

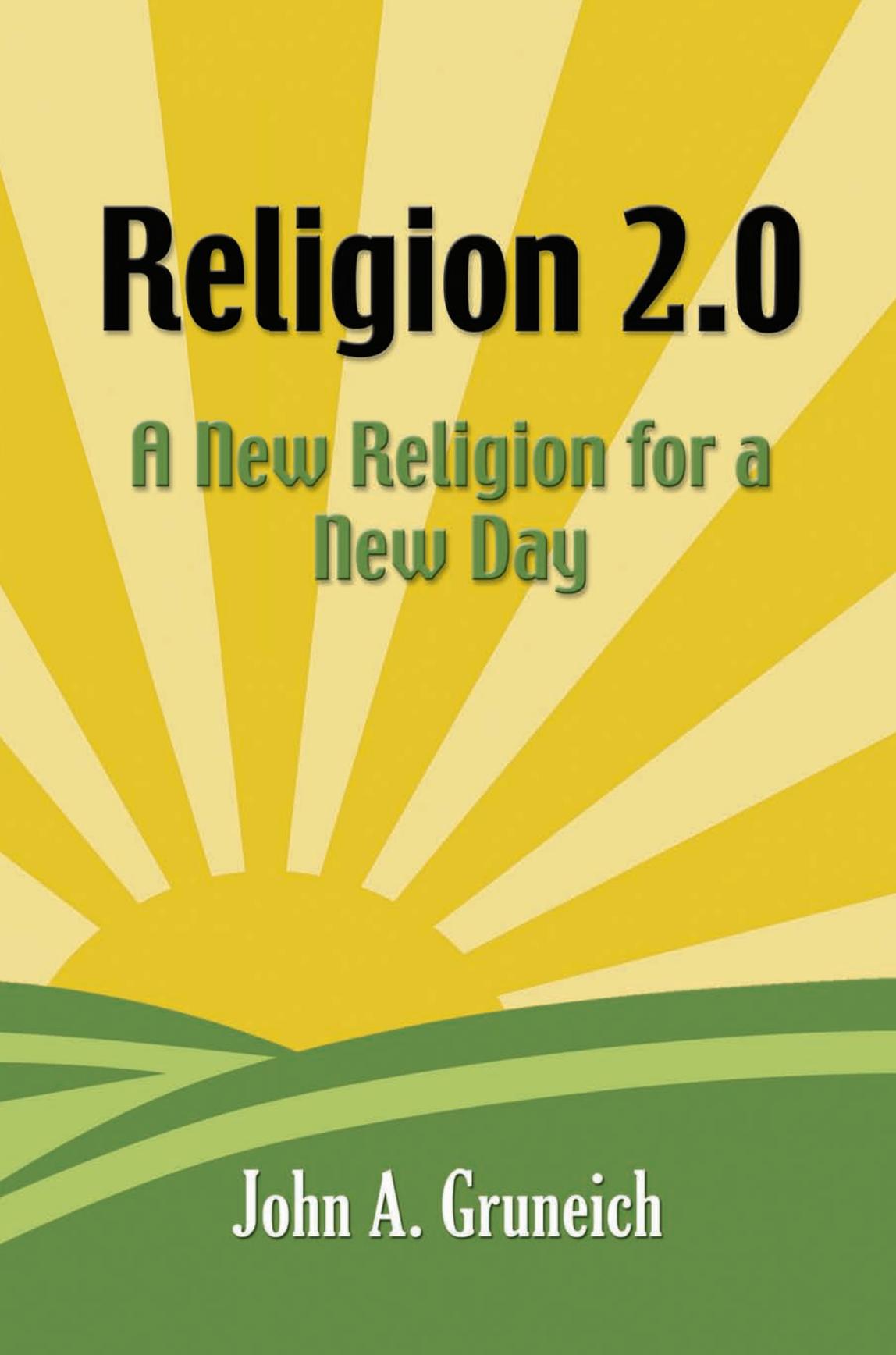
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Religion 2.0

A New Religion for a
New Day

John A. Gruneich

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Chapter One

God

If we want to build a “new” religion, we have to develop some new ways to understand God- some new thinking. We also need to develop a new kind of religious community that helps us to follow God in our daily lives- some new group behavior. Both ideas and community (group behavior) are essential for Contemporary Theism (CT). This is true because CT is a relational faith. Such a faith correlates effort from the realm of ideas with efforts from the realm of relationships. Maturity in thinking and maturity in relationships are understood to be mutually related processes in CT. More mature relationships require better thinking. And better thinking is most likely when thinkers mature in their relationships (to others and to God).

Before we go any further, we should ask: Can any thinking about God, “new” or otherwise, be rationally viable today? This issue of rational viability will be one concern of this chapter. Rationality is a central focus of CT, but mental reflection must also take into account one’s personal experience. In a deep philosophical sense, one’s experience is prior to and foundational for rationality. One can have experiences without rational reflection, but it is hard to see how one can rationally reflect without experience. If this is true, then I owe you a brief account of the experiences that have shaped my understanding of God.

One time that God’s presence was powerful in my life was during the Vietnam War. I had a low draft number and knew I would soon be called to service. I did not think the war was moral, yet the pressures from my culture urged me to enlist. I struggled with the decision, and finally decided to file for Conscientious Objector status. Throughout this process of moral discernment I sensed God’s help and presence. God has also been present in my life through the medium of art. The visual arts have communicated to me a direct experience of the spiritual realm. Also musical arts have convinced me of the reality of the spiritual dimension. God’s reality has become manifest to my awareness in the beauty of the natural world. At certain times the grandeur of a mountain range, the beauty of a sunset, the amazing reality of a newborn child have been sufficient for me to believe in God’s reality and creativity. In the realm of abstract philosophical thought, I have had moments of inspiration. In those rationally inspired transcendent moments, the emotionally moving feeling

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for God fit beautifully with an overall idea of how God and the world are interrelated. God's reality has also been palpable for me in the experience of communal worship, with and without the accompaniment of prayer. In the sometimes painful personal struggles and suffering of companions, I have known the reality of the spiritual dimension. Three times I have come close to death, and believe that God in some way helped me escape from those near death experiences.

From this personal spiritual experience as well as rational reflection on such experiences in general, I have adopted two corollaries on the spiritual life.

1) Religious people regularly give to too much importance to their spiritual experiences.

2) Non-religious people regularly dismiss the spiritual experiences we all typically have.

Both corollaries will be developed in more detail. For now, it seemed important to outline some of the personal experiences from the moral, aesthetic, artistic, devotional, and rational areas of life that have lead me to see that God is real. Of course my experience is limited; many others (including you the reader) may have had more profound spiritual experiences than I. My limited experiences are not necessarily transferable to others and certainly not normative for others. Hopefully my listing of some of the highpoints on my spiritual journey will help you reflect on your spiritual journey. It does seem that if one stays open to these types of experiences that most of us regularly have, then belief in a CT type of God seems to naturally follow.

These experiences provide good enough reasons for me to believe in God, but they are not slam dunk arguments. There are no such arguments or experiential accounts from either the religious or atheistic side. If there were such rationally convincing arguments, then we would all be either be some kind of theist or alternatively, some kind of atheist. What may be more fitting for more people are not slam dunk arguments, but rather recognition that religious questions are complicated, and progress in religion, like all progress, is more likely if one adopts a multidimensional approach. That multidimensional approach will be outlined in the next chapter, and includes rational argument, but is not limited to rational argument.

CT would say that religion is one's answer to the meaning and purpose of reality as a whole, as well as one's relationship to that reality. If religion is understood in this way, it is reasonable to suggest that all of us have to keep revising our faith as we move through life. It is often helpful to see ourselves as travelers on a journey. Particular beliefs as well as

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doubt may all be stages on that journey. It is possible that deeper trust in God is only possible after a period of rejecting God. What may be most helpful on our journey is to stay open: to one's experience, to other ideas, and to the direct spiritual communication that continually comes from God. It will also be helpful to remain skeptical of all "final" or "ultimate" explanations including one's own. It may be that the mystery that surrounds and imbues reality is finally impervious to all human approaches, be they rational or spiritual.

This book claims that Contemporary Theism is "new". What makes CT new? One new or original aspect of CT is the pairing of "theism" and "contemporary". The word contemporary modifies the way we understand God in very important ways. The basic idea is that contemporary experience, as it accumulates over time, reaches a point where all those accumulating facts need to be reinterpreted. This need for reinterpretation is obvious in science. For example, for 1500 years all civilized people thought that the earth was the center of the universe. This geocentric universe of Ptolemy had to give way to a radically new idea. At the time of the renaissance, Copernicus and others thought that it was not the earth, but rather the sun that was the center of the universe. The rapid acceptance of the new heliocentric model meant that not only were there now new facts about the universe, but also that all the old facts had to be reinterpreted. This change of interpretation is often referred to as a shift in models (paradigms). Most scientists understand that even the most accepted current models (paradigms) of nature, must be open to new models that include more facts in a more holistic way.

While this openness to new paradigms or new ideas is pretty obvious in science, such openness is not at all obvious in religion. In fact religion most often presents itself as having a "once for all" quality. In the world religions, God is understood to have acted or communicated to human beings in some decisively important way in the human past. That past revelation can be studied and interpreted, but it cannot really be surpassed or improved upon. For example, in Judaism that revelation is the giving of God's law to Moses. For Christians that unsurpassed revelation is the unity of God in Christ. For Moslems the unsurpassed revelation is God's word recited by the prophet Mohammad in the Koran. All three of these examples of revelation in the great religions of the West, along with all other understandings of God's revelation are often interpreted as having an "ultimate" or "final" quality. Religion assumes that God has already spoken, and will not speak again in such a fundamental way. It is somehow assumed that these revelations from God, while occurring within history, have a timeless quality about them that transcend history. It is

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assumed that no fundamentally new revelation is either desirable or even possible from within the framework of each revelatory tradition.

In contrast to the unassailable status accorded divine revelation in the various religions, our new religion will recognize only “provisional” or “reformable” revelation, if we can call it that. In the new religion we are proposing, all the historical revelations of the Western monotheisms just mentioned, plus any other historical revelations all need to be modified in the light of ongoing human experience, growth, and reflection. This means that the accumulation of human experience and insight is so important that it will shape our ongoing understanding of God and reality in fundamentally new ways.

If we move away from such broad generalities and if we could actually poll everyone on their beliefs about God we would likely find that the majority of people alive today, as well as past humans have professed belief in God. If we can trust majority opinion it would suggest that God is real. This “popular” belief in God perhaps comes from ordinary reflection about reality. Since everything in existence comes from somewhere, or was created by something, it seems logical to suppose that ultimately there should be a creator of the universe itself. If you don’t believe in this creator God, then you are left with the idea that the universe created itself. While certainly possible, it seems unlikely to common sense, since every object in our experience has a creator or a maker. Of course common sense is not always right. But it would also be wrong to simply dismiss this “popular” view of God.

Many people also report spiritual experiences (see above for my personal summary). These spiritual experiences are important. It is likely that one’s personal experiences stand behind one’s theology, or one’s rational attempts to account for that experience. Again, spiritual experiences themselves, along with majority opinion itself, does not establish the truth of the spiritual realm or the reality of God. But both cannot be ignored in one’s thinking either.

It is important to recognize that we all tend to place our own experiences (spiritual or otherwise) into a larger rational context. For some this rational context is a full blown holistic philosophical theory of reality, or God. Most of us do not think in such a holistic way. We are mostly anecdotal thinkers. We don’t usually construct a theory that pulls together our own thoughts and experiences in a holistic way. In fact there are powerful intellectual currents in modernity that denigrate holistic attempts, probably because the most common such attempts are religious. The most general holistic systems are religious, in the sense defined above. CT joins

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with all the other religions in proposing a holistic view of reality. Where CT diverges from other religions is the nature of that holism.

Of course holism in general, much less the type of spiritual wholeness CT describes is in conflict with some important modern ideas. Two of those ideas are materialism and fundamentalism. As we discuss materialism and fundamentalism, the strengths of CT should become clearer.

Materialism

In general, materialism argues that the only finally real things in the universe are particles of matter in motion. In other words a detailed theory of the physical will explain everything else, from stars and planets, to life, culture, economics and religion. Materialism makes no room for a spiritual dimension to life, or any idea of God. Materialism in some form is probably the dominant cosmology of modern science. The whole project of religion, and certainly the project of this little book are pointless if materialism is the final truth. Again materialism is the idea that the various combinations of matter in motion are the only finally real entities of the cosmos.

Materialism is accompanied by a method, often called reductionism. Reductionism is the rational process that examines life, awareness, culture, economics, religion and all other more complex phenomena in terms of their constituent parts. These larger structures and processes are explainable when broken down into their ever smaller physical components. Materialism as a philosophy and reductionism as a method, leave no room for non-physical realities such as mental thoughts, spirit, or God.

A good place to begin a response to materialism is to offer meditations on three realities: the big bang, quantum mechanics, and human awareness or mind. As indicated above these arguments of CT are not slam dunk arguments. They are offered as way to stay open to experience. What actually is most likely to be useful, in terms of a rational argument is a spirit of openness. Since the creation is vast, and since any spiritual dimension would be equally vast, and since we know so little about both God and the cosmos, humility and openness would seem to be wise.

If we talk about the big bang, one can argue that it was a "spiritual" event. Or if the word spiritual bothers you, we can at least suppose the big bang was a non-material event. Most scientists would agree that our present cosmos came into existence about 14.5 years ago. At that time all of the matter and energy of the entire cosmos was compressed into a tiny space, smaller than an atom. The big bang was a colossal explosion,

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which started the cosmic expansion that is continuing still today. As a result of this big bang, the stars and galaxies of the universe are receding from each other. As they recede the universe gets ever larger, and also less dense. There is disagreement within science about this expansion. Will it continue forever, or will it eventually stop and the cosmos will recollapse into a “big crunch”? That answer to that question for now seems to be that we don’t know for sure.

The idea that the big bang is a spiritual or a non-physical reality is as follows. As we get closer and closer to the instant of the big bang, our understanding of the laws of nature breaks down. As one ponders that singularity it appears to exhibit no time, since that event was the beginning of time. It inhabits no space since it is so small it cannot be measured. There is no substance, all substance having been crushed to less than an infinitesimally small point. Such a state of affairs can be viewed as a spiritual reality i.e. nontemporal, nonextensive, without physical substance. In this sense the metaphysical gave rise to the physical, or the spiritual gave rise to the material.

It appears that there is no empirical or scientific way to show what preceded the big bang, what led to the big bang, or indeed why there was a big bang at all. It is important to see that those questions, while unavoidable for humans, are not now answerable by science, and in fact in principle seem to be unanswerable by science. The inability of science to provide an explanation for the foundational reality of the beginning, or the initial conditions of the cosmos, is one reason why religion has been, and will most likely continue to be a fixture of human thinking and feeling. Religion, in general terms, provides an answer (or perhaps more accurately a variety of answers) to the question of cosmic origin, both to its cause, and to its purpose.

CT suggests that what came before the big bang, as well as why there was a big bang at all is this: God. Of course, as soon as this affirmation is made, it must also be affirmed that this answer is a “spiritual” and not a scientific answer. Why not just say that the world exists and we don’t currently really know how or why? Or, alternatively, some scientists have speculated that the whole cosmos may have begun with random quantum fluctuations in the void. Others argue for parallel universes that will continue into an infinite future just as they have been evolving from an infinite past. Again, the proposals of these scientists have minimal physical or experimental basis, and receive skeptical comments even in the world of materialist physics. It could even be said, that such “scientific” speculations are at least as fanciful as the Biblical God creating the world in seven literal days, as presented by religious fundamentalists. CT

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suggests that the big bang is one decisive example of the physical arising from the spiritual or the non-material.

The emergence of the physical from the nonphysical (or the spiritual) can be seen on both the very large and the very small scales of nature. On the smallest scale, physicists have described what is called a quantum vacuum. The quantum vacuum produces experimental effects on the atomic and subatomic scales. Quantum theory describes “virtual” particles which are constantly appearing from out of the quantum vacuum and disappearing back into the quantum vacuum. The Casimir effect is one experimental support for the existence of these virtual particles. In this effect, when two plates in empty space are set very close to each other, there is a measurable force which pushes the two plates together. This is due to the force exerted by the larger number of virtual particles outside the plates than between the plates. These virtual particles do not have physical mass, and yet affect the plates that do have physical mass. Such virtual particles and such quantum effects seem to call into question traditional notions of just exactly what the “physical” is. At the quantum level the traditional materialistic idea of “particles in motion” becomes an inadequate way to describe reality.

In addition to these reflections on the big bang, and quantum ideas, one may find a spiritual dimension which is complementary to the physical dimension in the realm of human mental awareness. The idea here is that mental thoughts affect brain states, which lead to certain types of behavior. A “thought” is here understood to be a spiritual or rational (that is a non-material) reality, and cannot be completely explained as only the physiological or neural states that accompany that thought. CT would say that this mental activity, while definitely having physical correlates, is also a non-physical mental phenomenon. This view is supported by the common sense conviction that all humans assume that their thoughts affect their behavior. Thoughts, which are non material, affect material reality through the processes of reflection and volition. It also is true that our minute by minute awareness of our world and the constant internal mental dialogue occurring in our thoughts is of the essence of our life. Take away that internal mental dialogue and you remove one’s very self. If materialism is true, then the basic experienced reality of our own awareness is just an artifact of neurotransmitter release, or neuronal nets in complex firing sequences. A non-material or “spiritual” view provides a way to avoid the distasteful materialist idea that our internal mental states are not really important, or even not actually real at all.

These reflections on the big bang, quantum ideas, and human awareness provide an opening to allow “spiritual” views. Not only are such

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views possible even for modern scientists, but they can be seen to provide more compelling accounts of nature and our own lived experienced. Far from being an option, theism, or the reality of the spiritual, begins to look more like an essential idea for making sense of our world. At the very least CT suggest that a multidimensional view is more inclusive of the complexity of reality, than a purely materialistic view seems to be.

Fundamentalism

In contrast to materialism, fundamentalism does believe in a spiritual world, where God is King. In fact the spiritual world is said to be both more powerful and more important than physical reality. It is quite striking to note that the “true believers” from both the materialist and fundamental camps argue in similar ways. Both camps argue that reality is not really multidimensional but rather monistic, and that their own particular brand of monism most fully accounts for that one reality. Fundamentalists however go further than materialists, when they try to convert others to their views or failing conversion often resort to coercion in various forms to enforce their views. There is therefore more reason to fear the fundamentalist than the materialist, even though the rationality of both operates in emotionally similar ways.

The often emotional nature of materialist and fundamentalist arguments helps account for the heated nature of their interaction. Each group emotionally denies the foundational argument of the other. CT approaches these often acrimonious debates at a tangent. There is some truth in both the materialistic and fundamentalist arguments. But there is also significant emotionality that potentiates the rational shortcomings in both.

The biggest rational weakness of fundamentalism is the idea that the most important facts about reality are already known. This includes the idea that God has already done all the really important stuff, and nothing really important is going to happen in the world from here on out. It is helpful to put this idea in context. Think for example about the immense stretches of cosmic time. It is difficult for humans to practically understand time periods longer than a human lifetime. With imagination one can perhaps grasp the approximately 6,000 year history of human civilization. With greater effort one can contemplate the million or so year history of human evolution. But the 3.5 billion year history of life’s evolution on earth, much less the 14.5 billion year history of the grand sweep of cosmic history will or should awe human awareness. Then, as one begins to think even this 14.5 Billion year history is but the start of a very young universe, and that the earthly environment that allows for human like life forms will

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be present somewhere in the universe for at least another 100 Billion years, maybe a certain kind of humility is needed. Part of that humility would be to suppose that God has not already done all the really important stuff. Maybe God is going to do some more stuff that is even greater than anything even the most enlightened religions have suggested. For example, maybe God is actually going to surpass the amazing events connected to Moses, Buddha, Jesus, or Mohamed, and the revelations connected to those religious geniuses. Not only is that future amazing activity of God possible from a CT point of view, it is actually almost guaranteed.

This cosmic reflection leads to three important points. The first is that when it comes to arguing for God, or any "final" explanation of reality, humility is always needed. We are limited beings, and our ideas are also limited, even if those ideas are based on so called "divine revelation". Secondly, if God is going to do some new things, then we have to stay open. We have to stay open in our beliefs, and in our sacred scriptures, and we have to stay open personally, and as faith communities to the new things God is doing and will do. The third point is that without science, we would have no sense of the grand sweep of cosmic history. Scientific cosmology is then, a direct aid to spiritual maturity. Without the full scientific picture of reality, religion will tend to remain small, parochial, and self satisfied with past revelation. In this sense science is essential to developing a modern and faithful spirituality.

Let us look at some other spiritual realities that fundamentalism either ignores or downplays. The first is evolution. For most modern thinking people, the basic ideas of evolution are pretty self evident. Take for example the age of the earth. Christian fundamentalists will argue that the earth is only 6,000 years old. This dating comes from a literal reading of certain bible texts. For those willing to look at the evidence (some examples of which are fossil formation, isotope decay, and geological stratification) the 6,000 year fundamentalist proposal for the age of the earth is simply stupid.

But the spiritual problem of fundamentalism goes beyond the stupidity of arguing for a 6,000 year old earth. The larger problem is that evolution implies ongoing change in all of reality. We see ever increasing evidence that all dimensions of reality evolve. Evolution as a general approach to reality is being applied to ever more diverse fields from cosmology, to biology, economics, and even the understanding how the laws of nature themselves may be changing. All of those aspects of reality are seen to evolve or change over time. The logical implication of the increase of

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evolutionary ideas is that if all of creation evolves, then perhaps in some sense our ideas of God must also change and evolve.

Of course evolution or change is not the only important philosophical category. CT does not suppose that change is the only way to understand God. The doctrine of God's dipolar reality will be described below. Such a dipolar view includes elements of permanence as well as change. For the present discussion it must be emphasized that for modern people, their religion has to at least take seriously the evidence provided by evolutionary views. This means serious problems for fundamentalism, and for the existing holy scriptures of the current religions. Almost without exception those scriptures are based on non-evolutionary cosmologies. That is the main reason why a new view of scripture is essential for any "new" religion. The CT view of sacred scripture will be developed in chapter five.

Fundamentalism is almost always also parochial. Fundamentalists insist that they as a religious group possess essential saving wisdom that is not possessed by other groups- be they other religions or any secular belief system. This view leads them to see salvation as something that God gives to reward true believers (themselves) and withholds to punish all others. Thus, fundamentalists must insist there is only one way to understand revelation, and those who do not accept the true faith will be punished by God. This stance, which divides humanity into believers and unbelievers, or the faithful and the infidel, means that fundamentalists are at odds with the most central essential ethical challenge of modern history, namely how can we all learn to live together as a global civilization? That global challenge is the increasingly pressing need to construct a differentiated, sustainable, celebration of global civilization. Or another way of putting this, if human beings are to survive on this planet they will need to construct a globally just and sustainable world civilization. Such a global understanding is foreign to fundamentalists, as well as many other forms of modern religion. Their religious incantations will only allow them to include fellow believers in their community, or in God's community, and certainly not humanity as a whole, and especially not the religions with whom they are in competition. In other words there is a marked duality to fundamentalist thinking, and a hostile rejection of persuasive, systems, or network metaphors. For fundamentalists, the most important spiritual question is who understands God properly, rather than the question of how can my understating of God help build a better world, much less what can I learn from other faiths about God.

Another problem of fundamentalism is the way that God is understood to act in the world. God is understood to operate under the general

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category of power. God is preeminent in power (e.g. God is thought to be omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent etc.) It could be the power to create, to punish, or to save, but for the fundamentalist, God is nothing if not all powerful. It is perhaps becoming more evident that the metaphor of power when applied to God, while having elements of truth, leads to many distortions. A God that is only or mostly power, is likely to use coercion, judgment, punishment and related methods in relating to His (Her/Its) creation. Such an idea of God makes it more likely that God's followers will also employ power as a spiritually necessary discipline. In fact it would be hard to account for the warfare between religions, without this idea that God is primarily about power.

In contrast, in CT God is understood to be the unexcelled exemplar of persuasion. It is God's lure extended to the creatures that allows for maturation and growth, while respecting the integrity of each creature as a "response-able" being. CT would downplay the one-directional and coercive connotations of the metaphors of kingdom, rule, power, and commandment, among others. Such metaphors entail the idea that those in power direct those below them, in a way that is not reciprocal. The ruled do not affect the rulers; the powerless do not affect the powerful, in the traditional understanding. In contrast can one see that the powerful and the powerless, along with the rulers and the ruled, are mutually affected by one another's actions, and are part of one relationship system? The ultimate relationship system is the unity of God's relationship with the world, and the world's relationship to God. All other relationships can be illumined and studied in light of that primary system, and its persuasive characteristics.

If more mature human beings, and more mature behavior is the goal of religion, then persuasion would seem to be more effective in the long run than coercion. This does not mean that CT endorses a sentimental "live and let live" or even a "do your own thing" type of ethics. Chapter six will outline the challenging nature of the personal disciplines those following CT will be asked to undertake. It is important to repeat again, that the metaphors of persuasion are more central to CT than are the metaphors of power. To begin to understand such a God, we need to understand God's dipolar reality.

Dipolar Theism

The term dipolar refers to the two aspects or two dimensions of God's reality. In recently describing this dipolar theism to a friend, he thought I was using the psychological word "bipolar." He thought that I was advocating for a "Bipolar God"! He thought that I was proposing a God with

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a split personality, and such a God must be crazy! It's possible that you may think this CT bi-polar God is a crazy idea. CT suggests that while there are many mysterious elements of God and many unknown facts about the universe, it is worthwhile to do the best one can to rationally understand the universe and God, as well as their relationship. In that attempt the attribution to God of two aspects is very useful. This is why "dipolar" rather than "bipolar" views are presented. Dipolar most simply means two. God has two aspects that are both essential to understand.

In its general outlines, CT uses many of the ideas of God developed by process philosophy, whose most important thinker was Alfred North Whitehead. Process thinking developed the term "dipolar theism". Process thinking got its name because it gives more importance to process (or patterns) than substance (or things). Philosophically what is more important are changing processes evolving over time, and not static substances that endure eternally. For CT God is a God of process, more than a God of substance. These ideas of process and substance are important. Over the course of human thinking, probably the dominant way to conceive of reality is that it is the realm of substances (particles) in motion. A substance is a thing or an entity that exists through time. Each substance has properties like color or hardness. Those properties are stable, and give each substance its particular character. To understand reality, you have to understand and describe the properties of the substances and how they change as they interact with one another.

In contrast to this "substance" idea in CT it is not the duration of real things that is central, but rather the processes that affect them as they change through time. The philosophy of substance concentrates on duration and permanence. The philosophy of process concentrates on change and movement. Of course in a sense both substance and process ideas are needed for any doctrine of God or reality. But in a very general sense, the emphasis upon process as compared to substance ideas will lead to quite different doctrines of God. CT attempts to focus on a process idea of God. This means that the way God changes in relationship to the cosmos is emphasized more than His (Her/Its) enduring substance. This process God is more compatible with one of the great general organizing ideas of modernity: evolution. A process God also seems to be more compatible with the idea that the deepest insights about our universe are more related to change, than they are to permanence.

God's Primordial Nature

The two aspects of God are God's primordial and consequent nature. These two aspects of God must be seen clearly in themselves and in

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their relation to one another and the world. God's primordial nature is God considered as creator. One can observe that one of the basic convictions of religion is that God is the Creator. Whether it be the Deistic notion of a creator getting the cosmos started and then leaving, or the concept of Pantheism where God and the world are one; Creation, in some form, is a persistent theme of theistic doctrine. In a CT view of creation, God is creative to every actual occasion, or actual entity, in the form of the conceptual entertainment of the eternal objects. Or stating this idea more nontechnically: from the realm of possibility God mediates new creative possibilities to each actual entity. In this understanding, novelty arises from the creative action of God upon each actual entity in each moment of its becoming. God is the conduit, as it were, between pure possibility and actuality.

It is important to see that God is present as creator in every act of creation within the cosmos, not just at the "beginning". God's creativity in the world can best be understood as the concrete actualization of many various possibilities in one particular entity or one particular person. Without this type of minute by minute relationship between God and the world, God quickly becomes distant. It would seem that one must make a basic choice about how God is creative of the actual world. It would seem necessary to argue that either God is involved in every instant of reality, or He (She/It) is not involved at all. It would be hard to argue that God is directly involved in some aspects of creation, but not involved in others. This is one reason why the traditional religious view of miracles as God's special intervention into nature is misguided. God is, from a CT point of view, constantly involved in every act of nature, not just when He (She/It) causes certain miraculous events.

The primordial nature of God describes the way God constantly affects the world. God gives to every actual occasion or actual event various options. These options vary, depending on the complexity of the individual. For an individual electron, the "options" are very limited. But for a human person, the "options" received from God can be extensive and complex. Thus the primordial nature of God provides a coherent way to understand how God relates to the world, and how the world manifests creativity and novelty.

If one rejects this theistic way of understanding life, then one has to provide another source for novel things to spring forth from past events. If one rejects God's primordial nature, one has to explain why there are new things in the world, or why unique events take place, or why evolution to higher forms is even possible. Can the habitual processes of the past

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produce anything new? They can, if they are seen to combine their own individuality with the influence mediated by God's primordial nature.

In CT, God entertains all forms of potentiality and possibility within God's own conceptual life. This means in more simple terms, that God thinks about every possible course of events the future may take. From that vast mental activity, God mediates those possibilities to each individual that are most likely to lead to creativity, or to diversity in contrast. God is the primary source of novelty to the actual occasions of experience. While God is Omni-creative in this sense, it must also be seen that God works with the particular actual occasions that are existent. There are limits to God's creativity, based on the nature of actual entities as creatures. God cannot make an ape into an Einstein. God works with what is actual in any moment of reality. But by acting creatively to every actuality, over time, God has brought forth the current cosmos, and all the amazing events and creatures that populate that cosmos. God continually lures that cosmos into greater complex harmony in contrast. The creativity on God's part is unsurpassed by any other force or any other creature, but does remain limited. It is limited by the nature of the individuals with which God has chosen to work.

One could say that the knowledge of these limits is knowledge of the natural laws or rules through which God expresses God's creativity. The great texts of creation from the book of Genesis provide an artistic and spiritual way of expressing the creativity of God. The deeper spiritual meaning of these texts is lost if they are understood to be literally true descriptions of physical reality, and acceptance of those literal details is made a test for one's "faithfulness". It would be hard to overestimate the harm done by such ideas to many people's individual faith, as well as the possibility of creative dialogue between religion and science.

God's Consequent Nature

If in the primordial nature of God we conceive of God's role in creativity, or as Creator, in the consequent nature of God, we conceive of God's role as savior or redeemer of the world. Again, redemption or salvation, in its various forms is a central teaching of religion. Within every religion there is an analysis of life, and its evils, from which the follower of the religion, if faithful, will be saved. The evil may be conceived of variously as mortality, finitude, sin, hubris, or idolatry; but however conceived, religion, in its essence proposes a solution. In this sense religion appeals to the innate human desire that what is of value might be preserved, or made to last. Since one's own life is universally held to be of

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value, eternal life, or life after death is often promulgated by religious teaching. Salvation is powerfully connected to duration.

In our ordinary understanding of duration, we can say that every entity continues to influence the future, simply by virtue of the effects of that entity upon other entities within the universe. A star exploding in one corner of the galaxy for example, will have effects upon many other stars close to it, for an indeterminate amount of time. Likewise a human person's life will have ongoing influence on other humans by virtue of their memory of that person. Sometimes that influence is extensive, and affects countless future generations. Sometimes however, that influence is fleeting, affecting only a few close intimates and rapidly fading from the universe. CT suggests that all that is useful or creative from that person's life is not only passed on in this general sense, but is also preserved within the divine life. And while the universe retains a limited remembrance which fades, God "remembers" in vivid detail each entity, and is able to refresh that memory to suggest future possibilities for other entities. Thus God insures the fullest possible use of every occasion of experience.

In this specific CT sense all entities are "everlasting". But the "location" of their everlastingness is not primarily in the universe but rather in God. In this sense CT presents an alternative to materialism. For materialism what possesses duration is the universe itself, particularly its physical components. It would seem difficult to argue against the obvious reality of the material objects in my immediate experience, and the corporeality of my own body. But the materialistic attribution of ultimate reality to these palpable physical entities is one of the great misapprehensions of modernity. It is exactly that materialistic misapprehension that is leading to so many pernicious effects in economics, culture, and human vocation. Contrary to initial impressions, what endures is not substance but process; or alternatively what endures is not matter but spirit.

Fundamentalists make a parallel mistake in regard to duration or redemption. For the fundamentalist what endures is the subjective experience of human persons after death. It can be noted that materialists assume that ultimate reality is constituted by the physical nature of the universe irrespective of human persons, while fundamentalists believe that ultimate reality is constituted by the non-physical salvation of the human person irrespective of the universe. These mistakes are both lethal and complementary. In fact one could say these two conceptualities function in such a way that they reinforce the extremes of the other, and thereby sustain ongoing regression and conflict. Such conflict is the hallmark of the emotionally and rationally immature.

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In CT all actual entities as they perish become part of the divine life, eternally valued and preserved in God. Thus nothing worth saving is lost, and each actual entity, through God, makes its own unique contribution to the ongoing process of creativity mediated through God. Such an idea is in agreement with the fundamentalist conviction that God is real. Where CT differs from fundamentalism is the recognition of creaturely limits. Probably the most egregious example of the rejection of creaturely limits is the idea of subjective immortality. Subjective immortality is the common religious idea that human persons preserve their conscious memories and awareness of self even after death. In fact fundamentalists often go so far as to say that the 80 or so years of human life are but a tiny warm-up for the unending billions of years of life of the saved in paradise. Such a view locates salvation within a spiritual realm totally cutoff from the universe. This and other crippling weaknesses of the attribution of subjective immortality to humans will be more fully discussed chapter three.

CT suggests that all of creation, humans included, does indeed produce value that essentially affects God's being or reality. This is the main reason why the term Co-Creator is appropriate for human beings, and why Co-Creator Communities are proposed as the communal embodiment of CT ideas. But the "location" of permanence or lasting value is not in Creation, but in God. The creation is lured by God to richness of experience, and higher levels of differentiated unity, but that always includes at the same time the acceptance of limits. It is within the simultaneous movement towards the unity of both aspiration and limitation, that human maturation has lasting significance.

In the daily experiences you and I have as we lead our lives, we commonly understand that our views and opinions change as we interact with other humans and our environment. In CT this process of change in humans can also be observed in the case of God. God actually changes Him (Her/It) self during the process of relating to the cosmos, and to human beings. There is a two way influence between God and the creatures. In a small but significant way, what we do changes God. In almost all the other forms of theism this is not true. Those other theisms say that God affects us, but we don't affect God.

If what we do as human beings has a small but significant impact upon the reality of God, that idea will lead to many important ramifications. The first is that creativity is not just a divine prerogative. The creatures are also creative, and none more so than human beings. Of all the living species that we know, humans are by far the most powerfully creative. The artifacts of human ingenuity cover the earth, and in fact are impacting the planet on a historically unique scale. The only other change in global

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ecology that may be comparable to what Humans are now affecting was the transformation of the atmosphere of the earth due to the respiration of aerobic organisms starting about 2 billion years ago. It is possible that the modern artifacts of human action may modify the physical environment of the planet on a scale comparable to the “oxygen revolution” caused by those early organisms. If so, humans themselves might change the earth in such a way that would make ongoing human life untenable. The two most likely scenarios are a nuclear disaster, or the ongoing ecological crisis. These human scenarios may turn out to be as epochal as the earlier aerobic transformation itself.

God: Reward or Punishment?

It is in the context of one’s most profound reflections on the nature of reality and God, that the idea of divine rewards and punishments should be addressed. Probably one of the most controversial aspects of this chapter will be the proposal that in CT there are no rewards for believing in God, and no punishments for not believing in God. This idea is so out of step with religion in almost all its forms that it will be emotionally rejected. The careful elaboration of this idea will go a long way to differentiate the God of CT from many other conceptions of God.

Under God’s primordial or creative nature, God is always maximizing the creative options that are mediated to every actual entity as it evolves. This creative aspect of God is continuous and ever faithful. This activity is also understood to be independent of any response on the part of the creatures. I may welcome God’s creativity or reject it, or simply be oblivious to that activity, all of which will make no difference to God. God unfailingly provides new creative possibilities to all, even the most forlorn, evil, or obscure elements of creation. This view suggests a kind of infinite patience on the part of God that is commonly overlooked. It also shows that there is nothing the creature can do to either earn greater creative input, or earn more attention from God.

Unlike what the official high priests of most of the world’s religions say, God is supremely un-anxious about how you regard Him (Her/It). From the point of view of God’s primordial nature, you could say that God doesn’t care what you think about Him (Her/It). God will provide you with a constant stream of creative possibilities for your life, regardless of whether you are a devout believer, or a hardened atheist. In other words, unlike many traditional understandings of God, for CT God is not a jealous God. What or who could possibly make God jealous? Jealousy is a reactive human emotion that may actually be more a description of what God is not, than telling us anything important about what God is. The idea of a

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jealous God is a good example of the need for traditional religious ideas to evolve.

Are there then simply no rewards for faith in God? What's the point in believing in God if I receive no benefit, or if I at least avoid a punishment? To answer that question we need to consider the other (consequent) aspect of God's nature. To repeat, in God's consequent nature we focus on God's role in redemption or salvation. In this aspect there is a differential valuation.

While in God's primordial nature nothing the creatures do affects God's creativity, in God's consequent nature all that is of worth in human belief and behavior affects God. In God's consequent nature, God fully receives all the responses the creatures make to God's creative input. In very general terms, God saves from every life what is of value. For some lives that saving is extensive, for others it is minimal. This view of rewards shows God to be unfailingly just.

Another way of saying this is that God is concerned to redeem the entire cosmos and not just human beings or human awareness. If rewards and punishments of human beings is the central salvific truth of religion, then that teaching is simply much too narrow from a cosmic perspective. This religious narrowness becomes apparent when one realizes what has been described so far is the "objective" immortality of all entities. All those other entities, as well as other sentient beings both on earth and on (possibly) other planets, are at least as central to God's purposes, as human reward or punishment. To believe that rewards or punishments for humans is the central salvific truth is to argue that human worth exceeds the worth of any other being or any other entities of the universe. Such a view makes God the servant of human ego, and ignores the grandeur of cosmic vastness.

The appeal to rewards and punishments also promotes human rational and spiritual immaturity. The highest ethical imperatives are more related to what I should do, regardless of my reward or punishment. Certainly on the emotional level I will respond to rewards for doing some things, and I will also try to avoid other things if I am punished. Rewards and punishments operate mainly on the emotional dimension of human nature. But operating on the emotional dimension is in tension with the goal of this book, which is to promote spiritual maturity through the maturation of life in the rational and spiritual dimensions. The next chapter will develop this idea in more detail.

Rewards and punishments, especially the idea of eternal rewards and punishments simply rejects the needed recognition of human limits. Human beings are limited creatures. If we are limited creatures, than the

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notion of either an eternal or unlimited reward, or an eternal or unlimited punishment ignores the basic reality of human nature, namely that we are limited beings.

Another problem with the religious idea of rewards and punishments is what it does to human community. If I believe that God's main job is to dole out the proper rewards to the deserving and the proper punishments to the erring, then it will be that much more likely that I will think I can help God along in this important work. This means that if God is mainly in the rewards/punishment business, then God's limited human followers should also be in that business. To the extent however, that one is focused on either rewarding or punishing others, to that same extent one is not focused on one's own spiritual maturation. For CT, the first obligation for those who seek spiritual maturity is their own improvement. It would be hard to imagine a greater change in daily religious practice, than the recognition that God provides unfailing just treatment of all people. And that unfailing just treatment is much more related to what people actually do with their lives and how they behave, than it is to what they say they believe about God. If religion could move even slightly toward the idea that God rewards all humans regardless of what they say they believe about God, we would have made a giant step towards global maturation

Today we don't have to believe in a tribal God that rewards his favorites and punishes His (Her/Its) enemies for what they say about God's royal highness. Rather we can conceive of a God that is not primarily about rewards and punishments, but is concerned rather in promoting richness of experience, harmony in contrast, or even human spiritual maturation. Unlike the tribal God who plays favorites with us, depending how we regard that God, we need a God who is unfailingly just, and who applies the same standards to all people, indeed all of creation in its myriad aspects. Such a God of justice is worthy of worship.

God's Dipolar Unity

If one can keep the dipolar nature of God in mind, it will provide a balanced way to deal with a large range of issues. Some of those issues are: is God immanent or transcendent; is God loving or judgmental; is God personal or impersonal; is God independent of creation or dependent upon creation? If we can think of God as dipolar, then we will more easily see that God includes and transcends all these polarities. If we can maintain a dipolar view, that will help us to see that relationship is a category that applies even to God. God's primordial and consequent nature are in relationship. God is in relationship to the world, and the world is in relationship to God. The deeper truths of faith are found in pursuing the

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nature of these relationship systems, and not the essence or the substance of the entities themselves considered independently of their relationship systems.

Let us remember that in CT when we talk about God, we always conceive of God in relation to the universe, or the creation. This means that any belief in God entails a certain understanding of the universe, and any comprehensive understanding of the universe leads to a doctrine of God. Thus the question of God is the question of what is the nature of reality as a whole. What causes reality, how did it start, where is it going, and what is my role in reality? For CT to question the existence of God would be the same as questioning the existence of reality as a whole. We commonly suppose that reality exists, whether or not we accept it or reject it, whether or not we like it or hate it. We don't normally "decide" if we believe in reality- it's just there. Similarly the most profound understanding of God has similar characteristics. We know God is real, because we simply can't make sense of reality without God.

Having now presented our doctrine of God in a brief general way, we are now in a position to offer a particular approach to human nature. We will suggest that the preeminent issue of modernity that both stands behind and also transcends any of the more particular crises listed on page four of the introduction is one of disordered relationship systems. It can be argued that the familial, rational, and spiritual relationships of humanity show global disarray. What seems to be needed is a new way to understand the multidimensional unity of those relationship systems. To begin that discussion we now turn to a six dimensional view of human nature.

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