

Dear everyone, greetings.

Before we delve into secularism again, I want to share why I write this “b” edition every 2 weeks.

- 1) For fresh spiritual material to chew over for isolated front line workers who may not readily access fresh material for spiritual reflection and growth.
- 2) “Men in responsible positions should improve continually. They must not anchor upon an old experience, and feel that it is not necessary to become scientific workers” (Testimonies 4, p. 93). Presumably, EGW includes men and women, young and old in this quote.
- 3) To ensure I keep thinking theologically in the absence of the need to prepare a weekly sermon – which is in itself an amazing spiritual discipline.

So, fresh, somewhat heavier and a little poorer from the festive cheer, we continue our discussion of secularism and the S3 era in which we live.

In our S3 era, we are not living in an era of disbelief, but we are living in an era of believing *otherwise*. We find it impossible to live in a world without meaning, so if we no longer recognize / acknowledge the meaning previously found in the transcendent, we try to find a new meaning / purpose in our secular imaginary.....a secular meaning in a mechanical universe without intrinsic meaning.

This relocation of meaning to a secular imaginary came about via a number of factors:

- 1) We abandoned the concept philosophically (in the West, at least) of a greater good / higher purpose that transcends earthly, material human flourishing. There is no longer a final judgement, no accountability for our actions, words, deeds or thoughts beyond that which society would impose on us. We can't just eat, drink and be merry (in the transcendent worldview) because yes, we may die, but that's not the end. We still have to stand before the judgment throne of God and answer for our deeds. This is no longer the case in the secular and immanent imaginary. There is nothing beyond this life, so what matters is material human flourishing.
- 2) In the immanent, secular imaginary, God is not present, so we have an anthropocentric view of the universe. It now revolves around us and what we believe right / wrong, good and proper or evil and to be rejected. We now create our own rules. For many Christians living in an S3 era, they can end up living with a nominal deism, in which God is recognized as being “out there” but we are now primarily seeking to understand the material universe and the material mind and sociology rather than theology, and God is reduced in import, significance and function within our increasingly material universe.
- 3) We reject the concept of mystery. Everything is to be understood, and our acceptance of a sense of mystery about ourselves or the universe fades away as we examine, dissect, analyze, compute and debate. Mystery and functional paradoxes, such as found in the teachings of Jesus, which do not make sense to the “rational” mind, are to be rejected. Mystery implies we are not the masters of our material world, and suggests there is something beyond us....so it has to go.
- 4) Finally, we have a lost a sense of the need for what Christians call “sanctification.” We are who we are, and without any moral absolutes, we can no longer evaluate ourselves against any moral yardstick, e.g. the 10 Commandments. We are no longer called to participate with God in the process of character perfection and refinement, for who is to say that you are any better than I in our brave new material, immanent and relative world? Even among practicing Christians, abomination is downgraded to sin, and then to issues, and then is no longer spoken

about at all, and then the reverse happens....to mention anything as being sin is to commit the greater sin of intolerance and a lack of acceptance.

Clearly, in the above 4 factors that helped shift us to the S3 era, the 1st Angel's message makes little sense to the modern secular mind. Judgement? The hour of God's judgement? God's wrath upon humanity? Creation? None of this makes any sense to the S3 immanent and buffered self....no sense whatsoever, or more commonly known as "nonsense." This is the western, secular and urban world in which we minister. Our message makes sense within a transcendent worldview to porous selves open to grace, forgiveness and the Spirit, but our message makes no sense to buffered seculars firmly entrenched within a material, immanent worldview.

At a social level, we are witnessing what Taylor refers to as the Modern Moral Order (MMO, sometimes colloquially referred to as "political correctness"). As the socio-political order is "liberated" from the transcendency of the past and the primary voting criterion for many western voters is the economic competency of a given party, so the MMO develops a public ethos that at best has a functional deism. Why is this? The MMO is "liberated" from any given religious tradition or deity, and is independent of any specific beliefs. We have the makings of a civic religion. In this environment, politicians make continual reference to cultural values / beliefs from the transcendent past to "resonate" with voters along the lines of their own "hauntings" from the transcendent past, but nobody is really willing to "die on a hill" for these cultural values / beliefs. We may talk about "God" on the hustings or in bumperstickers, but woe-betide the God who presumes to act in our lives or inform our decision making or reveal Himself via Scripture or call us to holiness and away from the deification of lust or tyranny or falsehood. The new MMO perpetuates the new anthropocentric worldview for the buffered selves who cast their votes, and this in turn fosters the increasing buffering of these buffered selves.

As the MMO seeks mutual benefit across society, it may be argued to be the illegitimate offspring of Christian universalism. We ought to be concerned about others, we ought to stand up for the marginalized / voiceless / oppressed, we ought to care for the needy....not because they make any sense in the evolutionary world, but because these are the hauntings of the previous transcendent worldview in our newly immanent world.....but when push comes to shove, stirring declarations of "Never Again" such as after the Holocaust or the ethnic cleanings of the Balkans are meaningless.

Going beyond the bounds of this particular discussion, as the Google and Facebook culture spreads around the world with the rapid trends of mass urbanization, post-modernity and secularism, it is possible that we may see greater resistance to, and outright rejection of, the 3 Angels' messages as individuals of all backgrounds move towards buffered selves within an immanent imaginary. This then becomes our greatest challenge – to share the Good News, but it is only through the power of the Spirit's moving upon hearts, breaking through the buffering and defenses of skepticism, that any conversion can take place. It is not a matter of logic or brilliance of reasoning or clarity of scripts for lessons, for what is logical in the transcendent worldview is fundamentally illogical in the immanent worldview. And if I speak with you from my own transcendent worldview with a porous self, and you have an immanent worldview with a buffered self, then the more logical and beautiful the message is that I share means a more illogical and repugnant message for you. So what matters is not the script or lessons I use, but the moving of the Spirit, who comes in through our prayers and petitions. As in Acts, perhaps our most powerful outreach tool is prayer.

That is enough for today....we will continue this discussion in our next Worldview. I hope and pray that as you read, you are able to see yourselves, your neighbor, your community, your national trends and

national “elites” in this conversation. May God grant us wisdom to reflect wisely on the times in which we live and ask how the Good News may indeed go forward in our rapidly urbanizing, secularizing and demythologizing world.

Best wishes,

Conrad.