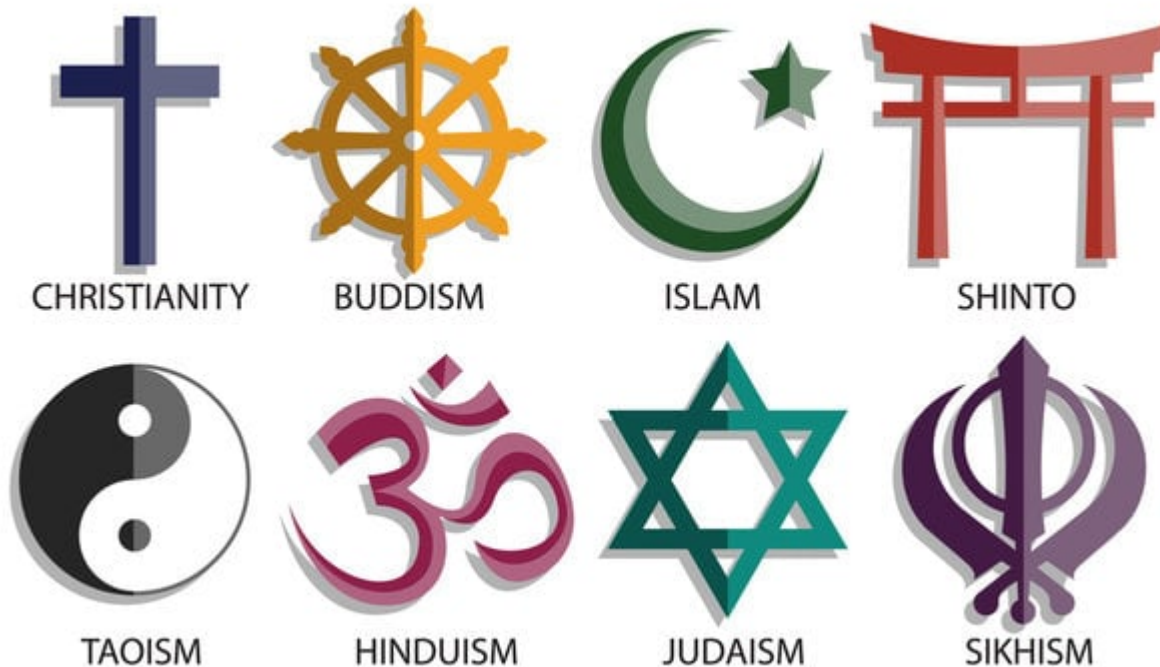


# HAS THE TIME COME TO BIRTH A NEW RELIGION?



by Robert Lewis

Set religion free,  
and a new humanity will begin.  
–Karl Schlegel

Belief is satisfied with asking Him to exist  
and underwrite the world's existence.  
–Jean Baudrillard

**The age of secularism is upon us.** Swelling its ranks are, by and large, the devotees of consumption and self-gratification, convinced that the production and pleasure templates – and not the temple – are the best guarantors of a meaningful life.

As a life-style or world view, secularism doesn't pretend to be an alternative to or protest against religion. From *Wiki*:

*Secularism seeks to interpret life based on principles*

*derived solely from the material world, without recourse to religion. It shifts the focus from religion towards temporal and material concerns.*

According to sociologists Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera's review of numerous global studies on atheism, there are 450 to 500 million positive atheists and agnostics worldwide, which represents 7% of the world's population. If you include secularists, that figure jumps to 14% or roughly one billion people.

Disconcerting to many but promising to others, the growing number of the religiously jaded or disaffected begs the question: why are more and more people turning away from religion? Why has secularism, an informal, non-belief system, gained significant foothold everywhere in the world?

Does secularism's growing popularity force the conclusion that the world's current religions, despite their remarkable diversity, no longer satisfy the spiritual aspirations of hundreds of millions of people, and that in order to supply the deficit left in the wake of the deficiencies of all religions, perhaps the time has come to consider birthing a new one?

As we settle into 21st century, we observe that the praxis of prayer and the practice of astrophysics now seem separated by light years, and the ever widening gap is being rapidly filled by a global community of non-believers, who, if only in desultory fashion, are looking for answers, for reasons to believe that life is not an accident. Like broken off satellite parts drifting aimlessly in space, these self-declared non-believers find themselves unfulfilled by the purely materialistic interpretation of life. The new religion that their spiritual hunger is begging to come into being will therefore require a new set of axioms and presuppositions, and will represent a revolutionary attitudinal shift in the

conception of deity or godhead. Once run through the gauntlets of science and logic, deity will be reconfigured as a prime-mover or creative cosmic intelligence (CCI). If the conventional judgmental deity calls for adoration, worship and obedience, the CCI will designate the vastness of everything that is that constitutes the universe, including itself, as that which is most worthy of human contemplation. Secularists, atheists and agnostics, at the behest of their spiritual indices, will concern themselves with the task or challenge of attempting to grasp something, however minuscule or incomplete, of the nature of CCI – its purpose and place in the cosmic chain of cause and effect.

The seeker, challenging the limits of human intelligence, will attempt to articulate and refine the following *sine qua non* questions. What are the origins of the universe as well as the origins of life on the planet earth? Does a CCI inhere in all of that or is it separate? And of the unceasing macro-events or effects that are taking place in the cosmos – the Big Bang, the collapsing of galaxies – is it possible to isolate a CCI as the cause?

As astronomy breaks one galactic glass ceiling after another, as the laws and principles that describe the operations of the universe are made more explicit, the proposition that it is all fortuitous becomes less and less tenable, which implies a first cause. Is there a design or shape that forms the basis of the universe? Was there a state of being before the universe, before CCI? Both cosmologist and metaphysician (theologian), each in his own manner, will attempt to bring into the effective range of human intelligence the idea or pre-supposition that the universe subsumes a creative cosmic intelligence.

For anything to be regarded as *qua* intelligent it must be capable of manipulating its environment. Not trees but humans can manipulate their surroundings which is why the latter are deemed intelligent and the former are not. The creative

intelligence that inheres in the universe is therefore deemed intelligent because it is capable of manipulating its environment, which is the universe. During the past century, astronomy and astrophysics have discovered that 'big' things are happening out there – super novas, collapsing stars, black holes – and according to the either/or binary, the events are either purposeful or random, just as here on earth there are land masses that are left to the whims of nature while on other occasions subject to the manipulation of human intelligence.

What the founding of all new religions has in common is that their alternatarianism arises out of lack or deficiency in the religion(s) against which it presents itself as a more credible alternative. As such, every new religion is a critique of the old. The challenge of all religions, especially since the industrial revolution, has been to maintain their credibility vis-à-vis the on-going discoveries in science, and closer to the present, in astronomy and astrophysics. For all but the anachronistically challenged, The Big Bang theory has rendered null and void Creationism, the notion that God created the world in a week. Darwin or evolutionary biology put to bed the fiction that man, the most evolved of the primates, began with Adam and Eve. Our understanding of disease at the microscopic level is at odds with the dietary laws practiced by most religions. Genomic analysis is undermining religion's consensus hostility towards homosexuality. According to numerous studies, "[The brains of homosexual men are structurally different](#) from those of heterosexual men in a region thought to influence male sexual behaviour."

Denis Prager, [from his essay in Crisis](#), forcefully reminds us that religiously imposed restrictions on human sexuality run counter to practice.

*"Human sexuality, especially male sexuality, is polymorphous, or utterly wild (far more so than animal sexuality). Men have*

*had sex with women and with men; with little girls and young boys; with a single partner and in large groups; with total strangers and immediate family members; and with a variety of domesticated animals. They have achieved orgasm with inanimate objects such as leather, shoes, and other pieces of clothing, through urinating and defecating on each other (interested readers can see a photograph of the former at select art museums exhibiting the works of the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe) ; by dressing in women's garments; by watching other human beings being tortured; by fondling children of either sex; by listening to a woman's disembodied voice (e.g., "phone sex"); and, of course, by looking at pictures of bodies or parts of bodies. There is little, animate or inanimate, that has not excited some men to orgasm. Of course, not all of these practices have been condoned by societies—parent-child incest and seducing another's man's wife have rarely been countenanced—but many have, and all illustrate what the unchanneled, or in Freudian terms, the "un-sublimated," sex drive can lead to."*

Prior to the practical birth of any religion, is the idea or concept of it which is born in a single consciousness. For a religion to blossom, that is to evolve from an idea into something concrete, tangible, it must take hold, or nest as a significant operating principle in the consciousnesses of a large number of people. There was a time when Islam was merely an idea, the brainchild of a single individual. In a mere 1,400 years, Islam has grown to include more than two billion followers. By any accounting in respect to its numbers and influence, it is a successful religion that, nonetheless, like all the world's religions, is losing agency.

If in the glaring light of science, all the world's religions are demonstratively superannuated, what will the new religion look like, what will it offer? Will it require the equivalent of the Ten Commandments? What will its position be on human nature, mostly frowned upon by conventional religion? Can

there be a religion without a founding myth, without rites, without prayer, without a location (temple, shrine, Church, Mosque)? Will its leaders be strictly philosophers, astrophysicians – the new theologians?

From a private email, friend and retired pastor Robert Lyon writes:

*What do we mean by “religion”? It comes from the Latin verb religere, to bind; so I suppose one’s religion is what one feels bound to. What one holds most important is, by definition, what one worships. Doesn’t the word “islam” have the same connotation as “religere”?*

*But to what might one be bound? to a set of values and ethical behaviors, such as the 10 Commandments? to a set of rituals . . . or such to a person as the formerly divine emperor of Japan? One could, I suppose, formulate an ethical system on which most of us would more or less agree, and try to justify it against anarchy on grounds of expediency, but one is still faced with the question of the “meaning” of our existence. An ethic can’t provide that by itself. The other thing an ethic can’t do is give assurance that wrongs will be righted “in the end” and that justice, not chaos, will prevail.*

The word-concept of ‘universe’ attempts to bring into the grasp of human understanding the size of everything that is – an impossible ask without metaphor and analogy. To try to better comprehend the enormity of all that which comprises everything that is and is not (voids, anti-matter), consider the dimensions of our Milky Way Galaxy, which is one of trillions upon trillions of galaxies. To traverse our galaxy from one end to the other, light, which travels at 186 miles/second, requires 100,000 light years (don’t forget to pack your lunch). This same galaxy requires 225 million years to perform a single rotation. Now imagine, which in Canada

requires no imagination, stepping outside on a winter day during a snowfall, and represent to yourself that each snowflake is a galaxy, and that the snowfall extends from one end of the country to the other, from Vancouver to St. John's. And then we must remind ourselves that even that breadth-taking, image-analogy falls exponentially short in capturing the measure of that which is immeasurable. So, with the snowflakes as individual galaxies dancing before our eyes, does it make any sense whatsoever that the creative intelligence that inheres in all of that expects us to attend Church on Sunday at 10 am and thinks less of us if we don't, or doesn't want us to consume meat on Friday, or flick a light switch on Saturday? To conclude that a God or a CCI expects anything of us is a conceit that human intelligence should strike down before the thought has been completed. Human intelligence, at this stage in its evolution, is incapable of knowing anything of the operating principles or essence of a CCI. Conventional religions adjure us to praise, revere and love God, but how can we love what we don't know? How can we worship or pray to an abstraction about which we know nothing? Shouldn't our proper response be simply one of humility and awe of a capacity, of a power before which all speech must turn mute?

Dualism is founded on the notion that whatever anything is, it has an opposite, or at a minimum something other than itself. As a universal organizing principle, dualism knows no circumvention or eclipse. It is the basis of everything that is—and isn't. Singularity cannot exist without plurality. It is impossible for there to be one of anything. The one implies the many. Hot cannot exist without cold. If there were only a single unvarying temperature of 27 Celsius, the very concept of temperature would disappear. In order to exist, 27 Celsius requires other 'unlike' temperatures.

As per the law of duality, there was no beginning to the universe, or a something that was begat or arose out of a

nothing. As a something, the universe has always existed because you can't have a something without a nothing. Therefore, what will distinguish this new religion from all others is that it will not require a genesis or founding myth. The same applies to the advent of intelligence, which has always existed as a counterpoint to dumb nature.

In respect of right and wrong, good and evil, they need not be grounded in the religious impulse. Right and wrong are coeval with choice, a uniquely human dispensation. When there are two unlike choices, one will be better than the other. As to what constitutes the better choice, we adduce Kant's categorical imperative which asks if the decision we are about to make can be turned into a universal principle, that is, would we want it to apply to everyone? And the better choice will always be at the service of Henri Bergson's concept of the 'élan vital,' the life force within us all, a biological imperative that compels us to prefer being alive than not.

The new religion will not require a specific place where like-minded people gather. One can contemplate the CCI anywhere, anytime, in solitude or in a group. Furthermore, the new religion will have no need of an all-informing holy text. The corpus of literature dedicated to the task of unraveling the CCI will be an unceasing work in progress that runs parallel to the evolution of human intelligence.

As to what human intelligence can grasp of a CCI, we only have to examine our human attributes – capacity to love, hate, lust – to know that if they are not fortuitous but an issue of the CCI, we could not have been thus endowed by a CCI that wouldn't itself know of them, and to a depth and degree that must confound the mind. So, if we are capable of love and compassion, and evil and perversion, it is because the CCI knows of them and their greater purpose in the cosmic scheme of cause and effect.

If at the beginning of this essay, the argument being put



forth was that there is a demonstrable need of a new religion, I am now forced to conclude that this religion has already been born. There are already hundreds of millions of dispersed earthlings who are united under one cosmic tent, who believe in a CCI, for whom their common place of gathering is the good earth, itself.

Belief in a CCI is first and foremost a concession to the mystery of the Being of everything, just as Being is the first asking of metaphysics. And while we beg to know more of the CCI, and by corollary the meaning and purpose of our lives as revealed in the cosmos, we don't know if the CCI wants to be known by its creation even though we are presently questioning it. And of course, we don't know if we are a separate issue or a part of it, much like the cells in a human foot don't know that they are part of the human body that is controlled by a central intelligence, the brain.

What we do know, for example, is that if we eat well or poorly over a lifetime there are measurable physical consequences for our health and well-being. We don't know if this same cause and effect, Karma, holds true in respect to our moral conduct. Thousands of positive chemical changes occur when we revert from the hating to the loving mode: serotonin indices go up; our immune system performs more optimally. Why is this so? Is it all an accident, or is there a law, not yet discovered, that describes a more comprehensive life principle? It could very well be, as the philosopher Jean Beaudrillard poignantly suggests, that the passage to contemplation and wonderment is the highest movement granted the human species.

Believing in a CCI may be nothing more than the belief that human intelligence can do no more but no less than asking the question of the CCI, a modest starting point that is predicated on the belief that the remarkable diversity and complexity of all living things is not an accident. Evolutionary biology cannot explain how a monarch butterfly, with a brain no larger than a pinhead, can find its way from

Canada to Mexico (3000 miles), and that subsequent generations find their way back to the exact same address in Canada without ever having been there. There is no evolutionary explanation of how and why life became self-conscious. Life was doing fine before that, an observable fact that should give us cause to pause – and wonder, where the act of wondering, a uniquely human attribute-privilege, already, for many, confirms the existence of a creative cosmic intelligence.

This new religion that has already been born is the bridge between being and Being, and no one is excluded from the crossing. And because we know next to nothing about all that is, and the CCI that inheres in it (the universe), It shall remain unnamed.

We only know we want to know more about It, if only to better assess what kind of relationship we should have with It.