From Spiritual Bankruptcy. A Prophetic Call to Action. By John B. Cobb Jr., Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2010.
Pp. 1-13 and 143-183.

As you read be sure to be clear in regards to what the author (COBB) means the he uses the following words:

- SECULARISM (pp. 6, 8-10, 12-13)

- RELIGIOUSNESS (p. 6)

- SUPERNATURALIST (p.6)

Summary of Book

In these times many people feel that their cherished religious values are held hostage by the forces of secularization and that, as a consequence, society is morally bankrupt. While acknowledging this problem, John Cobb overturns the prevailing expectations by drawing a distinction between secularization and secularism.

Secularization, as Cobb uses the term, has a prophetic function. It is a process by which religion is cleansed and refocused on mission and ministry rather than on other-worldly myths and concerns. The uncritical understanding of religion that focuses on religion for its own sake is what Cobb calls secularism. In Cobb's view, secularization has led to secularism or a culture of consumerism that threatens those very religious convictions many hold dear. After teasing the concepts of secularization and secularism apart, Cobb proposes an alternate path for secularization that will help us reevaluate our relation to our world and each other.

CHAPTER ONE

IN CONFRONTING CATASTROPHE, WHO CAN HELP?

I. Collective Insanity

In the summer of 1969, I awakened to the fact that humanity faces a crisis of unprecedented proportions. My son, Cliff, had persuaded me to read Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. The book was wrong about a lot of things, but it was right about one extremely important matter. The growth of population and of per capita consumption was on a collision course with the limited capacity of the Earth to support human activity. Most of our supposed intelligence and rationality was directed to "improving" activities, leading us to self-destruction in the sense of making them more efficient.

For a few years it seemed that we might, collectively, begin to behave rationally. Earth Day 1970 got a lot of press. There was widespread public concern. There were articles, books, and conferences. Some significant legislation made its way through Congress and was signed by Richard Nixon. The United Nations held a major conference at Oslo and established helpful programs. If this momentum had continued during the past forty years, the world would be in a very different place.

But that was not what happened. With the United States in the forefront, world opinion, or at least that of its controlling leadership, decided we had had enough of that issue; we needed to get back to "serious business." Serious business was, of course, making money. From that point of view, it was regrettable that in the brief period when world attention had turned to the fate of the

Earth, a few laws had been passed that interfered with the real business of the world, but they could be worked around. By economic globalization, industrial production could be moved from countries that had enacted laws to protect their environment to others that had not. The proper goal of humanity was to increase global product, especially in a way that would further enrich the wealthy. The public accepted this reversal, and the burst of ecological concern was viewed as one fad among others.

As a result of these developments, I had another awakening by the end of the 1970s. This time I saw that collectively we are insane. After it had become clear that economic growth was leading to disaster, efforts to attain faster rates of economic growth were redoubled. The call was not for meeting certain human needs, even if that required some amount of growth. That could be quite rational. The goal was growth as measured by gross world product, a measure that has very little to do with the well-being of humanity.

Perhaps an imaginary story will provide a way of understanding why I charge humanity collectively with insanity. Suppose that there is a small city-state, something like Luxembourg, built on a large floodplain. Suppose that the city has grown up in the past hundred years or so after a large dam was built to control flooding. Suppose that the dam has been quite successful. It also provides electricity and water for the city and for the countryside, especially for irrigation of farms. The lake behind the dam is the center of recreation for the entire country. The citizens have become accustomed to attending to the ordinary affairs of life with a sense of full security about floods. They are proud of their steady economic growth and general prosperity.

The river and its tributaries rise in a large hilly area that was once heavily forested and still supplies the city with wood. The economy of the city at the time the dam was built was largely based on furniture making using the fine woods from the forest. Of course, the forest was also used for lumber and for firewood. As the population increased, more of the forested area was being used for agriculture and summer homes. As the furniture industry grew, so did its demands on the remaining forest.

Now suppose that the government, knowing that the dam is old, commissions a team of specialists to check it out. Their report is shocking. The lake behind the dam has been filling up with silt so that the capacity to hold water is already greatly reduced. Everyone knew that would happen eventually, but most had supposed that no serious problem would arise until the distant future. Now they learn that because of deforestation of the hillsides from which the river comes, the pace of siltation is becoming more rapid each year. At the current rate, the ability of the dam to control flooding will end in twenty years. If the rate continues to accelerate, the flooding is more imminent. In the event of unusual storms, there may be occasional minor flooding at any time. The

team has also found that cracks have developed in the dam, allowing some seepage. This is likely to increase, and there is some danger that the dam may give way abruptly.

The report creates an uproar, and the people demand action. The government appropriates money for reforestation and repair of the cracks in the dam. There are suggestions of building a new dam farther upstream to capture the silt, but even among those making the suggestions, there is no consensus about where it would best be built. Any new dam would flood homes and businesses along the river. Many of these homes belong to the most affluent and influential citizens. In any case it would be very expensive.

Others propose massive dredging to deepen the lake so that it can function longer. But this raises questions not only of huge expense and the lack of suitable ways of disposing of the silt but also of maintaining water supplies and electricity while the dredging is taking place. So a decision about these matters is postponed.

A few measures are passed. Some of the most important forests are to be protected from further logging. There are new restrictions on expanding agriculture in the region and on building more homes. Plans are made for some reforestation.

Within a year, the question of how to respond to the threats to the city disappears from the front page of the papers and from the main television programs. The city goes back to normal, with a vague sense that the danger has been dealt with. The furniture business thrives. There is little unemployment. Everything seems fine.

In a few years, when the budget is tight, reducing the amount budgeted for reforestation turns out to be the easiest way to balance it without raising taxes. As the need for wood for the furniture business grows, compromises are reached about extracting trees from the protected areas. Rules against new summer houses and the expansion of farming are relaxed. Siltation accelerates, but it remains invisible and little publicized.

Despite the relaxation of rules on logging, wood for furniture becomes scarce. Its cost rises. Furniture makers complain that they cannot compete with other makers where wood is cheaper. They blame the protection of some of the forests. The rules are relaxed, but the result is only a slight delay in facing the now permanent shortage of wood for furniture making. The business declines, and so does the economy of the city.

Meanwhile, now and again, after unusually heavy rains in the mountains, there is some flooding. Sections of the city become uninhabitable. The people from those sections are moved to the less populated areas, most of which are in the headwaters of the river. A few voices are raised, pointing out that these policies only increase the siltation that is the deeper cause of the problems.

Some urge again that something fundamental be done, but most morally concerned people prefer to cope with the immediate problems of those who have lost their homes and businesses rather than with the capacity of the dam and the deforestation of the land around the headwaters of the rivers. They prefer to listen to those who say that the problem is unusual weather.

Those who call for a massive response are told that the country cannot afford the cost of constructing another dam or dredging the lake. Many taxpayers are angry that anyone would suggest increasing taxes for such purposes. Leading politicians avoid the issue.

Some concerned citizens remain troubled. They raise money and approach the city's most famous research university. They hope that if respected scholars develop a comprehensive plan, public opinion can be mobilized in its favor and the government will go along. They are directed to the department of public policy.

However, the professors in this department make it clear that they are not equipped to help. They deal with policy questions that arise in the normal course of government operations, not with how to respond in radically different circumstances. The citizens ask where in the university they can get help. They are told that there is no individual department in the university that can help them, but that perhaps an interdepartmental team of scholars who personally are concerned about the future of the city could be organized.

The citizens approach the university administration again. They are told that if sufficient funds are provided, the university would be willing to organize such a team, but that previous efforts with interdisciplinary research had not proved fruitful. The departmental structure channels research, and such research is directed to ends set for it by those ready to pay. Research about an overall plan of this kind is not the university's role. Accordingly, this much-admired center of research and teaching is of no use in finding answers to the most important questions facing the city.

I will not continue the story in the present tense. Two future scenarios are possible. It may be that the floods will gradually get worse, with increasing loss of property and life on each occasion. The cost of dealing with these tragedies rises, and the economic base of the city is further weakened. Although there is increasing recognition of the need to do something, the ability to pay for what needs to be done declines. Tensions increase between those whose property is most threatened and those living and working on higher ground. The now frequent floods not only cause deaths but lead to increased disease as well as homelessness. The dam no longer stores sufficient water for both city usage and irrigation for agriculture. Food supplies decline. It is harder and harder for the government to find consensus on which to act as groups compete over reduced resources. Violence erupts more frequently. Eventually the city is

largely abandoned and a greatly reduced population survives on the higher ground beyond it. Relations among those who blame one another for the catastrophe are acrimonious.

The other possibility is that the dam gives way abruptly. Water and silt destroy most of the city with a huge death toll. Even so, with the end of irrigation, food supplies become too small to sustain the reduced population. Without electricity or piped water, much of what the people had known as civilized life is ended.

I have tried to make the failure to act to save the city understandable. Nevertheless, I think the reader will agree that it is also insane. At some level, people know that taking fundamental action with regard to the dam is far more important than expanding their manufacture of furniture. They know that economic sacrifice is necessary and rational in order to save the city. But they choose to act as if this were not the case. Giving primacy to immediate economic advantages at the cost of future catastrophe is insane, even if it is all too understandable.

Despite the craziness of collective human behavior directed by political and economic leaders, there are thousands, even millions, of people who do understand that concern for the fate of the Earth is not properly dealt with as a passing fad but should be the first priority for thought and action. There are also groups that have continued to focus on this issue; conferences have been held; and there has been a continuing stream of books alerting those who cared to read of the ever-worsening situation and what could be done in response. Whether it is madness or addiction that accounts for the absurd behavior of the human species as a whole, it cannot be blamed simply on human nature. Humans can see the world lucidly and act appropriately. What is the difference between those who do and the others?

The question is primarily about those who live to some extent in the world of ideas as well as the world of immediate need. Why do so many of them behave in a way that is wholly inappropriate to the needs of the planet? Why have the vast majority of those with power chosen to use that power to worsen the prospects of the Earth? And what leads some to behave responsibly? Where can we look for communities that nurture a rational response to the knowledge of humanity's greatest crisis?

II. The Insanity of Religiousness

Suppose that the majority of the citizens of the doomed city had been very religious. Would this have led them to behave more rationally? That is highly doubtful. Being religious tends to confirm existing patterns of behavior or even

those of ancestors rather than encourage drastic innovation. Being religious would have led some to find consolation in thinking of another world or seeking ways to escape the reality of this world through spiritual disciplines.

Religiousness typically expresses itself in ways that distinguish "us," those who assert the right beliefs and do things in the right way, from "them," those who do not. The distinction may be between Baptists and other Protestants, between Protestants and Catholics, or between Christians and non-Christians. In the doomed city it could be between those who lived by the river and those who lived in the hills. The more religious people are, the more strongly they are committed to "us." The others may be tolerated or strongly opposed, or they may be objects for conversion. Religiousness would have been more likely to intensify hostilities among groups within the city than to encourage work toward unified action.

In our world, the situation is made worse by the supernaturalism that has played a role in most of the traditional religions, which I am calling here the great Ways. Secularists generally suppose that the great Ways are inherently and perhaps exhaustively supernaturalist. To believe in God, for example, is thought to be inherently supernaturalist. I am not using the term in that way. Belief in God has been an important part of what has moved the leadership of Christian churches to repent of its neglect of the natural world. But belief that God intervenes in the course of worldly events *is* supernaturalist. And a great deal of Christianity and of some of the other Ways seems to take this idea as central. Modernity has intensified this intervention motif, since it excludes God's presence and constant working from nature. Most religiousness is now supernaturalist, and this works against the needed sense of human responsibility for the Earth.

Secularists also often suppose that the Ways are inherently otherworldly. For example, to believe that there is continued or renewed life after death is taken to be basic to Christianity. In my usage, religiousness can characterize this-worldly convictions as well. Also, simply believing that there is more than this life is not inherently otherworldly. It *can* ground the sense of the importance and dignity of each human being here and now. But this belief *can* direct attention away from this life to another, belittling the importance of what happens here.

Religiousness often attaches to ideas and norms that made sense at one time but are not helpful today. For example, in ancient times most human communities were strongly pro-natal. Many died in infancy, and life expectancy was short. To maintain a steady population required many births so that any interference with bringing children into the world was damaging to society. Social pressure to marry and have large families made sense in ancient times. Traditions dating from those days reflect that situation.

Today, the global population already exceeds global carrying capacity. In terms of resolving the current global crisis, that fact is of immense importance. The need is to stop global population growth as soon as possible. Yet the religious stance tends to continue to promote the ancient teaching.

Despite a large dose of religiousness among American Protestants, they also tend to a form of worldliness. For the most part they see themselves as very much a part of the general culture. This has its roots in a time when being a member of a Protestant church was part of being a normal American. What one believed as a Protestant and what one believed as an American were little distinguished. These Protestants had strongly religious feelings about both the American flag and the cross, and they often put both symbols in their churches. As American culture changed, both in its conservative and in its liberal dimensions, so did many Americans who were members of Protestant churches. Since in the United States neither liberals nor conservatives sustained a serious response to the knowledge that the world was heading toward catastrophe, the more religious Protestants did not either.

Until fairly recently the most religious Americans tended to be politically quiescent. This position was partly because they thought they were called to accept the status quo and their place in it, serving those in authority. It was partly because they tended to be otherworldly and regarded too much attention to the situation in this world as a distraction. Where denominations became active, as in the Social Gospel and the civil rights movements, the more religious members remained silently resistant.

This situation has changed dramatically with the rise of the religious right so that conservative religion and conservative politics have been fully intertwined. In *The Family* (Harper, 2008) Jeff Sharlet provides a history of the merging of Protestant piety with the anticommunism of the American economic establishment during the Depression. Somewhat misleadingly, he uses the label *fundamentalism* for this whole movement. This movement focuses its energies on change in the sociopolitical scene. It brings into the political arena the religiousness cultivated in popular Protestantism, not the actual teaching of the Bible or the tradition. It ignores critical biblical and historical study and exploits the religiousness for ends often opposed to traditional teachings. It retains and reinforces the religious characteristics of dividing the world into "us" and "them," and it transforms the "us" into defenders of traditional American values such as capitalism, patriarchy, and American imperialism as well as Christianity.

Sharlet describes the theologically and ethically relaxed religiousness generated among the political and economic elite through networks of prayer cells operated by "the family" in the United States and around the world. Here the shared commitments are to elite rule and to the freedom of their business

activities from governmental interference and organized labor. Jesus is made over into the promoter of these goals, and the one to whom unquestioning obedience is owed. Sharlet discusses more briefly the allied, but quite different, religiousness encouraged by mass revival movements, television evangelists, megachurches, Campus Crusade, and so forth. Here personal morality and conservative theology, focused on opposition to abortion and to homosexuality, play a larger role, but much of the energy is directed to the same political and economic goals.

By no means are all the practices promoted by the religious, even the religious right, harmful. Their religion encourages many people to develop excellent personal habits and do many good things. They are often fine citizens and upright in their dealings. Religiousness often generates excellent community life among those who basically agree. The religious are likely to behave charitably to persons in need, especially in emergency situations.

Religiousness as a whole, therefore, is not to be condemned. But neither is it to be affirmed. Like human phenomena in general, it is ambiguous. Sadly, in relation to the utterly critical situation of our time, it is more of an obstacle to the needed response than a participant in it.

I have said that collectively, we humans are crazy. Much of this craziness is found in religion. Ignoring or denying information that would require changed behavior is irrational and, when the future of the Earth is at stake, crazy. Believing that some one set of ancient legends is literally true is crazy, especially when it leads to discrimination against believers in the literal truth of other legends. When religiousness is co-opted for purposes that run diametrically against the needs of the world, the insanity becomes vicious.

III. The Insanity of Secularism

Damaging as is the religious attitude, the insanity of the world cannot be blamed primarily on religiousness. With the exception of Israel and a few Islamic nations, the ancient Ways do not play a determinative role in global leadership. The great majority of nations is now secular in the sense of being open to multiple Ways and committed to none. Most nations pride themselves on making their decisions on the basis of rational discussion without appeal to supernatural authority or to anything otherworldly.

Throughout the modern era, secularism has presented itself as the sane alternative to the craziness of religion. Today, in the United States, its clearest commitment is to exclude the Ways from an equal place in the public square. It focuses attention on this world and the human condition within it. It claims to reject all restrictions on critical thought. Surely concern for the world and

the application of critical rationality are essential to the resolution of our problems! One might hope, therefore, that the dominance of secularism would lead to serious concern for the fate of this planet and its inhabitants and to a rational response. But clearly it has not done so. Why? What is the secularist world lacking?

To answer this question, I turn to the major expressions of secularism in the modern world. Four are significant in shaping current thinking and behavior. They are science, philosophy, higher education, and economism.

First, science has directed its attention entirely to this world and developed methods of studying it that have proved extraordinarily fruitful. Chiefly scientists have alerted us to the destructive effects of our actions on our environment. And individual scientists have given us the leadership we urgently need. But the scientific community as a whole has gone about its business little affected by the crisis. When scientists offer the guidance we need, they are regarded as stepping outside their proper role as scientists.

Second, philosophy, beginning with Descartes, separated itself sharply from theology in order to be fully secularist. It has had a fascinating history, which has also affected the wider society in many ways. But the dominant school of philosophy today, linguistic analysis, contributes very little to the needed response. Fortunately, a group of philosophers have brought their analytical skills to bear on issues related to the environment. They are tolerated in the wider philosophical community. Yet that community has not been much affected by this subgroup. Most members of this subgroup attend to environmental issues because of passions they bring to philosophy rather than derive from it.

Third, the modern university is a fully secularist institution. The research university is organized around academic disciplines, including the sciences. These disciplines aim at being value free. This organization of knowledge is designed to press forward the frontiers of research, and it has been brilliantly successful in this regard. Some of this research is useful for understanding the environmental crisis and suggesting responses to it. More of it is useful for improving the quality of production of corporations and increasing its quantity as well. Serving corporations rarely contributes to saving the Earth. More often, it hastens catastrophe. Since the university does not promote its own values, research goes to where the money for it is available. Overall, university research contributes more to the Earth's problems than to their solution.

Fourth, the ideology that now governs the world can be called *economism*, which is a fully secularist way of thought. Its principles are articulated in one of the academic disciplines, economics, which has been particularly successful in becoming completely secularist. Economism is based on the choice of economics to be the queen of the sciences. Its basic orientation is to promote

the growth that is undercutting the possibility of a healthy future for the planet.

I have said that human society as a whole is crazy. By society, I refer to the leadership that, despite being fully informed of the catastrophic consequences of present policies, persists in just those policies. I have indicated that religiousness contributes to this craziness but that today it is not the primary determinant of world affairs. I have looked at major forms of secularism to see whether they can lead us into a more rational path. The answer is discouraging.

IV. Secularizing the Great Ways

Religion attributes a kind of absoluteness to some features of the past. If something is said to be biblical, many religious Protestants treat it as beyond further discussion. Conciliar and papal pronouncements can have final authority for very religious Catholics. The Ten Commandments have very special authority for many Christians. One or another image of Jesus can be the focus. Most other traditions also reverence ancient documents. Sometimes the authority is affirmed on the grounds that the statements are divinely inspired. Much of the religious focus in the Abrahamic tradition is on obedience to divine commands. Today in the religious right such beliefs are mixed in with the sacralization of free enterprise and American imperialism.

On the other hand, secularists intend to deny any authority to the past. In physics, quoting Aristotle's views is wholly irrelevant. Only empirical data and successful predictions count. Beginning with Descartes, philosophers chose a similar break with the past. Descartes wanted to begin with his own experience taken as exemplary for all human beings. He wanted to build from that with indubitable steps. Then the result should be reliable and even certain. Others have pursued this goal of a secularist philosophy, but to the extent that they really free themselves from the forms of understanding developed through millennia of human experience, they have ended up with less and less. Secularist philosophy has difficulty proposing any *ought*. Normative discourse is largely viewed as expressive of preferences.

When these polar opposites are presented as the alternatives from which to choose, the prospects are discouraging indeed. But there is, in fact, a third option. It is possible to recover, refine, and reappropriate the wisdom of the past and clarify its relevance to the present. Prior to modernity, most critical thought had this character. Plato and Aristotle began with ideas that had been shaped by Hellenic cultural experience over the centuries. They developed their philosophies from this material, sifting what was worthy, clarifying its meaning, and organizing the ideas in new ways. Almost all traditional Indian

and Chinese thought has been of this sort. It did not discard the past, but it did not take any one past formulation as beyond further critical discussion. On the contrary, thinkers critically examined the inherited ideas, clarified their valid meaning and use for life in the real world, and organized the resulting thoughts so as to ensure their mutual coherence. I call this the *secularizing* of tradition.

Currently I have the opportunity to support postmodern work in China. For millennia China lived by ancient teachings modified very gradually in response to changing circumstances. In the nineteenth century, Western developments in science and technology and the resulting superiority of the Western military put pressure on China to change. There was danger that the colonial powers would divide China up among themselves. This was totally unacceptable to the inhabitants of the world's oldest continuous civilization, one that had repeatedly absorbed its conquerors.

Leading Chinese thinkers saw that unless China made major advances along the lines of Western superiority, it would long be subordinated to the Western powers and even to Japan. They viewed Chinese traditions as obstacles to the needed changes. They set out on an ambitious program to transform China into a modern nation, with *modern* understood to mean the Western Enlightenment and industrialization.

Real change arrived in the twentieth century, most dramatically in the adoption of a Chinese form of Marxism. Marxism was thoroughly secular in the sense that it rejected traditional religions, but at least in Mao's version, it emphasized personal ethics. The individual was strongly encouraged to live for the common good.

Subsequently Mao's little red book has been set aside. China decided that to compete effectively with the West, it would have to adopt Western secularist styles of education and economics. Thinking that the United States is the most successful Western nation, China has built scores of huge schools on the model of the American state universities. But the only ethic that is communicated in these great universities is how to get ahead, especially in economic terms. Higher education no longer promotes the quest for the common good.

China gave up its traditional values in order to compete with the West on its own terms. It has been remarkably successful. But when we ask whether China, by succeeding in this competition, is contributing to the health of the Earth, the answer is obviously negative. Both the ecological and the social consequences of rapid modernization have proved destructive within China, and if China continues on its present course, the whole world will suffer acutely.

One response could be to judge that the ancient religious culture of China, which is expressed in both Confucianism and Taoism, is superior to the secularist Western Enlightenment that has extensively replaced it. But reestablishment of an ancient Way would itself be crazy. Despite the wisdom of the

ancient Chinese sages and its positive effects on Chinese society, the people as a whole were not liberated by this heritage to think creatively in relation to new problems. Indeed, in the daily life of most Chinese, superstition played a larger role than the true wisdom of the sages.

There is another option. This is the critical reappropriation of its own tradition, which is rich in wisdom about nature and society. It can be reappropriated without abandoning the scientific and technological achievements of modernity. But this wisdom might redirect these modern achievements into the production of an "ecological civilization," including a "harmonious society," a goal to which the government says it is now committed. This embedding of elements of the modern in the overarching vision and wisdom of the critically appropriated ancient tradition can provide an alternative to both religiousness and secularism.

There are secularizing thinkers in all of the world's great Ways, and they are able to find resources in their traditions for responding appropriately to the current global crisis. This was demonstrated in a remarkable series of conferences organized by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim that brought together thinkers from one tradition after another to discuss ecological issues. The results are available in the ten-volume series Religions of the World and Ecology (Harvard University Press). The thinking expressed in these volumes may sometimes be mistaken or one-sided or naïve. It is certainly not crazy. The work begun in those conferences continues under many auspices, including the Forum on Religion and Ecology.

V. Secularizing Christianity

The Bible includes at its heart an account of the secularizing of an ancient Way. Participation in the tradition of secularizing the Way is the most faithful form of Christianity today. That is a central thesis of this book.

In the Hebrew Scriptures this process of secularizing appears most dramatically in the prophetic writings. In ancient Israel, to prophesy was to claim to pronounce the word of God. Retrospectively most of the prophets were judged to be false. In general the false prophets were those who were most religious, that is, most committed to the values of the existing culture and most reassuring with respect to them. Their writings were not included in the collection of scripture that we call the Bible.

The true prophets turned out to be those who were most critical of the existing structure of society and of the economy of the time and particularly of its religiousness. They were typically unpopular and often persecuted. But their words were remembered and preserved. They called for justice and mercy, and

railed against the idea that God was pleased by ceremonies and sacrifices. They warned against the view that because of the power of their God, the Hebrews were safe from foreign armies.

Jesus stood in this tradition, critiquing both the political and the religious authorities of his day and calling for countercultural communities. Like the earlier prophets, he was persecuted and, like some of his predecessors, executed as a threat to established political and religious structures. Sadly, the message of Jesus has been concealed and corrupted by the religiousness of many who intend to reverence him. Nevertheless, the secularizing process has reasserted itself again and again.

The following chapters trace the history of the struggle between religion and secularizing in the history of Christianity. They then turn to the rise of secularism and its expression in science, philosophy, higher education, and economism. The final chapters discuss hopeful developments in the culture and in recent Christianity.

CHAPTER NINE

A NEW BEGINNING IN PHILOSOPHY

I. The Prospects for a New Philosophy

The preceding chapters pointed out the limitations of secularism. These limitations resulted from the secularist effort to cut thinking off from ideas inherited from the premodern past. This effort has been most explicit in philosophy, but it has shaped science and higher education in general. It works especially against thinking with full seriousness about questions of value, human meaning, and personal commitment. It now works also against seeking coherence in our understanding of the world as a whole, even of the purely physical world. At a time when the Earth as a whole is in crisis and radical commitment to its salvation is critically needed, these limitations are very serious.

If secularism were a minor factor in human affairs today, its criticism would be an academic affair, and in one sense this is the actual situation. Few people are totally secularist in their personal lives, for life is very much a matter of values, meaning, and commitments. But secularism plays a role in the social order vastly greater than it plays directly in individual lives. For example, the world as a whole is organized chiefly around secularist economic considerations, even if the individuals who promote the dominant economic theory and those who serve economistic institutions actually care greatly about other things. This structuring of global activity accelerates the destruction from which human intelligence should be used to save us.

The failure of secularism to provide guidance in our time of overwhelming crisis does not mean that the world can simply return to its ancient Ways. These Ways have again and again succumbed to religion. Even the finest wisdom

embodied in traditional thinking can have only indirect bearing on the creation of the new theories, institutions, and practices apart from which the Earth cannot be saved.

On the other hand, when the ancient Ways are secularized, they *can* contribute greatly to the needed changes. Some of this secularizing takes place within a tradition because of its deepest nature. This is beneficial, but its results are far from sufficient to meet today's quite new needs. Secularizing a Way includes rejecting any idea that it is a self-enclosed entity that flourishes out of its internal resources. Secularizing involves learning from others, and the quality of the result of the secularizing depends very much on the quality of the others from which it can learn.

Through most of Christian history, the churches' thinkers looked to philosophy as a support and resource for expanding Christian understanding. Christianity had to unlearn much that it absorbed from Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, if the church had tried to think about the world without the aid of these philosophers, its thought would have been worse. As Descartes and then Hume and Kant reshaped philosophy, those who sought to secularize Christian thought often turned to them and their heirs for help. The results are disappointing. Openness to the major forms of modern philosophy has done more harm than good.

The church has always wanted to be in harmony with all that is truly known about the world. In recent centuries this has led to directing its attention even more to science than to philosophy. Throughout early modern history, the churches' secularizing thinkers related themselves closely to what was understood as the scientific worldview. The enormous influence of Immanuel Kant led most, especially on the European continent, to accept a dualism that put an end to the expectation of direct learning from science. On the other hand, in the English-language world, new developments in science, especially evolutionary theory, led to massive theological adjustments.

Unfortunately, the metaphysics with which science identifies itself drastically limits what is possible from the side of the church. Secularizing thinkers who wish to learn from science how best to develop theology cannot adopt the mechanistic worldview as a comprehensive doctrine without abandoning the wisdom whose relevance they seek to develop. And the abandonment of the goal of understanding reality on the part of scientists can only leave the churches' thinkers perplexed.

The church created the Western university, and for centuries the work of the churches' thinkers and what students gained from higher education in Christendom were intimately intertwined. But the modern university has separated itself not only from the institutional church but also from those goals that the church and the university once shared: truth, beauty, and goodness.

The church can gain much information from the university, but it must look elsewhere for wisdom.

This lack of partners for secularizing Christian thinkers raises the question about whether the contemporary world is capable of producing new forms of thought that could guide and assist with the deepest concern of secularizing Christians: the salvation of the Earth. The answer is affirmative: there has been a significant, truly promising ferment among philosophers. In the twentieth century it took two forms.

In the past three decades the movement of thought that attracted the most excitement in philosophy and related disciplines was in France, and it was called *deconstruction* or *postmodern*. It was described at the end of chapter 5. Another movement occurred in the twentieth century. It took nature seriously but rejected its identification as matter in motion. One of its greatest exponents was Henri Bergson. In France, Gilles Deleuze, one of the leading postmodernists, recognized the value of his work.

The best-known figure in the United States was William James. James was not only a naturalist but also a pragmatist and a radical empiricist. This combination of new approaches to philosophical questions opens the door to something very different from the modern philosophy whose most insightful practitioners understand that it has come to an end.

In *Science and the Modern World*, Alfred North Whitehead recognized the significance of the new beginning represented by James. Whitehead held that James inaugurated a "new stage" in philosophy when he published "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" in 1904. James undercut the Cartesian ego at the same time that developments in science undercut Cartesian materialism.

If Whitehead thought that this new style of philosophy would soon sweep the field, he was sadly mistaken. After a few decades during which new developments of physics opened the door to a new naturalism and reconnection of philosophy and science, the linguistic turn in its analytic form returned Anglo-American philosophy to a much more limited late-modern project. Bergson, James, and others in this movement were relegated to the margins of twentieth-century philosophy.

II. The New Philosophy

What kind of philosophy is needed today if people are to see the Earth, its crisis, and humanity in a way that inspires and guides the required actions? The Earth should be seen as a living organism or as supportive of numerous living organisms. These should be recognized as having their own values so that the human perspective will take these into account instead of appraising such

entities in relation to human goals. Human life should be deeply respected as a part of the Earth system, which is one of radical interconnectedness and interdependence of its parts. Human ability to exercise responsible freedom, individually and collectively, should be accented. The values, convictions, and commitments of human beings should be emphasized as having enormous influence on the fate of the whole Earth and, therefore, as worthy of the most exacting consideration. This understanding of human beings as part of the natural world with special responsibility for its destiny should be coherently related to a coherent scientific understanding of the world.

Secularism has dramatically failed to provide what is needed, at least partly because of its concentration on sense experience and its processing. This focus has disconnected modern philosophers from the past. The goal was to find, especially in visual experience, a common ground on which to build. We now know that this view of the independence of visual experience from culture is exaggerated. East Asians and Westerners actually see the world differently, for example, in terms of background and foreground.

James proposed a *radical* empiricism that began with the whole of experience. When philosophy does this, it must recognize the enormous role of the past in shaping contemporary experience. The idea of finding a neutral, unconditioned starting point for thought must be abandoned. The work of philosophy is to evaluate critically the thought derived from the past rather than to displace it.

If thinkers really begin with the examination of where they are and the beliefs they hold most confidently, they will move in many diverse directions, but they are likely to find considerable overlap. Many of them are likely to find, for example, that the beliefs of which they are most confident are among those that they have least often articulated. The reason is that we are more aware of those beliefs that have been challenged in one way or another.

Almost all persons believe that they live in a real world that contains other people and physical objects whose reality does not depend on being experienced by them. Anyone who truly does not believe that has serious psychiatric problems. Those who have studied philosophy may be aware of holding this belief or may claim to have rejected it. But the person who claims to have rejected it seems, by the act of such claiming, to assume the social matrix she or he denies.

For one who begins philosophy with a critical examination of the actual experience of people, therefore, it will make more sense to adjust other beliefs to this one than to treat this one as requiring support from something more assured. The Cartesian doubt, which began by doubting the reality of an external world, led to preoccupation with epistemology. If philosophy starts instead with the affirmation of a natural and social matrix, its task will be to explain

these. It will seek to understand the relation between human beings and the remainder of the world, rather than to justify the claim that there is such a world. Like Greek philosophy, it will focus on ontology rather than epistemology or language. The acts of knowing and speaking will be among the phenomena to be explained. Since the history of modern philosophy shows that the epistemological and linguistic starting point has not led to useful conclusions, and since the analysis of language has become an increasingly trivial activity in view of the global crisis, it is time to return to something more like the fruitful philosophizing of the Greeks.

The actual experience of people everywhere is also that there is an intimate two-way connection between events in their bodies and their personal emotions, purposes, and decisions. A philosophy of the radical empirical variety will, therefore, take this as a datum to be explained rather than one to be ignored or explained away—as materialists and idealists have done. If science proposes to study nature comprehensively, then the interaction between the physical and the psychical will be a significant part of its work. If it defines itself as dealing only with physical phenomena insofar as they can be explained by other physical phenomena, it will need to be supplemented by other forms of disciplined study.

One of the most important features of this relationship is the awareness that although what we become in each moment is largely determined by the condition of our bodies and the specific events of our past, there is also an element of self-determination. Without that, our sense of responsibility for both thought and action, our rationality, and our moral judgments would be wholly meaningless. Yet they are deeply entrenched in our experience. Here, too, the task of philosophy is to explain rather than to explain away.

On the side of science, the need is to take seriously new findings that do not fit the old paradigms and to find new paradigms that enable our new knowledge to make sense. The need is to develop coherent accounts within each discipline and coherent relations among them so that they can add up to a coherent vision. This vision should always be subject to revision when good reasons are provided for a change.

Ideas about God and the world are not universal. But in cultures where they have long been important, they are to be examined critically rather than simply excised. The philosophies that belong to this new family have generally adopted this approach. Some find in the reconsideration of the grounds for order and novelty the need of a critically revised doctrine of God. Because the new paradigm does not exclude the influence of the subjective on the objective world, of purpose on physical behavior, it is open to the possibility of divine influence as contemporary secularism is not. Others emphasize moral and religious experience together with the wonder of human freedom as the

place where full explanation calls for reflection about God. But the new method and starting point do not predetermine any particular conclusion on the theistic question.

The point here is that persons who think about the world in this way can recognize the greatest problems of our time and analyze them. They focus on a holistic and inclusive understanding of themselves as significant actors within the system of nature and accept the responsibility that this vision entails. They can draw wisely from the information provided by many sources without having their decisions determined by specialists in any one field. This is not academic philosophy as one discipline alongside others, but it is something much more important. It is a renewal of the ancient quest for wisdom that can give real help to human beings in finding their way through practical difficulties of a novel and overwhelming sort.

III. Alfred North Whitehead

The one who developed the most comprehensive and rigorous vision was Alfred North Whitehead. Whereas James was a psychologist, Whitehead was a mathematical physicist. At the present stage of scientific development, knowledge of mathematics and physics is essential to forming a truly comprehensive system of thought. Accordingly we are fortunate that one man, immersed in these fields, recognized the pioneering genius of James and fleshed out his ideas into the most original cosmology of the twentieth century.

Whitehead was acutely interested in, and appreciative of, relativity theory, convinced that it required a major break from Newton's understanding of space, time, matter, and motion. But he thought that Einstein's formulation, with its talk of the variable curvature of space-time, was incoherent in its fusion of physics and geometry. Space is not, in Whitehead's view, the sort of thing that can be straight or curved. Any space that can be treated by elliptical or hyperbolic geometry can also be treated by Euclidean geometry. He developed a theory based on multiple time systems that predicted the same phenomena as Einstein, although he devoted far more time to a slightly different theory with slightly different predictions. The slightly different predictions are not supported by evidence as of now. But whichever formula eventually proves best, he showed that the phenomena can be explained in an intelligible way. That so few physicists are interested in intelligibility is a problem discussed in the preceding chapter.

Although Whitehead did not follow quantum theory so closely, his philosophy takes quantum events as fundamental and has interested a number of quantum physicists. By envisioning changes in a field of quantum events rather

than seeking to understand what is going on in terms of particles and waves, there is far greater promise of a coherent theory. There is hope, as yet unrealized, that relativity theory can be formulated in terms of quantum theory, and Whitehead's conceptuality may well contribute to that. Certainly his concepts are more conducive to coherence in biology than the mechanistic ones now in vogue.

No one would claim that Whitehead has provided us with the final answers about the physical universe. Whitehead would not, but he has provided an approach and a conceptuality that can support continuing advance without abandoning intelligibility and coherence.

Whitehead's single greatest contribution to philosophy is his idea of prehension. It is immensely helpful to secularizing Christians to whom the next chapter returns, but it is important for thinking in every field.

This importance can be shown by considering once again the problem of causality. One deeply entrenched feature of our understanding of the world is that some things happen *because* of other happenings. Our whole sense of responsibility rests on this as well as most of our expectations about the future. Try to imagine what it would be like if, as you thought about tomorrow, you supposed that what happened today would have no efficacy in shaping tomorrow's events. Neither common sense nor science can get along without ideas of cause and effect.

Taking seriously the priority of sensory experience, Hume found himself forced to reject causality or to redefine it so radically that it no longer performed its proper roles. Kant recognized the problem and resolved it by abandoning all talk of an objectively real nature, replacing it with the inescapable ordering of the phenomena by the human mind. If we follow Kant, we can no longer assert that one actual event causes certain subsequent occurrences; we can only say that our minds are so constructed that they necessarily order the sensa that characterize experience in causal relations. The necessity previously thought of as inhering in relationships between events in the real world is understood by those who follow Kant to belong only to the human mind.

Although scientists ignored Hume and Kant and went on with their work as if commonsense notions of cause worked, most philosophers have accepted the choice between Hume and Kant. No one has ever really believed either of these theories, but they are taken as required in the course of philosophical reflection.

If, instead of beginning with sense experience, we begin with the totality of human experience, we can move in a quite different direction. Although the sense of being affected by the past and influencing the future is quite vague, it is also quite inescapable. Again, one may try to imagine that the present moment of one's experience came into being out of nothing or entirely by its

own act. I, for one, cannot pull this off. Most of what is now in the experience is felt as derived from elsewhere. The elsewhere may be the body or the immediately preceding experience or something more remote.

An example may help guide reflection. Suppose one is hearing the second syllable of the third word in a sentence. One hears it normally as part of a sentence. But one recognizes quickly that one is not now hearing the sounds that composed the first syllable of the word and the preceding words. They are present, but present as the continuing efficacy of the past in the present. If the past were not efficacious in the present experience, there might be sounds, but we would hear no sentences or even words.

How are we to understand the relation of one moment of our experience to its immediate predecessor? The model of one billiard ball striking another is not helpful. That is a model of contact between self-contained things that remain external to one another. What we have instead is the presence of the past in the present. The past is present as past, but that is still an important mode of presence. To put it another way, the past experience plays a large role in the constitution of the present experience. It does not cease to be the experience it was—now in the past—but it also functions constitutively in the present.

This relationship has received very little attention in modern philosophy. But for radical empiricists it is of obvious importance. Whitehead gives it a name. The present occasion of experience prehends the previous one. This term emphasizes the activity of the present occasion. But most of what happens in this relationship is determined by the previous occasion. So we may equally well say, the previous occasion is causally efficacious in the constitution of the present occasion. The earlier occasion is the cause of some features of the present occasion; those features are the effect.

No event or experience as a whole is exhaustively the effect of any other event or experience. Every event or experience prehends, or takes some account of a vast number of past events or experiences. Most of these prehensions play a trivial role, but all contribute to the solidarity of the universe. Each of us is bound up with all those in the past, and all those in the future will be bound up with us. Our being is relational through and through.

Once we understand that causality is the way one thing is in another, we can also see how this idea was lost in modern substance philosophy. No two substances can be in the same place at the same time. In a world of matter in motion there can be no causality. Whitehead shifts to a world of events and experiences. When we examine our experience in a moment, we see that previous experiences play a large role in it. All unit events are like this. Quantum events can be understood as the way a vast field of quantum events expresses itself at a particular location. In short, a quantum event is a synthesis of many

prehensions. The situation is similar with moments in the life history of bacteria.

I have used the double terminology of *events* and *experiences*. It is easy to understand that an experience is an event. It occurs and it is over, although it is also present, as a part of the past, in new experiences. It provides the clue about the causal relationships present in all events.

Some events are of enormous scope. The Second World War was an event, but it can be broken down into billions of smaller events with their many causal relations. This process of analysis, however, can go only so far. Among the events that make up World War II, there are billions of momentary human experiences. These are unitary events. There cannot be half of an experience. However complex it is, it has ontological unity.

In the physical world we now suppose that the quanta also have ontological unity, whereas the atoms, which were once thought to play this role, do not. The quanta are most analogous to a moment of human experience. They synthesize their prehensions of past events and become part of the past for new quantum events. Whitehead was an emphatic realist, who believed that these quantum events occur quite apart from human experience. That means that they exist in and of themselves, and that in turn means that as they occur, they are subjects. The only idea we can conjure of a subject is an experience. Hence for Whitehead all unitary and indivisible events are experiences. Of course, experiences vary greatly; the vast majority of them include no consciousness or sense perception at all. They may be thought of as throbs of unconscious emotion.

The prehensions I have discussed thus far are physical. That is, they are prehensions of other experiences or events. But if new occasions of experience were simply syntheses of aspects of earlier occasions of experience, there would still be a deterministic system. There would be no way to understand human thinking or acting. Whitehead belongs to the philosophical community, however, that seeks to explain rather than to explain away.

To explain self-determination and all the higher subjective capacities, Whitehead proposes that in addition to physical prehensions, there are conceptual ones. These prehend pure potentials, which are something like what Platonists have called ideas, but Whitehead's thinking about them grows out of his creative work in mathematical logic, which is very different from anything available to Plato. Conceptual prehensions introduce into an occasion the possibility of something that contrasts with what it has received in the past. This enables even very simple occasions to attain more intensity of emotion. What most physicists call *waves* Whitehead identifies as *vibrations*, and he asserts that the vibratory character of the physical world testifies to the importance of some contrast even in very primitive entities.

In human experience the awareness of unactualized possibilities enables us to be conscious of the actualized ones. We are conscious only when we experience something as not something else. This presupposes conceptual prehensions. The data of conceptual prehensions also play a large role in visual experience and in thought. Whitehead provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which physical and conceptual prehensions are synthesized and developed so as to explain the great differences of complexity between elementary occasions and complex ones.

The physical prehensions of each occasion constitute the physical pole, and the conceptual prehensions along with all the syntheses of the two constitute the mental pole. Thus Whitehead recognizes the distinction between the physical and the mental. But every experience or actual occasion is an integration of these two poles. There is not one part of reality consisting of physical events or things and another part of reality consisting of mental events or things. There is duality, or dipolarity, but no dualism.

Causality is the name of the power that one entity exercises on others. In much thinking to this day, power is understood as the ability externally to compel someone or something to act as one wishes. This idea obviously has a basis in events. If one strikes a billiard ball with one's cue in a certain way, it will knock another billiard ball into a pocket. This appears to us as entirely coercive, determined by the exact way in which the cue strikes the ball.

In human relations also, some people seek this kind of power over others, and there are instances where it is approximated. To prevent a young girl from stepping into traffic, an adult may grab her with no consideration of her present desires. This power can play a needed role. It can also destroy and kill.

Hume discovered that there is no basis in sense experience of the external world for attributing to phenomena this kind of coercive power. In order to restore a realistic understanding of causality, Whitehead developed an analysis of how one thing may be in another. That is, he shifted from external relations to internal ones. This is the primary and ultimate basis of all causality.

The world of our common experience, however, is primarily a world of things that are made up of many of these individuals. The bonds among these individuals lead them to constitute much larger wholes, such as stones. These bonds are internal relations, that is, physical prehensions. But when we ask about the effect of a stone thrown at a glass window, such internal relations play only an indirect role in the shattering of the glass. In many situations, our direct interest is in external relations. Although these are ultimately derivative from internal relations, for practical purposes, even in most fields of science, they are rightly treated in their own terms. They play a large role in human relations as well, most of all in war.

In human relations, we relate to other persons who, moment by moment, are individual experiences. Here we discover that internal relations come directly into play. The appearance of one person to another enters into the experience of the other. The sheer presence of one person can be profoundly reassuring or disturbing to another. Thus the physical feelings of one another, which Whitehead calls *causal*, play a significant role in the constitution of each of us.

In human relations, we exercise another kind of power on one another. We often want to get others to act in a particular way, contribute a new idea to them, or change their opinion on some topic. In this case, their physical prehensions of us will not suffice. They must prehend our ideas as well. But in this case, we do not expect their prehension of the ideas, which we may communicate orally or in writing or by example, to achieve the goal in itself. That would be the bare prehension of the idea. The issue is *how* the idea is felt, and we can influence, but not determine, that. Persuasion is an internal relation, but it must be distinguished from physical causality of both the internal and the external variety.

IV. Whitehead's Theism

Whitehead devoted most of his attention to the development of a conceptuality appropriate to the present state of scientific knowledge that also connected it with the best understanding of *human* experience. His account of causality was central to this unifying vision. This in itself is of great importance for secularizing Christians. But his contribution went further. He opened the door to reflection about divine causality as well.

As long as the only choices for understanding causality were those offered by Hume and by Kant, the idea that God plays a causal role of any kind was excluded a priori. But if God plays no causal role, what can be made of the biblical stories? What can be meant by creation, grace, or incarnation? The answer is: nothing at all. Since secularizers of Christianity typically try to formulate beliefs in ways that the dominant philosophy allows, theistic affirmations have long been marginalized. Anything approximating biblical acts of God has disappeared from the secularizing Christian literature.

Partly as a result of the difficulty of speaking of God, for secularizing Christians the understanding of human beings and history has assumed the central role once occupied by God and the human soul. God the Creator of the world has been replaced by Jesus the Savior of individual people or the leader of a social movement. This is, for the most part, authentic Christian secularizing. However, when Christians, committed to taking the best available philosophy seriously, are forced to abandon serious talk about God and what God

does in the world, their enterprise is seriously weakened. Religious Christians, seeing this, have warned against secularizing in general.

Whitehead's restoration of causality, as the effective presence of one entity in another, changes this situation. This way of thinking closely parallels the primary mode of causality with which the New Testament is concerned. There it is said that God was in Christ, that Christ is in believers, that believers are in one another, and that believers are in Christ.

With Whitehead's conceptuality, even the idea that God is the Creator of the natural world can be given significant meaning. The rejection of any causal relation between God and the world was due to the metaphysics of the early nineteenth century rather than to any superiority of nontheistic accounts of the world to the theistic one. In Hume the laws of nature can only be abstractions from the observed regularity of successions of sense data. These abstractions play no explanatory role with regard to the occurrence of these regularities. For Kant the human mind is the creator of nature and thus also of its laws. Nothing can be said about what the world is apart from the mind or before human minds existed. With a new metaphysics that provides a realistic understanding of causality, the old reasons for positing God in relation to nature can be reexamined rather than dismissed a priori.

For Whitehead the order in the world results from the immanence in actuality of pure potentiality, which is itself ordered. This immanence is a matter of conceptual prehensions. What an occasion of experience prehends conceptually is in part determined by the ordering of those potentials. This ordering establishes the regularities to be found in nature as well as the possibility of novelty and self-determination. The ordering of pure potentials is the work of God. Without God there would be no world.

Whitehead's understanding of God is quite different from the one that became dominant in the Christian tradition. The dominant tradition affirmed that God is in total, unilateral control of all that happens. For Whitehead every event is causally affected by myriads of past events and is also in some part, however small, self-determining. That God is one of the many causal factors, displacing none of them, is a very different view from the idea of God as omnipotent. But God's role, unlike that of any other causal factor, is essential. Without the immanence of God, nothing happens.

The traditional view is that God is immutable and therefore not affected by what happens in the world. Whitehead's view is that everything is a synthesis of prehensions of other things. He speculated that this is true of God as well. God is perfectly affected by all that happens in the world.

Traditional views of God's power include a mixture of types of power. But Whitehead's analysis indicates that one form of power, perhaps the one that comes first to mind when we use the word *power*, is excluded. External power

can belong only to societies containing numerous indivisible events. The power that moves objects around externally is excluded from God. God is not, in the appropriate sense, external to anything. Primarily God is immanent in the world in and through the potentials that are so arranged as to produce order in worldly events.

By order, Whitehead does not mean regular patterns. The most highly ordered entity in the world may be the human brain. It is not constructed in repeated patterns that could be regarded as regular. The extremely complex, even irregular, order of the neurons makes possible the most valuable events that now occur, human experiences. God's aim in the ordering of potentiality is to bring into being in the universe as much value as possible. God lures us to act in ways that further that goal.

These changes in the view of God have two great advantages from the perspective of those who seek to secularize Christianity. First, they are closer to biblical thinking in general than is the tradition formed in the early church under Greek influence. Second, they direct attention to the importance of what happens in the world and of human responsibility for it. Affirming God as Whitehead understands God inherently strengthens tendencies to secularizing of inherited theistic traditions.

V. Implications for Secularist Institutions

Preceding chapters have criticized the outcome of secularism in science, in higher education, and in economics. That the shift from the metaphysics of Descartes to that of the new naturalism, inaugurated by William James, and most fully developed by Whitehead, would support different outcomes is evident. This chapter concludes with brief comments on each.

1. Science

Since Whitehead was a scientist, he is quite explicit about some of the changes for which his thinking calls in that field. He would keep the distinction between geometry and physics that has been threatened in the acceptance of Einstein's formulations of relativity theory. He would renew the quest for intelligibility and coherence throughout the sciences. He would end the exclusion of subjectivity from a role in the world science studies. At one point he proposes the development of a psychological physiology to complement the existing physiological psychology. He would not exclude parapsychology from the range of topics to be studied.

More broadly, he would replace the mechanistic model with an organic one. The organism is always in interaction with the environment. That means that study of the larger environment and its effect on the entity is important to the understanding of the entity itself. Often the larger environment may itself be an organism. For example, a molecule in a cell needs to be studied not only as mechanists do, in terms of its parts, but also as a part of the cell and therefore influenced by what happens at the cellular level. If the cell is part of a brain, science should consider how what happens at the level of the brain as a whole affects it. Of course, the brain is part of the body, and the body is part of the whole psychophysical organism, which is part of a family and so forth. The mechanistic model tries to build up its knowledge of the cell, the brain, and the body, out of its knowledge about the molecule and its behavior outside the body. For Whitehead it is important to see that influence goes in both directions. He would be glad that a few students of animal behavior have actually lived with the animals in the wild. He would expect there to be differences between animals in the wild and the same animals confined in cages, most obviously in behavior, but also in internal bodily functioning.

In no way would a Whiteheadian science deny that much that happens in nature has a mechanistic character. At times, Whitehead called his vision *organic mechanism*. He was not disposed to throw out the achievements of the past. Newton's physics was true with qualifications. In many of its uses, the qualifications are not important. What must be avoided is the belief that Newton (or, for that matter, Whitehead) has achieved the completion of science so that phenomena that do not conform to his principles are ignored or denied. Scientific theories are hypotheses and should always remain such. Scientists should work with them as long as they fit well with other theories and accommodate the facts as they are discovered. But they must be wary of religiousness in science as much as in any other type of tradition. The record in this regard has not been good.

2. Higher Education

Advocates of the new naturalism have written extensively about education. John Dewey's work was once highly influential in shaping the education of children, although it never had much effect at the university level. Whitehead's writing on education also has been more seriously considered in relation to the lower grades. Indeed, the new naturalists have dealt much less with higher education in general. Nevertheless, it is not hard to indicate the sort of changes required at that level as well.

The disciplinary organization of knowledge has made a significant contribution to research. Yet even in regard to research it has often channeled this

away from important topics and missed significant connections. In any case, research should not be the primary purpose of higher education.

Universities already recognize this in various ways. Much of their work today is training people for specific jobs other than research. This slices the pie differently, and the market plays an increasing role. The courses offered are those that attract enough students to pay for themselves. This depends to a considerable extent on requirements for credentials. Defending academic integrity today often depends on practitioners of the established disciplines. This resistance has maintained a degree of commitment to open inquiry concerned with accuracy and truth.

But for authentic education, the relationships among facts are as important as the facts themselves; the relevance of facts for personal and social life is as important as the accuracy of the facts; and today the connection between all sorts of facts and human destiny is of extreme importance. Objective information separated from human values is not the content of authentic education.

Radical empiricists advocate student-centered education. This does not mean that universities leave more and more choices to the students. It means that studying how people learn and reflecting on the real needs of individuals and society would jointly shape education, including its more advanced forms.

The detailed outcome of this collaboration cannot be predicted, but it would certainly separate higher education from job training. Like research, job training is important, but it should not be the heart of higher education. Higher education would then go back to some of what characterized liberal arts colleges.

There would be some effort to identify broad fields in which it is important that thoughtful and responsible human beings should be informed. Courses would be designed to provide just that information rather than an introduction to doing research in that field. One course in biology might be designed to prepare students to understand what is happening in the world with respect to ecology, zoology, and human health. Another course might help more advanced students deal with what can be learned scientifically about the phenomenon of life that contributes to an overview of the whole of reality. These courses, and similar ones in other fields, would fit the stage of education that Whitehead called *romance*. They would be taught in such a way as to emphasize the interconnections among the fields. Students would be involved throughout in interactive learning.

Whitehead affirmed also the importance of *precision*. At some point in their program, students would identify a topic to which they were prepared to give serious and sustained attention. It could be in any field or could cross the normal boundaries of fields, but it should be a topic of some importance. The student should take enough time to master the selected topic.

For example, a student might have become keenly interested in the way in which the expansion of industry is threatening ecosystems around the world and wondered how this problem might be addressed. She might decide to study one such situation in south China. In this case, attaining precision would not fall entirely in the province of biology. It would also involve economic practices, cultural sensitivities, political policies, and demographics.

She might realize that the task of analyzing this problem is too complex for her to do alone. Indeed, the institution, recognizing that serious research on real-world problems is more than a single student can handle, might encourage groups of students to work together, assigning subtasks to their members and interacting among themselves so as to come out with unified conclusions and recommendations. Such an undertaking would teach the limitations of individual research, the benefits, even the necessity, of collaborative work, and also the extra difficulties it involves.

Spending a substantial part of a student's program on such research would teach the student what makes for responsible research and the ability to discern the reliability of others' conclusions. Whereas the research shaped by disciplinary concerns is only indirectly related to real-world needs, the student who experienced this quest for precision with respect to a real-world problem would understand its importance for dealing with the current crisis. The student who has engaged once in serious research of this kind can do so again when the circumstances of life require it.

In "End the University as We Know It" (*New York Times*, April 27, 2009), Mark C. Taylor proposed the abolition of disciplinary departments and the reorganization of the faculty around problem-focused programs that would be reconsidered and restructured from time to time. This would contribute greatly to the sort of student experience described above. It would also redirect research into the channels in which it is truly needed.

Whitehead called for a third stage, *generalization*. It brings together the romance of the first stage and the scholarly rigor of the second. What has been learned through the work of precision that allows for a deeper appreciation of what has been treated only in the stage of romance? It is only through generalization that the results of precise scholarship find their true meaning and importance.

In the medieval tradition, the studies that enable someone to appreciate life and be a leader in society may be followed by professional training. The professional fields were medicine, law, and theology. Today, leaders in business are often viewed as guides in society. Perhaps there should be a truly professional program in that field.

Persons who have responsibility to guide cities and shape public policies should be professionals in the traditional sense. This is also true for people in

management of many types of institutions. Perhaps within law we should distinguish between those who want only to practice law and those who want also to understand the nature of law, its role in society, and how and when it should change. The latter would be the professionals.

3. Economics

Because economic thinking determines national and international policies so extensively, its change is crucial. Currently its goal is growth. The sustainability economism seeks is economic growth. Yet the goal of the economy should be to contribute to the sustainable well-being of humanity and, indeed, of the global ecosystem. Since studies show that economic growth contributes little to human happiness, and policies that are justified by this aim usually reduce well-being, economic theory requires drastic revision. Happiness is largely a function of just those interpersonal relationships that are ignored or even denied by currently standard economic thinking.

This does not mean that the increase of market activity is inherently bad. It means only that growth should not be the goal of national governments or international organizations. That goal should be the well-being of people and even of the whole biosystem. When growth contributes to such well-being, its role should be appreciated.

There are two ways to increase economic activity. One was advocated by Gandhi and has been promoted by many nongovernmental organizations. This way is to help existing communities increase their production. Gandhi thought that introducing sewing machines into peasant villages would increase production at times when farm work was not demanding. Others have spoken about appropriate technology. It is important that the local people decide what changes they want and are able to handle whatever equipment is provided them. This approach to community development not only provides more goods and services for the village but also strengthens relationships among the villagers. Those committed to radical empiricism favor this kind of development.

The other form of development is the one that is now dominant. Since economic growth occurs fastest when labor is organized in the most efficient way, the aim is to industrialize both agriculture and factory production. Much of the rural population can be displaced by agricultural machinery and fossil energy and moved to cities to work in factories. That these huge movements of population deeply disrupt human relationships is not considered. Neither is the fact that the kinds of communities that are reestablished in the slums of the major industrial cities are usually inferior to the traditional ones. The only

consideration is that more goods and services are produced and consumed. It is even difficult to get attention to the destructive consequences for the biosphere, the exhaustion of resources, and the widespread pollution that result from these policies. Radical empiricists regard economism as a disaster for the Earth and all its creatures.

CHAPTER TEN

SECULARIZING CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES

I. Secularizing Traditions Globally

Much of the preceding chapters has been devoted to a negative evaluation of secularist movements and institutions. The reason for this focus is that the world now relies on these movements and institutions for guidance to respond to the crisis it faces, but they have failed. This is not because of individual weakness. As individual entities, many are helpful, but secularism is a disaster.

The most obvious alternative to secularism is religion. Despite the rise of secularism and its current dominance in science, philosophy, universities, and the economy, and to some extent because of it, religion continues to play a large role in human affairs. Can we look to religion with hope? Sadly we cannot. In terms of the now common usage, the most religious people are the ones who are most insistent on the superiority of their beliefs and customs and most committed to the advancement of their institutions and communities. Sometimes they are ready to use violence to advance these ends even when the founders of their traditions urged nonviolence.

Religiousness is associated with the desire to maintain established moral codes and cultural practices even when the situation has changed drastically. The traditions to which it clings are typically anthropocentric, whereas today the hope for human beings lies in developing a very different sense of our relation to the biosphere. These traditions are patriarchal, whereas patriarchy directs society in self-destructive directions. Many religious beliefs either turn

people inward at a time when the problem is global or offer the promise of divine intervention instead of affirming human responsibility guided by God.

On the other hand, the great Ways that are commonly called religions contain other elements. The sages of ancient India discovered a great deal about the body and mind and how, through special practices and disciplines, the psychic, mental, and spiritual condition of people could be improved. The ancient Chinese reflected on the right ordering of society and what constituted authenticity of personal character. They also considered the relationship of culture to nature in profound ways.

The ancient Greeks developed the method of inquiry and examination of ideas. They produced political philosophy, ethics, science, and mathematics. They asked questions about what is truly real at an intellectual depth rarely matched in human history. The ancient Hebrews examined themselves and their history before God and reported on the results in diverse and significant ways. They found meaning in the course of events and contrasted what they found to be the divine purpose with the actual course of human affairs. They were led thereby to consider how God would have us live in a world in which political and economic power rule.

The wisdom in all these traditions has qualified and challenged the religiousness of the people. Although the institutions and cultures that transmitted the traditional Ways from generation to generation reflected religiousness, this also led to admiration for those who taught wisdom. This wisdom thus affected and became part of the tradition, usually in considerable tension with the religious tendencies.

Often the elements of wisdom have become so embedded in the religion that they cease to function in a truly liberating and empowering way. But again and again, in all traditions new leaders appear who distinguish and highlight the wisdom and use it in world-transforming, *secularizing* ways. They are emphatically not *secularist*. They call forth and develop, rationally and critically, what has long been a part of human experience. They do not try to construct wisdom out of immediate experience and reasoning alone.

This book affirms the potential of a secularized Christianity. But a secularized Christian is one who appreciates that there are other great Ways in which analogous processes occur. Indeed, as we look in the twentieth century for examples of the secularizing of a tradition, the thought and work of Gandhi are the most impressive. He secularized Hinduism. It is characteristic and important that, as he did so, he was unabashed in accepting the influence of thinkers outside Hinduism, especially Jesus. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist leader A. T. Ariyaratne, influenced by Gandhi, expresses the potential of secularizing in the Buddhist community. The secularizing of one tradition can contribute to the secularizing of another.

To secularize a tradition is to bring it effectively to bear on the real problems of human beings and society in a healing and creative way. This requires liberating the wisdom of the tradition from the distortions introduced by religiousness. Many of these distortions direct attention away from what is truly needed. They rigidify elements in the tradition that need critical rethinking.

But secularizing the tradition does not mean abandoning all its religious practices and beliefs. Hindu practices and beliefs were important to Gandhi. Because he shared these with hundreds of millions of Indians, he could move them to work with him for achieving Indian independence without a military revolution. The secularizers of traditions take these traditions, including their religious aspects, seriously.

Those who engage in this secularizing are not themselves beyond criticism. When Gandhi becomes the object of religious veneration, that tends to inhibit the continuing process of secularizing. It is appropriate to admire and follow, but not to become uncritical. Even the greatest secularizers are, like all of us, flawed. But they are moved by their traditions to work with passion, conviction, and commitment for what they see to be the common good in the real world.

II. Secularizing Christians

It may be easier for Western secularists to appreciate secularizing Hindus and Buddhists than secularizing Christians. The identification of Christianity with Christian religion and the resulting, extremely negative view of Christianity that many Western secularists now hold tend to make them attribute admirable actions of secularizing Christians to secular influences rather than to Christianity. Sometimes this is justified. Some Christians have done good things that are more directly influenced by the Enlightenment than by their faith. However, there are others for whom faith is clearly determinative.

Gandhi had another outstanding disciple named Martin Luther King, Jr. Just as Gandhi, while rooted in his Hindu tradition, was deeply affected by Jesus' teaching, so King, while rooted in his Christian tradition, could study Gandhi and gratefully learn from him. The Christian faith that he shared with millions of other black Americans enabled him to energize a large following for nonviolent work toward justice. His Christian faith also led him to direct the energies of the movement away from simply improving the lot of the oppressed blacks toward the common good of the American people, especially the poor. His Christian faith led him to oppose the Vietnam War when his advisors warned him that this would weaken his specific movement for civil rights for blacks. In relation to the wider Euro-American community, he based his

appeal on Enlightenment principles embedded in America's founding documents. But the principles he selected were ones that he understood to be faithful to the Bible.

Another case of achievement on the part of a secularizing Christian is that of Nelson Mandela. His spirit and convictions played the primary role in making possible the nonviolent transition to majority rule in South Africa. Some credit goes also to F. W. de Klerk. Along the way the secularizing Christians who produced the *Kairos* document and those who excommunicated the segregated white Calvinist church in South Africa from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches played significant roles.

One recent president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, was deeply motivated and guided by his secularizing Christian faith before, during, and after his presidency. During his presidency, bringing peace between Israel and Egypt was an accomplishment that reflected his faith. In other respects he was not especially successful. However, his work as an ex-president is respected all over the world.

Toyohiko Kagawa was converted to a secularizing Christian faith in his youth and devoted his life to bringing to Japan changes for which that faith called. He was repeatedly imprisoned for his efforts to improve the lot of laborers. Nevertheless, he succeeded in organizing the Japanese Federation of Labor and is considered the founder of the Socialist Party in Japan. He played a role in getting universal male suffrage enacted and later worked for women's suffrage. He established schools and hospitals. He was strongly committed to peace, and he opposed Japanese militarism. In 1940 at the height of Japanese military success in its war against China, he was arrested for apologizing to the Chinese for the Japanese invasion. He also criticized the American firebombing of Japanese cities. For that, American occupation officials viewed him with suspicion.

In addition to the work of secularizing Christians in public affairs, others have made major contributions in particular fields. One of the most exploited groups in the United States has long been the farmworkers. Cesar Chavez devoted his life as a secularizing Catholic to gaining dignity and rights for them. Along with Dolores Huerta he organized and led the United Farm Workers. He was far less successful than King, but he brought the issue of the exploitation of farmworkers into the consciousness of the American public and won significant victories. His spirit has inspired the ongoing movement.

Dorothy Day was the founder of the Catholic Worker movement that continues her commitments all over the world. She differs from others mentioned here in that her passion for the oppressed developed outside the church. She brought it to the church and integrated it with Catholic social teaching. Like

King and Chavez, she was devoted to nonviolent confrontational activism. She is being considered for sainthood.

In 1942 a Baptist minister named Clarence Jordan determined to establish a community that would be shaped by authentically New Testament principles. He called this Koinonia Farms, and he located his community in south Georgia. The community was interracial, to witness against the racism of the culture. It was pacifist, to witness against the use of violence in human relations. And it was communist in the sense that resources were shared in common by its members, to witness against the dominance in the society of the quest for private possessions. One outgrowth of Jordan's work is Habitat for Humanity.

Frank Laubach was a Protestant missionary in the Philippines. He was deeply spiritual and produced influential quasi-mystical devotional writings. He achieved international fame and influence through the development of a method of teaching literacy. Each one who learned to read was responsible to teach another. Through this method, at least sixty million people have become literate.

A final example is from the world of sports. These were long segregated. Branch Rickey was inspired by Methodist social teaching to work against segregation. When he was baseball coach at Ohio Wesleyan University, he refused to remove a black player from his roster when playing in the South. Later, when he became president of the Dodgers organization, he looked for a black player with the personal strength to endure the harassment he would receive in Major League Baseball. Through Methodist connections, he found Jackie Robinson, and segregation in the world of sports unraveled.

For every secularizing Christian activist who becomes a public figure, there are thousands who work in the shadows. My point in listing a few is to make clear that I am not talking about abstract possibilities, ideal people, or an insignificant movement. Although in recent decades a primarily religious form of Christianity has been the most visible, the secularizing form has not disappeared. The Christian Way continues to inspire millions of people to work for the common good of humanity and increasingly for the Earth itself.

III. The Rise and Decline of Secularizing Churches

The implications of the Enlightenment cut against slavery, but by themselves Enlightenment ideals rarely went far to affect actual behavior. The founding fathers of our country were deeply influenced by the Enlightenment

and expressed those ideals in their documents, but those who owned slaves did not free them. All were prepared to compromise on the issue of slavery for what they saw as more important goals. The Constitution both affirmed ideals and compromised with the status quo. Enlightenment beliefs as such did not generate a significant antislavery movement.

The work of a devout evangelical, William Wilberforce, ended Britain's participation in the slave trade. In the United States, no follower of the Enlightenment matched John Woolman, a Quaker, in effective dedication to the cause. Without his impact on the Quakers, there would have been no Underground Railway for escaping slaves.

Christians in the United States have shared in the national division vis-à-vis the status quo, slavery being the example here. The debate in the churches was somewhat more intense than that in the general public. On the one hand, there was a religious defense of slavery based on the fact that the Bible takes the institution of slavery for granted. On the other hand, there was a strong antislavery movement. The latter was based on the secularizing of Christianity, insisting that despite the New Testament toleration of the institution, the actuality of slavery in nineteenth-century America was intolerable to the conscience sensitized by Christian faith. The major denominations split well before the Civil War split the nation.

Christians were challenged again by the exploitation of labor in the early days of the industrial revolution in eastern and midwestern cities. Of course, many Christians thought that this was an acceptable economic and social situation and that, as religious people, Christians would preach the gospel to the exploited workers and provide them with charitable aid to reduce their suffering. But others thought that society as a whole should support changes that would end the extremes of exploitation. They argued that a purely individualistic, religious understanding of salvation missed the deeper message of the Bible. The prophets called for justice as the salvation of society as a whole. Jesus proclaimed the *basileia theou*, the commonwealth of God. Leading preachers began calling on their people to understand the social meaning of the gospel and to work in the name of Jesus for a just society.

This new form of the Christian message was called the Social Gospel. It was a clear instance of secularizing a Way and one of the most successful. The majority of the leaders of the mainstream Protestant churches from the 1890s to the Second World War accepted it. One may speak of the secularizing of whole denominations. One may also point out that the recommendations of these denominations influenced Roosevelt's New Deal.

Partly because of later developments, some suppose that the farther the church goes in secularizing, the less urgent its message seems, and the less fervent is the response it evokes. This loss of urgency was not characteristic of the

Social Gospel period, however. There was excitement about Christianizing the world, with the understanding that this meant bringing peace and justice as well as health and prosperity everywhere. Thousands of the best and brightest American youth volunteered for the mission fields.

The Social Gospel leadership was naïve and misled in many respects. Secularizers are just as fallible as anyone else. They were too optimistic about the possibilities of bringing peace and justice to the world. They did not understand the depth of resistance that would meet their appeals for justice. Perhaps most important, they did not appreciate the power of sin in their lives.

One leader of the Social Gospel, Reinhold Niebuhr, sharing its idealism, had been a strong pacifist. But historical events in the 1930s persuaded him that Christians must come to terms realistically with the need for force. He became the greatest American critic of the Social Gospel, pointing out the shallowness of much of its theology and the consequent shallowness of its political analysis and action. His purpose was to enrich and deepen the secularizing of Christianity, not to derail it. However, his analyses made enthusiastic commitment to particular causes more difficult.

The passion for the well-being of the world that continued to characterize a large segment of the American churches between the world wars expressed itself during the Second World War as a commitment to a postwar world order that would not only prevent war but also promote justice globally. It provided strong support for President Roosevelt's call for the four freedoms. And it helped to create a climate in which the isolationist opposition to the League of Nations did not recur so as to prevent the formation of the United Nations.

Sadly, the climate of the mainstream churches changed dramatically in the aftermath of World War II. With the implementation of the New Deal, the power of labor unions to fight their own battles, the creation of the United Nations, the emergence of the European Economic Union, the generous treatment by the United States of its defeated enemies, and the dissolution of European empires, the goals of the Social Gospel seemed largely achieved. Of course, the cold war with the Soviet Union and the existence of nuclear weapons brought crucial new issues, but they seemed less amenable to the actions of church people.

Meanwhile, returning veterans sought to establish normal families and normal life, which typically included participation in churches. Membership and resources boomed. But the new members came to the church for support in family and community life rather than for guidance in understanding social and international issues or encouragement to get involved in those issues.

The new prosperity of the churches in the 1950s did not move preachers in a conservative direction in theology or politics. It rendered them more complacent. The secular discipline with which they allied themselves was

psychotherapy. Individual and family counseling became a central feature of the pastor's work. The content of sermons tended to be psychological.

This move was not away from the secular. It could be seen as secularizing in a different direction. But the difference from the Social Gospel was deeper than that. Whereas the Social Gospel grew out of deep rootage in the Bible, understanding itself as recovering a more direct relation to the prophetic mission and message of Jesus, the psychological gospel reflected psychological ideas that were current in the culture and only then sought support in the Bible. In its response to the felt needs of the members, it tended to be more an assimilation to the culture than a secularizing of the tradition. The culture to which much of the liberal Protestant church assimilated was influenced by secularizing Christianity, so it would be wrong to describe it as secularist. Its understanding of human wholeness was far from value free, and for the most part its values could be approved from a Christian perspective. But there was little confrontation of the culture with the call and vision of the gospel.

The declining interest in the wisdom of the Christian Way and in its critique of every culture evoked many critical responses. In some of these, the secularizing of Christianity in its normative form can be seen. Many of the church's leaders worried about the shallowness of its teaching. But well into the 1960s prosperity evoked complacency.

The complacency of the churches was shaken by two major developments: the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. The former caught the public imagination in 1955 chiefly through the bus boycott in Birmingham. Martin Luther King, Jr. achieved national visibility in this struggle. It would be too much to say that prior to the work of King the white churches had been silent on racial issues, but as we look back, the paucity of concern is startling. Issues of race were marginal in the Social Gospel. The churches were extensively segregated. Many white Christians recognized that blacks were not treated fairly, but the issue was kept on a back burner. Blacks were regularly counseled to be patient. If there had been only the bus boycott, most white Christians would still not have been stirred out of their complacency.

It was King's genius to keep the issue of segregation in the public eye while appealing to an awakening Christian conscience. His strategy was remarkably successful. By the 1960s, race had become the most important public issue in the United States. Many white Christians were willing to march with King and to support him in other ways. Church leadership made strong statements against racism. Churches were forced to deal with their internal racism and especially with the segregation that was its most visible expression. In the course of a few years, the churches repented in the biblical sense of going through a change not only of opinions and attitudes but also of structure and

action. Obviously there is still racism in the churches, but avowed racism is not tolerated, and where specific instances are pointed out, the effort to deal with them is usually prompt and serious.

The other major disruption of the complacency of the Protestant churches was the Vietnam War or, perhaps more accurately, the protests against the war beginning around 1964. Because young men were required to register with the possibility of being drafted to fight in Vietnam, they could not fail to take an interest in this war. Many of them thought the war was a mistake. The combination of genuine conviction that the war was wrong and personal interest in avoiding conscription led to deep struggles that spilled over into the church. Most congregations feared they would be split by the division between supporters and opponents of the war, so they tried to avoid dealing with the issues. This reduced the relevance of the church to the real world. Many of those who had crowded in during the 1940s and 1950s began to leave.

The issues were most intense on college and university campuses. On many of these campuses there were ministers representing various churches. Their job had been to work with students coming from their denominations. They were usually representative of the more secularizing side of the church, attracted by the opportunity to connect the Christian message with what students were learning in the university. Most of them sympathized with the opposition to the war. On many campuses they functioned as intermediaries between angry students and frustrated administrators, sometimes defusing dangerous situations.

The combination of the civil rights movement and the struggle against the war opened the door to a wave of self-criticism in the United States. Prior to the 1960s, the vast majority of Euro-Americans thought of the United States as a basically virtuous nation, one that was on the side of peace and justice. In the collective American mind, the United States was opposed to the imperialism and colonialism of which European nations had been guilty.

By the end of the 1960s, millions of Americans saw their country differently. They saw it through the eyes not only of black slaves but also of Native Americans and Latin Americans. Once eyes were opened, Americans saw the depth of racism at work in the treatment of Asian immigrants and even the Irish and other newer European immigrants. They saw that the United States also functioned as an imperial power, especially in Latin America. They saw the whole of American history as involving a class struggle in which the rich were almost always winners.

The new picture implicated Christianity in the crimes of the American people and the American government. Whereas the term *Christian* previously connoted something self-evidently good, it took on ambiguous meaning. Of course, this new self-criticism aroused deep anger and hostility in religious

Christians. It remains a source of sharp division in the nation and in the church between those who consider criticism of their nation unpatriotic and those who believe that true patriotism calls for realistic appraisal of crimes as well as virtues.

When the turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s was over, the more secularized churches emerged smaller and weaker. Some erstwhile members were alienated by the church's failure to give real leadership to the causes of justice and peace. Some left because the church's psychologically oriented message seemed irrelevant to the real needs of the time. Some left because they did not enjoy being part of a community torn in controversy. Some left because they had come only because of social expectations of church membership, and these pressures declined. Some left because the church provided no clear alternative to the secularism that increasingly dominated the intellectual world. Some people who left became part of the secularist world. Some sought to meet deeper personal needs through practices stemming from Eastern spirituality. Some turned to more traditional and religious forms of Christianity.

The churches that had been mainline were now old line. They did not have the resources to reestablish a presence on most campuses. Meanwhile they had ceded the airwaves to the religious right. They have continued to lose in membership and resources, and those losses have been especially pronounced among younger people. The prospects for reversal of these trends seem poor.

IV. Continuing Secularizing in the Old-line Churches

This story of decline is true, but it is not the whole truth. Even in their decline, these old-line churches have continued the process of secularizing. Even as they lose members and resources, they have continued to face the sins of their religiousness and to repent. Alongside the depressing story of decline, there is an exhilarating one of faithfulness.

One evil of which Americans became aware in the late 1960s was properly laid primarily at the feet of the church. Everyone had been aware of the terrible treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, and that had generated support for a Jewish state in Israel. But American Christians initially blamed only the Nazis. Gradually, secularizing Christians realized that most of what the Nazis had done was continuous with what Christians had advocated and, from time to time, enacted. Scholars such as Roy Eckardt (*Elder and Younger Brothers* [Scribner, 1967]) and Rosemary Ruether (*Faith and Fratricide* [Seabury, 1974]) made us face the ugly history of Christian teaching and practice. We learned

that from an early point, Christian teaching had been anti-Jewish and that this polemic was built into our Christology.

As a minimum, standard formulations of Christian theology implied what is called *supersessionism*, that is, that the new covenant God established with the church took the place of the old covenant God established with the Jews. The implication is that if the Jews want to be in covenant with God now, they must join the church so that when they refuse to do so, they condemn themselves.

The realization that this basic teaching underlay the appalling treatment that Jews had received at the hands of Christians throughout the centuries of Christendom was deeply painful to secularizing Christians. When this awareness was combined with the realization that this idea had laid the groundwork for the Holocaust, it was clear that it must at all costs be uprooted from Christian teaching. Whereas repenting for racism had been recognizing our failure to implement well-known Christian teaching, repentance for what we had done to the Jews involved a change in basic teaching. Nevertheless, the secularizing churches proceeded seriously, and in a sustained way, to repent.

Although the problem of Christian anti-Judaism was a distinct and uniquely important one, secularizing Christians also reflected more broadly on the claims made for Christian superiority in relation to other traditions. They saw that each community thought its ways and ideas were best. Perhaps each is best in some ways, ways particularly important to that community. But the better position from which to approach other communities is pluralistic. Each can be appreciated for what it is, and we can be open to learning from all. We can, in our turn, offer what we think is of unique value in our tradition. In one form or another, secularizing Christians have become pluralistic in their approach to other traditions. This has been another step in secularizing, requiring major reformulation of church teaching.

The late 1960s gave birth to three theological movements that have come to be identified as *liberation theologies*. Each called for further repentance. Earlier we supposed that by ending legal and institutional segregation and ensuring civil rights to blacks, we Christianized our behavior. However, blacks pointed out that our inherited theology enabled us to live for centuries in a racist society without noticing it. This theology was so Eurocentric that it led us to overlook the presence and equal importance of persons of other races. It was formulated by academic professors who thought it more important to deal with the latest scholarly finding than with the reality of suffering and oppression in the society. Renewal of the Social Gospel would not suffice, since the Social Gospel supported labor unions that typically excluded blacks from membership without criticizing this exclusion. The church needs a new kind of theology, formed through listening to the voices of those who are most oppressed and identifying with their struggle.

In Latin America a somewhat similar protest developed against inherited forms of theology and church practice. The society there had long been obviously structured in classes. Church leadership had identified itself with the upper class even when many priests ministered to the poor. It was time for the church's thinkers to engage in class analysis informed by Marxist sociology and to see how their teaching was shaped by their class identification. When they compared traditional theology with the message of the Bible, the contrast was painful. Theology should be rewritten from the perspective of the oppressed, and the church should accept its role in society as that of liberating the people from oppression. Much more than in the United States, theology in Latin America thus entered the actual social struggle supporting revolutionary forces. This liberation theology was accused of being Communist, although Christians influenced by Marxist class analysis maintained the primacy of their Christian allegiance and distanced themselves from the Communist Party.

In the United States, the feminist critique of inherited Christianity went even deeper than the other liberation theologies. It pointed out that the Bible is written from the male perspective and, for the most part, supports patriarchy. It affirms the worship of a male deity. That God is male is taken to mean that the human male has the right of rule over women. Ordinary language typically makes women invisible by using male terms to refer to both sexes.

Patriarchal theory expressed itself in patriarchal practice. Only men were allowed to be religious leaders. Women were the property of their fathers until they married and then, of their husbands. Often, pastors told women to submit to their husbands, even when they were verbally and physically abused.

Many feminists left Christian churches altogether, seeing Christianity as hopelessly patriarchal. But others remained and led in a process of extensive repentance. In most old-line Protestant churches today, women play a large leadership role. Denominational hymnals have changed much of their sexist language. Even biblical texts are translated in new ways. Of course, patriarchy has not disappeared in the churches, but the changes have been remarkably rapid and pervasive.

The feminist movement was related in complex ways to the sexual revolution. This had already much earlier made a major impact on a broad spectrum of churches. From an early stage in Christian history, sexuality as such was viewed negatively. The teaching of St. Augustine intensified this in the Western church.

With surprising rapidity the churches recognized that they had been wrong. The Bible takes sexuality for granted as part of the created order. Of course, it could be the occasion of sin, but it was not the focus in the biblical discussion of sin. The church needed to repent, and it did.

Recognition that sexual feelings and their expression in physical relationships are normal and healthy does not in itself determine the church's ethical teachings on the subject. These have varied greatly. At one extreme are conservative churches that seek to maintain their ethical teachings unchanged, even when they officially repudiate the negative attitudes toward sexuality that long supported them. In the more secularized Protestant denominations there is confusion and uncertainty about sexual ethics, but they have at least ended the guilt-inducing teaching of the past.

There is one area of sexuality, however, in which progress is not so widespread. The test of how fully Christians have incorporated the idea that sexuality and its physical expression are inherently good comes with the question of homosexual relations. Many who are quite tolerant of varied expressions of heterosexual feelings remain totally opposed to expression of homosexual feelings. On the other hand, the secularizing segment of the church regards the negative treatment of homosexuality as symptomatic of the earlier hostility toward sexuality in general. For many, the condemnation of homosexual actions is unjust and unjustified. This issue is tearing churches apart.

V. The Promise and Problems of the Secularizing Churches

This book began by identifying the most important issue of our time. Its seriousness can hardly be exaggerated. In a currently unpublished lecture, Arran Gare of Swinburne University in Australia stated succinctly the future toward which just one of the environmental problems we face is taking us.

> Gaia Vince, in an article in the February 28, 2009, issue of *New Scientist*, describes what the Earth may be like if it becomes 4 degrees warmer. His map shows that most of China, the United States, Africa, South America, and Australia will be uninhabitable. Even if the change in climate greatly reduces the human impact on the environment, Fred Pierce points out in the March 28 issue that the thawing of the permafrost will release vast quantities of methane and carbon dioxide that will continue the process of warming.

The disasters toward which we are moving are horrible indeed. If the Earth is to avoid this fate, there must be massive repentance, that is, reversal of direction. Thus far the steps taken by society as a whole fall woefully short of the needed changes. Humanity will not make those changes unless humans understand themselves in relation to the Earth in new ways. The actual changes that have been made in recent centuries have been toward secularism, whose major

expressions are to be found now in science, economics, philosophy, and higher education. These changes have done more harm than good.

This chapter asks whether the old Ways, specifically Christianity, offer more promise. The initial answer was that in their religious form these Ways are obstacles to the needed response. The question is then whether the ancient wisdom they contain can be freed from its entanglement with religion. Here the answer has been more positive. The response of substantial portions of Christianity to the challenges of recent times indicates that this wisdom still has power to overcome the dead hand of religion. This is encouraging.

In this book the focus is on identifying those who might draw and guide the world into the profound and radical repentance apart from which its fate seems to be sealed. There is little to be hoped for from either the religious or the secularists. Can secularizing Christians help?

The end of the 1960s was the time of the dramatic emergence of a new understanding of the relation of human beings to the natural world. People learned that the life support system they had taken for granted is fragile. Nothing could be more urgent than to reduce human pressures upon it. Resolving all the other issues humanity faces will turn out to be of relatively minor importance if humankind does not avoid a massive depopulation of the planet.

The secularizing churches recognized that the dualistic and anthropocentric view of the human relation to the planet had blinded them to what was really happening and led to destructive lifestyles and economic systems. They recognized that by accepting this modernist worldview, they had been unfaithful to the Bible. They affirmed that human beings are part of the unified life system, a part that is peculiarly dangerous to the whole and has special responsibility for it.

The record of church leadership is good. In 1975 in Nairobi the World Council of Churches changed its identification of its goal from "a just and participatory society" to "a just, participatory, and sustainable society." It followed by holding conferences all over the world to discuss and reinforce the idea of sustainability. There was no question but that the focus was on the sustainability of humanity and of its natural environment together. At its next assembly in Vancouver, it changed its phraseology from the still anthropocentric "sustainable society" to "the integrity of creation" and once again held numerous conferences to discuss the meaning of this phrase. Today it is giving priority to questions of climate change. Many member denominations have developed excellent statements, as have the Vatican and the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, who has given remarkable leadership. Evangelical churches are more divided, but some have produced fine statements.

These documents provide a solid basis for action. But whereas repenting of racism and patriarchalism and anti-Judaism have affected the actual life of con-

gregations in significant ways, the verbal response to the global environmental crisis has not. Few congregations are giving community leadership on these issues or modeling necessary lifestyle changes. The topic remains [illegible]

There are three obstacles to realizing the potential contribution of secularizing Christianity to saving the world. First, a large portion of the Protestant community that has dealt successfully with other challenges is still hung up on the issue of homosexuality. The religious forces within the formerly secularizing denominations have dug in their heels and blocked further progress. We cannot expect leadership in dealing with the global crisis from denominations that are preoccupied with this issue.

This obstacle is highly visible, but it is likely to be the least serious. A few denominations are already breaking through. The Unitarian-Universalists and Quakers were first. The Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ were next. As of this writing, the ELCA, the largest Lutheran body, has made a breakthrough. Even if the United Presbyterians and the United Methodists are left behind on this issue as denominations, their secularizing members can work through parachurch organizations. And sometimes a denomination that is still struggling to work its way through an obstacle of this kind can manage to mobilize energies for other challenges.

Second, the formerly mainstream denominations that have gone farthest in repentance and secularizing are also among those that have had the largest losses in membership and resources. Prospects for reversal of these trends are poor, and morale is poor.

Morale is certainly important. If morale were good, a denomination might respond to a challenge effectively, even if its statistics were declining. Bemoaning membership loss and trying directly to reverse it only demoralize further. But morale may improve in other ways. People like to feel good about the character and accomplishments of the groups with which they identify. For many people, it has been demoralizing to participate in a community that is emphasizing the evils for which it has been responsible. But now that the process of repentance is largely complete, some denominations can take the high ground. To belong to a community that has successfully dealt with a series of difficult tests can give members confidence in their ability to respond to other challenges as well. Taking on the challenge of the global crisis could attract new members and thus further improve morale.

VI. Separating from Secularism

The third obstacle to serious response of secularizing churches to the danger faced by humanity as a whole is the one this book is about. Many leading

Protestant secularizers remain blind to the negative consequences of secularism. They tend to accommodate Christianity to its secularist environment and to defend secularist institutions.

This book is intended as a contribution to overcoming the confusion within the Christian community between *secularizing* and assimilating to a *secularist* culture. Secularizing is essential to the relevance of the church to current problems. It is to be contrasted with accommodation to the dominant culture. But this contrast is not always easy to see. Secularizers seek guidance and direction from the leading thinkers of their time. They typically want to be informed about science by the best scientists, about philosophy by the best philosophers, and about economics by the best economists. They feel considerable awe before the vast amount of knowledge represented by the research university. They want to modify received church teachings in terms of the best current thought.

For decades now, even for centuries, the most approved thought in all these fields has been reductionist and materialist and has encouraged thinking that individualistic self-interest is the most rational motive of human action. If secularizing Christianity adjusts Christian teaching to this worldview, then it is fundamentally destructive of the church's wisdom.

One basic consequence of looking to the secularist experts has been the abandonment of any effort at overarching thinking. Theology has concerned itself with the issues surrounding the challenges discussed above. It has successfully exposed and undercut the ideas and teachings that have led the church into its destructive roles. But in the secularizing churches it has ceased to help Christians think clearly and convincingly about God, about Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about salvation. Without confident and convincing affirmations about these central topics, secularizing Christianity can have little future. It is not enough to know what teachings have done harm and to change them. One must share in a positive wisdom as well.

The most practically serious consequence of the acceptance of secularist authority has been the failure to reject and oppose economism and all its consequences. In view of the deep concern that secularizing Christians show for poor and oppressed persons, their limitation of criticisms to the abuses of the economistic system is strange. Most of the destructive consequences of economism follow from its theoretical affirmations. These are diametrically opposed to those of most versions of Christianity, whether supernaturalist or secularized. Christian acquiescence requires explanation.

Through most of Christian history, greed was considered a serious sin. The most admired people were the saints, most of whom had taken vows of poverty. In the new economic theory, seeking to maximize one's income and increase one's wealth is viewed as rational, and under the aegis of economism, those

who are most successful at doing this are celebrated as models for society. The difference has been justified by the change in the system of production.

For thousands of years, the quantity of goods and services available in a community was chiefly a function of the amount of labor expended. The amount available per capita was relatively stable. If one individual or group increased its income, the increase was at the expense of others. The goal of the church was to distribute the wealth appropriately. This did not mean that all would receive the same amount, but it did mean that all should get their just deserts. Greed was refusal to accept these limits. It was a very serious sin.

The industrial system, developed in England in the eighteenth century, changed this situation rather abruptly. It made it possible to increase greatly the amount of production per worker. Partly it was achieved by organizing labor so that each worker performed one job repeatedly. Partly it was achieved by using coal-powered machinery that did much of the work previously done by manual labor.

By increasing the production per worker, the total wealth of the community was increased. What had previously been available to only a few now became available to many. Extreme poverty was reduced.

Although Christians long celebrated *voluntary* poverty as spiritually liberating, they never favored involuntary destitution. Hence they did not oppose a system of production that promised wide prosperity. This system worked best when entrepreneurs were prepared to take risks in hopes of sizable gains. It also worked best when management sought the most profitable ways of organizing business. The profit motive, previously known as greed, turned out to be indispensable to the new economic order. Traditional Christian ethics seemed to become counterproductive. Christians ceased to speak against greed or redefined it to make it irrelevant to ordinary economic decision-making.

An analogous change occurred with respect to the payment of interest. Most religious traditions frowned on taking interest on loans. The reason was that it was a major way in which the rich took over the property of the poor. When a poor farmer was ill and unable to till his land, he borrowed money to survive. Later he might be able to repay what he had borrowed, but when interest was added, he often could not. The land was forfeited and often his freedom as well. In Leviticus there is the proposal of a year of Jubilee in which debt-slaves are freed and land is returned.

No one figured out a way of avoiding this problem. But a negative attitude about debts and the collection of interest affected Christendom. To reduce Christian guilt, the task of moneylending was assigned to the Jews. Biblical teaching forbade Jews to lend to other Jews, but they could lend to Christians.

With the industrial revolution, the situation changed. To build factories, money was needed. There were those prepared to lend if the loans would be

sufficiently profitable. The entrepreneurs could pay back the loans with interest and still make money for themselves. Debt and interest became fundamental to the economic system. William Shakespeare reflected the older values when he wrote, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" (*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3). But the world of business went in quite another direction. The church did not find itself in a position to protest.

A few Christians did protest. Some argued that their faith called for the support of the public ownership of the means of production. In a socialist system, production would not require the competitive exploitation of workers. It would not require a large role for the motive of greed. And it would not require an economy dominated by debt and interest payments.

A third feature of traditional Christian ethics was the advocacy of frugality. Christians were encouraged to work hard but to spend little and give much. The new economic system benefited from the work ethic. Frugality had also led to the accumulation of the capital that was needed for new enterprises. However, the system functioned well only if there were many people eager to purchase the goods it produced. Overall it encouraged consumerism rather than frugality. If this is what the system demanded, Christians hesitated to preach frugality.

The majority of the Christian community and its institutions resolved the problem by withdrawing from the field of economic ethics. This was a major step in the broader withdrawal from participation in public affairs. In much of the nineteenth century, the Protestant churches concentrated on matters of personal morality and spirituality, along with family, and even the Social Gospel, for the most part, did not critique the fundamental economic system or the theories that supported it.

Although there was little protest to the program of economic globalization when it was instituted under Reagan's presidency, its consequences for the developing world became too terrible to ignore. In 2004 the Accra Declaration of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches took a major step toward attacking the theoretical underpinnings of economism. It noted "a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation." It rightly pointed out that "the root causes of massive threats to life are above all the products of an unjust economic system.... Economic systems are a matter of life or death." It named "the development of neoliberal economic globalization" as the culprit. It treated the rejection of this system as a matter of faith rather than simply as a discussable idea about social ethics. This opens the door to theoretical as well as practical engagement.

In the United States the near collapse of the financial system and the extraordinary arrogance with which its leaders have treated Congress have created a climate in which questions of economic theory can gain some attention

in the church and elsewhere. Even key players have acknowledged that their assumptions did not work out. Alan Greenspan confessed before the Congressional Oversight Committee in October 2008 that "those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders' equity (myself, especially) are in a state of shocked disbelief."

Traditional Christian teaching now has a new relevance. American consumerism is impoverishing the planet in terms of its resources and causing extensive pollution. Earthists are leading the way back to teachings of frugality. If the United States government had followed economistic principles and left the banks to the tender mercies of market discipline, the financial system based on debt would have collapsed. It turns out that today much of self-interest is expressed in nonproductive ways. We can question the desirability of basing the real economy so fully on debt and of rebuilding the huge virtual economy of finance. Critical reappropriation of elements of the traditions can compete with efforts to reestablish economism in its earlier form.

We are called to imagine a different economics and a different financial system. Perhaps the government could take back from the Federal Reserve the power to create whatever money is required to meet the needs of its people rather than pay interest on its debt to banks. Perhaps the proposals of Henry George to tax only the unearned income from rising land values could be considered again.

Perhaps the global economic system could be replaced by numerous local ones, producing much of what they need, and trading for the rest. This would reduce the pressure on the environment caused by the vast system of transport required for the global market. If growth were no longer the god we served, the rich might have fewer choices, but this would not be a catastrophe. Eating locally grown food has its advantages. Restoring personal connection to the land can be more humanly enriching than having more clothes in the closet.

As long as secularizing Christians look for guidance with respect to basic theory and policy to the modern secularist university, they will have little to offer a desperate world. The more the church adapts its teaching to that of the university, the less its own wisdom will be able to express itself. The first step in the recovery of its vision and wisdom will be to recognize that secularism has run its course, that the institutions and movements that embody it belong to the past, and that a new basic vision is being born. This vision rejects the reductionism, the materialism, the sensationalism, the anthropocentrism, the patriarchalism, and the dualism that have dominated the modern era.

The new philosophy, science, and understanding of society that are discussed in the preceding chapter are not set in stone. Unlike the secularism that dominates the academy and international affairs, these new ways of thinking invite the contribution of ancient wisdom. They attend to all aspects of

experience, the ethical and mystical as much as the sensa of the British empiricists. They welcome Hindus and Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians, as well as Jews, Muslims, and Christians. They welcome especially persons from all these traditions who welcome one another. They understand that all of these together lack some of the wisdom of our still more ancient ancestors, and they welcome especially contributions from the remaining indigenous communities.

If secularizing Christians turn to this new community of discourse, they will be invigorated, energized, and inspired. Their understanding of their own tradition and their own convictions will continue to be transformed. They will not try to fix any of these ideas in such a way that all will agree. But they will live out of the best vision they can construct, testing it as they go. They will discover that what they have to say is healingly relevant to the deepest crises of our day.

Further, although the new naturalism of the philosophical vision that is aborning has not had the global ecological crisis in view, it provides much of the vision that can guide effective response. If secularizing Christians can integrate their passion for saving the Earth with the new philosophy, there is a possibility for effective leadership in thought and action. Perhaps the world can yet be saved from the worst of the horrors toward which it now moves.

VII. What Secularizing Christianity Offers

There is a large overlap in what is positive in the offering of all the ancient cultural and religious traditions of humankind in their secularizing forms. In general, the accumulated wisdom of all cultures informs and supports a great deal of common sense. It gives a picture of a unified world of which human beings are a part. Nature is fully real and is, at least in part, alive. Human life is continuous with other life but also distinct and of special significance. Questions of value and importance are intertwined with events and with the way the natural world is understood to be. Fact and value are not sharply separated. Moral judgments are rationally justified. There are better and worse ways to live, and the quest for wisdom is to find the better ways.

Overall, this vision is a far more credible and useful guide than the basic view of reality one learns from modern science or any of the major modern philosophies. These reacted against the religionized forms of the major Ways, which to varying degrees and in varying ways had mixed these commonsense elements with claims to superiority over others, superstition, supernaturalism, otherworldliness, excessive power in the hands of religious leaders, and rigid moral codes that sometimes demanded irrational and even vicious behavior.

There was much against which sensitive and thoughtful people rightly revolted.

There have been two forms of the revolt. One is the secularizing of the tradition. This occurred in Greece and in Israel and has continued to the present time. The other is secularism, which rejects the tradition and seeks a new basis for thought. The more it has succeeded, the more it has failed to benefit humanity and the Earth.

It would be possible at this point to describe the potential contributions of the secularizing version of each of the great traditions to the needed response to our current crisis. But I am writing as a Christian theologian concerned specifically for the contribution of secularizing Christianity. I want in conclusion to formulate these contributions in direct connection to the contemporary crisis.

If collectively we are to free ourselves from our insane course of action and respond appropriately to the global crisis even at huge cost, then we must have a passionate concern for the Earth as a whole and for all its people. The secularizing Christian tradition affirms one God creatively and redemptively related to the whole of the world. It calls us to devote ourselves to this God and, therefore, to work with God for the salvation of the world. Especially as articulated by Jesus, it opposes any tendency to divide the world into friends and enemies, favoring the former and opposing the latter. Jesus emphasizes that God's care extends to all. He states in the strongest terms that we should love even our enemies, even those who do us harm. If we take Jesus seriously, as we consider how to save the world, we will not calculate how the benefits and losses of particular policies will fall out on friends and enemies. God cares for all alike. We are called to work with God—not for the sake of our group, however that is defined—but for the whole of God's creation.

If human society as a whole is to act in ways that lessen the catastrophes that are upon us, leadership cannot continue to come from those whose knowledge and understanding have served the establishment that has been leading us to destruction. This requires a great reversal. It requires taking seriously the long-despised ideas of indigenous people. It also requires evaluating policies by their effects on the least powerful and listening to them.

Just this kind of reversal is central to the message of Jesus. Children and prostitutes, he said, would enter the commonwealth of God before scholars and religious leaders. Those who were successful in the Roman Empire thought in terms of what supported the status quo. The commonwealth of God was based on entirely different principles. Those who are successful in the American empire think in terms of what supports the status quo. If the world is to be saved, we must develop policies on entirely different principles.

If we are to create a new culture with new ways of relating to one another and to the Earth, we must free ourselves of the idea that true morality can be equated with any set of rules or principles formulated in the past and religiously sanctioned in the present. These rules are not all bad, and many of them can play a positive role in the new situation. But they were developed in a different context, and when morality is identified with conformation to these rules, it distracts attention from what is now most critically needed.

Secularism prides itself on freeing its followers from conforming to given rules. One chooses one's own morality. But the real need is an intensification of moral feeling, not its anaesthetizing. It is important that more and more people feel a moral urgency to work for the salvation of the world.

Jesus' message frees us from the legalistic understanding of morality while intensifying the sense of the importance of living in such a way as to realize God's purposes for the world. Our work for the common good is to be motivated by love rather than duty. It will respond to needs rather than conform to rules. Paul richly amplified this feature of Jesus' message.

We need a message that will be convincing in itself. But a message gains much of its convincing power from the messenger. The figure of Jesus has won a unique place in the imagination of humanity, not only in the church. In his own life he showed what it meant truly to believe the message. This image of Jesus has been strengthened by critical-historical study rather than undercut by it.

What is brought vividly to light in Jesus' vision as we secularize our heritage is of immense importance for the salvation of the world. Without it the Earth will continue on its way to self-destruction. But that does not mean that converting everyone to the acceptance of Jesus' vision would in itself save the world. Followers of Jesus have never as a group focused attention on the fate of the Earth. Their attention has always been directed to more narrowly defined needs.

There are, then, two further requirements. First, believers will need to be reminded again and again by Earthists that the global situation should have the highest priority in their thought, action, and commitment. Although they are psychologically more drawn to the immediate needs of their neighbors, they can recognize the primacy of the larger context. Martin Luther King, Jr. showed how so organizing as to keep a truth before the conscience of the church could permanently shift its emphasis. Christian Earthists could make this happen again.

Second, believers must be persuaded that activism motivated by love and goodwill does not, by itself, suffice. In Jesus' words, we must learn to be wise as serpents. Too often liberal Protestants and other secularizers seek to make their contribution with gestures here and there. These are admirable, but if they are

not guided by thoughtful, comprehensive plans, they will not counter the better organized efforts of others to maintain the status quo. Leaders of the liberation movements understood the need for deep reflection. They outthought those who resisted their message. Earthist Christians can succeed here too.

Secularizing Christians face a daunting challenge and have barely begun to respond. But in a world in which there is so little sanity, every spark is worth fanning. This one *could* start a fire that would save the world.