

LIVING INTO THE DIVINE PROMISE - by Rev. Bruce Sanguin

Being Who We Are Called To Be in 2012

The year 2012 has caught the interest of many spiritual communities. Mostly this is due to interpretations of some ancient Mayan calendars. The Mayans thrived from 250-900 AD in Guatemala and Mexico. The source of the prophecies is the Mesoamerican Long Count Calendar, of which there were three versions. One calendar ended after thirteen "baktuns" (cosmic cycles)—somewhere around 2012; another after twenty baktuns—around 6000AD; a third ended infinitely far in the future. All the calendars consist of pictographs and hieroglyphics carved in rock, which are notoriously open to interpretation. Present-day Mayan elders tell scholars that the year 2012 had no special significance for their ancestors.

We're not dealing with science. Rather, the current interest is one expression of the longing of the human soul that shows up in three fundamental ways: nostalgia for a Golden Age, expectation of an Apocalypse, and dreams of a New Utopia. The Golden Age yearning looks backward to a time when the stars seemed to align and smile upon the human race. The 1960's, for example, represent a Golden Age for many people, with hippies living off the grid and according to the principle of free love. Woody Allen's latest film, *Midnight In Paris*, explores this nostalgia for a previous, better age. In the end, the protagonist concludes that it's better to live fully in the present.

Apocalyptic scenarios are the genre of the oppressed and disillusioned. The power differential between the elite and the oppressed is so great that only a cataclysmic intervention by an all-powerful God can right the ship (meaning, punish the evil-doers and reward the long-suffering faithful). In the Christian bible, the Book of Revelation needs to be interpreted against this backdrop: Rome is the beast that will be defeated by the Lamb of God (Christ).



Patricia Irr, osf

Why do we "fear the very light we are beginning to see"?

Utopian visions look forward to an ideal future. In the hands of authoritarian regimes and ideologues, they are frankly dangerous. When attached to a revolutionary spirit that is committed to imposing this utopian vision for the good of all the people, the

EDITOR'S LETTER

By now many of us have heard something of the myths and mysteries, prophecies and projections, transformations and transmutations attached to and unfolding from this 2012 calendar year. In this edition of *SpiritEarth*, we've invited writers to explore the 2012 phenomenon from and through an evolutionary perspective.

Evolutionary Christian minister and author Rev. Bruce Sanguin, was hosted by The Well with Barbara Marx Hubbard over a weekend this past January. While here at the La Grange Park Center, we asked Bruce to write for this issue, and he has provided the overview piece.



Rev. Bruce Sanguin at The Well January 2012

Mary Southard's reflection interpolates for us the evolutionary pattern of death/resurrection in our Universe. She helps us to recognize that, if we cooperate, the deadly destructiveness that is humankind's present behavior can birth us into new life as compassionate co-creators. And thanks so much to Mary for the rich blessing she bestows at the end of her reflection.

Pat Bombard, BVM, shares her insights about the paradox partners of faith and secularity, helping us to recognize there's a value to and necessity for their stabilizing/exploratory tension (similar to dark matter/dark energy?) in our Universe of continuous expansion and transformation.

Finally, we hear from Mary Kate Sperduto on behalf of her friends Ross, Adam, and Willie. This is a group of young people already incarnating the new consciousness of care and oneness articulated in the earlier articles. Mary Kate and her friends are on fire about the plight of our planet and have formed the Rainforest Rescue Coalition. The raw passion of these kids is infectious! Check out their website at <http://rainforestrescuecoalition.org> to make a donation or to sign up for this summer's fundraising bike rally.

May all humankind be awakened into deep compassion for one another and the whole creation so that together we may bring about "a new heaven and a new earth."

Barbara Foreman
bforeman@csjoseph.org

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Congregation of St. Joseph
1515 West Ogden Avenue
La Grange Park, IL 60526-1721
(708) 482-5088
www.csjthewell.org

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Mission Statement

SpiritEarth is a publication that expands and advances The Well's mission as a regional center for telling and engaging our Sacred Universe Story and fostering the evolving role of humankind in this great drama.

OUR MOMENT OF GRACE - by Mary Southard, CSJ

“Now I am revealing new things to you
Things hidden and unknown to you
Created just now, this very moment.
Of these things you have heard nothing until now,
So that you cannot say,
Oh yes, I knew this.”
Isaiah 48: 6-7

NOW is a time like no other in human history; we can feel it in our bones. The end of the Mayan calendar in 2012 has captured our imagination. It signals the end of an era (not the world), and this and other ancient traditions suggest that the world as we have know it will undergo a change. Both Mayans and Aztecs believe that each new creation was an improvement on the preceding one.

The end of an era! Who among us cannot list what’s not working? We are weary of wars and violence and hunger. The dreams that fired the industrial age and enshrined technology have become nightmares, contaminating the soil, air, water, food, and atmosphere which sustain life. We can no longer look to the structures of power or official religious leadership for integrity, safety, and security.

The pattern of death and resurrection, loss and renewal, chaos and creativity, is the defining pattern of our entire Universe. The death of a star gave birth to our solar system; the oxygen crisis two billion years ago gave rise to more complex life forms; the extinction of the dinosaurs was followed by a proliferation of new life forms, including flowers and mammals. In history, the fall of Rome made room for the fresh creativity and culture in the Middle Ages. This pattern is at the heart of Christianity—the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, the Paschal Mystery. We find it in our own lives too: the death of a spouse, a cancer diagnosis, a mid-life crisis can give birth to a new way of seeing, a new sense of self that includes new meaning and purpose.

In 1996, I wrote these words in my journal: “It feels like we’re in a birth canal! –as people, --as a species! We’re looking into the unknown, about to see everything with new eyes....” The terrible pressures of our time, the fear and loss we feel take on

meaning in this larger context. It is the peril and promise of giving birth, the reluctance to leave the security of the womb. We fear an uncertain future for ourselves, our children, our grandchildren, and our planet; we feel fear arising when traditional belief systems seem challenged by scholarship and science. We fear the very Light we’re beginning to see.

But we have reached the time when the baby must leave the womb in order to live. We are a very young species as our destructive behavior (as disconnected adversaries) clearly shows. It’s time to take our place as adults (as interconnected collaborators) in the larger Community of Life. We’re being asked to give birth to the next stage of our species, to release the possibilities that wait within us, to “awaken the energies of love” (Teilhard de Chardin).

The world as we have known it has already entered a time of unprecedented change. We have discovered ourselves and our human consciousness as part of a vast, ancient, magnificent, evolutionary, Sacred Universe. We have also grasped the power to destroy Earth and one another in more ways than one. We are making choices now that will define whether and how we experience life in the next age on Planet Earth.

A BLESSING

*We live in an amazing time of vision,
of recognition, of awakening.
We stand on the threshold of our New Birth
as a human species.
We begin to see New Light beyond the womb.
A sacred fire burns fiercely in our hearts:
Creator Spirit moves in each one of us
and in all of us together
bringing to birth the energies
of love and compassion.
The CHRIST is being born through us
“That all may be ONE...”*

*May you participate in the
Great Work of Love in our world.
May LOVE and profound Compassion
fill your heart.
May each day find you more awake
to the promise and possibility within YOU.
May you be to the
Presence of LOVE in our world!*

Faith and Secularity: Paradox Partners in Our Transforming Universe?

- by Patricia M. Bombard

Having taught on the college level for several years, I am aware that most of the young adults in my courses describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Many probably consider themselves thoroughly “secular.”

Recent news reports describe Pope Benedict XVI and U.S. Catholic bishops as concerned that a “radical secularism” in the country is eroding religious freedom and posing “grave threats” to the faith. And asked to explain an unprecedented investigation of American Catholic women religious, now in its third year, Cardinal Franc Rodé, who ordered the investigation, reportedly said, “Most of all, you could say, it involves a certain secular mentality that has spread in these religious families and, perhaps, also a certain 'feminist' spirit.”

These opinions from today’s church leaders stirred in me a need to explore faith and secularity from the perspective of the Universe Story. To my surprise and excitement, what I discovered was a view of faith and secularity as paradox partners, an idea that might offer a starting place for dialogue in reconciling the current conflict between them for so many, in particular our young adults. I also began to consider how my conclusion challenges us to promote the Universe Story among our present religious and political leaders.

In this essay, then, I hope to expand our thinking, open dialogue, and ask ourselves important questions concerning this issue. To begin, we must look into the Universe Story to find there the wisdom about the meaning and power of paradox.

A Universe of Paradoxes

Scientists today have helped us to see that our Universe emerged through a single process, from its point of emergence 13.7 billion years ago through stages of greater complexity leading to the presence

of stars, galaxies, and planets. With their help, we now know that unity is a major theme in the Universe Story.

Yet, I have come to realize that within that very unity are many paired aspects: day and night, up and down, masculine and feminine, for example. We in the West inherited a dualistic worldview from the Greeks that taught us to see these pairs as separate opposites. This conditioning blinds us to the fact that they are – in our Universe of deep oneness – intimate partners in paradox. The Jungian analyst and author Robert A. Johnson notes that each aspect in the pairing “is comprehensible only in contrast” to the other. “Masculinity has relevance only in contrast to femininity....up is only possible in the presence of down.” The reality of this conjoining is what makes these pairs a “paradox.” We find it difficult to hold them in our consciousness as interconnected and complementary when we so automatically view them as separate, even competing opposites. Johnson suggests we learn to honor both opposites equally. “Then the pain of contradiction is transformed into the mystery of paradox.”

As I reflected on Johnson’s insights on paradox, I realized with a new curiosity that each of these pairings – in their unity – contributes to our Universe’s emerging and sustaining processes over time: without day and night, without masculine and feminine, life as we know it could not exist. Aware then of this life-giving presence of paradox in our Universe, I delved into a study of the evolution of faith and secularity. To see how I reached the conclusion that they, too, exist as paradox partners, creating in their interplay a path to new life, let us now look more closely at faith and secularity.

Faith and Meaning

Author and educator Sharon Daloz Parks suggests that faith, like spirituality, is rooted in the human

activity of meaning-making. Both are about the questions we ask and answer throughout our lives, questions such as: Who is God? Who are we? How are we to be here with others? Viewing faith from within the perspective of the Universe Story, we know that humans, during the thousands of years of our evolution, have answered these questions in different ways. These answers have become the repository of various cultures and “faith” or “religious” traditions.



Bill Fleming

“...within...unity are many paired aspects: day and night...for example.”

Daloz Parks suggests we humans now are experiencing a global transformative moment in our cultures and faith traditions that affects us as individuals and as a global village. She writes: “We live...in a turning point in the flow of history....As we become aware of the power of our participation in an interdependent planetary reality we increasingly recognize that we are birthing – and must birth – a new cultural imagination on a global scale.”

Secularity as Transformative

Secularity also has its roots in a transformative process. The Catholic priest Ronald Rolheiser says that secularity originated in the Greek philosophical duality of the temporal and spiritual. That philosophy envisioned a moral system of social and political life based solely on ideas about what it means to be “human” (Who are we?) apart from the existence of a “Divine” (Who is God?).

Minister and author Bruce Sanguin suggests that the modern era, which continued the movement to separate politics from a faith tradition, resulted in many positive social changes brought on by questioning previously held, faith-based assumptions. He writes: “The modern era enabled humanity to ask for the first time paradigm-busting questions: Is it reasonable that black people should be slaves, just because of their skin colour? Why can’t women vote? Why would we give kings and queens, along with an aristocracy, unfettered powers when they don’t represent the people? As a result of this kind of inquiry, slavery was abolished, equality for women was affirmed and promoted, and four major revolutions – the French, English, Russian, and American – were fought on behalf of the universal rights of humankind.”

In previous centuries, as Sanguin notes, the tension between faith traditions and secularity centered on issues of race, the rights of women, and the privileges of the aristocracy. Today, as the news reports on the

Pope’s critique of American culture suggest, the issues at the center of the tension between some faith traditions and secularity include same-sex marriage, the ordination of women, and abortion. If faith and secularity are indeed partners in paradox, not to allow their dialogical interchange on these current issues to happen, not to allow secularity to ask its questions of faith is to be “not the church but the Taliban,” says Rolheiser. Johnson adds, “Fanaticism is always a sign that one has adopted one of a pair of opposites at the expense of the other.”

Conclusion: Moving Toward Reconciliation

To see more clearly how a reconciliation of faith and secularity might allow them once again to engage as paradox partners, we need to explore yet another dimension of our Universe. The philosopher Ken Wilber points out that transformation in our Universe always involves growth in complexity through a process of inclusion. In other words, just as stars learned to come together to create galaxies, our

result is, for example, Lenin with his end-justifies-the-means dismissal of human carnage, “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.”

But from an evolutionary perspective, an idealistic vision of the future is healthy and a natural expression of trust in the Hidden Wholeness (God) from which a universe emerges and evolves. Looked at from within an evolutionary perspective, the gospel has a future orientation. “Anybody who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). There’s no patience for nostalgia and no Golden Age. Jesus’ sole purpose in life was to reveal and realize the Kingdom of God, the divine realm that is always already present and waiting to be fully realized. In an evolutionary paradigm, the future is organically emergent, not discontinuous (as it is in the apocalyptic and utopian imagination). While evolutionary leaps do occur in nature (punctuated equilibrium), the future that emerges is always informed by and connected to the past.

Futurist, Barbara Marx Hubbard, is brilliantly exploiting the interest in Mayan prophecy and the year 2012 as a strategy for consciously realizing the divine realm on Earth. As she puts it, the crisis of our age is simultaneously the birth of a new order. She is rallying support and creating the conditions for leaders from every field to step up

and consciously create our preferred future, declaring 2012 to be the birth of a new humanity.

When the church is faithful to her core identity, we are aligned with this kind of project, for this is what the Holy One and Holy Oneness is always in the process of doing. “Behold I am doing a new thing. It is springing forth now. Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) The readings for the first Sunday of Lent from Mark’s gospel depict Jesus emerging from the waters of baptism, the heavens being torn



Photo courtesy of NASA

“...a new thing”: the birth of a star

apart, and a dove descending upon him (Mark 1:9-11). The symbolism is thick, connecting this story with the story of Noah and the cataclysmic flood. Biblical writers interpreted this historic event as God’s desire to start a new creation in response to human violence (Genesis 6:6-8). Noah sends a dove out from the ark, and when it returns with a twig in its mouth, it is a sign that terra firma has been found. The new order can begin. So Jesus’ baptism is the beginning of a new order. The heavens are torn open (note the

birth imagery), he undergoes spiritual death in the baptism, and what rises up out of the water is no less than the birth of a new order—the Kingdom of God personalized in Jesus. The dove, traditionally associated with the Spirit, can also be interpreted as a sign that terra firma for the new order has been discovered in Jesus. The new Earth and new Heaven are grounded in him. Let the new creation begin. This is confirmed when the heavenly voice thunders, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

Paul intuited that what was happening in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was the inauguration of a new order, embodied by those who consented to a mind and heart transformation in the Christ in service of the new creation that had been inaugurated by Jesus. So complete was this transformation that Jeremiah’s prophecy of a future when the whole of the Law would be written upon the hearts of believers had arrived. It meant that circumcision, dietary and purity laws, and observance of feasts and rituals were no longer required as a means of acquiring grace. Those were part of the age of Adam, the first creation. The future belonged to the ones who knew, from the inside out, that how they showed up with and for each and in the world was the future present. To the degree that the brothers and sisters in Christ offered love and compassion, the

Action Born of Awakened Consciousness - by Mary Kate Sperduto

*“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”*

The Lorax

My name is Mary Kate Sperduto, and I’m a 19-year-old aspiring conservationist majoring in environmental studies at Prescott College in Arizona. Not very long ago some friends and I participated in an “Awakening the Dreamer” symposium at The Well. The symposium alerts participants to the many and extraordinary challenges the human community faces at this time. Unwilling to surrender to overwhelmed resignation about the environmental devastation happening all over and the looming threat of a catastrophic collapse of ecosystems on Earth, my friends and I decided to ACT.

Ross Sullivan, Adam Bauer-Goulden, Willie Heineke, and I have formed the nonprofit Rainforest Rescue Coalition whose mission is to promote sustainable human-nature relationships by conserving and protecting rainforest land around the world. Funds raised this summer will be used to purchase and protect land in the endangered Rawa Kuno Legacy Forest on the island of Borneo and to run a sustainable agroforestry program for the native communities living in the buffer zone of the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo communal conservation area in the Peruvian Amazon.

Thanks to the “Awakening the Dreamer” symposium and an enlivened “all-is-one” consciousness, my friends and I have felt inspired and empowered to take a stand on behalf of Earth and all her beautiful creatures.

The Rainforest Rescue Coalition received a 2012 Generous Promises Grant from the Congregation of St. Joseph.

Faith and Secularity - continued from page 5

consciousness expands to include others into our world (Who are we now?), and our societies change to bring “the other” into communion with us (How are we to be here with these new others?). One might call this process of inclusion the dynamic of love, of opening to new relationships that bring new life.

As paradox partners in our Universe, faith and secularity open the door to our growth in complexity both as individuals and as collective societies. We need the moral wisdom of a faith tradition to call us to grow beyond adolescent self-interest in order to participate in the fundamental unity of our Universe (Who are we?). Without this wisdom, we are left to experience the unhealthy nature of secularity. Yet, we also need secularity to grow beyond the limits of our present faith stance and respond to new insights and complexities about who shares our Universe with us (How are we to be here with others?). Today, we need the paradox partners of faith and secularity to be in dialogue with one another once again, recalling that the transformative nature of dialogue works both ways.

What we need, then, are more leaders – religious and secular – who understand the Universe Story and the individual and collective story of the human journey of transformation and who can then help us negotiate our present moment in history by placing faith and secularity into dialogue with one another. For the sake of the whole planet and all human life, especially the young in our midst, we might together ask, “What choices on today’s conflictual issues will bring more love, greater unity, and the promise of ongoing life?”



The Well

Congregation of St. Joseph
1515 West Ogden Avenue
LaGrange Park, Illinois 60526-1721

Living into the Divine Promise - continued from page 6

future had already arrived and would continue emerging in fresh iterations of divine intimacy with the world.

In evolutionary theology, God is imagined not so much as up above, but out in front, the allurement of a divine promise that gripped the Jewish people and that apprehended both Jesus and Paul. To lay claim to this promise is to embrace an ideal future, not one that is dropped down from heaven, (as in apocalyptic literature), but rather is already sacramentally present when we show up so fully that we refuse to settle for anything less than the promise of love, joy,

and ecstatic pleasure in the gift of life. We say “yes” to being the presence of that promise, individually and collectively in a mystic embodiment of the divine realm. (This is, of course, the meaning of our own baptisms.)

So, why not declare 2012 as the year when the church unambiguously decides to live into the divine promise? Why not be who we are called to be?

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