

## GOD AND EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS

Joseph Draper, PhD

Regis College, Weston, Mass.

### **“Mysterious and Powerful Others Beyond,” and Structures of Consciousness**

The above heading, while awkward, attempts to avoid the swaggering display of personal authority that comes with titles such as *The Evolution of God* – Robert Wright’s project of observing “God” as an evolving product of human minds. With the swagger comes the stumble; if one asks only what’s in the box, one risks overlooking and tripping over the box itself.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I explore what is in the God box as instances of the *structure* of human knowing in three periods in the evolution of consciousness. This exploration searches various ways humans in the last two millennia in the West have held God as an object of consciousness. Looking not only at the content of knowing – the God one holds – but also at the structure of knowing – the consciousness that is organizing divine content – puts us in a position to ask more fruitful questions than Wright’s work allows.

Looking at God simply as content of the human mind lures one toward an unhelpful question, as it has Wright: “Is ‘God’ God?” Is there really a God behind

---

<sup>1</sup> I say this with all due respect for Wright’s fine work and the importance of his life project of helping the human inhabitants of the planet to form non-zero-sum relationships with one another where advancing the good of “the other” can be understood as advancing my own good. See Wright, R. 2009. *The Evolution of God*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

all that constructing? By exploring content (object) *and* structure (subject), however, we are in a position to ask: “what is it about most humans, in every age, as far back as we can reasonably look, and in most places on the planet today, that makes them make religious meaning? On behalf of what does consciousness concoct the notion of divine beings, of endless perdurance, of ‘things that are not there?’ How are human communities organized around, and the species advantaged by, that ‘ultimate’ concoction?” These questions have significant pedagogical implications for religious educators because they draw attention to the evolution of human consciousness itself and not just the evolution of the images, ideas, and ideologies that consciousness produces. They allow us to attend to the possibility that religious conflict may be a matter, not of different belief systems, but of different orders of mental complexity in collision. Content keeps our gaze on what may turn out to be less important than we thought, but the structure of knowing draws our attention to the evolving complexity and dynamism of mental cultures today and across time.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever one believes about God, humans seem to posit mysterious and powerful “Others Beyond” in one order of mental complexity only to find them not so mysterious and powerful in the next. Human consciousness, holding onto the earlier gods it now understands, throws a new “Ultimate” out before itself, and then starts walking a thousand year journey toward it; only to discover, upon

---

<sup>2</sup> For evidence of cognitive diversity today, see, E. Drago-Severson, *Becoming Adult Learners: Principles and Practices for Effective Development*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004

arrival, that the ultimate is not-so-ultimate anymore. And so it conjures a new, qualitatively more complex Ultimate and repeats. That we do this says nothing, ultimately, of God as a reality behind all our positing. This paper essentially ignores “God” as *God* but looks instead the varyingly complex, but always useful ways we posit God and the inevitable conflict that results when one construction of God encounters a new order of mental complexity.

### **God in Instrumental and Interpersonal Consciousness**

By the time of the Greco-Roman period human culture likely consisted of a composite of three orders of mental complexity: first order, variously referred to as impulsive, archaic, or “primitive” consciousness; second order, referred to as instrumental or imperial consciousness; and third order interpersonal consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Based on a study of Roman religion, voluntary associations, and the Corinthian community,<sup>4</sup> I have argued that this period is characterized by the overwhelming presence of second order consciousness with a sizeable minority of first order, and a tiny highly advantaged third order elite.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller treatment of evolving consciousness, see Robert Kegan, *Evolving Self*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; *In Over our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Draper, *Evolving Communities*.

Instrumental consciousness is embedded in, and therefore unable to reflect on, needs and interests.<sup>5</sup> It understands the gods as immortal beings who can do things for you or to you. Their favor is secured through a contractual relationship based, not in magical incantations, not through heroic archetypes, but in ritual protocol – the rules and roles of religious ritual handed down from the ancestors; rituals through which the gods are made to supply human needs and interests (gaining favor, or averting divine and earthly threats). The gods are experienced as unstable because they are impulsive and unpredictable. Stability is achieved by discovering their intentions. *Assuming* their plans and projects are good, humans do *not* assume the impulsive gods will back them. In ritual, intentionality is projected onto the gods,<sup>6</sup> for it is the *gods'* intentions that matters, *not* the supplicant's; ritual makes those divine intentions known.

When the god does not come through, one need only tweak the ritual as did ancient Roman augurs when seeking favorable signs in great matters of state. Augurs read signs from the sky that included the flight of birds and their cries, as well as signs of thunder and lightning. As Robert Turcan has noted, none of this was random.<sup>7</sup> The augur marked out a portion of the sky (*templum*) as a consecrated space (*effatum*) and a time of observance; if a bird's flight or cry was

---

<sup>5</sup> Embeddedness is a key term in Kegan's constructive developmental theory and refers to what one is subject to and, therefore, unable to reflect on it and decide about it; or able only with great difficulty. Object refers to what one can reflect on. See Kegan, *Evolving Self*.

<sup>6</sup> Ritual does not simply repeat and imitate exploits of the gods, as is the case in the "primitive" religions Eliade describes, but makes the gods produce truths regarding human actions.

<sup>7</sup> Turcan, R. 2001. *The Gods of Ancient Rome*. New York: Routledge.

troubling, he could ignore it by crying, *non consulto* which can be loosely translated, “wasn’t looking, doesn’t count.” However, once the gods were consulted through the taking of the auspices the resultant action, including promised sacrifices, had to be scrupulously carried out. But if the gods were properly invoked and they failed to live up to their side of the bargain one could punish them, as was the case when citizens of Rome desecrated temples at the death of the beloved Germanicus. Gods, whose knockable presence is “objectively” available in temples, are themselves subject to human needs and interests. Roman religion practiced a disciplined, even passionate piety in service to the city-state that was grounded in immediate, concrete results.

The god one holds as object in instrumental consciousness is a god of impulse, a god who can bring in a happy harvest today, and devastation tomorrow. But that unstable god is constrained in instrumental consciousness by transactional ritual in service to human needs and interests. Thus, while humans hold impulsive gods as object, the gods are *subject* to human needs and interests, and they cannot reflect on this fact.<sup>8</sup> But this “subjugation” of impulsive gods is

---

<sup>8</sup> In an earlier pre-instrumental, first order consciousness, the gods are *subject* to human imagination; they are concocted out of a consciousness that does not distinguish among the world as imagined and the world as concretely there. Therefore, the Earth and the human world are experienced as unstable; a fact balanced by the stability provided by the world of the gods they become fused to. This, I believe, is a core argument in M. Eliade’s, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005. By “fusion,” I mean that first order consciousness does not clearly differentiate the world of the gods and the world of humans. Critical human actions such as hunting, mating, tilling, and even settlement establishment attain their meaning because they imitate and repeat the actions of the gods. In a consciousness that does not recognize a concrete world (the world *is* as one imagines it to be – all is fantasy), Eliade’s

achieved because humans hold imagination as object in a concrete and stable world that, unlike an earlier order of mental complexity, is really there, enduring apart from one's perception of it and able to retain its somethingness across change. The gods held in instrumental consciousness are powerful by virtue of immortality, but unethical because power bequeaths impulsive prerogatives – permissible among the gods, but no longer allowed in human culture.

In the next qualitatively more complex interpersonal consciousness, the divine world has regained its stability but humans have lost their own. A new discovery is made by third order consciousness: as the gods are greater than us by virtue of immortality, so too *must* they greater than us by virtue of ethics,<sup>9</sup> a new understanding that cost Socrates his life.<sup>10</sup> One no longer needs to doubt the intentions of the gods: they are *always* good because the gods are *by nature* good. What a supplicant now doubts are his own intentions because he no longer assumes their validity and seeks the gods' backing. He doubts his intentions because his interpersonal consciousness seeks certainty not in ritual protocol but in mutuality – intentions “certified” by the affirmation of respected others, including God. Third order consciousness represents a radical order of mental

---

terms, sacred and profane, are notions perhaps too complex to describe what amounts to “important” and “unimportant” actions.

<sup>9</sup> Martin, D., *Inventing superstitions: From the Hippocratics to the Christians*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> According to Bernard Lonergan (1972), Socrates was the first person in the West to move beyond what he refers to as common sense knowing (Kegan's second order consciousness) by asking questions that could only be answered by a qualitative change in (or differentiation of) consciousness: a move into the realm of theory; a realm of abstract ideas and definitions that exist only in the mind.

complexity when compared to the dominant instrumental consciousness of the time; one enjoyed by a tiny, highly advantaged, well educated elite.<sup>11</sup>

In third order interpersonal knowing, one becomes uncomfortable with the gods as they appear in cultural myths; one rejects the notion that gods, or God, can be imagined and therefore made into a material image (first order) or an anthropomorphized object of imagination (second order). Mythology is transformed into philosophy and theology.<sup>12</sup> God may, for the first time, be *defined*; God is pure intelligibility, pure relationality; but at the same time subject to one's theological construction. God is no longer concrete, an object of the world, or an object of imagination. God is a "monad" or a "covenanting God" or, in the Christian tradition, a "Communion of Persons" who is experienced relationally and internally, who is understood as establishing a communion among the people themselves, and a communion between God and the people of God. As ideational, it is a non-imagined, non-material *relationship* that grounds human/divine interaction in this life and the next.

---

<sup>11</sup> While late stage mental complexity highly correlates to advantage, with education the most advantaging variable (though wealth and leisure help), advantage does not cause complexity. Therefore, anyone at one order of complexity can evolve into another order of complexity despite delimiting and disadvantaging factors. Socrates may be evidence of this, as pointed out by my colleague at Regis College, Jason Giannetti. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates announces that he was the son of stone mason. In the *Thaetetus* he mentions that his mother was a midwife. Elsewhere, he quips that he never had enough money to afford the kind of education the sons of the wealthy enjoyed. For the connection between education and mental complexity, see Robert Kegan's analysis of over a dozen dissertations using constructive developmental theory in, *In Over our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, 189-195.

<sup>12</sup> For a fascinating exploration of the evolution of the Greek mind as it moved from epic, to lyric poetry, to tragedy, and to philosophy, see Snell, B. 1953 *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ritual moves from a tit-for-tat transaction to a mutual *conversation* between a people and God; ritual protocol mediates that conversation through which all parties, including God, are made present – that is, efficaciously available, one to the other. Interpersonal knowing constructs a covenantal mutuality where obedience moves from correctly fulfilling rules and roles, to fidelity to human and divine relationships. God is no longer an object of imagination conjured on behalf of my needs and interests, but a God of ideation conceptualized on behalf of interpersonal mutuality. While Almighty God may continue to be experienced as blessing and withholding blessings, it is never arbitrary and capricious, and it never requires one to mitigate uncertainty by ritually leveraging divine secrets. God does not simply do things *to* us and *for* us; rather, we are *with* God and God is *with* the people.

Thus, the god-object a third order believer holds is a God of rules and roles, and needs and interests, but held now in service to a God subject to interpersonal relationships. This God is a powerful aid to becoming other-oriented because the great “Other” – divine beings – are no longer concrete resources external to the self as they were in second order, but in an abstracting move, have been “invited in” as a source that organizes the self. In second order, gods can never be more than *resources* that are accessed by advantage-seeking humans.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> The metaphor of invitation is instructive. The Roman ritual of *evocatio*, calling out, was practiced on the field of battle before a town that was about to fall under Roman arms. The ritual invited the gods of the doomed town to leave and join the ever-practical Romans before the

In third order consciousness, God is not simply a resource, but the *Source*, or *the Source* of every need and every relationship, a source that does not simply tell me what to do, but that tells me who I am. However much God has been invited in, my identity comes from sources that remain outside the self that show me who I am at the same time they show me *whose* I am, who I belong to that, together with me, make up the whole of who I am. The same capacity to invite God into the self allows one to invite the other into the self and find oneself in the face of the other. One does not have to *resolve* or try hard to “put others first,” or to care about the feelings of others. One simply does this in third order; a liberation from what is now understood as one’s earlier selfish opportunism; but experienced as bondage by a later fourth order consciousness. What happens when second order construction of the world and the gods is confronted by third order? The next section explores this question.

---

slaughter and enslavement began. Why would the gods refuse this gracious offer, the Romans might ask? After all, it was obvious by the evidence of the imminent destruction of the town that the local gods had handed their people over to the Romans. And these gods could be confident that the scrupulous Romans would care for them properly, building temples, assigning and funding a priesthood, and enacting a detailed ritual protocol with suitable punishments for lapses in discipline. By calling out and taking in the gods of their defeated foes, there is no question as to whether they were “internalizing” them, or inviting them into *themselves* to become operative as a source of values and beliefs. These gods simply added to the status of Rome, providing evidence to all the world by the people they had subdued of their rightful honor and, moreover, increasing the divine resources at their disposal to strengthen and preserve the glorious narrative they were embedded in.

## **Colliding Orders of Consciousness: Paul and the Corinthian Community**

The apostle Paul and the Corinthian community of the first century provide an excellent case study of the collision of two orders of mental complexity. The Greco-Roman world as described above was dominated by second order consciousness. The patron-client system that existed throughout the Empire can be understood as the construction of second order consciousness. Characteristic of the patron-client system was honor and shame as concrete, and usually visible, identity markers.<sup>14</sup> Identity as a concrete *status* was quantitatively increased by honor in the form of titles, recognition, monuments commissioned in one's name, best seat at the games, and diminished by shame such as receiving an insult by someone of lesser status, being reduced to slavery.<sup>15</sup> It is out of this

---

<sup>14</sup> Andrew D. Clarke highlights the system of benefaction, or patronage, and its connection to honor and shame that permeated the Greco-Roman world: "It should not be overlooked that patronage only functioned effectively in that society because it operated by means of the ubiquitous Mediterranean culture of honor and shame which was active at *all* levels of society, and not just at the more rarefied level of the elites" See A. D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000, p. 60, emphasis original. The patron-client system also described divine-human relationships. See P. A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> See Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. Slaves were referred to simply as "bodies", *soma*, and as things, *res*; were often found by slave traders as infants left to die on garbage heaps (exposed) and nursed by other lactating slaves; were often raised as child and adult sex workers; had to stand in their master's stead when a sentence of corporal punishment was handed out; and were excluded from the honor/shame system because they were in a state of perpetual shame. Her work is a chilling reminder of the horrible conditions slaves in the Greco-Roman world lived in. She specifically highlights the conflict slaves were put in by Pauline household codes for sexual purity since slaves did not enjoy bodily integrity and were therefore unable to resist the sexual advances of their masters, or to prevent him from bringing them to the harbor to serve as a source of prostitution income.

cultural milieu that Paul introduced a qualitatively different way of forming relationships and organizing communities.

Over four hundred and fifty years after Socrates first cracked the third order code for the West,<sup>16</sup> Paul attempted a radical, nearly impossible epistemological project: in preaching his gospel, he also attempted unwittingly to democratize third order consciousness in a world overwhelmingly dominated by second order. Richard Ascough<sup>17</sup> argues that Paul's preaching put stress on three simple principles: Spirit-guidance, "mutual up-building of one another in love" (1 Cor. 13:1-14:1; 16:14), and "choosing to serve others as a slave" (1 Cor. 9:15, 19; cf. 7:22). All of these placed third order demands on community members, requiring that they set aside their own needs and interests on behalf of relationships and understand the community and Christ in non-concrete metaphors. Further, Paul organized the Corinthian community, not around the familiar rules and roles and the system of benefaction, but around third order values of mutuality such as "putting others first." So insistent was he on this point that he did away with all titles and status markers, refused to act as the

---

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lonergan would argue with this (predating Kegan by a decade, he used different terms to describe five differentiations of consciousness; instead of third order consciousness he said, simply, theory). Lonergan argues that the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues discovered the exigency for a new kind of knowing that would eventually lead to abstraction, definition, and theory; but never crossed over into this new realm of mental complexity. It was Aristotle, in Lonergan's belief, that fully worked out the definitions of things within the realm of theory. See, *Method in Theology*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.

<sup>17</sup> Ascough, R. "Chaos theory and Paul's organizational style," *Journal of Religious Leadership*. 1.2 fall, 2002. Also available online at <http://www.christianleaders.org/JRL/Fall2002?ascough.htm>.

community's patron, and insisted that the honor that people desire had little to do with the divine honor that freely accrues to those who are in Christ. Paul boldly tried to convince them that shame and humiliation (with all the visible markers, including beatings reserved for slaves) were actually good things if received on behalf of the gospel.

The Corinthians weren't buying it. Few of Paul's strategies seem to have significantly altered the behavior of the Corinthians. In fact, Paul's curriculum met with serious resistance and generated tremendous conflict. A significant literature has been generated over the conflict between Paul and the members of the community. Whether the struggle was between the rich and poor, as suggested by Gerd Theissen,<sup>18</sup> or among the poor themselves, as suggested by Justin Meggitt,<sup>19</sup> or among more advantaged leaders, as suggested by Stephen Chester,<sup>20</sup> what may have been more significant was the collision of two horizons of knowing – the community's dominant second order mind and Paul's third order curriculum. While economic, social, religious, and political factors played a role in the conflicts, the underlying conflict was an epistemological one.

The status-deprived Corinthian community simply vied for prominence by dragging the Spirit into acknowledging their greatness by conferring showy gifts like tongues that individuals could display before the awe of others. Stripped of

---

<sup>18</sup> G. Theissen, *The social setting of Pauline Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> S. J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church*. New York: T & T Clark, 2003.

role defining, honor bestowing status, not only did community members turn the gifts of the spirit into sources of status, they aligned themselves into factions headed by heroic figures like Peter, Apollos, and Paul. Even “Christ” got demoted to a rank and file hero by members who clearly did not grasp the complexity of the divine man Paul had tried to communicate.<sup>21</sup>

Paul may have assumed too much from the community on the question of status, but he also failed to grasp their reaction to shame. Paul waxed eloquent about the many beatings, hardships, and humiliations he endured on behalf of the gospel. Preaching that God’s power is manifest in human weakness, he referred to himself and those with him as garbage before the eyes of the world (1 Cor. 4:8-13) – mistakenly believing the Corinthians would find in his example a true representative of Christ who similarly suffered weakness and humiliations. Instead, the community more and more became embarrassed by their founder; an apostolic figure too willing to denigrate his own reputation and rightful status, so willing to sully his own honor, comparing himself to refuse.

When traveling missionaries arrived, they easily persuaded the Corinthians to accuse Paul of being “crafty” and that he took them in by “deceit”

---

<sup>21</sup> Second order consciousness is second order consciousness, whether it is experienced in antiquity or today. Only the content has changed and expanded. Therefore, if one looks at the behavior of the Corinthian adults through the lens mental complexity, it is remarkably similar to the behavior today of ten year old children collecting baseball or Pokémon cards. By having a “Manny Ramirez” card, *I’m* somebody; especially if you don’t have that card. In fact, your best card has weaker stats than mine. Given this, the Corinthians opportunistically aligned themselves to various heroic figures, not to enter into relationships with them, not to share their values and beliefs, but because doing so increased their stature in the eyes of their peers. Status is concrete in second order, and really, really useful.

(2 Cor. 12:16). The Corinthians demanded proof that Christ was speaking through him (2 Cor. 13:3) and, when Paul refused their patronage while at the same time receiving aid from the poorer Philippi, they accused him of financial mismanagement (2 Cor 11:7-12; 12:14-18). They began to question his appearance referring to his bodily presence as weak and “lowly,” and his speech as contemptible (2 Cor. 10:10).

By preaching over the heads of the community,<sup>22</sup> Paul made things worse for himself by underestimating the people’s (second order) loathing of shame and need for near-heroic leaders. In second order, the leader has to look the part and may have to play the authority role with a bit of pomp in order to be followed. Apart from organizing a gathering of new followers of Christ, Paul could do little to “change the minds” of those embedded in a Greco-Roman understanding of needs and interests. Mental cultures move slowly, however much their leaders wish otherwise.

What Paul did do was invite them to hold a qualitatively new and more complex God, to move gods subject to needs and interests to a God who holds these, reflects on them, decides about them. Paul preached an attractive risen Lord

---

<sup>22</sup> Paul was aware that he needed to practice care in his preaching, that he not go over the heads of the community: “For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end – as you have already understood us in part – that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast and you are our boast” (2 Cor. 1:13-14). At the same time Paul underestimated the kind of conversion necessary – transformation toward increasing mental complexity – for the community to, as he had done, subvert the social and cultural expectations of the period

whose spirit bestowed palpable and useful gifts within the community. But he preached, too, a dying Lord whose humiliations and embarrassments may be enacted in those who follow him in this life. The Corinthians may have preferred only the former – an impressive, mighty man-god who breaks the bonds of death and promises to all who believe a similar death-breaking – rather than a human being who suffered a shameful death reserved only for the slave and the criminal.

### **God and Modernity**

A similar epistemological process occurs today with the exception that the cognitive culture, at least in the U. S., is more diverse and dynamic (there are more statistically measurable cognitive constituencies, and they interact and conflict). It is fifth order today, represented by an obscure and statistically insignificant (and apparently un-measurable<sup>23</sup>) cognitive constituency that, like Paul in his day, is rankling the feathers of various communities (usually communities of academics – who themselves are a foggy and sometimes frightening obscurity to many American).<sup>24</sup> And like Paul, these preachers may

---

<sup>23</sup> In thirty years of constructive developmental dissertations, not one person as been clocked at fifth order, which is why, perhaps, Drago-Severson refers to it as a “theoretical” order of consciousness.

<sup>24</sup> This assumes that Paul, who crafted a third order gospel and constructed third order communities, was himself beyond third order. Though there is some evidence for this (his teaching about eating meat sacrificed to idols, for example; his relationship with and antagonism toward powerful apostles who knew the earthly Jesus; his understanding of grace: was he constructing a third order theory of grace (an internally consistent ideation verifiable through understanding and judgment) or was he constructing a fourth order ideology of grace (a clear and rigorous unification of multiple ideations into a coherent and complete metanarrative (i.e., was his

have to expect more than a few centuries before the complexity of their curriculum is even noticed by the general population. Unlike Paul, no one as yet appears to be attempting the impossible: “democratizing” fifth order consciousness.<sup>25</sup> Postmodernism is likely the construction of fifth order consciousness, but is rarely discussed outside of highly educated circles. Fourth order modernism *still* is not the numerically dominant order of mental complexity, at least in the United States.<sup>26</sup> However, modernism, now under attack by postmodernism, has lost its earlier, anti-authoritarian edge and lost interest in its gleeful project of demythologization.<sup>27</sup> Modernity might be long forgotten before the consciousness that produced it becomes the numerically dominant order of

---

a theory of love or was love, for him, a theory of everything?)), there is not the space to make the argument. If he had achieved fourth order, he would be, given the period, an epistemological savant.

<sup>25</sup> But who knows what is in store. Rising sea levels and baffling species die-offs have a way of focusing the mind. Perhaps they will also grow the mind. As I hint at below, fourth order consciousness, fondly attached to the human – taking human agency as ultimate – has little to say to these problems.

<sup>26</sup> Again, see Kegan’s analysis in, *In Over our Heads*. In the studies that researched the general population (the “SEC” dissertations), third order is the dominant order of mental complexity, second order is subdominant, and fourth order comes in third. In Drago-Severson’s study of a sample that is truly disadvantaged, *second order* is the dominant order of mental complexity with fourth order comprising one-fortieth of the sample (one person). See, *Becoming Adult Learners*.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., it is no longer attacking third order, but is defending against fifth. For examples of early fourth order in operation one might look at nineteenth century American reaction to the massive influx of poor, uneducated Catholics from Europe. While much of the anti-Catholicism was rank prejudice and irrational fear of the papacy, some anti-Catholic criticism stemmed from fears that Catholics were incapable of exercising the personal authority necessary for American style democracy, that they were beholden to the authority of foreign born priests and bishops, and even the pope, and that the Baroque devotionism practiced by many Catholics smacked of “superstition.” See Dolan, J. 1985. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from the Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Doubleday; Hennesey, J. 1981. *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press; and especially, McGreevy, J. T. 2003. *Catholicism and American freedom: A history*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company

mental complexity. By the time third order vied for hegemony with second order, the Reformation began knocking at its door, and then the clearly fourth order Enlightenment occurred and began actively undermining third order foundations. But none of this stopped, nor could it have, third order's march for supremacy. Today's U.S. mental composite is made up of a stable third order population (roughly half) with fourth order or second order vying for subdominance. But second order is clearly in decline, probably proportional to the rise of fourth order.<sup>28</sup>

So, what is fourth order consciousness besides the darling of modernity? How does one, who insists on remaining attached to communities of faith or at least features of their traditions hold God as object-subject? In fourth order self authored knowing, one's felt intimacy with the divine in the previous order of consciousness is discovered to be an assumption that has let one off the hook; that has limited one's own capacity to authentically enact one's core religious beliefs. If second order distributes mutuality (it benefits from, and sometimes protests, a necessary mutuality it cannot yet understand), then third order distributes *responsibility* to the community and to God. One discovers that one has been petitioning God on behalf of others (not just the self) such as "the poor," one's friends and, nobly, one's enemies, and then patiently waiting for God to act.

---

<sup>28</sup> Which is why third order is numerically stable: evolving second order "feeds into" third order; but a third order which remains relatively stable because it, too, is evolving and "feeds into" fourth order.

One's capacity to feel affection for others is increased by the practice of praying for them to an all loving God, but once complete, once one's prayers are concluded, it's God's turn to make them a reality. In fourth order, one becomes very uncomfortable with this because one's notion of God undergoes a radical transformation.

One begins to re-cognize that God is not simply an object of one's own understanding; God cannot be "materialized" or anthropomorphized; nor can God be "idealized" or conceptualized. God as mystery is simultaneously incomprehensible and present. God is actuality, truth, and life as affirmed by one's self-knowing judgment on behalf of self-consciously enacting the divine mystery. Prayerful intentions for others who are in need *commit* one to being a possible means through which God might answer the prayer. One may thus make petitions more soberly and less frequently since they project an end, a telos, into the heavens that may oblige one to become a means for their fulfillment, however partial and limited. Prayers of petition that distribute responsibility to God are now experienced as empty utterances.

In the powerful discovery of, and demand to operate out of, one's own personal authority one relativizes the external authority of texts, traditions, and leaders. This often misunderstood subordination of external authority to self authorship does not have to mean separation from communities which hold and hand on sacred texts and traditions – which can retain their sacredness even as

they are also understood as interesting ancient artifacts worthy of critical analysis. A person in fourth order struggling to maintain her connection to a tradition may be heard to say the following: “Whatever grand and miraculous things God can do I am little concerned with because I now know something; I know that if I am to have anything meaningful to do with a God who promises liberation for oppressed persons then I must mindfully, presently make myself available to the ubiquitous God of social justice<sup>29</sup> – and not to do ‘as God wills’ because I am less certain than I was before about God’s will, and I recognize that ‘God’s will’ was often the self-serving, ethno-centric construction of my community. Rather, *I* will make myself available to the possibility that my hands and feet and tongue may become the fragile, broken body parts of God on behalf of the concrete need before me. And not just any need, but those needs I judge are within the boundaries of my competent agency. I can no longer leech off the will and work of my community or relieve myself of a commitment God has bound me to by virtue of my own over-bold petitions and praises. I cannot praise God if I cannot raise these condemned and glory-bound hands as God’s own.”

Ritual now becomes a here-and-now participation in the everywhere-and-always-present divine mystery perfectly realized in the liturgical action of a believing people. In the “liturgy of the world,” one imperfectly enacts God’s presence in human-divine solidarity through which one’s own self authored

---

<sup>29</sup> The “social” part of God’s justice fourth order is no longer embedded in and can therefore reflect on it. Embedded in the “social” third order assume this about God’s justice.

actions are made available to a transcendent Other. In this way, one “realizes” the myth; that is, makes real, here and now, a sacred narrative stripped of its magical, mythical features through an ongoing intentional inhabiting of its truth. But this ideological construction of participation in the immanence of God through self-authored solidarity means that, however complex, God, a relational object, nevertheless remains subject to human agency.

In a second order culture, the ethical orientation is essentially ego-centric. There is no clear understanding of the notion of “human rights.” In a third order ethno-centric culture, human rights applies to “my people.” When one is stuck with a God with universal aspirations, one’s goal becomes that of making everyone “my people” so that one can confer on them rights. But fourth order consciousness, with or without a belief in God, is able to confer human rights even to “not-my-people,” or “people-who-refuse-to-be-like-me,” or even “people who hate me.” Fourth order gathers networks of theories and draws them into a single, unified ideology that attends in most, if not all, cases to one essential thing: the human metanarrative.

This represents a critical weakness in today’s world for it carries with it the hidden assumption that the human species is the source and summit of the evolutionary process; that evolution sought only to give birth to humans and then, weary with the pangs of labor, quit its 4.5 billion year biological struggle. It is a weakness in the Christian tradition of imagining that, because God became

human, only humans matter. But the matter that God took on as God's own in the Christian narrative was the matter of twelve billion years of evolution. The matter that matters to God might be any and every matter, every molecule, capable of responding to life's organizing principle. Fourth order is embedded in the glory and majesty of "man" and constructs an ethic that proffers rights to every human, but few to the millions of species, the billions of biological forms, the trillions of chemical reactions that are the condition of the possibility of conscious human life. In fourth order ideology there is no "known unknown," to use Lonergan's helpful term. There is no way around the perfection and beauty of an anthropocentric ideology until one discovers – that is, *knows* – that there is something wrong, incomplete, *unknown*, about the whole notion of a "theory of everything" that includes everything human while overlooking "everything else" humans depend on – a bio-spiritual everything else that subordinates human ideology to its new ultimate.

The more world-distinct one becomes, the less one confuses self and world, the more of the world one holds as object. This is inversely proportional to the degree to which one holds God as a material, imaginable, intelligible, and ideological object. Said differently, the degree to which one objectifies God may be proportional to the degree to which one is not subject in a transcendent economy – an economy that subordinates human culture to the evolutionary process that gave it birth and that is not complete. Human evolution might

therefore be understood as a one hundred thousand year struggle to manumit God from the bondage of human consciousness. Theoretically, the self, holding all but God as object, now becomes subject to nothing in the world but that which is not there: God.

### **Implications for Religious Education**

What is significant today is that there are three orders of mental complexity operative in the adult population (four if you count fifth order), each with sizeable numbers. There are two critical implications for this. First, no adult community, no board, no council is a cognitive monolith. And yet much of adult education continues to teach to a single adult mind, thus baffling or alienating other cognitive constituencies.<sup>30</sup> In any given community, second order, third order, and fourth order knowers are likely present, interacting, and conflicting. Each of these knowers has different understandings of what constitutes learning, how to be a follower or leader, and what to do with knowledge production. But each of these constituencies are fundamentally connected: Consecutive orders of consciousness are connected by a subject-object dialectic (what second order is subject to, third order holds as object) and by the agency-communion dialectic (second and fourth are agental orders, while third and fifth are communion orders). These variables when understood determine how a community as a community learns and gets things done.

---

<sup>30</sup> For an exception to this, see Regan, J. 2002. *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation*. Chicago: Loyola Press.

The second implication is conflict. Given the interaction that occurs in cognitively diverse communities, conflict is inevitable. But it needs to move from a discomfiting experience that we need to make go away by “resolving it,” to something that needs to be recognized as signs of life in the community and in need, not of resolution, but facilitation.<sup>31</sup> Earth is a living planet *because* of all the chemical reactions that occur; Mars is a dead planet because all chemical reactions long ago ceased.<sup>32</sup> No conflict, no life. But understanding conflict requires leaders removing its sources from the realm of content (what Kegan would call made meanings) and seeking them out in the structure of human knowing. Conflict, as Lonergan powerfully argues, not only reveals different horizons of knowing, they expose those horizons to further differentiation and growth.

---

<sup>31</sup> For an important book that attends to community conflict (though does not seek its root causes in epistemology – in conflicting orders of mental complexity), see, Cowan, M. A. & B. J. Lee, SM. 1997. *Conversation, Risk & Conversion*. New York: Orbis Books.

<sup>32</sup> Capra, F. 1996. *The Web of Life*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday.