

## RELIGION - IMAGE AND ACTUALITY

"In the Church, you know, there is a great heightening of every moment of experience, since every moment is played against a supernatural backdrop. Nothing can be humdrum in this scheme. Every least act of the mind has infinite significance", stated Marshall McLuhan, communications theorist, University of Toronto.

In our culture we make clear distinctions between "history" and "story". The word "myth" has tended to become attached only to the latter, and hence to mean "not really true." Therefore, to some a great deal of biblical and religious teaching is seen as something untrue and illusory.

Theologians and academics don't use mythology this way. Mythology appropriates symbolic language to point beyond itself to truth apprehensible in faith. It is a unique way of communicating what is created and perceived by the imagination.

Myths are what advertising people call "images". They deal with reality that transcends the ordinary reason and observation. They always present themselves as authoritative, the statement of truth for which no "proof" is needed and none ever given.

The original Greek term "mythos" meant a decisive, final pronouncement. Myths need not argue their own validity; they must be taken as given.

Religious myths are usually accounts of superhuman beings and extraordinary events in a time altogether different from that of ordinary human experience.

Myth is what is taken for granted when thought begins. The assumption that humankind's observations can discern truth is the mythology of science.

At its best mythology answers a deep and lasting human need by embodying truth that can be expressed in no other way. Without myth, in fact, no culture can satisfactorily define itself and survive.

The Greeks as well recognized another kind of truth. Besides

mythos there was "logos", which meant factual, provable, arguable truth, the kind we encounter in everyday, common sense life.

In the New Testament "logos" meant "word" and the thought or reason which is expressed in words.

Greek philosophers believing that the universe is essentially rational, used the term "logos" to denote the rational principle by which it is sustained.

Our belief in Canada as a nation is mythos. Our belief that modern Canada, a country with its own government, began July 1st, 1867, is logos.

Christianity is both mythos and logos as well. It speaks of the spiritual action in creation and how life crosses over from mythos to logos. This gives the Christian the advantage of living in two worlds at

(Christian perspective, Cont.)

once. The Christian inhabits the timeless world of myths, in which ancient truth informs and enriches succeeding generations, and also the practical, day-by-day world of logos, where they must wage wars within and without, and seek the meaning and purpose for their lives.

It is wisdom to consider well the urging of Deuteronomy 30:19, "...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendents may live".

STOP TELLING GOD WHAT TO DO

The scientist-philosopher, J. Bronowski, in his book, "The Ascent of Man", (P. 256), says it is "important to talk of the ascent of man in the presence of two men, Newton and Einstein, who strode like gods. Of the two, Newton is the Old Testament god; it is Einstein who is the New Testament figure. He was full of humanity, pity, a sense of enormous sympathy. His vision of nature herself was that of a human being in the presence of something god-like, and that is what he always said about nature. He was fond of talking about God: 'God does not play at dice,' 'God is not malicious'.

Finally a fellow scientist, Niels Bohr, one day said to him, 'Stop telling God what to do'.

But that is not quite fair. Einstein was a man who could ask immensely simple questions. And what his life showed, and his work, is that when the answers are simple too, then you hear God

thinking."

LEARNING TO COUNT

Years change swiftly now and are less tractable.

The world still spins to shadowbox with cares.

Love alone, they say, sustains us - but love drifts in all directions, an officious wind taking the leaves of trees from place to place.

Out of my chest, out of my hand one poem tumbles and it is doubtful that any wonders will. Only half my fear and doubts have been realized yet the other half cling to my skin like leeches. I cover my age with rags and inquiries.

As a child I counted animals, sometimes stars; in my teens, only the hours and the minutes; in my twenties, days and weeks. Next it was months and years. Now I'm looking at decades and centuries.

Shall I learn to count eternities?

(Written by John Asfour in "One Fish From The Rooftop", published by Cormorant Books).

"The universe is the primary revelation of the divine, the primary scripture, the primary focus of divine-human communion."

- Thomas Berry

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH DEATH

Just like adults, children need to grieve and should not be screened from the full reality of the meaning of death. As the American poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Sorrow makes us all children again."

Earl Grollman, specialist on grief states: "We shouldn't let children sidestep death's profound thud of finality through euphemisms, fantasy or secrecy. Our present-day culture tends to treat death like a bad word, especially with kids."

Grollman, a retired rabbi, has written 24 books on grieving. He says, "Grief is not a disease. It's as natural as eating. It's nature's way of healing a broken heart." He thinks we should take the word "death" off the taboo list rather than trying to hide it with terms such as, "passed on", "passed away", "went away", "departed".

Children need to grieve, however, in their own way, Grollman says. Whether we like it or not, children are constantly exposed to death. Pets, friends and relatives die, and death of all sorts saturates television news, cartoons and entertainment.

Preschoolers tend to think death is reversible, Gollman says. Children aged 5 to 9 years understand death can happen to others, but not to themselves. They often personify death in the form of a person, spirit or bogey man.

Children aged 10 and older often strongly fear death.

Adults shouldn't deny that children feel less strongly when death comes. No matter what stage they're at, all children should be gently but repeatedly told death is not temporary, Gollman says. Children should be allowed to see adults grieve, whether they cry or

feel sad, morose or troubled.

Children should be encouraged to attend funerals, Grollman adds.

In grief, Grollman recommends, adults should share only honest religious convictions with the children. Children (and most everyone) have built in radar that enables them to quickly detect inconsistency or deception.

Gollman finds it dangerous when an adult tries to console a child in pain with a cliché such as, "We can't be selfish; God was lonely and wanted daddy in heaven."

Heaven is a difficult concept for some children, Gollman says.

Gollman cautions also against people saying "It's God's will".

Children can be angry at God when someone dies. Such feelings should not be shut down and condemned.

One thing Gollman finds helpful is connecting death to the cycles of nature. He suggests reminding children how trees, plants and animals, are born, grow and die. That's just the way it is.

Gollman stresses, listen to children - to their anger, guilt and sadness. When words fail, touch. "Attitude can be more important than words", Gollman points out. Physical demonstrations of love and support are the greatest gifts", he says.

EVERYTHING HAS ITS TIME

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- a time to be born, and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- a time to kill, and a time to heal;
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- a time to weep, and a time to

(Seasons, cont'd)

- laugh;
- a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
- a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- a time to seek, and a time to lose;
- a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
- a time to tear, and a time to sew;
- a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- a time to love, and a time to hate;
- a time for war, and a time for peace.

from Ecclesiastes, the Bible, chapter 3.

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RE-INVENTING THE CONGREGATION

Our Canadian society, along with much of the world, is experiencing a paradigm shift in the patterns of organizations and their management. Most churches are involved in varying degrees today in attempting to re-invent their programmes and structures.

George Parsons of the Alban Institute, Washington, D.C., visits many church groups and tells them how organizations have a life cycle that from time to time must be renewed or reactivated.

He points out that an organization begins with a birth, must survive infancy, gains strength, enthusiasm and energy in its adolescent stage, and in time reaches its prime. Its focus is now upon serving.

As the organization matures its administration becomes strongly co-ordinated. The organization likely becomes inclusive, aristocratic, and bogged down by bureaucracy.

The next step is the death of the organization, unless it changes its ways and outlook. Actually, at this stage the organization usually suffers chaos and confusion. This is seen in the churches today. Many cannot understand what is happening to them.

The secret is that amidst the chaos a new birth must be activated or death will overtake the organization. The new birth will be reliant upon the post-modern ways of communicating information and sharing relationships. The new techniques are quite different from the old.

The emerging post-modern denomination works through coalitions and networks, assumes a skilled constituency, and responds to a diverse membership.

The call to reform must recognize also that our problem is theological at heart. Dr. Paul Tillick, theologian, once explained: "A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statements of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be perceived."

This can be an exciting time for Christianity. As Albert Schweitzer declared: "What has been passing for Christianity during these 19 centuries is merely a beginning, full of weaknesses and mistakes, not a full-grown Christianity springing from the spirit of Jesus."