

The World Network of Religious Futurists



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Editorial

As we enter the New Year, and the third since I took over as Editor of Global Visions, I would like to begin by wishing all our readers a happy and prosperous New Year. A lot has been happening in the WNRF recently, so I have slightly modified the format to take account of this. I hope to return to our normal format for the next issue, which, due to increasing pressures from my other duties, will be my last. I hope to have an interesting debate ready for next time.

As I have already mentioned, instead of the usual format of a series of articles, this issue contains a substantial news section. I might be facetious and describe this section

as a combination of Remembrance of Things Past and The Shape of Things to Come (although at substantially shorter length!). The main articles come from Paul Meyers, on Church and Youth in the Future, Jay Gary, on the millennium, and James Wellesley-Wesley, who asks some pertinent questions about the mission of the WNRF Think-Tank. In connection with this, I also include a reprint of Richard Kirby's 1984 story "Chaplain to the Stars".

Enjoy the Magazine.

Gordon Arthur

Christ and Youth in the Future: The Postmoderns and What They Mean to Us.

by Paul Meyers

In a previous article, I closed with a question concerning the Youth in our societies and how the Church can meet them. The question was pointed at our church programming, asking, "Is what we do in the programming of the church enough to meet the deep, inner spiritual needs of this generation?" For a refresher, I am referring to the generation called the BABY BUSTERS, GENERATION X, the 13ERS, the POST-MODERNS, and the LOST GENERATION. All of the above are titles for the generation born 1964-1980. They are considered a "messy" group by

many of the resources that I have been reading. Like their parents, the BABY BOOMERS, they are skeptical of authority. Unlike their parents, they have little hope for the future, and they feel lied to and unwanted. For example, they are made to live with their parent's "mistakes" from the SEXUAL REVOLUTION, like AIDS and a 48% divorce rate.

I am attracted to the title POSTMODERNS for this generation, (of which I am a part) because of the Spiritual and Futuristic Implications the title imposes. As the first full generation of the now called POST MODERN ERA, the POSTMODERNS have been born in the age of innovative technology. They have evolved with a constant update of systems and structures (a quasi-fast-food technology that assumes instant gratification) and if they are to have a positive future, they believe it won't be handed to them, but instead they will have to make it themselves. They work to live, as opposed to their parents who lived to work.

Spiritually, if they believe that God exists, then they believe that they can create that God themselves through a combination of spiritual sources and references, with an added plethora of spiritual experiences. It is not uncommon to see a member of this generation who is searching spiritually to be consulting the Bible, a book on Zen, and a New Age

resource all at the same time. In my opinion, this begs the futuristic question: Does Christianity have a chance with them? Is there room among this pluralistic generation for a faith that holds to an Absolute Truth like Christianity holds (I do not wish to answer that question, but I do invite readers to a dialogue on this topic)?

If we, who are the Modern established Church, are even willing to chance bringing any kind of a Hope-filled Gospel to this generation, I believe that our avenue must be RELATIONAL. That is, we must WANT, and even CRAVE to be in relationship with them... to step out and meet them in their context and begin to relate to them in their post-modernism. (A tough and scary place for the established Christian Church!) Most importantly, we must want to go get them in response to an EMOTIONAL compelling and not an INTELLECTUAL compelling. That is, we must want them with us because that's what the Love of God is all about, and not because our church membership numbers are dwindling. Intentionality and Accountability are big with this group, and they require us to earn their trust before they will listen.

Be encouraged, there are more with us than against us (1 Kings 18: 1-38)!

Author's note: Most of the information for this article has been compiled through a series of readings. Even though I echo the feelings and thoughts personally, I take no credit for originating these thoughts. I

invite comments and dialogue via the W NRF Think Tank.

Bimillennial Bytes

by Jay Gary

“Scanning the millennium for religious futurists”

United Religions Press For Millennial Launch

Since the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations charter in 1993, a San Francisco group, led by Anglican Bishop William Swing, has been working to establish a United Religions (UR), a permanent gathering place where representatives from the world's religions might engage in on-going dialogue and cooperative action to resolve the economic, environmental and social crises that “confront us at the dawn of the new millennium.”

Cooperation over the past three years from interfaith leaders has encouraged UR Initiative leaders to move their proposed Charter signing up from the year 2005 to June 26, 2000. Organizers hope the creation of UR will be happen while a “walking pilgrimage for peace among religions takes place in villages, towns, and cities throughout the world.”

This century has witnessed at least a dozen proposals for a United Religions body surface, only later to recede into obscurity. The most recent 1993 proposal was considered by the Chicago based “World Parliament of Religions” but failed to gain the financial support it needed move forward.

Some theologians, including W NRF's Richard Kirby, feel any proposal for a UR body must not just aim at “making a better world” but also be self-critical and aim at “making a better religion.” While embracing social and moral goals, Kirby feels any future UR body should see its primary purpose as “advancing the knowledge of God” through religious research. Ironically, this theological dimension has been absent from recent 20th century United Religion proposals.

Executive director of the UR Initiative in San Francisco, the Rev. Charles Gibbs, admits that the United Religions proposal is still in a consensus-building process. Gibbs plans to move the UR charter-writing process forward through a 200-person global consultation in June of 1997.

Summit Looks to Holy Land 2000™

Some 25 leaders from around the U.S. in the area of trade, travel and culture gathered in Chicago on September 18-19th to consider how the church in the Holy Land might be empowered to welcome some 10 million pilgrims to the land of Christ's birth.

An uncertain peace process in Israel, coupled with economic pressures, has recently threatened to derail millennial preparations in Bethlehem. The cancellation of millennial celebrations in the very place where 2,000 years ago angels sang, “Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men” could leave the bimillennium adrift without a historic anchor. The Chicago

summit, convened by the Catlin Foundation, seeks to address these problems and turn the millennial tide.

“Our focus during this summit was to look at how preparations for Christ’s 2,000th anniversary in the Middle East can strengthen human rights, religious freedom and prospects for peace,” stated Robin Wainwright, of The Magi Project. Wainwright’s own project intends to reenact the “Journey of the Magi” during the fall of 1998 to kick off a commemorative “Holy Land 2000™” season from 1999 to 2001.

At the summit, the announcement of the opening of a U.S. support office for Holy Land 2000™ was made. This office in Colorado will support this coming season in Israel/Palestine as a private ministry of trade and tourism by eliciting corporate, sister city and church participation.

Jubilee 2000:

“Proclaim Liberty to All Peoples” Here is a quality web site which covers how the Jubilee dream of debt remission and economic recovery is being picked up by various economic and religious groups in reference to the year 2000. Includes graphics, sound files and primary documents of various Jubilee campaigns.

Center for Millennial Studies:

“What past turning points tell us about today.” An academic web site at Boston University which contains links to religious millennial sites, archives, events and commentary

on historic millennial turning points in western culture.

WNRF News

1997 Resident Scholar in Civic Communication

Seattle Research Center, World Network of Religious Futurists;

Research Associate, Stuart C. Dodd Chair in Social Innovations, Forum Foundation.

Work Description

by John Perkins

To solve our collective problems - and build a compassionate, sharing global community - will require methods of collective communication on a large scale. Can civic communication be improved enough to be up to this monumental task? Emerging processes and methods for large group discussions answer with a tentative “yes.” Some examples of these methods include: deep democracy and worldwork processes developed by Arnold Mindell; Open Space Technology developed by Harrison Owen; the Delphi Technique developed by the Rand Corporation; Fast Forum(R) communication technologies developed by Richard Spady and the Forum Foundation; the Future Search Conferences promoted by Marvin Weisbord; The National Issues Forums sponsored by the Kettering Foundation; The Collaborator’s Notebook compiled by Jan Ballard; The Natural Step developed by Karl-Henrik

Robert; groupware computer programs; and the Internet.

My research will have three objectives:

- * deepening my understanding of civic communication;
- * exploring, through the resources of the research center, the theological, religious, and spiritual theories which underlie modern methods for large group communication; and
- * delving into the pioneering social innovation theories of Stuart C. Dodd.

The aim of my research will be the articulation of methods for action scholarship - that is, unraveling the synergistic implications of combining the traditions of scholarship with those of civic activism. I will meet with Richard Kirby, Director of the Seattle Research Center, and Richard Spady, President of the Forum Foundation, a minimum of four times during the year to discuss research findings.

I am a Ph.D. candidate in Organizational Change. I am researching conference and discussion methods which overcome space and time constraints. My other research interests include decision making, deliberative democracy, and organizational change.

WNRF Think-Tank

Announcing... the launch herewith of the WNRF Electronic Think Tank. This was created in theory at the 1996 WFS General Assembly during our business/open meetings.

I am not going to get too constitutional about it, but obviously we should encourage

one another's best inspirations leading to the best actions from the best of our spiritual traditions. We need to be more than the sum of our separate parts; or, as Parker Rossman would say, to develop Collective Intelligence - in this case, collective (spiritual) inspiration.

As we develop this "ministry" we will add members, consulting participants and projects. Our starting point, however, is the important topic of religion and the philosophy of science/technology. To launch our discussion, I am happy to report that I have secured the agreement of Reverend David Eiler to begin our electronic discussion with a letter from him to stimulate our thoughts. Let it encourage us to fashion together a spiritual philosophy of science and technology.

More generally, please, everybody, let us share with one another our thoughts and feelings on the following categories of "Think-Tank" life:

1. E-mail addresses to be added to our number.
2. Your response to the points raised in David's letter.'
3. Your ideas on boosting our Collective Intelligence.
4. A topic you would like us to discuss.
5. Your thoughts on Think-Tank method.

We are on our way!
Thanks, everybody,

Richard

Date: Fri, Aug 30, 1996 6:05 PM EDT

From: DavidE3593

Subject: Re.: Project

To: DrRSKirby

Dear Richard,

Hope your summer has been going well. I also hope you received my telephone message thanking you for all at the Conference in DC in July. As I stated, I now understand that Chaos as a study does not arise out of quantum physics.

I had a chance to think through the relationship between the two as I was driving home. So I was in error. However, I sort of wonder if chaos theory could not be used in studying some aspects of quantum theory. Haven't thought any more about that.

I am sorry to have missed saying good bye to you. However, I was rather anxious to get on my way and get home. And, I found, because of construction, etc., it was a good thing I did.

I am at present just starting to read a book by Brian Appleyard, a columnist on Science and Philosophy for the Sunday Times (London), entitled Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man. His central thesis is that science has done humankind "appalling spiritual damage". He seems to be arguing for a theocratic kind of society, or at least one in which the differences between religions are not reduced to their lowest common denominator, where tolerance of other religious traditions is not encouraged. He is open about his biases so the book is not troublesome in

its point of view for me, at least in the reading of it. I do think, however, he needs to do some careful study of the statement of Jesus and St. Paul about the relationship between Christian life and belief and the State. Also, I think he needs to study some the pre-Constantine Christian writers on this subject. I feel that he has opted for only two alternatives - toleration and intolerance. I believe there are more, but have not yet taken the time to think through what other options there may be. He also uses science and technology interchangeably. As you know I take issue with that. I feel that theology is related to science and ethics is related to technology. And that for purposes of study and analysis, the two need to be kept separate. I also realize that the boundary between science and technology is fuzzy. But I have to go with Ian Barbour for the basic distinction.

Well, anyway, I have not forgotten the project you suggested I do. I am having a need to read and let what I am reading, as well as my own reflecting, to go subconscious and ferment for a while, at least until I come up with a controlling paradigm by which to the formal work of the project.

I know you will be in the somewhat near future be going to India. May God go with you that your travels be safe and your time spent resulting in much more than you hoped for. Please greet those who will be there that I met at DC for me.

Take care and shalom,
Dave Eiler

Continuing the same line of thought, some news about recent and forthcoming events.

India

A WNRf conference took place in India in September, and on Oct 1. Rev. Ishdenanda Senapati reports that it was a great success. He is planning to translate Richard Kirby's "Temples of Tomorrow" into Hindi and maybe other languages. Richard was unfortunately unable to be present, but sent the following fax to the participants:

Friday, 27 September 1996

Dear Rev. I. N. Senapati and WNRf Conference participants,

I send my greetings and regrets. Without a visa, I have been powerless to enter the country and fulfill my speaker's obligations.

This is my message to the Conference: Let us build the Temples of Tomorrow starting today! In my book Temples of Tomorrow, I have given a detailed blueprint for these buildings and their people and their tasks. I look to the Rev. I. N. Senapati to carry forward this mission and to train young people in it. I ask the people at this Conference to translate this book into local languages for the many parts of India, and to carry its message to spiritual leaders so that these leaders can experience the future of religion as a living reality. Our work together is to make future civilization a truly spiritual expression of culture.

To meet the changes made by science and technology, we need to listen to the Divine

Spirit and discover new forms of spirituality and worship. I ask you all to make this Conference a new beginning for Indian religions for the future. I invite you all to grow as thinkers and experimenters, and to make the science of religion a subject where creative genius attracts the best ideas and the best people. Please record your proceeding in such a way that we can publish them. Please ask local artists to begin drawing the to carry forward this mission and to train young people in it.

I ask the people at this Conference to translate this book into local languages for the many parts of India, and to carry its message to spiritual leaders so that these leaders can experience the future of religion as a living reality. Our work together is to make future civilization a truly spiritual expression of culture. To meet the changes made by science and technology, we need to listen to the Divine Spirit and discover new forms of spirituality and worship. I ask you all to make this Conference a new beginning for Indian religions for the future. I invite you all to grow as thinkers and experimenters, and to make the science of religion a subject where creative genius attracts the best ideas and the best people. Please record your proceeding in such a way that we can publish them. Please ask local artists to begin drawing the Temples of Tomorrow immediately.

Your brother always,

Rev. Dr. Richard S. Kirby

1997 Events

In 1997, WNRf meetings will take place in Oklahoma and in London; Feb and May respectively. We are studying the future of religion in the light of minority wisdom traditions.

WNRf events at WFS Assembly

The WNRf will be organizing three sessions at the annual assembly of the World Future Society in San Francisco in June, one on Friday night, July 18, from 6:30 until 7:30 pm, and a second on Saturday morning, the 19th, from 7:30 until 8:30 am. Both will be Open Business Sessions, to which all are welcome. There will be a Future of Religion special event, on Thursday night after the opening plenary session, from 9:00-11:00 pm. Further details to follow.

WNRf COUNCIL FORMATION

In recent months, in an issue of Global Visions and at the World Future Society Open Business Meetings in Washington, D.C. in 1996 it was announced that a WNRf Council would shortly be formed. This is long overdue after eight years of our existence, and fifteen of the RFN movement in the USA and Canada.

I now announce the proposed composition and membership of the Council in accordance with our exposition of the subject.

Council Members as National Director-Officers: Ken Bedell (US), Simon Bell (Eurasia), Moshe Dror (Israel), Aziz Nasir (Pakistan), Ishde-

nanda Senapati (India), Jorg-Michael Thurm (Germany).

Council Members as Editors: Gordon Arthur; Bill Heins [Emeritus].

Council Members as Earl Award Winners: Barbara Marx Hubbard, Parker Rossman, Dick Spady, Ed Wenk.

Council Members as Project Officers: Paul Meyers and Mary Anne Moorman (Youth); James Wellesley-Wesley [Elder Wisdom]; Doug James (Health Issues).

Yours truly will serve as chair for the time being, though with a view to moving towards a rotating chairpersonship.

The Electronic Mission of the WNRF - A Discussion Starter

by James Wellesley-Wesley

This is a start on trying to focus in on the "mission" of the WNRF think-tank. As Richard expresses it, the need is:

- to develop collective spiritual inspiration and intelligence (to become midwives of new knowledge/intuition of things of the Spirit);
- to support innovative thinking about religiosity of all kinds in the future (seen as the potential development of a prophetic on-line school/college of the future);
- taking Religion and the philosophy of science/technology as a starting point.

The following questions and thoughts occur to me in connection with the above

guidelines and from the contributions already offered by others:

- How does one open up to, access and become a channel for the expression of Spirit (as distinct from spirits)? While learning (scholarship), as I understand it, requires the progressive accumulation and ordering of knowledge from all relevant sources, and wisdom is more a matter of the distillation of experience, the experience of Divine Reality requires the purification of the senses and sensitivities from all superficialities, foreclosures, distortions, contaminations, etc. - a clearing of the receptivity of the faculties to the possibility of inspiration, enlightenment, direct perception.

Prior to this we see as through a glass darkly, while to the degree we approximate to such a state of receptivity we may come to see face to face, one to one, Deo Gratias. As I see it, these processes are not interchangeable but complementary to wholeness (holiness). They may also be conflicting, unfortunately, requiring a certain sequence in their development (Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven!). The requisite disciplines for such development, however, are long-established - and long-neglected! For instance, to the extent that learning precedes experience (as is often the case in these times), then at some stage a process of unlearning has to be introduced in order to open up the way for direct perception to occur. This often comes about as a consequence of the recognition and accep-

tance of the ultimate inadequacy of mentation processes and is a characteristic experience of those engaged in scientific research at the frontiers of knowledge, as well as being deliberately engaged in by spiritual disciplines worldwide. (I suggest that it is a basic feature of "initiation" processes - sine qua non).

- I see it to be necessary to come to recognise the different dimensions of Reality, and the different states of Mind appropriate to each. I find the concept of dimensions to be more integrative than that of levels, since dimensions intersect, interpenetrate and interact, whereas levels tend to separate (unless connected by a spine). We have the difficult task of finding ourselves extended through, and having to coexist in, these different aspects of Reality simultaneously, by developing 3-D Mind (i.e. "spherical", as distinct from linear or cyclical Mind). This bears upon the difference between spiritual, scientific and psychic investigation (and leads me to disagree with the statement that "science has done humankind appalling spiritual damage", for instance. It could equally well be said that entrancement by the psychic is causing spiritual damage - but, as I see it, nothing can harm the Spirit as such, and once the Spirit has been directly experienced both the psychic and the scientific will come to be seen in the context of the whole - in contrast to being confused with the whole).

- "The world does not change; people's perception changes". To me this is a fundamental observation. I believe the quantum physicists would say that we live in an observer-conditioned universe (even, observer-created) and it has long been a source of wonder to me that, this being so, the world is as coherent as it seems - but of course this too depends on one's state of mind!).

- How can world views be changed for the better (or worse)? Is it not a matter of changing the image in the mind's eye. This is surely the understanding of advertisers, in relation to the superficial affairs of this world, and of propagandists (spin doctors) in their efforts to mould collective political perception. Essentially (spiritually) does not the experience of direct perception of Reality result in the spontaneous conversion of the sense of identity, value, meaning and purpose (mission)? Only if the psychological health of the person concerned is sound enough - if not, such experience leads to inflation of the egoic identity and illusions of omnipotence (invariably with destructive consequences) or to a blowing of the fuses.

- "Cheering for the other side" - surely any Religion that claims to be universally valid must be inclusive?

- "Lack of moral vision for steering..." - So it's not just a matter of consciousness but also of conscience (he/she who, in later years, maintains

the infant heart - according to Mencius!).

- Finally, for now, on the question of "prophecy" - not only of the future, but of the ever-present Divine Reality. Show us the way to come home to your Eternal Presence, O Lord. For if God is not experienced as present, who is it that is absent? Is this not a matter of each one coming to our true Self in the Christ? And is not this the heart of matter that, among us, we need to come to reveal anew?

"Chaplain to the Stars"

by Richard Kirby

This is a work of fiction. Characters are fictional and are not intended to resemble any actual persons living or deceased. This story first appeared in Ministry Development Journal (US) in their Fall 1984 issue. It was, therefore, written before the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

Chaplain JoAnne Meister emerged shaken from her meditation on the Earth. She knew only one thing for sure: she was going so resign her position as Chaplain to the Lunar Scientific Research Base. It was a decision that was astonishing, even to herself, and the fear of death was near at hand; yet the fear of the Lord was still stronger.

When she had first taken up her position in 1992, it had seemed as if all her dreams had been fulfilled. Her career had been like a vector that had

pointed in the inevitable direction of this position - first chaplain in outer space, first woman chaplain on the staff of the reorganized NASA. Her childhood, as oldest child of a Lutheran pastor who had previously been an astrophysicist, and a mother who had made a career for herself in molecular biology, had been filled with a fascination for spiritual and scientific things. Even when her parents had adopted three other children, and then had two more of their own, she had been accepted by her five siblings as the kind of person who would end up in outer space - with a clerical collar.

JoAnne's early interest in plants and flowers had led her to become a gifted amateur botanist and, later, geologist. She had never, however, lost her faith in God, perhaps because of the sunny faith and spirituality of her father. At college she had pursued the rather trendy double major in science/spirituality, specializing in exobiology - determined to disprove the old adage that it was a science without a subject matter - on the scientific side and in Space Age Mysticism on the spiritual side.

JoAnne's thoughts lifted from her gloomy reflections for a moment, and she recollected the very feel of the book she had once owned, Rudolf Steiner's *Eleven European Mystics*. That remarkable author had helped her to understand how scientific research and the life of prayer were not essentially different.

One of the reasons that JoAnne had risen so effortlessly through the ranks to her

present appointment was her uncomplicated patriotism. She loved America, she believed in it, and was wholeheartedly committed to the idea of an American mission in the world. She had felt that to be pastor to the American astronauts and lunar scientists was the most wonderful contribution imaginable to the spirit of America, and its mission in God's scheme of things. In fact, she had taken a leadership position in advising NASA on principles of American pastoral theology suited to outer space. Again it was a personality characteristic which was traceable to her parents' (especially her father's) enthusiasm for American history. They had raised her and all the children with a rich diet of American history; the great American heroes had been to her childhood what the saints of the Roman Catholic Church were in many Catholic Christian Households. Consequently, JoAnne had been free from doubts or complications of thought; she had been assessed by the NASA psychologists as the ideal chaplain-astronaut. She believed in God and America, she was an optimist, she got on well with people, and her whole life had been a preparation for her present position.

Until the encounter with... with.... Until her evening meditation on the rising Earth had shattered her ego adaptation and her innocent understanding of America's mission to the stars.

JoAnne's thoughts shifted again momentarily, and she recalled the excitement which

she had felt, which so many people had felt when America had taken the initiative in the astounding merger of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in 1987. Christians all over the world had felt that it was a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit which had led to the astonishing meeting between the Pope and the entire executive staff of the World Council of Churches - out of which had come the World Catholic Church.

No one had ever believed it was possible, but the Pope had, incredibly, declared that the threat of nuclear war was so great that there could be no more delays in the convergence of the Christian Churches. Convening an emergency session of the Vatican Council, the Pope had drawn together the best minds of the Christian world in the epoch-making Vatican III. Ruling it with an iron hand, so typical of his strong leadership, the Supreme Pontiff had set for the Council the tasks of reforming the Catholic Church root and branch. He had insisted that the subject matter of the Council was not to be the reformation of church doctrine as such, nor of the institutional structure of the Church. Rather, the Holy Father had set before his assembly of minds the fivefold challenge of finding alternatives to war and peace as traditionally conceived, of controlling the technology before it controlled the human race, of building a world civilization governed by the people of the earth (Polis Earth), of governing the redess-

ign of human nature with the spiritual gifts of humanity, and ultimately of launching the perfected species of humanity in its career among the stars.

Vatican III had been an international sensation, for the Holy Father - overruling his cardinals and his closest personal advisors - had included science fiction writers, authors of books on the Aquarian Age, astronomers and astronauts, and even poets as part of the deliberative team. Vatican III had been a Christian think tank on the largest scale imaginable at that time. From its deliberations had emerged several important steps.

Most important had been the formation of the World Catholic Church. The Holy Father had pointed out, in his wisdom, in his role as "First Theologian" of humanity, that the phrase "Roman" Catholic Church had become a hindrance to Christian unity, and with that a hindrance to world peace. Moreover, it was a contradiction in terms. For the sake of the Gospel, the "Roman" Church must die to an old way of being, and be reborn as the World Catholic Church - merging with the World Council of Churches. Perhaps because of the extraordinarily imaginative leadership, and the heroic vision and determination of the pope, the executive staff of the World Council of Churches had voted that the World Catholic Church should continue - or should begin - under the spiritual leadership of the Pope, who would remain "Bishop of Rome" but would primarily function as "First

Statesman” of the World Catholic Church. A team of theologians from around the world, with an especially strong contingent, surprisingly enough, from the stuffy old Church of England and its aristocratic American counterpart the Episcopal Church, had rapidly translated these decisions into the jargon of philosophical, symbolical and applied theology, creating in fact a whole new systematic theology geared to the needs of the World Catholic Church. Detractors of this movement had of course condemned these theologians as mere rationalizers, although they insisted that they were creating a system of thought which was no rationalization but a legitimate clothing of the contemporary faith.

The most surprising feature of Vatican III had been its location. JoAnne had been so proud that it had taken place on American soil. The Pope had explained that Philadelphia had been chosen in order that the spirit of independence which had been there proclaimed might now be offered to the entire world. The Holy Father also had explained that the Incarnation of Christ had been, in effect, a Declaration of Independence for the entire human species - indeed for the whole created order. Accordingly, it was fitting that the Third Vatican Council should not literally be at the Vatican but at the site of the American Declaration of Independence.

Warmed by this endorsement of its mission in the world, America had taken a heroic leadership role in founding seminaries for the

World Catholic Church, in training teachers and theologians, and in building a new pastoral theology which would suit the re-formed Church. And it was to the Phoenix World Catholic Church in America Theological Seminary that JoAnne had gone after her Ph.D. in geology. Her longstanding amateur association with NASA had enabled her to win a NASA scholarship for her seminary years, and she had left the seminary a NASA employee. Shortly thereafter she had been ordained pastor by the courageous American bishop who had given up his denominational role in order to serve the World Catholic Church. And then it was time to go for final training at NASA, ready for transportation to the moon. As an expert in Terran geology, she was well able - as a good pastor should be - to understand the concerns of the work of her small flock of Selenite geologists. And she was able to bring a suitably American flavor to her pastoral care, even though she was proud to be a pastor in the World Catholic Church.

JoAnne brushed back from her forehead her striking red hair. She was an attractive young woman, at 32 years old, in the prime of adulthood, the perfect astronaut - her body firm, neither slim nor chunky but (as a friend joked) reflecting her “yeoman ancestry” from Europe centuries previously. At 5 feet 7 inches, compactly built, with regular, highly American features, she had just the right kind of body, and just the right kind of ap-

pearance for her position. She was in fact, a public-relations dream from NASA’s viewpoint - the all-American girl, not too original in her thinking, and thoroughly loyal to God and country.

Until her evening meditation that day.

JoAnne had been alone, preparing herself for her sermon the following Sunday. She had thought up a wonderful sermon for her flock. Meditating on the Beatitudes, and reading Jesus’s words concerning the lilies of the field, she had been inspired with a vision of the Moon as a garden for humanity - almost a new Eden. The molecular biologists would collaborate with the botanists, and within the artificial atmosphere of the Lunar Research Colony there would grow flowers of unimaginable splendor. God’s own Spirit would govern the design and growth principles. It was to be a sunny sermon for the sunniest time of her life. For she had never felt so fulfilled: it seemed that her whole life had been but a preparation for her work as pastor to the American astronomical lunar scientists.

Until she had really opened her heart to God in prayer that evening, watching the whole Earth, rising into the horizon of her meditation.

JoAnne had been in the little chapel of the Lunar Research Unit, the chapel which had been so graciously designed to face Earthwards, and she had been gazing out of the windows of the chapel, watching the Earth rise. It was then that the shattering encounter had taken place.

With a mingled feeling of awe, terror, and littleness, she had watched aghast as a strange being had crossed the threshold of her vision and gazed at her across the divide of the artificial windows of the chapel.

Was it an angel - or an extra-terrestrial alien? Strive as she might, JoAnne could not seem to find the words to describe it. It was a presence, that was the best way of describing it to herself. And it was numinous. There was a sense of holy dread which she felt as she recalled its presence. She wanted to fall on her knees again at the mere recollection of its presence. What was that old hymn, in the days before they had a world hymnal? "As the Light of Light descendeth, from the realms of endless day"? JoAnne shivered. That hymn had described Jesus of course, in the context of the Lord's Supper; and she certainly had not been witness to an appearance of the Risen One.

Yet she had seen something - or had she?

Had it merely been a kind of lunar mystical experience? She searched her mind for vague recollections of William James' Varieties of Religious Experience, but she could not remember much of it, except a chapter on mysticism. But she couldn't remember much about what he had said in connection with mystical experience. What was it he had said - "mystical experience was brief, persuasive, life-changing, cognitively rich"?

But she had not merely had a private experience; she knew

she had had an encounter. And she knew her life was changed.

The alien-angel had not spoken in audible words; it had merely contemplated her. And yet, in that indescribable encounter communication had truly taken place. Had it been imaginary? To the contrary, it was the most real experience of her life - she knew that much already. But would the alien-angel have been visible to others had they been present? JoAnne had no way of knowing. She knew that when she returned to the chaplain's office in another part of the building, she could try to telephone Sister Mary-Margaret, a former nun who had been a contemplative for thirty years, and was vastly wise in spiritual discernment. But JoAnne knew that such a conversation would be monitored by the staff of NASA, to say nothing of the TV audience, and heaven knew what groups of teenagers who might have cracked the code of the computer systems connecting earth to moon. How sad it was that the infant World Catholic Church had developed no extra-terrestrial spirituality at all!

Another alternative, JoAnne knew, would be for her to order her computer to access the database of mystical literature which the theological pioneer Lars Scott-Eriksen had created in 1990. It would have been easy to access it; but again, the ears of NASA would be privy to that exchange of information. And, in the light of her experience, she could not, would not, be duplicitous; for she had met God as perfect Truth.

As that thought struck her, JoAnne realized that the encounter was beginning to translate itself into a series of thoughts, insights, messages. Now she remembered something about mysticism! Wasn't it the Protestant mystic Boehme who had said something about learning more in a mystical moment than if he had spent years at the University? For a moment JoAnne felt a surge of anger as she realized how cheated she had been in her seminary experience, where spiritual experience as such had been deplored as being in something like bad taste; and now, here she was, theologically educated - supposedly - but ill-equipped (to put it mildly) to deal with actual religious experience.

JoAnne smiled for a moment. Maybe today would go down in history as the first lunar mystical experience.

The smile was brief, and JoAnne's features creased as she resumed her reflection on that strange encounter. Of course it would be dismissed as a hallucination. Her career was over in any case. The NASA psychologists with their neat categories of mentation would describe it as a nervous breakdown; the NASA public relations department would have to rethink her past; and the tamer theologians would invent some category of outer space delusion, with an impeccably orthodox grouping for this kind of pseudo-mystical experience.

Real mystical experience, the "staff" theologians would state, was such as promoted the well-being of the flock, the

country, the Church. Real mystical experience, the psychologists would say, was such as integrated the personality around a socially acceptable role. And they would say that her personality had disintegrated. And they would, in a sense, be right. For her old ego adaptation had died in that moment of encounter, that timeless moment in the relentless gaze of the Holy One.

The Holy One! Could such a phrase have really come to her mind in connection with the angel-alien? Yes - but what did that mean? She had been touched by perfect holiness; and she had been given a message for her employers.

The slow realization of the import of her experience quickened inwardly as JoAnne realized the dreadful truth: God was speaking to her not as an outer space chaplain, but as a prophet to NASA. She shuddered, the holy fear renewed, for she knew her Old Testament well enough to know the kind of life a prophet could expect.

JoAnne was angry: she had been meditating on the Beatitudes, she had been happy, she had been joyful, she had been liberated and her mood had been gay. She had happily prayed to God - and now this!

The impact of the encounter continued to seep into JoAnne's consciousness although she wearily tried to evade it. It was clear what she now felt about the American mission to the stars. It was clear what she really thought about the research on the moon. For it was as if, in the very interstices of time, be-

tween the span of two moments, the alien-angel had conveyed to her the realization that there must be a mission to the poor before there can be a mission to the stars. Contemplating the rising Earth, she had no longer been able to suppress what she had always known: that, in a certain sense, the mission to the moon was an indirect exploitation of the poor and starving of the world.

It was as if the sight of the whole earth had shown her - symbolized by the appearance of the alien-angel - that there must be no mission to the stars until the mission to the poor had been honorably discharged. JoAnne could feel her new "sermon" forming within her:

"God is calling us to create a world community before He will allow us to colonize the planets, let alone the stars."

"When the last hungry mouth has been filled, the very gates of the galaxy will open to Homo Christus, Friend of the Galaxy; and humanity will take its place among the stars..."

JoAnne sank to her knees, despairing at the immensity of the task that had been given her. Yet she somehow knew that in the twinkling of an eye she had really grown up; at last she was a real adult. Wiping away a tear from her eye, she began to ask herself once again if she might pray once more. But what in the world would prayer be like after this encounter?

JoAnne gazed at the planet, her mother Earth, as it hung in space; and as she held it steady in her gaze, it seemed to her

for a moment that the clouds and atmosphere shifted into a familiar configuration: a cross.

But this was like no cross JoAnne had ever seen before; for it was radiantly white, and its edges shimmered with a soft radiance. Was it the clouds, the atmosphere, some aurora terralis?

JoAnne looked from the cross on the wall of the chapel to the mystic cross athwart Planet Earth; and a strange peace seemed to envelop her.

She spoke aloud for the first time since her encounter - so long ago, yet so recently - and there was a stirring of new authority in her voice. "Now I understand," she said to no one in particular.

And the chaplain, Rev. JoAnne Meister, former Chaplain to the U.S. Lunar Research Colony, stood up, and with firm steps walked toward the Communications Center. She was ready to begin her real life's work.

The author's theological commentary follows.

A Theological Commentary on "Chaplain to The Stars"

by Richard Kirby

An Outline to Study

Introduction

Principles governing the writing of Christian science fiction

Principles governing the use of science fiction for ministry development

How to promote the use of science fiction

Bibliography

Introduction.

“Chaplain to the Stars” is a work of Christian science fiction; it is a self-conscious attempt, based on twenty years of thought and research, to create a specific category of literature and to model or exemplify it. It’s my hope that many volumes of Christian science fiction - with their associated expression in film and other art forms, including multi-media - will ensue; not only from “established” writers, but from unpublished writers, and especially from the rising generations of Christians.

I believe that science fiction is of crucial significance in the future mission of the Church and I consider science fiction to be an important part of what might be called Twenty-First Century Systematic Theology.

Christian science fiction is a deliberate, homiletical, controlled exercise of the imagination in God’s service, in order to clarify values with reference to scientific and technological research, and to portray “preferable futures” for the Church in this hypertechnological era. Also, some part of an ancient epistemological error, I believe, makes us suppose that art cannot be a direct expression of ministry. I regard science fiction as an attempt by the collective unconscious of humanity to bridge the painful split in our consciousness between arts and science, technology and religion, leisure and work. And I define science fiction as the evolutionary conscience of humanity.

One of the gifts of science fiction to humanity is its ability to use our imagination in strange new ways, to ease intellectual rigidity, to permit us to explore strange new worlds of the imagination, above all to help us grasp - really feel - the permanent distinction between the actual and the possible.

Bertrand Russell wrote of the Scientific Outlook in a book of that name; I like to think of the Science Fiction Outlook as one in which we know that all things are possible through an interaction of spirituality and science; and as a way of life governed by the Sense of Wonder which Plato declared to be the main motive of philosophers, and which science fiction analysts declare to be the main characteristic of science fiction’s esthetic experience.

Precisely because science fiction bridges the gap from science to fiction, and from art to mission, it is appropriate that we write it as a direct expression of our theological principles. There is no reason why this remarkable literary genre should not achieve its full stature by being shaped by us to our own purposes. In fact, through deliberate Christian science fiction - that is, science fiction written about prayerfully conceived preferable technological futures for the Church - we can transform our consciousness’s horizons beyond our wildest dreams. And through Christian science fiction we will begin to see that the “World Future Society” is none other than the Church of Jesus Christ, that is, humanity come of age.

Through Christian science fiction we will come to understand that every congregation has the privilege of being a science-fiction community: one which cares for the future of our planet, our species, and our technology, and is willing to express that caring through loving, prayerful envisioning of possible, probable, and preferable futures. Through Christian science fiction the Church can at last take its proper place among the futurist movements of our time.

Principles Governing the Writing of Christian Science Fiction.

Christian science fiction is ministry, and develops ministry. It is mission, and it nurtures mission. It is an expression of the religions and the scientific imagination in a controlled way - as befits ministry.

There is no limit to the stimulation of Christian science fiction. It should be encouraged among very young children (I have taught the same kind of thing to very young gifted children) as well as to older and established writers. And congregations should be encouraged - and rapidly - to think of themselves as communities of the imagination.

The five basic purposes of Christian science fiction writing and exegesis are those which must govern all contemporary Christian ministry. Thus it considers:

1. The development of alternatives to nuclear war.
2. The moral governance of our technology before it takes

us over or we - a weary, neurotic, adolescent species - abdicate in its favor.

3. The creation of a world order of government by the people of our planet, with the concurrent development of a world civilization (in which I happen to believe that the Judeo-Christian tradition will take the lead and be the religious telos).

4. The redesign of human nature through science governed by prayer and meditation, art and the psychical gifts of humanity.

5. The mission of the whole and holy humanity to the stars.

There are of course theological principles governing Christian science fiction writing.

First; It is eschatological. That is, it is such as is calculated to speed the consummation of our age. Therefore, it is missionary in import and in effect.

Second; It is homiletical. That is, it is always basically of the form of a sermon, or at least a tale of spiritual heroism promoting faith in God and his Christ. It always contains the Good News of God's saving intervention in our history.

More generally, Christian science fiction should proceed from a life of Christian prayer, and it should proceed as prayer, for prayer is a form of scientific research. Its special gift is to encourage the ethical use of science and the moral governance of artificial intelligence, and to depict preferable futures. Ultimately, Christian science fiction could lead to the identification of a fourth

category of futures - actual futures. An actual future is a Christian concept of futuristics indicating the idea of a Divine Plan for our species. It suggests that through prayer we can discern God's will for us, that is, actual futures.

Thus, paradoxically, through Christian science fiction and its theological analysis, we can understand ourselves to be designers of our future, and yet to be obedient to God's will for us. For, theologically, I do not believe in an infinite range of possible futures, but only in one future, which is God's plan for us. Yet, we are called to come of age as co-creators, and through prayer and meditation to express that future scientifically.

Christian science fiction can be used to help scientists and technologists, politicians, artists and theologians; and it could be written to order as a part of responsible discernment of the moral use of our technology.

The story "Chaplain to the Stars" has been concerned with the morality of space travel and space science, and with issues of pastoral theology in outer space. Yet it was also designed to suggest some actual futures for the world church; as such, I gave it my best ideas, hopes and suggestions. Though fiction, it is to be understood as prescriptive, ecclesiastical futuristics. I hope very much for Vatican III, for the World Catholic Church and for the unification of humanity; and I make no sharp distinction between advocating that through fiction and advocating it through nonfiction.

Other theological principles governing Christian science fiction are these:

It should be such as advances the work of the Church; it should, if possible, deal with religious experience; it should express some form of ministry; and it should express a coherent doctrine of God, preferably enhancing our understanding, as good theology should, of the Divine-human relationship, for Christian science fiction is but a branch of Christian theology in our era. Thus, it should allude to the Three Persons of the Trinity - and here it is like a good sermon.

Christian science fiction represents, I believe, the consummation of science fiction in general.

Principles Governing the Use of Science Fiction for Ministry Development

Eschatological fiction is that which promotes ministry, that is, which helps people see God's Holy Will for them and do it.

Science fiction can be analyzed for ministry development by prayerful, perhaps liturgical reflection on it with these questions in mind or before the group/congregation:

What ministry does this suggest for me/us?

What church reorganization does this suggest we might be called to in the light of this set of ideas?

What theological insight or revision is suggested by this work?

What is implied for future scientific research and technological practice?

What does this suggest as “actual futures” for humanity?

How can we enlist children in these projects?

These principles can be used in the “exegesis” of Christian science fiction; and prayer itself should govern the choice of works to contemplate according to these principles. Moreover, the five priorities listed above - especially the aversion of war - should govern the prayer.

How to Promote the Use of Science Fiction.

Hold a diocesan or congregational think tank conference on science fiction in the service of the Church.

Create a competition for children writing Christian science fiction, the winners being those who fulfill the stated principles and truly catalyze ministry, as judged by an impact on the scientific and political communities, the military-industrial complex, etc.

Have a competition between parishes, each being a kind of laboratory of the Christian imagination.

Have parishes or other church structures competing to produce the best Christian science fiction movie.

There are many other possibilities - the Holy Spirit will lead us into them.

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