

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Recognizing the Somatic Versal Reality: A World Parliament of Religions Journey

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“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8 Authorized Version)

Humanity has been in a state of war throughout the whole of recorded history. Even cave painting and tribal knowledge, passed down, word of mouth, from generation to generation, tell the story of a people at war. The men of the indigenous tribal groups of the Americas took great pride in their prowess on the field of battle, each feather in their bonnet indicating the number of times they were able to “count coup” on an enemy; that is, to pass by, touch the enemies head, then get away safely. Would that this were all they were out to accomplish. Alas, they were ever intent upon doing the worst.

Early systems of faith were an integral part of each tribe. As a tribe went to war their spiritual leader would consult the tribal version of a transcendent reality; their god. The conquering tribe would boast of their god as bigger, stronger and better than the other; in many cases forcing a vanquished enemy into worshipping the conquering god.

The Parliament is the oldest, the largest, and the most inclusive gathering of people of all faith and traditions. The first Parliament took place in 1893. Since, this historic event has taken place in Chicago, USA • Cape Town, South Africa • Barcelona, Spain • Melbourne, Australia - and the latest in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Guiding Principles of the 2015 Parliament are as follows:

- Respectful dialogue: We listen and speak with respect
- Non-proselytizing: We do not attempt to convert others or speak derogatorily about any tradition
- Willingness to explore a wide variety of topics: We embody compassion as we engage in difficult conversations

The 2015 Parliament focused on social ecological justice. Numerous groups were in attendance advocating interfaith dialog and education as well as tolerance. There was no proselytizing or preaching; just a call for cooperation toward the end that all would endeavor to work together for the benefit of all.

As I contemplated my becoming a part of the convocation I felt that I was already a part being as I had been raised in a way of thinking that is way passed the dream; I had determined long before that I would not even notice the color of another human being's skin except to marvel at its beauty and to fear no differing element of faith or practice but to embrace and make it a part of my own.

Sessions

Women's Assembly Major Speaker Session

The Women's Assembly provided an important opportunity for women to address and discuss two areas of vital interest:

- the responsibility of the world's religions to affirm women's dignity and human rights
- religious and spiritual inspiration for women's empowerment

Reflection: As I listened and felt the power of the speakers I recalled the great women in my life; their strength and perseverance while being filled with warmth and affection. My mother's, mother's mother, Great Grandma Belle was the youngest of six children and only daughter of pioneering homesteaders in the late nineteenth century. She grew up in the Mojave Desert where the family grew alfalfa and various rock fruit. Though the location is now a hotbed of high technology for the US Department of Defense and NASA, back then, as she would say, it was next door to nowhere.

She met a handsome foreigner named Theodore who had been working on the California water projects, married and setup housekeeping. My mother's mother, Marie, was born on leap year 1912. Not long after that Belle and Theodore had a falling out. In that day not

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

many women would sue for divorce, but Grandma Belle was not like most women. Rather than running home to the old homestead she found a job working for the postal service. Eventually she would become the local post master. She would always emphasize that she was the Post “MASTER”; not mistress!

Belle’s only child, Marie, would marry the son of the local barber, William Jr. (commonly known as Wienie, due to his preference for frankfurters) and start a family in the depths of the great depression. Wienie would work at his father’s barber shop while he and Marie would always have an agricultural enterprise ongoing. They would say if all else failed they would at least have something to eat. Wienie was drafted during World War II and sent off to be a Pharmacist Mate in the US Navy. While he was away serving, Marie not only kept up the farming efforts but also opened a stationary shop with a Western Union post. With so many of the men away this was a vital resource for the community; all this while serving as leader in the community for resource conservation and security.

And then there is my mother; but I could write a book about her so I will only say that she is her mother’s daughter, imbued with the same strength I saw in her mother and grandmother.

In short, I see no way that I could ever have been anything but a proponent for equal rights for women. Thus, I felt completely at home in this session.

Women, Compassion, and Social Justice

Peace and the social good were identified as central values in most faith traditions and these make every effort to realize these values. In the world today, however, human beings are threatened by violence on every level: social, interpersonal, political, and economic. It was expressed that all human beings ought to have equal opportunities to reach their greatest potential. Unjust social structures were specified as keeping countless people in a state of constant misery and uncertainty. This panel explored the continuing question of how humanity can survive and prosper by utilization of two assets of inestimable value: women and compassion. The discussion featured speakers from four religious traditions who began a

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

discussion of the topic and then invited the audience to raise questions and propose workable solutions.

Reflection: In the past and even now there are occasions and contexts where women have been the object of oppression meaning that there is in each the trans-generational trauma by way of epi-genetics giving more than empathy since they truly feel the pain of another.

Religious and Spiritual Sources of Inspiration & Empowerment for Women

The panel facilitated a conversation focused on highlighting the manner in which religion and spiritual faith work to inspire women to make a difference, and empower women to be the change they wish to see in the world.

Reflection: All too often women have been toys of men in religious and cultural play and tools for extreme rituals. It is passed time that humanity is equal in all venues.

Religion and Ecology in the Anthropocene

While we have in recent years seen a "Greening of Religion", the Anthropocene, the era of human domination over the earth, has begun to question classical definitions of nature, wilderness and ecology as stable, harmonious spheres outside of human domains over which we steward. What does a Spiritual Ecology of the Anthropocene look like? This talk will propose several emerging trends in the Greening of Religion, Science and Religion and Spiritual Ecology as a novel worldview and whether it is compatible with the emerging era of the Anthropocene.

Reflection: All too often various systems of faith teach an apocalyptic end of the world leaving the followers to assume that they have no responsibility to care for the earth. Yet, even the first man and woman in the bible were made proprietors of their garden; the first profession was actually gardening.

Spiritual Tools and How to Use Them

This was a learning and review program. There were spiritual health tools presented that work for any tradition. Learning what these tools are and how to use them was expressed as a way to increase human safety, nurture and power. In addition spiritual fitness tools were

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

explained that work for any tradition also. These tools, used correctly, build human strength, endurance and flexibility. The tools covered include peace, justice, joy, kindness, love, humility, blessings, forgiveness, thanksgiving, healing, praise and cleansing. It was affirmed that these are available to all from birth; it's learning to use them well that is important.

Reflection: If we would but teach these tools early rather than the opposite we might well one day see a world at peace.

Income Disparity, Justice and the Breakdown of Community in Western Societies

The presentation expressed the huge income disparities that were highlighted by the Occupy movement in the US when it popularized the notion that 1% of the population owned vastly more income and wealth than half of the US population (though actually they would have been accurate to point to the top .1 of 1%), has become a major campaign issue for 2016 in the U.S. But neither side really addresses the central spiritual/religious dimension of the problem: the globalization of selfishness and materialism and the growing inability of people to experience empathy for "the other," much less recognize them as created in the image of God. While theologians have talked of an immediate recognition of the God in others, the reality of 21st century Western societies is the growing inability to recognize and respond compassionately to the plight of the majority of their co-religionists and/or their fellow members of society.

Reflection: Obscenity=billionaires on the same planet where there are people who are homeless, naked and/or starving to death. We must do better than this.

Redeeming the Earth: A Global View

In this session it was admitted that Christians are responsible for the care of the earth, and often culpable because of a particular biblical interpretation or theological perspective, this session turned to many of the major religious traditions of the world--Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zen Buddhism, and the Traditional Religions of Pacific Islanders, Native Americanism, and African Indigenous Peoples--to discover

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

the moral values and insights needed to help Christians to partner together for the good of creation.

Reflection: The misinterpretation of many scriptures has led to untold abuse of the planet; we are responsible.

Combating Inequality and Ending Extreme Poverty

It was reported that in September 2015 world leaders would be endorsing the goal of ending extreme poverty by the year 2030 as a major part of the new Sustainable Development Goals which will replace the Millennium Development Goals that expired that year. While the world achieved the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half, at that time, over a billion people still live in these dehumanizing conditions while inequality continued to grow in many parts of the world. The workshop provided participants an opportunity to learn about and discuss the critical contributions of faith-based organizations and religious communities in combating inequality and ending extreme poverty through two important initiatives. The Parliament issued a Declaration on Income Inequality and the Widening Wealth Gap and called upon religious communities to act with “moral authority, courageous voices, and organized people power” to address this question of unbridled greed, as a crisis of the human spirit. In collaboration with the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, the World Bank Group had been working with a diverse group of faith-based and religious leaders to address the shared goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030, through the Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative statement and initiative. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, a trustee of the Parliament presented and led a discussion on combating inequality and Rev. Adam Taylor presented and led a discussion on ending extreme poverty from the perspective of the World Bank Group.

Reflection: The bounty of the planet and the sweat of human brow should be shared equitably.

Discerning Our Care for the Earth

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

This program was drawn from a Quaker practice known as Worship Sharing. Participants were given questions for reflection that focus on a topic or problem - in this case, our care for the earth. After silent reflection, participants were invited to make statements that speak to the questions.

The questions for this program, taken from Quaker meetings, had been adapted for use in an inter-faith context. They were:

In this time of increasing conflict over natural resources and the destruction of life-support systems (water, soil, air) on which we all depend:

- 1) What am I called to do in order to protect and restore the earth?
- 2) What is my faith community called to do?
- 3) How can my faith community reach out to other faith communities to protect and restore the earth?

Participants were also given guidelines based on Quaker practice. They include:

- 1) Use "I" statements.
- 2) Listening deeply and lovingly without commenting.
- 3) Allow silence between sharings.
- 4) Exercise healthy self-discipline.
- 5) Honor confidentiality.

Reflection: Reduce, reuse, recycle. I am reminded of the work we did in troop 508, Meiners Oaks under the leadership of Swabby Simmons. We opened a recycling center in the mid 1960s collecting recyclables from around Ventura county.

Ending Legalized Violence Against Children

The premise was that legalized violence against children perpetuates children's powerlessness and low status leaving the way open to all other forms of extreme violence and exploitation against children. This interactive workshop discussed why prohibition of corporal punishment of children is an essential strategy for ending all forms of violence against children.

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

In the light of the Parliament theme, the workshop challenged the idea that some degree of violence against children should be socially approved and sanctioned. Since the UN Secretary General's Global Study on Violence against Children (2006) many religious leaders and communities have joined the global movement to end corporal punishment of children and regard it as both a moral and religious imperative. Participants were invited to discuss examples of ways in which religious communities are taking action, review new resources and contribute their own ideas, skills and experiences towards the development of further tools for action. The workshop closed with a short vigil on the workshop theme. All participants received a newly launched handbook and other publications including resources for worship and gatherings on the theme.

Refelction: I am convinced that the anger that drives violence toward a child is evidence of self-centeredness on the part of the parent where there should be sorrow for the child's failures which would engender affection and drive teaching and encouragement.

God's Other Children: The Non-Human Animals

This workshop explored the philosophical, scientific, and theological roots of the belief that humans are distinct from and superior to all other animals, and demonstrated that the belief is not only scientifically false, but also theologically deadening. In fact, a scientifically correct understanding is that all animals on earth are related and share features of body, mind, and soul. When we live in recognition of this scientific reality, we are theologically challenged to regard all beings as children of God, and members of our extended family.

This workshop placed the scientific understanding of life on earth in the context of Christian theology and invited participants to reflect on the possibilities for deepening their understanding of--and liveliness within-- their own religious traditions, exploring together the possibility of a rich natural spirituality that might invigorate most, if not all, religious traditions. Interfaith conversation was facilitated for all participants by way of structured exercises and small and large group discussion.

Reflection: we must recognize our oneness with all living with the system of the planet

Ecological Civilization and the World's Religions

The global social change needed to address climate change, care and protection of non-human nature, inequality, rights of women and indigenous people, poverty and peace is of civilizational dimensions. In China people speak of three great stages of civilization: agricultural, industrial, and now the need for ecological civilization. In June of 2015 more than 2,000 people, working in 85 different tracks (economic, legal, cultural, environmental, etc.), came together at Pomona College in Claremont, California, to consider the foundations of such a civilization. This panel reported on the outcome of the conference and its meaning for world religions and transformative partnerships.

Reflection: To reiterate a previous reflection, each system of faith entails a form of obligation to the creator/deity to live up to certain standards. In virtually all cases the material universe is a gift from that entity to humanity the care of which we are responsible for.

Personal Collective Reflection: Social and ecological injustice is still too much of a reality on our planet. Organizations such as the Parliament are ideal power bases to facilitate the changes that can move us away from the feudal mentality of capitalism gone awry and the law of the jungle, where "might is right". We must strive to protect the weak and most vulnerable among us. The only way to reach this is to join with Dr. Rangimarie Turuki Rose and affirm:

I am you You are me

Addendum

The following is the monologue of a journey I have been in the midst of all my life. I had only recently begun to catalogue these so many steps on twitter.com, under the name @dpgerman starting in 2014. The internal realizations were sometimes inexplicable at first blush but in time the beat of a somatic heart manifests clarity.

Long before the Parliament

2014

Fantasy can be a foundation for the future

Progress rides on the back of risk

2015

January

Attaining utter somatic awareness could lead to the world changing along with you; think: there is no box

Eschew extremism join the rest of humanity at the center

Injustice: the richest has too much to eat while the poorest breathes a final breath for lack of clean water, food or medicine

Given sufficient time and resources just about anything is possible

We can react to differences with cowardice or courage/curiosity it should be evident which leads where

Reality is too vast a thing to think that we could ever understand or own it

Polished or Purified?

Against nobody; for everybody

Meaning without others is meaningless

Time is a human emotional construct

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

February

Humanity does not define reality; it is for us to discover it

Empty yourself into others and you will be full

"a city on a hill" should be an agnostic metaphor; no matter what you believe, be an example to the world that is worth following

Somatic cognition; believing that there is more to it all than what your immediate senses can detect.

When perception weighs you down like a ton of bricks it is as real as the genuine article

The more we know, the smaller we become

We follow pieces of evidence as light for the next step but when all is dark we each choose our own direction into the shadows of faith..

Where there is no empirical evidence there will always be a leap of faith

Change your inside and your outside will change. Then, perhaps, others will change with you. But if they don't change, love them still.

March

You won't get stronger if you don't push harder

Any absolute, imperative, human need constitutes a fundamental human right

I dream of a day when we won't think about race or religion but will work together for the good of all humanity

Our current world: a shantytown in the shadow of a mansion.

April

As we peer deeper into the inestimable depths of the cosmos we will find an ever expanding horizon

As we peer deeper into the microscopic depths of creation we will find ever more minute constituents

We never grow in times of ease

Beware when governance becomes matrices of subterfuge

It's never too late to dream

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Given sufficient time and resources just about anything is possible

Nothing is impossible If you don't have to do it yourself

Whether you are an Atheist or a Zoroastrian, or anything in between, I will work with you for the benefit of all; let's get together!

Never steal from the poor

Never sue someone who has no money

Never mess with someone who has nothing to lose

May

Loud and obnoxious vocalization of faith or extreme actions (radicalism, that is) could be an overcompensation for hidden fear and doubt

Who are the consummate actors of complicit self-delusion?

The point of greatest resistance is the potential point of greatest catastrophic failure

There is more to reality than what we have discovered so far

Conformity and uniformity are not necessary components for the unity which we need to make the world a better place.

June

I cannot force inspiration; who am I to tell God when to breath?

The state of reality is a fluid paradigm

The middle is the only place where there is true balance

A sociological study is like dissecting your own brain and everybody else's at the same time ...

^{nth} sense; the prospect that there is to reality much more than what our 5 feeble senses can surmise

Enable a global social consciousness

Creation is nonconformity

July

Trouble-makers break the old mold and create something new

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Nobody knows everything and everybody knows something

It would appear that those who have everything feel that they have nothing since they always want more

I cannot, by the scientific method, nor with logic and rhetoric, prove, beyond a shadow of doubt, what I believe by faith.

Never never comes, always always is, but sometimes sometimes comes and goes

Success=Failure+1

I can only take pride in the things which I have achieved by my own effort and in my own strength; I cannot be proud of what I was born as...

To the material world, spiritual warfare is as a gentle breeze...yet, it can turn the world upside down...

Reality is unyielding yet ever changing

When your emotional trash can fills up don't dump it in your neighbor's yard; recycle it by using it as energy for good...

When you get butterflies, don't let them beat you down; put a bridle on them and fly...

Obscenity=billionaires on the same planet where there are people who are homeless, naked and/or starving to death

August

The time to quit is right after your last breath...maybe

You cannot live on the mountain top; you should only go there when you need to ... only you will know when that time comes..

It is possible that there is no "mere mortal"; only that our present state appears so

My character tells the world who I am more than all the tattoos, trinkets or t-shirts I could wear

We do not allow reality; we accept it

Do not mistake intense intentionality for a lack of self-control

Maturity is not having no emotions; it is measuring and controlling them

It is our nature to transcend a present state

Reality: an interdependent system of infinite essence

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Escape selfness to wholeness

The bane of humanity; an insatiable hunger for more than one has

When asked about a part of our life, we often say "it's complicated". What we have is an intersection of conflicts

September

Normal: continuous, increasing chaos

The human brain is but an interface by which the real entity accesses the rest of reality

Fear, anger & hate are vestigial reactions to dangers & unknowns; they should be removed just as we do the appendix

Race and ethnicity are artificial social boundaries which should be torn down, never to be erected again

I may be an object to myself but can I ever be objective about myself?

Humanity can only continue to progress if we maintain our living space in an habitable state

With every breath, with every heart beat, you change the universe

A sad reality: humanity has developed into a paradigm where natural genius is not nurtured

The infinite crushing nothingness into oblivion to produce preciousness

The past and future are in the present if only in ideas, hopes, dreams, fantasies and memories...

Each reality is growing from the roots of the past and its seeds the possibility of the future; but not every reality is a fragrant flower

Like flowers blooming from the midst of a patch of weeds the fond memories make even the most horrendous past seem pleasant

The possibility of any future from any present reality is endless

October

And then I arrived at the Parliament...

Intelligence: being creative without being destructive.

If you escape the trappings of human religion you might then connect with the transcendent reality of infinite essence

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Be careful that your religion does not become fig leaves to hide what you are from the world or the world from yourself

All too often the 1st impression is wrong & acting upon it can have disastrous consequences

The most authentic worship: in the middle of nowhere, by yourself, completely naked and empty handed

The glory of God is all that there is fully alive and aware

The heart can accomplish what the head cannot because it feels beyond the physical senses

Everybody's trying to hide something

Rags or vestments, jewels or trinkets. All are but fig leaves

If there is conflict in any place, there is no peace

Building a tribe for self advancement of the same is a veiled attempt to subjugate others

The simple act of discriminating between one and another opens the door for injustice

Oppression begins when we erect boundaries

Attending 2015 Parliament of World Religions

Modern humanity cannot abide silence; are we afraid to hear the inner-most thoughts of our hearts?

Though we are equal we are not the same

Defining differences does not dictate division

Holding on to hurt only brings more pain

We must not erect a barrier that keeps us from doing what ever we can for the benefit of all

There is no other; we are all one Infinitesimal somatics

If you walk in darkness you are more likely to trip and fall. Thus, you are safer when walk in the light.

Do not love the world because of what we have done or will do but because we are

We all believe in something that exceeds the perception of our physical senses

Capitalism gone awry is trickle-down social injustice

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

The drive to propagate ones genetic code is a force of natural

Rabbit trails are beautiful diversions and can lead to productive adventures

Stand by for the coming cultural cleansing

And then after the 2015 Parliament of World Religions

November

Since we are stardust, we should be shining

Structure and order are almost anathema to the artist

Mammon is the opiate of the affluent

It's just text

Some people almost kill themselves trying to keep from dying

Space, to Newton, is three mutually perpendicular measures of displacement. To Einstein it is the weft to the warp of time; almost an ether

Do not be afraid and do not be offended

The fiction of today will be the reality of tomorrow

The craft of a scholar-practitioner: unlocking concealed realities.

If you continue to scratch a wound until it bleeds it will never heal

An epistemological stance is ever in motion

December

Your life is as a ship passing through the sea; pray your wake deals kindly with every shore it meets...

Perestroika: shine the light on evil, don't hide it

The answer to life, the universe and everything, is life itself

A polygraph "measures" human emotions, which cannot be truly quantified. Thus, it is a waste of time and resources

Sometimes I think the only reason I'm not kicked to the curb is because I'm too busy being thrown under the bus

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

Sometimes I feel like I'm in a hamster ball on the auto bon

2016

January

We do not have a health care system, we have chaotic disease treatment and death care

This is what the entire universe looks like in one image read.bi/1IJDntp via [@BI_Science](#) as far as you know

The Somatic Versal Reality: I am Not but Star-Dust

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The 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions, October 15 - 19, 2015, Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

The following references, though not specifically called out, were foundational in my thoughts

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