

A Gimble in a Wabe #10.

That Inner Longing for our Inner Essence: My Road Trip Back to the Roots of Religion

My Road Trip:

I grew up as a baby redneck on the frontier, on the irrigated edge just across Salmon Falls Creek Canyon from the Owyhee desert in southern Idaho. At the age of five, I was given a fully dressed (slacks, white shirt and tie) full immersion baptism in a tank, decorated like the banks of the River Jordan, just behind the altar of a Southern Baptist church in Castleford and was thus “saved”. Sadly, laments my family, it did not take and as I grew older, my interest in science and geology introduced me to skepticism and a growing interest in philosophy. Previous chapters in this series traces a portion of that search and surprisingly, made me more understanding of the core needs that are at the heart of the great world religions and coincidentally, at the heart of my own spiritual search. However, it is difficult to communicate this path to my fundamentalist family.

Four years ago, I discovered that I had a still living aunt in Kansas, not far from Joplin, MO where my parents met and were married (in the same church that outlaw Jessie James and his wife were married according to my father). Since my granddaughter was interested in visiting potential colleges out west, we took a road trip and included southeastern Kansas on our itinerary so that I, as well as my daughter, granddaughter and grandson could all visit and get acquainted with Aunt Alice.



Alice (left) and my mother in Idaho, the summer of 1958. I was unaware of her existence or visit as I was serving a summer cruise as a Midshipman in the U.S. Navy in the West Pacific at that time.

Alice is a devout Christian, has the bible completely memorized and with little encouragement, becomes a spontaneous preacher. My self-definition as a devout agnostic did not impress her and I was preached to for a good part of our visit as she wanted to save my errant soul from perdition. Since my daughter is a born-again Christian¹, I was well roasted on both sides by the time we ended our visit and departed from Kansas, the epicenter of evangelistic fundamentalist America.

This story was later recounted to my brother and his family in Idaho. I was reminded that my brother is also a self-educated biblical scholar. He and the rest of my family greatly enjoyed my discomfort and squirming at the attack of this sweet and saintly old lady (She is only 11 years older than I).

¹My daughter complains that in the Unitarian-Universalist Sunday school that we sent her to, she learned a lot about the society of the Kalahari Bushmen of South Africa and little about the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ. This gave her little to fall back upon as life presents its inevitable crises.

This attack on my lack of orthodox faith has led me to re-examine the bible and the roots of Christianity. If I am going to dismiss a generally accepted “Truth”, I had better know what I am dismissing. Being somewhat of a scholar myself, I began re-reading portions of the gospels and, becoming frustrated by inconsistencies that require biblical scholarship, I enlisted the aid of Albert Schweitzer’s “Quest for the historical Jesus”² and found the roots of my own skepticism as well. However, Schweitzer’s general conclusion was that alternative explanations of the miracles are still speculations. If you are going to be a Christian, you just have to take that proverbial leap of faith, that there is a message that transcends questionable miracles. I admire his humanism but he did not offer me a convincing theology. However, the New Testament does point to a convincing code of conduct and the basis of a valid ethical system that I also note is not consistently followed (in spirit) by fundamentalists.

I also searched Wikipedia for Flavius Josephus for the only two independent non-Christian historical references to the existence of Jesus. The first was an account of the stoning to death of James the Just, brother of Jesus the Christ. James is thought to have been the Bishop of Jerusalem. The second was a notice of the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ by Pontius Pilate. Josephus also mentions the execution of John the Baptist. Most certainly, the Nazarene did exist as a historical personage. The Gospels are full of a “sweet Jesus” body of teaching that gains my admiration.³ This body of teaching, as of this date and with current political discourse, sounds humanistic, socialistic and opposite to the tone and actions that we see from many present day Christian fundamentalists that attend the 2012 GOP primary presidential debates. This body of early church dogma and teaching is also quite apocalyptic and states that the end of days is near. According to the Book of Revelations, we are well past our “use by” date.

The miracles of the bible do not impress me. Documentation is scanty and, like Schweitzer’s sources, I find that there are other explanations: -A comatose Lazarus presumed to be dead rising and walking out of his tomb; -an insufficiently crucified Jesus being revived; -the appearance of food for the multitude... One can find rational explanations, especially considering it was all documented at least 60 years after the events and was not recorded by eye witnesses but by those who heard the stories first and second hand from the original apostles. Real or not, the biblical miracles are inconsequential compared to the miracle of sheer existence as we understand from our present scientific understanding of the “creation” of the universe.

Genesis:

The conditions that lead to our existence are another matter and the act of creation of the All from a void still blows my mind. I recently read Lisa Randall’s book: “Knocking on Heaven’s Door”⁴. She clearly gives the scientific state of understanding and speculations from sub-atomic particles, dark (or better stated, invisible) matter and energy to the Big Bang with its initial inflation and subsequent expansion into our observable cosmos. In the end, Professor Randall lauds the scientific method and the intense investigations at CERN on the Large Hadron Collider

²Albert Schweitzer’s “The Quest of the Historical Jesus, a Critical Study of its Progress from Reimauris to Wrede”, 1910, London, Adam and Charles Black: is an excellent compilation of German and European Protestant scholarship on Christianity and its origins. It combines dogmatic scathing as well as sympathetic scholarship conducted during the 19th and early 20th century. It is very dense reading. In addition to being a great biblical scholar, he was a physician and a profound humanist. He was granted the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his scholarship and his medical outreach in Africa.

³ I am particularly drawn to the black tradition of “Hate the sin, love the sinner”.

⁴ Lisa Randall, Knocking on heaven’s Door, 2011, Harper Collins, New York.

(LHC). She proposes the path of subatomic as well as cosmological measurements and observations spiced with a little Darwin as the best path to answering the questions: “What are we?” and “How did the universe come into existence?” Maybe, it takes the novice mind who can understand a bit of the physics and with the perspective of the scientific method, to take a few steps back and utter a string of expletives: **Wow, that we exist is a fricking miracle! Why do we exist? For what purpose? And who are we?”** We can speculate on string theories and generate theoretical/mathematical models of multiverse but the exciting science of it all seems to come up to a wall at the great singularity, the big bang.

The beguiling mystery of existence has always been with us. The Book of Genesis has it as following: ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light” and there was light.***⁵

It took another six days for God to get around to creating the firmament, day and night, division of the world into land and sea, creating all the grasses and plants, creating the fishes and the animals and finally, toward evening of the sixth day, creating man in his own image with dominion over all of his creations. It was quite a week for God. He set the whole shebang into movement and took a day off to rest.

So where does the scientist/atheist/agnostic philosopher come down on the formation of all things based upon current physics and cosmology? From our current scientific perspective, I can restate Genesis as following:

“In the beginning (about 13.75 billion years ago) there was a void and that void was devoid of space, matter and time. Out of this void arose a singularity, which we call the Big Bang, in which everything that we know, observe and have yet to observe emerged and which contained cosmic potential for an entire incipient universe in which organic life would become possible at discrete locations. Everything that is possible, including time itself, inflated out of that singularity into our expanding, evolving universe where eventually matter with memory for recreating itself also evolved. This expansion as well as the eventual evolution of life took place due to properties of matter and physical laws and constants that were also created at that singularity. Through the evolution of consciousness and reason, we can now discover and probe into the font of all existence.”⁶

The real mystery where we may as well evoke a God of causation is **that initial singularity**, i.e. the big bang and the Goldilocks nature of the universe (anthropomorphic effect, not too hot, not too cold, etc.) We do not have the science or physics to address this singularity where prior to our primal event, there was no prior, for time was also initiated/created coincidental with the nuclei of all existence. But, the science of physics and cosmology is necessary to appreciate the secular nature of the fundamental miracle of all existence. Before we had access to modern science, telescopes, microscopes, and particle colliders, we had no means for exploring Geneses. Our civilization is less than 4000 years old. Our ability to probe into the essence of existence

⁵ So sayeth the Gideon Bible in my hotel room and hence the Big Bang.

⁶ When I read this to my fundamentalist brother, he had no problem and thought it was compatible with his biblical account. He is not a young Earth advocate.

dates from when, some 400 years ago: Galileo turned a Dutch designed telescope from the horizon where they spotted incoming sailing vessels of war or commerce to the heavens where he marveled at mountains on the moon and plotted the orbits of the moons of Saturn and Jupiter and heretically declared that the Earth orbits the Sun and not the other-way around⁷. This act of heresy lead the Holy Inquisition to commit Galileo to house arrest for the rest of his life and his writings to be banned (unsuccessfully).

Our tools are becoming more powerful every year and our discoveries are becoming ever more profound. We can now explore the limits of dimension (as recently sent to me by my old friend Dan Niebauer as: <http://htwins.net/scale2/scale2.swf?bordercolor=white>) which extends from the diameter of the universe to the dimension of the smallest sub-nuclei component at the Plank limit. Until we have a better tool, it is fair game to assign the territory beyond these limits to the realm of God. I have no problem with this as long as we do not evoke this God, whose realm is so vast as to have a personal interest in the way I live my life at such a small local scale at this un-noteworthy region of the universe.

That Inner Longing:

So why religion? Humans, early in their development of civilization, began asking the “*how come?*” questions. Early man had not developed the discipline and tools for scientific inquiry but he was developing powers of reason and early in the game, invented God or hierarchy of gods and gave them the powers to kick start and create all that is. Hence, by intuition and projection, we created our gods of causation.

I showed in the last chapter that the gods were most likely created by schizophrenic projections from the right hemispheres of the brains of charismatic individuals. The classical Greek gods were all too human and my study of Julian Jaynes⁸ leads me to exclaim “**of course, we created our gods as well as our devils**”! I leave it to the reader to review my previous article for some of the mechanics. The question though is: Why have we created God in our own image?

I think that I came up with an answer that seemed to evolve out of my previous writing. I have come to call it that “*Inner Longing*”... We are here for only this while. We may think that we will live forever when we are children, rather, we do not think about it because there is so much that occupies our minds as we prepare ourselves for this world. As we grow into our full power and maturity, we begin to notice disease, pestilence and war thinning our ranks and parents and grandparents die and disappear. As we grow older and become parents and grandparents ourselves, we become quite aware of our limited life and begrudgingly accept our own final demise. But, we long for more. Moreover, we feel that there is more. We sense, or perhaps we simply invent a soul that has some connection to a plane beyond this one. Throughout all of these stages of growth and observations, we become acquainted with an *Inner Essence*. *Believe it or not, we locate that inner essence not in our head, rather in our upper chest, in our heart.* Through that **Inner Essence**, we long for continuity, to see to the other side of death and decay of the corporal being. That, I submit is the font of first spiritual searching which has been

⁷ It has only been a year since Galileo had the sin of heresy rescinded and he was released from house arrest and his writings removed from the list of the banned.

⁸ Julian Jaynes, Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral mind.

morphed into the building of churches, the structure and institutions of religion. We have started with our **Inner Longing** and layered on a myth structure to placate the insecure mind.

But what is it in religion and the evolution of religion that causes me to give it a conditional pass? I think that I came upon it during my last Gimble in a Wabe and that church at its best is an outlet for that **Inner Longing** that is the core of all of the religions and, more importantly, I was able to catch a fleeting glimpse and articulate that **Inner Longing** for my **Inner Essence** (or perhaps a **Soul**) within myself. The sheer act of writing about it revealed something that has always been within me, dimly beyond surface mentation and in my heart. I have approached it poetically in my Genesis Trilogy:

GENESIS TRILOGY

1- *Space/Time Determination*

*There is an instant in projected time
When all is still.
There is nothing to stir, a void.
Time is timeless
And dimension awaits.*

*Mind projects.
It begins!
Screaming energy packets issue from no-where.
Energy forms a universe
And in quantum indecision
Is born determination.*

*Time grows an easy couplet with space.
It is cool.
Awareness arrives.*

*An assemblage probes into its atom ---
...Can this condensation
Be the final aspiration
Of space/time determination?*

2- *Giving Birth to Wild Magic*

*We are here
As molecules
Attaching and detaching radicals.
We develop memory in matter.
We learn to replicate ourselves.*

*We are here
Casting our heads above the ignominious slime,
Grasping that first ray of perception,
Joyously responding to light.*

*We are here
Dragging our scaly bodies across the sand bar
That separates our marsh
From one more bountiful.*

*We are here
As the grazer raises its head
To note points of fire
In the evening sky.*

*We are here
Where a sapling grasped just so
Can be used as a tool or toy
And our hands make bird wing shadows
In the mid-day sun.*

*So here we are
Countless eons from molecules---
Dancing in the primordial slime,
We struggle to know what we are.
We write the *Book of the Future*
And dare give birth to wild magic.*

3- That Cosmic Inner Longing

*It is a miracle beyond loaves and fishes,
Beyond walking on water,
Beyond the resurrection of the Nazarene.*

*It is the mother of all singularities.
Thirteen point seven five billion years ago;
The creation of all cosmic potential
And three star cycles to here.*

*Miracles beget miracles
As organic matter develops memory
And the ability to reproduce, modify,
Recreate to changing environment,
And by existing it changes the environment
And accelerates further change.*

*Organic matter creates new organic matter
And in three billion years of cascading complexity
Matter develops awareness.*

*Another miracle takes place!
The assembly probes itself,
And becomes self-animated.
Complexity provides a cradle
For that cosmic inter longing
That drives us to reveal our Inner Essence
Which invites us to reattach our strings to the Absolute.*

So I ask the reader to do as I did to myself. Go within and see what it is that drives your vector. I have come to see within myself and I suspect it in others, that intense inner longing for Truth, for communication with the beyond or heaven or whatever you want to call it, that higher dimension that is the ground of our being. That inner longing is what drives me. I listen to my fellow scientists who seek the “**What?**” and I feel dissatisfied as I also want the “**Why?**” and then seek the “**Inner Essence**” of existence.

The Ten Commandments, The Atheist Manifesto and the Devout Agnostic:

If you are going to study religion, you also need to study the other side of religion: Atheist philosophy. My friend, Dan Niebauer who is always sending me profound cosmology input, sent me the following link which I also saw soon after in the TAT newsletter:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Txp8LhL56rU>; (“Through these godless Eyes”). On the surface, I quite agree with the message. About the same time, I received a timely and somewhat ironic Christmas book gift from my wife, Ruth: “The Atheist Manifesto⁹” by Michel Onfray, Professor of Philosophy at the Free University of Caen, France. Onfray does a remarkable job of exposing the horrible crimes committed against the “other”, i.e., those with alternate sets of view and dogmas differing from the prevalent orthodoxy that is traceable to the three great Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These religions are all derived from that inner longing and attempt to provide succor to the troubled masses. But, they all have been perverted by the need to provide organizational continuity. Let us take a critical look at the Ten Commandments¹⁰ which are common in one form or another to all Abrahamic religions.

- 1- *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.*
- 2- *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My Commandments.*

⁹ Michel Onfray, “Atheist Manifesto, the Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam”, translated from the French by Jeremy Leggart, Arcade Publishing, New York, 2005, original French copyright 2005, Editions Grasset&Fasquelle.

¹⁰The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17 NKJV)

- 3- *“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*
- 4- *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*
- 5- *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.*
- 6- *“You shall not murder.*
- 7- *“You shall not commit adultery.*
- 8- *“You shall not steal.*
- 9- *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
- 10- *“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”*

The first three out of 10 commandments are devoted to the structure of religious organizations, i.e. church building and the religious structure and differentiation of the believers from the non- (or alternative doctrine) believers. The fourth promotes good health for you should not overwork the body. However, the believer should spend his Sabbath contemplating his Maker and perhaps sustaining the belief structure and hierarchy. The fifth calls for respect for and honor/protection of that first level of society and civilization, the family. The remaining five are devoted to social order and are the basis of almost all present day civil law. However, the same Moses that delivered the stone tablets chiseled by the Hebrew God also conveyed a message from that same God declaring the Jews to be his chosen people and granted them the land of Israel which unfortunately, was occupied by the hated idol worshiping Hittites. He ordered the Jews to exterminate every man, woman and Child and save the virgins as spoils of war. Obviously the sixth commandment really means, *“Do not kill a member of your own tribe”*: the seventh: *“do not steal from a member of your own tribe”* and so on.

This this is the crux of my argument. Religion begins as a tribal set of laws and way of living to promote, bind the tribe to a unifying belief structure and, driven by that **Inner Longing**, to give hope for a better life beyond this one. It becomes broader as the tribe grows and accepts converts but still can provide for extermination of Hittites. It also allows persecution and/or extermination of the Albigensians of Languedoc, Calvinistic Huguenots for having different dogmas as well as the Jews. The Church of Rome went so far as to establish an official Inquisition to sanction dismemberment and burning at the stake for sins of blasphemy, heresy and apostasy. The church (Protestant as well as Catholic) looked the other way during the holocaust and countless others from the Crusades to the extermination of Native Americans and the Rwandan and Bosnian racial cleansing/genocides of more recent times. Meanwhile, Islam converted and grew its ranks through conquest and had few qualms about enslaving or exterminating persistent non-believers and idol worshipers.

The genocidal aspect of the history of almost any given Abrahamic religion is almost enough to drive one to atheism or anti-religion. Michel Onfray, the author of the “Atheist Manifesto”, spent most of this spleen on the crimes and atrocities of the Abrahamic religions with almost no mention of Buddhism, Hinduism and other eastern religions. To my understanding, there has never been a holy Buddhist war, though Buddhists do fight in wars. The Hindus believe that there are many paths to God and will place a statue of Jesus on a mantle near Shiva.

Atheists are not immune to the commission of atrocity. Atheist thinkers such as Marx, when given a chance to organize a philosophy, invented communism and Lenin’s and Stalin’s promotion of that particular “ism” resulted in identical genocide. I recently saw a theatrical adaptation of the book “Wild Swans”¹¹ which is a personal/historical three generation family account of the Maoist communist revolution in China, the state replacement of the feudal aristocracy with an equally demeaning communist party structure, the Cultural Revolution and finally transition into the modern industrial state through a combination of the death of Mao and the birth of “Real Politic”. The people remained surfs, though there is now a chance for upward mobility since Mao’s dogmatism is being replaced by economic pragmatism. Lenin’s Communism as it was transferred to the tender mercies of Stalin led to atrocities in the Soviet Union that rivals, indeed exceeds the holocaust and created a repressive society that was copied by the Chinese Communist revolution.

As a counter to the communist ideology that displaced her from her aristocratic roots in Russia, Ayn Rand developed the philosophy of Objectivism. She states: “*My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute.*”¹² The end result is the creation of the “greed is good” capitalistic plutocratic ideal that has no sympathy of the victims of these innovators. Mix this with Calvinistic theology that claims that God favors the successful (or conversely, you are successful because God favored you) and you have American Fundamentalism. Rand’s ideal society would be just as onerous to the common man as its opposite, the Marxist ideal.

Contemplating the experience of China and Russia and unfettered capitalism, all I can say is “**Damned all of their eyes!**” Do not put either the Atheist or the evangelical fundamentalist Christian (*or hybridizations of the two*) in charge. Thomas Jefferson along with Ben Franklin, John Adams, James Madison and other founders learned the lesson of the religious wars of Europe and the evil of the inquisition. They saved America by inspiring and installing a secular constitution where we are simultaneously blessed with **freedom of religion and freedom from religion**.¹³ I might add my own expletive: “*God save us from any utopia of the true believers of a social/economic theory/theology!*”

Though I find myself in agreement with most of the themes of humanistic atheism; for me, it lacks that inner wonder and there seems to be no satisfaction of my **Inner Longing**. It seems to not feed my right brain. They will tell me that my Inner Longing is irrational and

¹¹ Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*. Simon and Schuster, (London, 1991); Anchor paperback, (London, 1992), [ISBN 0-385-42547-3](#); Harper Perennial, (London, 2004)

¹² Indeed, many economic conservative lawmakers have dictated Ayn Rand’s writings as required reading by their staff members.

¹³ For all his enlightenment, Jefferson owned some 600 slaves and felt free to bed a few. History gives him a mixed moral report card. We can give him a pass as “a creature of his times”. We should all do as well with the life granted to us.

inconsequential. But atheism does not provided that magnificent spirit that we find beautifully expressed in the black church and in southern old time gospel music. To my mind, a balanced modern life is one that moves seamlessly from science to engineering, to accounting, to inventory on to process specifications, and then, for balance and completeness, on to philosophy, poetry, music, sculpture, drawing and painting, and dreamy revelry of the soul. Fritjof Capra's epilog to his book "The Tao of Physics": "*Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science, but man needs both*" resonates well with me if I take liberties and redefine mysticism as spirituality.

...And What About Alice and the Road Trip?

I evoke Arlo Guthery by the Question: "Remember Alice?¹⁴:" This whole rant was initiated by my Aunt Alice who rubbed my nose into the evangelical fundamentalist beliefs that I grew up with and grew away from. Although she would be horrified by where our visit has led me, I have to thank her for the stimulation. It was a magnificent road trip. I am simultaneously impressed with and horrified by the fundamentalism of our heartland which is now co-mingled with windmills, mile-long railroad trains parallel to the interstate, oil wells and corn fields. This road trip provided a snapshot of Middle America. America remains a place where the mind can become bogged down in dogma or it can soar. We witnessed our internal conflicts on a national scale in the 2012 primaries and general elections. I must conclude from the above that we may differ in our dogmas but we are united in that **Inner Longing** for our **Inner Essence** that is at the core of us all and a starting point for our attempts to find union with the **Eternal Essence**. It is indeed a creative time.

Peace to the wanderer.

¹⁴Alice's Restaurant by ArloGuthery.