

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE,
ANCIENT WISDOM

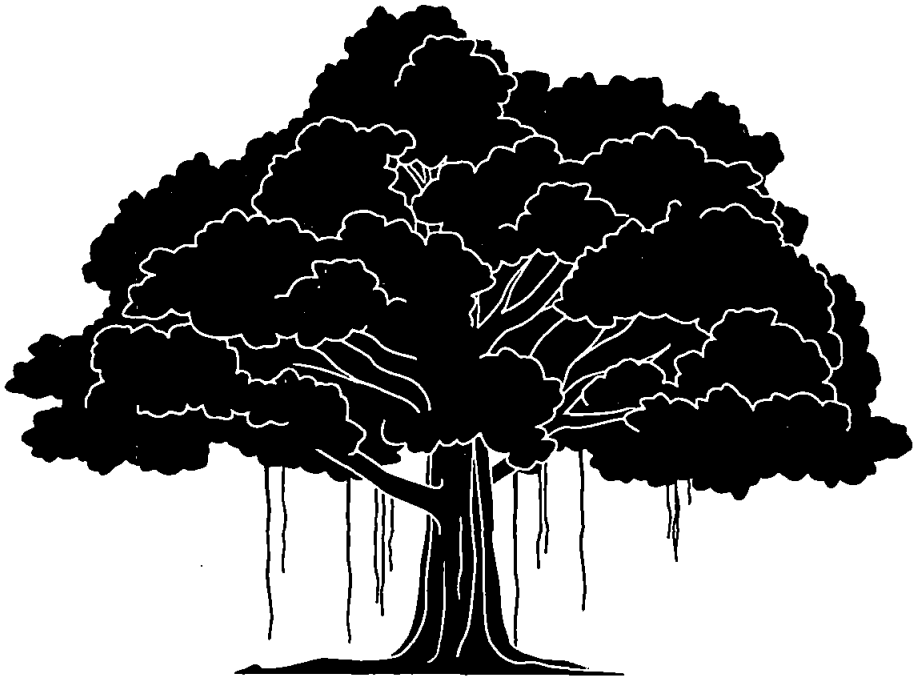
Challenges in Contemporary Spirituality

EDITED BY STEVEN FRIESEN

Institute of Culture and Communication
EAST-WEST CENTER 卐 HONOLULU, HAWAII



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TU WEI-MING
RUBELLITE KAWENA JOHNSON
CHARLES H. LONG
JILL RAITT
EWERT COUSINS
LAWRENCE E. SULLIVAN

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Copies of this publication may be obtained from the
Institute of Culture and Communication,
East-West Center, 1777 East-West Road,
Honolulu, Hawaii 96848, USA.

Contents

Preface vii

TU WEI-MING

*Challenges in Contemporary Spirituality:
An Introductory Note* 1

RUBELLITE KAWENA JOHNSON

Hawaiian Spirituality and Physical Realities 7

CHARLES H. LONG

Matter and Spirit: A Reorientation 12

JILL RAITT

Embodied Christianity 17

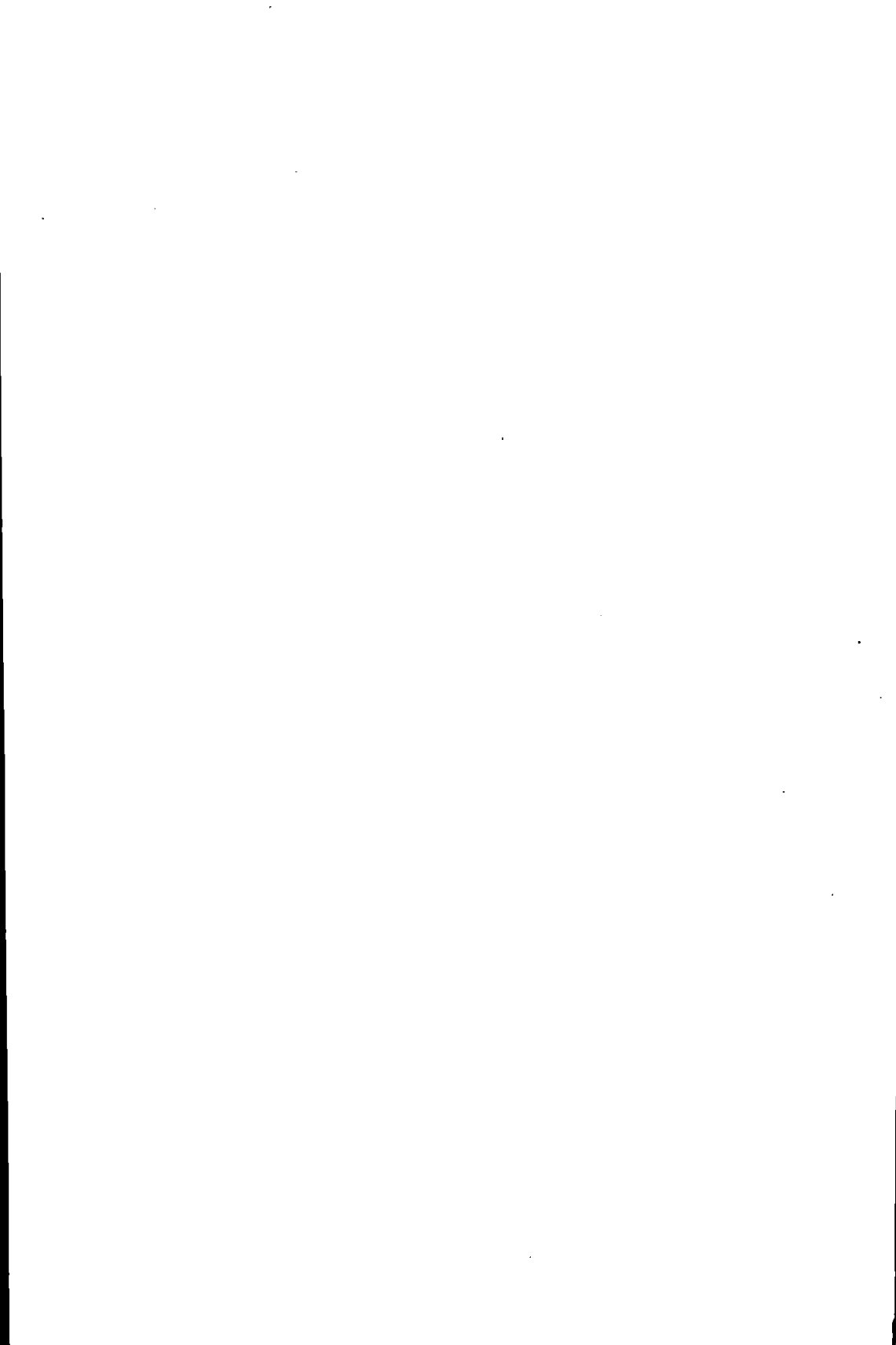
EWERT COUSINS

Three Symbols for the Second Axial Period 22

LAWRENCE E. SULLIVAN

*Dissonant Human Histories and the
Vulnerability of Understanding* 26

Conference Participants 34



Preface

THIS BOOKLET grew out of the Third Conference on World Spirituality, held in Honolulu at the East-West Center in June 1991. The conference was entitled "An Exploration of Contemporary Spirituality: 'Axial Age Civilizations' and 'Primal Traditions'" and was devoted to an examination of the ways in which the world religions are indebted to indigenous spiritual traditions.

Four days were spent presenting papers, discussing issues, sharing meals, and reflecting on the beauty of these islands and their traditions. As the end of the conference approached, we tried to sum up the experience and suggest the future direction of this effort. But the myriad thoughts and concerns seemed to defy elegant articulation.

Fortunately, the conference participants took part in a public symposium the next morning that was designed to make the work of the sessions accessible to a wider audience. Five speakers were asked to make summary statements, and it was in this forum that we found the common thread of the week's activities. The symposium included further debate and disagreements, but the issue was clear: what is the spiritual significance of matter?

The oral presentations by the five speakers at the symposium have been revised slightly for this booklet, and an introduction to the materials has been provided by Tu Wei-ming. Recognition is also due to all of the conference participants, for the statements recorded here represent their ongoing collective efforts. Their papers will appear in a volume published by Crossroad Publishing House (forthcoming, 1992).

There are many others whose assistance proved invaluable in the planning and organization of this conference. The East-West Center

hosted the conference and saw to our every need. Special thanks go to the staff of the Institute of Culture and Communication for service above and beyond the call of duty.

The Center for Contemporary Spirituality at Fordham University initiated and sponsored the first two conferences in this series. Their continued support of this third conference was crucial to its implementation.

Finally, the conference participants would like to express their gratitude to Laurance and Mary Rockefeller, whose generous grant to the Dialogue of Civilizations program at the East-West Center made the meetings and this booklet possible.

Ho mai ka 'ike nui, ka 'ike 'ike.

“Grant knowledge of the design, and of the details.”

(From a Hawaiian prayer, blessing the products of human crafts)

STEVEN FRIESEN

Research Fellow

Institute of Culture and Communication

TU WEI-MING

Challenges in Contemporary Spirituality: An Introductory Note

THE CELESTIAL vision of the earth, the blue planet, occasioned by science and technology is a totally new reality: through the eyes of the astronauts, we can see for the first time in human history not only the boundaries of the good earth but also the thickness of the air we breathe and the vulnerability of the atmospheric shield surrounding us. Our habitat is a lifeboat in the midst of a vast and apparently uninhabited ocean of galaxies. We may gaze outward toward the infinite, but we are rooted here on earth. To recognize the material earth as our spiritual home, the resting place for our return as well as the point at which we begin our journey, empowers us to seek inspiration and strength from our rootedness.

We must fully acknowledge, however, the overwhelming difficulty inherent in this simple desire to become reconnected with our source of life. We can admire the phenomenal ability of the banyan tree to

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renew itself by continuously sending new roots down into the earth, but our own existential condition is just the opposite: our insatiable appetite for expansion has alienated us from the source of our nourishment. We are now in danger of destroying our own life-support system.

As children of the Enlightenment, we have flourished in the spheres of interest that define our lifeworld: market economy, democratic polity, free and open society, and pluralistic culture. The values underlying these unique contributions of the modern West are by now standards of inspiration for the global community as a whole: human rights, civil liberties, due process of law, independence, autonomy, and the dignity of the individual. Even if we are willing to acknowledge our role as squanderers, if not destroyers, of nature, we beneficiaries of the modern West see our duty, as inheritors of the Enlightenment mentality, to insure that our transformative potential be fully realized.

The multiple histories involved in the modern West may complicate the picture of the triumph of instrumental rationality, but they do not invalidate the strong belief that the modernizing process which originated in Western Europe and flourished in North America will eventually engulf the world. The inability of the so-called Third World to offer an alternative model for development and the collapse of the communist system as a challenge to market economy and democratic polity strengthen the position that modernization is in essence Westernization and, by implication, that the American form of life is the wave of the future.

Our self-reflexivity, however, reveals more than the negative assertion that our life-style is unexportable. We see that it is also dangerous for our own well-being. The Faustian drive to explore, to conquer, and to subdue may have unleashed dynamic forces in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but if we look toward the next millennium, an unbound Prometheus, with his unbridled aggressiveness, can not bring a new order for the global community. We need an ethic significantly different from the social Darwinian model of self-inter-

est and competitiveness. We must go beyond the mentality that the promise of growth is limitless and the supply of energy is inexhaustible. The destructiveness of “secular humanism” lies not in its secularity but in its anthropocentrism. While the recognition of the spirituality of matter helps us to appreciate human religiosity as a way of living the fullness of life in all its dimensions, the exclusive focus on humanity as the measure of all things or as endowed with the unquestioned authority of dominion over nature relegates the spiritual realm to irrelevance and reduces nature to an object of consumption. The human project has been so impoverished that the answer to “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” is either want or greed. The crisis of modernity is not secularization *per se* but the inability to experience matter as the embodiment of spirit.

The ambivalent character of modernity as informed by the Enlightenment mentality of the modern West presents a major challenge to contemporary spirituality. To the extent that the study of religion as an academic discipline intends to explore the spiritual landscape of the human condition, the challenge is profoundly felt at all levels of our joint intellectual enterprise: the definition of religion, the role of the religionist, the scope of the religious conversation, and the salient features of the religious methodology.

In response, Lawrence Sullivan offers a new perspective on the study of religion. He observes that in the academic setting, the discipline of religious studies has been substantially enlarged to incorporate virtually all dimensions of the human experience: aesthetic, ethical, cosmological, economic, political, social, and cultural. As a consequence, the interpreter, far from being a mere innocent or sophisticated bystander, must take seriously his or her own “engendered bodily experience of the inherited categories of thought” in developing what Wilfred Cantwell Smith characterizes as a corporate critical self-awareness on the part of those of us involved in the vocation. Understandably, the table of conversation must be significantly widened. It is necessary to allow different angles of vision to present themselves, for any given situation in contemporary spiritu-

ality entails the clashing images of multiple histories. Furthermore, it is highly desirable to listen ever attentively to the different voices, especially those feeble ones such as those of which we are reminded by Ewert Cousins's plea that we "heed the suffering of the earth and listen to its voice."

Cousins's thought-provoking announcement—"the earth is the prophet and the teachers of wisdom are the primal people"—defines contemporary spirituality as a "collaborative venture," a "collective spiritual journey of our time." The implications are far-reaching. Can we, creators, executors and judges of modernity who have direct access to, if not absolute control over, the symbolic resources of the global community, imagine ourselves to be not only students of non-Western modes of thought and forms of life but also humble followers of "primitive" cultures?

Jill Raitt's focused attention to the centrality of bodiliness in the Christian symbols of the Eucharist, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection brings into focus the persistence of material reality in the variability of the Christian experience. "Embodied Christianity," by placing bodily birth, bodily life and death, and indeed bodily resurrection in the foreground, powerfully rejects triumphalism and exclusivism as universal claims of abstract truth. Christianity may have overpowered several world religions and silenced many indigenous traditions, but its real challenge today is self-enrichment through empowering the spiritualities of other peoples of the world. It may be difficult for the Christian message to extend beyond its genetic rootedness in European and American culture. Yet Raitt and many others maintain that: "The truth of Christianity is not whole until Christians have learned what it is to be humanly religious."

Charles Long makes explicit that the time is ripe for us to reclaim a vast arena of human experience under the general rubric of materiality. The Cartesian dichotomy is of course conceptually flawed; it has erected a great wall encircling the modern West, undermining its capacity either to reanimate the ancient wisdom of its own heritage or to engage in productive communication with other spiritual tra-

ditions of the contemporary world. In practical terms, the separation of the body from the mind and, by implication, the total alienation of matter from spirit has so impoverished the spiritual world that the study of religion devoid of economy, polity, society, culture, aesthetics, and ethics becomes either a residual category or a dispensable luxury.

Reindigenization, as Long envisions it, is “a profound reflection and critique of modernity itself.” Furthermore, like Cousins’s anticipation of “the second axial period” and Sullivan’s recommendation for a new perspective on the study of religion, reindigenization calls for a reorientation, an attitudinal change, a creative transformation, and a new method. We may characterize this collaborative endeavor as the quest for the spirituality of matter which involves epistemologically “embodied thinking” and metaphysically an “anthropocosmic vision.”

Rubellite Kawena Johnson’s “Hawaiian Spirituality and Physical Realities” gives us a glimpse of the frustration and hope inherent in the exploration of the indebtedness of world religions to primal traditions. The inability of the study of religion as an academic discipline to explore adequately Hawaiian spirituality gives much persuasive power to the need for a new perspective along the lines Sullivan suggests. If the voices of primal peoples authentically reflect the prophecy of the earth, as Cousins suggests, why has Hawaiian spirituality remained silent? What sorts of newly constituted conceptual apparatuses will allow us to hear these voices? After all, Christianized Hawaiian spirituality and indigenized Hawaiian Christianity provide awe-inspiring examples of Raitt’s “embodied Christianity.” Hawaiian primal traditions are an inexhaustible source for the emerging global spirituality. We will do well to recognize this fact and to allow such traditions to become vehicles for our human quest.

The emerging global spirituality, inspired by primal traditions and originating from virtually all world religions, entails a communal critical awareness among concerned citizens of the world responding to the unprecedented crisis of meaning, conscience and, indeed,

survival. Are human beings a viable species? One wonders. The mode of questioning is more than a rhetorical device. The constant fear of a sudden annihilation of the human community and the actual process of the gradual disintegration of the ecosystem are experienced facts in our daily life. It has been empirically demonstrated that many of our children have so internalized these concerns that these are no longer imagined possibilities but lived realities. This primary datum of the human condition cannot be ignored by students of religion.

The recognition of the spirituality of matter is in full accord with the advocacy of the sanctity of the earth as a core value for the global community. The awareness impels us to orient our life from casting our gaze outward to listening ever attentively to our own inner voice. Reindigenization, so understood, is far more than a romantic assertion about the salvific power of primal traditions. It is a call to put down new roots and rediscover the real source of our life without losing sight of the fruitful ambiguity characteristic of all intellectually sophisticated spiritual pursuits.

RUBELLITE KAWENA JOHNSON

Hawaiian Spirituality and Physical Realities

A S I THOUGHT about presenting new perspectives on world spirituality, I had to ask myself seriously what contributions the Hawaiian viewpoint can bring to this task. So I considered two questions, "What can be learned from the history of the Hawaiian experience of culture change proceeding from internal and external influences?" and, "What contributions does Hawaiian primal spirituality make to local and world culture?" I went over some of the things that I spoke about in the Workshop on Primal Spirituality (January 1991), where we took up Hawaiian spiritual concepts, that is, the very core of their beliefs. I am not going to go through that again. Instead, I would like to begin with the question of why Hawaiians converted to Christianity so readily.

My response includes both the political background and the flexibility of the Hawaiian people, whose adaptability is legendary. Hawaiians were decimated to about one-sixth the size of their estimated

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original population. The last large epidemic, in which thousands died, occurred in 1853. From 1853 to 1991 the population of 100 percent pure Hawaiians has not appreciated beyond eighty-five hundred. It was around eighty-five hundred in 1853 and that population has not increased, even though there are around two hundred thousand part-Hawaiians. Yet the Hawaiians have maintained an example of integrity in holding onto their own center. Yes, they lost their land. Yes, they were impoverished. Yes, they became something other than they were originally in terms of their own spirituality. But if you examine the history of the Hawaiian conversion to Christianity, what you see is the ability of Hawaiians to accommodate the ideas that came in.

From the very beginning Hawaiians showed this ability to accommodate another philosophy into their everyday living. They kept hold of their own traditions and also changed as they went through the process of accepting other ways of life. Sociological comparisons show that Hawaiian norms are relatively tolerant of ethnic intermarriage, which resulted in multicultural family life. In this way Hawaiians have, I think, provided the background for accommodation that is a principle of the moral order in modern Hawaii. In so doing Hawaiians have also become an example for the world of a society that can allow people to practice their own religious beliefs without exclusive or isolationist strategies that either try to change others or modify them to meet some foreign standard.

This was a necessity in Hawaiian family life, primarily because of intermarriage, but also because of a philosophical understanding that humans are the same psychically and psychologically no matter what the racial background. I think this is the major contribution that Hawaiian spirituality has to make to the world's future. You do not see fundamentalist, isolationist, or confrontational resistance to ideas that come in from the outside.

I went over the sociopolitical background for this in my paper for this conference. In 1819 the high priest Hewahewa renounced his *kahuna nui* (high priest) office and the entire *kapu* (taboo) system

was abandoned. What could we compare this kind of upheaval to in modern American life? Let us say the chief justice of the United States suddenly renounced his office and recommended that every court cease its legitimate operation. The next day you would have no courts, no police, no legal system at all.

What does that do to a society? This is what happened to Hawaii in 1819. The legal aspects of the superstructure of the *kapu* system were done away with in one fell blow. With that went the mercy institutions, not just the human sacrifices. The only comparable example that comes to mind is the process going on in the Soviet Union right now, where top-ranking political leaders are trying to impose change rapidly from above. In the Hawaiian political revolution in 1819, a theocratic system was dismantled and the majority of people were liberated from the demands of the formal moral order.

So this fundamental, internal revolution paved the way for the first Christian missionaries, who arrived in 1820. Christian morality came in and had enormous success because it filled a vacuum that sociologists, anthropologists, and other analysts have described as an example of culture fatigue.

A crucial aspect of the dismantling of the *kapu* system in 1819 is that only the superstructure of the religion vanished—the priesthood orders, the temple buildings, the ritual calendar, and the laws governing their operation. This was an enormous cultural loss. I am not saying it did not have its negative aspects. But by and large, only the superstructure vanished. The basic core of Hawaiian beliefs—the spirituality of humans, the reality of their immortal existence—these things have always continued on at the family level. They are maintained in the home, where Hawaiians also accommodated these other “imported” ways of life along with spirituality and religious practice. They were able to hold onto their own basic belief system.

The arrival of Christianity disturbed the general morality of Hawaiians in many ways, and even though they gave up some very good things from their culture, they did not surrender everything. The accommodation factor is tantamount to saying that the belief system

that was operating at the core and at the heart of Hawaiian religion did not vanish as a result of the political overthrow of the external edifice of the religion. Nor did it give way to cultural domination by foreign Christian powers.

The Hawaiian experience of the last century has been extremely difficult. We have had virtually no power of our own nor political leadership at the top of the government, and we have been deprived of most of our aboriginal lands. That means that the Hawaiian way of life has suffered a great deal in diminished resources. Through all these changes, Hawaiians have become an example of enormous patience, long-suffering, and you might even say deliberate passivity in allowing these changes to take place to their great disadvantage. In so doing they have shown a great deal of strength and character.

One of the things I did not take up in my conference paper was the psychodynamic perspective, and that is the one I want to share now. One great contribution that Hawaiian spirituality makes to world spirituality is that we do not go to human authority for the confirmation of our being. Now what do I mean by that?

I will have to tell you a story. Several years ago when my daughter was pregnant, she was working on a circle island tour bus that would go down at 4:00 in the morning and pick up the tourists and take them down to the airport. This particular morning at about 4:00 when she woke up, I kissed her good-bye and went back to sleep. While I was asleep I saw myself in her van, sitting on the right side of the bus, and I could hear the people talking, about seven of them in the bus, and I noticed she was falling asleep. So, I said to her in the dream, "Wake up, Hana. You are falling asleep, you are losing control of your van." Well, she just fell and slumped over the wheel. So I reached over, in the dream once more, and I pressed the brake down hard. You would expect the car to stop, but it did not. It went around a concrete embankment instead and it climbed around, and then I woke up.

I went to work that day and at night I came home. She was cooking dinner for her husband. So I said, "Hana, did anything happen to you

today?" And she said, "No, nothing out of the ordinary." I said, "Did you fall asleep at the wheel of your van this morning?" She said, "Yes, I did. I fell asleep." And I said, "Well, was there anybody in the seat next to you?" She said, "No, nobody sits there because we do not allow passengers in the front seat." So I asked, "When you woke up, where were you?" She said, "I was coming up a concrete ramp at the airport." I said, "Well, fine. Somebody came and told me you were all right." Then I proceeded to tell her my dream and I asked her one other question. I said, "Where did you fall asleep?" She said, "Well, the last I remember is the Bishop Museum." If you know Honolulu traffic, the Bishop Museum is quite a distance from the airport, and there is a critical junction where you have to select the right ramp to get on the freeway to go down. You have to reject the lowest one and the highest one and take the middle one. From the Bishop Museum to the airport she had not been awake. She had been asleep.

This experience is just one of many in our family. I wanted to retell it for you to show how the psychodynamic aspect of spiritual consciousness convinces us that human spirituality is true. This is another dimension to reality beyond the physical aspect. And I leave it with you as a demonstration of our positive faith.

CHARLES H. LONG

Matter and Spirit: A Reorientation

ALFRÉD NORTH WHITEHEAD wrote: "*The function of Reason is to promote the art of life. . . . I now state the thesis that the explanation of this attack on the environment is a three-fold urge: (i) to live, (ii) to live well, (iii) to live better. In fact the art of life is first to be alive, secondly, to be alive in a satisfactory way, and thirdly, to acquire an increase in satisfaction. . . . This conclusion amounts to the thesis that Reason is a factor in experience which directs and criticizes the urge towards the attainment of an end realized in imagination but not in fact*" (*The Function of Reason*, Princeton University Press, 1929, pp. 3, 5).

Whitehead situates and defines reason as a necessary and inherent dimension of human existence; reason is an activity imbedded within life itself. Throughout this week we have been discussing the meaning of what we have characterized as two kinds of spiritualities, the primal and the axial. We have not only raised questions about the meaning

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and content of this classification as the expression of the total modes of human orientations in the world, we have also been engaged in critiques of these terms as the best ways of indicating where the points of significant differences are in the history of human societies.

But there has been another level to our discussions. That level has had to do with a soteriological or ethical concern. This concern arises out of the human problem of our times—the crisis of modernity. This is a genuine crisis, not just a restatement of the general human problem. To be human is to realize the problematical nature of our existence, the contradictions we all face, the issues of our finitude, the actuality and problematics of evil; all human beings and societies have always faced problems of this sort.

For most of the time in all human societies there was a way of giving significant expression in a specific manner to the human problem—a significant statement that would be adequate to the problem, on the one hand, and lead toward some sort of resolution, on the other. The ability to define the human problem in a specific manner and situation is a creative product of the human community.

In our time, we don't even know how to state what the problem is, though we know that the problem is intense and catastrophic in its implications. We can state the problem in a piecemeal fashion as, for example, the economic problem, the ecological problem, the problem of war, the problem of self-determination and freedom, the problem of minorities, of women, of gender and sexual preference, and so forth. All these are problems, and in any one group of their respective adherents, their problem becomes the one and only problem. But to deal with it adequately means that it impinges on another or on all the other issues. We have no language able to sum up adequately and humanly all the problems—and this itself is a problem!

We are unable to state what the problem is in an adequate manner. I am told by my colleagues in physics that the fundamental statement of a problem is not accomplished in a piecemeal fashion. Although several equations might state some part of the problem, the real statement and resolution must finally achieve an elegant style, for

example, $E = mc^2$, a case where all the complicated relationships are expressed simply, profoundly, and comprehensively in a single formulation. Christian theology knew how to state the human problem; it was sin. This manner of statement leads one into the formation of narratives, the meaning of time, a soteriology and ritual, the entire complexity of human existence. Somehow our cultural resources have not enabled us to state our problem adequately.

Our delving into the issues of "the primal" and "the axial" is as much a way of trying to find a way of stating the issue as it is in attempting to find a way of resolution. In speaking to this issue in the language of "human spirituality" we are attempting to speak of a wider, deeper, and pervasive mode of human orientation that, while encompassing the religious traditions of humankind, is not limited to these traditions. We are attempting to find those human resources in the past and in the present that will enable us to restate and reconfigure, to refine and find again a proper way of speaking and acting in terms of the human mode of being in our time.

Let me put forth one notion that follows from my quotation from Whitehead. By situating reason within life and not as simply a mode of observation or analysis of life, Whitehead touches on the totality of human meaning as a mode of human orientation. If, for the sake of this discussion, we are willing to say that there are two general classifications of human cultures in history based upon how they "reasoned" life, one the primal and the other the axial, what do they have in common at their best? In both of these sorts of traditions we find that the human community was able to define *the proper* mode of being human for their time and space. And in both orientations, they were able to recognize in very different ways the necessity of *limits*, of *boundaries*, and to have a proper regard for the essential meaning of the human within these orders. It was this ability that enabled these societies to achieve a perduring sense of order within their common lives.

What has stylized our lives so much in the modern period is that we have been led to believe that there are no limits to the human mode

of being, that the human being itself was identified with Being Itself and thus there were no limits outside of the human species. The human as the insatiable being has been a mark of our modern world, and we have come close to creating our ultimate limitations as the tragic outcome of our insatiability—the destruction of the entire world through war or ecological insensitivity. This insatiability has also eroded the relationships among and between human persons and groups, such that now all people stand armed against their neighbors.

We must, in whatever orientation or reorientation we accomplish, define within our spirituality a place to be still, to be quiet while being active and a stance from which we may be active while being quiet. I find this to be a trace and a meaning that we might think about from the cosmic orientation of the primal traditions and from the metaphysical orientation of the axial traditions. We might from this point of view of our modernity undergo the critiques of both these traditions as the first step toward an adequate and new orientation of the human mode of being in our times. We should not attempt to return to either of these orientations, but we must think and live through them without the mistaken assumption that our times represent the epitome of the human species.

I should like to begin this reconsideration and critique through the recovery of the literal and metaphorical meaning of matter and materiality. In one way or another, all of our pressing problems might be subsumed under some notion of materiality. Whether we are talking about ecology, gender, or ethnicity, the issue of matter or materiality is to the fore. In the modern Western world, however, we have thought of matter as inert or neutral or have relegated it to the realm of commodities and commodity exchanges. But whether we are speaking of our bodies (personal or social) or the issue of economics or of the spirit, in one way or another we are speaking of matter, of that which forms the relationship among and between ourselves and other human beings and the created world. I am placing the locus of matter and materiality precisely at the point of relationships, contacts, and exchanges between and among human beings

and between human beings and all other forms of life and meaning. We are speaking of how our bodies are embodiments, and this fact ought to cause us to have regard for the human matter and its place in the universe.

Both the primal and the axial traditions make use of a richer and more subtle vocabulary in their discourses about matter and materiality than our modern cultures. For the most part we have not been concerned with their understandings of this important dimension of human life. No one in either the primal or axial traditions would have thought of matter in the crude and gross manner in which we have dealt with it. Only the physicists in the modern world approach the kind of sophistication that reminds us of the importance that matter and materiality had for the other traditions. In the modern world of the West we seldom think of matter and spirit in the same context. We have dismissed matter as a possibility for the meaning of human spirituality, and now we are attempting to resurrect our old notion of matter and materiality and clothe this old notion in the garments of spirituality.

Something might come from a serious reflection upon whatever hints appear in the two general orientations to this issue. We have, for the most part, left the issue of materiality to persons and scholars who have little regard for spirituality—the Marxists and the economists. We deal with spirit, they deal with matter; we have been resigned before this situation. A serious reflection upon the nature and meaning of matter and materiality in our time is more than a critique of the Cartesian dichotomy; it calls for a profound reflection and critique of modernity itself. If we begin with a reflection on matter and materiality, we will touch upon an issue of human orientation that will allow many peoples and traditions to contribute to the discussion of spirituality in our time.

JILL RAITT

Embodied Christianity

WITHIN THE broad perspective of “Local Knowledge, Ancient Wisdom,” my particular task is to look at Christianity in the light of what you have just heard from Professors Johnson and Long and what you will hear from Professors Cousins and Sullivan. As I ruminated on the insights obtained from this conference, I came back to the place where I started, thus describing the circular course spirituality often takes as seekers find an enriched understanding of what they intuited at the beginning. By way of summation I shall emphasize that material complex so ambiguously regarded today, namely, the human body. To do so requires also that we reconsider our relations to the rest of material reality. Since the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Christians have almost forgotten Christianity’s early emphasis on bodiliness and its place in the Christian liturgy. I do not think that we need to return to the past to recover this emphasis. Prompted by conversations with those traditions which, during this conference, we have

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called "primal," we can recover the body-centeredness of Christianity from scripture and the sacraments.

Christendom encompasses a rich, diverse inheritance, from the liturgical Eastern Orthodox traditions to Quaker meditation. Nevertheless, what is central to all forms of Christianity is the person of Jesus, called the Christ. In traditional Christian understanding (I do not want to say "theology" because the term tends to create a barrier between most Christians and learned specialists), God took a body, a real body. Jesus was God incarnate. God did not inhabit a body, did not pick up and put down a body; God was not only a spiritual being but became a corporal being. Jesus rose bodily and appeared to his disciples and ate with them, even inviting Thomas to put his hand in the wound in Jesus's side.

Christians need to recover that appreciation of the body. Some Christians, including some of my students, are offended by the emphasis on body in early Christianity. Paul wrote, "If Christ is not risen, then vain is your faith." What does that mean? It means that the resurrection of Christ was not simply a spiritual immortality such as was accepted by many in the Greco-Roman world. It meant that the whole Christ, the man born-of-woman, rose bodily. One student dropped my seminar on St. Augustine because he could not deal with a risen body or with bodiliness. Christianity for him was purely spiritual. I have seen him since (he is a religious studies major) and he is doing quite well. But it took him a full year to come to terms with Christianity's long insistence on the centrality of the body of Christ, risen, present in prayer and sacrament, and the reality into which Christians are baptized.

From Christ's command, from his table-fellowship and post-resurrection sharing of himself as body and as bread comes Christian practice which, for at least fifteen hundred years was centered in sacrament. Sacraments are nothing other than the earth and its products becoming vehicles of spiritual realities. The products of the earth pass through human hands, becoming bread, oil, wine, and so

on. These elements of our existence, these necessities of our lives, become the means of deep spiritual contact and growth.

This is our wisdom, ever ancient, ever new. We are recalled to it by those traditions called “primal.” From “primal” traditions we learn a basic human relation to the earth and its products, to our processing of them and to their sanctified use in those rituals Christians call sacraments. Material reality cooperates in a divine activity that raises people from being simply of the earth to being of earth and of heaven. Although the goal is the life of resurrection, Christians need to remember that the path to resurrection is through bodily birth, bodily life and death, and lastly, bodily resurrection. But this path is not a solitary one. Primal religions teach us also that however important the individual may be, no individual can survive physically or spiritually without a supporting community.

St. Paul teaches the communal solidarity of Christians through an image made powerful by its appropriate relations to the body of Christ risen and eucharistically present: Christians are one body. That is basic. It is what the scriptures say; it is what the sacraments say. All who are baptized and participate in the Eucharist are one body: you are many grains ground into the one bread; you are many grapes crushed into the one wine; and all are Christ. Augustine’s challenge to neophyte Christians needs to ring out today: “Know your dignity, O Christian; you are Christ.” But to belong to, to become, to participate in one’s deity are not new ideas! Neither rebirth nor incorporation is peculiar to Christianity. Christian initiation has continuities with all the religious communities that initiate, name, and call their “new-borns” to pass through death into new life; that say there is no point in being born if one is not reborn.

After baptism, Christians are called to participate in the bread which symbolizes, presents, and, in some way, is the Body of Christ. I know how theological battles over the Eucharist have torn Christianity apart. The “sacrament of unity” became the primary sacrament of disunity, particularly between Catholics and Protestants, but also,

and not less fiercely, among Protestants as well. But fundamentally, the Eucharist is the presentation of Christ to Christians for their incorporation into the Christian body. The Church is an incorporation, an incarnation. The sacrament to which scripture calls Christians lifts them to heaven and at the same time binds them to the earth, which Christians should revere as God's mirror and the material source of the sacraments. This sacramental unity with each other and with the earth gives Christians deep roots from which they can draw strength to address the ecological and social problems of the twenty-first century.

An important insight that comes out of a conference like this is the increased perception that Christianity is a religion among religions. It has its way of relating to the earth and to spiritual reality, but its way is not the only way. We may speak of other traditions that are worldwide or that remain indigenous, that is to say, we may speak of what we here call "axial" and "primal" religions. With all of these religions, Christianity shares deep insights. For some time I have been convinced, and am now more deeply convinced, that Christians and students of Christianity may no longer live as though they alone possess the whole truth. The truth of Christianity is not whole until Christians have learned what it is to be humanly religious. Even those truths which Christianity has long revered as central are not fully understood except through the perspectives provided by other religions. Christians are enriched, deepened, and called to the highest, best, and deepest spirituality by understanding better the spiritualities of other peoples of the world.

This respect for what Christians can learn from other peoples is the opposite of Christian triumphalism with its extraordinary insensitivity to the spiritual lives of those whom Christian missionaries encountered and often converted. Before they can hear well the primal wisdom that indigenous peoples have to share, Christians must acknowledge the deep wrongs they have wrought and the permanent damage they have done by overpowering rather than empowering, by preaching and teaching without listening and learning. Most espe-

cially Christians must ask to be forgiven for so often distorting the Christian message by equating it with European culture imposed by conquest.

Lastly, while we may speak of Christendom and a shared core of belief in the incarnate Christ and celebration of the sacraments, we must acknowledge that universal Christianity exists nowhere as such. There are only particular Christianities in particular times and in particular communities who have their own ways of hearing the scripture and celebrating the presence of the incarnate and risen Christ. Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, and others frequently need reformation in order to fit into their time and space. Christianity is not a religion that came into being and remained intact as it was then, now, and forever. Rather it constantly renews itself through adaptation to the places, times, and peoples in which it becomes incarnate. Insofar as it does so, Christianity remains vital and shares in what I think this conference has been about: a wisdom ever ancient and ever new.

EWERT COUSINS

Three Symbols for the Second Axial Period

ALTHOUGH I AM a Christian, I would like to speak here in the larger context of world spirituality. I choose not to speak in the theological and philosophical terms of the axial civilizations, but in three primordial symbols: the earth, the tree, and the journey. For symbols are the basic mode of expression among primal peoples; they also have a major place in the axial regions and, I believe, will play an increasing role in mediating between the spirituality of the primal and the axial traditions in the transformation of consciousness that I have called the second axial period. These three symbols—the earth, the tree, and the journey—can be called archetypal for they touch a deep center in the human spirit, linking spirit to matter and drawing the human community into its future.

I believe that the human community is at a point of breakthrough—a breakthrough into global consciousness, a consciousness

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that encompasses the entire human community and plunges its roots into the earth. There have been breakthroughs in the past, such as the transformation that occurred in the first millennium B.C.E. and has been called the axial period. Our present breakthrough—which I call the second axial period—is more momentous than the first. In fact, this breakthrough is crucial, for if we do not make this breakthrough, we will not survive as a species. Many of us sense deep in our being the anxiety of destruction from nuclear weapons, from pollution of the environment, and from the dehumanization of millions of people through economic, political, and social oppression. Although we are surrounded by this cloud of anxiety, there is still reason to have hope in the human spirit because it is grounded in creativity. This creativity ultimately emerges from the transcendent realm, the divine, the primordial source of all energy and being. In this ambivalent situation—a moment of great anxiety and possibility—I am going to take an optimistic view and present the earth, the tree, and the journey as symbols of hope, as catalysts that can evoke the consciousness that will move us into the new global environment.

The first image I would like to propose is the earth as seen through the eyes of the astronauts from outer space. Ours is the first era in history when human beings have had a sensory experience of the earth as a whole. From this perspective the earth symbolizes that the human race is a single community. Many of us have had the experience of being citizens of the total human community. By this time most of my spiritual companions are not from the West. Those who accompany me on my spiritual journey are from the Hindu, Buddhist, and primal traditions. We are already existing in a new human, global environment. Yet the breakthrough has not occurred.

It is true that we find our rootedness in the earth and in our own ethnic and spiritual traditions. There is no doubt that the human spirit needs rootedness. The concept of reindigenization highlights that fact. It is necessary for all the traditions to find their roots, not only in the wisdom of their past, but in the deeper levels of the earth. But this brings us to our second symbol: the tree. When we think of

roots, we must also think of the growth of the tree. Roots sink deep into the ground in order for trees to grow, blossom, connect, and intertwine. Trees symbolize a double dynamic: grounding themselves in particularity and branching out into universality. In Hawaii this symbol suggests the banyan tree, which not only grows from its roots, but which sends from its branches new roots into the earth. This graphically symbolizes the need of the spiritual traditions to plunge new roots into matter in order to achieve a more holistic spirituality that will give us a solid foundation to resolve our ecological crisis.

Let us now turn to the third symbol: the journey, an image that is pervasive in the primal and axial spiritual traditions but takes on new dimensions in the second axial period. From our perspective on the surface of the earth we can perceive that there have been many spiritual journeys: the primal, the Hindu, the Jewish, the Islamic. But from the astronaut's perspective there has been only one spiritual journey: the human journey. If we turn our gaze outward towards the galaxies, we can perceive another journey: that of the universe as a whole. The single human journey is part of a single cosmic journey—from the original big bang fifteen billion years ago, through the formation of matter and the galaxies, to the emergence of human consciousness. Some astrophysicists are now claiming that there is an anthropic principle at the root of the entire unfolding of the universe. The panoply of galaxies leads to human consciousness that can reflect on the spiritual significance of the wonders of the cosmos. But it also stimulates all of the traditions to explore new dimensions of the spirituality of matter.

In the context of these three symbols I believe that Charles Long has highlighted a crucial problem, if not the crucial problem, for a spirituality of our times. We must reexamine ourselves from the standpoint of the primal traditions, from the standpoint of the axial traditions, and from the standpoint of a new tradition that is emerging, namely, the global tradition. Together we must explore the possibilities of a new spirituality of matter, a new spirituality of the earth. There is reason to claim that the earth itself is the prophet of this new

global consciousness. The earth is groaning now under the persecution that certain strands of culture have inflicted upon it. We must heed the suffering of the earth and listen to its voice. But who knows how to listen to the voice of the earth if not the primal people? They have access to the voice of the earth, to the spirituality of matter as the source of life and as a pervasive dimension of spirituality. The axial religions to some extent have lost the rootedness in the earth that the primal people have always maintained. Awakened by primal traditions, the axial religions can discover new meaning in their symbols and beliefs that link them to the earth, as Jill Raitt has pointed out, in the Christian belief in the Eucharist, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection.

It is said that in the axial period, or what I call the first axial period, an elite emerged who were philosophers or spiritual teachers. Who are the elite of this second axial period? I think the earth is the prophet and the teachers of wisdom are the primal people. This is a strong statement, but I hold to it deeply. I do not mean that they are the ones to teach the human community alone, because I agree with Charles Long that it has to be a collaborative venture. But the wisdom of the primal peoples has a privileged contribution to make to the human community as a whole.

Taken together, the three symbols—the earth, the tree, and the journey—symbolize the distinctive spiritual process of the second axial period: a process that I believe constitutes the collective spiritual journey of our time. We must enter into this process. If we only stand back and observe, the spiritual energy will not flow. If we enter into this process, there is reason to hope that the transformation of consciousness will occur. With this cluster of images, with this sense of possibility, and with this hope, let us proceed on the journey!

LAWRENCE E. SULLIVAN

Dissonant Human Histories and the Vulnerability of Understanding

THE APPRAISAL of the role of indigenous spiritualities in religious life has opened or reshaped some perspectives on the study of religion. I would like to touch upon five points. In a sense they are all enlargements of subjects that had already been a part of the study of religion but have had to be reappraised. One is the nature of religion. The second issue is the role or nature of the interpreter. The third point I would characterize as the issue of voice. I picture this as a table of conversation, and the question is: what kind of voices will be present at that table. The fourth concern is the role or nature of comparison. The last issue is what I would call the labor of imagination.

During the last century, the definition of religion has been enlarged as it has become an area of study within the university. There has been an enlargement beyond doctrinal emphases that center religion on a set of beliefs that can be written as a creedal statement; an enlarge-

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ment beyond religion conceived exclusively as an institutional entity with a directive priesthood or authoritative voice. These aspects are not to be denied, but that overly narrow construal of religion has been broadened to include other dimensions, such as aesthetic expressions, which have been present in our thinking this past week. These are not simply decorative embellishments set on top of religion; they are substantive expressions and efficacious vehicles of spirituality. Through music, weaving, dance, and architecture human beings come to reflect on their human condition and on the relationship of human life to the world.

If religion and spirituality have a bearing on the way human beings live their life in all its dimensions, then political and economic realities are intimately bound up with the religious orientation toward life as well—sometimes forcing religious thought in new directions, other times reflecting on political and economic circumstances and calling them to change. Also implicated are the cosmological dimensions of life. These are the ways in which human beings relate to the cosmos as a structure, or, more precisely, the manner in which human beings construe the cosmos as something to be faced religiously. Here different sciences play a role in religion. Whether the science be geometry, house-construction, or astronomy, the role of the religious imagination is instrumental in the historical formation of those ways in which human beings know their world. On account of this, the study of religion requires hustling after historical facts—“historical” here in the narrow sense of taking stock of all the contextual dimensions of cultural and social life—because these dimensions have a bearing on the way people live their religious life.

The second major change in the study of religion has to do with the role of the interpreter. The interpreter is not seen any longer as an innocent bystander objectively amassing data about religions. The interpreter is the guiding mind, the person whose perceptions, experiences, and cognitive frames assign these data to specific categories. Categories are evaluative and are deeply implicated in the facts they cultivate. The line used to circumscribe the historical data ought to

be traced around behind us and not just looped around the data that sit in front of our eyes. There is no view from nowhere. The historical circumstances of the viewer are germane to the process of understanding, and hermeneutics thus requires us to examine the ground on which we stand as interpreters.

This is not just an end run or detour around one's principle subject matter, nor is it an exercise distinct from the process of understanding the religious life one is interpreting. Both the specific historical details of the cultural point of view under study, as well as the engendered bodily experiences that shape inherited categories of thought, are essential components. This entire conference has remained true to this line of inquiry by examining where the categories of axial and primal originated. As categories, they not only characterize what may sit in front of us as historical objects of study but also expose our own points of view and show our own orientations as shaping the communities and civilizations that we want to understand.

The third change that has contributed to a new perspective in the study of religion is the widening of the table of conversation. The study of religion often reckons itself as originating in the nineteenth century. This might be too clean a break with earlier attempts to understand the discovered world. In any case, as a university discipline it has a nineteenth century and early twentieth-century history. In the post-World War II period, and in the emergence of independent nations and national university systems, the table of conversation has widened considerably to include different angles of vision on the study of religion in indigenous societies.

Particularly significant have been the people who have grown up in the communities that are often assigned for study. This is a vastly different kind of voice, one that is complicated by the multiple histories involved in any given situation. Think of the studies by Ashis Nandy, for example, who speaks about the *Intimate Enemy* and who analyzes the cultural history behind *Alternative Sciences* in South Asia. Obviously, the technological and scientific disciplines are taught competently through South Asian universities. But Nandy points out

that not even science is a disembodied set of eternal truths or formulae. Sciences are not purely conventions whose assumptions are timeless. Science has a specific cultural history to which its formulations are bound. Moreover, its history is linked to specific biographies. Nandy wonders why biography becomes so important in the study of history, whereas in the study of science the biographies of Euclid or of Copernicus and of their times are not seen to be an intimate part of their scientific formulations. New voices, whose historical cultures have stood outside of the flow of Western intellectual history, but whose more recent circumstances have afforded a clear view of Western academic categories, bring to our table of conversation new angles of vision concerning the knowledge that we have, including the knowledge we have of religion.

This calls for a reexamination of history, not in that narrow sense—the sense of cultural context mentioned earlier—but history as the way in which human beings evaluate their existence in time. If the table of conversation is widened to include other voices that have become increasingly the agents of their own history (instructors of their own meaning on the historical stage) then the notion of history is also widened, and we are forced to contend with competing evaluations of one's existence in time and differing perceptions of the human condition. Rather than looking on this as a smooth, pleasant, and positive convergence of views, we must admit that there exist also clashing images of the crises that constitute the human condition.

That leads to a fourth point: the need for comparison. Comparison has had its ups and downs in the last several decades. With the adoption of the Malinowskian doctrines that the study of culture be grounded in extended fieldwork and language competence and that culture be studied from “the native point of view” (that is, from one particular cultural and ecological nexus), comparison fell on hard times. This was true in spite of Malinowski's own example in writing broadly comparative studies. Malinowski's doctrines proved intuitively acceptable, and the study of culture has thrived in the last decades following these canons. But the very success of culture-spe-

cific studies raises this question: if we have good, contextualized ethnographies, and good historical and linguistic studies done according to these canons, what is one to do with them? Furthermore, if the table of conversation is widened, Malinowski's canons begin to look superfluous, even silly. If, for example, we have scholars from communities in Africa and Oceania who grew up language-competent and who have spent their lives in their own communities, the prescriptions of language-learning and extended time "in the field" begin to seem unnecessary.

No matter how one has become language-competent and no matter what reasons have afforded time to participate in the life of a community, what does one do with studies that are well done in these ways? Are only people who become language-competent and spend long periods of time in those same communities entitled to read those ethnographies? Clearly not. Writers and publishers are directing their work to a wider public. Are the language-competent and "field"-experienced the only ones who are allowed to think about these reports? Clearly not. Readers of vastly different background and perception are invited to consider what is written. The crisis of knowledge must also include this question: how are we to think about our images of humanity that are presented in good works of cultural study? Here it is important to underline the need for comparison for a number of reasons. Comparison done well is always a puzzlement, inevitably fitting together some pieces that just do not square with one another. But comparison done thoughtfully, comparison done with an adequate eye to the historical context from which one draws, comparison done with an adequate examination of the grounds that one occupies as an interpreter, this kind of comparison exposes the arbitrariness and vulnerability of our terms of understanding.

This is what we are seeing in our examination of the terms "axial" and "primal." When we begin to map these terms and how they travel, or do not travel, easily from one tradition to another, the arbitrariness of these terms floats to the surface. This is a healthy thing. The arbitrariness or even the wantonness of these particular terms ex-

poses important aspects of the human dilemma in our moment: any terms used to think broadly about the human condition across cultures will be flimsy and loosely fitting, perhaps even ill-fitting. It helps in our task as interpreters, to see the arbitrariness of the categories, for recognition of that arbitrariness lays bare our own prejudgments. These might be not only our personal prejudices but the historical preconditions and choices of thought that have already been made for us. As receivers of inherited ways of thinking, many such prior judgments have been made without our consent or awareness. Comparison can expose these to judgment, a judgment that might not be ours if we did not go through the exercise of careful comparison.

Comparison respects the nature of our own situation, rooted not just in “field” work (if one is lucky and funded) but in the academic scene where writing and reading shape so many features of our mental and physical landscapes. No doubt this asymmetry provoked a crisis regarding the general knowledge of humanity. Given the way human experience seems to be rooted in myriad, specific cultures, how can we responsibly and convincingly know about humanity? Innumerable people in literate society can walk into libraries in myriad locations and learn an inordinate number of things about an overwhelming number of people. This is one image of this crisis that characterizes our own particular moment. Of course, this is only one, emblematic way of describing that crisis, there being many more ways of coming into contact with and knowledge of many different points of view concerning existence in the world and human nature. The point is that, however it is encountered, this cascade of different, clashing views seems characteristic of our own moment. If we do not try to face these clashing views by coming to some solid, comparative knowledge of diverse cultures, then we will not be facing our own situation. It is not just a sentimental impulse that calls for comparison; it is coming to grips with the situation in which we find ourselves, where we can and do know about so many histories of so many people.

The fifth and last issue concerns the labor of imagination. Comparison is not a mechanism that can be followed in a routine way to bring us to some final answer. No comparative process of understanding is one in which formulaic procedures are followed and from which predictable results follow. Comparison requires full engagement of oneself, one's perceptions, and one's given understanding with what it is one can hope or pretend to know about others. Comparison does not yield final solutions. We must bring to comparison or to the study of religion some image of imagination itself as a distinctively human labor.

Charlie Chaplin, the filmmaker, once wrote to Roman Jacobsen, the linguist. Jacobsen had suggested that language exists in the gaps between sounds, in the contrasts between bits, maps the differing relations of sounds systematically, and thus understands what is being communicated. Jacobsen's point was that language really exists in the gaps, in the silences, in the differences that are unspoken, in all those things that are held back in each sound-bit and that make it distinct. Chaplin was taken with this idea and responded that it seemed to him film functioned in the same way. Each frame of film is static and in order to see motion, in order to see moving pictures, the film viewer has to fill in the gaps between each frame and between all frames taken severally together in order to imagine movement, continuity, character, and story. The role of the artist, therefore, is to construct comparisons of images that are linked closely enough for the imagination to engender coherence, irony, and plot but also distant enough to allow viewers the room to take up their responsibility to exercise their creative imagination.

This is true also of the situation in which we find ourselves in the study of religion. I do not know that we can persuade one another to interpret facts or understand religion (or the terms "axial" or "primal") in any particular ways. We cannot absolve one another of the responsibility of imagining our way through the gaps and the differences, the clashing points of view. Since imagination is a distinctively human labor, that responsibility to labor with our imaginations

seems unavoidable, if we are to be authentic human beings in our own world. Each of us must labor to imagine what it means to be human in the differing views that are served up to us in our communities, in our experiences, in our academic work. Perhaps this ultimately is a religious situation in the broadest sense of the word: to face what can only be imagined and to orient ourselves to that imagined reality as the most important in our world.

*An Exploration of Contemporary Spirituality:
"Axial Age Civilizations" and "Primal Traditions"*

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