

Chapter 29

Spirit Completeness Beyond all Metaphors

So what does all this cultural analysis mean for our understanding of religion? First of all, it dramatizes that no religion or religious culture dropped down from the realm of Final Truth. No primal metaphor is the right one or the best one. All primal metaphors and all the religions they have spawned or will spawn are creations of human beings. Further creation is plausible. Further recognition of the gifts and the limits of each of these primal metaphors is possible. Further developments and elaboration within each of the primal metaphor zones of experience can happen.

Since no existing primal metaphor is the complete one, shall we invent something that includes the wisdom of all of these primal metaphors? Shall we invent a primal metaphor that works better and more inclusively than all of these? Not so fast! We need to recognize that each of these primal metaphors was developed and explored by millions of people over thousands of years. It is arrogant in the extreme to assume any of us have the personal depth to even understand the profundity of each of these metaphors much less the capacity to invent something that includes and excels them all.

But we can reflect on how the dialogue between these six zones of experience can take us where no people have gone before. We can intuit that there exists a profound humanness that underlies all of these metaphors and zones of culture. We can experience the joy of discovery as we dialogue deeply across the boundaries of these zones of religious creation and culture building.

I have heard people say that the cultural divisions on our planet are so deep that they can never be fully breached. I certainly agree that these divisions are deep. However, I have been encouraged by a number of experiences that make me more hopeful about breaching these differences than the more common view suggests. Here is one of those experiences:

I was teaching an eight-week, residential, religious program in Australia in which there were six Aborigine people from a traditional outback village. These people had learned English and other things from a Presbyterian mission, but their ancient culture was still very much in evidence. I am guessing that their primal metaphor is a form of the Sub-Saharan African metaphor that their ancestors had taken to Australia at least 12,000 years ago in a pre-civilization form, even a pre-agricultural form. This culture is very different from my own. At first I found many of their comments cryptic. Occasionally, it dawned on me what some of their strange talk meant. I was not sure that anything I was saying was getting through to them. Then one morning after I had given a talk on "The Land of Mystery," a tall, slender, very dark-skinned Aborigine man came to me and made this striking and memorable statement: "When you give a talk like that, I can hear you in my own stories." I had no idea what his stories were, but as I looked him in the eyes I knew that we had communicated.

This and a few other such experiences have convinced me that all these truly vast cultural boundaries can be crossed, even at the most profound levels – perhaps especially at the most profound levels. We live in an interreligious and intercultural era. We could all become more wise about our own profound humanness as we listen deeply across these boundaries.

Within the vision that there is a profound humanness that is common to all humans whatever their culture or their religion, we can realize ever more clearly some important things. (1) All our religions are human creations that are limited and yet reach out for the same profound humanness. (2) All our primal metaphors upon which our religions are built are limited and yet are created by humans seeking to share among one another the same profound humanness. (3) All the cultural formations and

religions that are built with roots in these profound metaphors are limited, partial, incomplete, and yet each reflect in its own way and in considerable measure the profound humanness that we all share.

Four Approaches to Truth and Six Basic Cultural Areas

As we explored in Part One, there are four approaches to truth: the it-approach or scientific approach, the I-approach or contemplative approach, and two We-approaches, the intimacy approach and the commonality approach.

And as we have just explored, there are at least six major cultural areas on the planet. Each cultural areas uses all four approaches to truth, but with regard to its religious roots (or primal metaphor), each of these areas emphasizes one of the four approaches to truth more than the other three. Here us a chart on that:

Area	Primal Metaphor	Approach to truth
Sub-Asia–	Uniting with the Infinite Silence	– the contemplative approach
Arabia–	Intimacy with the Eternal Communicator	– the intimacy approach
Europe–	Ordering the Absolute Wonder	– the scientific approach
The Orient–	Balance within the Master Community	– the commonality approach
Africa–	Attunement with the Final Rhythm	– the intimacy approach
Native America–	Designing the Unstoppable Flow	– the commonality approach

So what does this tell us about these societies?

For example, the complexity of the Chinese culture can be explored with such insights as these: the Confucius base of that culture emphasizes the commonality approach. Taoism provided an emphasis on the intimacy approach. And Buddhism, arriving from Sub-Asia and adapting to Oriental culture, provided the contemplative approach. The scientific approach was not absent in classical China, but it was profoundly strengthened by the impact of the Maoist revolution. Now China is a very strong culture. If it can bring all these important approaches to truth together in a balanced mix, it will be a even stronger.

Europe is a blend of the classical Greek structures of thought and Arabian influences that arrived through the spread of Christianity and Judaism and the fight with Islamic cultures. This means a strong emphasis on the scientific approach, enriched by the intimacy approach. The contemplative approach is both needed by European cultures and is being added recently through strong encounters with and immigration of citizens from Sub Asia. Most missing is the commonality approach to truth emphasized in the Orient and by Native America.

North America, as well as Central and South America, are now basically European cultures, but they have been enriched profoundly by the Native American emphasis on commonality. This gift can be much more fully adopted, especially in North America where it has been pushed onto reservations, rather than full assimilated. In Central and South America, Native American commonality has more fully moved into family and neighborhood life, but is still often held in a second-place status. Enrichment of all the American cultures from the Oriental form of commonality would also be strengthening. American cultures, more fully than Europe, have received the gifts of the African intimacy approach.

A lifelong study project of such analysis, could be outlined for each geographical area on the planet. And such study could be fine tuned for specific places – that is,

Germanic Europe is different from Mediterranean Europe, and Mississippi is different from New England or California, and Bolivia is different from all these places.

Wherever a culture is being examined and enriched all four of these approaches to truth need to be distinguished and carefully taught in secondary and university classrooms as well as religious, civic, and business associations. Culture is not simply given from the past: it is being created in the present. And the unavoidable future of intercultural mixing across the entire planet is challenging every cultural enclave to open up its hearts and minds to the enrichments of our entire planet-wide human experience. Furthermore, for this mixing to be fruitful we need to emphasize all four approaches to truth and explore the religious depths of all the major world cultures.