

The Three Stages of Faith Development

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We live in a scientific age, an age characterized by the rigorous demand for scientific facts and evidences to consider any assertion as truth. Despite that prevailing view, however, we see illusions, delusions, and deceptions camouflaged as truth ruling the day. This is causing enormous tragedy and destruction to the human race.

Take religious faith for consideration. Many people operating according to religious norms and traditions inherited from parents, and past generations inflict heavy damage on themselves and others. Nothing else matters to them if a statement made is uncomfortable to their sensibilities.

Matters of religious faith have been a subject of contention throughout human history. When we discuss our religious beliefs, we abandon truth and keep any attempt to follow a scientific method of inquiry of truth off limits and use every means at our disposal to prevent free discourse and criticism.

We have followed this path throughout history, and have paid enormous prices for doing so. We have fought many wars, and clashed with civilizations other than our own because of our differences. It does not matter whether or not the faith is under the same umbrella or belongs to one general tradition. It is the interpretation of the sacred writings that matters.

Take for instance, the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Whereas the followers profess belief in the same God, they express serious and irreconcilable differences in the interpretation of the teachings of these faiths. In particular, at this juncture in human history, the differences have been much more focused and sharper than ever before.

Recent examinations of religious beliefs have engendered many points of incompatibility amongst the countless number of identified religious beliefs. Phillip Clayton as reported in the Los Angeles times dated March 25, 2012 reported that there are almost 10,000 religions in the world. That is not a misprint. 10,000 ways to worship a higher being, a supreme being. What is more, the adherents of many religious faith look upon the adherents of other religious faith as infidels, nonbelievers, or lost souls not worthy of redemption and deserving of condemnation and destruction.

Extreme Views

While this feud is brewing between and amongst followers of faith in the Supreme Being, many free thinkers who regard themselves as either atheists or anti-theists are emerging and gaining ground. On the one extreme, we have notable and world famous physicists like Stephen Hawkins, who state that theology is not a necessity. In his book, *The Grand Design*, Hawkins states that God did not create the universe, and maintains that while God may exist, it is not necessary for

the universe to have a creator, and that the existence of gravity will make it possible for the universe to emerge from nothing. In short he argues that the universe and humanity exist because of “spontaneous creation”.

On the other extreme we have the likes of the Taliban who are ardently working to create the world in their own image, and are prepared to sacrifice anyone including themselves to achieve this objective. They derive their call from religious leaders like the late religious zealot Ayatollah Khomeini who sought Islamic Dominion and said *“We are at war against infidels...I ask all Islamic nations, all Muslims, all Islamic armies, and all heads of Islamic states to join the Holy War. There are many enemies to be killed or destroyed...the final aim of which is to put Koranic law in power from one end of the earth to the other”* (Ayatollah Khomeini, “The U.S. is the devil on this planet.” World Islamic Popular Command) <http://www.letusreason.org/Islam21.htm>

In a similar vein, many conservative leaders of the Christian Church have a similar desire. George Grant wrote in *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action*:

“Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ -- to have dominion in civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness. But it is dominion we are after. Not just a voice. It is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less... Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land -- of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ.” <http://www.brucegourley.com/christiannation/theocracy.htm>

Comte's Contribution

It is comforting to note as a historical reference point the works of August Comte, the great French philosopher who understood the need for faith and prescribed a method of analysis for its proper understanding. It was during August Comte’s time that Sociology developed, and Comte is regarded as the father of the science of modern Sociology for giving the discipline a scientific framework for analyzing the behavior of society. Comte coined the term “Sociology”, and attempted to provide the tool not only to explain past behaviors of societies, but also provided the ingredients to predict their futures.

Comte developed a form of empiricism that he called positivism or the positive philosophy. Many thinkers and philosophers started reflecting on this philosophy to check out its validity and acceptability to help interpret and explain the behaviors of societies. One of these philosophers was John Stuart Mill who stated that we have no knowledge of anything but phenomena, which is relative and not absolute leading to the inevitable conclusion that the ultimate cause of phenomena are unknown and remain inscrutable.

What is interesting about Comte’s philosophy of positivism is his explanation that human culture developed in three progressive stages. He identified these three stages as Theological, metaphysical and positive. Although earlier thinkers have discovered these three stages, Comte is

generally credited with the discovery of these stages because of the passionate explanation and analysis he provided.

According to Comte, in the theological stage of human cultural development, human beings rely on supernatural agencies to explain phenomena that they cannot explain otherwise. This stage may be regarded as the infantile state of human development. This is the primitive stage of human existence where every natural phenomenon is explained as an act of God. A storm, an earthquake or an accident is attributed as the wrath of God. In this stage of human existence, people may believe in the presence of God in every living or nonliving thing. They may also believe in many Gods or even in one God. The important distinction is their belief that every natural phenomenon is maneuvered by a supernatural force and that humans are inept to do anything about it.

In the metaphysical stage of human cultural development, phenomena are attributed to abstract and poorly understood causes. Although the metaphysical stage of human development is an extension of the theological stage, there is order and form in explaining phenomena. Reason and rationality gradually replace imagination and attempt to give meaningful explanation to natural phenomena. There is a serious attempt to arrive at conclusion based on a proper analysis and understanding of the phenomena.

In the third and final stage of human cultural development, which Comte called positivism, humans finally shake off the fog of obscurities from their reasoning powers, and science takes the upper hand. Here humans attempt to explain every phenomenon applying the laws of physics. Illusions and delusions dissipate and an equal or greater force of reason takes control and explains events and occurrences as act of nature that is governed by the laws of physics. There is a cause and effect relationship for every phenomenon and nothing is taken for granted.

Concluding Remarks

When we look at the scene of the world, we cannot help but wonder why humans are inflicting such heavy damage on themselves when the light of science is shining so brightly. God is beyond comprehension, and any attempt to explain his behavior or nature will result in failure and will add to the misunderstanding and confusion in the process. What one needs to do is follow the dictates of science and attempt to explain events and occurrences in that light. Any event, occurrence or belief that does not conform to the rigorous investigative tools of science must be regarded as superstition.

Andrew Cohen, a noted spiritual teacher writes that all the great religious traditions share similar creation stories. When people share similar creation stories and myths with other individuals a new sense of interconnectedness emerges. Suddenly, blood line ceases to be important, and sharing a particular religious world view becomes much more significant. That would be mythocentric and will bind such believers together. Indeed opening one's mind and examining other faiths will demonstrate the commonalities and similarities of these faiths.

<http://bigthink.com/videos/andrew-cohen-explains-cosmocentrism>

There are signs across the world that democratic nations expressed, through the will of their people, are being persuaded to give up part of their sovereignty to form some form of a union with other similar nations. Believers of many faiths are also doing the same thing and are preparing to live peacefully with believers of other faiths. There are many obstacles and occasional setbacks towards movement in this direction. By and large, such societies are gradually being formed creating a social and political environment that accommodates divergent points of views.

An optimist will conclude from this emerging phenomenon that the unity of the world through some form of federation is inevitable at some point. This may take a long time to come to fruition. When that happens, all the fanatics, power mongers, and zealots will fall by the wayside, and the inter-faith dialogue that is presently underway will have succeeded in creating the “Religion of Humanity” that August Comte worked very hard to form.