

## 14. History and the Age of Spirit

Joachim of Flore (1135-1202) suggested that there were three overlapping ages, the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Spirit. His work is valuable as a counter to the notion that history is going around and around in static circles. Joachim saw that history is going somewhere and that new periods of history begin long before old periods end. His Age of the Father ran from Adam to Jesus, His age of the Son begins with Isaiah, His Age of the Spirit begins with Benedict. I find his periods rather artificial, but his underlying notion of history is intriguing.

In my discussion of the Trinity in Chapter 13, I emphasized personal authenticity and the experience of Awe, spelled out as Trust, Love, and Freedom. This is an emphasis on the Holy Spirit third of the Triune experience. Beginning with Søren Kierkegaard, Christian theology has emphasized authenticity over authority. Authenticity is an emphasis on Holy Spirit. The authority emphasis of Christendom was rooted in the concern to preserve the centrality of the Jesus Christ revelation. It was an age of emphasis on human "Sonship," The Awed Ones.

Since the work of Søren Kierkegaard we have been opening an Age of Spirit in Christian theology and practice. And this development is replacing an Age of Second-Face emphasis. The theology of Moses and the Prophets emphasized becoming ever more clear about the life of devotion to Almighty Reality, the First Face of the Triune experience.

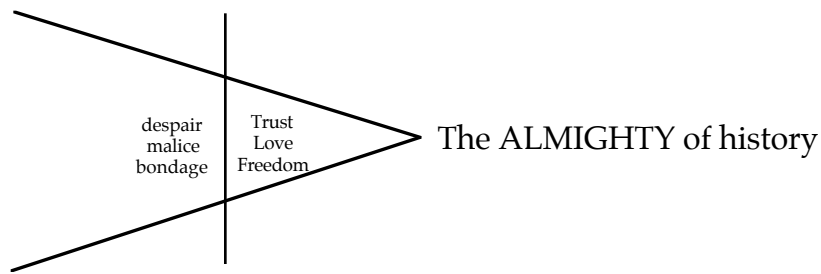
In suggesting this fresh Joachim-like model of the history of triune awareness, we need to underline that all three faces of the Triune experience of God appear in all three eras of theological emphasis. In the Old Testament we find all three: The Almighty Lord of history, the People of God, and the Spirit of God.

The theology that characterized the early centuries of Christian theology emphasized the Second Face, but this did not mean that the First Face was abandoned. The Almighty God of history was heatedly protected against a Gnosticism that denied the importance of the First Face. Also, the Holy Spirit was given reflection in the Bible and in second and third century theology, but not with the emphasis and heat that was poured out with regard to the basic nature of the Jesus Christ breakthrough.

As we participate in a post-Kierkegaardian era in Christian theology, Holy Spirit has become front and center. This does not mean, however, that we are going to neglect the Awesome and the Awed Ones and focus only upon the Awe. We are going to find ourselves approaching a further clarification of all three Faces of the God experience. Through our skill in clarifying Awe, we will be enabled to further clarify the Awesome and the Awed Ones.

We need to guard against overemphasis in our Holy Spirit emphasis. For example, it is misleading to proclaim that God the Almighty is dead, that Christ is dead, and that only Holy Spirit is important to us from now on. There is no Awe without the Awesome Otherness that Awes us. And there is no Awe without the Awed Ones who are being Awed. One of the ways we can see an overemphasis upon the Third Face of the Trinity is in a neglect of the God of history, of historical issues, and of our historical responsibilities. My name for this neglect is "the estrangement of aloofness." History has been a core theme of the Bible and in most eras of the Church history. History is certainly a core theme in this manifesto for a Next Christianity. If we do not retain our love of history, we lose our love of God in the Christian sense. We drift off into experiences of timeless states of being and ignore the ongoing flow of time within which these deep experiences are happening. The unstoppable flow of time is an encounter with the Awesome Almightyness.

Following is a diagram that helps us picture the relations of Spirit and history, as well as a view of the Trinity from a historical outlook:



In this diagram God the Almighty is being confronted by the wedge of humanity entering the future. Humanity can be pictured as a wedge because the wider scope of humanity is the least sensitive and responsive to the Awesomeness of history that is Awe-ing us. The most sensitive and most responsive portion of humanity narrows to a point occupied by the most prophetic members of our species in this particular moment in history. The line that seems to separate the sensitive-and-responsive from the insensitive-and-irresponsive is a poem about the decision to accept the Call to be the Awed Ones in history. This dividing line is not a clear line among a literal population. No person is completely insensitive to Reality or completely irresponsive to Reality. Nevertheless, we can define the Awed Ones (or the People of God) as those for whom sensitive and responsive to Reality has become the main course of their lives. In spite of imperfections in this regard, our lives can be directed by the Call to embody Trust, Love, and Freedom as described in the last chapter.

This chart also holds the insight that the states of Trust, Love, and Freedom are not a form of aloofness from time, but a sensitivity and responsiveness taking place in time – within the history in which we confront the Almighty Reality toward which this sensitivity and responsiveness is directed.

We could also misunderstand this picture in a moralistic fashion – thinking that we must get busy trying to be sensitive and responsive. Such moralism is countered if we remain aware that our states of Awe (i.e. Trust, Love, and Freedom) are gifts of Reality not accomplishments by humans. Humans embody and enact those gifts, but they get no credit for creating them. The Awed Ones are servants of the Almighty. Such servants humbly be what they are being be-ed by Reality to be.

Finally, the above diagram may also seem to damn most of humanity to despair, malice, and bondage. Again, that is a bit misleading, for the gifts of Trust, Love, and Freedom can appear in any life from time to time. But it is also true that the ruling characteristic of humanity as a whole is fallenness. However many trips we have made to the “mountaintop” of Enchantment with Being, we still participate in the swamp of estrangement from Being. To whatever extent we share life with the majority, we share in their despair, malice, and bondage. And to whatever extent we share life with the Awed Ones, we share in the cruciform principle shown to us by Jesus – the truth that the majority hates this challenging minority of Awed Ones. We are continually choosing between: (1) the glory of being hated as an Awed One and (2) the temporary comfort of being accepted by the majority on its way to the doom of despair. Herein is the truth of history revealed by Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and all the other enlightened followers of this heritage.

### **The Mission of the Awed Ones**

The sensitive and responsive minority of Awed Ones play a healing role in history. They are the saviors of humankind. They are the reconcilers of humanity to Reality. They are the deliverers from the karma of despair to the liberation of the Awed life of Trust, Love, and Freedom. This healing task is never finished. Not only are humans stubbornly addicted to their current estrangements, but they keep inventing new

estrangements and new versions of the old estrangements.

The temptation to estrangement from Reality is part of every human being's constitution. In the story of his forty-day fast before beginning his ministry, Jesus, our symbol of profound humanness, faced the tempter. All of us who have been restored to our Freedom face the temptation present because of that very Freedom to freely decide to no longer be free. In order for Freedom to remain in our lives, Freedom must be lived through the ongoing exercise of that Freedom. Most of us have already experienced Freedom at some point in our lives, and perhaps we can also recall our retreats into new forms of bondage.

Furthermore, there is a widespread unconsciousness about the already established estrangements of the general society. This unconsciousness is tragic, for it means an unrealism heading toward despair. It also means an acting out of that despair as malice toward truth, motivated by a reactivity in defense of illusions. Consider the illusions of civilization in both its capitalist and communist forms; both tend to deny or minimize the impending climate catastrophe. Both manifest various levels of inattention to waning fresh water sources, to soil loss, to starvation and social chaos. Our estrangement from facing these challenges and dealing with them has grim consequences. It is an understatement to say that there is no end in sight for the work of bringing humanity's estrangements into awareness, articulating humanity's forgiveness, and beckoning humanity to fresh starts in realism.

### **Witnessing Love**

The "work" indicated in the last sentence of the previous section has the classical name "witnessing Love." We, the Awed Ones, bear witness by both living a realistic life and telling others about its possibility and the path that must be taken from despair to Trust, from malice to Love, and from bondage to Freedom. One of the great discoveries of our era is that the experience of despair is both the hell we want to avoid and the doorway to the glory of authenticity. We must pass through the hell of a self-aware experience of our despair in order to see our desire and longing for authenticity. No one cries out for forgiveness of their estrangement until the hell of it begins to be intolerable. This fact presents us with the most disagreeable part of the task of witnessing Love – assisting people to consciously experience their despair – the very last thing on earth any of us want to experience is our despair. Fortunately for the witnesser, most people have already been brought to self-aware despair by the everyday actions of the Almighty in their lives. So the witness can often move right away toward sharing the good news that there is a way out of despair – that despair is a doorway to the forgiveness of estranged living and a fresh start in the realism which knows no despair. Realistic living knows no despair, because Reality supports realism rather than judges it. Our despair always means that we are not fully engaged in realistic living.

The Awed Ones' task of witnessing Love has three aspects that correspond with the following three aspects of Paul Tillich's description of the grace happening: (1) the awakening to despair, (2) the dawning of acceptance, and (3) the acceptance of acceptance.

Here are the parallels in the work of witnessing Love with Tillich's aspects of grace: (1) The witness stands firm in support of the harsh truth that estrangement exists and is headed to or is already arriving at the doom of despair. (2) The witness meets the despairer with the healing message that each specific life is received just as it is, that the past is approved as the unalterable origin of this particular life's goodness, that the future is open to a mode of realism that is now possible, and that the whole cosmic drama of things is the wholesome world of my one and only livable life. (3) When this good news is heard, the witnessing person has only one aspect of witnessing Love left

to do – beckoning the forgiven one to step forth in an acceptance of the forgiveness – a step that is challenging because it means the surrender to the judging action of the Almighty upon our estrangements and embracing an undeserved “WELCOME HOME” by Reality in spite of our unworthiness for any fresh start.

The term “beckoning” I have taken from the story of Jesus walking on the water and responding to Peter’s request to join Jesus in such walking. Peter says, “If it is really you, call me to walk to you on the water. Jesus responds, “Come on then.” These three words summarize well the beckoning dynamic of witnessing Love.

Peter does step down from his safe boat and walk on the water making for Jesus. Then out on the water of his stormy life, he notices the strength of the winds and waves and begins to sink. The temptation to estrangement is always present! Peter calls out to Jesus, who holds out his hand and pulls Peter back to his feet on the wild waves of Reality and then asks Peter this challenging question: “What made you lose your Trust like that? It is Trust in the goodness of Reality that keeps Jesus, Peter, you, or me on top of the waters of realism and out of the depths of despair.

*On almost every page of all four Gospels, Jesus is presented as an example of what witnessing Love looks like.*

## Justing Love

In addition to witnessing Love, justing Love is a companion aspect of the work of Love carried out by the Awed Ones. The meaning of this made-up term is that our witnessing Love is carried out alongside our caring for the human body, the mind, the emotions, and the whole social life of humanity. In the New Testament stories about Jesus, we see justing Love as the call to give water to the thirsty, feed the hungry, visit the prisoners, heal the sick, care for the poor, render justice to everyone, and prepare the society for the challenge of facing up to the entire drama of historical unfolding.

In our recent centuries, Protestant theologians like Walter Rauschenbush and Reinhold Niebuhr challenged the more Evangelical types of Christianity for their overemphasis on witnessing Love. Rauschenbush established a tradition called “the social gospel.” The liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez also opened minds to the social justice component of the work of the Awed Ones.

Social structures need to be seen as coagulations of human choices that typically fail to care for people fully enough. Therefore, the Love of people includes changing those structures toward forms that are more just, sane, workable, and worthy of being the ways we live together in a realistic manner – in a manner that gives everyone an opportunity for survival, social liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In a fully elaborated Christian theology and ethics, we presuppose that “happiness” means Trust, Love, and Freedom. Yet, the focus of justing Love is upon something else than opening these Holy Spirit depths of personal living. Justing Love focuses upon the opportunities to enjoy the material, mental, emotional, and social conditions that provide possibilities for all human life, both for profound living and for the ordinary supports for all human living.

Loving God in the Christian sense, means loving what we are truly encountering in world history and in our actual everyday lives. It can seem at first that the calling to “Love What Is” might result in a passive or ultraconservative sort of ethics, but that would be to ignore the truth that the given or actual Reality always includes possibility. There is no *actual* that does not include the *possible*, and there is no *possible* that is not rooted in some *actual*. If loving the actual excludes loving the possible, then we need to rip the word “actual” out of the English language. And if loving the possible excludes loving the actual, then we need to rip the word “possible” out of the English language. Actual and possible are two wings on the same bird – Reality. However paradoxical that statement may sound to our philosophical minds, it is simply the truth: Realty

includes both the actual and the possible. Here is an illustration of what this insight means in social practice:

### Thinking Outside the Fossil Fuel Box

As long as we insist on thinking inside the Fossil Fuel Box (the actual), there is no way to envision a genuine alternative to fossil fuel use, and there is no way to chart a path from our hopeless *here* of impending climate catastrophe to a hopeful *there* of a viable alternative energy system.

I was rocked into seeing afresh the importance of seeing the energy *possibility* beyond the norm of current thinking by an article by Gail Tverberg entitled "Renewables; Good for Some Things; Not so Good for Others." This article, though written by a progressive person of good intentions, is a example of thinking inside the Fossil Fuel Box. She begins with this assertion: "Renewables that we have available today won't replace all of today's fossil fuels in any reasonable time line." The phrase "reasonable time line" excludes a full grasp of the *possible* that is present in our *actual* situation. To be realistic, to "Love What Is," we must think of an *unreasonable time line* if we are going to avoid the worst-case scenario of the climate-crisis catastrophe – "unreasonable," that is, in terms of the thinking that goes on inside the Fossil Fuel Box.

The Tveberg article is a good analysis of how difficult the transition from fossil fuels to a wind-and-solar-based system will be. And clearly there will have to be a period of transition, for this is an enormous leap, and we will need to use the energy of fossil fuels to make this leap. But overall the Tverberg article amounts to a huge victim image about making this needed energy transition under any circumstances. And the article leaves out of consideration some very important facts, without which the *technological possibilities* are invisible. So let me sketch some of those facts:

(1) It is now technologically possible to fuel jet planes with liquified hydrogen cheaper and safer than with jet fuel. This also has implications for trains, trucks and other transport means and major equipment.

(2) Hydrogen can be produced from any energy source – fossil, solar, wind, etc. Hydrogen is not an energy source, it is an energy currency like electricity. Electricity and hydrogen, operating together, can connect any energy use to any energy source. The economics and efficiency of energy conversion to hydrogen is rapidly improving. For storing energy hydrogen can replace batteries in many important applications. Storing energy is a key innovation for replacing the easily storied fossil fuels. Hydrogen is a light weight and efficient energy-storage medium compared with batteries.

(3) Unlimited growth in the overall use of energy is not a necessary prediction. We are currently so wasteful in energy-use practices that we may be able to cut the overall use of energy in half without lessening what we need energy to do. This is not a welcome truth to energy sellers, but to government policy makers it is a primary opening to useful progressive action.

(4) The building of an infrastructure to distribute energy through electricity and hydrogen may be far cheaper over the long haul than maintaining the current energy infrastructure, especially if we figure in the damage done by harsher and more frequent tornadoes, hurricanes, desertification, flooding, and the social chaos that will attend a continuation of the current energy system.

So what are the blocks for using the power of fossil fuels to arrive at a post-fossil fuel energy system? The main block is populations and their politicians who are continuing to live inside the Fossil Fuel Box of understandings. Plus it is energy companies that have already located fossil fuel sources and built long-range business plans based on selling those "goods." Such companies will have to be severely regulated, perhaps

nationalized, perhaps outlawed if we are going to leave some of that fossil fuel product in the ground. This requires a political shift from big money control of our governments to popular control by an enlightened population. That may seem like an impossible challenge. But it is *the* challenge. It is *the* possibility within our actual situation. We have the basic technology for making a transition from the fossil-fuel system to a solar-and-wind energy system. The technological challenges are a real limit on the speed with which the transition can be made, but not the main limit. It is the political limits that fundamentally control the speed of the transition.

We have not yet begun the energy transition in earnest. With a full political dedication to the transition, it might shock us how quickly this enormous shift could be conducted. Just suppose that all subsidies to fossil fuel companies were removed. Just suppose that 90% of the profits of fossil fuel companies were used to subsidize the transition. Just suppose that government support for thoroughgoing energy conservation got fully serious. When we look at history carefully we see that change can happen rapidly when the economic and mental factors line up together. Consider the story of the automobile or the computer chip. Technology when well financed and widely purchased is an almost irresistible force for change. And investors don't care what they invest in, they will go with whatever is going. Our core block is politicians who are bought by and defended by the current economic establishment.

In conclusion, there are reasonable grounds for being unreasonable with respect to the "reasonable" thinking that goes on within the Fossil Fuel Box. Reality is always unreasonable with respect to the inherited form of reasoning. Reality is always alive with possibilities that shock to the roots the reasonableness of inherited reasoning.

For a reference on these possibilities of hydrogen, see **David Sanborn Scott**, Ph.D., Vice-President (for Americas) International Hydrogen Association, Founding Director, Institute for Integrated Energy Systems, University of Victoria, Canada, author of *Smelling Land: The Hydrogen Defense Against Climate Catastrophe*

Also see a fuller analysis of the energy crisis in chapter three of the book *From Empire to Eco-Democracy* authored by myself, Ben Ball, Marsha Buck, Ken Kreutziger, and Alan Richard. Climate responsibility is a primary social justice issue of our times.

Here is a second illustration of justing Love, loving the REAL as both *actual* and *possible*. It may seem impossible at first for gay and lesbian individuals and those of us who respect and love the gay and lesbian individuals in our lives to Love the actual world in which gay and lesbian individuals are misunderstood, considered abnormal, despised, and oppressed. But this actual world is the only world we have. We have to live in it, and to live in it wholeheartedly, we cannot love only the possibility of correcting that world but not the actual world in which that possibility exists. That would be a split love, seeing life as two great powers – one evil, one good. Such a view is the Manichean heresy in relation to the one good Reality of classical Christian theology.

At the other extreme, it would be a lack of Love for Reality to exclude the possibility of correcting the illusory living within this actual world. Gay and lesbian oppression is based on a set of illusions. And all illusions are vulnerable to the judgment of Reality. In other words, Reality is on the side of respect for gay and lesbian individuals. Reality is defending them from oppression, opposing their enemies, holding before us all the possibility of revealing the illusory nature of all grandiose thinking about the glory of being heterosexual. But this possibility of ending these gender illusions as well as this established malice toward some of our citizens can only be healed by some of us paying the cost of standing for the truth. Standing for the truth of possibility in this actual world of illusory living results in some sacrifice on the part of the first defenders of that truth. This is called in Christian theology, "the cruciform principle."

In the cruciform principle we face yet another crisis of faith with regard to affirming

Reality as good. How can Reality be good if the cruciform principle is part of Reality. Christian theology has grappled with that issue in this way: Reality loves (forgives) sinners (the illusion dwellers) by sacrificing Reality's truest sons and daughters for the healing of these sinners. For we who are the Reality lovers, this means that we become the servants of the despairing rather than their self-righteous rulers and despisers. With our own bodies and blood, we enact Reality's forgiveness for the illusion dwellers. And we do not forget that it has been the bodies and blood of other servants of Reality who brought to us our awakenment and our awareness of the healing forgiveness for our own illusion dwelling.

Yes, loving Reality is a humbling life. It humbles our prideful illusion dwelling. It humbles our reluctance to live in the actual world of illusion-dwelling people. It humbles our lethargy and fear to embrace the possibility of being a healing force in this Spirit-sick, illusion-dwelling, despairing *actual* world.

### **Presencing Love**

A third task of Love carried out by the Awed Ones is simply being there in history as a resource for and a continuity of profound human living and loving. Sometimes witnessing Love and justing Love is secondary to simply preserving within a group of humans the grand secrets of true authenticity – plus the methods of preserving these treasures and living them. The communal life of both Christian congregations and monastic orders have, at their best, carried out this Presencing-Love task. In some circumstances the most appropriate response is just being there in Presencing Love. Even when witnessing and justing Love are functioning as our foremost focus, we have to create the presence of those groups of people who do the witnessing and put their bodies and minds into the tasks of justice.

Therefore, community building among the Awe Ones is an important aspect of Presencing Love. For those Awed Ones who are committed to a Christian practice as their means of staying alive, Presencing Love includes recreating the next institutional forms of the Christian religion. Upon that controversial issue, I will reflect in the next chapter.