

## Shyness and Religion

I have noticed that more of my readers are religious than I expected.

That's not a complete surprise. Introverts are by nature more religious than extroverts. In several of psychologist C.G. Jung's books he described the strong religious sense of introverts and pointed out that the mediaeval period, the great age of religion in the West, was a time in which the introvert was much more at home. If you had trouble coping with the social world, you could retire into a monastery. It was socially acceptable, and a lot of people did it. If the other monks in the monastery\* were too much for you, you were free to retire into a solitary cell. Some voluntarily remained in them for years, in a few cases producing great books and/or music there.

But, even so, it was a bit of a surprise to discover that my readers are often religious, for I come from an atheist background. When I was growing up in the 1950s, almost everyone in my steel town working-class neighborhood attended church and Sunday school, but my father steadfastly kept my brothers and I out of them. Though he died unexpectedly when I was only five years old and my mother then submitted to family and social pressures, he must have still had a strong influence, for I proved remarkably resistant to Christian teaching.

At that time there was a bible reading in public school every morning, so young atheist me got to know the Bible. I listened silently, day after day, year after year, privately conducting my own critique of what I was being told. Whether it was about God, science, math or history I didn't believe everything my teachers said. Shy and solitary, I kept my ideas to myself, but by high school I was a keen skeptic and a determined atheist.

Nevertheless I was drawn by a few things in the Bible. When I learned that Jesus had said God watched every sparrow fall, I was impressed. I was moved by the story of the Good Samaritan too, and some other things.

But I was more interested in science and nature. You might think that that helped keep me away from religion, but I don't think so.

Religion, at least in its beginnings, and at its core, is about knowledge, mystery, and the search for meaning. That's what science is about too. Though the sciences investigate mysteries, they have not driven them from the world. Instead the mysteries have multiplied. Read an up to date book on astronomy or physics – mysteries abound. Now we know that we live in a gigantic galaxy, only one of billions of galaxies, in a universe now said to have 10-11 dimensions, with mysteries like gravity, dark matter, and quantum entanglement around every corner.

Yes, the universe surrounding us is a million times larger and a million times more complex than it was perceived to be in the time of Jesus Christ. But if he was alive today, I don't think science would be a problem for him. Anyone as intelligent as he was would be fascinated by science. If he came back, he would probably read deeply in the sciences (Nature, someone has said, was God's first book).

Yes, for whatever the reason, I have always had a soft spot for the Christian church and other religions. Maybe it's just that I, like everyone else according to Jung, have a religious instinct.

Oddly enough, modern society seems to be moving in the opposite direction, away from that instinct. Many people who claim to be religious don't really believe in anything more now than making money and trying to get everything they want. Judged by their actions, I believe most people are non-believers now.

What bothers me about this is that it leaves humanity alone and unrestrained at a pinnacle of existence, one where we have mistakenly put ourselves, judging ourselves to be superior to every other living thing.

Oh, yes we allow that there might be aliens out there in the galaxy who we may meet one day and who we expect to be more or less equal to us – made up of atoms and molecules and carbon-based chemistry, with big brains to go with it. It is as if we only expect to meet other versions of ourselves, traveling about in space ships, etc. No one expects to meet gods.

Well, it seems to me colossally implausible that in this almost limitless and infinitely complex universe there should not be something bigger than us, and/or vastly more intelligent than us.

It doesn't have to be something you can see. In a universe of ten dimensions, where we can perceive only four (time is now accepted by most physicists as the fourth dimension), we can't see very far can we? Why do we expect everything to be perceptible?

The idea that there might be intelligent entities in the universe constructed of energy fields and forms, or that are products of higher dimensions, is almost never discussed or even contemplated.

My sympathy with the religions of the world is at least partly connected to this – that only they accept the likelihood that there is something greater than us.

The problem is that those religions have become so separated from science, for it is science now that has the attention of the public. Because of spectacular scientific successes (the atomic bomb, the trips to the moon, manipulating DNA, etc) the public is now entranced by science, and the same sheep-like people who used to swallow religious dogma wholesale, now feed on scientific dogma.

Scientists want to blame religious leaders for the divide, arguing that it's irrational adherence to prescribed dogma that prevents keeps the religious from accepting science, but that's unfair. The greater part of Christian thought, from Augustine to writers of our time, has recognized that the essential ground of religion is human psychology. Christ himself dealt almost entirely with the human mind and heart, and the ancient Hindu, Bhuddist and Islamic writers did that too. Psychology is the bed rock of religion. In the depth of their understanding of it, religious thinkers are often supremely rational, to the extent that modern psychology often has a long way to go to catch up with them.

And yes, the sciences have their own dogmas. I could give many examples, but here I'm going to discuss only one – the century old phobia towards paranormal phenomena.

Late in his life C.G. Jung predicted that the great task of science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be the study of the paranormal, but serious funded research is still not happening. That's because anyone who attempts to investigate anything paranormal is ridiculed, ostracized, attacked in scientific journals, and their funding disappears.

There is nothing in the least scientific about this irrational refusal to contemplate things that aren't explicable by current science.

Some say the scientific community is afraid that investigation of the paranormal might turn up something that will validate religious beliefs. I think there's some truth to that.

The paranormal is the key to the divide between science and religion. The two will only find common ground when scientists finally face up to paranormal phenomena\*\*. But this chasm of thought between science and religion prevents that from happening. The situation cries out for someone to build a bridge between them.

Which brings me back to shy religious people. I believe it's true that it is among shy people that you most often find authentic religious feeling and thinking. But shy people are attracted to science as often as they are to religion. The famous introverts of science are legion, from Darwin to Einstein to many men and women of our time.

So here is my prediction. One day, and I believe it will happen in the first half of this century, someone in the sciences is going to build that bridge. I think they will start it by means of means of an investigation of telepathy and clairvoyance (which may be two sides of the same coin). Who will do this? My bet is that the man or woman who will lead the way will emerge from the ranks of shy and solitary people. It might be one of you reading this.

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\* The word monastery comes from the Greek word *monasterion*, which referred to a hermit's cell, and the verb *monazein* 'to live alone'. Presumably both of those derive from *monos*, which means 'one' or 'single'.

\*\*Telepathy and clairvoyance are the key phenomena, and they are a physics problem more than a psychological problem. The medium that the mind uses for those things must be identified before we can learn more about them. So it physicists we need, yet sadly no physicist, to my knowledge, since Sir William Crookes attempted it in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (he helped found the Society for Psychical Research in 1882).

Photographs – These are views of 'La Sagrada Familia' the cathedral in Barcelona. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was not without religious thinkers who were just as in touch with the natural world as the spiritual one. One of the most significant was the architect of this magnificent church, the shy introverted Antonio Gaudi. The frescos and sculptures on the ramparts, walls, and spires of his church include not only Biblical scenes and characters, but trees, ferns, geese, cattle, fish, snails, etc. It seems as if his vision of the 'sacred family' included all creation, not just human beings. (Copyright for both photographs – Lesley Enston)

Skeptics will say - Well, if you believe so much in science, where is the scientific evidence?"

There is plenty of evidence - in paranormal events. Unfortunately scientists still shy away from the paranormal. That's not just because they don't know how to study it. If you are a scientist and you try to investigate anything paranormal (which is only called that because it refers to things we don't understand), you will be ridiculed, your funding will disappear and your career will be in peril. There is a world-wide taboo in scientific culture against the study of the paranormal.

Traditional scientists will tell you that paranormal events cannot be studied because they are not susceptible to experiment (they also think they can't be real for the same reason. Don't be taken in by that argument. There is a mass of scientific knowledge that was not acquired through experiment. The classification of animals and plants into genera, \_\_\_\_\_ and species, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the geologic record, the study of prehistoric ages through the collection of stone age artifacts, were all completed by means of the slow accumulation and cataloguing of empirical evidence.

The paranormal can be investigated the same way.

And it has been. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been a concerted effort by a few dedicated people – F.W. Myers, the psychologist William James, J.B. Rhine, R.A. McConnell, G.N.M. Tyrrell,

The psychologist J.B. Rhine's work in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century might be the most impressive. He is most well known for his study of ..... Through tedious hours and years of work he established a body of evidence that should have established once and for all that telepathy, clairvoyance, and are real.

There is the work of the recently deceased psychiatrist, Dr Ian Stevenson on reincarnation. I hadn't the slightest interest in reincarnation until I read an obituary for Stevenson. When I learned that in his spare time he had devoted countless hours and much of his own money traveling the world to investigate children who were supposed to be exhibiting signs of past lives intrigued me.\*

The British biochemist Rupert Sheldrake has been actively collecting evidence for some time, and has produced some impressive books – *The sense of Being Stared At*, *Dogs Who Know when Their Owners are Coming Home*, etc. But Sheldrake is very much on his own and there has been a concerted effort by some members of the scientific establishment to silence him.

The problem is that none of these people are physicists, and it is physics that is required to investigate the medium for telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. As far as I know, there has not been a physicist interested in anything paranormal since....

I was hoping that this was about to change. When I first discovered physicist Michio Kaku's book, *Physics of the Impossible*, and saw that he had chapters on ....telepathy, ....., I thought I was about to meet the beginning of....

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DOGMA

When I was a boy in the 1960s, we were told by scientists that the moons of the other planets would be like our moon, rocky and inert. There was nothing very scientific about that statement, except that it was made by scientists. Then the two Voyager spacecraft, and later other probes like the current Cassini mission, went out and discovered a moon with an atmosphere and lakes (Titan), another with an ice-covered apparently deep water ocean (Europa), others with active volcanos, etc.

Back then, if someone asked what existed before the 'Big Bang' they were always told by physicists that that was a meaningless question, that it made no sense to ask it, or to try to answer it. Then, after decades of that frustrating resistance to inquiry, Stephen Hawking declared that he wanted to know what existed before the Big Bang. Suddenly there was a stampede of physicists, mathematicians and astrophysicists into that field\*\*.

For decades most anthropologists and geneticists clung to the idea that Homo Sapiens is a completely new species, unadulterated by any of those who have gone extinct, even though the evidence for that was specious, or non-existent. It hasn't only been religious leaders trying to maintain a separation between humanity and other species. But recently it has been discovered that all people in the world, except those derived from sub-Saharan Africa, have 1%-4% Neanderthal DNA in their genomes\*\*\*.

Those were scientific dogmas that were revealed to have no basis. Unfortunately there are other dogmas that are entrenched and won't budge.

\* \*Hawking wasn't the first to talk about the pre-big bang era, but his fame and popularity with the media made it acceptable for scientists to talk about it publicly. Now they don't want to stop talking about it.

\*\*\*We owe this stunning new information to the scientists of the Max Plank Institute in Germany, a research facility that is also at the leading edge of biology and physics. Once someone gets DNA from a homo erectus fossil (the 10,000 year old fossils found on the Indonesian island of Flores recently must be candidates), we will probably find ourselves very closely connected to them too.

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## Gods

The Hindu religion with its almost limitless gods and almost infinite room for every kind of thought or world position, may be closer to reality than any of them.

But the religions of the North and South American peoples, especially that of the wilder people of the forests and plains, were broad and expansive and always ready for to accept anything new the gods might offer. Jung called attention to the famous dream of the boy Black Elk, with the four sets of horses and riders, rushing together from north, south east and west to a central point, was treated by the shamans as a great dream. They gathered the necessary horses, and performed the ceremony, with Black Elk riding on one of the horses. Jung thought this was a fine example of the birth of religious ceremony.

What evidence am I referring to?

The problem with the great religions today is that they seem to have lost sight of the need for renewal. I believe renewal is only going to come when they, or someone, finds a way to reconnect science and religion.

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Scientists keep telling us that this is not possible, because science is rational and religion is irrational. That's nonsense. The great thinkers of Christianity like Augustine, Meister \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, were supreme rationalists. Modern scientists, in the meantime, exhibit an extreme irrationality in their aversion to subjects like the paranormal, which many of them fear may provide support to religious ideas.\*\*\*\*\*

Yes, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, the Bhudda, all understood the need of their time for something new. Yet in our time that cries out for a bridge between religion and science, no one wants to build it.

When I talk about unseen connections between things, do you know what I mean?

## SCRAPS

There was a time in the past when religions were not incompatible with science. During the \_\_\_\_\_ centuries, the great age of Islam, the middle east was the heartland of science, and Islamic scientists led the world. Mohammed himself was an intelligent and adaptable man. He too might have accommodated modern science.

The Hindu religion, along with its cousin Bhuddism, has never been hostile to science. In fact the Hindu chronology of the universe fits the modern scientific view better than any religion.

The religions of the stone age hunter-gatherer peoples, of whom there are barely a few remnants left, were something else again. The San people, or Bushmen, of the Kalahari desert seemed to have no restrictions on their thought at all – their greatest god was a praying mantis, who was married to \_\_\_\_\_, and whose best friends were....a porcupine and a being that live inside a rainbow. Would a people like that have had any problem adapting to the ideas of science?

Most scientists are always trying to separate science from religion, but I think that's a mistake.

It is really peculiar. They haven't a clue why gravity exists, or why sub-atomic particles can emerge from or disappear into a vacuum, but no one says 'Well, this is impossible, so it must not be happening. The reason why they can't accept telepathy is that it appears to require a medium other than those we know, one the mind has access to. It is a problem of physics more than psychology, yet, sadly, no physicist has shown interest since \_\_\_\_\_ helped create the Society for Psychical Research in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## War & Peace

One day in a conversation with my daughter a couple of years ago, I told her that based on my observation of Toronto subway commuters, the people who read fiction now are almost all women. "When was the last time you saw a young guy reading *War and Peace* on the subway?" I asked her. Those were my exact words.

A couple of days later I was seated on the subway riding to work, dozing through a few stations. I woke up to discover, inches away from my eyes, the opened front cover of a large hardcover book, with the title in giant letters – *War and Peace*, by Leo Tolstoy.

Holding the book open in his hands, standing directly in front of me, reading intently as the train continued from station to station, stood a young man. He appeared to be about halfway through the book. I was startled by this, that's for sure. I'd already got the message. But when I got up from my seat to get off at my stop, and I looked back in interest at this young man, I saw to my shock that he was surrounded, though mixed in with the rest of the rush hour crowd, by four other young men, all of them standing in more or less a square around the *War and Peace* reader, each one apparently reading a novel.

A coincidence? Well, if so, it was a gigantic one. I'm not a mathematician, but I'm sure I had a far better chance of winning first prize in a any lottery than having that experience.

Jung's term for an event of that nature was 'synchronicity'. Like him, I think there are far too many of them to be the result of random events. I think I was playfully corrected. If so, just imagine the complexity of events that had to be co-ordinated for that to happen.

But I wouldn't begin to suggest that scientists try to study that. I would be happy if they would stick to something relatively simple, like **telepathy**.

Anyone who will take a look will see that the evidence for telepathy is overwhelming. My own suspicion is that it is a mental attribute that we once had in greater \_\_\_\_\_, which has atrophied since we developed language.

Here's another story, one from a case investigated by J.B.Rhine.

Part of the problem too is that most of the literature about the paranormal is superficial, unreliable, and trashy. Those books and TV shows encourage the disrespect for interest in the paranormal.

Carl Jung predicted shortly before his death in \_\_\_\_\_ that the paranormal would be one of the chief subjects of science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Well, not yet.

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And my experience of the world over the past forty years has taught me that there are invisible connections between things and events that are impossible to explain unless there is something bigger than us.

The psychologist C.G. Jung once predicted that science would begin to investigate paranormal events in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Well, they haven't started yet.

What do I mean by invisible connections? Usually it's just coincidences that give you pause, but are too vague and fleeting (in the way dreams are) to draw any conclusions. You'll probably not notice anything if you're not looking for it. But once in a while....

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But don't watch too hard for these things. Don't become like those people who want to see UFOs, so they see UFOs. Keep the antidote of skepticism always with you. Many things can be explained. If there are gods or other entities out there, make them prove their existence to you.