

A Post-Christian Conversation

An email string with a friend on the far side of Christian thought.

Saturday, October 15, 2005 10:11 AM

Hey Dave, here's a new batch of music, 'Where Did Bird Flu?' (+plus 'Album 2/Chaotic Stasis')

<http://4cnewmedia.com/worksinprogress.html>

Chris

Saturday, October 15, 2005 3:27 PM

Wow, some great sounds here, Chris. Love your production work. Didn't have time to listen to a whole lot, but bookmarked the site and will return.

I had to laugh when I saw the page title: "worksinprogress." I mentally parsed it "work sin progress." Since "sin" means "without" in Latin, you can see why I thought it was funny and also so very you. Then I realized it was "works in progress," and had to laugh again. A little knowledge of Latin is a dangerous thing, but then work without progress often describes my life...

Dave

Saturday, October 15, 2005 7:21 PM

"work sin progress."

I like that. 'Work Without Progress, deconstruction in action!

In my defense, 'sin' also meaning 'missing the mark', my ongoing 'excuse' is I don't aim for anything therefore hit my target every time...I try to hit nothing and succeed ;-)

Thanks for the reply, give my love to everyone.

C

Tuesday, October 18, 2005 7:59 AM

Hey, I've been looking at the Aramaic roots of the words of Jesus, and interestingly, the concept of sin to the ancients meant the state of being separated: from each other, God, community. Being unable to perform necessary functions/contribute to the collective, i.e. unclean, impure. Had nothing to do with behavior or actions. If certain actions (hataha/sin = error, failure, mistake, missing the mark) led to separation, then they were sinful. Puts a whole new spin on sin, no? Further, evil (bisa) in Aramaic had the connotation of simply being unripe, not ready, not suitable for intended purpose, out of time/rhythm, while good (taba) was ripe, ready, in time/purpose. Interesting how all these words and concepts don't carry a moral valence the way we think of them in the modern western sense.

So put that through the grinder...

D

Monday, October 17, 2005 3:06 PM

I will get back to you on that sin thing, till then...here in the desert, on this rainy day, this stuck to my mental ribs.

"To live in the presence of great truths and eternal laws, to be led by permanent ideals---that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him, and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him." ---Honore De Balzac

C

Monday, October 17, 2005 7:29 PM

Wow, that's great! I'm saving this one in the quote file...

Raining here too--love it. My kind of day. So, if you aim at nothing and hit something by accident, is that sin as well? Get back to me on that...

D

Tuesday, October 18, 2005 10:49 PM

>So, if you aim at nothing and hit something by accident, is that sin as well?<

Hmmmm, without the ethical/moral dimension, that almost sounds like:

Main Entry: **ser-en-dip-i-ty**

Etymology: from its possession by the heroes of the Persian fairy tale *The Three Princes of Serendip* : the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for (I had to look it up because I thought it might have to do with some sort of Lord Of The Rings fast food treat...seren, Sauron, get it?)

>Evil...the connotation of simply being unripe, not ready, not suitable for intended purpose, out of time/rhythm, while good (taba) was ripe, ready, in time/purpose<

Out of time/rhythm? Aside from the obvious joke concerning my fascination with being 'off-time' this opens up quite a can of worms. What is 'in time/rhythm' in this context?

My first reaction. In social anthropology, Aramaic time, both now and then is/was completely different from our western concept (just ask any business man working within those cultures). Same with rhythm, just listen to what they consider their 'dance music.' Our linear, segmented, metered AND INVENTED time was quite curious to the Indians who didn't even have words for the past or future so this is not even a regional thing, it is cultural. So, all that to say, any attempt to translate the meaning would involve at least some consideration of the dimension of time/rhythm in context of the culture.

Now, having said all that, it is probably likely (by it's usage) that the term is referring to the social aspect of time/rhythm, being 'in step' with accepted social behaviors and norms. I am sure I don't need to remind you how much that rubs me the wrong way ;-). So, going with that assumption, would 'marching to a different drummer' be evil? Somehow, it implies to me marginalizing those who have individual expression of what life/living is apart from the larger cultural 'unit.' A personal reaction for sure, I understand the terms are quite useful in less 'charged' contexts (i.e not suitable for intended purpose), but here I am inclined to think a 'judgment' of values is still implied. When it comes to personal/creative expression (which is the line I have drawn between these points), this has always been a contentious point for me. The rock hard duality of right and wrong (which I personally blame the Greek/Roman cultures for ;-)) is one that by its very nature suppresses individual expression and creates artificial polarities. Of course, similar things could be said about the 'rules' of communication being applied to the arts, they have their

place and function but are applied too universally/unquestioned in my view (pre-agreed-to meanings, the use of redundancy and cliché, etc., are, by their nature, opposed to individual expression/invention)...but that's a subject for another day. After all, this is only the first 'sinning'!

In case it gets lost in the text, I am of course commenting on the general abstract premises, and not arguing personally to persona comment/amplification to the definition ;-) I appreciate the dialog and extrapolation! See ya for the '2nd sinning'.

For reference, Edward T. Hall's 'Hidden Dimension', along with his three follow ups, are great reading on social/cultural time and space.

Enough!

C

Tuesday, October 18, 2005 11:17 PM

This quote is does hit the target in regards to the allusion I made to communication rules being applied to other arts. It has been attributed to everyone from Frank Zappa to John Cage (the black page to the blank page).

'Writing about music is like dancing about architecture'

C

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 8:34 AM

I love this! Does sound like Zappa, but then I don't know what Cage sounds like...

D

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 9:13 AM

...and in case you were wondering, the 'black page' is both a song title and a literal reference to what the manuscript sheets for the piece looked like, black with notes! Cage's 'blank page I am sure you got ;-)

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 9:27 AM

This is so interesting, Chris, because at once you're resisting Western culture and yet a part of it. The rub for you is the conformist aspects of being in time/rhythm as equated with *taba/good*. But in an ancient/Eastern or really any subsistence culture, the individualism (as you correctly state) that began with the Greeks and has been "perfected" with John Wayne-style American individualism would be as alien as past and future were to those Indians you mentioned who had no words for such concepts. Eastern/ancient culture of which Jesus was a part, was a collective/communal culture. The ancient temple-state system was one in which every person had a station and a place in life that defined their purpose in the community. While that rankles our Western sense of individuality and expression, it can be quite comforting to know your place in life--family/tribe and outward into the kingdom at large. These societies, while seemingly harsh/oppressive to us, were extremely stable, lasting for thousands of years in some cases--we should be so lucky as we disintegrate after two hundred. Part of our social breakdown is due to the lack of roles and sense of purpose people feel in their lives since the social revolutions of the 60s.

So where I'm going is that everything was defined in terms of what was good for the family, tribe, and kingdom. When a person was functioning well for the collective, and all was humming along, that was *taba/good* and when not, *bisa/bad*. (This is why a menstruating woman was considered "unclean." Though obviously not her "fault," she was not able to fulfill her sexual/procreative function during that

period and had to be purified afterward.) Very functional and practical, which are practically synonymous with Jewishness.

In a more personal sense, and in the sense I believe Jesus was communicating, it's all about relationships with those closest to us. Being out of time and rhythm and purpose and usefulness to our family, friends, our neighbors (meaning anyone in close proximity), was bad because it involved separation. Being in time/connection/unity was good because it mirrored Alaha/God, which literally means unity/oneness. So I guess what I'm saying, buddy, is that you can be as non-conformist and individualistic in your artistic expression as you wanna be, and still be taba/good in terms of what Jesus is driving at in the the unity of your personal relationships. We no longer have a collective culture, so we can take that off the table. Focusing on our personal relationships and how we connect with "neighbors" is what defines our good/evil ratios. But even then I don't see God looking at us in a moralistic sense, but merely squeezing our heads and seeing whether we're ripe or not, and then patiently waiting for another squeeze later. It's not about duality--duality, bad. It's an extremely harmful worldview--separates, categorizes, creates adversarial relationships...it's about unity. If you correctly translate the Kingdom of God/heaven, you get the Reign of Unity. Interesting, no? That's all Jesus was trying to communicate, the awareness of unity with each other and God right herenow.

So put that in the grinder too. And hey, I'd heard once that the Indians had no words for past/future, but never substantiated it. Is the book you mentioned where you read it? I'd like to study that more. I just gave a presentation to an AA group last night where one of the points was staying in the present moment, and I could've used this, if I'd had it more researched. Let me know.

Great talking to you like this--why'd we wait so long?

D

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 2:08 PM

I just got back from grocery shopping (you know, one of those communal thingies you mentioned)! so I am only giving the short response.

>So I guess what I'm saying, buddy, is that you can be as nonconformist and individualistic in your artistic expression as you wanna be, and still be taba/good in terms of what Jesus is driving at in the unity of your personal relationships.<

Absolutely, my argument was indeed biased within a very narrow and not clearly defined context, that of aesthetic philosophy. Anyway, yes, I totally agree about the 'laws' of community being necessary and beneficial. Obviously some strong defensive reflex on my part. I really needed to further place my statements into the intended critique of 'moral art', aesthetics being governed by systems of control imposed by philosophical dogmas, but I guess it made sense to me (emotionally) because too often these laws are taken as all-encompassing across all life dimensions automatically by those who need such imposed limitations to 'feel' comfortable. I think you and I have had the discussion about the modern state of so-called 'Christian arts'. Rhythm and time statements cause synaptic meme-storms in my thought space, the beat-actionary-falter-funkist-multiplex-conciousness-vectors in me just take over!

Remember Joseph Campbell's statement about the 'you should' dragon? I think I was commenting primarily from that space of authoritative abuse/misuse of what you so elegantly pointed out are the needed elements of a community/social/relational unit. So I think we are agreeing, I am just getting my licks in at 'the dragon' at every opportunity (for Joe ;-)

btw, have you ever heard the number that sociologists came up with concerning social units? It seems to be about one hundred and fifty people. Above that number, the unit seems to quickly deteriorate and break into separate and exclusive units.

Anyway, I am only partially through your response but need some shut eye to truly plumb it's depths, just wanted to get that initial reaction off.

C

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 2:24 PM

Dammit, I need to sleep...but just 'digested' your whole response. Nicely put, I'm with you ;-) Reign Of Unity, cool.

C

Thursday, October 20, 2005 8:44 AM

Only way to fly...

D

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 2:20 PM

>I'd heard once that the Indians had no words for past/future, but never substantiated it. Is the book you mentioned where you read it?<

I will look it up when I get back up from my nap. I am pretty sure it was in the first one "Hidden Dimensions" but let me verify. Another 'gem somewhat related is 'Metaphors We Live By' by Lakoff/Johnson.

'Reality itself is defined by metaphor, and as metaphors vary from culture to culture, so do the realities they define'

It is these studies of language, all stemming from the structuralist schools (semiotics, cultural anthropology, etc) that illustrate for me why language and the games created from it (philosophy) needs to be understood for it's real roles and limitations in our lives. Which, if we were having a beer right now would allow a nice segue back to my declarations concerning communication laws and the arts. Alas, the beer remains a wet dream.

As the existentialist would say, 'It only hurts when I exist'.

C

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 2:28 PM

One more footnote, another important read for me related to this idea of duality PLUS unity was Edward De Bono's 'I am Right, You Are Wrong'. Edward's big resume item is the fact that his term/idea 'lateral thinking' was added to Webster's (though apparently so was Will Smith's 'Jiggy' so maybe not that big of a deal anymore).

C

Thursday, October 20, 2005 8:43 AM

So much in all these responses, and I don't have time to reply fully, but here, I'm not sure I agree with the Lakoff statement. I don't think the realities vary. That assumes a pluralistic universe. I still hold to the assumption that absolute/objective/universal truth/reality does exist and is knowable in part. But only in part--that's the glass darkly of Paul, or Thomas Aquinas' great line that a comprehended God is no God at all. So for me, the nature of God is the nature of that ultimate reality and it exists outside our

perception/interpretation of it. But I do agree that Lakoff is hitting at a very real phenomenon: that since our metaphors vary from culture to culture, our perception/interpretation of the realities they define also vary, but not the reality itself. I live with this every day trying to teach leftist "orthodoxy" (oxymoron for sure) to a rightist church culture. We don't see things the same at all, but the things we see are unaffected by our imaginings. Over...

D

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 2:46 PM

American Indian time and language is thoroughly discussed in Edward T. Hall's 'The Dance Of Life'. This was the actual source I had referenced earlier.

C

Thursday, October 20, 2005 8:46 AM

Great, now my reading list just got longer--why can't my time do the same?

D

Friday, October 21, 2005 5:58 AM

>absolute/objective/universal truth/reality does exist<

My thinking is, what we define as 'reality' is dependent upon our particular set of human senses. How we perceive and are able to interact with our environment becomes the beginning from which we then build our conceptual models for viewing the mostly filtered-out world. THEN add our sense of 'self', of which we were hardly 'aware' of originally happening. That first separation into 'self', that first discerning of our hand under 'self' control, seeing the reflection in the mirror and realizing it's us! Add emotional protective devices that are invisibly created to keep us from shorting out from it all and forget about it! Now, assuming that as my own basic model, we might be able to build bridges between us to this idea of yours, but you got some 'splaining to do Lucy! I do believe there are certain commonalities of experience (reality?) between people, but to me the realm of faith (and its particular thinking-through models) is about asking questions, questions like 'what we are doing here?', and 'why?', I do not believe in some 'single' answer to these questions, some answer that would take on the firmness of a platonic solid.

For me, the question (and answer) will always be under the influence of an individual's senses, perceptions, and associated protective filters, always operating, always 'translating' invisibly, transparent to all but the most meditative self-examining traveler (like it does much good to see them anyway). If having certain laws of physical nature affect us in a similar manner, and our basic interactions with these stimuli make experience seem common enough to call it the same reality, fine. But beyond that, even between extremely self aware individuals I believe it's still a guess that we are even talking about the same thing, let alone experiencing it the same enough to extrapolate some single fixed world outside of our own personal 'borders'. Too much of an emotional/translational filter matrix working out of sight (and conscious mind) for me to be convinced that one person's insightful clarity applies to another who by nature has a different 'gut' reaction to all the same 'input' (all other things being supposedly equal...but not ;-)). We can agree to use the same models, but that's all they are (IMHO), these MAPS are not some self existing reality apart from our senses. Isn't this the 'if a tree falls, and no one was there to hear it, did it make a sound' koan? In other words, the MAP is not the TERRITORY.

So, I think the idea of seeing behind some curtain, even a glimpse, to be limited to what you think the curtain IS, I currently can't subscribe to some preexisting curtain that exists outside of all of this mental gesturing and gibber gabber. I know you will have much to say on this, I welcome your considered view, but remain unconvinced at this point in my life of any single, universal reality outside of the word games of language and fractal webs of filters and emotions we peek from behind to invent those wondrous fantasy worlds awaiting transcendent. Too many assumptions to make it work (for this cynic anyway), too similar

to the concept of Plato's cave for this little sock puppet.

Slightly related, did I ever tell you I 'dreamed' the next dimension (above our four) once? At least I 'think' I did ;-) ...and then there is MY 'string' theory...old guitarists never die, they just stop changing their strings.

Seriously though, I keep an open mind to all this as much as I can (given my disappointments in just about everything at this moment). So s'plain away my dear Lucy (in the sky with...)

C

Friday, October 21, 2005 8:36 AM

You funny, Chris...

Well, I find it always best to start at the beginning...and so you start with things you can be sure of. Is there anything can we be sure of? You and I at first blush may rush to differ on what we can be sure of, if anything, but I want you to consider (to paraphrase Jesus and CS Lewis) that there is one universal that we all seem to agree on at least, and that is the law of reciprocity, or the Golden Rule. In the West, the most famous enunciation is from Jesus, but it existed in Judaic tradition before Jesus and has been formulated in just about every tradition and religion and philosophy man's ever invented. Though tacitly understood, we define our laws and develop our societies around this principle that each of us should be treated as we ourselves want to be treated. That each person has rights that should not be infringed, if for no other reason than we want those same rights protected for ourselves. Call it enlightened self-interest, as Hobbs did--see it only from the negative if you must, that we want what we want and don't want that want frustrated, or see us breaking through to the next level where we actually do want what's best for another, but either way the principle remains.

There is a sense of fairness, fairplay, rightness and wrongness at this basic level that Lewis talks about, where my rights end at the other person's nose. This is why Jesus (and Hillel) could say that all the Law and Prophets were summed up in this one phrase, to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, which is another way to put it. To be honest, Chris, in all of the theology I've studied, this really is the only thing I can be sure of, that I can "prove." The rest, all the rest is subject to interpretation, assumption, and dependent on our particular set of human senses. And here, as in all of our perceptions, Plato's cave analogy does apply. When you think about it, we don't sense anything directly. Everything we see, touch, taste, smell are only electrical impulses being interpreted by our brains. We are walking around in the dark, flying on instruments only, like one of those robots in a movie that "sees" the world in wireframe on a grid background. But for us, the instruments are our senses and our brains, and since it's all we've ever known, it's easy then to substitute the interpretation for the reality behind it, or as in Plato to think that the shadow on the wall actually is the reality being projected. And if this is true for physical objects, how much more is it true for spiritual "objects?"

But here's the rub. As the prisoners in Plato's cave look at a shadow of, say a guitar, on the wall and mistakenly believe it to be an actual guitar and not just the form of the real thing, that doesn't mean there's not a real guitar somewhere projecting the shadow/form. In fact, if there were not a real guitar somewhere, there wouldn't be a form/shadow for us to interpret through our senses. The fact that we perceive something indicates there is something to perceive. The fact that we all perceive it differently may prove the map is not the territory, but does not prove that the territory does not exist. It's amazing that we can agree on anything at all even in the physical world given our intensely subjective perceptions, but we see physical things similarly enough that life as we know it is possible. Certain things like electricity work objectively enough for us to build a civilization upon regardless of how/if we understand it. But as we move to the spiritual, all bets are off. We can say we follow this or that master/prophet or this or that god, but what exactly do we mean by this prophet or that god? My Jesus is not necessarily yours, right?

And so you return to what you can be sure of. The fact of the Golden Rule as a/the one thing we all agree on (at least operationally), is a form/shadow that denotes a spiritual reality we can also agree on: that

some force exists that we can't directly see, but operates, like electricity, in predictable ways that are in this case defined by the Golden Rule. The force I call God, and the predictable way I call Love, and the effect of the way I call Unity. Mere words that mean only what I assign, right? No, not really, because each of those words, those forms, speaks to relational states that we also can all agree on. Why do we crave acceptance and will do almost anything to avoid loneliness/separation? There is a corollary to the Golden Rule and that's that at core we all want to be accepted and connected--we are hardwired to seek Unity. That there is a God who also wants that unity--and wants it with us--is whole of the Gospel, the Good News. That's it. Any more than this is interpretation. But it's all and everything we need. Seek first the Kingdom--seek first the Reign of Unity, and everything else comes as a bonus, because everything we need or think we want is embodied in Unity. That's something we can be sure of, because it stems from what we all agree upon regardless of the perception of forms.

Einstein was once asked what was the most important question his work could answer, and he said, "Whether the universe is friendly or not." Question answered. The universe is friendly. There is an absolute Unity behind the forms that we see and at times misinterpret. But enough gets through that we can limp our way to the end of our senses, and then risk jumping off into the abyss to test our theories. And make no mistake: they are all theories until we do jump and see for sure whether the universe is friendly.

Over...

D

Friday, October 21, 2005 5:28 PM

Cliff note reply '-)

First paragraph-Agreed. I would take it further (or sidestep) to say that a biological imperative is referenced in these concepts. It is of a biological self-interest to interact with the environment in a manner best suited to survival, both as an individual and as a unit of a larger functioning whole (the community?) So the biological instinct I think naturally carries over to social realms and is restated in this Golden Rule. Cooperation is key to the larger social organism's survival, I believe the individual units in this arrangement (humans) perhaps wind up expressing this cooperation as 'morality,' faith systems and 'Golden Rules'.

As always, even though you use certain words that I am somewhat uncomfortable with under normal circumstances (i.e. Kingdom) I know that your underlying meaning is one that I can trust (and agree with without the extra layer of 'spiritual language) so I won't bother disagreeing with their use and premises, I believe I get what you are saying, and indeed, as I have I have said before, you are one of the best men I know so your actions/life take the negative connotations out of these words for me here.

In the end I find your 'argument' to be solid in basis, it is only at the point of giving personality to this 'Unity' that for me, I simply am unable to come to such definite conclusions in regard to a 'belief' system (and as you know I somewhat made that jump for a time).

One thing I do want make clear. I have no vested interest in my current views, it is simply what I am left with when all other concepts are unable to hit me at any instinctual level (in other words, I do not invest myself in elaborate philosophical explanations for the big 'what' and 'why') It's a kind of Occam's Razor derived plateau for me in my life, the most straight forward interpretation/compromise until I am able to have any other sort of 'door of perception' open for me. I live with the contradiction of what I experienced as a 'born again Christian' and what I believed before/after as both being true! (which they really can't be) but as my Christian experience had absolutely no philosophical basis to how it arrived in my life, it's all I can do, believe in that experience as a first hand witness but continue to be unable to come to any philosophical acceptance of what it referenced.

I, as always, find your words to be wise and considered and know that you practice a life that I have only the highest regards for. My problem is I'm weird. All the normal social instincts others seem to have I just don't. I am not even practicing a life, I only survive at this point because of the family umbrella that protects me and the most basic drive/instinct of learning/making (creating) as an end in itself, 'making' seems to keep my head above water but unfortunately does not seem to have any real social currency.

An aside concerning my 'makings': I stopped making 'music' a long time ago, I perform experiments from curiosity and questioning, and my recordings are the aural diary of these questionings. Not exactly a foundation for anything, but as I said, it keeps my head above water and seems to be at the root of who I am. My 'makings' vibrate at my inner mental frequencies so provide mental, meditative function and relief but unfortunately their effect seems to stop at my personal borders so have no application in any of the trades or arts. But I have to do them to be happy.

So there you go. While I do have a problem with the 'An invisible man who lives in the sky and knows when you been naughty or nice, who loves you so much you will be gnashed in his teeth if you don't love him back' aspect of religion (which I in no way associate with what you believe or are writing about) in your underlying meaning (spirit?) we are in agreement.

Miss ya. luv ya.

C

Saturday, October 22, 2005 10:34 AM

Chris, again there is just so much here, just as you did a bit back, I'm going to wait till I have time to properly address your last post. I think we're a lot closer in many respects than you think...I'll write more as soon as I can. Life here intrudes. Marian does a Sat morn women's bible study, so I take little Brennan out for bagels and coffee (only one of which he actually eats), just to get two of the boys out of the house. See how time goes when I get back. In the meantime, a few points:

I think this little string of ours has some meaning beyond our "personal borders" as you mentioned. Do you mind if I post a sanitized and edited form of it on theeffect blog? Names will be withheld to protect the innocent, in this case, you. Let me know.

Also, ran across this article--I think you'll find it interesting. Actually sort of parallels your point in part about a non-personal unity/god, but then the premises don't always support our (one/only) hypotheses, do they? Anyway, check this out: http://www.commonground.ca/iss/0410159/cg159_geoffUniv.shtml .

Great talking to you, my friend. Moresoon.

D

Saturday, October 22, 2005 3:44 PM

In the spirit of the 'Reign Of Unity' and for the purpose of a general answer/summary, to all questions below...YES.

Seriously...

>I think this little string of ours has some meaning beyond our personal borders as you said. Do you mind if I post a sanitized and edited form of it on theeffect blog? Names will be withheld to protect the innocent, in this case, you. Let me know.<

I don't have a problem with my name being used, if it's to protect me, forget about it. My innocence went the way of the Dodo before the Dodo did. If it serves any purpose for you to keep it stealth, then fine ;-)
My name and opinions are always open to scrutiny, just Google 'Loopy C' sometime, even I am amazed

at getting most of the first page!

I am not even sure without rereading what might be useful, for my part I really wasn't making any kind of argument or point against your words, only expressing my general difficulty and trials with the 'big questions'. I went to bed after my last reply feeling quite uncomfortable that these expressions of my present (ever-present) state might ever be taken as any kind of endorsement of a particular view, as I said, this is just where I wound up, plain and simple. No real pride with how it's all turned out...survival and practicing mental/motor skills under the weight, or 'gravity' of ME is all. In the silence and the dark, it is where I arrive. In relation to everyone else, it is certainly very lonely...but it is completely true to myself, what more can you do in life but follow your inner 'divinings'? Here's hoping that one fine day, being true to myself AND being useful/social/happy become the same thing ;-)

C

Tuesday, October 25, 2005 9:47 AM

So sorry to have taken this long to get back. The weekend was a blur and yesterday was no better. But writing back to you has priority this day.

I completely understand all your disclaimers in this and your other post that you're not pushing any particular worldview/philosophy and just expressing what is. I guess I'm trying to get you to reconsider something you embraced once and through the hurts and disappointments of the intervening years have put aside. I did a sermon a while back where I quoted Chuang Tzu (got a few more raised eyebrows on my sheet for that...):

"You cannot speak of ocean to a wellfrog, the creature of a narrower sphere.
You cannot speak of ice to a summer insect, the creature of a single season."

To which I added:

"How can you speak of perfect love to a human being, the creature of a broken heart?"

The wounding that we all receive at the hands of life, the experience we have of imperfect love being practiced all around us and to us is a lethal combination in terms of making it extremely difficult for us to believe in something so completely other than our senses tell us is real. If it's too good to be true, it generally is. I had a mentor years ago, very influential in my life, a Catholic priest with very liberal views. When I started to object to a particular view of his based on my understanding of Scripture, he just held up his hand and stopped me saying, "All I can tell you is what I've become convinced of. You go become convinced of what you are convinced of." At the time, I thought it was a cop out. Now I realize it's the only answer we can give each other.

There is no rational way to God. God is not rational by definition because he occupies a dimension outside of the one in which our laws of rationality exist. Getting to God takes a radical break with rationality at the point where rationality runs out, trails off. The church has always tried to drive people to God's love through the fear of punishment. Do this or else. That's an impossibility. You can't get to love through fear. As Yoda might say, fear only leads to more fear and to separation and to suffering. Never to love. To get to love, you have to make that same sort of radical break with fear that you do with rationality to get to God/love/unity. Fear is rational. We have a lot to be afraid of. At some point you make a break and go become convinced of something you can't prove, but know is true. And then the kicker is, you can't transfer that knowing, that convincedness to anyone else. It's yours alone. No one can abdicate that responsibility of going and becoming convinced to anyone else. No one can do it for us. We all have ruby slippers on, but the witch can't tell us about them--we have to find out for ourselves. Enough illustrations there?

A few months ago, when I was still Associate Pastor at CMC, I was driving to church by myself one Sunday morning. It was one of those beautiful beyond words mornings with the sun just cresting the open

hills, and I was lost in the moment, driving along. Then this thought hit me. What if this really is all there is? This beautiful little planet we scurry around on in the black of space for awhile and then die. Nothing after that. What if? And here I've spent so much of my life dedicated to a different proposition. You don't think we all have doubts from time to time? I think anyone who doesn't, isn't thinking very deeply about life. But then my very next thought was, but Jesus believed, and assurance returned. Because I don't believe that Jesus came from nothing, or the love that he expressed is random. It's not a rational belief. We can rationally say that it's a biological imperative that drives us to mutually beneficial relationship that looks like love, but when, based on the hunch of my belief, I was willing to take that radical break with rationality, I got a glimpse of something that convinced me, as it has billions of others. And now, convinced, I realize that there is no better way to live, regardless of what may come next. And there's no going back.

I'm not too interested anymore in any particular worldviews, theologies, or philosophies, except in how they direct the conversation toward deeper things. Theology is simply our attempt to explain the unexplainable, and so is, again by definition, rife with error. No one has it right, no one can get it all right. The really important things can be apprehended by a child. That's the beauty of it. I now am convinced that until we're willing to lay down everything we think we know and begin to entertain things we can't explain or prove, we will always live in the wells of our own construction, like the wellfrog. Our seeing limited by the walls of what we can already explain and understand. Lifting ourselves up over the edge to get that glimpse of ocean takes the radical break.

I'd ask you to remember your time with Karen. She made you believe something, not by trying, but because of who she was and how you loved her for it. It wasn't rational, but you simply accepted it. In fact, it was the rational part, the fear part that chipped away at the relationship until it was gone. The hurt of that loss has never left you, but that should give some hope, too. Because the hurt, the loneliness is the reminder that there's something else that is possible, no? I'm convinced of a personal God of unity, not because anyone tried to convince me (though they did), but because the unity/love I have experienced with others led me to take a leap, a risk that allowed me to glimpse that ocean. You might think that it's all over for you in terms of love or relationship, but you're wrong, unless that's the reality you accept. Yes, you're weird, as you say, but we all are to some degree. And we all have idiosyncracies that inhibit our interactions with others. If yours are more severe than some, they are less so than others.

I've a friend in England who has Asperger Syndrome. Have you ever heard of that? It makes many of the simple social norms and interplay we take for granted very difficult or impossible to maintain. I don't know if you have some of that in you, you might look into it. My friend is a deep believer in God from a Jewish tradition, but he spends much of his time alone. No wife, roommates. He says it's lonely, but he does force himself to go to synagogue, to work, to the internet cafe. Some of the interaction is exhausting, but he tries. He's one of the wisest men I know, and though he's a few years younger than me, I've learned a great deal from him.

I don't know how your life will go, of course. I just don't want you to give up. If you're happy in your lifestyle, then there's nothing to fix, even if there is some loneliness or other flies in the ointment. It's not for me to say your life needs changing just because it's not mainstream or like mine. It only needs changing if you know it does, because you long for something else or something more. If so, then I'm trying to show you there's a way through whatever fear or pain is keeping you down or holding you back. Don't hide behind your intelligence or rational concepts. Be willing to risk all that stuff you won't miss anyway for something you might think has passed you by. Let Karen still guide you the way she once did. I remember you back then, buddy. There was a light in you that you probably thought (and probably still do) that she lit in you. But it really wasn't her. It was your love for her that lit you up. Find a reason to love again, and it will light you up again. It's the love and the unity we feel with our beloveds that light us up. It comes from within, just as Jesus said the Kingdom comes. It's possible any and every moment, Chris.

Thanks for all the kind words you said about me in the last post. I love you too. But my stone not yet smooth, either. You asked what I needed from you. In terms of music, if we can work together and create some great vibrations in the air, that would be wonderful at some point, but not for their own sake. Maybe through the work, we can help each other smooth out some of the remaining edges. That's all. Let's keep talking.

D

Tuesday, October 25, 2005 10:05 AM

No, thankfully I don't have any matching (Asperger) symptoms. Just an aversion to all things 'domestic' ;-)

C

Tuesday, October 25, 2005 10:25 AM

That was fast, must've caught you right at the box. Hope there's more coming in response to the tome I sent. I'm finding the most useful thing about these kinds of conversations is just to clear the decks for jumping overboard. Glad to hear there's no Asperger in your future...

D