15. A Theology of Equity, Democracy, and Citizenship

In the history of the world there have been good Kings and good Queens whose psychological health and spirit qualities exceeded their lust for boundless power. These persons, like perhaps Ashoka of India and Elizabeth I of England, used their power to benefit their citizenry and hold in check the power lusts of their competitors and bureaucratic assistants. But very often the 6500-year-old experiment with royalty has been a failure in good management and humane promotion. At times royalty descended into arrangements of irresponsible violence, corruption, and frank insanity. The pioneers of democracy were right to risk their lives to do away with royalty (or at least to modify it significantly).

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other U.S. founders were each in their own way flawed characters, perpetuating overt and subtle forms of racism, patriarchy, bullying, egoism, and power lust. Nevertheless, like the rare good kings and good queens of yore, these U.S. founders did the right thing in chopping off the head of classical civilization and replacing it with the an elected executive held in check by a populist House, an aristocratic Senate, and a constitutionally anchored Court of last appeal. This entire arrangement was a nexus of compromises, the most egregious of which was the counting of slaves as three-quarters of a person. Other nations in the world constituted similar arrangements, some better, some worse. However limited our so-called democracies have been, democracy is a social innovation that has become a planet-wide commitment in the “lives” of human beings, a commitment that is not going away in spite of all the tendencies and efforts to kill it or limit it or make democracy a surface facade that hides an operating and controlling aristocratic power.

Without presuming to know exactly how a full democracy would look, let us imagine ourselves under obligation to build one. Let us claim that some sort of true citizen equity is both possible and realizable in spite of the enduring temptation on the part of almost all human beings to satisfy their lustful discontent with unlimited social power in one social realm or another. Checks and balances are useful for at least limiting the enduring temptation to megalomania so prominent in our species. So let us not indulge our imaginations in any sentimentality that minimizes these dangers.

At the same time, let us not indulge ourselves in ideas that human beings are equal in terms of the temporal standards of judgment we invent. Humans simply are not equal in intelligence, physical energy, sanity, or Spirit maturation, however we choose to define such measurements. The diversity of gifts and potentials is an aspect of our existence that we realists are duty-bound to recognize. The only equality that a realist can acknowledge is our equal status in being a conscious being posited in space/time by the Final Reality—that is, a creature of our Creator, if that old language is still useful to us—in other words, that our elemental existence is equally valuable to every other human being, however great their talent, sanity, and potential for creative contribution. This ultimate equality persists in spite of every class designation, gender, culture, race, skin tone, beauty measurement, disposition, friendliness, or support of causes. Democracy is a witness to this ultimate equality, even though its sociological application “equally before the law” requires attention to the inequalities that manifest in all the temporal levels of consideration.

**Equality and Equity**

We must, therefore, distinguish carefully between the words “equality” and “equity.” The notion that all humans are created equal is not an ideal for the organization of a society, but a statement about the nature of human life in relation to


Final Reality. Our various differences and inequalities do not challenge the truth of our essential equality as creatures before our Creator. But when we turn our attention to organizing a society our guiding principle is equity not equality. Equity can include considerable degree of inequality among a citizenship. But our understanding of equity need not justify abandoning anyone to a destitute state of life. Grueling poverty is a sign of failure in the entire structure of a “democratic” society. And this failure does not reside in the destitute individuals themselves, but in the oppressive or thoughtless structuring of the society. Society does not have to be a monopoly game with big winners and total losers. That is not the only possible game. It is in truth a game invented by sociopaths, social Darwinists, or free-enterprise extremists. Equity can be defined as ending that needless game. A minimum of care can be provided every human being that is born.

Also, “equity” can be defined to include putting an end of the social institution we call “billionaires” as well as any other social structures that provides any one citizen with such inordinate states of power. We can easily begin this deconstruction of the monopoly game society by having billionaires and other preposterously rich member of society pay their fair share into the public fabrics that promote the common good. And we can have our universities and business schools satirize any complaints about this from the super rich or any rationalizations that these persons have earned this wealth. Each billionaire has been created by the exertion of every other member of society. Furthermore, we have learned from abundant experience that unlimited power corrupts absolutely. When most humans have the power to do almost anything, they do bad practices, and they do them for no other reason than they can do them without penalty.

Though there are difficulties in defining “equity,” these difficulties do not excuse us from finding appropriate solutions. Democracy begins in the minds of each person and becomes a social manifestation for all persons only as we continue to hope, think, and work for the possibility of a thoroughgoing equity to transpire in our actual social practice.

So without supposing to have final answers, let us contemplate about next steps that might be taken by those of us who are committed to a social equity that includes every human being. And let us also recognize that this passion for social equity has a foundation in the universal respect for all persons, a deep respect that exists in tension with all the biological, mental, and social inequalities that are an unavoidable part of our human existence and social considerations.

Three Axioms of Equity

Axiom number one: The fight for equity includes working with all three dynamics of social formation: economic, political, and cultural processes.

Economic Equity: If we have been paying attention, we have already discovered that there can be no enduring political equity without economic equity. As long as there are persons with billions of units of economic power along with millions of other persons with almost no economic power at all, a true political democracy is not possible. Making steps toward a redistribution of wealth that favors a variegated middle-class condition for every citizen is a step in the right direction for the formation of a full-blown democracy – as well as for retaining the steps toward democratic society already taken. A movement toward greater economic equity requires a cultural transformation in the minds of both rich and poor, namely that boundless economic power is not a worthy goal, but a malfunction of the whole society that must be severely restrained. Further, the abiding temptation to seek economic immortality, needs to be resisted by the cultural norms contained in the heads of every person on
Earth. Impossible you say. Not at all. It is simply a description of the hard work ahead.

**Political equity:** Though political equity is entangled with economic equity and cultural equity, it also stands on its own as a project for thought and action. The vision of spreading decision-making power to more and more people was a key story among the founding fathers and mothers of the United States, and of this nation’s continuing story. We the people of this nation started with giving ordinary male landowners and their families significant power over would-be kings, aristocrats, and religious potentates. After the drama of decades of critique and a horrifically violent civil war decision-making power was spread to male African American slaves and their families. Later, woman, standing on their own (alongside their males or without male partners) were also granted decision-making power. Forces still exist that seek to limit the power of both women and minority races. Further, most of the super rich have never been willing to appropriately share power with the extremely and moderately poor. One-person-one-vote is a fiction as long as the voting options are severely limited by big money interests before any voting takes place. Also, democracy is corroded as long as voters are brainwashed with lavishly-paid-for, frequently-told misinformation and downright lies. The correction of these flaws in political equity will require in the U.S. some extreme shifts in the thinking of several Supreme Court Justices, in clarifying the Constitution itself with clear amendments, and in convincing ordinary people that government is rightfully theirs, rather than viewing government as a distant and untrustworthy.

Government has indeed become untrustworthy, because it has become the plaything of the rich and powerful. This obvious truth is too often not being admitted. In addition, government is too often said it be untrustworthy because it is corrupted by liberals, or socialists or communists, or some other fictitious explanation dreamed up be the defenders of the rich and powerful.

The political empowerment of the people can begin in every local neighborhood with politically lucid programs of citizen education. In addition, these awakening citizens will need to work together in power-wielding organizations that change local laws and economic practices and yoke people together across nations for imaginative voting, and across whole continents for relations of equity in trade, migration, and mutual care. It is not a fact of nature that money has to rule political life. This can be changed by large masses of active, well-informed citizens. The enemies of equity know this: that is why so much money putting forth misinformation and underfunding public education.

We equity-promoting activists must understand that our movements in populist political wisdom need to be economically supported with public sector economic investments, good jobs for the population, appropriate government supports and benefits, as well as far-reaching social safeguards including public healthcare insurance and rules, Social Security for the elderly, living wages, public parks and post offices, safe food, clean water, fresh air, workable infrastructures, and careful care for the natural ecosystems and communities of life. Perhaps the most grimly evil strategy devised by the rich and powerful has been their plotting of economic starvation for any of the publicly financed enablements of the populist opposition to this excessive political power of the wealthy. Any practice that impoverishes citizens to maintain power could be structured as a crime—a felony with jail time, rather than allowed to flourish as a normal aspect of a democratic society.

**Cultural equity:** The notion of public education and inexpensive or free college opportunities is democracy promoting. The denial of this is a means of dumbing-down the population to the status of powerless pawns of the rich and powerful.
“Democracies need informed citizens to make them work, and only survive amid a formative culture that produces individuals willing to think critically, imagine otherwise, and act responsibly.” The quality of that education needs to be politically realistic, economically well-informed, and culturally progressive, devoid of all racial, cultural, and religious bigotry. When reactionary forces twist or do away with public education and affordable college, the fight for cultural equity will include persistent sidelining the power these anti-education forces.

The history of nationalism in Europe, Japan, and the United States is a good example of the need to fight for cultural equity. Mid-20th-Century Germany and Japan were unforgettable examples of identifying the mission of the national apparatus with idolizing the homeland culture at the expense of its more universalist-minded citizens and at the expense of all the other nations on Earth. Though nationalism in the United States has had a different quality, nationalism has been and continues to be a deep cultural flaw of this nation. U.S. nationalism has not been rooted in a deep love of homeland culture, but formed by a people who brought an alien European culture into conflict with the deep history of the Native American homeland culture. Our first form of violent nationalism was the displacement, contempt for, and slaughter of these native cultures, the buffalo, and many other natural features. The enslavement of African people was another expression of this European-based nationalism. In the 21st Century U.S. nationalists are still imposing on the planet, U.S. economic interests, and political control in ways that show contempt for the diversity and well being of all peoples. Nationalism has economic and political elements, but it is at root a cultural malady in the minds of a people. It is a lack of respect for diversity within the nation and upon the planet. It is a rejection, conscious and unconscious, of cultural equity.

The Old Testament prophets used the emotional power of poetry to make their calls for greater realism. Here is a poem I wrote some years ago that focuses on this topic of equity:

**I Love Politics**

Ronald Reagan was wrong to make “regulation” a curse word and create disdain for government, politics, and politicians.

I say, let us love politics and piss on the private sector.

Let us make business obey the rules. and let us create better rules-- stricter rules--and enforce them immaculately.

If any business persists in believing that it has “no limits,” let us take away its incorporation. Let us outlaw its very existence.

If billionaires insist on doing whatever they like with the billions that we earned for them, let us tax them into millionaires.

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And welfare?
Let us put everyone in society on welfare.
Let us build everyone parks and common facilities
and schools, and environmentally clean places, and fresh air,
and fresh water, and sound ground
and nutritious food,
and safe products of every sort.

Yes, let us put everyone on welfare
by giving everyone a minimal safety net,
for all may fall, at any moment,
in this fast changing era,
into dire needs.

Yes, let us assure everyone
of a minimum of elemental support
whether they wish to work or not
whether they can work or not
whether they are sane or not
drunk or not
children or not
elderly or not

Let us decide together
county by county
what that minimum support shall be,
and let us take pleasure
(those of us who have
more than the minimum)
in sharing our more
with those who have
less than the minimum.

And let us also honor work,
socially meaningful work.
Let us spread the privilege of work,
and let each of us be properly rewarded for our meaningful work.
Let those who work receive more than the minimum of social support.

But as we work for our proper remuneration,
let us not loose sight
of the truth that good work is fun,
that good work is a privilege,
the privilege of serving
our sister and brother humans
and our sister and brother living beings
with contributions
that are meaningful
to them
and therefore to us.
Work is not a curse
or a necessary evil—
the not doing of which
makes us unworthy—
unworthy of social support,
unworthy of basic esteem.

Our existence alone
makes us worthy of support.
Work, meaningful work is a privilege
and meaningful work needs
to be economically supported
so we can keep on doing
this meaningful work.

If our work is not meaningful,
if it is destructive or unnecessary,
let us refuse to do it.
Let us starve;
let us go homeless;
yes, let us even walk, rather than ride,
before we do meaningless work.

But more than that, let all of us
who have the privilege of meaningful work
make certain that no one starves
that no one goes homeless
that no one is denied the minimum
of transportation, health care
cultural enrichment, and meaningful work.

Yes, that is my politics:
PUT ALL OF US ON WELFARE,
for each of us may need it.
And let us make this welfare
an affirmation of our existence
not a disgraceful condition
or a temptation to
lazy indulgence.

And let us admit that all of us are lazy,
that all of us are indulgent,
the billionaire as well as
the impoverished dope head
roaming the streets
in a daze.

Let us admit that the
billionaire is also in a daze
the daze of having no limits.
Let us cure the billionaire
of this daze
by assisting him or her
to support the minimum
needs of everyone who exists,
as well as the needs of the Whole-Earth dynamic
that makes serving human needs
(and frog needs)
possible.

Let us convince
the billionaires
and even the millionaires
that only a small part
of their wealth is their very own
to do with whatever they like.
The rest of their wealth
is a public trust
a pool of public, not private, possibilities
which they must work out
with the rest of us.

Indeed, let us move toward
the realization that all
accumulations of wealth
are a public achievement
and a public trust
with which to serve the public
and to serve the public
as the public itself
chooses to be served.

Yes, let us piss on the private sector,
to whatever extent the private sector
does not voluntarily
abolish its private omnipotence
in public
service.

Axiom number two: A viable human equity depends upon putting concern for the life-
supporting features of planet Earth ahead of the well-being of any human institution or any
group of human beings.

We can illustration this truth with the urgent necessity for a planet-wide curtailment
of fossil-fuel burning for the sake of moderating the impending climate-caused
catastrophes. If we don’t do this, we might as well start conducting funerals for the
human species. In order to provide an alternative future we must overcome
widespread denial of the impending outcome of climate catastrophe – a denial being
lavishly paid for by wealthy oil companies and other fossil-fuel-related industries.

The climate-change disaster is only one (a key one) of many more also devastating
prospects – for example: the pollution, waste, and needless uses of the limited fresh-
water supplies; the misuse of rivers and oceans; overfishing; the destruction of forests;
the rape of soil conditions; the elimination of species diversity; the neglect of air quality;
the poisoning of food supplies; the loss of native seeds; and this list is gruesomely
longer.

All these are big transitions. Let us imagine what it would be like to engage in a full
dealing with the global-warming crisis. The fossil-fuel industries are dedicated to selling
all the product they have discovered and upon which sales they have built their long-
range business plans. The prospect of leaving some of that treasure in the ground does
not fit into their thinking. Bill McKibbin has pointed out that we can dare to burn only
about a fifth of the fossil fuel products already discovered. Yet these fossil fuel
companies not only insist on selling what is already discovered but expanding their search into the extremes of ocean depths, tar sands extraction, and sensitive environment reserves. This addictive behavior has to be forcefully stopped. At some point in the very near future, those who realistically care about a responsible future have to consider the current behavior of these huge corporations as criminal actions. We have to pass laws that counter big corporation control of our future. This legal shift can begin now by eliminating the tax breaks and other perks governments currently provide these publicly pampered companies. In response to the quite likely failure of fossil-fuel companies to cooperate with the needed transition, we realists will need to consider ever more serious legal restraints.

U.S. citizens also a foreign policy issues that affect the climate crisis. Near at home, the United States will have to deal severely with Canadian tar-sands oil—the most dirty fossil-fuel product, and a product that is in no way needed. This industry must be shut down. Hopefully something short of declaring war against this good neighbor will suffice. Nevertheless, every aspect of this vast transition will require a sternness on the part of the rising populist movements and their governmental representatives. Let no one claim that doing this transition is impossible, just because it is difficult. We are called by Reality to do the impossible, and to do so with deliberate speed.

With climate catastrophe we are not dealing with “other political positions;” we are dealing with physics, with the natural world, with that Final Reality that we all face in world history. We sometimes say that we must not mess with “Mother Nature.” Far too seldom do we notice that “Mother Nature” is a “face” of that Almighty Otherness of Christian devotion that we have barely begun to fully celebrate and obey.

Axiom number three: A viable human equity depends upon giving up the notion that civilization is a mode of social organization that needs to be saved.

In the popular mind, “being civilized” has become another term for “good society.” Actually, saving civilization is the problem, not the solution. Civilization is a mode of social organization that began to replace small tribal societies 6500 years ago. It is now the reigning social mode on planet Earth. But it is not the mode of social organization that will resolve our problems and provide humans with equity and viability for our species’ survival. Civilization was from its beginning a topdown, classist society with very wealthy privileged rulers at the top and with the vast majority of people relegated to some form of peasant, serf, or slave.

Another word for “civilization” is “empire.” Every empire is a civilization. And every civilization is also an empire—perhaps a somewhat less violent one, but every civilization rules over a segment of people and land, defends that people and land from other civilizations, and stand ready to expand its rule over more land and more people. The entire history of civilization is an imperial battlefield. Whatever may be the good elements that the civilization mode of social organization has enabled, a civilization is characterized by topdown governance, vast inequalities of wealth, and a uniformity of culture that is oppressive toward some of its own people and most of its neighbors.

The end of being civilized does not mean some sort of negative opposite called “uncivilized.” There is no opposite to civilization just as there is no opposite to tribal society. Tribal society and civilization are nothing more than two forms of social organization. There is no reason why there cannot be a third major form of social organization. Kenneth Boulding introduced to me the category “post civilization” to go along with “pre-civilization” and “civilization.” We can count the democratic revolutions as first steps in the dismantling of civilization. Our so-called democratic civilizations are part way efforts toward the full dismantlement of the civilization mode of social organization. We need a fully democratic-post-civilization social vehicle to ride our way out of our present contract with doom. Our ecological movements have also
been part way efforts toward the full dismantlement of the civilization mode of social organization. We need a fully eco-sane-post-civilization social vehicle to carry us to any sort of promising future.

Civilizations are not survivable. Our choice is not a good civilization in place of a bad civilization. Our choices are: (1) riding the vehicle of civilization off the cliffs of doom or (2) building of a survivable, post-civilization mode of organizing the human species.

Democratic movements and institutionalized practices have improved human life on Earth, but they have not yet fully changed the basic character of what we call “civilization.” Our so-called democratic civilizations are not yet democratic, and democracy is not yet viewed as a form of dismantlement of civilization. In addition to being topdown, civilizations have been and continue to be warmongering and police-states against their own citizens for the sake of a law and order that supports and favors the prosperity of their upper classes. Furthermore, the civilization mode promotes a cultural uniformity that is deeply biased against thoroughgoing diversity – often to a genocidal degree as was the case in U.S. society with Native American cultures and African slaves. We can also call to memory the German Nazi treatments of Jews, the horrific tensions between Irish Catholics and Protestants, the senseless slaughters between Sub-Asian Hindus and Muslims, the wars among Sunni and Shia Muslim cultures, the fights between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Hindus, and let us not forget the perpetual war between the state of Israel and their Palestinian neighbors. These various cultures must learn respect each other and live together in peace. The core problem is that these societies are “civilized.” This insistent uniformity is what “civilized” looks like. We are confronting challenges no less far-reaching than dismantling every civilization and finding a different word than “civilized” for the good society.

The Muslim “terrorists” that we USers so fully demonize are nothing more nor less than deeply-hurt people defending and promoting their own obsolete version of civilization with foolish and desperately violent strategies. And we who parade what we call “the American way-of-life” are doing something similar: defending and promoting our civilization. If we truly want to be on God’s side (on Final Reality’s side), we have to oppose civilization itself in all its forms, including our own. The desperate militarism of the Muslim extremists is futile and silly. But also, the U.S. expectation to control the world with an overgrown military establishment is equally futile and silly. Perhaps there are needs, and will always be a need, for carefully chosen military restraints carried out by international coalitions of power against genocidal crimes against humanity. Also, for the time being this can mean defending and supporting the “best” of civilizations against to “worst” of civilizations as an intermediate step. Nevertheless, the “best” of civilizations are those that are the most willing to end their character as expressions of the civilization mode of social organization. The best civilizations are societies that are opening themselves to becoming fully democratic and eco-sane alternatives to the social patterning we now call “civilization.”

Not you, not me, not them, not us, but Final Reality has assigned civilization to the scrape heap, to the sidelines of Earth history where it will eventually die. We do not face the choice of whether or not civilization is ending. We face the choice of whether humanity will die with civilization’s ending or whether we will build a different social vehicle in which to ride toward a vastly transformed life on planet Earth.

So let us begin now to mourn the loss of civilization. Civilization has been a useful companion for a while. We clearly value many things about civilization. Some of these values can be maintained in a fresh context. Some of these values cannot be kept, but have been good enough to deserve our tears. So let us mourn their loss; let us conduct
our funerals for civilization. Let us weep and wail for all those values to which we have clung, but must now set aside. Those who deny this need for the death of civilization may think they are making themselves happier, but they are actually hanging onto a deep despair that is eating their lunch, as well as their breakfast and dinner. Let us mourn perhaps, but not despair. Let us prepare an empty place in the core of our social-mode familiarities for the arrival of an unprecedented way of being human society on this planet. This is a hopeful proclamation, replacing futility with genuine possibility. Yet as we do this vast transition, we can also give thanks for all the benefits civilization has brought to us—expanded consciousness, useful technologies, cosmological vision, wider possibilities, and more. I repeat, many of these gifts can be repositioned within our new mode of society, but basic features of civilization will need to simply die and be buried. We must relinquish civilization if we want to survive and thrive as that most conscious species on this rare and beautiful planet. This is the judgment of God. Obeying this truth is realistic living for this moment in the course of social affairs.

**Citizenship**

The above three axioms imply a new form of citizenship. A fully democratic and eco-sane future depends on a new birth of citizenship. No longer can citizenship be limited to voting, obeying the laws, and being friendly. The citizenry we now require for envisioning and building a post-civilized society must be informed and have a sense of total responsibility for the whole of their society and their planet. This new citizen is a truth seeker, an educator of others, and a person engaged in an ongoing fight for a seat at the table of decision-making that will determine the course of Earth history.

We cannot all sit in the most expansive councils of government. Some decision making requires the representation of most of us by the most able among. This can be a true representation only if the citizenry insists upon being well represented. Allowing big money pools to choose our representatives is not democracy: it is a form of aristocratic dictatorship.

Voting ever so often for the least bad of two or three predetermined options is not enough to qualify one as a citizen of a democracy. A true citizen participates in the overall consensus building for the future course of history. And consensus building is something deeper than majority rule. Choices made through majority voting is an improvement over strict royalty rule. Majority rule can be a useful means of enacting the consensus of the people, but it is a highly approximate method. Majority rule can be easily corrupted by big money ownership of the means of communication and representative selection into a pretense of democracy. Rather, this new citizenry must learn consensus building and start building a workable forward-looking consensus among neighbors, local organizations, towns, cities, counties, regions, areas, continents, as well as across the whole planet. Consensus does not mean total agreement. A workable consensus always includes dissenting members. A workable consensus is a proposal for seeing and acting that is widely accepted as workable for now and includes a respect for those loyal dissenters who agree to view their dissent as more relevant to the next stage of the consensus-building process. Consensus building is a dynamic, ongoing process. And consensus building implies an agreement that we are all ignorant of any final truth that has dropped from heaven or originated in some greedy cult of egoic opinion. In consensus building we are seeking operational truth on the basis of what we actually know, scientifically and contemplatively, about ourselves and our historical challenges. Consensus building is not a battle between rigid dogmas and opinionated bigots. Consensus building is a quest for ever more truth to live by. Citizenship is an insistence on perpetually bringing fresh consensed-upon truth into social empowerment.
Finally, these new citizens will not indulge themselves in a localism that excludes the global or in a globalism that excludes the local. Democracy needs to be realized at every scope of sociological formation and governing. Even imagining a full-blown democracy for humanity across the whole planet is a challenging project, but it must be faced, worked out, and accomplished. It is true that consensus-building is easiest in a group of five or twelve. With 150 people, consensus processes cannot be usefully conducted without carefully designed and well-learned structures. With an entire region of 150 million, the task of democracy is even more complex. With a whole continent of humanity, consensus building can seem impossible. Nevertheless, a planet-wide democracy of many independent continents, regions, and neighborhoods is the way forward. Without a planet-responsible citizenship who are building and enacting consensus processing from the grassroots to the planetary scope, no way forward for humanity is possible. Such citizenship begins with you and me. This is the Word of God. This is the truth with which Reality is confronting us in the course of real history. Its seeming impossibility has to be made possible.