find the symmetry and harmony of the whole, in a way that had escaped the Earth-centered scheme. But the motivation for this was principally aesthetic. In wanting to find symmetry and harmony in the cosmos, Copernicus was adopting the Renaissance ideal in architecture and painting as a precept for astronomy. So the foundations of the Copernican theory do not lie only in astronomy as such, but in the entire cultural-historical situation"

Now, I spend some time on this by way of trying to get at what happened in the modern era. Because it was during the modern that the heavens, which once told the story of God's glory, fell completely, deafeningly, and sadly silent. And we need to remember, that despite the Jewish suspicion of nature religions, all of their major festivals are based on the lunar cycles. Some more ancient wisdom that is bred in the bones of Judaism got lost somewhere along the way.

Bortoft says that science itself is historically and culturally conditioned. It is conditioned by organizing ideas,

and the organizing idea of modern science (in its materialistic expression) is that the universe is dead. Matter is all there is, and matter itself is not being lived by any animating force. No intelligence, no wisdom, no vitality. Nada.

Human beings have been reduced to genes and neurons. And for the most part we've bought it, hook, line, and sinker. Theologians and ministers scramble to find the science that will validate faith. Science has become what the church was in the 15th century and scientists have attained to the status of medieval priests. Nothing is legitimate unless it is validated by the priesthood.

Don't get me wrong I love science. It has served humans well in the 20th century. But we need to put it in perspective. We need to understand, first off, that science doesn't discover raw facts. It discovers what it is looking for and what it is looking for is filtered through an organizing idea about reality. That organizing idea today is materialism—which values the parts over the Whole.

I'm not trying to turn anybody on to horoscopes. But I am here to encourage us all to put into language what the heavens and our beloved planet, along with all our kin creatures continue to say silently, for those who have an ear for silence.

The whole Earth is filled with the glory of G_d. The heavens are full of a wisdom that we can know because this wisdom also resides in us. We can shift from the rationalistic mode of "knowing about", to the mystic way of knowing, through union with what we seek to know. Listen to the stars. They have a story to tell. Listen to our beloved planet and to the moon. They have a story to tell about an Intelligence and a Love that is living us all in this great, unfolding that is life itself.

Jesus knew that even if we continue to remain silent, which we

cannot afford to do as a church, the rocks would cry out. But let's not remain silent.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has become increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get info that is reliable. You can find useful data fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned slightly about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other question we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medicinal reviews found that up to three quarters of people on such drug practice side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your partner and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this curing. Talk to your heartiness care provider to see if it's sure to make the switch.

[The Practice of Failing Bravely](#)



I was happy to receive [an email from Deepak Chopra's](#) organization that related to my fifth Core Agreement: Fail Bravely. I was delighted to see that he sets the whole relationship between "success" and "failure" in the context of evolution. In essence, if the

point of it all is to personal and collective evolution, then judgements that we've succeeded or failed are actually beside the point. Both come to us as opportunities to evolve.

It might *feel* better to succeed. But have you noticed, this feeling is itself fleeting? As the saying goes, "we're only as good as our last success" –or at least that is what we've been taught to believe. Which means that if we can't continue to get the applaud meter going in the right direction consistently, our small self tells us that we are a failure. And if we are able to get that applaud meter up into the red zone, usually we end up burned out.

Deepak wisely suggest an alternative, a method of self-inquiry, if we are to hold "success" and "failure" within a larger mandate to evolve. What follows is taken directly from his article which I've linked to above:

Emotions: *Ask yourself how you feel. Be with the feeling. Compare it to other times when a similar feeling has arisen.*

Self-support: *Consider yourself the agent of change. If you're facing negative input, don't blame anything outside yourself. Focus on how to deal with your own emotions and responses in a positive way.*

Perspective: *Do what it takes to get an objective view of the situation. This is different from having friends who tell you that things can only get better. Instead, find someone who*

has experienced the same thing you're going through and who has successfully met the challenge.

Patience: *The mind reacts to negative situations with various symptoms of stress, including anxiety, insecurity, shame, shock, the urge to run away, etc. Be patient enough to let these responses subside. Don't make any decisions until you are centered and less stressed.*

Self-compassion: *Approach yourself with kindness. Be easy with your stressed-out state. Don't judge yourself. When your mind spirals into thoughts of loss, failure, and anxiety, accept these as normal, the way pain is normal if you cut or bruise yourself. Don't buy into them as the truth; symptoms are signs that you are still hurting, nothing more.*

Decision-making: *Once you have practiced the other things on the list, you are ready to decide one of three things—Should I try to fix the situation? Should I put up with it? Should I walk away? People who consider themselves successes—and whom the world views as a success—are good deciders. They get to a place inside where they have enough mental clarity that they can weigh the three choices just outlined. The opposite of this, being a bad decider, comes about when a person is too impulsive, insecure, uncertain, or confused. These are normal states, especially in a crisis. In learning how to handle them, however, you evolve and learn that making good decisions is an acquired skill.*

This is harder than it looks. My take on this is that this kind of practice requires a lot of maturity. I remember in my late 20's when I was going for my accreditation as a supervisor in pastoral counselling. The panel failed me. I didn't have the ego strength to follow the above steps. I had never "failed" before. I was Bruce Sanguin, successful in everything I put my hand to. I just felt rejected. I was devastated. For a good three weeks I felt worthless as a human

being.

I had no self-compassion, no patience, no perspective, and no self-support. Nevertheless, I decided to appeal the decision. My appeal was accompanied by a 20 page article which was very clever, criticizing the educational method and the interviewing style of my panel. Unfortunately, my appeal was successful. I deserved to have failed. I truly believe that my own evolution would have been better served by entering into a deeper inquiry than I allowed myself. Essentially, I blamed them.

My reactivity was evidence enough that I wasn't ready to become a supervisor at the age of 29. I needed to understand the underlying trauma, the deep shame that was triggered by my "failure". It was a lost opportunity.

I would add to Deepak's list, go see a competent therapist, who can help you get at the trauma, the memory that was triggered. Only then can our "failures" truly serve our evolutionary path.

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treatment. Talk to your heartiness care purveyor to see if it's sure to make the switch.

Compos(t)ing a Life



I glanced at an email last week from Kristen Tippet's radio program. The top billing read *Composing a Life*, but I read *Composting a Life*, which I thought was a brilliant idea—composing a life precisely by composting your life.

I read Mary Catherine Bateson's book (*Composing a Life*) over a decade ago. I remember it being a fascinating read. She is the daughter of Margaret Meade and Gregory Bateson, a fairly heady gene pool.

Like most people I know these days, we compost. All the kitchen scraps end up in a big oil barrel out back. (Not a bad use for all the oil barrels that will soon be obsolete). We don't get fancy, with layering, turning, and all that. Yet, I never really get over the alchemical magic of it. I open the lid, the heat rises (the serious work of transformation is happening!), the earth worms (where did they come from?) are participating in the metabolization of the waste into soil, and the fragrance of the underlying humous is divine.

My father has been composting forever. He grew up on a farm and knows all about the alchemy of soil-creation. He told me once that he never really gets over the the miracle of it.

My plan is to use this batch of fresh soil as the base for a couple of roses out front. Kitchen scraps transformed into beauty.

It makes sense to me that this is the primary spiritual discipline: composing a life by composting a life.

Jesus was always talking about the need to divest and let go of all the scraps of one's lives. In the human realm the challenge for us is that we have a difficult time sorting out the scraps that need to be tossed in the compost bin from what is really important to hang on to. (Which pretty much comes down to soul).

All the stuff we don't need—old trauma, belief systems, self-images, excessive wealth, and ultimately, the personality—is not wasted in Jesus' composting system of spiritual development. The compost bin is G_d. G_d's love metabolizes all that stuff and turns it into pure gold—a life that is truly alive. One that is dedicated to being a medium to nourish and draw out the innate radiance and glory of oneself and others.

I like the image of G_d as a divine dung heap, the one who takes all that we no longer need and does the metabolizing trick, transforming lives. I like the idea that even our trauma, when we've worked it through and we're ready to let go of it, is not wasted. All the energy that went into compensating for the trauma is now available for love, for evolution, and the "gay, great happening, illimitably life".

The discipline is daily composting, an inquiry into what is ready to go into the compost bin. Could be a chip on your shoulder. Might be a habit that is serving nobody. Or an addiction. Whatever it is, it also requires a commitment to daily "die" to whatever it is that is keeping us from the open-hearted life. But of course that is the spiritual paradox. This death is but a transformation. Learning to trust

that in just one lifetime is a challenge.

Maybe this is how the cross actually works. In his death, Jesus took upon himself all the violence, greed, and lust for power. He acted like the dung heap. (Wasn't Golgotha a dung heap? I'll have to check my sources.) He drew (and continues to draw) all of this darkness out of us. Everything that is not love was tossed in the composting bin of his heart, there to be transformed. The rose that is a new humanity is even now making its way through the dark loam.



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On the Precipice – But of What?



I notice that Bishop John Spong has recently sent a letter to Moderator Cantwell of the United Church of Canada imploring the church to pull back from “this precipice”. What follows in the letter is a scolding of the small, pre-modern minds who have dared to call the Rev. Gretta Vosper to account. That is, whether she is fit for ministry.

Gretta is the minister of West Hill United Church in Scarborough, Ontario. This was the church I served before coming out to Vancouver. For years following the transition I would get emails and phone calls from former members who had left the congregation because Gretta had made many significant and disconcerting changes, most of which were the logical consequences of her growing clarity that she was an atheist. I just listened to these folks compassionately.

She continues to identify herself with “progressive” Christianity. If you go to [her website](#), she identifies herself as “minister, author, atheist”. It's catchy to say the least.

But I think what her choice to continue to lead a church as an atheist doesn't make a lot of sense. It makes no more sense than the Atheist Society of Canada having as their leader a devoted Christian.

Bishop Spong's letter mistakenly assumes that by "atheist" Gretta means a-theism. That is, that she is merely rejecting the theistic God of traditional Christianity.

Gretta has called herself "an atheist minister." While that language is startling to some, the Christian academy knows exactly what she is saying. To refer to oneself as an "atheist" does not mean that one is asserting that there is no God; it means that the "theistic" definition of God is no longer operative or believable. It has not been operative in intellectual circles since the 17th century. Perhaps if Gretta had called herself a "non-theistic" pastor, people would not respond with the negativity that is born out of such incredible and profound theological ignorance. Gretta's style, however, is to shock people into opening their minds to new possibilities and thus to call them into a new understanding of God.

Ummm...I don't think that's what she's saying Bishop. I was a co-keynote speaker with her when she presented the universe as cold and indifferent and meaningless and there being no role for *any* kind of God. She isn't trying to shock anybody into believing in another kind of God. After reading the letter, I seriously wondered if he had engaged Gretta in an in-depth conversation before writing his letter of support.

He should really be aware that 99% of the clergy in the United Church of Canada are non-theistic, if the theism he's talking about is the traditional interventionist God. But he should also be aware that there are very intelligent and nuanced forms of theism these days. Dr. John Haught in my opinion is a very credible theist.

Spong goes on in the letter, rather arrogantly I thought, running down all the those in the UCC who are persuaded that Gretta should be required to clarify her thinking on the matter. His tone along with his critique misses the ethos of the UCC, which has never been accused of being close-minded. It is more post-modern, than traditional.

Gretta was the President and co-founder, (I believe), of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity. But what she is about is not progressive, it's not avant grade, as Spong makes it out to be, and there is much confusion about this. It modernist atheism, a simple rejection of any kind of God. Which is good and fine. Atheism is a legitimate worldview. It's been done and is being done very well by many philosophers and scientists, who assume an ideology of materialism (physicalism). It's secular humanism—a particular form of spiritual intelligence. But it's not cutting edge. Thomas Jefferson attempted to reduce Christianity to morals and values over 200 years ago with his version of the Bible, that cut out all the miracles, the resurrection, and any reference to Jesus as divine.

Gretta defends her choice to remain in the church because her Board and the existing congregation is happy with her. But nobody is asking the majority of those who left the congregation.

She also defends herself by making a distinction between beliefs and actions. What's important is how you act not what you believe. But belief, not as intellectual assent to dogma or doctrine, but heartfelt conviction (based in personal experience) about the Mystery that inhabits us as conscious beings in a vast universe, does matter. When she says that the universe is cold and indifferent and proceeding without any apparent purpose, that is a belief. It's metaphysics. She makes that conclusion, based not on empirical fact, but on her interpretation of facts. And that interpretation is itself shaped by the modernist ideology reduces reality to the

physical, that is persuaded that reason is our salvation, and is committed to jettisoning a traditional view of God.

Now in the human realm belief systems are part of the wonderful diversity of creation. They are an expression of differentiation, and there is unity in differentiation. Church is distinct from Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, etc. but not separate from other belief systems. But the differentiation is real. It's not a bad thing. It's the way reality shows up—in all its variegated, unified glory. Church shows up as a community that believes certain things about Reality. Those beliefs evolve certainly, and there is a very wide range of beliefs in the UCC, but all of which include whatever we mean by G_d.

Gretta has a different set of beliefs about reality. And reality needs her beliefs to be whole. They are part of the glory of creation. But they sufficiently distinguish her from that aspect of creation called “church” in such a way that she no longer “fits”. What is being tested by the UCC is precisely Gretta's “fitness” for ministry. This is not a moral test. It is not a test of her goodness as a human being. It's an inquiry into whether or not she is a fit. Why not welcome that inquiry?

Oh, and this isn't about “inclusivity”. There is so much misunderstanding about this UCC mantra. It's not about the church being “inclusive” enough to make room for atheist clergy. Using a biological metaphor, if the cell membrane fails in its function of allowing what is essential in, and keeping what is non-essential or is actually detrimental to the cell out, it will cease to be what it is in very short order. For a particular kind of cell to be itself, it needs the intelligence to discriminate what belongs in and what doesn't. If it loses this intelligence, it dies.

Now, I'm not saying that it would be the end of the world if the church died but as long as it is “church” it needs to be

self-defined. An atheist society would cease to be what it is if it allowed its leadership to be Christians or Jews. And to repeat, the glorious diversity of creation needs atheist societies. But inclusivity doesn't mean confusing the two.

Gretta is playing an important role in the UCC, whether or not she is taking on that role consciously. She is forcing the church to look at how philosophical materialism, rationalism, and empiricism has crept into the institution. Our historical realization that we needed to take science seriously if we were going to be credible, brought with it a Trojan horse—an underlying modernist agenda to rid the world and the universe of Spirit. Rationalism and materialism, *as a belief system*, has in many quarters trumped the mystic sensibility. They have a place in the order of the universe, but not in a church.

Bishop Spong has provided great leadership for which I am grateful. But he's off-base in this letter. He's missed the ethos of the UCC, what the actual issues are, and he's missed Gretta's theology or lack thereof. Gretta too is a fine human being and a compassionate defender of the marginalized. But it's time to move on.

Honestly, this is the last you'll hear from me on this.

Prayer

Entering seminary I naively assumed that my education would go beyond merely learning *about* God. I expected help to *know* God. But the curriculum was squarely aimed at my mind—systematic theology, liturgy, history, Bible, etc.

Courses on prayer and contemplation were on offer down the

road at the Roman Catholic colleges. Protestants are focused more on the Word made flesh, revealed in the New Testament, and made known in the gathered body on Sunday morning, through spoken prayers and the sermon. There was an expressed concern at seminary that these other forms of prayer led to “quietism”, a withdrawal from engagement with the real world. But the folks in the congregations I’ve served do want to know how to pray and to know God.

Over the years I’ve found that it’s easier for Protestants to adopt forms of prayer that use scripture as a springboard to the divine. *Lectio divina*, for example, is growing in popularity. It’s a gift of the Benedictines. This method assumes that scripture is a living word of God, which can speak in unique and fresh ways to the individual. A scripture passage is read (*lectio*); the practitioner focuses on a word or phrase that jumps out at her (*meditatio*), feeling within how this word/phrase touches the heart (*oratio*), followed by a simple resting in the presence of God (*contemplatio*).

In the liberal Protestant church there is, I suspect, general agreement that the “lowest” form of prayer is petitionary—asking God for stuff. Most congregations still do it, but I get the impression that it’s out of habit more than anything else. It raises questions that drive the rational mind batty. For one thing, does it have any meaning in the 21st century, post-scientific world, to pretend that God is out there somewhere, like a satellite dish to whom we beam our prayers hoping that they are somehow received? Do we imagine that without our prayers, God either doesn’t know our needs, or is somehow moved to act in a way that he wouldn’t otherwise without our verbal signals? It doesn’t matter whether the prayer is for world peace, a new car, or for Aunt Sallie’s healing. For the postmodernist churchgoer, the cringe factor is high with this kind of prayer.

We shouldn’t be so quick to dismiss petitionary prayer. Prayer

is all about transcending the rational mind with its *this or that* logic. At best prayer is *transrational*, not irrational, but rather beyond rational in a way that transcends, but includes reason. Prayer is about tapping into higher forms of mind such as intuition, and ultimately into the divine mind. Any form of prayer that emerges from a will that is truly abandoned to divine will can rightly be called mystic, because it flows from a felt union with God.

I recently accompanied the love of my life through a surgery. The first couple of days of recovery were excruciating because the opiate-based painkillers only served to heighten her anxiety. At one point, in her desperation she asked me to pray with her. I prayed unhesitatingly that Jesus be present and use me as channel of healing. The room filled an energy that I experienced as a sweet stillness. For the duration of her recovery, Jesus was a more effective painkiller than all the opiate-derivatives that were on offer. Don't ask me to explain it.

Jesus encouraged us to ask for what we need. The Lord's Prayer itself is pretty much an extended petition—for daily bread, forgiveness, to be saved from temptation, and delivered from evil. He tells his disciples that just any father wants to give his children good things, so we can ask God for whatever we want and expect to receive it. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

But if it's your ego making the ask don't hold your breath. The trick seems to be a will in submission to the divine will. "Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Before any petition is mentioned in The Lord's Prayer, God is 1) confirmed as actual (who *art* in heaven), 2) hallowed, and 3) submitted to (thy will be done on earth...). When this pattern of prayer is sincere, it's safe to say that we've exited the realm of ego. Submission to the will of God

establishes some kind of coherence with divine heart and mind. To use the author's of John's gospel metaphor, the branch needs to be connected to the Christ vine. If it is we will bear fruit in the world, and the Father will give us "whatever we ask" (John 15:5-15).

Prayer then is a response to an already existing condition of being intimately entangled with the highest, deepest, and most encompassing reality that religions call God. It is initiated by soul's love of the most true, the most beautiful, and the most good. Prayer is the response of the soul to the Love that is God. The soul is that part of us which has never felt or believed in the separation and isolation that ego and its cultural constructions (the world) takes to be real.

And the tradition teaches us that this recovery of reality and the life of prayer that results is best found through silence. The working definition of prayer that I learned from the RC's in seminary was that of 8th century theologian John of Damascene: "Prayer is raising of the mind and heart to God". But in silent contemplation, the great mystics of every religion have intuited that it's not us, but God who does the raising. We are raised to the mind and heart of God when we can silence the mind long enough to discover the ever-present One desires to be united with us.

The Jesus lineage has generated many different forms of prayer throughout history all focused on silencing the rational mind. *The Jesus Prayer* originated with the 4th century Desert Fathers and Mothers who understood that silence required more than finding a secluded cave in the desert. The real raucous takes place between our ears, with the incessant chatter of our thoughts and a mind that refuses to take a Sabbath.

To quiet the mind, they recommend repeating the phrase "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" with head bowed toward the heart, was most effective at shutting down the

mind. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a 14th century spiritual classic, is also focused on silencing thoughts, through the use of a single word, like “love”, repeated over and over again. The intent is to offer oneself completely to God, through love. “By love God may be grasped and held. By thought never.” *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a 19th century anonymously published Russian book tells the story of a pilgrim seeking to live by St. Paul’s injunction to “pray without ceasing”, using the Jesus Prayer.

Centering prayer is another form of prayer popularized by Fr. Thomas Keating building upon the use of a sacred phrase or word, a mantra, such as “God is love” to quiet the mind. First one sets the intention to consent to the presence of God, then introduce the sacred word, and whenever a thought or an image arises, it is a signal to return to the sacred word. Every thought or image, then, is not a failure, but rather an opportunity to surrender again to the presence of God. With practice, one discovers that there are times when neither thoughts nor the sacred word is sounding. Here we simply rest in the presence of God, a deeply nourishing, fulfilling, and joyful state.

On the other hand, the 13th century mystic, Meister Eckhart, is a bit grumpy, to say the least, about any techniques or paths to God. There is no path to God, because God is the path. Those who seek by way of a technique end up mastering the technique, but missing God. What is required above all, according to Eckhart, is detachment. From what?

Start with yourself therefore and take leave of yourself. Truly, if you do not depart from yourself, then wherever you take refuge, you will find obstacle and unrest, wherever it may be”.

Realize, says Eckhart, that God is the “I” of one’s own I, not

a being, but the Ground of Being who surrenders Himself to us. Drop into the gift of the Ground of Being that is your most intimate self, relinquish all other notions of self as false constructions, and experience union with God. Otherwise, he exhorts, “stop flapping your gums about God”.

Twentieth century expert in mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, defines mysticism as the “art of union with Reality”. For the religious person, Reality is God and therefore union with God is the goal of mystical prayer. Jesuit priest, Fr. Jean Pierre de Caussade (1665-1751), was regarded by Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, as a spiritual genius. Like Eckhart he was suspicious of techniques and concerned that the common man or woman could find union with God. His book, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, teaches that as we abandon our will to the divine will in our ordinary routine of our lives, we discover that our very lives, in all the ordinary details and duties, are being lived by God. Our lives become sacraments of the sacred, as we attend mindfully to all that arises in the course of a day. And perhaps this is the proper orientation and attitude of a prayerful life, that which makes us potentially all mystics. Assume that we are always and everywhere being lived by a divine heart and mind, and as we surrender in humility to this grace, we come to know God and to God’s ways.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has become increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get information that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about “[levitra cost](#)”. Did learned something about “[buy levitra online usa](#)”? Other matter we are going to is “[buy generic levitra online](#)”. In effect, a medical reviews found that up to three quarters of people on such remedy experiment side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual

malfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your associate and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this therapy. Talk to your heartiness care provider to see if it's sure to make the switch.