

THE NEW RELIGIOUS

Some thinking on the
journey of the religious in the
next thirty years.

I believe...

Being is beyond, beyond, beyond;
Yet grounded in our very selves.

Life is good, the past approved,
each one received, the future open;
Such an understanding is Being's gift to
Human kind. It elicits our participation
in life's journey.

In freedom we are born and live and die.
In freedom we can give ultimately
and bring forth new life.

There is a League of those who know
these things and love them.
They have travelled beyond death to life.
The Other World in the midst of this
is their inheritance. Their companions are
the League of bygone days and of days to come..

Life is wonder-filled.
Its treasures are endless.
It beckons, beckons, beckons.

The world is in disarray at the deepest dimension of its being: the religious. For centuries the different religious groups have lived in contained paddocks, and apart from throwing stones at each other and an occasional foray to sheep-steal, everyone has lived in blissful ignorance of each other and their priests have ministered meaningfully to their flocks. That is no longer true. The fences are down, the sheep are intermingling and ancient prejudices are showing up as irrelevant. None has been more affected by this assault than ourselves...

How quaint to be in India and to find that people on the other side of the world are actually debating whether or not to do the Daily Office.

How shocking to be told by a Brahmin who has been in the Order for years that absolutism is a meaningless category for the Hindus.

How interesting to discover that you have been sustained over a period of years by a daily ritual that has no recognizable religious content.

How unnerving to find that Those Who Care, care for a whole variety of reasons that cut across religious training, life experience, age, sex, and everything else. They just care.

One of the ironies is that the religions have become identified with the institutions that have called them into being. What was life-giving has been strangled. The "word", the spirit, the life-giving energy has become a thing of debate, something that can be rejected or disregarded. But spirit cannot be judged by the institution. Each religion has made its contribution to humanness and that cannot be taken back. Sometimes it becomes necessary to hack your way through the jungle to find the ancient castle. That seems to be the task of our time.

I want to spend a little time showing what I mean by reference to the Christian religion, which is the one I know best! The "Christ-event" points to a great shift in human consciousness. People who had always seen life one way suddenly saw it another and it shocked them out of their minds. They saw it not only as a theory but as demonstrated in a life. They finally understood that there was nothing unique about that one life...he was the first-born of many brothers. The shifted paradigm was indeed a practical model. People try to escape the offense of that event/fact yet finally it has to be understood as a fundamental statement about the way life is.

This sounds a bit dogmatic so let me back-peddle and ground what I am saying. The world operates out of images of subservience. There are those who exploit that and those who are prepared to be exploited. Whole systems are built up on the principle. The Old Testament is a good book to turn to for illustrations. Life is hierarchical. The one who sits on top is usually a despot. Your enemies are out to get you, your king is out to get you, the devil is out to get you, the elements are out to get you and God is out to get you. This never goes away. For the most part people live within the constraints of that life-style.

When you look at the Old Testament, and when you look just a little bit at the other mythologies, what you see is something dancing around, a bit like a ghost, that is suggesting an alternative. "It doesn't have to be this way" it is saying. What the "Christ-event" is all about is a shift in gestalt. One day somebody saw it and said: "My God, you could actually set up a world order on the pattern of freedom and responsibility". The consequent expended life was a demonstration of that and through that life the core of a new social vehicle came into being. What was put into human consciousness was a new perspective - more than that, an interpretation of life that had always been there but had only been glimpsed as a will o' the wisp. Now it was out in the open, come of age and ready to do battle with the reductionist and dehumanising world-view that had so long held sway.

For many, religion connotes a set of principles that you live by. The "Christ Word" has nothing to do with that. It is more like a flash across the screen that grabs people's imaginations and compels them to leave their nets and follow in its quest. If you are looking for an ideology, a system devised to structure your living, then that's not it either. I am talking about that wispy vision which struck Buddha and Confucius and Mohammed as well as Jesus : I am pointing to the common water table upon which and from which all the great religious statements have emanated : that is what I am pointing to when I talk about the "Word".

This seems to me to be a very hard thing to get said. I am trying to say that the Word is a Word for all people. It has become a sectarian thing because that is the way that people have wanted to escape its offense, but that finally does nothing to negate it as a universal declaration. I sometimes hear us speaking as if we can't operate in the pluriform world because we have these strong Christian biases. There is truth in that but in the end, we are the bearers of the Word. The job to be done is to restructure the proclamation of that Word in the new paradigm. This has nothing to do with transposing Christian trappings ; it has everything to do with ensuring that possibility gets built into the social fabric in the new time. That's worth spending your life over.

It's a pity, I suppose, that the "church" got institutionalised so that you can belong to it whether you live out of the "paradigm of possibility" or not, whether it is your life's mission to call others to that journey or not, etc. But finally, it is of no consequence because when you say "C.H.U.R.C.H." you are pointing to a transparent dynamic not an institution. The startling fact is that the pilgrims on that journey are everywhere. Institutionally, the church is nothing.

I say these things with pain for I love the historic church. I love its mythology. The symbols used to put together its creed are rich beyond measure. The great prayers, the great music, the majestic liturgies, the adoration expressed in architecture...all these things have been tremendous strategic endeavours to ensure the declaration, manifestation and formation of the Word in history. But all that is now, largely, a spent force. It will not freight us into this unknown future. It does not fit the pluriform society where complexity and holism and indeterminacy and morphogenesis are the norms of thinking and doing. The new called for is radical and unconditional and with great sadness I know those dear old trappings have to go. I remember as a kid receiving a photograph of the Himalaya mountains with the white snow-capped peaks and the dark valleys and hollows. People told me that if I looked I would see something that was not hills and valleys. I looked for two days and it looked like hills and valleys. Then it happened. The paradigm switched and I experienced that for the first time. Of course it was a bit hokey because what you saw was the face of Jesus, but that's the required exercise today...to look until you see the new paradigm.

The heritage of the Christian Church is extremely important to us who take responsibility for ensuring the religious within the new paradigm. The old vessel is broken into fragments, but midst those potsherds we have found the key to the universal and the transparent - the key to the Way. Sometimes I hear us talking as if, in going to the globe, we have become secular and lost our way. The truth is that our whole organisation is structured on the "paradigm of possibility". Pointing people in its direction and helping them to struggle with it is what we are all about. Why else did Phil and Dierdre Dowsett spend all those years of their lives in India, Joe Slicker in Kenya and on and on? The world needs the Vision, the Guides, the Encouragement, the Eliciting of Those Who Care about the Word. It will probably be seen as heresy, so at this point it's just between you and me: everything has got to go in order that the Word (whatever it be called) may live. Jesus will survive as a Great but we will have to find another way of speaking of the Word Incarnate or this paradigm cannot be taken seriously. When we say we are called to be the Religious we mean that we understand ourselves destined to struggle with the articulation of that ghostly vision which when it flashes before your eyes will never go away. That is what is the basis of the new times in India and Chad and Canada and Japan.

I want to take a little time to talk through our journey as the Religious. I am calling the first 16 years the "Transparency". With RS-1 we stumbled upon the tools that let us authentically see through the 2-storey universe to universal statements and images. It is hard for us to remember what an enormous discovery that was. Until 1967 I had read a lot of theology etc. etc. but the fact was that the 2 storey universe had me hog-tied. That one reading from the N.T. in RS-1 about Jesus walking on the water caused scales to fall from my eyes...nothing less. Our "seeing through" paved the way for the New Religious Mode charts and ultimately the key to the Other World. And they have scarcely begun to be used yet. What a day it will be when some Hindus and Muslims pick up those tools in order to peer through their own mythology. They will see wonders and so will we.

The second phase of our religious journey (68-84) I am calling "Pluriformity", not because we know a lot about pluriformity, but because this multi-faceted jewel has been shown us and the fascination of what we have seen will not go away. In this period our discovery has been the Other World, a kingdom so vast that we have really only taken a little peek at it and scurried back home again, but it has been enough. The other part of this 16 years has really been about "Silence". On the one hand we have been preoccupied with doing, but on the other we have found ourselves speechless before the wonders that have been shown us.

Now, to look into the future. I want to suggest that the next 16 years have to do with "Contemplation". I am sure that we will have to fill out this task with stronger images than Nuns praying behind iron grills, but this will nevertheless be our assignment. We will take out our old Other World Charts and begin to make them live again with images that will set the universal heart aquiver. I suppose we are starting with a Model T Ford but that was a fairly marvelous invention. I think the other element of the next 16 years is "Prophecy". We will learn again how to address the hearts and minds of people with the urgency and possibility of the moment in relation to the awe-inspiring future. We will call forth the Chosen.

In extending this image, I can see that the period from 2,000 to 2,016 will have to do with "Theology". New creeds and new ethics will emerge in that time. And then the period from 2,016-2,032 will be about "Permeation" of the social structures with new symbols like was done in the middle ages.

This leads me to reflect on the 16 years in front of us. We are facing the call to be nobodies out over nothing. There is the possibility of us being Somebody of course. The IERD, the Global Advisory Board, LENS International - all these point to the opportunity. But these things have all been components of strategies that have done their job. If we keep them it will be for a purpose, but in fact, like the Local Church Experiment, they have served their purpose and we can give them to whoever needs them. The more urgent task is that of exploring the future paths over which our fellows must tread.

Do you remember JWM sitting before the Other World Charts and brooding? A couple of weeks ago I visited Otford Conference Centre and saw in my mind's eye so clearly, the table that JWM sat at in 1967 involving us all in building the grid. It was his exercise and we looked over his shoulder and then it became our exercise. These for me are images of the next 16 years : not too much on the doing pole but a lot of profound brooding that will effect a lot of doing. Brooding on forms and poetry and rituals and the new religious mode. We will listen and watch for what enables people to leap across paradigms. We will build the pedagogy, the style, the structures, the mythology, the network that strikes at the root of the contradictions about Meaning.

All this raises the issue of what to do this year. We will do the Declaration of the Spirit Movement and probably nothing else will matter too much, as long as we do that, and not for our own sake's but for the World's. Then there is this business of the Regionalis.

In the first instance this probably has nothing to do with the Macro/Micro but with a deep spirit issue. Why is it that when I read, hear, see something, it doesn't make any difference to my life? Why is it that in families the Universal never gets through the vortex to the particular? Why do villages languish? Why is ADAB bewildered? The IERD will inform us on these things but I think we will find the answers within our innermost selves.

The third thing about this year is the Pilgrimage. We have been given an image, and maybe we will have to go Ayres Rock in the middle of summer to plumb it to its deeps, but we can begin working on the concept now. There are three things about Pilgrims that I know:

- They are story-tellers. We can learn some more about that. Our story telling tends to be a little direct. The task is toward mythology and we have 10 years practical experience to draw from.
- They are mendicants. They live off the land and the land is pleased to support them. This is important to learn more about.
- They are contemplatives. They are travelling yet the end of the journey is not their prime purpose. Every encounter is an adventure in itself. We need to explore that style.

I suppose we will think some about ritual etc., but in a real sense, in the pluriform world we may have to learn to live without ritual and priests and congregations...just people dotted over the face of the earth who know they have been touched by the Mystery to care. We will play an important part in giving form to this strange movement of the spirit but we will have to be courageously patient. As we have gridded the world in the past 32 years in the next we shall grid the Other World, and that will probably start with us sitting before our rood screen with our journal. That will be the foundation stone of the Year of the Council.