



W. Paul Jones'

Theological Worlds

2013 | David K. Popham

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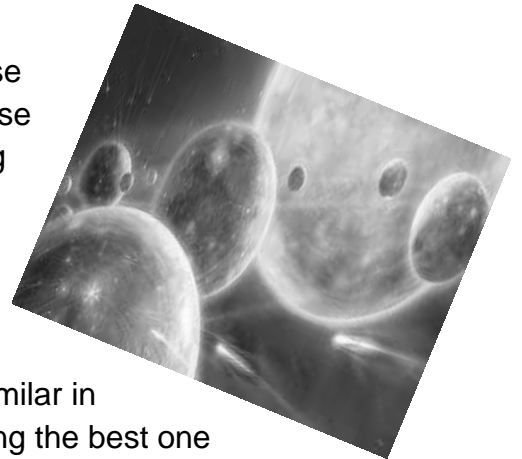
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A Brief Overview

Before venturing forth as an astronaut to the various Worlds it is best to have a map before us describing the multiple soulscapes we will encounter. The summary which follows is the work of Sara Weatherman, C.M., an insightful soulscape artist.

World 1: The journey from Separation to Reunion. People longing to find our way home. They yearn for harmony and inclusiveness. The cycles of life – birth, death, and rebirth – are central. World 1 people are always looking for a new way of seeing, and are often contemplative. God is Eternal Now, present in the cosmos. Christ is the Revealer of God.

World 2: The journey from Conflict to Vindication. These folks are often on the front lines of justice issues because they long for a level playing field, justice for all. Working toward the Kingdom of God on Earth provides strong motivation. God is in the future pulling us toward that Kingdom. Christ is the Liberator who frees us to fight for the freedom of others.



World 3: The journey from Emptiness to Fulfillment. Similar in some ways to World 1, but the focus is on the Self, being the best one can be. God is within – we are made in God’s Image. Wholeness is important, as are feelings and a sense of community. Christ is our model of this Wholeness. Many self-help books are aimed at people in this world.

World 4: The journey from Condemnation to Forgiveness. God is seen as judge, Christ as Savior. Much of “church language” comes from this world, as does much in our order of worship.

World 5: The journey from Suffering to Endurance. For many, life is just getting from one day to the next, with good friends walking beside them. God is Emmanuel; Christ is the Suffering Servant who walks beside us. Dependability and tenacious faith, in spite of it all, are significant.

Each “World” has its favorite Scripture passages, its favorite hymns, and language it uses to describe faith. All five worlds can be found in Psalm 23 or the Lord’s Prayer. The boundaries of the world are porous; we move among them as needed.

Grid

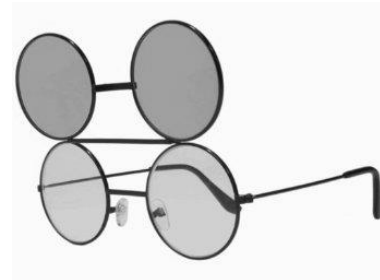
| Pulsating Logic | World 1 | World 2 | World 3 | World 4 | World 5 |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| Obsessio/ Defining Quandary | Alienation/ Separation | Hostile Powers/ Conflict | Emptiness | Condemnation/ Culpability/ Guilt | Recalcitrant Powers/ Suffering |
| Epiphania/ Incorporation | Union/ Harmony | Vindication/ New Earth | Fulfillment/ Wholeness | Forgiveness/ Adoption | Endurance/ Perseverance |
| Struggle for Meaning | Authenticity in the face of an overwhelming cosmos | The dilemma of history as chaotic | Possibilities for the unfulfilled self | Passing through the valley of the shadow of personal guilt | Living means persisting on the edge of absurdity |
| Quest | Alienation to Belonging | Injustice to Justice | Death to Life | Condemnation to Pardon | Duplicity to Integrity |
| Feel | Longing | Anger/Rage | Ache/Void | Guilt | Overwhelmed |
| Action | Sensing | Co-creating | Becoming | Confessing | Being Reliable |
| Self-Image | Orphan/ Pilgrim | Warrior | Outcast | Fugitive | Victimization/ Refugee |
| Atonement | Love as the tearing of the veil | Love as taking our part | Love as filling to overflowing | Love as forgiving the unworthy | Love as persevering with long-suffering |
| Christ | Revealer who lifts the veil | Liberator who breaks my chains and with whom I join in the fight | Model Human who teaches me how to be whole | Savior who redeems me from my sins | Suffering Servant who walks with me through life |
| God Location | Eternal Now | The Future Horizon | Within | Judgment Throne | Emmanuel (God With Us) |
| Proponents | Tillich, McFague, Neo- liberalism | Gutiérrez, Fiorenza, Liberation Theology | Cobb, Heyward, Process & Relational Theologies | Barth, Niebuhr, Neo-orthodoxy | Wiesel, de Beauvoir, Existentialism |

Three Ways to Conceive the Theological Worlds



Separate spheres
Totality unto themselves
Crashing about

Lenses through which our perception is focused
Interactive as filters directing our attention and screening information



Separate yet interactive components which make the full or whole picture
Can be rearranged
Individual components are compromised without the others

Two Sets of Continuums to Keep in Mind

First set arises in the exploration of the Theological Worlds

Obsessio ----- Epiphania
(angst) (aha!)

- Persons may be attracted to a world due to the angst in their life
- Persons may be attracted to a world due to the pattern of resolution the world presents

Second set arises as persons construct mental pictures of spiritual realities

Concrete ----- Abstract
(literal) (metaphor)

- There is no “correct” spot on this continuum
- Concrete/literal construction tends to lead to more solid, and therefore less flexible images
- Abstract/metaphorical construction tends to lead to more fluid, and therefore less solid images

NOTE: These two sets of continuums provide a better tool to understand spiritual dialogue than the worn and trite conservative-liberal divide, by helping us understand the deeper motivations for our religious views.

Obsessio

An obsessio is the horn of human angst
which gores us and leaves us
wounded and bleeding.



W. Paul Jones describes the obsessio as:

*“...whatever functions deeply and pervasively
in one’s life as a defining quandary, a conundrum,
a boggling of the mind, a hemorrhaging of the soul,
a wound that bewilders healing, a mystification that renders one’s life cryptic.
Whatever inadequate words one might choose to describe it,
an obsessio is that which so gets its teeth into a person
that it establishes one’s life as plot.”*

Epíphanía

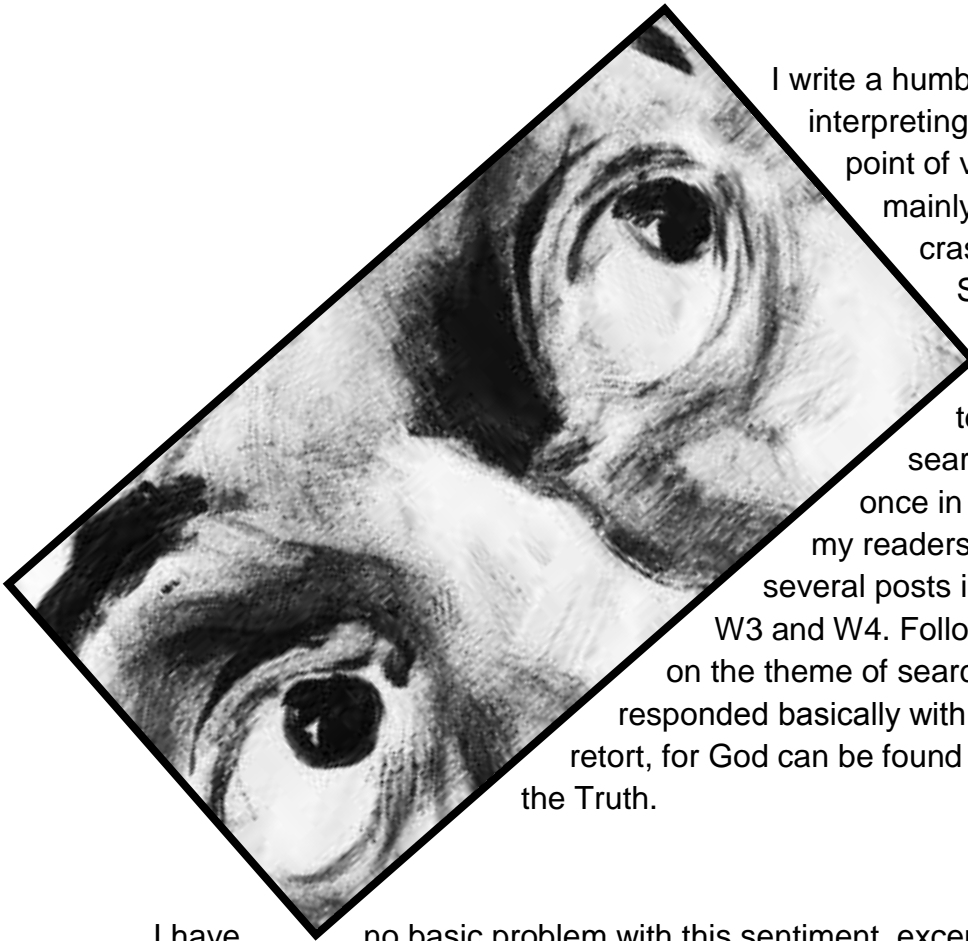
An epiphania is the
healing balm which mends
the gored soul.



W. Paul Jones describes the epiphania as:
*“...that which keeps the function of obsessio
fluid, hopeful, searching, restless, energized, intriguing,
as a question worth pursuing for a lifetime.
it keeps one’s obsessio from becoming
a fatal conclusion that signals futility.”*

Existential Violence

Says W. Paul Jones: “Each theological World can be a valid arena in which to live, move, and have one’s being. No one World, as such, is better or more true than another. Neither can these Worlds be arranged so as to view some as elementary, others as more mature.”



I write a humble blog concerned with interpreting scripture from a queer point of view. This is the place I mainly observe the Worlds crashing into each other. Since I am very strong in my primary World (W1), my ponderings tend to speak of searching, yearning, and once in a while finding. One of my readers who has responded to several posts is, I suspect, strong in W3 and W4. Following one post robust on the theme of searching the reader responded basically with a “quit searching” retort, for God can be found in Jesus, and Jesus is the Truth.

I have no basic problem with this sentiment, except that it does not speak to W1 drives – the obsessio or the yearned for epiphania. In fact I felt that my whole spiritual questing had been pejoratively cast aside. I had been existentially violated. I cannot not search – to quit looking and to claim “here God is,” would be to give myself over to the annihilation of idolatry. Just as asking the reader of the blog to continue searching after finding God violated the “pulsating logic” of his world.

W. Paul Jones indicates that our goal is to help persons explore and understand their World so as to stake their souls upon the God they encounter there.

World 1 Obsessio: Separation & the Cosmos – The Alien

As we stand before the sheer vastness of the cosmos, there emerges the sense of being an alien. Separated from the whole we are weighed with a sense of alienation and abandonment. We are solitary figures in the face of an overwhelming and silent cosmos. Life is a fundamental mystery: everything that is, could just as well not have been, or have been radically different. We are nameless, directionless, homeless with “reality” simply the name for the incidental point where we happen to be.

Haunted that there is only nothingness without a God behind it, we are marked by a yearning to be united to that Ground from which our existence comes, from which we are estranged. To exist is to be separated from the Ground of Being. Life is marked by the search for that to which we belong. We are pilgrims/orphans, looking for home. The issue is in which direction – back to the womb, or toward a home not of this order?



Citizens of World 1 are obsessed with the presence of the “absence.” The obsessio is a yearning for the “other.” As Paul Tillich stated, “We know that we are estranged from something to which we really belong, and with which we should be united.” Abandoned implies by *someone*. Absence implies *presence somewhere*.

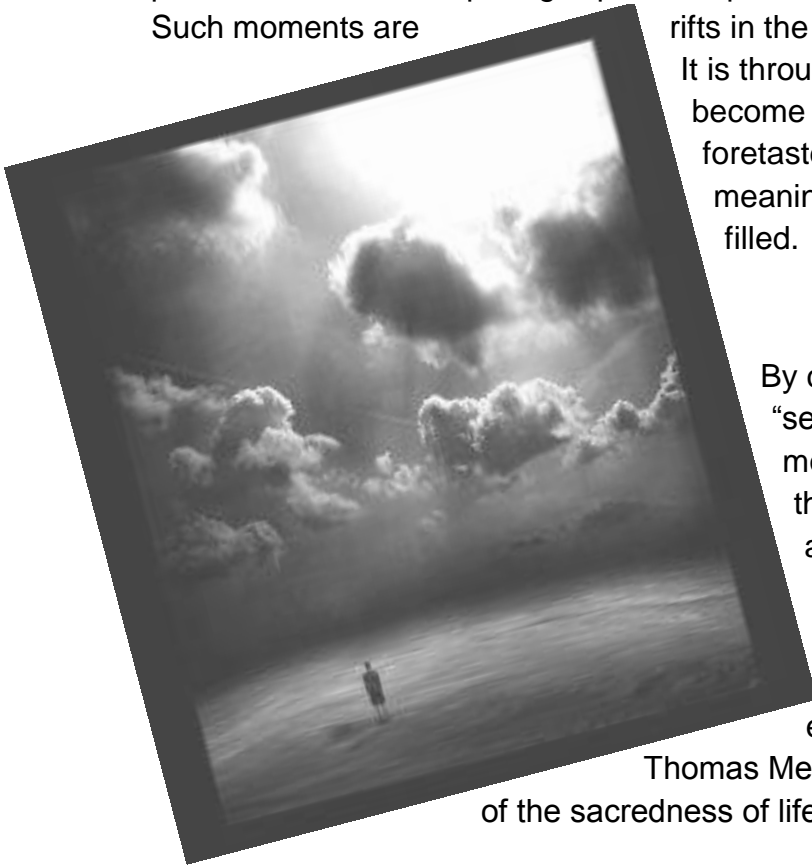
World 1 Obsessio: mystery waiting to be recognized and trusted.

World 1 Sin: mistrust, faithlessness

World 1 Gospel Truth: the eyes of our hearts indeed need opening.

World 1 Epiphania: Reunion as Homecoming

Epiphania comes as the ability to see the “reality beyond reality”: the invisible beyond the visible, the spiritual beyond the material. Such seeing is always partial and comes as quick glimpses or special moments which hint of “other.” Such moments are



rifts in the curtains, or holes in the mystery. It is through this kind of seeing that things become new. Such moments provide a foretaste which bathes the infinitely meaningless with the unfathomably awe-filled.

By consciously recognizing such “seeing” we participate in the present moment. Such glimpsing often has the effect of merging the present and the future into an Eternal Now.

Those who experience such epiphanias often experience what Thomas Merton called the “Spontaneous awe of the sacredness of life.”

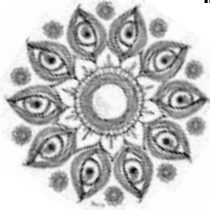
Elizabeth Barrett Browning speaks of such perception in her poem *Aurora Leigh*: “Earth’s crammed with heaven / And every common bush afire with God / But only he, who sees, takes off his shoes / The rest of us sit around it, and pluck blackberries.”

World 1 Epiphania: new awareness/”seeing”

World 1 Christology: Christ is the revealer who lifts the veil/opens the eyes

World 1 Gospel Celebration: sacred moments are rifts/holes through which we glimpse eternity.

World 1 Quest:
Expanding the Soul to Tear the Veil -
To Know the Truth



“All births mean separation from the All, the confinement within limitation, the separation from God, the pangs of being born anew. The return in the All, the dissolution of painful individuation, the reunion with God means expansion of the soul until it is able once again to embrace the All”
(Herman Hess, *Steppenwolf*).

Tearing the veil opens up a different dimension of reality. Through this experience we gain a perspective for contrasting views of the All/God. Also, in this experience we begin to understand that our search for God takes place within God’s search for us.

By graciously experiencing the mystery of “why something rather than nothing,” each moment of existence becomes a sheer gift: the Now is graced. Salvation for citizens of World 1 is a new way of seeing, a change in perspective, an “aha!” moment which ushers in the Eternal Now.



The quest is pursued through exploring, wandering, experimenting, studying, trying new things/ideas/god-concepts.



World 1 Scripture: all words of the bible point to the Word behind creation

World 1 God: not a Being per se, but imaged as woven into the fabric of creation

World 1 Salvation: a new way of seeing, a change in perspective

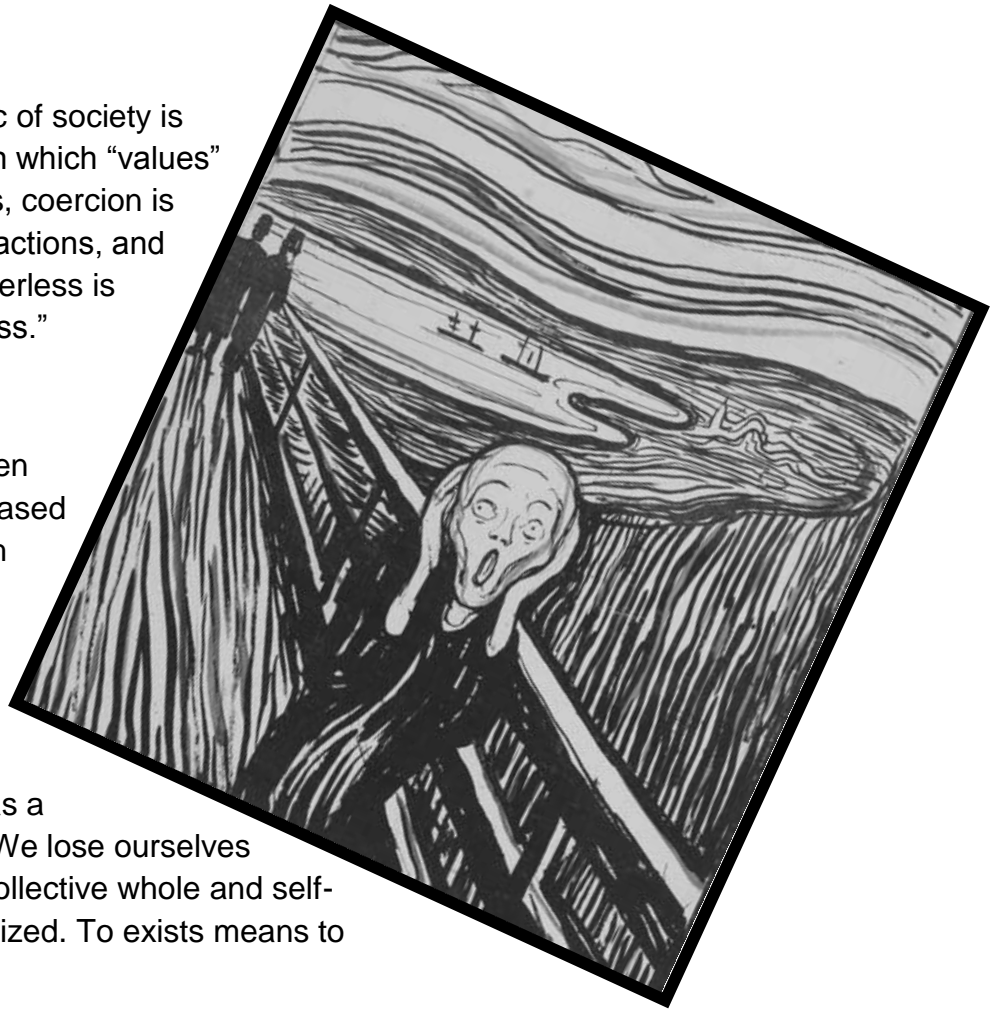
World 1 Movement: from Orphan to Gnostic

World 2 Obsessio: Conflict and History – The Warrior

The obsessio is born amidst the nameless faces forgotten and used in the apparently purposeless struggle we call history. It is a narrative of chaos and violence within a meaningless repetition of evil in a directionless rise and fall of things. History's plot is as constant as it is tragic. Only the players change.

It is as if the very fabric of society is structured by conflict in which “values” are the pall of interests, coercion is the motive for “moral” actions, and exploitation of the powerless is the measure of “success.”

Citizens of World 2 often understand life to be based off a hierarchy of death where the weak are vanquished by the strong and the lesser are “food” for the advanced. It is as if everything alive lives as a parasite off of others. We lose ourselves in the process of the collective whole and self-determination is minimized. To exist means to struggle.



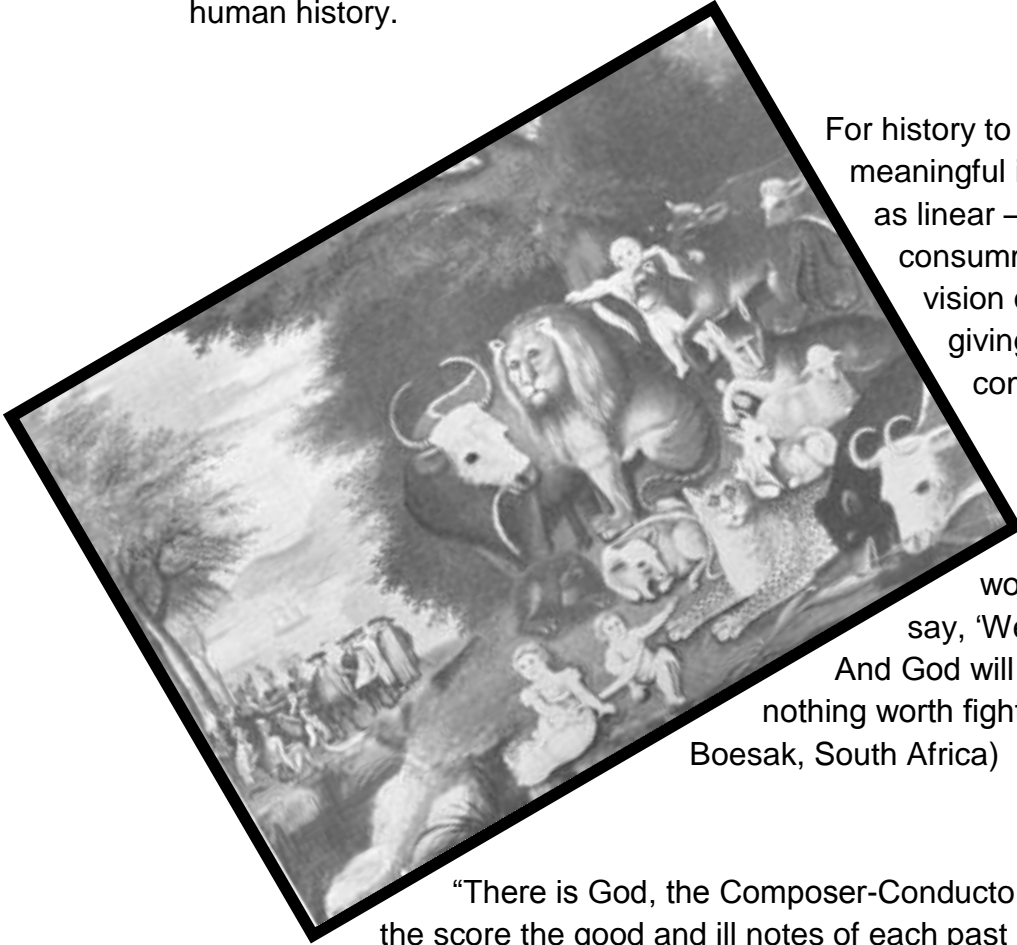
World 2 Obsessio: victory to be won.

World 2 Sin: impotence

World 2 Gospel Truth: human society needs to be transformed into the Kingdom of God.

World 2 Epiphania: Vindication as Consummation

Hope for World 2 citizens take the shape of a significantly different future. For the world is not taken up into God, but rather transfigured for the restoration of the earth. The good news is that God does participate in history. Our rage is with God's rage for God takes sides and casts judgment upon the shenanigans of human history.



For history to be vindicated as meaningful it must be perceived as linear – moving toward consummation. Epiphania is a vision of sabbatical shalom, giving joy to tragedy turned comedy.

“God will ask, ‘Where are your wounds?’ And we will say, ‘We have no wounds.’ And God will say, ‘Was there nothing worth fighting for?’” (Allan Boesak, South Africa)

“There is God, the Composer-Conductor, incorporating into the score the good and ill notes of each past moment, offering new harmonies. Faith is God's intent to orchestrate a whole in which even the errors will appear as grace notes.” (WPJ ala Hebert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*)

World 2 Epiphania: actual change

World 2 Christology: Christ is the liberator who breaks my chains and with whom I join the fight

World 2 Gospel Celebration: God opposes death and decay in human society and so should we

*World 2 Quest:
Commitment to Taking Our Part -
To Change the Truth*



The quest is to take up the call to fall in love with humanity as God has fallen in love with humanity, and to act decisively in society by taking sides against all the foes of human good. To answer this call to combat, it is necessary to disrupt the forces of evil with passionate commitment, meeting foes of human good with the battle song of triumph.

God struggles as our companion in incarnate Presence, on behalf of a world in which, as Spirit, God is wrenching a groaning creation in promised consummation. This is the God who invites creation into co-creating a history which moves toward the coming Realm of God.



History's plot is a narrative moving toward resolution. It is the story of a tragedy transformed into a comedy because it is also God's plot. The "aha" moment comes when recognizing that the rejected of society are those invited to the seats of honor by God. The goal is to enter the struggle so that the Good News really is experienced as "good."



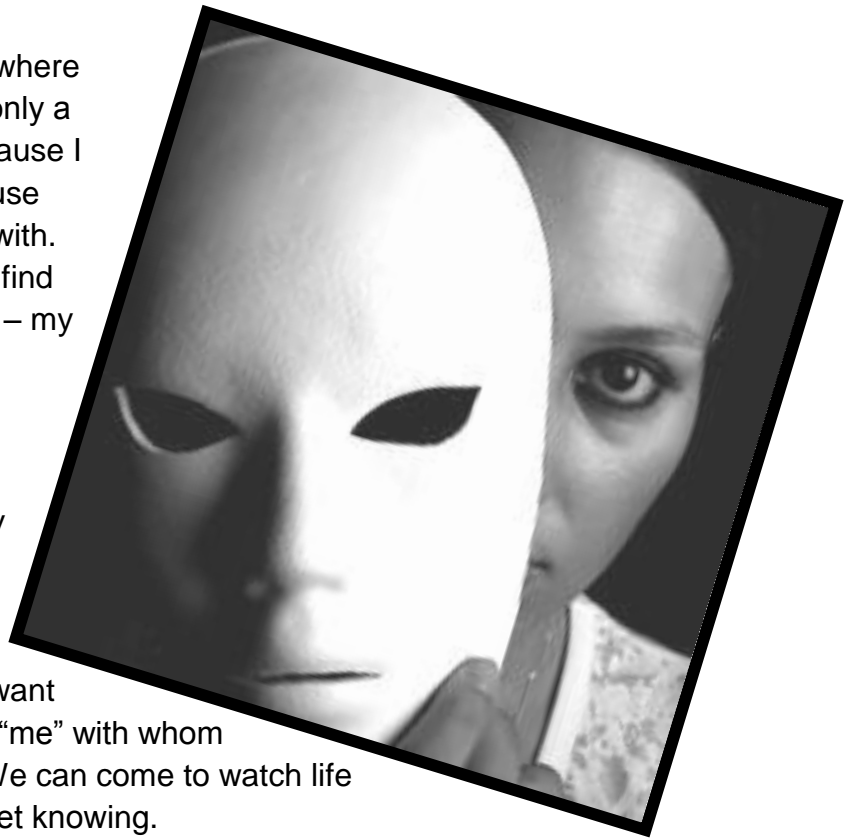
World 2 Scripture: dangerous book that encodes God's ongoing project to fashion a society of shalom
World 2 God: Incarnate Presence irrevocably wedded to history and comes back for those left in history's wake
World 2 Salvation: transformed society/Kin-dom come.
World 2 Movement: from Warrior to Covenant Partner/Co-Creator

World 3 Obsessio: *Emptiness & the Self – The Outcast*

The obsessio centers on the empty or false self. The weight is a lack of self-confidence, which emerges from an inability to believe in ourselves. This inability leads to self-estrangement which may be experienced as emptiness, invisibility, loneliness, or rejection.

The conundrum becomes that where there should be an “I” there is only a void. I am an outcast – not because I have been cast out – but because there is nothing there to begin with. No matter how pleasing others find me, I know I’m a zero. The self – my self – always seems to be an afterthought, even by me.

My secret is that there is simply a vacuum behind the façade of what I appear to be. I so crave to be accepted that in the game of trying to be who they want me to be, I no longer know the “me” with whom the “I” and “they” are playing. We can come to watch life from behind a “me” that “I” regret knowing.



“The inauthentic self is one smothered in the ‘has been,’ paralyzed by the ‘can be,’ hiding from authenticity through mass anonymity and or material accumulation” (Rudolph Bultman).

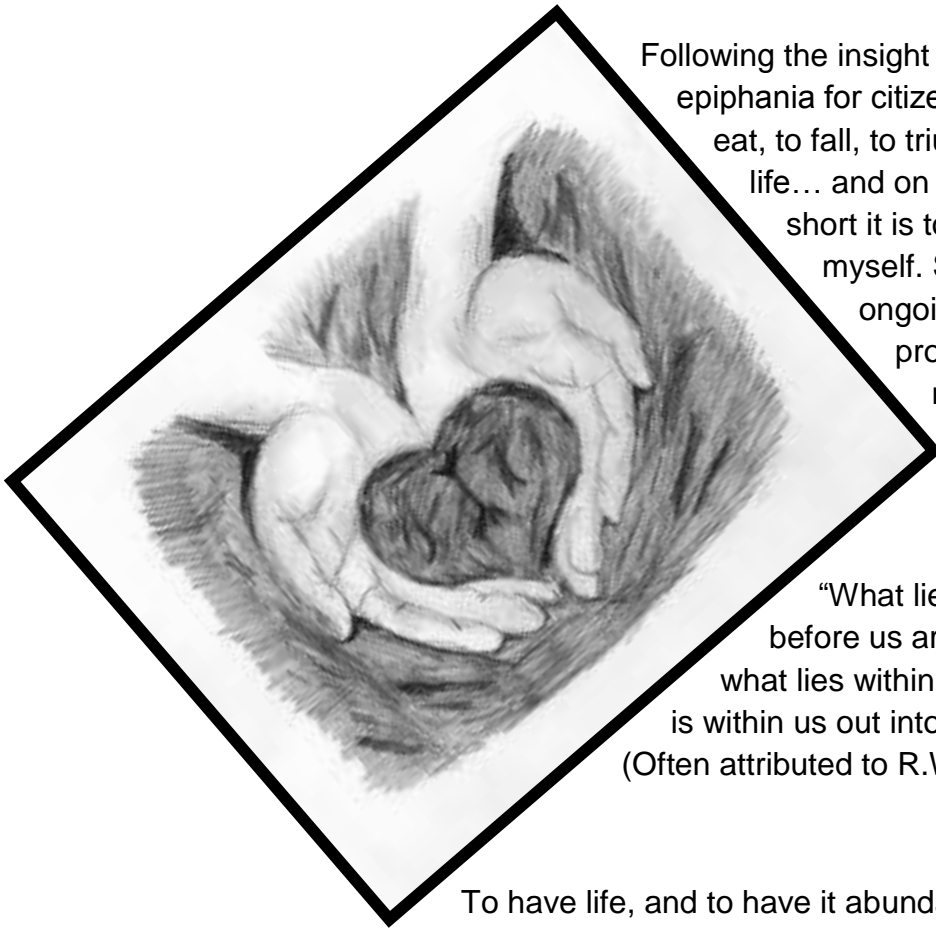
World 3 Obsessio: fulfillment to be realized; unrealized potential

World 3 Sin: to miss the mark

World 3 Gospel Truth: no one gets through life without experiencing brokenness

World 3 Epiphania: Fulfillment as Enriched Belonging

Self-liberation can begin with the recognition of psychological slavery as a patronizing subjugation of those who already have so little by those who have so much. Freedom is experienced as transcending predetermined limits, hierarchical roles, heteropatriarchal patterns, and internal guilt while entering into the wholeness belonging to self-discovery, self-growth, and self-risk.



Following the insight of James Joyce, the epiphania for citizens of World 3 is “to live, to eat, to fall, to triumph, to create life out of life... and on and on and on and on!” In short it is to dream enough to believe in myself. Selfhood then becomes an ongoing project, an event in progress – never finished, never totally determined – a project always in the making.

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring what is within us out into the world, miracles happen.”
(Often attributed to R.W. Emerson, but unknown).

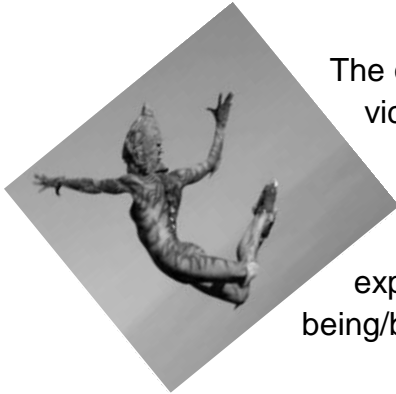
To have life, and to have it abundantly also means to be grasped by some form of enriched belonging through the love of friends, communities of caring, or communities of faith.

World 3 Epiphania: abundant life

World 3 Christology: Christ is the model human who teaches me how to be whole and loves me into wholeness

World 3 Gospel Celebration: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive”
(Irenaeus).

*World 3 Quest:
Filling to Overflowing -
To Become the Truth*



The quest is to become who I am by living directly rather than vicariously. Where I used to live through my partner, company, social class, nation, etc., I now live directly. It is I who reaches out, enfolding and bringing fullness through my own embrace of life. I give myself to expanding and exploring a broad Eros which pushes me into passionate being/becoming.

The spirituality that speaks to citizens of World 3 is Ignatian in flavor. The life reflected on has more weight than the life not reflected on. Even though there is much dreaming, trying, and failing: the invitation “to be” promises the act of self-authentication.

Since we cannot love others if we do not love ourselves, we must risk exposing who and what we are to others. With luck and God’s abiding in us we might discover that we can be ourselves and have love and community by finding the treasure of the self/Self.



World 3 Scripture: expression of spiritual experiences
World 3 God: lover of the soul/self
World 3 Salvation: flourishing of the true and authentic “I”
World 3 Movement: from Outcast to Blessor

World 4 Obsessio:
Condemnation and the Demonic –
The Fugitive

For citizens of this World the soul is diseased/demonic, for deep within the self is the will to dominate in order that I may survive. The disease is so great that just to be born is to be immersed in sin. So we “do” in order to justify ourselves – as if we must atone for being alive. This self-justification is acted out in rebellion against God.

Self-deception becomes the order of the day. We hide our motives from ourselves, although all around us are those who suffer from our willfulness. Our tendency is to drift toward arrogance, to play God by idolizing who we are and what we possess. In short we participate in hubris.



We have the courage to look at human duplicity without illusion, and see evidence of the Fall in the universal human pretentiousness to be something we are not: unstained and guiltless. We cannot will the change for this is pretentiousness, as the will can only will what it deems to be in its own self-interest since sin is embedded in the lining of the heart. The struggle with temptation and sin leaves us powerless, resulting in idolatry. Guilt invades our very depths and we are rendered fugitives by our fear of a just God.

World 4 Obsessio: guilt

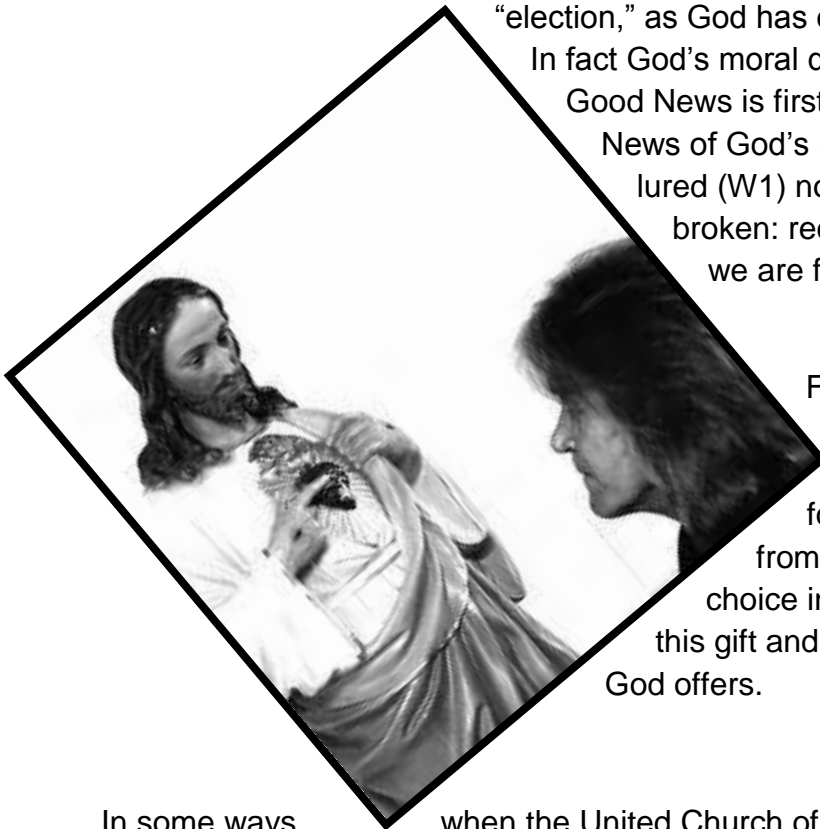
World 4 Sin: willful, intentional, chosen, relished rebellion because it provides access to the forbidden

World 4 Gospel Truth: we can harm the relationship we have with God

World 4 Epiphania: Forgiveness as Reprieve/Adoption

Guilt pushes us toward epiphania for there is no hope without confession of the need for atonement. Since I am powerless to change my attitudes and behavior only an intervention by God in the form of forgiveness can impact my life.

The resolution to the obsessio has no basis on our side, it is a gift. This is “election,” as God has every right to show no mercy. In fact God’s moral duty is to condemn. Often the Good News is first experienced as the Bad News of God’s reprimand. We are neither lured (W1) nor changed (W2). We are broken: recognizing and confessing that we are fugitives.



Forgiveness is the miracle of God’s willingness to restore us into relationship. While forgiveness comes as pure gift from God, we do have a personal choice in whether or not we accept this gift and participate in the salvation God offers.

In some ways when the United Church of Christ invokes, “No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here,” we invoke God’s offer of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration.

World 4 Epiphania: rebirth of an entire new life to replace the old sinful life

World 4 Christology: savior who redeems us from our sins

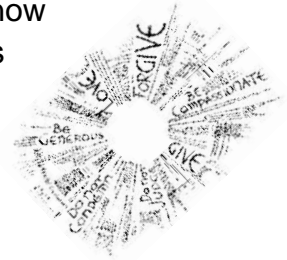
World 4 Gospel Celebration: our response is faithful obedience to God’s grace, not for self-realization (W3), but for self-sacrifice as a joyous response to God’s love

*World 4 Quest:
Forgiving the Unworthy -
To be Reconciled with the Truth*



The quest for World 4 is the most courageous of all, for it is in part a quest against the self. This quest is to turn self-deception into guilt, intensifying our frantic efforts at self-justification, moving us toward confusion. Occasioning chaos, this movement disrupts our duplicitous attitudes. The disruption allows for transformation as we come to see ourselves through God's eyes as both abhorred sinner and beloved child.

Our brokenness bleeds with irony for only in being forgiven, do we truly know ourselves as sinners. Only in being loved do we come to know the meaning of condemnation. Only when face to face with God's rightful anger do we realize that our destiny is in the hands of the Foolish Lover. Our drivenness to earn God's love gives way to being fed by God as we are given permission to be a child of God.



God's extension of justification/restoration by grace signals a new relationship. Our appropriate response to this gift of God is faith in, or trusting God to be gracious toward us. We are converted after the cathartic experience of grace, mercy, and tenderness when we realize we are loved in all our unloveableness.



World 4 Scripture: not a mirror, but a prism of God's truth. Scriptural authority raises the Bible above the duplicity and hubris of sinful humanity.

World 4 God: sits on the judgment throne named "the mercy seat"

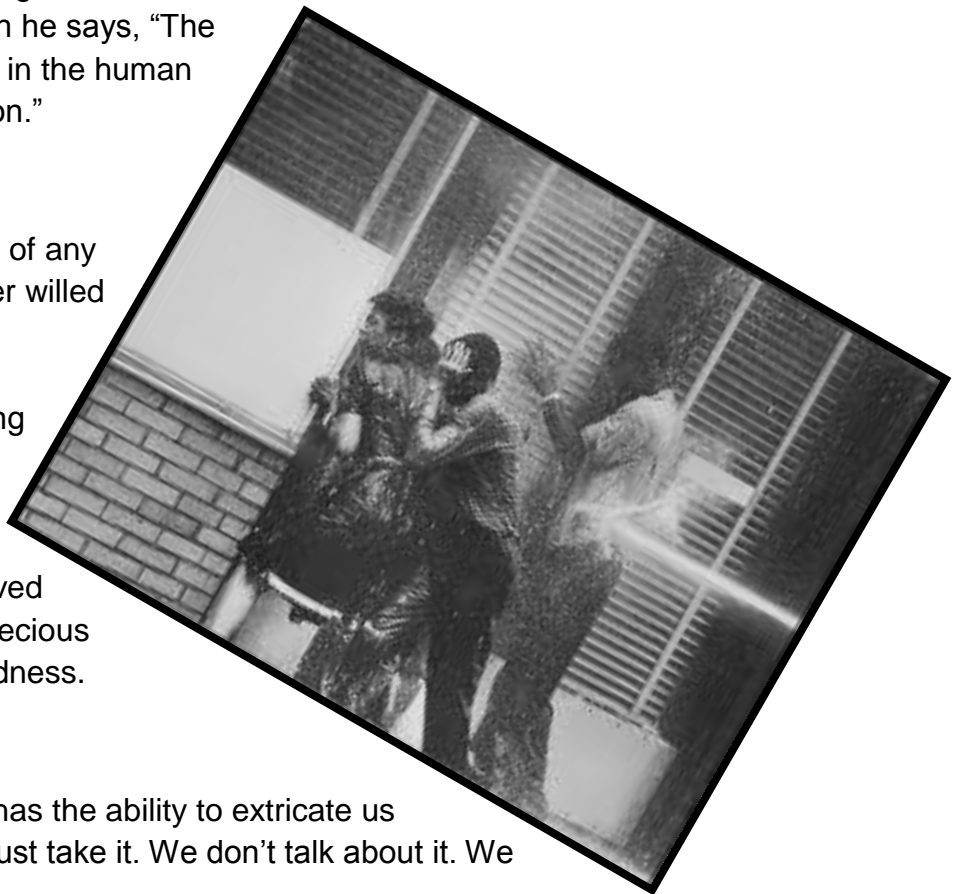
World 4 Salvation: from rebellion to obedience

World 4 Movement: from Fugitive to Evangelist

World 5 Obsessio: Suffering and Life – The Refugee

There is tediousness to daily living in this world. It seems that whatever can go wrong, will; whatever was troublesome yesterday will prove troublesome again today and the next day. In face of the onslaught or recalcitrant and intractable powers we feel we are sitting at the foot of a tsunami, existing on the edge of absurdity. The Jewish theologian Richard Rubenstein speaks from this world when he says, “The promise of a radical novelty in the human condition is a pathetic illusion.”

In this World we are purged of any notion of romanticism. Never willed and rarely desired, we are transfixed by the sheer “givenness” for which nothing can be done. Life is a predator, or a plague, dealing out morally indiscriminate and undeserved suffering. Even our more precious moments are tinted with sadness.



Neither the self nor history has the ability to extricate us from our predicament. We just take it. We don't talk about it. We make do.

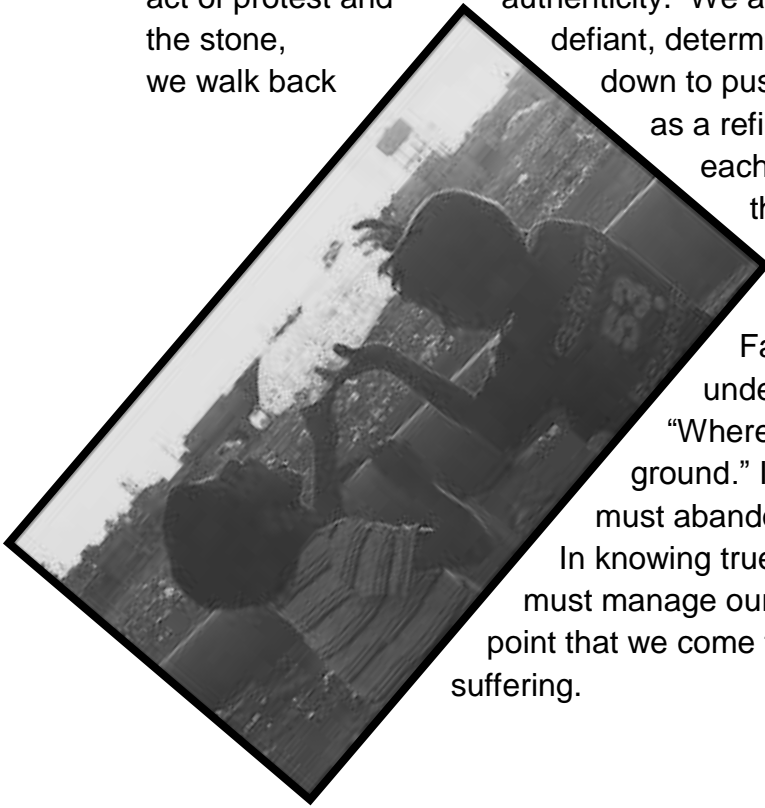
World 5 Obsessio: this is the way things are (givenness of recalcitrant powers)

World 5 Sin: giving up

World 5 Gospel Truth: sometimes even God is powerless

World 5 Epiphania: Endurance as Survival

In this World life is not a problem to be solved. It is an experience to be endured. It is in enduring that we touch wisdom. There is no radical reversal of our fortune, but rather a “keep on keeping on” in such a way that enduring becomes the very act of protest and authenticity. We are the contemporary Sisyphus rolling the stone, defiant, determined, courageous, and laughing as we walk back down to push it again. Suffering can be viewed as a refining fire for our inner attitude. While each day is the same, how we live through *this* day is our choice.



Facing intractable powers, we understand Oscar Wilde when he wrote, “Where there is sorrow, there is sacred ground.” If God is to make sense to us we must abandon a God with the power of influence. In knowing true forsakenness, we discover that we must manage our own lives without God. It is at this point that we come to know God as weakness and suffering.

All God can offer is companionship. “As we scream over the way things are for us, so God screams over the way things are for God” (W. Paul Jones). In this primal divine scream God becomes the unforgiveable, God becomes the unlovable, God becomes the unacceptable, and a true participant in human sorrow.

World 5 Epiphania: enduring is its own “overcoming”

World 5 Christology: Jesus is the suffering servant stretched out upon the cross of this world with us

World 5 Gospel Celebration: God is a participant – Emmanuel

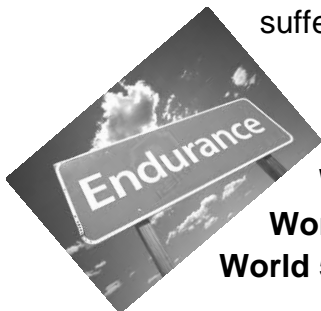
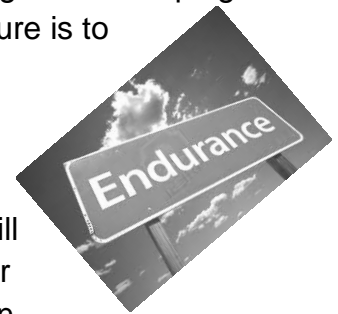
*World 5 Quest:
Outlasting with Long Suffering -
To Live with the Truth*



It is how we live out the “No” of recalcitrant powers that determines whether our life is – in the end – a “Yes.” The only question worth addressing is do I suffer alone? Am I the lone victim? The “aha” moment comes in realizing all of us are huddled, and all of us are scared, yet in being in it together – in sharing in the huddle – a love can be born among us. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated, “We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.”

In this World we endure, and the essence of endurance is shared suffering. Redemption is experienced as compassion born of being in it together. “Keeping on” in the face of intractable powers is an act of nobility. To endure is to survive, and to survive is to triumph.

God is not “for” us (W2), but “with” us. Atonement occurs when the human plight is recognized as God’s own inner history. “I will help you O God... Only this thing becomes more and more clear to me: that you cannot help us, but that we must help you, and in doing so we help ourselves. That is the only thing that matters: to save in us O God, a piece of yourself. Yes, my God, even you in these circumstances seem powerless to change very much... I demand no account from you; you will later call us to account. And with almost every heartbeat it becomes clearer to me that you cannot help us, but we must help you and defend up to the last, your dwelling within us” (Etty Hillesum, Holocaust victim). God’s apparent “absence” must be wagered upon as presence, an echo of W1, but here connected to suffering.

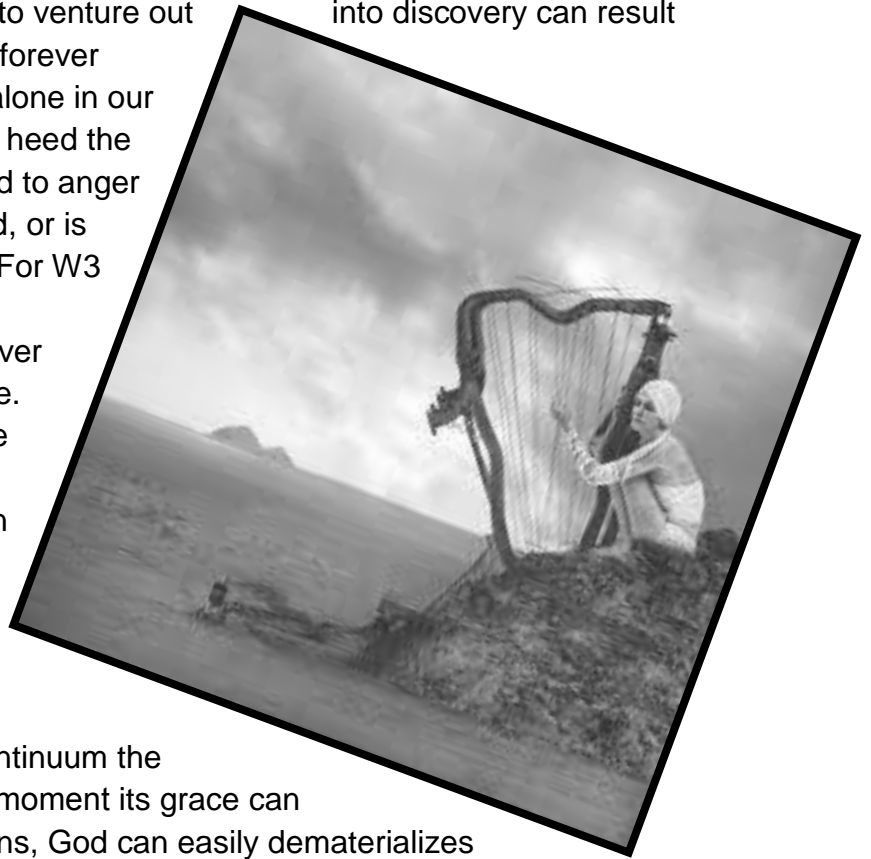


World 5 Scripture: expression of integrity in relationships
World 5 God: Emmanuel who suffers with us
World 5 Salvation: enduring/outlasting
World 5 Movement: from Victim to Survivor

Quests Gone Awry

A funny thing can happen on the journey of the quest – it can get screwed up. Using the dynamics of the Worlds a quest can get snagged on either the obsessio or epiphania side of the continuum.

Typically, the obsessio snag has to do with a failure to answer the call of the quest in our lives. In W1 failure to venture out into discovery can result in us becoming solitary figures, forever drifting through the cosmos all alone in our little boat of life. In W2 failure to heed the cries of hurting creation can lead to anger that builds up and is internalized, or is expressed in destructive ways. For W3 self-loathing may become the identifying factor in lives that never risk putting themselves out there. Failure to quest in W4 can leave us guilt-ridden, manifested as judgment of others. If we remain the victim in W5 we can easily slip into depression in the face of overwhelming odds.



On the epiphania side of the continuum the resolution which give the “aha” moment its grace can become callused. For W1 citizens, God can easily dematerializes into metaphor. W2 citizens can become wrapped in self-righteousness. W3 citizens may become narcissistic as they gaze upon the beauty of their own self-growth. W4 citizens can structure society into a believer and non-believer dichotomy creating a “who’s in/who’s out” attitude. W5 citizens can become masochistic, intentionally seeking out pain, and becoming the eternal victim.

The question now becomes, “Is the quest appropriately functioning in our lives?” The purpose of the quest is to deliver us from the obsessio to the epiphania within the “pulsating logic” of its world. When the quest is successful, resolutions and aha! occur. When this does not happen we are left wandering about, without any real assurance.

Theological Worlds at Play

When first encountering the Worlds it can be difficult wrapping our understandings around the ins and outs of each one. To help facilitate our grasping for clarity, let's play around with some well known literary characters. Remember, we are becoming aware of dynamics already around us and in which we are immersed. While I am fond of saying that a person's language helps us to understand their primary World, it is equally true that one's primary World is detectable through their quest

Lord of the Rings

J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* gives us a fun place to begin our playing.



W1 and the quest to peer beyond the known world are represented by Bilbo Baggins and his venture in the prequel, *The Hobbit*.

W2 and the quest against hostel powers are represented by Strider, later revealed as Aragon, King of Gondor, who has been battling evil forces even before he meets the burgeoning Fellowship of the Ring.

W3 and the quest for personal growth are represented by Samwise Gamgee, Frodo's faithful friend, who discovers an inner strength, and upon returning to the Shire, becomes mayor.

W4 and the quest for pardon are represented by the Dead Men of Dunharrow. They have been imprisoned in Dwimorberg due to the guilt of their own oath breaking during the "War of the Last Alliance." Paying this debt in the service of Aragon, they are pardoned and freed.

W5 and the quest to endure are represented by Bilbo Baggins. As the ring bearer his only hope is to outlast the weight and influence of the ring; something we may argue he ultimately fails to do in the depths of Mount Doom. Upon return to the Shire he continues to suffer the effect of the wound received on Weathertop. He outlasts, yet his ultimate circumstances are never drastically changed.

Les Misérables

With this story we contend with characters known more through the movie and the Broadway show, yet less known through the original work by Victor Hugo. All three tales present nuanced portraits of the personalities around which the narrative is woven. For the purpose of our playing the characterizations of the novel are central.

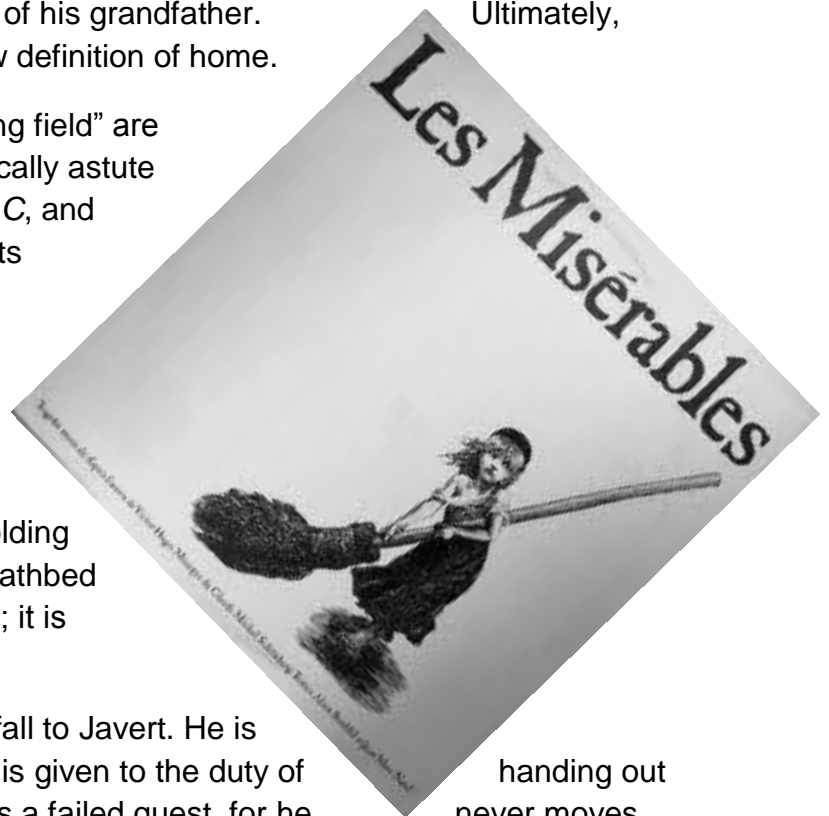
W1 and the movement of expanding the soul to the cosmos are represented by Marius, the romantic paramour of Cosette. In the novel, the main trajectory of Marius' life is exile from the home of his grandfather. Ultimately, returning with Cosette as his new definition of home.

W2 and the call to "level the playing field" are represented by Enjolras, the politically astute member of the *Friends of the A B C*, and leader of the barricade. He foments revolution on behalf of the people forgotten by the recently restored crown of France.

W3 and the growth of self understanding belong to Jean Valjean whose continuing story is the unfolding of a life worthy of living. On his deathbed Valjean states, "It is nothing to die; it is frightful not to live."

W4 and the call of righteousness fall to Javert. He is the police officer whose entire life is given to the duty of due punishment. Javert represents a failed quest, for he handing out never moves beyond the obsessio. In the novel he is presented as an agnostic: ultimately committing suicide rather than yielding to "a mysterious justice according to God going counter to justice according to men."

W5 and the need to outlast are represented in two lives that never mingle in the story, Fantine and Eponine. Fantine is faced with a calcified French society. Eponine is faced with the unrequited love of Marius, just as intractable as society's snobbery. Neither survives the narrative. Fantine dies of the poverty she cannot rise above. Eponine dies in sacrificing her life for the one who is unable to return her love.



Theological Worlds Application

Faith Formation

1. An encounter (retreat, Sunday School, etc) with youth or adults about the Worlds with the use of various media: music, film, true life stories
2. Composite learning groups that study a subject, scripture, or theme through the lens of a specific World. Note, we do not have to be primary in a World to use its lens.

Worship

1. Alternative liturgies, prayers, hymns/songs. You may approach the entire service through one World, or use the various pieces of liturgy to give voice to the service's theme from the perspective of the different Worlds.
2. You may play with the sacraments through the lens of the Worlds. The Eucharist can be about finding home, being renewed for the battle, taking into ourselves the Self, a sign of pardon, an acknowledgment of God's suffering with us. What are the prospects for baptism, a funeral, a wedding?

Stewardship

If it is true that congregations have "personalities," then it is also true that congregations will have primary Worlds from which they observe life as a community. Stewardship which takes on the language of the primary World will help articulate the purpose of church life, communicating the bigger picture beyond budgets and bottom lines.

With the Worlds in mind, we can raise our stewardship conversations to the level of "purpose," "meaning," and "struggle," which are the most pressing, yet least explored areas of stewardship understanding.

Pastoral Care

A crisis of faith – regardless of its origin – is a crisis of a particular obsessio to resolve itself within the accompanying epiphania. For example divorce for a W3 person will raise the question of “Who am I?” The same event for a W1 person will raise the issue of cosmic reality in the form of the question “What’s the purpose of falling in love?” Pastoral Care conducted with an understanding of the interplay of the Worlds can speak more directly to the primal obsessio raised by the crisis.

Administration

Different Worlds bring different gifts and attention to the administrating of our life together. The following chart is according to W. Paul Jones:

W1: WHOLENESS – organic sense of the relation of whole and parts

W2: VISION – drive toward what is worth accomplishing

W3: PROCESS – dynamic toward sensitive inclusiveness

W4: INHERITANCE – commitment to faithfulness

W5: CONTINUITY – determination to preserver together

Evangelism

Evangelism is our ability to tell our story, especially the story of the good news of our epiphanias as provided from the hand of God. Those sensitive to the Worlds can tell their good-news stories, and help others develop their own good news as we aid and point them to the gracious epiphania of God’s love.

Conflict

W. Paul Jones began insights about the Worlds while contemplating the growing conflict between “liberals” and “conservatives.” What he came to realize is that this simple dichotomous way of defining conflict was a misnomer. Other forces are at play – the clashing of Worlds. Understanding the Worlds will not eliminate conflict, but it might prove a bridge to understanding its source and aid in building appreciation for the other person’s point of view.

Theological Worlds Resources

Written Resources

Jones, W. Paul, *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief*, 1989, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee.

Jones, W. Paul, *Worlds Within A Congregation: Dealing With Theological Diversity*, 2000, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee.

Internet Resources

The following internet articles are related in that the first, written from an evangelical perspective, raises the question of obsession and what happens when sin (W4) is not the obsession at work in the person's spiritual journey. The second is written in response with further exploration:

<http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com/2011/01/theological-worlds.html>:
Theological Worlds

<http://blog.wisch.org/random-thoughts/theological-worlds-and-cognitive-dissonance>: *Theological Worlds and Cognitive Dissonance*

The following are parts of a series of reflections by Nancy Koester:

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1724>: *Theological Worlds, Part 1*

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=1723>: *Theological Worlds, Part 2*

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=1725>: *Theological Worlds, Part 3*

The following is by Lee Barrett and looks at the Worlds within the UCC:

<http://www.ucc.org/education/polity/pdf-folder/Barrett-Theological-Worlds-in-the-UCC.pdf>: *Theological Worlds in the United Church of Christ*.

Theological Worlds Liturgies

Obsessio: A Confession

Our God, who lures us to venture forth, a comrade in the fight, a lover of the soul, a pardoner of all offenses, and one who is also scared by life, we come heavy with the burden of our obsessios.

At times they overwhelm us. At times they freeze us in place. Help us to understand that no obsessio is bigger than your love for us.

Hear us and heed us as we confess our fear and our anxiety which accompany us into the dark night of our souls.

We confess that the cosmos is more nothingness than somethingness. Overwhelmed by the sheer insignificance we present in the face of such a universe, we fear we may truly be all alone and adrift in the void.

Heed us, our God, fortify us for the voyage of a lifetime.

We confess that at times human society appears mired in oppression and history is beyond the point of redemption. It is easy for us to give up and to give in, becoming numbered among the haves while ignoring the have-nots.

Heed us, our God, grant us a vision that sees time and history transformed into your Realm of peace and harmony.

We confess that there are times when we do not feel that we are children of the great creating and sustaining God. Our inner love wanes and falters in the face of other voices which come negative and loud into our self-understanding.

Heed us, our God, and infuse your love deep within, so that we might become incredible brothers and sisters of Christ, blessing the world in our time, as he blessed it in his time.

We confess that we rebel against you. We rationalize that what serves us is best and lose sight of serving you.

Break our pride and humble us so that we might come to understand that obedience to your will is the true path of happiness.

continued

Help us to confess that there are things we have no control over. Those powers beyond our handling do exist and weigh on us.

Teach us to persevere so that we might not be overcome by these powers, and that we may, before their terrible face, laugh with holy contempt knowing you are with us, holding our hands.

Great God who sees creation and proclaims it “very good,” honor our confessions, breathe your Spirit into our anxiety, and bring us the hope of Christ’s love so that we may not be overwhelmed by our obsession. Amen

Epiphania: A Thanksgiving

Christ who comes as the gift of love and touches our shadows with light, we give you thanks that in the nighttime of our living your light comes and beckons us beyond acquiescence to that which haunts us.

Where we feared there was but nothing, we found something. We found you! O Christ of the way, may our searching never cease until at last we are home in your presence.

Where we fainted in the heat of the struggle, you revived us and gifted us with your vision of Sabbath shalom. O Christ of transfigured worlds, use us in the transformation of human society.

Where we have not loved ourselves appropriately, you have loved us with all you have and are. You call us to expand our souls, to expand our selves not that we may be egotistic, but that we may live the life abundantly which you offer, O Christ.

We thought that our sin was bigger than your forgiveness and we thought that our hideousness marred your gaze upon us. Yet we find in you the height and depth of infinite love. We find in you, our Christ, adoption as your sisters and brothers of grace.

Life is tough. The row we hoe cramps our backs and blisters our hands. Yet, when we look there you are grasping a hoe right alongside of us, dignifying our row with holy labor. We do not know if you share our cross, O Christ, or if we share yours, but we are thankful for your presence.

In the myriad ways your presence in our lives brings hope, we are thankful. May the light you have shared with us, be shared by us with others; and may the hope we have found in you, be found by others. Amen

Quests: A Petition

Spirit who comes as the animating breath of life, blow in us and through us vivifying life and love. It is you who drives us into our quest, even as you drove Jesus into the desert.

Abide with us as we tame our dragons, encourage us as we turn and return upon the path, and strengthen us when the quest appears in peril.

Great Spirit guide our feet as we seek the veil, hold our hands steady as we tear it away, and grant us graciousness as we behold what lies on the other side.

Abide with us as we tame our dragons, encourage us as we turn and return upon the path, and strengthen us when the quest appears in peril.

Great Spirit guide our hearts that we may discern the good fight, steady our hearts as we lurch again into the breach, and fortify our hearts as we seek to build a better society for all.

Abide with us as we tame our dragons, encourage us as we turn and return upon the path, and strengthen us when the quest appears in peril.

Great Spirit guide our self-understanding so that – becoming aware of our potentials and possibilities – we may truly know how to love another, as we have learned to love ourselves.

Abide with us as we tame our dragons, encourage us as we turn and return upon the path, and strengthen us when the quest appears in peril.

Great Spirit, guide our conscience that we may be ever sensitive to how our words, our thoughts, and our deeds affect you. Help us to be ever attuned to your' fluttering wings so we may not condemn nor judge, but speak healing to the sin sick soul.

Abide with us as we tame our dragons, encourage us as we turn and return upon the path, and strengthen us when the quest appears in peril.

Help us to sit with one another, for no other reason than simply to be together. And may our togetherness form bonds of love so strong that the powers and principalities shall not prevail, but we will endure to the end.

Place in us an adventurous spirit that we may boldly and wholeheartedly step onto the path before us. Knowing that the treasure of encountering you, Great Spirit, and discovering ourselves is well worth the dangers we may come upon. Amen