

This e-mail is sent only to a voluntary subscriber list. If you no longer wish to receive these weekly columns, send a blank e-mail (no message) to softedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca. Or write to me personally, jimt@quixotic.ca

Wednesday October 29, 2014

The beginnings of us all

By Jim Taylor

I like Guinness. I like watching the bubbles.

You're supposed to pour Guinness so it foams. Guinness even puts a plastic marble inside its cans, to make the beer foam more vigorously when it's poured.

So at first, the glass is almost entirely foam. The dark beer is invisible among those millions of tiny bubbles. The foam swirls. Gradually, darker patches appear. The liquid beer, heavier than the foam, starts to settle to the bottom. The foam begins to dissipate....

Every time I watch a Guinness sorting itself out, I think of Angela Tilby's book, *Science and The Soul*. Tilby visualized the origins of our universe as "the foam of spacetime."

In that explosive beginning she imagined a foam of still undefined energy particles – what would eventually form quarks and bosons, leptons and gravitons -- frothing wildly in every direction, creating space and time as they expanded.

I try to imagine how the foam on my Guinness might behave if there were no "down" for the heavier beer to settle into. If there were no "up" for the lighter bubbles to rise towards.

Because in the beginning, when that first explosion of energy occurred, there was no up or down. Space and time didn't exist until the foam started expanding. They were formed by the foam itself, rather than existing independently.

And then, like the foam in my glass, the spacetime foam began settling

into its components. Sub-atomic particles coalesced into atoms, into molecules. Gravity began pulling molecules together. Crushed closely, they generated heat; compressed, they began fusing into more complex molecules.

The fusion created more heat. In the fullness of time, it blew some of those new stars apart and blasted heavier molecules out into space.

Gravity clumped some of those heavier molecules together, and formed rocky planets. Like ours.

On which some complex carbon-based molecules continued fusing. But instead of creating heat, they created life. Plants. Which exhaled oxygen as a waste product.

The oxygen levels of this planet increased from zero to around 20 per cent. New forms of life emerged from the seething stew to make use of this unutilized raw material. Animals. Us.

Everything that exists today derives from that original “foam.” Everything, alive or dead. Everything that was, or is, or will be – we are all related by our common origins.

Bob Sandford, chair of the UN’s Water for Life Decade, started one of his speeches by saying, “Every time you take a breath, you inhale the exhalation of every living thing on this planet since the beginning of life.”

As a corollary, of course, every time I exhale, or burn a log of wood in my fireplace, or propel my car with the remains of plankton that lived 300 million years ago, I add to the atmosphere by-products that every living thing will have to contend with indefinitely.

We are all intimately related. By our breath. By the elements that make up our bodies. And by the fact that every molecule, every atom, can trace its origins back to that original foam.

I can get quite intoxicated just watching the foam in my glass, even without drinking it.

Copyright © 2014 by Jim Taylor. Non-profit use in congregations and study groups, and links from other blogs, welcomed; all other rights reserved.

To comment on this column, write jimt@quixotic.ca

YOUR TURN

Last week’s column, in which I mused about stages of development – personal and corporate – got sent out just as news of the shooting on Parliament Hill began to hit the airwaves.

Naturally, Isabel Gibson put the two together: “I’m reading today’s blog with the coverage of the shootings on and near Parliament Hill on in the background. Yesterday, I was a block away from there at the relevant time.

“I wonder whether societies, like people, also have a choice to make when under stress, not to say attack. To take any necessary action dispassionately, in full recognition that situations are more complicated than we’d like them to be... or to revert to what I would call a tribal mind-set, and react entirely emotionally.”

Shadra Shoffner wrote, “You did it again....encouraged me to think!”

Jeff Johnson added additional thoughts to my musings: “The person who has provoked the most spiritual thought in me over the last ten years is a Franciscan teacher and author named Richard Rohr. He integrates beautifully the spiritual, psychological, mythical, and the biblical dimensions of life and faith.

“Your article this week on stages made me think of some good stuff Rohr has written on development in a few of his books. In ‘Falling Upward’, Rohr sees the journey of spiritual development in basically two stages, which he refers to as the first and second halves of life. He says the first half of life is about building the ‘container’ of our lives, creating our identity and our systems of belonging and support. Then the second half of life is about finding the ‘actual contents that the container is meant to hold and deliver. (p.1) Rohr says most people stay in the first half of life maintaining the container and not going on to explore the depths of life that our first half was preparing to fill us with.

“Some of the people and ideas you mention are also found in Rohr’s book ‘The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See.’ In an appendix in the book called ‘Levels of Development’ he integrates several of the psychological stage theories into nine levels:

- 1) ‘My body and self-image are who I am’ -- security needs, safety, and defense**
 - 2) ‘My external behavior is who I am’ -- need to look good to others, the conservative ‘shadow’**
 - 3) ‘My thoughts/feelings are who I am’ -- education as a substitute for transformation - the liberal tendency**
- **Normally, a major shock, defeat, or humiliation must be suffered and passed through to go beyond this stage.**
- 4) ‘My deeper intuitions and felt knowledge are who I am’ -- helpful, but leads**

to self-absorption

5) 'My shadow self is who I am' -- the dark night

6) 'I am empty and powerless' -- 'God's waiting room' he calls it

7) 'I am much more than who I thought I was' -- death of the False Self, birth of True Self, still a disorienting place

8) 'I and the Father are one' -- he quotes Teresa of Avila 'One knows God in oneself, and knows oneself in God.'

9) 'I am who I am' -- warts and all, detached from self-image, the serenity and freedom of the saints"

Jim again: I'm relieved that someone as perceptive as Rohr similarly sees a common pattern in these stages of development.

Bev Ireland caught me in an error: "Not to be picky, but I believe Maslow's last stage was 'self-actualization'."

She's right. I don't know whether my fingers made a mistake in typing, or if Microsoft autocorrected the word without my noticing.

And in response to Rafael Vallejo's complaint about missing some columns randomly, Nenke Jongkind wrote "I also live in Ontario, Toronto in fact, near Bloor and Yonge, and have no issues at all receiving your emails in my gmail account."

PSALM PARAPHRASES

Okay, I have to say I don't like this psalm reading. As I read it, it portrays a God who plays favourites, who gives rivers of abundant water to one group, but dries rivers up for another group.

I have four different versions of this psalm in Everyday Psalms. The version below doesn't cover all the recommended verses for this Sunday (1-7, 33-37) but it does offer a picture of God I can live with.

1 God's love is not fickle;

It does not swivel like a weathervane.

33 God could easily turn a summer day into a blizzard,

A wedding celebration into a funeral,

34 A placid pond into quicksand,

A family reunion into a civil war.

But God does not do such things;

God's love never wavers.

**35 God turns sandboxes into gardens,
and slums into communities of joy.**

**36 In God's world, foxes have holes,
and birds have nests,
and refugees have a roof over their heads.**

**37 All are free to forage in the fields,
to gather fruit from the trees,
to plant beans in tilled hills.**

**38 In the world God intended, they find themselves families.
They live in harmony with each other,
and in harmony with their world.**

**41 God never abandons the downhearted.
God gathers them like chicks beneath a hen's protective wings.**

**42 God's little ones look up without fear;
the shadow of those outstretched wings silences those who would hurt them.**

**43 Let those who have ears to hear, hear.
Let them remember that God's love never wavers.**

**For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the Revised Common
Lectionary, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake
Publishing, info@woodlake.com.**

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca.
Or forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

TECHNICAL STUFF

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, jimt@quixotic.ca.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at jimt@quixotic.ca. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca. Similarly, you can un-subscribe at

softedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca.

You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
