Addressing

our

Uncertain Future

by

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An Epigraph of Sorts

This eBook is about both our problematic future and how it might be addressed, and offers a replacement for Christianity. Given the latter fact, here is a passage from a book that I love:[1]

"Don't like Christianity much do you?" I [Kent Nerburn] said.

"That's not true," he ["Dan"] retorted. "I like Jesus. Ever since I was a little boy and I learned about him I liked him. He was wakan. He should have been an Indian."

It was a sentiment I had heard before.

"He didn't own anything," Dan continued. "He slept outside on the earth. He moved around all the time. He shared everything he got. He even talked to the Great Spirit as his Father. He was just like an Indian.

"I love him, Nerburn. I still love him. I still talk to him. Those were things I learned from the [Catholic] priests and sister. They were good.

"But I don't like what the churches did to my people. When I see Indians standing in front of crosses it makes me sad. It is like they are such good people and their belief is so strong. Why can't it still be our old belief? Why was that taken away from us? The old ones shouldn't have to be begging Jesus to listen to them."

He shifted slightly in his seat so he could see my reaction. I gave none.

"I guess it's a good thing Jesus wasn't an Indian," he continued.

"The U. S. government would have hunted him down and killed him. They would have killed him like they killed Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. Just another dead Indian troublemaker."

(I have added the links.)

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[1] Kent Nerburn, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With an Indian Elder*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1994, pp. 181 -182.

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Preface

This eBook represents a convergence of my two primary concerns—our problematic future as humans, and the fact that Christianity reflects the "New Testament" poorly.[2] This might seem like an odd combination, but as one who grew up in the West—in the sense of *Western world* (Wisconsin especially—but I have also lived in North Carolina, Maryland, and Ohio), it is virtually inevitable that I would have been influenced in my thinking *about many things* by the *Bible*—with its "fantastic world" created in language, as Leonard L. Thompson (not a relative) has put it.[3] For as Thomas L. Thompson (*also* not a relative—except in the sense that we are *all* ultimately related), has noted:[4]

> Biblical texts are important because they have formed our consciousness and our language. They are the foundational remnants of an intellectual tradition common to the Western World. This language has provided us with a tradition of integrity, of criticism, and reform.

What I do in this eBook is *continue* that tradition (in *intellectual*—as opposed to *practical*—terms, at least), especially under the heading "reform"—by introducing a new religion—"*NeWFism*"[5] (centered on what I call the *New Word Fellowship*)—that religion better expressing the "thrust" (as I conceive it) of the New Testament than Christianity as it now exists. Having been raised in Protestantism—and being a member of a United Presbyterian church at present—I am familiar with the phrase "always reformed, ever reforming," and regard this eBook as

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[2] Christianity is not, of course, monolithic, for it consists of a number of separate "denominations," with members of some denominations not regarding certain other denominations (Mormonism and Unitarian Universalism being examples) as "genuinely" Christian. Each Christian denomination presumably perceives itself as having some relationship with the New Testament, but from *my* perspective (with which many are likely to disagree!) they *vary* in how well they reflect the New Testament, with *none* of them reflecting it adequately.

[3] *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978, p. xv.

[4] *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archeology and the Myth of Israel*. New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 388.

[5] So far, this religion exists only "on paper;" *that's* what I mean in stating that whatever my contribution is here, it is of an *intellectual* rather than *practical* nature. As I indicate in Section VI, I have no plans actually to *initiate* the religion—but not because I don't *believe* in it wholeheartedly.

continuing that reform Tradition.[6] There is, however, irony here in that my interest is not so much (not at *all*, in fact!) in reforming *Presbyterianism* as in introducing a *new religion* entirely!

The institution that is the centerpiece of NeWFism was introduced in two previous eBooks, *What are Churches* For*?* (dated August 11, 20111—in which I referred to it as a "Structured Interaction Group," or SIG), and *A Religion for Today* (dated May 25, 2013—in which I referred to the institution as a New Word Fellowship, or NeWF).[7] Thus, the novelty of the present eBook lies not so much in presenting a *new institution*, as in *discussing* that institution from a perspective that differs somewhat from the one used in the two earlier eBooks.

Although I perceive the NeWF as having the potential of forming the basis of a new religion, I would emphasize that my interest is *not* in creating a new religion *just for the sake of creating a new religion*. I *do* genuinely believe that NeWFism reflects the "thrust" of the New Testament well—better than does Christianity as it exists currently. More importantly, however, I believe that *participation* in NeWF sessions would have the potential of having a variety of positive *consequences*—not only for the participants *as individuals*, but for our *society*, and even for our *species*.

Regarding the latter, I believe that participation in NeWF sessions has the potential of addressing our problematic future as humans in a meaningful way—a matter that has been uppermost in my mind for some time, as one having five grandchildren, and being terribly concerned about their future.

Basic to the NeWF is a certain concept of "God," one that departs somewhat from the prevailing concept—in that it can be thought of as a more highly "evolved"[8] concept.. Because of that fact, I devote Section II below to the "God" concept *per se*, and then in Section III not only discuss the NeWF as an institution, but the concept—*concepts*, actually—of God associated with that institution.

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[6] I am also familiar with the term *Sola scriptura* (i.e., "by Scripture alone), but accept that concept only in a limited sense—as it is interpreted, e.g., in the first subsection of Section III below.

[7] I have drawn some passages for the present eBook from both of the earlier ones, which fact has likely resulted in some inconsistencies, etc., in the present eBook. I have not found it necessary, however, to try to remove whatever inconsistencies that exist in the present eBook—as I have not been able to convince myself that they are all that significant.

[8] The "God" concept *has* evolved—not only with the ancient Hebrews, but with other peoples as well— but with a "lag." This lag has likely been for a variety of reasons, including the fact that clerical leaders and governing elites have had a *vested interest* in the retention of the existing concept(s) of "God." Of course, the term "lag" implies the value judgment that change that *should* be occurring is *not* in fact— which implication expresses well my current assessment of the matter!

I suspect that most Christians, in reading the Bible, *impose* a certain concept on the Bible and thereby fail to perceive the fact that a number of *different* concepts of "God" have been "deposited" in the Bible by its various writers/redactors over the years: Although many Christians may *believe* that the Bible came into existence *suddenly*, the fact of the matter is that it developed over a long period of time, and involved the independent writing and merging of a number of different works—the actual facts of the Bible's composition remaining, though, a controversial matter. One (unsurprising) result of the Bible's complex history—from a compositional standpoint—is that "God" is given different meanings in different parts of the Bible. The importance of *that* fact, for my purposes here, is that helps provide a rationale—and justification—for the "unconventional" concept of "God" that I associate with the NeWF.

The relationships explored in this eBook are depicted by the figure below, where S1[9] is the religious institution being proposed. I perceive that institution as not only *a* (if not *the*) solution to Problem 2 (P2)—the fact (in my opinion) that Christianity does not reflect the New Testament well—but also (and more importantly) as having the potential of being a *vehicle* for developing ideas regarding how to address the threat that exists to our future (P1) as humans. That is,
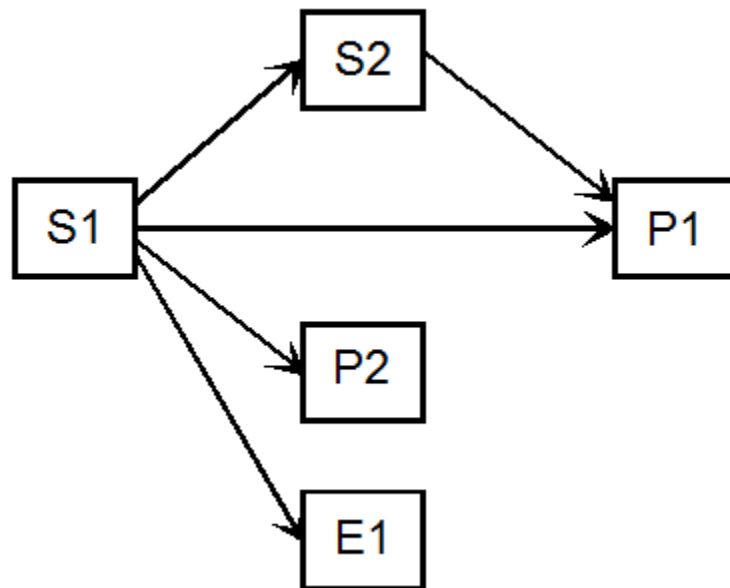
NeWFism, as I perceive it, is not a religion of the "pie in the sky" variety but, rather, has potential *practical* value—i.e., it can be *useful*. Some may regard such a claim as bordering on blasphemy, but I make no apologies for it—and at a later point (in Section III) quote Carl G. Jung in support of it!

As the figure indicates, I perceive the religious institution in question as not only having the potential of being the basis of a new religion ("NeWFism") and addressing the primary problem (P1) we currently face as a species, but also as having the potential of being a vehicle for designing and creating a *second* institution (S2)—which is so labeled because I perceive that institution in *solution* terms—as, indeed, having even *more* potential for addressing, in a meaningful way, the threat to our future as humans than the NeWF

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[9] The "S" here stands for "solution," meaning that I perceive the NeWF as a solution to the problem that Christianity does not reflect the New Testament well.

per se.[10] Finally, participation in the religious institution proposed can, I believe, have a variety of positive effects for participants (E1) as *individuals* and for the *societies* within which they live, and those possibilities are given attention in Section IV.

The organization of this eBook is as follows (the Roman numerals referring to Section numbers):

I. Introduction—in which the two problems of interest here are identified and discussed briefly. The two problems: The threat posed to us humans specifically by global warming,[11] and the fact that Christianity does not reflect the New Testament well.

II. The "God" concept is given attention—with emphasis on the fact that "God" is conceived variously in different parts of the Bible. That is, "God" is *not* given a single, clear meaning in the Bible—despite what many Christians seem to believe.

III. On developing a New Testament religion. I begin this section by noting one possible avenue for doing this (one consistent with, if not actually being, the path that members of the Society of Friends—i.e., Quakers—have taken), followed by the approach that *I* suggest.

IV. Implications of participation in the institution proposed—for those involved in NeWF sessions—in terms of .how they may *feel*, *think*, etc., and the *behaviors* that they may engage in (either as individuals or as members of small groups) as a result.

V. A *second* implication of such participation—that it might result in the development of *ideas* for creating another institution useful for addressing (and more *directl*y) the problem of global warming eco-communities, the cooperative eco-community. What I focus on in this section is design criteria for the second institution. I include in that section a discussion of what I regard to be the *fundamental* problem facing us humans, The Discrepancy (which problem does not appear on the figure above). That concept then becomes the basis for a discussion of "human design specifications." The rationale for the latter discussion is my conviction that eco-communities should be designed not only with global warming in mind, but be designed to maximize the

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[10] It addresses that problem by promoting the creation of a new institution, the proliferation of which would result in the replacement of the Existing Order by a New Society. Given the rottenness of the Existing Order—chronicled well by, e.g., Chris Hedges in his columns, such as this one—why would one *not* be in favor of societal system change?!

[11] My solution to the global warming, note, is of an *institutional* nature. The conventional answer to this problem is geo-engineering, but that approach has serious flaws. In fact, geo-engineering measures might create *new* problems that would simply make our continued existence as a species more tenuous than it already is.

well-being of their residents—*that* requiring that their "design specifications as humans be met.

VI.   Conclusions.

My message here in brief:

Global warming will be causing societal collapse and, thereby, a horrendous loss of human life within the next few decades (if not years!)—***whether or not we want to this to occur***. In addressing this likelihood I recommend the creation of two institutions relative to addressing this problem. First, I recommend the creation of New Word Fellowships as a vehicle for developing *ideas* for addressing this problem—while incidentally serving as the basis for a new religion (NeWFism), one more reflective of the New Testament than is Christianity (I would argue). Second, NeWF sessions *could*, conceivably, lead to the development of *ideas* for creating, and then *actually building*, for NeWF participants, another sort of institution, the cooperative eco-community—which institution would more *directly* address the threat of global warming. Following these suggestions will not *guarantee* that one will be able to survive the ravages of global warming, but I know of no *better* way to address that problem.

Section I: Two Problems

As I noted in the Preface, what motivated the writing of this eBook is my concern for two problems—our problematic future as humans, and the fact that Christianity does not reflect the New Testament well. My *principal* objective here, however, is with offering *solutions* to both of those problems.[12] First, however, I need to say a few words about the problems themselves.

Our Problematic Future

The future looks extremely bleak—although few seem to recognize this rather strong possibility: Most people seem to be living their lives under the (tacit) assumption that *tomorrow* will be much like today, the day *after* tomorrow likewise, etc. Even if one looks several *decades* into the future (as one does, e.g., while planning to make mortgage payments on a house), one tends to assume that little change will occur between now and then—certainly not the sort of change that would affect one's *way of life*—or even *very life*—significantly.

Such an assumption about the decades ahead would, however, appear to be grossly in error—and *making* that assumption regarding the next few decades is likely to have tragic consequences for those who do so. Why? Consider, first, the following facts (derived from a recent eBook by Thom Hartmann). So far in earth's history there have been five major extinction events:

1. About 450 million years ago (when most life was sea life) about 60 – 70 % of all life was destroyed—the so-called Ordovician-Silurian Mass Extinction.

2. About 375 million years ago about 70% of all life was destroyed during the Devonian Mass Extinction.

3. The Permian Mass Extinction of about 250 million years ago was truly a massive extinction, because *95% of all life then existing was destroyed*!

4.   The Triassic-Jurassic Mass Extinction occurred about 200 million years ago.

5. Finally, there was the Cretaceous-Tertiary (or Paleogene) Mass Extinction of 65 million years ago (this one "doing in" the dinosaurs).

Hartmann then notes that **"The sixth extinction may even rival the speed and intensity of the great Permian Mass Extinction. It's "*the one happening today*." (italics added)**

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[12] Perhaps because my dad was a carpenter, my orientation tends to be more to creating than to criticizing—to building more than to tearing down.

This is a sobering statement, indeed! But what does he *mean* by it? Let us next, then, try to *answer* that question.

Although incidents such as the recent [Fukushima disaster](#) pose a definite threat to humans,[13] the threat that Hartmann is referring to in his eBook is that associated with ***[global warming](#)***.[14] The injection of more and more heat energy into the atmosphere as a result of burning fossil fuels adds "[greenhouse gases](#)" to the atmosphere, which "trap" more and more of the long-wave energy emitted from earth.[15] That extra heat energy in the atmosphere not only has the result of tending to (a) increase (in *trend* terms) the mean temperature of the atmosphere, but resulting, e.g., in (b) an increase the *number* of storms, (c) an increase in their *severity*, and (d) more erratic weather conditions (so that our ability to *predict* the weather is reduced). **Note that all four of these phenomena are involved in what is called "global warming," not just warming *per se*.**

What makes the global warming that is occurring *at present* so ominous is that—as Hartmann points out—scientists are increasingly coming to recognize **that *global warming was involved in the mass extinctions of the past*.** *That* fact makes highly believable the possibility that the global warming that is occurring *now* will have the ***same result***—with *our* species being one of its possible victims.

That global warming *does* pose an ominous threat to us humans in the near future has been made clear by Dahr Jamail in his recent—and excellent—"[Are We Falling Off the Climate Precipice?.](#)" This article offers a number of chilling statements regarding global warming,[16] including the following:

> [Some climate scientists} think that, if the record ongoing releases of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, thanks to the burning of fossil fuels, are aided and abetted by massive releases of methane, an even more powerful greenhouse gas, life as we humans have known it might be at an end on this planet. They fear that we may be at—and over—a climate change precipice hair-raisingly quickly.

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[13] *Thom Hartmann has also raised the possibility of economic collapse in 2016, in his [The Crash of 2016](#): The Plot to Destroy America—And What We Can Do About It* (2013). Kirkpatrick Sale [has identified](#) 2020 as the relevant date, however. For a related essay see Alan Nasser's "[Why FDR Did Not End the Great Depression—and Why Obama Won't End This One](#)."

[14] This morning (January 7, 2014) it was -16° F. here in Milwaukee, so that it is somewhat ironic to be discussing global *warming* here! However, as I noted in my "[Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#)," "global warming" is a misleading term for the phenomenon in question, given that it involves not only a *trend* in atmospheric warming, but, e.g., increased variability in atmospheric conditions—what might, I suppose, be termed "declimatization"!

[15] [Deforestation](#) also contributes to global warming, I should add here.

[16] I recognize the irony involved in referring to "bad news" about global *warming* as "chilling"!

We are currently in the midst of what scientists consider the sixth mass extinction in planetary history, with between 150 and 200 species going extinct daily, a pace 1,000 times greater than the "natural" or "background" extinction rate. This event may already be comparable to, or even exceed, both the speed and intensity of the Permian mass extinction. The difference being that ours is human caused, isn't going to take 80,000 years, has so far lasted just a few centuries, and is now gaining speed in a non-linear fashion.

Some scientists fear that the situation is already so serious and so many self-reinforcing feedback loops are already in play that we are in the process of causing our own extinction. Worse yet, some are convinced that it could happen far more quickly than generally believed possible—even in the course of just the next few decades.

A briefing provided to the failed U.N. Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in 2009 provided this summary: "The long-term sea level that corresponds to current CO2 concentration [what is referred to as "climate commitment" by some] is about 23 meters above today's levels, and the temperatures will be 6 degrees C or more higher. These estimates are based on real long-term climate records, not on models."

Wildlife Service biologist Neil Dawe . . . in August told a reporter that he wouldn't be surprised if the generation after him witnessed the extinction of humanity. All around the estuary near his office on Vancouver Island, he has been witnessing the unraveling of "the web of life," and "it's happening very quickly."

Here's the question: Could some version of extinction or near-extinction overcome humanity, thanks to climate change—and possibly incredibly fast? Similar things have happened in the past. Fifty-five million years ago, a five degree Celsius rise in average global temperatures seems to have occurred in just 13 years, according to a study published in the October 2013 issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. A report in the August 2013 issue of *Science* revealed that in the near-term Earth's climate will change 10 times faster than at any other moment in the last 65 million years.

While the human body is potentially capable of handling a six to nine degree Celsius rise in the planetary temperature, the crops and habitat we use for food production are not. As [Guy] McPherson [17] put it, "If we see a 3.5 to 4C baseline increase, I see no way to have habitat. We are at .85C above baseline and we've already triggered all these self-reinforcing feedback loops."

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[17] Dr. Guy McPherson is emeritus professor of Evolutionary Biology, Natural Resources, and Ecology at the University of Arizona. He maintains a web site, "Nature Bats Last."

Despite the fact that many scientists are extremely worried about the future of life on earth, one senses no *alarm* about the future by our politicians (such as Pres. O'Bomber[18]) and other "leaders"—or even by those who report the daily weather! In addition, the mainstream press does little to *educate* the public regarding global warming—and well-funded "deniers" have been making a concerted effort to "convert" people to their way of thinking.[19]

Not only do few seem to be *worried* about the future; as a consequence, one senses no urgency in *addressing* this problem. Therefore, it is **entirely within the realm of possibility that our species will "extinguish" itself within a few decades** via the "greenhouse" gases that it has been pouring into the atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (starting around 1750 CE), the buildup of those gases in the atmosphere causing the global warming that is occurring currently.[20]

I realize that it is difficult to *visualize* the changes that could be occurring in the next few decades, and therefore addressed this matter in my "Lovelock's Limitations" and, to a lesser degree, my "Learning From *Soylent Green.*" I felt it necessary to write these two essays because the scientists who have been making projections about global warming, and how it might affect us humans, have failed to present *scenarios of change*—an unsurprising fact given that their expertise in climatology has no relevance for developing scenarios of societal change. I will grant that my discussion of change in these two essays is brief, but has sufficient content (I hope) to make the reader realize the "seriousness of the future"—and then begin thinking about how to *respond* to that seriousness.

I should note that scientists Mark Z. Jacobson and Mark A. Delucchi, in a 2009 *Scientific American* article, presented "A Plan to Power 100 Percent of the Planet with Renewables—wind, water, and solar technologies." Were their plan put into effect—and soon!—it's *conceivable* that disaster could be averted, or at least be rendered less damaging. However, given that their plan would need *governmental backing*—not only in the United States, but in other countries as well—the likelihood of their plan being implemented is *close to zero*. Even if governments *would* decide to back such a program, the likelihood is that their efforts would do "too little, too late," I fear.

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[18] For negative comments on O'Bomber from a different perspective see Paul Gottinger's interview of William Blum. Blum has an excellent website, and issues free monthly reports. Blum is the author of such books as *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*.

[19] What is particularly distressing—and infuriating!—is that some "deniers" are bringing law suits against climate scientists (Michael Mann being an example).

[20] I would hazard the guess that our species is more likely to become extinct as the result of global warming than because gays have been given rights!

Our political leaders (here in the United States, at any rate) seem to be "under the thumb" of corporate leaders and wealthy individuals (such as the Koch brothers)—for whom, strangely,[21] the only future seems to be next quarter's "bottom line." Given this, it seems to me that only a fool would look to our political "leaders" for relevant leadership. The tragedy, however, is that **there may not, in fact, be *any* solution to the problem of global warming that faces us currently**; but *if* there is, it lies, I believe, with *individuals* (a) recognizing the threat posed by global warming, and (b) then acting to (*attempt* to) *adapt* to the changes that will be inevitably occurring.

What lies ahead, I believe strongly, is the equivalent of the flood in the Biblical story. But the "flood" that *we* face will differ from the flood of Genesis in at least two respects. First, the (mythical) Genesis flood was a result of human "wickedness":

> [5] The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. [6] The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. [7] So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." [8] But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

The *direct* cause of *our* "flood," in contrast, will have been our "pouring" of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since about 1750 CE via our burning of fossil fuels; the *ultimate* cause, however, will have been blindness, ignorance, selfishness, and ideological drivenness on the part of our "leaders"—business and political—along with the failure of the media to inform the public adequately as to the dire situation that we are in. The importance of that latter fact is that if the public *were* made fully aware of the dangerous situation that we humans are currently in, pressure might be put on our "leaders" to *respond* to this threat in a meaningful manner.

I realize that our brains are not "designed"[22] so that we can readily peer realistically into the future. I *do* believe, however, that if the public were better informed by the media regarding the perilous nature of our situation, there would be *some* possibility that relevant governmental action would be forthcoming. However, I also believe that if governments *would* become involved, its efforts would be "too little, too late"—or might even be such as to *exacerbate* our problems!

A second difference between the "flood" that *we* face today and the flood of the Genesis story is that Noah and his family escaped death, but in *our* case it's entirely possible that global warming

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[21] I say "strangely" because such people will not be able to escape the effects of global warming. They may be able to use to resources to survive longer than most others, but in the end their wealth and power will prove useless.

[22] Our "design specifications" as humans are discussed in some detail in Section V.

will render our species _extinct_ (along with most other species, of course). Despite this (very strong) possibility, we must not let it deter us from at least _trying_ to "save" ourselves.

I find it interesting that John Todd and his wife Nancy Jack Todd—co-founders of the New Alchemy Institute and Ocean Arks International—in developing "bioshelters" as "living machines"—chose to apply the Biblical term "ark" to their research efforts. For what is needed today, I have become convinced, if people are to have any hope of being "saved" from the ravages of global warming, is to make an "Exodus" (see this for a famous example) from today's equivalent of Egypt (i.e., the Larger Society), doing so by creating today's equivalent of an ark (if I may mix two Biblical stories here!)

I say much more about this matter in Section V, but at this point would say simply that individuals can engage in adaptive activities by either (a) acting as individuals or families (and, e.g., becoming homesteaders), or (b) joining with others in small groups to create communities (_eco_-communities, specifically) for themselves designed (1) with the ravages of global warming in mind, and (2) to be as self-sufficient,[23] economically, as possible[24]—given that global warming is likely to cause societal collapse throughout the world. _When_ (not _if_!) that occurs, unless one can produce for one's own needs (as an individual, a family unit, or a community), one will likely die a premature death.[25] Unfortunately, **even if one does one's _best_ to survive, one may fail**—but, again, we must not allow that possibility to put our minds into a state of resignation and "acceptance of the inevitable."

Having long ago concluded that the only answer to most of our problems as humans is societal system change[26] (of the right sort), in 1984 (a year made famous by George Orwell!) I published a strategy/scenario for how to "convert" our society into one of eco-communities—and am still

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[23] "Community-sufficient" would be a more apt term here.

[24] In addition, I would add that communities should be designed with human "design specifications" in mind—a topic that I address in Section V.

[25] As Jared Diamond has noted, societal collapse has been a fairly common phenomenon in human history. Societal collapse is likely to occur on a worldwide scale within a few decades (or even years), that collapse being unprecedented in being accompanied by a horrendous culling of the world's population.

[26] As will be seen later in this eBook, I am in agreement with Bruce Lesnick, who has stated: "To address anthropogenic climate change, capitalism will have to be replaced as the dominant world economic system. How do we know this? Well, we know that eliminating ongoing exposure to a poison is a prerequisite for curing an illness due to poisoning. We know that any hope of modifying a dog's aggressive behavior requires, at a minimum, that you stop rewarding the animal when it bites someone. In short, we know that to solve a problem you must eliminate the causes before you can hope to effectively treat the symptoms." Related to Lesnick's point here is Richard Smith's "Green Capitalism: The God That Failed." Also, see this video.

in basic agreement with that strategy/scenario. That strategy/scenario used the "pull" and "push" concepts from migration theory[27] to develop a "pull-push-pull-push-drag" (!) strategy/scenario of societal system change.[28]

In developing the strategy/scenario I perceived the process of societal system change in *geographical* terms,[29] so that "waves" rather than "stages" seemed to be the most appropriate *label* for the phases of change. In addition, I assumed that of the "nine American lifestyles" identified by Arnold Mitchell, it was his "Societally Conscious" and "Experientials" who would be the best candidates for leadership in developing a New Society. Finally, I argued that the vanguard would need to consist especially of people in those two categories who had incomes independent of jobs (I had retirees in mind especially)—so that they could be potentially mobile.

Having made those decisions I perceived societal system change in terms of five "waves"—each with a certain more-or-less definite "constituency," as follows:

> **Wave One**: "Societally Conscious" and "Experiential" retirees (aware of the threat to our human future posed by global warming). That is, individuals potentially subject to the "pull" factor.
>
> **Wave Two**: Retirees not in either of those two categories, but having a lower income, and therefore potentially subject to the "push" factor—finding the possibility of moving to an eco-community more attractive than their current residential situation. (Given that our society is becoming increasingly "rotten," Wave Two *could*, potentially, involve a "flood"!)
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> **Wave Three**: Non-retired "Societally Conscious" and "Experiential" people who, in observing what was occurring during the first two "waves," decided that they would either move to an

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[27] While an M.A. student at the University of North Carolina, I did some (Population) course work under Dr. Daniel Price—and did a seminar in Human Ecology with Dr. Rupert Bayless Vance.

[28] I should add that the inspiration for developing this strategy/scenario came from Robert Owen, of whom it has been said: "Robert Owen advocated the transformation of society into small, local collectives without such elaborate systems of social organization [as existing societies have]." What I have done, with my strategy/scenario, is to suggest a *means* to the end envisioned by Owen. Put another way, whereas *Owen* seemed to have confidence in the "city upon a hill" theory (i.e., the idea that if you create one, it will be so attractive that others will *copy* it), *I* am convinced that that theory needs a "boost"!

I should add that Russian Geographer Peter Kropotkin later presented ideas similar to those of Owen, in, e.g., his *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1898),

[29] This should not be surprising given that I have a Ph. D. in Urban Economic Geography from the University of Cincinnati (1970).

existing eco-community that welcomed new residents, or establish eco-communities for themselves. People, that is, for whom the "pull" factor was also operating.

Wave Four: Working-class individuals—whether employed or unemployed—dissatisfied with their existing lives, so that the "push" factor might motivate them to move to an existing eco-community that would welcome their presence—and provide them with a way of life in which social-class distinctions would be basically non-existent.[30]

Wave Five: Once the Movement in question had reached a certain "critical mass," those remaining would have lost their economic support—given that most of the "host" would have abandoned the Larger Society by this point in time—so that the "parasites" remaining would be forced to either (a) migrate to a different society (i.e., one that would tolerate such people) or (2) join an existing eco-community. If they chose the second option, they would be "dragged" from the Existing Order. It should be noted, however, that such people would be able to join an existing eco-community *only* if they were willing to give up the notion that they must live in a class-based society within which they could be parasites.

A point that must be emphasized here is that it appears virtually inevitable that global warming will "cull" *most* of the world's population within a few decades—or at least by the end of this century. Although it's possible that a "remnant" will survive, **it's also possible that *no one* will.** What *does* seem certain, however, is that *if* anyone survives, this will *only* occur because they have made an effort to *adapt*—in one of the two ways identified earlier—with the eco-communitarian option being the preferred one (if the New Society is to retain any semblance of civilization).

In making an analogy, a few pages back, with certain Biblical "events," it might be noted that I made no reference to a chief "character" in both the flood and Exodus stories—i.e., "God." This omission suggests the question: Do *I* see "God" playing any role in our "salvation" from the threat of global warming? And if so, (a) "God" given what *meaning*, and (b) *doing* what?

Because I *do*, in fact, perceive "God" playing a role in our (possible) "salvation," I use the next section—"Wrestling With 'God'"—to (among other things) *clarify* the meaning that I give to "God," and specify the role that I see "God" playing in our possible salvation.

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[30] Given the high rate of unemployment at present—with little prospect that conditions will improve in the near future—it's conceivable that if an eco-communitarian movement were to be inaugurated soon, it could attract large numbers of (currently) working-class people. The reason that I say "little prospect" is that our current president Barrack O'Bomber, has said: "[While] government has a critical role in creating the conditions for economic growth, ultimately true economic recovery is only going to come from the private sector." What this indicates is that O'Bomber—and other of our "leaders"—are in thrall to "free market" ideology, and therefore incapable of understanding what needs to be done to solve our economic problems. I should add that the quotation by O'Bomber was taken from the Alan Nasser article referred to earlier.

In Section III below I then discuss the matter of deriving a religion from the New Testament, and proceed to propose a new religion. As I noted in the Preface, however, the institution that I introduce in that section is one that I perceive not merely as a *religious* institution but as one that *could*, quite possibly, be a vehicle for addressing the threat of global warming (by small groups of people) in a meaningful way. Put another way, it could, quite possibly, be an institution that could be "*salvific*"! Given that (some) religions are supposedly about "salvation," this means that the institution in question could be regarded as religious in more than one sense!

Before proceeding to those topics I must, however, make a few comments relative to the problematic nature of Christianity.

Christianity as a Problem

This problem is, obviously, totally unrelated to the first problem (that of global warming)— except in the important sense that the *solution* to this problem has the potential of also being a solution—directly *and* (especially) indirectly—to the *first* problem, it being one of the purposes of this eBook to argue that point.

Let me begin here by noting that Christianity is a religion that is ostensibly based on the life and teachings of one Jesus of Nazareth (in what is now the state of Israel), who lived about 2000 years ago. As such, then, the religion should be called "Jesuanism" rather than "Christianity," for the latter term alludes to a *title* applied to Jesus, rather than his *name*. The title—*Christós*— means "'anointed') [and] is a translation of the Hebrew   (Māšîaḥ), the Messiah." Thus, the "Christ" in "Christianity" asserts that Jesus was *a* messiah, or *the* Messiah.

Evidently the first *written* source to refer to Jesus as "Christ" was I Corinthians 15:3 – 5,[31] written by Paul of Tarsus:

> [3] For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas,[b] and then to the Twelve.

However, "the use of the term ["Christ"] by Paul is odd. As Merrill Miller has shown, Paul understood Christos as a cognomen [see this for a discussion of that term] for Jesus (1999). He never used the term as a technical, titular, or predicate designation to define Jesus's special identity or role."[32] Thus, given that the earliest writings about Jesus go back to Paul, a man who

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[31] The book of Corinthians was evidently written in the city of Ephesus (on the west coast of present-day Turkey during the time period 53 – 57 CE.

[32] Burton L. Mack, *The Christian Myth* : *Origins, Logic, and Legacy*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2001, p. 113. The 1999 work by Merrill Miller cited by Mack is a paper, "The Anointed Jesus," prepared by Miller for the Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins, held in Boston, Massachusetts.

had never met Jesus (physically), and apparently did not think of Jesus as a, or the, Jewish messiah—but, rather, thought of Jesus in (pagan!) "savior" terms—it is a curious fact that the term "Christianity" came to be attached to the religion that developed in Jesus's name.[33]

As to Christianity as a *problem*—in that it does not reflect the New Testament well—a good starting point here is to assert that the religion *of* Jesus became, with Christianity, merely a religion *about* Jesus—i.e., something of a rather *different* nature. Such an assertion has at least two problems, however:

- There are innumerable scholarly, and other, *perspectives*[34] on the nature of Jesus's "ministry," but no *consensus* on the matter—in large part because of the paucity of evidence in support of any given perspective.

- Of even more significance is the fact that evidence for the very *existence* of Jesus is meager. Bart D. Ehrman, e.g., has recently argued that Jesus *did* exist, but Ehrman's argument has been questioned by some (e.g., by Thomas S. Verenna).

Given, however, that Irenaeus was able to identify a number of Jesuan "heresies" in his *Adversus Haereses* or *Against Heresies* (c. 180 CE), and that later Epiphanius of Salamis also provided a long list of "heresies," it is clear that in the early years of Jesuanism considerable diversity existed. *That* fact is compatible with the thesis that Jesus *did*, in fact, exist—for it would be difficult to explain why numerous Jesuan groups came into existence otherwise. The *nature* of Jesus's *religion* is, however, open to question—except that the (presumed) fact that he was raised in a Jewish setting would necessarily have affected his religious ideas.

If the "religion *of* Jesus" is not known in any definitive sense, it is nevertheless true—as Mark S. Smith points out in his *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient*

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[33] Paul apparently played an important role in Christianity's development, however. See, e.g., Eric Zuesse's recent—and controversial—Christ's Ventriloquists: The Event That Created Christianity for one person's view of the matter. Constantine I ("the Great") and Theodosius I ("the Great") did as well, of course.

[34] Mack (*op. cit.,* pp. 35 – 36) has stated, e.g.,: "We now have the Jesuses of Q1 (a Cynic-like sage), Q2 (a prophet of apocalyptic judgment), Thomas (a Gnostic spirit), the parables (a spinner of tales), the pre-Markan miracle stories (an exorcist and healer), Paul (a martyred messiah and cosmic lord), Mark (the son of God who appeared as messiah, was crucified, and will return as the son of man), John (the reflection of God in creation and history), Matthew (a legislator of divine law), Hebrews (a cosmic high priest presiding over his own death as a sacrifice for sins), Luke (a perfect example of the righteous man(, and many more. Not only are these ways of imagining Jesus incompatable [*sic*] with one another, they cannot be accounted for as the embellishments of the memories of a single historical person no matter how influential."

Israel,[35] that the "thrust" of the Bible *per se* is toward *correct behavior* rather than *correct belief*—i.e., toward ortho*praxy* rather than ortho*doxy*:

> The study of Israelite religion often involves studying practices more than creedal beliefs because the Bible more frequently stresses correct practices than correct beliefs or internal attitudes. Christian scholars, however, tend to focus more on beliefs or internal attitudes because Christian theology has often emphasized this aspect of religion.

Given this, and the probability that Jesus was raised in a society within which the Jewish religion was dominant (but that "Galilee at the time of Jesus was the epitome of mixed peoples and cultures characteristic of the hellenized period,"[36] however), it is highly probable that Jesus's orientation was to ortho*praxy* rather than ortho*doxy*. For this reason we must regard the Nicene Creed, for example, as a *travesty*—must regard *any* creed, for that matter, as such. Why? Because the focus of creeds is on *beliefs* to the total exclusion of attention to *behavior*—to, that is, ortho*doxy* and not ortho*praxy*.[37]

Here is one version of the Nicene Creed:

> I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
>
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.
>
> Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.
>
> And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

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[35] Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. (second edition), p. 17.

[36] Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[37] Note that to assert that Jesus was likely a *teacher* primarily is not to preclude the possibility that he was *more* than that—e.g., a healer.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

As a creed, this focuses solely on "facts" *about* Jesus, and makes no reference whatsoever to what Jesus was "about"![38]

Constantine I was responsible for convening the "council of Christian bishops . . . in Nicaea in Bithynia" [in what is now the northwest part of Turkey, near the Sea of Marmara] that produced the initial version of the Nicene Creed in 325 CE, and there has been an ongoing controversy as to whether he was *sincerely committed* to the version of Christianity adhered to by the attending bishops or, rather, believed that that version of Christianity would be *useful* to him in governing his empire—so that his interest in Nicene Christianity was basically *political*.

The answer to this question is probably that (a) Constantine was attracted to a version of Christianity that emphasized "correct" belief over "correct" behavior because a religion that emphasized the latter could pose a threat to the empire—given that behaving "correctly" does not necessarily involve being a good subject (!), whereas a religion that emphasized creedalism would *not* pose such a threat. It's also possible, second, that (b) because numerous religions existed in the empire, Constantine perceived this as a potential problem, and thought it advisable to have just one;[39] so that a *new* religion—such as a *belief*-oriented Christianity—would best suit his needs as Emperor. At any rate, Constantine not only *tolerated* Nicene Christianity, but *promoted* it to a degree.

I believe it a mistake, however, to attribute too much to *conscious decision-making* by Constantine. What must be remembered is that societies are systems, meaning that the various sectors that comprise a given societal system work together with some degree of harmony—that

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[38] If one believes that Jesus was primarily, if not exclusively, a *teacher*, one will view as *deviant* (if not heretical!) versions of Christianity that emphasize not only (a) the *nature* of Jesus (i.e., what he was "about"), but (b) versions that focus on Jesus's (supposed) Second Coming (during a Rapture period), that (c) focus on helping people cope in their everyday lives (including by providing them with a "sanctuary" from the world—via impressive buildings and beautiful organ music), that (d) emphasize the participation in rituals, that (e) primarily provide people with an opportunity to socialize with others, that (f) primarily seem to provide individuals to use/develop their talents (for leadership, music, art, etc.), that (g) have an "educational" orientation, etc.

[39] Nicene Christianity was not made the official religion of the empire until Theodosius I did so, in 380 CE.

harmony perhaps maintained by a prevailing ideology[40] that prevents the society's "host" members from recognizing, and acting upon, their (inferior) host status.

In any given society one sector tends to be dominant, with the particular sector that is dominant changing over time (in response to changing technology, for example). At a given point in time the sectors other than the dominant one are in effect *servants* of the dominant sector—and this includes religion. Thus, regardless of the "purity" or lack of such of Constantine's motives, the *societal system* of which he was a part would have benefitted from a docile form of religion—so that *societal forces* could have been what drove him to be attracted to Nicene Christianity.

At times leaders are acutely conscious of their interests, and Constantine's actions in supporting Nicene Christianity may or may not be an example. A clearer example, however, is King James's having a translation of the Bible made in his name:

> King James did not encourage a translation of the Bible in order to enlighten the common people. His sole intent was to deny them the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible. The marginal notes of the Geneva version were what made it so popular with the common people.
>
> The King James Bible was, and is for all practical purposes, a government publication.

That is, whereas the King James version of the Bible legitimized *monarchy* (i.e., supported the "divine right of kings" theory), the Geneva Bible did the opposite! Would that more "Fundamentalists," many of whom are strongly attached to the King James version of the Bible, realized that fact! Also, would that they recognized that—as Thomas L. Thompson[41] has written—"the biblical texts are not, for the most part, religious texts themselves. They are rather philosophical critiques of religious tradition and practice."

The "upshot" of the above discussion, then, is that one problem of Christianity—religions in general, actually—is that it tends to support the *status quo*; this support may be inadvertent, but it exists nonetheless. Having an orientation to belief (ortho*doxy*) rather than behavior (ortho*praxy*) *itself* helps perpetuate the *status quo*.[42] But another way that such support occurs is via the creation of different *denominations* of the religion—Christianity in this case. "Civilized" societies typically have social class systems, and the social class structure of a society not only has an impact on a society's religious institutions (via the creation of different denominations,

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[40] For example: "We live in a society that features equality of opportunity. Given this fact, one's position in the society is primarily a function of the effort that one exerts in trying to 'get ahead.'"

[41] *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology And The Myth Of Israel.* New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 387.

[42] Also of importance, orthodoxy seems to promote violence.

each tending to have members from a certain social class), but those denominations tend to contribute to a *perpetuation* of the *status quo*.

Denominations attractive to upper-class people tend to emphasize ritual and beliefs (that no one is expected to take seriously, however!), and make their "supplicants" feel *comfortable* in their social class, even *deserving* of it. At the other end of the spectrum, denominations attractive to lower-class people tend to provide an *emotional outlet* for their members, thereby serving to defuse whatever discontent that they might feel. (Taverns can also help with this!)

In short, some denominations help their members come to believe that they need do nothing to help the "unfortunate" members of their society, or act to bring about changes in the society that might "even things out," whereas other denominations provide a defusing function that inhibits the exploited members of the society from either *recognizing* their exploitation, or *doing* anything about it. The net effect is for the denominations of Christianity to pose no threat to the *status quo*.

An additional problem common to most Christian denominations[43] is that they are *individualistic* in the sense that their members are in thrall to the belief that the answer to the problem of getting "good" behavior from people is to establish a set of rules,[44] and make those rules—such as the Ten Commandments (or Decalogue) or Beatitudes[45]—known to all. Even scholars often fall into this trap—e.g., E. A. Ross's old *Sin and Society* (1907). (Ross was a sociologist, and should therefore have known better.)

Needless to say, "good" behavior is desirable in a society, but:

- Such behavior must not be defined as behavior that merely helps one cope, serves the interests of the elite, etc.

- "Good" behavior, properly defined, has an *institutional basis*.

Finally, some church leaders and other personnel have been guilty of terrible evil—e.g., the Catholic Church with reference to the killing and torture perpetrated by Gen. Francisco Franco in Spain, and the molestation of youth in, e.g., the United States—including right here in Milwaukee.

The religion proposed in Section III below is not intended to be a religion that merely supports the *status quo*—although participation in the religion may have coping value. Rather, my hope

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[43] But perhaps especially those denominations that attract middle-class people especially.

[44] A problem inherited from Judaism—along with the tacitly held assumption that a religion must consist of two classes of people, clergy (along with the bureaucrats that support them) and laity.

[45] The former has a *negative* orientation, the latter a *positive* one.

is that the religion would not only *flower* in our society—and soon!—but would result in the creation of "building blocks" of a New Society—i.e., eco-communities—a new set of *institutions*). Section V discusses such communities in some detail.

In concluding this section I would assert that religion *can* (possibly) play a role in "saving" us from the ravages of global warming—but *only* if it is of the right sort, and *especially* if it results in the *institutional* creation described in Section V. Modern Christianity not only fails these two tests—but has even been labeled as <u>oppressive</u>!

Section II: Wrestling With "God"[46]

The obvious allusion in my section heading here is to the story, in Genesis 32:22 – 32, of Jacob's night of wrestling with "a man." Near daybreak that "man" told Jacob (v. 26) to let him go, and told Jacob (v. 28) "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."[47]

I suspect that many of us have had our struggles with "God," perhaps in part because of the numerous passages in the Bible in which God is portrayed as an evil, despicable Being, the following being a "decalogue" (!) of examples (also see this):

> [13] So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.
> <div align="center">Genesis 6:13</div>
> [24] Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. [25] Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.
> <div align="center">Genesis 19:24 - 25</div>
>
> [27] Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" [28] The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. [29]Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."
> <div align="center">Exodus 32:27 – 29</div>
>
> [17] Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man,
> <div align="center">Numbers 31:17</div>

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[46] Thomas L. Thompson (*op. cit*., p. 29) has asserted: "To struggle with God is to be human, the fate of all." He adds (p. 233): "Ironically, the intellectual world in which the Bible was formed doesn't tell us much about ancient deities, though it mentions them often." And (p. 305): "Gods are created, but the true God is unknown. This important maxim lies at the centre of the Bible's theology."

[47] Some translations say "an angel" rather than "God." Also, the reference to this story in Hosea 12:4 refers to "angel."

¹¹ If two men are fighting and the wife of one of them comes to rescue her husband from his assailant, and she reaches out and seizes him by his private parts, ¹² you shall cut off her hand. Show her no pity.

<div align="center">Deuteronomy 25:11 – 12</div>

²¹ They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

<div align="center">Joshua 6:21</div>

²² Those in the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives. ²³ But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua.

²⁴ When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it. [These acts were presumably approved by God.]

<div align="center">Joshua 8:22 – 24</div>

⁶ The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."

<div align="center">Joshua 11:6</div>

²¹ But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died [this act being approved by God, presumably].

<div align="center">Judges 4:21</div>

10 While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. ² Then Shekaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. ³ Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it." [Don't be concerned about the well-being of these women and children; just get rid of them by sending them away!]

<div align="center">Ezra 10:1 - 4</div>

Fortunately, God is portrayed in a more favorable light in other parts of the Bible, but *that* fact— that God is portrayed *variously* in the Bible—is *itself* a problem, for it means that the Bible lacks a consistent "picture" of God. The reason for this, of course, is that (as, e.g., Mark S. Smith has pointed out[48]) the God concept underwent a complex development with the ancient Hebrews,

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[48] In his in *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. (second edition).

with (p. 32) the "original god of Israel" being El.[49] Smith adds (p. 33): "In time, El and Yahweh were identified, while Yahweh and Baal co-existed and later competed as warrior-gods."

Jack Miles may be correct in stating that the themes of divine access to the human heart and divine omnipotence and mystery have "remained the defining incongruity at the core of the word God as it is understood in the vernacular languages of the West,"[50] and credits Isaiah with creating this incongruity. But if people in the West have acquired a certain concept of God—and then read the Bible with *only* that concept in mind—they have necessarily *misread* the Bible. They have failed to recognize, e.g., that in some passages (such as the ones just quoted) God is anything but an admirable Being, and that God has many *other* different "faces" in other portions of the Bible.

The problematic nature of the God concept in the Bible can be thought of as involving at least three "dimensions":

- The meaning being given to "God" in some passages is *ambiguous* because "God" is used in more than one way—i.e., is given one meaning in certain sentences, and another meaning in other sentences.

- In a *given* passage "God" is given one meaning, and in the *next* section is given quite another meaning.

- The meaning given "God" changes from book to book—this being especially true of the "Old Testament" (i.e., the Hebrew Bible—the Tanakh).

Let us, then, give some attention to each of these three points.

Ambiguity in Certain Passages

In discussing the matter of ambiguity in certain passages I first examine a passage from the Old Testament, then one passage from the New Testament. A useful starting point here is with the famous "burning bush" episode in Exodus 3.

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[49] Note the presence of "el" in, e.g., the words "Israel" and "Bethel"—and in the names Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, etc.!

[50] *God: A Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996, p. 236. Originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995.

The Burning Bush Story

In this passage (v. 14) "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" Also in this passage (v. 7) "The LORD said,[51] 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.'" And adds (v. 8): "'So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.'"

In this passage Exodus has God say that he[52] is "concerned" about his people, and is going to do something in response to that concern—he will "rescue" his people "from the hands of the Egyptians." Thus, God is presented as a Being who can (a) think, (b) feel emotion, (c) speak, (d) make decisions, and (e) act on those decisions—and in a manner beyond the capability of any mere human. But—interestingly—these attributes of God are ones that God does not attribute to *himself*; rather, they are attributes that I have *inferred* from the passage itself.

That fact suggests that the writers/redactors of Exodus on the one hand wanted to think of God as having certain definite attributes, but at the same time were reluctant to be *too* specific. In fact, in their having God say that his name was "I AM," they seemed to be implying that they thought it best not to put God in a "box" but, rather, leave the meaning of "God" rather open-ended. Exodus 3 is, then, a rather curious passage in the Bible!

"God" in I John

In I John[53] 4:7 - 12 we find the following curious passage:

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[51] Note the use of both "God" and "LORD" in this passage. Also, fact note is of interest: "The Hebrew for *Lord* sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for *I am* in verse 14." I should add that although this passage uses both "God" and "LORD," *I* have just used the word "God" in this paragraph. As Mark S. Smith (*op. cit*.), e.g., has noted, the ancient Hebrews had *several* Gods, but over time merged the different Gods into one. Evidence for the earlier polytheism of the ancient Hebrews exists in the Bible, but the writers and redactors of the Bible tended to try to suppress this fact—and most Christians tend to be taught (dishonestly!) to read the Bible as if early variety never existed

[52] The passage does not specify a gender for God, but because the society of the ancient Hebrews was patriarchal, it is reasonable to assume that insofar as they attributed a gender to God, it was the *male* gender.

[53] Here is a commentary on the epistle: "The **First Epistle of John**, often referred to as **First John** and written **1 John**, is a book of the New Testament. This fourth catholic or "general" epistle is attributed to John the Evangelist, traditionally thought to be the author of the Gospel of John and the other two Epistles of John. This Epistle was likely written in Ephesus between the years 95–110.[1] However, other

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⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

The author of this book has God be a person-like Being who had a son (i.e., Jesus), and sent that son into the world "that we might live through him" (whatever *that* means!). This son was (also?) sent as an "atoning sacrifice for our sins"—meaning, presumably, that Jesus's death on the cross should be perceived as having been a *sacrificial* death that functioned to "wipe away" our sins. God's sending his son to us was done, this passage claims, as an act of love on God's part.

Although the above statements about God suggest strongly that the author thought of God as a person-like Being, his declaration that "God is love" has a different meaning entirely. Note that the author did not here state that "God is *loving*" but, rather, that God *is* love. That is, the author *equates* God with love. That assertion suggests that one not think of God as some sort of entity "out there" some place but, rather, think of God as the (for want of a better term) "atmosphere" that may develop within a group if and when, for example, the group's members all engage in loving actions with reference to others in the group.

Put another way, that assertion seems to suggest that members of a *loving group* will likely all experience a "natural high"—a common "consciousness"—at some point in their interaction one with another, and that the label "God" can--and *should*—be applied to that "spiritual" experience. Supporting such a view is the fact that the author of John (who may also have authored I John) states (4:24) "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Granted that this latter statement is rather ambiguous in meaning, but it *does* declare that "God is spirit," so that the statements in the Bible that God is "love" and also "spirit" seemingly lack agreement with the assertion that God's sending his son to us was an act of love on God's part.

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scholars date this letter earlier, such as John A. T. Robinson who argues for the years 60–65.[2] The work was written to counter docetism, the heresy that Jesus did not come "in the flesh", but only as a spirit. It also defined how Christians are to discern true teachers: by their ethics, their proclamation of Jesus in the flesh, and by their love.[1]"

That is, in this passage we learn that God *is* love, and also something quite different—that God is *loving*.

The Creation Stories

The book of Genesis begins with not one creation story, but two such stories—the first in Genesis 1: - Genesis 2:3, the second in Genesis 2:4 – 24. In the *first* story God creates—by (like a king—a "telling" fact![54]) uttering spoken commands—the world in six days—creating humankind (both males *and* females) "in his image"[55] on the sixth day (1:27)—and on the seventh day rests, and blesses that day. In the *second* story God begins the creation process by creating an androgynous adult[56], who then names the animals (already existing!), and finally creates—from that creature—an adult woman, a male adult being the "residue" of this "operation"!

Not only is the creation sequence different in the two stories, but the God of the first story is not the same God as the one in the second story! The God in the first story is "Elohim," the God in the second story is "Yahweh."

It has been said, regarding these stories, that:

> A common hypothesis among biblical scholars is that the first major comprehensive draft of the Pentateuch (the series of five books which begins with Genesis and ends with Deuteronomy) was composed in the late 7th or the 6th century BC (the Yahwist source) and that this was later expanded by other authors (the Priestly source) into a work very like the one we have today.[6] (In the creation narrative the two sources appear in reverse order: Genesis 1:1–2:3 is Priestly and Genesis 2:4–24 is Yahwistic).[7] Borrowing themes from Mesopotamian mythology, but adapting them to Israel's belief in one God,[8] the combined narrative is a critique of the Mesopotamian theology of creation: Genesis affirms monotheism and denies polytheism.[9] Robert Alter described the combined narrative as "compelling in its archetypal character, its adaptation of myth to monotheistic ends".[10]

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[54] Suggesting that this concept of God arose *after* the ancient Hebrews began to have kings.

[55] Mark S. Smith (*The Early History of God*, p. 144) makes the interesting comment that: The use of the term "likeness" or "image" "presupposes the vision of the anthropomorphic god yet reduces the anthropomorphism radically compared to Ezekiel 1:26. While Ezekiel 1:26 conveys the prophet's vision of Yahweh in the likeness of the human person, Genesis 1 presents a vision of the human in the likeness of the divine. Rather than reducing Yahweh to human terms through an anthropomorphic portrait, Genesis 1:26 – 28 magnifies the human person in divine terms. In this way, Genesis 1 draws on the older visionary transition of the anthropomorphic deity but ultimately transcends it insofar as it omits any description of the divine."

[56] The "first creature [created] was an *'adām*, a sexually undifferentiated human." He adds (tongue in cheek): "There is semantic truth in the folk expression 'it takes a woman to make a man"! Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013, p. 148.

As to why Genesis contains two *different* (but not necessarily *conflicting*) stories of creation, rather than a single one, the following is one explanation:

> As for the historical background which led to the creation of the narrative itself, a theory which has gained considerable interest, although still controversial, is "Persian imperial authorization." This proposes that the Persians, after their conquest of Babylon in 538 BC, agreed to grant Jerusalem a large measure of local autonomy within the empire, but required the local authorities to produce a single law code accepted by the entire community. The two powerful groups making up the community–the priestly families who controlled the Temple, and the landowning families who made up the "elders"–were in conflict over many issues, and each had its own 'history of origins', but the Persian promise of greatly increased local autonomy for all provided a powerful incentive to cooperate in producing a single text."[12]

My principal point in referring to these two creation stories, however, is that the God of the first story *is not* the God of the second story. "Elohim" and "Yahweh" are not simply names for the same entity; the fact that the characteristics of the one differ from the characteristics of the other means that *two different Gods* are being referred to here.

This view is reinforced by this passage (posed as part of a question to Dr. Craig) on William Lane Craig's web site:

> Ancient Israel started out as a Polytheistic nation that later 'evolved' into a Monotheistic Religion and that they [i.e., groups in Palestine] blended their bibles (religious lore) and amalgamated their gods, El and Yahweh [Lord], into one single god. A thorough study of the Bible makes it clear that Yahweh is not the same as El. These were two different deities that were later synthesized in one. Yahweh originally was the god of war, the deity of Yahwism—a very old Bedouin religion of Arabia. His name is most likely the diminutive of "Yahweh Sabaoth." Which means, "he musters armies." A reference to that can be found in the Ex 15:3: "Yahweh is a warrior. Yahweh is his NAME." He is the exclusive God of the Hebrews (Ex. 7:16) and it is him who plays all sorts of tricks and punishes the Pharaoh and the Egyptians. It is again Yahweh who acts as the commander in chief when the Israelis led by Moses and then by Joshua invade nation after nation, massacring them and pillaging their towns and pledges to make them victorious over their enemies whose lands were promised to the Jews (Ex. 23:27-33). Yahwism was the religion of Judah the tribe that settled in southern regions of Palestine and from there it must have spread to the rest of Arabia. Yahweh is basically a chieftain very much concerned to find new homes for his clan and assist them in their wars. The old version of Yahwism was the religion of Ancient Arabia.

> The god of Jacob however, was El. El was worshipped in Aramea where Jacob came from (Deut 26:5). Therefore Israelites are originally Arameans. And El was worshiped in the kingdom of Israel. Psalms 82 leaves no doubt that indeed El and Yahweh are two distinct gods. This short chapter is the minutes taken at the counsel of gods where Yahweh is presiding. These are all sons of El, the Most High. Yahweh is admonishing other gods, rebuking them and firing them for being inept. In fact he reminds them that they are the sons of the Almighty (Elyon). This makes it clear that Yahweh is not the Most High. The Most High is El or Elyon, Yahweh's father and the father of all the gods. At the end he cast an ominous condemnation at his sibling gods and

warns them that they shall die like Mortals. The Bible does not say whether these gods actually died but Yahweh [LORD] calls upon The Most High [Elyon] to rise up, judge the Earth, for all the nations belong to him. Psalms 82: 6-8: "I say, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.' Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!"

Following is another brief statement on early religion in Israel:

Israelite monotheism evolved gradually out of pre-existing beliefs and practices of the ancient world.[76] The religion of the Israelites of Iron Age I, like the Canaanite faith from which it evolved[77] and other ancient Near Eastern religions, was based on a cult of ancestors and worship of family gods (the "gods of the fathers").[78] Its major deities were not numerous–El, Asherah, and Yahweh, with Baal as a fourth god, and perhaps Shamash (the sun) in the early period.[79] By the time of the early Hebrew kings, El and Yahweh had become fused and Asherah did not continue as a separate state cult,[79] although she continued to be popular at a community level until Persian times.[80] Yahweh, later the national god of both Israel and Judah, seems to have originated in Edom and Midian in southern Canaan and may have been brought north to Israel by the Kenites and Midianites at an early stage.[81] After the monarchy emerged at the beginning of Iron Age II, kings promoted their family god, Yahweh, as the god of the kingdom, but beyond the royal court, religion continued to be both polytheistic and family-centered as it was also for other societies in the ancient Near East.[82]

Although the writers/redactors of the Bible evidently made an effort to convey the idea that there is but *one* God in the Bible, historians such as Mark S. Smith (*op. cit.*) would argue that the evidence that we have points elsewhere.

A point that I should add here is that the "documentary hypothesis" has long been used to explain discrepancies in the Pentateuch (i.e., the "Five Books of Moses"), with four "strands" being identified in those five books—referred to as "J," "E," "D," and "P." However, this hypothesis is being increasingly questioned. For example, David M. Carr,[57] in a recent interview, had this to say about the hypothesis:

The main debate, as I see it, is between two models for the development of non-P materials: one that distinguishes between D, J and E, and one that distinguishes between D and other non-P materials but does not recognize early J and E sources. Usually the latter model (the one without J and E) invokes other models to explain the features used by older source critics to argue for J and E. In my view, these alternative models do a better job of explaining the evidence. But we all need a bit more humility in our claims of certainty for our hypotheses, especially hypotheses about the earliest stages of the development of the Pentateuch. In that sense, maybe the ultimate result of adopting such additional "methodological modesty" might feel frustratingly less productive!

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[57] Carr is also the author of the recent (2011) *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* and the earlier (1996) Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches.

Different Concepts in *Different* Books of the Bible

In 1995 Jesuit-trained <u>Jack Miles</u> published (*op. cit.*) the results of his "God research" relative to the Hebrew Bible (referred to by Jews as the *[Tanakh](...)*)—what Christians refer to as the "Old Testament." The thesis developed in the book is that the concept of God possessed by the ancient Hebrews evolved over time. In discussing different concepts Miles uses as his basis the order in which books appear in the Tanakh, and identifies the following 24 concepts:

1. Creator (Genesis 1 – 3)

2. Destroyer (Genesis 4 – 11)

3. Creator/Destroyer (Genesis 12 – 25:11)

4. Friend of the Family (Genesis 25:12 – 50:18)

5. Liberator (Exodus 1:1 – 15:21)

6. Lawgiver (Exodus 15:22 – 40:38)

7. Liege (Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

8. Conqueror (Joshua, Judges)

9. Father (Samuel)

10. Arbiter (Kings)

11. Executioner (Isaiah 1 – 39)

12. Holy One (Isaiah 40 – 66)

13. Wife (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

14. Counselor (Psalms)

15. Guarantor (Proverbs)

16. Friend (Job)

17. Sleeper (Song of Songs)

18. Bystander (Ruth)

19. Recluse (Lamentations)

20. Puzzle (Ecclesiastes)

21. Absence (Esther)

22. Ancient of Days (Daniel)

23. Scroll (Ezra and Nehemiah)

24. Perpetual Round (Chronicles)

I will eschew any elaboration of these concepts, given that such would not serve my purposes here (meaning that if you want to find out about these concepts, you will need to read Miles's book!). Let me note, however, that although Miles identifies and discusses a number of different concepts of God found in the *Tanakh*, the fact that the organization of his discussion is on the order of the order of books as they appear in the Tanakh, that order does not represent a *historical* order of their appearance.

That fact is of no consequence for my discussion here, however, for what I find of importance about the Miles book is the mere fact that he was able to identify so many *different* concepts of God in the Tanakh! A benefit of reading the book is that it can make one more sensitive to the fact that the "Old Testament" contains not just *one* concept of God, but *many*. Religion and the God concept *did* undergo historical change with the ancient Hebrews (facts made clear by, e.g., the Mark S. Smith and Thomas L. Thompson books cited earlier), but what is of interest for the present eBook is simply the *fact of variety* in concepts of God in the "Old Testament"/Tanakh.

The *reason* that fact is of interest and importance to me is that once one recognizes that the concept of God *did* change over time with the ancient Hebrews, one may be open to the suggestion that a *new* concept of God be adopted—a suggestion implicit in my proposing NeWFism. For I associate two concepts of God with NeWFism—that of *Presence*[58] and that of *Revealer*. Although neither of these appears on Miles's list, both are decidedly Biblical

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[58] Mark S. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 148, notes of Psalm 84: "The psalm presents a temple setting that explicitly draws on solar language for God to express the motif of 'seeing God,' in the psalms an expression for divine presence (Pss. 11:7; 17:15; 27:4, 13; 42:3; 63:3; cf Judg. 14:20, 22; cf. 1 Sam. 1:22), later transformed into a motif of seeing God or the divine glory in the future (Isa. 35:2; 52:8; 66:5, 18)." I would add that Thomas L. Thompson (op. cit., p. 393) has asserted that "The issue of divine presence is one that is the common property of both Old and New Testaments."

concepts—e.g., the basis for the pronouncements of the various Hebrew prophets was *revelations* from God. *Why* the ancient Hebrews changed their concept of God over time is a question that I will not address here—except to suggest that changing external situations and intellectual developments undoubtedly played a role.

The reason, by the way, that I associate Presence and Revealer with the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) is not because I am *imposing* those concepts on the NeWF but, rather, because the *experience* of being a NeWF *participant* will itself (I believe) *conduce* in those participating the sense of God as either (or both) Presence or (and) Revealer. This sense may occur *earlier* with some participants than with others, and may be felt more *intensely* by some than others, but I am convinced that *all* NeWF participants will, at some point, come to perceive God in either or both of these ways.

I need to add here that this does not mean that the concepts of God that people have *prior* to becoming NeWFians *would*—or even *should*—suddenly disappear: Those concepts may disappear, gradually, but may not—there being variation from person to person regarding this matter. I suspect, however, that the NeWF experience itself will be so *powerful* that it will increasingly shape the thinking of participants—so that the concepts of God as Presence and as Revealer will become increasingly dominant in their minds. Dare I add that I believe that over time participants' thinking will come, more and more, to resemble the religious thinking of Native Americans?![59]

The basis for my making such a suggestion—prediction?—lies in the fact that common to both Judaism and Christianity (and also Islam?) is the notion that God can be *controlled*—with sacrifices and petitionary prayers being the *means* of that control. If one thinks of God in terms of Presence and/or Revealer, one will, I believe, tend to cease perceiving—*if* one ever did—God as a Being that one can control. Rather, one's stance toward God will tend to be one of *appreciation*, and even *love*—so that insofar as one communicates *to* God (in response to communications *from* God, and the feeling of God's Presence), it would be to express one's thankfulness.

What could be more "Jesuan" than that! For an "expert in the law" is said to have [said to Jesus](#) (with Jesus responding approvingly):

> [27] He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

Feeling God's Presence, and receiving *revelations* from God provides one with a basis for not only *appreciating* God, but *loving* God. The NeWF, I believe, can provide one with the

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[59] As expressed, e.g., in Kent Nerburn's *[Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With an Indian Elder](#)*. Novato, C: New World Library, 1994.

experience that will enable one to relate to God in the manner suggested by Jesus, to so love the neighbor also—with the NeWF experience having numerous *additional* positive consequences as well.

My next task here, then, is to describe NeWFism.

Section III: On Deriving a Religion From the Gospels

I guess that I am my father's son.

My father (and mother also) was raised in a church of denomination A (Norwegian Lutheran) that his ancestors had helped establish in Mt. Morris, Wisconsin (located in Waushara County, in the south-central part of the state). Shortly after my parent's marriage, however, they decided that the religion of that denomination was too "dead" for them, so together with a few other couples they established a church of denomination B (Assemblies of God) in Wautoma, Wisconsin (about 8 miles from Mt. Morris).

At a still later point they became dissatisfied with that church (*why* I don't know), and left it for a church of denomination C (Conservative Baptist) in Wild Rose,[60] Wisconsin (which is about 8 files from both Wautoma and Mt. Morris). Finally, for some reason they decided, at a still later point, to return to the church of denomination B, and remained in that church for the rest of their lives (both died in December of 1987). I believe that the current church in Wautoma has a Thompson Hall named after my dad.

I was raised in churches of denominations B and C, but upon going off to college (in Oshkosh, Wisconsin), and then graduate school (in Chapel Hill, North Carolina) attended no churches— although while going to college in Oshkosh, I attended a friend's Lutheran church once. I met my future wife—who was from Richland Center,[61] Wisconsin—while a graduate student in Chapel Hill; as she had been raised in a church of denomination D (Presbyterian), when we married (in Salisbury, Maryland—where I was teaching at the local college at the time) I became a member of that denomination.

We remained in that denomination in moving, two years later, to Cincinnati, Ohio, and then Oxford, Ohio, and, finally, the Milwaukee area of Wisconsin; but when a point was reached where we both became dissatisfied with the then-current pastor, we began "shopping around" for a different church, and decided on one of denomination D (United Methodist). We remained members of that church for 29 years (i.e., until 2009), then, in becoming dissatisfied with the then-current minister, decided to return to the same Presbyterian church that we had attended earlier, and are currently members there. As my religious ideas do not match closely those espoused by the Presbyterian denomination—as should have become clear to you by this time!—

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[60] Yes! It was named for the wild roses that grow in that area.

[61] Noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright was born and raised in Richland Center, and later established a school—named Taliesin—at nearby Spring Green, Wisconsin.

that church may decide to expunge me from its membership rolls, if any members there become aware of this eBook![62]

Although my coursework, as a student, was primarily in History, Geography, Geology, English, Sociology, and Economics, I have long been interested in religion. Although I haven't counted them, I currently have more books in my (small) library about religion than any other subject; and I have attended church services in at least a dozen Protestant denominations, have attended a Roman Catholic church,[63] and once attended a Jewish synagogue with a group.

I should add here that after attending a Quaker service, talking with one of the church's members after the service, and using the word "service" in our conversation, I was instructed—in a kindly manner, of course—that Quakers do not use the term "service" in connection with their meetings; I was informed that their meetings are simply "meetings," with service being that which they engage in *after* their meetings! I appreciated that correction, and try to follow their usage of those two words. In fact, I would add that I have more admiration for the Quakers than for the members of any other Christian denomination.

Over the years I have not only done a fair amount of reading (for a lay person) in the religious literature, but have also done a fair amount of writing—especially during the past few years. Beginning in 2009 I started writing essays for the Dissident Voice web site (see this), but the essays I wrote for that site tended to be more philosophical than religious. I then started writing for the Religious Tolerance web site (using the name "James B. Gray" for some of my essays), with all of my essays written for that site having a religious thrust.

Given that writing helps clarify one's thinking, the writing that I have done over the past few years—in conjunction with the reading that I have done in the religious literature—has undoubtedly led to an increasing questioning, on my part, of the supposed relationship between the gospels and the teachings and practices of the churches with which I have had some association.

In August of 2011 Sufyan bin Uzayr contacted me,[64] and I have been writing for his Brave New World web site (in India) ever since—an eBook, *What Are Churches For?* first, followed by a series of essays (312 so far). Although many of the essays that I have written for Sufyan's web site have had a religious thrust, they have been varied in their subject matter—with global warming being the primary subject of many of them.

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[62] Actually, I have attended that church just once since September of 2013, so my membership may be cancelled for lack of attendance.

[63] Our son is married to a wonderful Catholic girl, and one of my friends is a Catholic. In addition, my *wife*'s best friend—from their days together in secondary school—is a Catholic.

[64] I have inquired (via email) of Sufyan regarding how it was that he learned of me, and his best recollection is that he had seen one of the essays that I had written for the Dissident Voice web site.

In addition, earlier this year I wrote an eBook—*A Religion for Today*—that overlaps considerably with the earlier eBook, particularly in that the institution that I introduce in the first eBook—the Structured Interaction Group (SIG)—also appears, and is also given prominence, in the second eBook, but under the name New Word Fellowship (NeWF). The SIG and NeWF are virtually identical except that the SIG is presented as a *secular* institution, the NeWF as a *religious* one.

The present eBook also features that same institution, but in this eBook it is presented as a *religious* institution, with the name NeWF being retained. What differentiates the three eBooks is that the institution in question is *introduced* in a different way. Thus, those interested in learning more about my religious ideas are welcome to read the other two eBooks as well— along with some of my essays.[65]

In that—in being my dad's son!—I refuse to accept the received doctrine, so far as religious ideas are concerned, unless I can honestly embrace them, I suppose that I am a part of the tradition established, centuries ago, in (what became) this country by Roger Williams[66] and Samuel Gorton. At any rate, I attempt herein to present my religious ideas—as they have developed to this point, at any rate—as honestly and clearly as possible. To a degree I have discussed theological ideas in these pages, but this has been done out of necessity rather than because an interest that I have in theology: The fact of the matter is that I have no theological training, and have done little reading in that branch of learning. My focus here is on my *religious* ideas, with *theological* ideas brought into the discussion only when that is virtually unavoidable.

I make no claims here of this eBook being free of factual errors, and I fully recognize that much of what I write here will be controversial. Insofar as the latter is the case, however, I have no interest in engaging in debates with others regarding my ideas, my view here being that just as others are entitled to their ideas, so am I. The fact that I hold such a viewpoint does not mean that the religious ideas that I have currently are *fixed*—for I strive to be open minded, and to make changes in my thinking when convinced that this is necessary. My non-interest in engaging in debates with others stems, rather, from the fact that my *primary* interest is in seeing my religious ideas being *implemented*, as opposed to discussing—or debating—them with others.

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[65] I have collected my various essays—written for the three web sites mentioned above—into six .pdf files, one of my Dissident Voice essays, one of my Religious Tolerance essays, and four of my Brave New World (BNW) Essays. I am currently working on Vol. V of my BNW essays. Any reader interested in obtaining any or all of the above need only ask me for them: ACT5367@mail.com.

[66] I have just completed reading a superb biography of Williams by John M. Barry. Actually, as Barry emphasizes, his focus in the book is more on Williams's ideas, and their development over time, than on Williams's life *per se*.

The title that I have chosen for this section indicates that my interest here is in deriving a religion from the gospels in the New Testament. This claim is somewhat misleading in that I have already created—on paper, at least—the religion, and now simply wish to provide a *rationale* for it—using the gospels as its basis. Be that as it may, I believe that the New gospels rationale that I provide here does, in fact, mesh with the religion.

I realize that the New Testament has been under intense scrutiny by scholars for decades,[67] but that fact is not relevant for the discussion that follows, for I simply take the New Testament for what it is "on the surface"—primarily because many more people are familiar with *it* than with scholarly studies of the New Testament. The New Testament may distort history and be bloated and biased, as Barrie Wilson has written, but my view on this matter is that there are more important activities to engage in than "fixing" the New Testament, and I find the New Testament *as it is*—the gospels portion specifically—as adequate for my purposes.

Although my primary purpose here is to discuss NeWFism as a religion derived from the New Testament gospels, I would like to begin here by noting an alternative approach to creating a gospels-based religion, one that uses the gospel of John.

An Alternate Approach

Consider the following four passages from the gospel of John:

> [15] "If you love me [Jesus], keep my commands. [16] And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate ["Helper" in some translations] to help you and be with you forever—[17] the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be[a] in you.
>
> John 14:15 – 17

> [25] "All this I have spoken while still with you. [26] But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
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> John 14:25 - 26

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[67] Ziony Zevit is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the meaning of a given Biblical text "can be established only through the study of original languages and texts, tasks requiring special expertise." But because the Bible is widely available and familiar to many in our society, those facts outweigh scholarly purposes given my intention here to propose a potentially *useful* religion that people can relate to because of its grounding in the Bible, its New Testament portion in particular. *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013, p. xiii. By the way, I provide a rationale for "usefulness" regarding religion later in this Section (relying there on Carl G. Jung).

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²⁶ "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.

⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

In all four of these passages Jesus is the speaker. In that Jesus states that the Advocate will teach, and the Advocate is presented as a *substitute* for Jesus, these passages imply that Jesus himself was primarily a teacher. *That* is a minor point here, however, the *principal* point being that the Advocate is not another human being like Jesus but, rather, is a *Spirit*.

(As an aside here, note the important—and surprising!—point here that these four passages **provide one with a basis—a *Biblical* one at that!—for *ignoring* the Bible as an authority in favo of this *Advocate*!** I would guess that most, if not all, churches that claim to be "Bible believing" ignore the implications of these four passages.)

To return to the subject at hand: What we have, then, with these four passages is a hypothetical situation after Jesus's departure that calls to mind the prophets of old—such as Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. These men were individuals who believed that they had received messages from God as to God's desires, and who believed that they must convey those messages to their countrymen—leaders in particular. Note that these individuals did not, though, create *religions* (unlike what I am proposing here); rather, they simply acted as *spokesmen* for God, believing that they had been chosen by God for this role.

Although some religions are individualistic (with Buddhism perhaps being an example), as social creatures most of us tend to assume that a religion must be collective in some sense—must involve people getting together and engaging in various activities, including passive ones. Thus, although one could, conceivably, create for oneself a *personal religion* based on the above four passages, if one were to do so one would run the risk of being labeled "crazy." Indeed, it's likely that most people in the modern world who claim to be spokesmen (or spokeswomen) for God are mentally imbalanced.

It is not surprising, then, that some members of the Society of Friends—"Quakers"—believe that God (or the Spirit of God) still speaks to people, but tends to do so in a "community" setting. Thus, Quakers who believe this practice what they term "waiting worship;" i.e., they gather, form circles, and wait for God to speak to one or more members present, those individuals then

conveying God's message to the others present. Those Quakers who practice "waiting worship" do not seem to base their meetings on the passages from John's gospel cited above;[68] it is clear, however, that the "waiting" sort of meeting is *consistent* with those four passages.

I have attended two such meetings here in Milwaukee, and found them interesting because they differed so radically from any other church meetings that I had attended: There was no organ music, no singing of hymns no sermon, no readings from the Bible—and not even a collection! What disappointed me, however, is that there was no discussion—during the meetings, at least. In my own personal experience—especially during my 29 years of attending a United Methodist church in a Milwaukee suburb—attending the church's adult class (which tended to be basically a discussion group—which I led from time to time) was the most valuable part of church attendance.

It should not come as a surprise, then, that NeWFism is centered on discussion. Note that in discussing NeWFism in the next few subsections I tacitly assume that the religion is just for adults. I realize that that assumption is unrealistic, but make no attempt herein to "fix" that problem (but *do* make some comments on the matter later). I will let someone more qualified than myself in these matters to develop the religion so as to include non-adults.

NeWFism

The Fundamentals [69]

One of my objectives in this eBook is to describe a religion which I have—*in principle*, at least—derived from the *gospels* portion of the New Testament.[70] Notice that I have used "a" rather than "the" here in recognition of the fact that others who might set the same task before themselves likely would derive religions differing in characteristics from the one that I do. That (very strong) possibility does not necessarily bother me, however, for those of us who were born and raised in the United States have become used to the fact that most of us live in close contact with people with varying characteristics, including religious inclinations. For example, while I was attending secondary school in a small town in Wisconsin, all of my fellow students were European in origin (I believe), but represented a number of different nationalities—German, Polish, Norwegian, Irish, Scotch, Danish, and Italian, and perhaps a few other nationalities as

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[68] For a discussion of the matter, see, e.g., Peter Blood's "The Biblical Roots of Quaker Worship."

[69] The allusion here is, of course, to a series of essays written between 1910 and 1915—essays that ostensibly form the basis for Fundamentalism. The reader of this eBook will soon discover that I view Fundamentalism as *fundamentally wrongheaded*!

[70] That fact should not be construed as meaning that I perceive no value in other portions of the New Testament—such as Paul's letters; rather, it means simply that I feel comfortable limiting my attention to the gospels—a very small portion of them at that!

well. My best recollection is that although many of us were fully aware of our ethnicity, this diversity in nationality backgrounds was of little or no consequence for most of us.

As the title I have chosen for this section perhaps suggests, my purpose in this section is to make explicit the particular assumptions—the ones of which I am *aware*, at any rate—upon which the religion that I later derive from the gospels is based. Some might question one or more of those assumptions; for me, however, the question is not so much if the assumptions I used are "proper" ones but, rather, whether or not the religion that I *assert* that I have derived from those assumptions does, in fact, do so. If others question me on that point, I would be interested in learning of their thinking on the matter. If, however, they question the *assumptions* that I use, I am less likely to be interested in their objections.

The "gospels" referred to here are, of course, the four familiar canonical gospels—Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John (rather than, e.g., the Gnostic gospels; also see this). The task that I have set before myself here, then, is to derive a religion from these four "books."

In doing so, I assume the following *for the purposes of this eBook*:

1. Despite the paucity of evidence for the existence of Jesus, I assume here that Jesus *did* actually exist[71] around 2000 years ago, and resided in Roman-occupied Palestine.

2. "Jesus" is an accurate translation of his Jewish name into the English language. (Some, however, would assert that "Joshua" would be a more accurate translation, and point out that "Jesus" comes directly from the Greek "Iesous.") I should add that although Jesus is often referred to as "Jesus Christ," "Christ" was not a part of his name. Rather, it is a *title applied to Jesus,* being a shortened version of "Jesus, the Christ." "Christ" itself literally means "anointed," and was applied to Jesus (but not by Paul, apparently—as I noted earlier) out of the conviction—or at least claim—that he was the Jewish Messiah.

3. Numerous books have been written, and continue to be written, about Jesus, each presenting the author's unique perspective on Jesus. Here, however, Jesus is regarded as having been a *teacher*—a teacher whose teachings were only delivered orally. That is, Jesus wrote nothing, because he lacked the ability to write—in, e.g., Aramaic, the language that he apparently spoke.

    My rationale for perceiving Jesus as only a teacher is that (a) Luke (in 10:25) has one of Jesus's contemporaries (an "expert in the law") refer to Jesus as "Teacher;" and (b) **only in the role of teacher did he—and *does* he—have relevance beyond his own time.** I

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[71] Bart D. Ehrman's recent *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* argues that there are good reasons for believing that Jesus *did* exist. Others, however, have questioned his reasoning, as I noted earlier

recognize that for some Jesus's primary relevance has been that he died on a cross. However, for me such a conclusion is a "stretch" and—more importantly—appears to have been an idea that was borrowed from a pagan (!) "dying savior" cult existing in the Mediterranean Basin during Jesus's time.[72]

For me, what Jesus's death on a cross (*if*, in fact, that is how he died) illustrates is what can happen to an individual who espouses ideas perceived as threatening by the "powers that be." In Jesus's case, he may have been perceived as a threat by *both* Jewish leaders in Palestine and Roman officials there—but for different reasons, of course.

I realize that my viewpoint here is likely to be regarded as radical—even "heretical"!—by many, but I, for one, see nothing radical about it. For me, the viewpoint is simply commonsensical!

4. His teachings were written down (in Greek, especially) several decades after his death. I assume here (for my *purposes* here, that is) that those teachings were written down accurately—so that they accurately convey his *oral* teachings.

5. Some of Jesus's teachings were of a direct nature, others indirect—in the form of stories ("parables").

6. I assume that Jesus chose the story-form for teaching because (a) stories are more readily remembered than are direct teachings, and (b) stories are subject to interpretation—with *different individuals* interpreting a given story differently at a given point in time, and a *given individual* interpreting a given story differently at different points in her/his life.[73] The fact that stories are subject to interpretation invites their *discussion*—an important point for me.

7. I assume, further, that this variation in interpretation was *expected* by Jesus, for he recognized a right possessed by each individual to reach his/her own conclusions, so far

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[72] The *reason* for such a borrowing may have been to make the emerging religion of Christianity similar enough to existing pagan religions that pagans would find it relatively easy to "convert" to the new religion. That is, because the new religion had both familiar and *attractive* elements it had a capability of attracting converts.

[73] Some might add that by teaching in parables Jesus was able to avoid charges of blasphemy by the Jewish leaders in Palestine. Those leaders may have perceived Jesus's teachings as blasphemous, but in being stated in an indirect manner, were not subject to charges of blasphemy. If the Jewish leaders in Palestine did so view Jesus, and were anxious to see him "disappeared," they would need to convince the local Roman authorities that Jesus was a threat to them—a matter regarding which certain gospel passages seemingly suggest is what occurred. See this for a related argument.

as the meaning of a given story was concerned; and even recognized such a right in the case of his *direct* teachings.

8. The fundamental assumption underlying Jesus's teaching (I assume here) was that the purpose of teaching is not for others merely to *learn* (and then remember), but mainly to (a) *stimulate thought* on their part, and (b) then *actions* based on one's *interpretation* of the teaching(s) that one has heard. Teaching has *intellectual* content, of course, but the *primary* purpose of teaching is not to add to the body of knowledge possessed by hearers but, rather, to affect the *behavior* of the hearer, that behavior assumed to be a result of *conscious decision-making*, not just habit.

9. In acting, only those actions which would impinge *negatively* on the well-being of others were judged, by Jesus, to be "out of bounds," sinful, I assume here.

10. *Whether* or not a given behavior was harmful should be decided by the one *affected*, not the one who *initiated* the behavior. Thus, one able to *empathize* with others was most likely to refrain from actions harmful to others.

In choosing passages from the gospels to use as the basis for formulating a religion, I have used two principles:

- Keep the number of passages small. In fact, each "list" below consists of just two items! I have not felt it necessary to burden the reader with a long list of passages.

- Choose passages that *resonate* with me. My "theory" here is that if a given passage resonates with me, this is because I am "in tune" with my *nature* as a human, so that that *nature* somehow "recognizes" the passage as important; given this, my *intellect* should then *also* so recognize the passage. From this perspective, whether a given passage has *historical* value or not is totally irrelevant.

What follows, then, are two collections of passages, each consisting of but two passages!

For the purposes of this essay I will assume that the *direct* teachings of Jesus consisted only of the following (using the New International Version):

> [27] He [i.e., Jesus] answered [an "expert in the law, v. 25]", "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

Luke 10:27

(It should be noted that this passage has its basis in Deuteronomy 6:5, except that "mind" is not mentioned in that passage. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus refers to heart, soul, and strength (but not mind); but in Mark 12:37 Jesus refers to heart, soul, mind and strength). John's gospel does not contain a comparable passage.)

> 5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, [2] and he began to teach them.
>
> He said:
>
> [3] "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
>   for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
> [4] Blessed are those who mourn,
>   for they will be comforted.
> [5] Blessed are the meek,
>   for they will inherit the earth.
> [6] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
>   for they will be filled.
> [7] Blessed are the merciful,
>   for they will be shown mercy.
> [8] Blessed are the pure in heart,
>   for they will see God.
> [9] Blessed are the peacemakers,
>   for they will be called children of God.
> [10] Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
>   for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> [11] "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1 - 12

Likewise, for the purposes of this essay I will assume that the *indirect* teachings of Jesus consisted only of the following (again using the New International Version):

> [29] But he [the "expert in the law" referred to in v. 25] wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
>
> [30] In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. [31] A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. [32] So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. [34] He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own

donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] The next day he took out two denarii[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

[36] "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

[37] The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

<div align="center">Luke 10:29 - 37</div>

8 Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, 2 but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. 3 As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

4 "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

6 They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. 7 They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" 8 Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

9 When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. 10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

11 "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

<div align="center">John 8:1 - 11</div>

(I find it impossible to read this brilliant story without tears coming into my eyes.)

It seems to me that a religion derived from passages such as those quoted above *could*, conceivably, be of an individualistic nature, but that given that *all* of those four passages invite discussion, it is more reasonable to assume that a religion derived from these passages would feature *discussion*. Not necessarily *just* discussion of those, and other related, passages but, more broadly, the discussion of what the participants felt "led" to discuss. Thus, I make *discussion*— rather than, e.g., *sermonizing*—the central feature of NeWFism.

Introductory Comments

One could very well argue that most Christian church services don't *involve* worship in a Biblical sense; and that church services typically don't even *prepare*—or prepare well—those attending them for worship *activities*. That is, in a Biblical sense what "worship" involves is *doing* the Will of God, once one has ascertained *what* that Will is. Many Christians hold the view that the Will of God is embodied in the Bible; what they don't seem to realize, however, is that "embodied in the Bible" is subject to interpretation. For example, for Quakers the Will of God involves *current revelation*—and one can argue that that interpretation has a Biblical basis (as I argued in the first subsection above under "An Alternate Approach"). In that with most churches the Will of God given attention is that (ostensibly) revealed *long, long ago*, and recorded in the Bible, they attend **to an *obsolete* version of that Will**. Quakerism, in contrast, has the virtue of attending to God's Will for *us*, and *today*—and NeWFism has the same virtue, as I will try to indicate below.

Let us begin here by assuming a group of individuals who (a) live in the same general area, (b) are intent on worshipping God in a Biblical sense (i.e., do God's will, upon discovering it), and (c) wish to meet with like-minded others. One question that arises is: How should they *design* their meetings? What *principles* should they follow as they proceed in their meeting design? I would suggest the following:

- The service[74] should provide each attendee the opportunity to express his/her ideas regarding specific activities perceived as worshipful—whether those activities are ones that the speaker is thinking about for himself/herself; or ones of a collective nature, wherein the speaker is inviting others in the group to join in, if so inclined. Observation of this principle has, as one virtue, the advantage of enabling members of a congregation to become acquainted one with another. Conventional religious services (including "contemporary" ones) tend not to enable this to occur.[75] In fact, not only does the typical service not contribute to feelings of community/solidarity within the group; it tends to contribute to the formation of cliques, and thereby animosity. (An ironic fact, I might add!) For if one's experience, in attending to church, consists only of listening to a minister speak and chatting with a few others during the coffee hour, one is deprived of an opportunity to become well-acquainted with many of one's fellow congregants.

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[74]I use the word "service" here rather than "meeting" because it is more familiar in this context. Given that "worship," in a Biblical sense, *involves* service, strictly speaking it is not appropriate to call religious meetings "services"—even if their purpose is the preparation of attendees for service/worship.

[75] Having a "greeting" (perhaps called a "passing of the peace") period does not—obviously—enable congregants to get to know one another.

- It should provide each attendee with the opportunity to *speak* on whatever s/he feels "called" upon to speak about—whether it is a personal matter, a congregational matter, a current issue (such as global warming), a matter of foreign affairs, or whatever. Indeed, this includes a freedom even to speak on matters that are only tangentially—if at all—related to worship activities! Respect for the person is the guiding principle here, one that must be allowed to override all other principles.

  Underlying this principle is the fact that *any* religious leader—such as the ancient Hebrew prophets and Jesus—addresses the problems that s/he perceives in his or her society *at that time*; and although some of which such an individual says or writes may have relevance beyond that time, much does not—so that each generation must address the problems of *its own* time, and do so in a manner having particular relevance for that time.

- Corresponding with this opportunity to speak there should be an opportunity to *hear* what others have to say—whether or not that pertains directly, or even indirectly, to worship. An implication here is that one speaking must be allowed to speak without interruption—so that others are able to hear, and understand, what is being said.

- The opportunity to speak and listen should exist in a context in which interaction occurs. That is, people should have the opportunity to react to what others have said.

- This sort of interaction should occur in a situation that does not involve—or even *allow*, for that matter—exchanges that become heated. That is, interaction must proceed in an orderly manner that allows everyone to "have their say," but in such a fashion that shouting matches do not occur—and walls[76] are created: Bridges are needed between people, not walls.

- Services should provide the opportunity for attendees to plan activities of a worship nature to be engaged in with members of the group.

- Services should provide an environment that strengthens the commitment of attendees to engage in worship activities.

- Related to this, services should energize those who attend them; they should, i.e., help

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[76] The ideologies that "possess" people's minds form the most significant "walls"—with *religious* ideologies tending to be "walls" that are especially difficult to "scale." It is ironic—is it not?—that "my beliefs are correct, yours wrong" tends to take precedence over "love God and neighbor" with many people who claim to be "religious"!

attendees "recharge their batteries," so that they will be better able to engage in worship activities throughout the coming week.

- Another way of stating this last point is that services should provide an environment that is inviting to the Holy Spirit (which was important in [Paul's writings](#))—as a Being that can "possess" people, and thereby give them courage, energy, "aliveness," etc.

- Given that the Holy Spirit can not only possess people, but reveal truths to them (as John's gospel points out—see the previous subsection), services should be designed so that they conduce revelations to those in attendance.

- The environment of services should be such that they conduce the "knowledge" that God is a *real*, yet ultimately *mysterious*, Reality—about which little definite *can* be affirmed. One implication of this principle is that I see it as "telling" us that although music might very well be associated with services, this music should be *wordless*: There is wisdom in the historic use of organ music in church services. Charles Wesley is often promoted as one who had a gift for writing lyrics for hymns; perhaps it is time, however, that we begin to reconsider the wisdom of congregational singing—and instead allow only instrumental music during services. Why? Because any given set of lyrics expresses a particular *theological viewpoint*, and therefore by its very nature will be incapable of appealing to all of the members of a diverse group. The reason this latter point is important is that a subprinciple here is that meetings should *not* be restricted to just those with a certain given theological perspective—a principle that deviates rather sharply from conventional practice.

- Services should provide an opportunity to socialize with others in the group on an informal basis.

Although in the process of enunciating these principles I have made a few comments on how inadequately conventional services "measure up," I will eschew further commentary—instead encouraging the reader (if s/he agrees with these principles) to apply the principles to the church services with which they have had experience. Rather than critiquing the conventional service, my interest is primarily in presenting ideas for a *new* service design, and I begin that process below by making a few background comments.

Whereas those who led Christianity's initial development had (being under the sway of Greek philosophical concepts) an orientation to *truth* (with its associated intolerance, persecution, and violence), the nature of Jesus's "ministry"—and specifically his use of the parable—indicates (it seems to me) that Jesus's orientation, rather, was to *people*. How so? The first point to

recognize here is that a parable, *by its very nature*, has no single, objective meaning.[77] If it did, there would be no point in conveying one's message to others in such an indirect way.[78] This fact that parables, *by their very nature*, lack a single meaning—and therefore potentially have as many meanings as there are hearers of them[79]—was, I believe, recognized by Jesus (at an unconscious level, at any rate); and it was for this very reason that Jesus chose to teach using parables.

Jesus's use of the parable in teaching indicates to me that he knew that people were not merely different *physically* and *behaviorally*, but different in how they *thought*. And because Jesus believed that humans were created by God, he therefore "knew" that human diversity—including intellectual/mental diversity—was *good*.[80] Given his appreciation of human diversity, it is not at all surprising that Jesus used the parable in his "preaching." For:

- A parable encourages each hearer to derive an interpretation of the parable that has meaning for that person.

- Given, however, that a parable is a puzzle, and is likely to be so perceived, each hearer is likely to come to see his/her interpretation as tentative.

- Given this, the hearer of a parable is encouraged to realize that other hearers of a given parable are not only likely interpret the parable differently, but also tentatively.

- Given *that*, a hearer of a parable may very well (depending on one's personality) feel motivated to ask other hearers how *they* interpret the parable—so that one may broaden and deepen *one's own* interpretation of the parable.

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[77]See Schuyler Brown's perceptive comments in *Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today*. New York: Continuum, 1998, p. 23.

[78]I should note, however, that a number of years ago Hugh J. Schonfield argued that Jesus "spoke in parables so that the spies and informers who made it their business to be present wherever crowds gathered round a public speaker would be unable to detect anything subversive or inflammatory in what he said." *The Passover Plot*. New York: Bantam Books, 1969, p. 74. Originally published in 1966 by Bernard Geis Associates.   A 40th anniversary edition of this book was published in 2005 by The Disinformation Company.

[79]*More*, in fact—for in my own experience I have found more than one way of interpreting the Good Samaritan parable, for example.

[80]Paul's reference, in I Corinthians 12:12 - 31, to followers of Jesus as being analogous to the different parts of a body (specifically, Jesus's body) conveys the same idea. Two of my essays are concerned with this matter—this and this.

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- In the process of this interaction with others, one may very well develop a feeling of tolerance—and even liking, then love—for others, and the group itself may develop a feeling of community.

- In the process of this interaction, spiritual growth on the part of each individual may also very well occur.

- Because a parable is easily committed to memory, it invites continual *re*-interpretation by each hearer, which means . . . .

In short, not only is use of the parable a teaching method that (unlike the dialogical method used by Socrates) tends to promote harmony and minimize violent behavior on the part of hearers; in so doing it tends to *cause* the very sort of behavior that it "*advocates*."[81] So that Jesus's Good Samaritan parable, e.g., not only *illustrated* the "love of neighbor" law[82] that Jesus identified as central, but tended to *cause*, in a complex way, such behavior on the part of hearers. What genius!!

My own personal opinion is that where Christianity as a formal religion especially is deficient today is in its *services* (which is *part* of why I am writing this). Attempts have been made to correct that deficiency through the introduction of "contemporary" services. But the "contemporary worship" service movement can be criticized on a number of grounds,[83] and my own conviction is that that movement is not the answer to Christianity's problems—for it ignores the question of *why* we should meet in the first place. What I offer herein as an alternative to the "contemporary" service is a new institution, the *New Word Fellowship*. This is a recommendation that could be implemented either by existing churches (not too likely!), or (as NeWFism) by those who have exited their (Christian) churches—or those who are, and have been, unchurched.

A given congregation that is formed might decide that its services should consist just of NeWF sessions; or might, rather, decide that NeWF sessions would be *featured* in its services, but that its services should also contain elements *in addition* to NeWF sessions. (Or it might begin by just having NeWF sessions, and at a later date add other components to its services—and from

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[81]Assuming, of course, that it *does*, in fact, teach love (if but indirectly).

[82]This is not to say that that's *all* it did. One can argue that the Good Samaritan parable critiqued the religion of Jesus's society, was a critique of the book of Job, etc., etc.

[83]See, e.g., A. Daniel Frankforter, *Stones for Bread: A Critique of Contemporary Worship*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

time to time make changes in the character of its services.)

The New Word Fellowship is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: Practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France);[84] a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries;[85] and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a NeWF my personal experience with the adult "Sunday school" class at the church that I started attending in 1980, and attended for 29 years. The group consisted of individuals who had certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group had his/her unique personality, each had had different life experiences, different educational levels were represented, etc. The group was not a random sample of American society, of course, but still was rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views were represented. Despite the latter fact, we all felt free to express our views (so long as they were not too "heretical"!), because we knew that the others in the group would respect them; for there was a general consensus in the group that we were all "seekers," and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I led this group at various times, and during those periods attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. Thus, when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes's *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group was extremely important in my own spiritual development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves), and until recently I attended these Sunday sessions "religiously" (in 2009 we rejoined the Presbyterian church that we had attended upon our return to Wisconsin from Ohio).

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two

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[84]Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 179, pp. 41-43.

[85]Medicine Story, "Circles of Freedom," *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, "Calling the Circle," *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox "out of the blue." How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as "love the neighbor" is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a "fleshing out" of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps "energize" them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a "natural high") during a given NeWF session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences, from time to time, in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to have a "high" that lasted continuously for over three months.[86] I don't know why I was granted this valuable experience,[87] but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon cross-culturally and historically.[88] And, second, I believe that such an experience was common with the first "Jesuans."[89]

Preliminaries

What is a New Word Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even

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[86]In addition, two books have given me a "natural high": Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: New American Library, 1958. First published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1904. Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912. I read the first book in 1959, the second in 1984.

[87]During that period my *perceptions* changed so that, e.g., I was perceiving differences in *kind*, but not *degree.* I recall, e.g., talking to a young woman during that period, encouraging her to run for a local political office. She responded that she felt that she was somewhat of a freak in being rather tall. Up to that point I had not noticed that "fact" about her. The "lesson" that I learned from that experience is that although it is "natural" to perceive differences in *kind*, such is not the case for differences in *degree*: Such differences are ones that our minds *impose* on reality.

[88]See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

[89]For a brilliant discussion see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer*. See in particular Chapter 12 ("The Christian Cult," pp. 170 - 87).

experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

The fact that NeWFism features the NeWF—and therefore *discussion*—as its central institution makes it different from any other religion with a Jesuan origin. Ironically, however, the earliest version of Jesuanism may have featured this. As Burton L. Mack has stated:[90]

> There is very little agreement about who Jesus was, what he taught, and what the priorities were for those who joined his school. Some thought that debating the Pharisees was the biggest challenge; others were not at all worried about that. Some thought that a change of life-style was the litmus test for those who wanted to belong to the Jesus school; others sniffed at such ideas. They thought that the teachings should lead to meditation and insight about one's true nature as a child of the universe. Social formations of various kinds are in evidence. **At first it appears that loosely knit groupings met in ad hoc ways to talk about the "teachings" of Jesus.** And as for the matter of Jesus having had students who surely must have known what it was he intended, there is no evidence of any such groups. This means that a select group of students is the result of mythmaking at some later time when different schools of thought in the Jesus movement wanted to trace their teachings to special students of Jesus. [bolding added]

Also of relevance here is the statement (in Matthew 18:20) attributed to Jesus that " For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them"—a statement, though, that does not imply that the meetings of Jesuans should involve *just* discussion.

It is certainly reasonable to assume that after Jesus's departure time passed before any *organized* groups were formed and that, rather, "loosely knit groupings met in ad hoc ways." Unfortunately, however, we have no evidence one way or another regarding this matter.

To continue: Participants in a given NeWF[91] meet at a specified place on a regular (or not) basis.

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[90] *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., p. 102. A point that I would add here is that Mack states a few pages later (p. 106) that the early members of the Jesuan movement "must have been normal human beings responding to their times just as others were." The significance of this is that I perceive NeWFians as also responding to *our* present—with its threat to our continued existence as a species posed by, e.g., global warming.

[91] A book of relevance here is Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. Also, I should note that Mack (*op. cit.*, pp. 105 – 106) points out that the time when Jesus lived was a time that was "ripe for social experimentation, and early Christians were not the ones behaving in this [i.e., an experimental] way. Many other social experiments were taking place during the time that did not need Jesus for justification. It was a time for new configurations of the older philosophical schools. Private clubs and associations, sometimes called *fellowships* (*koinoniai*), sometimes *companies* (*thiasoi*, a "troop" or "party" or Bacchic revelers), emerged throughout the Eastern Mediterranean." Etc.

As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the "Bishop"[92]); they write their name on the slip, then give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random[93]) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion "on track."

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one NeWF session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a NeWF is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four NeWF sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first NeWF, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one's group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/[r!(n - r)]!$, where n is the number of others in one's whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one's particular subgroup at a given time. Rather than using this formula, however, I would suggest that the Bishop refer to the chart in the Appendix to this section.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of sortilege (i.e., a random procedure). This means not only that participants in a NeWF do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being "bosses" and "grunts":

Despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense).[94] Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The NeWF, however, is based on the

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[92]The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

[93]Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

[94]See, e.g., writings by Michael Parenti and G. William Domhoff.

assumption that everyone is not only *important* and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely "called" to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a NeWF all accept Jesus's love of the neighbor command as their central "creed," the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words *directly* pertinent to that creed.[95]
Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they will be seated in a circle,[96] and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: A real, if intangible, entity.[97] It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their *lives* (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

I should perhaps note here that—in light of what I wrote in Section II (the fact that "God" is given a variety of meanings in the Bible)—my preference is to perceive God more in *experiential* than in *intellectual* terms. Thus, in my references previously and below to "Presence," such a concept of God is implicit, as it is in my references to God as a Revealer.

As an aside here: I noted in the Preface that I do not perceive NeWFism as a "pie in the sky" sort of religion, but one that could be *useful*. Given this, I find it interesting that Carl J. Jung[98]

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[95]I am reminded here of Matthew Fox's statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. *([Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life.](#)* HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 ("Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey").

[96] The "circle represents the unknowable, spirit, and the heavens . . . ." John Michell*, [The Dimensions of Paradise: Sacred Geometry, Ancient Science, and the Heavenly Order on Earth](#)*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2008, p. 72.

[97]In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to NeWF participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his *[Coming Home to the Pleistocene](#)*. For example, Shepard states (p. 155): "Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself." Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have "designed" us for such an activity.

[98] This passage occurs in Jung's "Approaching the Unconscious," p. 76. This is the first of six essays in *[Man and His Symbols](#)*. New York: Dell Publishing, n.d. First published by Aldus Books in 1964. The editor of this collection was Jung, with M. L. von Franz taking over this job after Jung's death. The coordinating editor was John Freeman. Freeman's statement (p. xii) in the "Introduction" that Jung's

has presented an argument of this sort (with the difference being that global warming was not uppermost in Jung's mind, of course):

> Modern man may assert that he can dispense with . . . [e.g., the notion that there is a God] and he may bolster his opinion by insisting that there is no scientific evidence of their truth ["immortality" being the second matter referred to by Jung]. Or he may even regret the loss of his convictions. But since we are dealing with invisible and unknowable things (for God is beyond human understanding, and there is no means of proving immortality), why should we bother about evidence? Even if we did not know by reason our need for salt in our food, we should nevertheless profit from its use. We might argue that the use of salt is a mere illusion of taste or a superstition, but it would still contribute to our well-being. **Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that would prove helpful in crises and would give meaning to our existence?** [bolding added]
>
> And how do we know that such ideas are not true? Many people would agree with me if I stated flatly that such ideas are probably illusions. What they fail to realize is that the denial is as impossible to "prove" as the assertion of religious belief. [!!] We are entirely free to choose which point of view we take; it will in any case be an **arbitrary** decision. [bolding added]
>
> There is, however, a strong empirical reason why we should cultivate thoughts that can never be proved. It is that they are **known** to be **useful**. Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced that they make sense; he is crushed when, on top of all his misfortunes, he has to admit that he is taking part in a "tale told by an idiot" [referring here to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*] [bolding added]

Referring to religion in *utilitarian* terms—i.e., as either "useful" or "not useful"—may strike some as blasphemous, but Jung did not think so—and neither do I. Significantly, Jung did not simply assert that religion can be useful, but provided a *rationale* for his viewpoint—one showing a great deal of wisdom on his part. My reason for thinking of NeWFism as potentially useful—that it might help our species avoid *extinction*—differs from that of Jung, but let me add here that I am in agreement with Jung's views. One implication of that is that although I tend to perceive God in terms of Presence and Revealer, I would welcome to NeWFism those who perceive God in a *variety* of ways—including as non-existent! NeWFism has no creed (thank God!); rather, it insists only that participants accept the *behavioral rules* associated with

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"object always was to help men and women to know themselves, so that by self-knowledge and thoughtful self-use they could lead full, rich, and happy lives" suggests that Jung—unlike me—did not believe in the necessity of societal system change (although he seemed to recognize that we humans were headed for disaster; for example, on p 73 he stated that "mankind is now threatened by self-created and deadly dangers that are growing beyond our control."). Certainly Jung's statement (p. 91) that "nobody seems to know what to do" supports such a conclusion.

NeWFism—which rules, by the way, are subject to change by any given "congregation" if that congregation's members decide that certain changes in those rules are in order!

To return to the subject at hand: After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet's remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a "talking hoop"[99] passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet's immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that *only* the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or until an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles[100]

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during NeWF sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

    a. Members of the group must accept the above premises and conclusions; i.e., at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept as a truism that one person's views are as worthy of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.

    b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to "speak one's truth"[101] and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel "led" to speak—and certainly one should

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[99]Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus symbolizing well the goal of a New Word Fellowship to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, *Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

[100]Compare with Paul's comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

[101]This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a "talking hoop" (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: Monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).

c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels "called" to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).

d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they have said. One should show respect for others in the group— keeping in mind that "loving the neighbor" entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one's own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one's *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.

e. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one's *own* "speech" for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the [blind men feeling the elephant](#). So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to *listen attentively* to others as they speak.

f. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path "naturally," one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn't like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.

g. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too "cozy." Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) "devil's advocate" (but only when it is one's turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).

h. There is always the possibility that some who join a given NeWFian congregation will not "fit in" well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute "ballots" to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then

collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the service—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $(0.65)(x)$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given congregation (where $x = $ the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a NeWF are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus's use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the New Word Fellowship, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus's "ministry" as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable.

The parallel between Jesus's use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the NeWF is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the NeWF has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.[102]

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[102]One with a scientific background might say that the New Word Fellowship represents an "operationalization"—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

Section IV: Consequences of NeWF Participation

In this section I identify and discuss major consequences that I associate with participation in NeWF sessions, doing so using two different approaches—first a *generic* approach (i.e., one that focuses on *types* of consequences), and then a *genetic* (i.e., *causally*-oriented) one.[103] I might add here that if there is magic in ritual,[104] then so too can there be magic in "institutional furniture."[105] The "magic" in a New Word Fellowship, it seems to me, lies in the *unexpected* consequences associated with participation in a NeWF—which consequences may, however, be enhanced if one knows in advance what effects participation in a NeWF may have on oneself. For such knowledged may *increase* the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—i.e., make them a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will, unawares, have some effect on one's thinking and behavior, *foreknowledge* of possible consequences of participation can also impact one's thinking and behavior.

Let me begin here by noting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher [Max C. Otto](#),[106] in discussing his concept of "realistic idealism" years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) "filling station" in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a "young man," and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied*

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[103]I might note here that I see NeWF sessions as involving *ritualized* discussion, and believe that that ritualization has important—and multitudinous—consequences. Relevant here is Tom F. Driver*, [The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities](#). HarperSanFrancisco.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. On p. 71 Driver asserts that the "major functions of ritual . . . [are] making and preserving order, fostering community, and effecting transformation." Driver then devotes Chapter 7 to "Order" (pp. 131 - 51), Chapter 8 to "Community" (pp. 152 - 65), and Chapter 9 to "Transformation" (pp. 166 - 91).

[104]Driver, *op. cit*.

[105]Thorstein Veblen, *[The Theory of the Leisure Class](#)*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899.

[106]*[The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life](#)*. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V ("Realistic Idealism," pp. 128 - 53).

both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the New Word Fellowship because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in NeWF sessions . Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a NeWF fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below under two headings. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

Outcomes: Generic Approach

I have already made a few comments on outcomes, but below discuss them in more detail, using first a *generic* approach—doing so under three headings: intellectual, sociological, and personal. After having used that approach, I use a *genetic* one.

Intellectual

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a NeWF would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not *in itself* enough. Members of a NeWF, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the NeWF in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a NeWF proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the NeWF—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the NeWF's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a NeWF as having the capability of producing "good" *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is "crazy" in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a NeWF—the individual "crazinesses" will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created "Feeling Therapy."[107] (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Sociological

Precisely *because* I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from NeWF sessions, I believe that there will be *sociological* implications. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other "rules of engagement" been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the NeWF has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as "fine tuning" is needed in the NeWF's design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the NeWF is such that "hardening of the arteries" would never occur.

Personal

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a NeWF can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: Speaking one's mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one's interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one's claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part

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[107]See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, "Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy," in *Modern Therapies*, edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

(but not all) of the truth.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control[108] others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies[109] may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a NeWF will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the NeWF as an *equalizing* force that can counter whatever "natural" tendencies exist toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will experience improvement in their physical,[110] emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the NeWFian experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: Different people experiencing a "natural high" at different times, and for different durations. This "high" (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming "high" is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed "spirit" in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term "soul" would be appropriate).[111] In so perceiving other people, one's behavior toward them will

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[108]*They* may perceive this as exercising "leadership," rather. That is, they may put a positive "spin" on their objectionable behavior.

[109]For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Moral*s. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

[110]Including psychosomatic health. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man's Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

[111] Such a perception is perhaps most likely to occur if one—as, e.g., an eco-community resident—lives *close to nature*. Supporting such a judgment is this statement by Ohiyesa (Charles Alexander Eastman): "I believe that . . . nearness to nature as I have described keeps the spirit sensitive to impressions not

be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has *reverence* for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite.

Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.[112] And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective[113]) blasphemous.

Finally, some may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.[114] On the

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commonly felt, and in touch with the unseen powers." *The Soul of an Indian and Other Writings*. Edited by Kent Nerburn. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001, pp. 48, 49.

[112]Few Christians seem to understand the fact that "God" can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept (in addition to that provided earlier in this eBook—in Section II) see Daniel C. Maguire, "More People: Less Earth: The Shadow of Man-Kind," in (pp. 1 - 63) *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four ("God: The Heart of Reality") in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith.* HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

[113]See Raymond Panikkar, "Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute," in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

[114]Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and the movie *Groundhog Day* (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are systems, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the society and the dominant value system associated with those "peopling" the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal

one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as "possession" by the Holy Spirit; and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity "out there" some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive the creative ideas they receive as "revelations" from God (perceived as a transcendent Being,). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a "high" are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their "high" as also constituting "possession" by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Outcomes: Genetic Approach

To further comment on consequences associated with NeWF participation, let me next use a different approach (one focusing on causal relationships), basing my discussion on the following diagram (next page).

Each numbered comment below refers to the corresponding number on the diagram. The discussion that follows is intended to complement that given earlier in this section, not duplicate it. Overlap exists between the two discussions, but some important points made earlier are not repeated below; and, on the other hand, the discussion below adds some points not made above. Together, the two presentations should give the reader a fairly clear picture of the consequences that I foresee for NeWF sessions. If I discuss only *positive* consequences, that is because that's all I foresee!

1. During the course of a NeWF session creative ideas (i.e., new understandings, insights, ideas regarding what certain individuals or the group might do, etc.) may be received by one or more participants. At any rate, different perspectives are likely to be presented, and the various thoughts spoken (whether or not original to the speaker) can be thought of as pieces of a puzzle.[115]

2. During some sessions a creative idea will occur to someone that results in putting these various pieces together to form a complete picture. This will not occur in all sessions—

system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, and I discussed in briefly earlier in this eBook.

[115]But not pieces capable of being put together in just one way. In that respect, the analogy here is not a perfect one. (*None* are, of course!)

perhaps not even in most sessions. But it *will* occur in some sessions—especially once participants gain some experience with the NeWF as an institution.

3. That picture—i.e., that consensus—will be recognized by each participant as a good idea—a great idea, in fact. And because each will realize that s/he has made some contribution to that consensus, all will develop a strong commitment to that consensus.

4. That realization will produce in at least some participants a "natural high," an altered state of consciousness. With some having such an experience, the "high" will last only briefly; with others, it will continue for hours, even days—perhaps until the next NeWF session. The consequences of this altered state of consciousness are discussed under points 9 - 15 below.
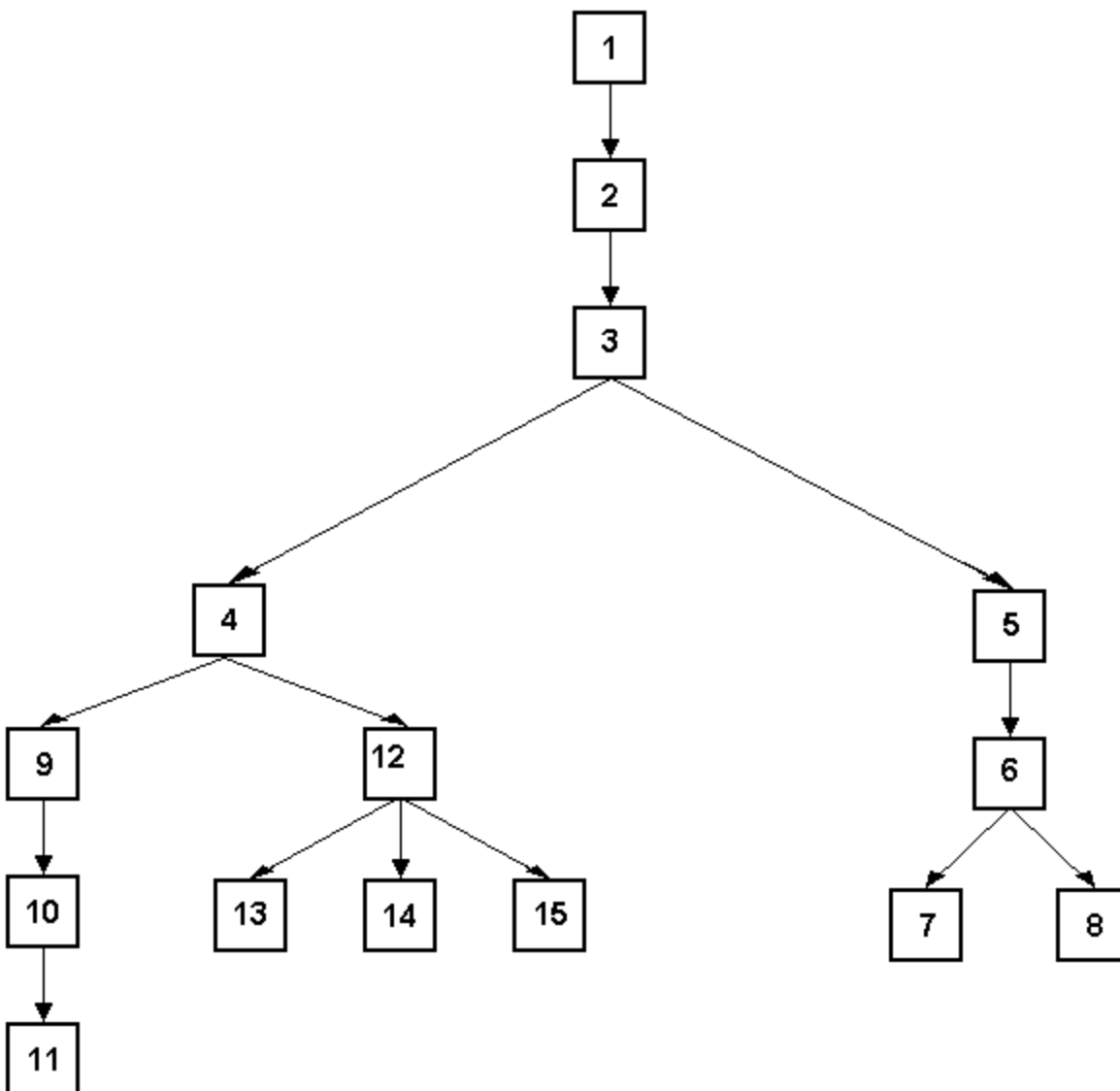
5. Achievement of a consensus likely will result in the development of a strong sense of solidarity, "community," within the group. A feeling that one's own personality has merged with the group—yet that one retains one's distinctiveness as an individual as well.

6. Gaining a sense of Oneness with the others in the group will also result in a feeling of well-being on the part of all members of the group. That is, all will develop feelings of enthusiasm, optimism, energy, "aliveness," a sense that one is a choice-maker in control of one's destiny, etc. Of course, the individuals comprising the group will have different personalities, so the feelings they develop in response to the achievement of consensus will vary.

7. If the consensus reached concerns an action to be engaged in by the group as a group, the feelings of well-being and enthusiasm will ensure that the action is performed well and expeditiously.

8. The feeling of well-being engendered by the consensus achieved will contribute to the physical, emotional, and mental health of each of the participants.

9. If the achievement of a consensus by the group results in a "natural high" on the part of a given participant (it may occur to several, even all), that person's perceptions may be altered—in that the person may begin to perceive that "there is more in Heaven and Earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy . . . ." That is, the person may begin to perceive things not just as consisting of inert *matter*, but also an intangible something that might be termed "spirit." Some will limit this perception to other people; others will limit it to animate beings; still others will begin to perceive "spirit" even in inanimate things such as rock formations.

10. Insofar as one perceives "spirit" in something, one will develop a feeling of respect—even reverence—for that thing. One may even perceive it as holy—as has occurred with many mountains, including the Black Hills in South Dakota.

11. That attitude toward other things will have behavioral implications for the one with such a perception in that s/he will not consciously engage in hurtful behavior directed toward things that are respected. One may even engage in *positive* behaviors toward them, including worshipful behaviors.

12. The experience of an altered state of consciousness may affect one's conception of Deity (if one has such a conception). The conventional way of conceiving Deity in our society is as a discrete, transcendent Being given the name God. But the experience of a "high"

may change one's conception of Deity—even to the extent that one no longer finds the name "God" as an adequate name for Deity. For one may, e.g., come to conclude (Buddhist-wise) that *naming* Deity is itself blasphemous!

13. One who believes in Deity may come to see the consensus reached as being a *revelation* from Deity (i.e., John's "Helper"[116]). This means that one continues to perceive Deity as a discrete, transcendent Being, but now is asserting that one does not accept the theory that the Christian Bible uniquely embodies God's revelation. With the Quakers one now "recognizes" that God is *not* dead (as the Biblicists imply), is still alive, and still reveals Truths to humans. And although one continues to think of God as a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to think that God's *only* role in today's world is to reveal Truths to humans—so that, e.g., so-called "acts of God" are not such, and that the very concept of "acts of God" is blasphemous.

14. One's "natural high" may be interpreted as "indwelling"—even "possession"—by God as Holy Spirit. Which may cause one to believe that when Paul was writing about being filled with the Holy Spirit, he was referring to what some would call a "natural high" experience. Note that in this case one is thinking of God not as a discrete, transcendent Being, but as an amorphous "ghostly" something that can be present in humans. What we have here is a "God as Presence" concept of God, a God that is *experienced* rather than a God that *does*, or has done, things (e.g., create things). Given the latter, a person who has come to conceive God as Presence is unlikely to think of God as, e.g., a *creator* of things, and is therefore likely to think of the current controversy involving the teaching of evolution as sadly misguided—that those who argue for Creationism/Intelligent Design are spiritually immature individuals whose thinking about spiritual matters utterly lacks in depth.[117]

15. If one comes to perceive spirit in all (or many) things (point 9), one may (but need not) equate that spirit with Deity—so that one comes to think of Deity in terms of *immanence*. That is, one comes to think of Deity as an all-pervasive Something that "inhabits" all things. One developing such a view would not only come to have *respect* for all things, but *reverence*. And if one not merely has respect for things, but reverence, one will be even less likely to engage in harmful behavior toward them. And if one *must* kill other living things to sustain oneself, one may feel that one must perform a ceremony first, and perhaps a ceremony afterward that expresses one's thanks. Because in this case one

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[116]See, e.g., John 14:26 and 15:26. "Advocate" is another translation.

[117]Of relevance here is John F. Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003.

thinks of Deity as definitely other than a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to conclude that any attempt to personify—or even name—Deity is blasphemous.

It is conceivable that a NeWF participant could move into category 13, or 14, or 15. For that matter, a participant could move into categories 13 and 14, *or* 13 and 15, *or* 14 and 15—*or* even 13, 14, *and* 15. There are several possibilities here. Especially if one moves into all three categories does it become possible for one to come to believe—paradoxically—that Deity is both knowable and unknowable at the same time! This is not, note, a conclusion that one can reach in "ordinary consciousness" using common sense. It is the sort of conclusion that one can reach only if one has had certain *experiences*.

Despite the fact that participation in a NeWF likely will likely expand one's *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a NeWF will, that is, make Deity come *alive* for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the "key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked . . . ."[118] Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a NeWF can one experience Deity in our society,[119] I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that "Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience."[120] A NeWF, however, is close to being a ski lift, I'm convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a NeWF can have "salvific" implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the NeWF. If New Word Fellowships involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may "come" to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to humankind's *survival*. This latter point is significant in that humankind's very existence is currently being threatened by "global warming," among other

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[118]"The Unawareness of God," in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

[119]L. Robert Keck has introduced "meditative prayer" as an alternate "path to the Spirit." See his *The Spirit of Synergy: God's Power and You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his Chapter 7 ("Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime"), refers (p. 125) to "the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about," and (p. 126) hitting the wall in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

[120]Marraine C. Kettell, "Becoming Ourselves," a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

factors.[121] (This matter is given more attention in Section V.)

Those familiar with feminist theological/religious literature will know that that literature emphasizes *experience*. For example, theologian Sheila D. Collins has noted (in discussing Mary Daly) that a "group of women at a Grailville theology conference," in writing down words "which expressed for them a sense of the meaning of God in their lives," wrote such words as energizing, empowering, grounding, being, creating, etc.[122] In other words, they thought of God in *verb* terms rather than *noun* terms. Thus, my discussion here of the NeWF may resonate with women more than men (who, I believe, tend to think of Deity as a person-like being—i.e., in *noun* terms). However, it seems to me that *both* men and women have narrow concepts of God, and that participation in a NeWF would help both develop a more sophisticated (if amorphous) concept of God.

It should go without saying that participation in a NeWF would place one squarely in the Judeo-Christian tradition. George E. Tinker has noted that the imperative *metanoite*, usually translated as "repent," is better translated as "return to God"—i.e., "recognize the divine hegemony, . . . return to the ideal relationship between Creator and the created."[123] Insofar as the key personages in the Judeo-Christian tradition have striven not only to themselves establish a close relationship with Deity, but help their fellows develop a closer relationship with Deity (and in a multi-faceted way), the NeWF is clearly in that Grand Tradition (unlike Christianity!).

Note, though, that a complex concept of "God" is associated with the NeWF (and in that respect is not unlike the Christian Bible!).[124] In some contexts (i.e., when one senses that one has received a revelation), one may conceive "God" as a discrete, transcendent Being. In other contexts (i.e., when one is experiencing a natural high), one may not so much *think* about what "God" is like, but *experience* "God" as a Presence (which one, like Paul of Tarsus, may refer to as constituting indwelling by the Holy Spirit). And in still other contexts (i.e., when one

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[121]See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

[122]*A Different Heaven and Earth*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974, p. 218.

[123]"Creation as Kin: An American Indian View," in *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 151.

[124]I should perhaps note that Jack Miles has discovered 24 different concepts of (or at least *roles* for) God in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., our "Old Testament")—a fact that I noted, and commented upon, earlier in this eBook (in Section II). See his *God: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

perceives Spirit in other people and/or things), one may think of "God" as an amorphous Something that is *immanent* (if one invokes the God-concept at all, that is). This latter God-concept is usually given the label "pantheism;" note, however, that it is given that label by those who not only conceive God as a discrete, transcendent Being, but tacitly assume that that's the *only* way "God" *can* be conceived. By, that is, narrow-minded people who, because *they* think that way, find it easy to condemn those who *don't* think their way as atheists, and treat them as if they had never heard of the "love of neighbor" command.

From the above discussion it should be clear that those who have for some time participated in a New Word Fellowship likely would not apply the label "panentheists" to themselves. For they are likely to regard this label that as a mere intellectual construct, one created by people who ostensibly would like to "think outside the box" imposed by their transcendent view of "God" but, in not having *experienced* anything that might be labeled Deity, are unable to escape their intellectual box.

On p. 4 of my "Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning" I introduced a graphic figure and stated that it was the "B" concept of worship that was Biblical rather than (the more conventional) "A" concept; that, in fact, the "A" concept should be thought of as not simply different from the "B" concept, but its *inverse*—its exact opposite. At this point, however, let me qualify that earlier statement by noting that although the New Word Fellowship, as an institution, on the one hand rejects—and utterly—the Servant concept of "God," this does not mean that it embraces, rather, the Master concept. As I have emphasized in this section, the NeWF participant likely associates different concepts of Deity with different contexts. Potentially three different concepts, in fact. One might say, therefore, that NeWF participants (some of them, at any rate) would be trinitarians, but in an unconventional way[125]—one that actually has some *meaning* for them!

Some Additional Thoughts

My discussion of the New Word Fellowship has, it will be noticed, focused solely on the NeWF as a discussion group, which suggests the question: Would meetings ("services") of participants in a NeWF consist *just* of discussions? And my answer is that although discussions (following the procedures outline above) would be the heart of meetings, NeWFian services might very well include much more than that: It is up to participants in a given NeWFian group to decide for themselves what (if anything) should take place during services besides discussions.

It is certainly possible, for example, that members of a given such group would engage in certain

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[125]For an example of the level of inanity to which conventional discussions of the trinity can descend, see Adelle Banks (of Religion News Service), "In Gender Debate, Jesus is 'Subordinate,'" *Christian Century*, Vol. 124, no. 4 (February 20, 2007), pp. 12 - 13.

collective activities prior to discussion sessions. (Recall that any given discussion group would contain about 12 people, so that if a given NeWFian group had, say, 144 members, and all members were present on a given meeting day, those members would divide into 12 NeWFs that day.) For example, a period might be devoted to announcements, another to music (but instrumental music only, as I stated earlier), another to readings, still others to rituals developed by and for that group, etc. And after discussion sessions had concluded, there might be a period for socializing, with refreshments. While activities were going on for the adults there would be infant/child care, and some sort of educational program for school-age children. Again, I am simply trying to be suggestive here; any given NeWFian "congregation" would make its own decisions as to the nature of its "services."

This fact of "congregational" autonomy does not mean that different NeWFian groups in the same area might not maintain contact one with another to share ideas, etc.—that, in fact, a "denomination" of sorts might not even develop. That, i.e., an *umbrella organization* might be formed that would, e.g., serve as a resource center for a group of NeWFian congregations—with a "bureaucracy" becoming attached to such a center. A control hierarchy would not, however, develop, given that members of any given congregation would prize diversity, and lack a pathological need to dictate to others how to think and act.

The fact that those attracted to NeWFism would, of necessity, be people who welcomed diversity in the others with whom they had contact (and that participation in NeWFs would itself help people become tolerant) does not mean that conflicts would never arise in a given NeWFian congregation. I would hope, however, that members of any given congregation would be able to deal well with internal conflicts, and be able in most cases to resolve whatever problems had arisen. The fact of the matter, however, is that people differ in intelligence, in the degree to which they are mentally ill, in their experiences, etc., so that cases will arise where the resolution of conflicts is not possible. In those cases, what I hope would happen is that a member who does not "fit in" would not simply leave the NeWF, but leave it and form another congregation. For there can't be too many NeWFian congregations!

But will NeWFismism be able to compete in the current "religious market" wherein the megachurches seem to be the "fittest" churches around? In answering this question, let me begin by noting that several decades ago sociologist Philip E. Slater suggested that there are "three human desires that are deeply and uniquely frustrated by American culture:

(1) The desire for *community*—the wish to live in trust and fraternal cooperation with one's fellows in a total and visible collective entity.

(2) The desire for *engagement*—the wish to come directly to grips with social and interpersonal problems and to confront on equal terms an environment which is not composed of ego-extensions.

(3) The desire for *dependence*—the wish to share responsibility for the control of one's impulses and the direction of one's life."[126]

I'm not so sure that I agree with Slater's third "desire," but would add to his list that many in our society recognize that they have certain talents, would like to develop those talents, but also feel the pressures of "career"—and are therefore forced to suppress such a desire. I believe that the success of the megachurches has little to do with the "conservative" theology that they expound, and much to do with the fact that they recognize (if but implicitly) that there are unmet desires "out there" (especially in suburbia), and have designed programs designed to "minister" to those unmet desires. In fact, some of those who have initiated megachurches have consciously used marketing techniques—as if they were selling cereal, not Jesus! As one who has myself been inspired by the Grand Tradition implicit in the (Christian) Bible, I have difficulty perceiving just how these megachurches *relate* to that Grand Tradition!

I have no difficulty in seeing NeWFian congregations as a part of that Tradition, however. More pertinent for the present topic of "success," however, is the fact that I believe that NeWFism can address well the needs and desires of the contemporary USan (i.e., citizen of the United States). One must, of course, have a sincere interest in spiritual matters to become a NeWF participant (a quality that may be lacking in many of those attracted to megachurches). And, one must have the mental flexibility to be able to "think outside the box," so far as one's ideas of "proper" services are concerned. Having studied the phenomenon of the diffusion of innovations, I know that the early stages of development are likely to involve "slow going" for any "NeWFian movement." However, once such a movement would achieve a certain "critical mass," there is the potential that it would begin to "take off," and become a significant force within U.S. society (among other societies).

The final point I would like to make is that I do not expect participants in NeWFs to *just* engage in talking. Rather, I expect varying sorts of activities ("outreach" and other) to occur on the part of NeWFians, each congregation making its own decisions on this matter—and with a "central office" (if one is established) acting as a resource.[127] For given that the "love of neighbor" command would be a central one for NeWFians, of necessity would members be "activists." In fact the motto of any particular NeWF should be: "Yes, I *am* my brother's keeper—inclding those brothers yet to be born!"

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[126]*The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 5. I am in awe of the brilliance of this book.

[127]For example, I would hope that NeWFians would recognize the dangers that lie ahead, and also recognize the necessity of *addressing* those dangers—that of global warming in particular—by moving our society in an *eco-communitarian* direction. See, e.g., Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

Because of the potential benefits—individual and societal—that can result from participation in a NeWF, I am hopeful that some of those who become aware of the proposal advanced herein will find it not only attractive, but compellingly so; and because they are also in substantial agreement with the Biblical basis that I provide for the proposal, feel "led" to "pick up the ball, and go with it." That would not only make me happy; doing so by a number of people—and soon—might very well be the key to humankind's "salvation"[128] from the threat of global ecocatastrophe. For humans would thereby be partnering with God—and as has been said (Matthew 19:26), with God, all things are possible.

Appendix: Group Formation

The Bishop is in charge of group formation. The chart below indicates how this would be done, depending on the number of participants on any given day. The first column indicates the number of participants present (exclusive of the Bishop), the other columns the number in each group that is formed that day. The first person chosen for a given group is the group's Prophet for the day. After all groups have been formed, the Bishop joins the last group.

No.	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
1	1				
2	2				
3	3				
4	4				
5	5				
6	6				
7	7				
8	8				
9	9				
10	10				
11	11				
12	12				

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[128]The term "salvation" is usually used in conjunction with the afterlife. Here, however, I use the term in a more Biblical (i.e., here-and-now) sense, e.g., as it is used in the book of Psalms. For example, in Psalms 22 (which begins "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?") we find (vs. 19, 20): "Oh LORD, don't stay away from me! Come quickly to my rescue! Save me from the sword; save my life from these dogs." The salvation needed when that Psalm was written was from the wrath of enemies; today, our enemy is global warming.

13	13		
14	14		
15	15		
16	8	8	
17	9	8	
18	9	9	
19	10	9	
20	10	10	
21	11	10	
22	11	11	
23	12	11	
24	8	8	8
25	9	8	8
26	9	9	8
27	9	9	9
28	10	9	9
29	10	10	9
30	10	10	10
31	11	10	10
32	11	11	10
33	11	11	11
34	12	12	12
35	13	12	12

36	9	9	9	9
37	10	9	9	9
38	10	10	9	9
39	10	10	10	9
40	10	10	10	10
41	11	10	10	10
42	11	11	10	10
43	11	11	11	10
44	11	11	11	11
45	12	11	11	11
46	12	12	11	11

47	12	12	12	11	
48	12	12	12	12	
49	10	10	10	10	9
50	10	10	10	10	10

Etc.

Section V: Addressing Global Warming

Here was a man [i.e., Martin Luther King, Jr.]—especially in the last years of his life—who clearly was thinking not simply about new programs and policies, but about what can only be called changing the system. "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar," King said. "It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

On another occasion, King said, "One day we must ask the question, 'Why are there 40 million poor people in America?' And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy and to ask questions about the whole society." Elsewhere he added, "Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all God's children."

(From Gar Alperovitz's "[Beyond the Dreamer](#)." I agree that "there must be a better distribution of wealth," and agree that "the system" must be changed (replaced, I would say!) to achieve that goal, but would add that today we must especially strive to create a New Society that will help "save" us from the ravages of global warming. In creating that New Society, human well-being must be given attention, not just human survival, and that requires attending to our "design specifications" as humans.)

In the Introduction I noted that we humans are in a dire situation presently, faced as we are with the prospect that global warming will be "wiping out" most of the world's population within a matter of decades (or even years!)—**regardless of what we do**. I added that our "leaders" have not responded to this threat in any meaningful way, and are not likely to do so: If they do, it is likely to be "too little, too late"—or may involve the wrong sorts of actions, ones that actually *exacerbate* our problems!

Given the lack of responsiveness on the part of our leaders, if one is to have any hope of surviving the ravages of global warming in our near future, one will need to try to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring. This means that one will need either (as an individual or family) to become a homesteader or move to a small eco-community—either an existing one that accepts new members, or one that one has created—jointly with like-minded others—for oneself, one's family members, and others.

I have also emphasized that the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) would not only be a religious institution, but could be a vehicle for "saving" at least some members of our species from a premature death resulting from the various "dimensions" of global warming.

I indicated that of the two possible courses advocated—becoming a homesteader or becoming an eco-communitarian—the latter course of action was the preferable one—in that it would permit the continuation of civilized existence in some form. I also indicated, however, that even the best efforts to survive might fail—that the "forces" associated with global warming might be so overwhelming as to make survival impossible. I added, though, that that (very real) possibility should not deter us from at least *trying* to survive.

In my "A Sociological Perspective on the CEC," "CECs and the 'Working Class,'" "Culture in the New Society," "A Communities Program: Some Tentative Ideas" and "Community 'Talking Points'" I presented some of my ideas regarding principles to be followed in community-building, and below add some more ideas—for consideration, e.g., by NeWFians. First, I make some comments on building a community with global warming in mind, then I discuss The Discrepancy—a critical "event" in human history that explains much of what has happened over the centuries, but also an "event" that has led to the exploration of "human design specifications." Their significance is that *unless* communities are also designed with *them* in mind, the well-being of residents will not be maximized.

Designing for Global Warming

Designing for global warming involves two considerations—the phenomena associated with global warming *per se*, and the implications of global warming for producing the food necessary for survival.

"Global warming" itself involves not just a *trend* in the warming of the atmosphere, but an increase in the *number* of storms, an increase in their *severity*, and increased *variability* in weather conditions—so that they will become increasingly unpredictable. Responding to the changing atmospheric conditions should involve (among other possibilities);

- Using earth-sheltering building procedures to reduce exposure to the sun, and take advantage of cooling offered by the earth.

- Building structures to minimize exposure to the elements—so that storm damage is minimized. This includes using materials for windows that will resist breakage.

- Using building procedures that minimize the need for energy use.

- Using and developing procedures for creating "safe" energy—such as solar panels, "trombe" walls, and wind mills.

Food and water are basic necessities for survival, and a prime consideration in community location is to choose a location where potable water is readily available—and likely will be available for years to come. So far as food is concerned, one must keep in mind that the imminent collapse of societies will mean that food will be available only if communities produce for the needs of their residents. Thus, if one is to have any hope of surviving the ravages of global warming communities will need to become "community-sufficient" in food production. They will need to:

- Produce those foods that are *least sensitive* to the vagaries of the weather.

- Produce foods in a *manner* to withstand both the vagaries of the weather and storm damage. This might mean, e.g., emphasizing greenhouse gardening (such as is being promoted here in Milwaukee by Will Allen's [Growing Power, Inc](#)., organization).

Will Allen's organization represents an excellent example here:

> The urban farm currently includes:
>
> - **six traditional greenhouses** growing over 15,000 pots of herbs, salad mix, beet greens, arugula, mustards, seedlings, sunflower and radish sprouts. These greenhouses also host production of six hydroponic systems growing Tilapia, Perch, and a variety of herb and salad greens, and over 50 bins of red wriggler worms;
>
> - **two aquaponics hoop houses** with two independent fish runs and growing beds for additional salad mix and seedlings;
>
> - **seven hoop houses** growing a mixture of salad greens and mushrooms;
>
> - **a worm depository** hoop house;
>
> - **an apiary** with 14 beehives;
>
> - **three poultry hoop houses** with laying hens and ducks;
>
> - **outdoor pens for livestock** including goats and turkeys;
>
> - a large plot of land on which the first stage of the organization's sophisticated **composting operation** is located including 30 pallet compost systems;
>
> - an **anerobic digester** to produce energy from the farm's food waste;
>
> - a **rain water catchment system**; and
>
> - **a retail store** to sell produce, meat, worm castings, and compost to the community.

In addition, gathering and hunting should be given serious consideration as food sources.

The Discrepancy and Human Design Specifications

A useful starting point here is the following statement:

> *Homo sapiens* has been a hunter and gatherer for 90 percent of his existence, and if to this period we add the era of pre-man, the figure rises to 99 percent of our ancestry. Because of this long evolutionary experience, hunting and gathering is the way of life for which we are genetically "wired," and it fits comfortably with our physical and psychological makeup.[129]

The *reason* we became "wired" for such a way of life is that those individuals who "fit" that way of life tended to survive, and then produce progeny who inherited the traits that would fit them to this way of life. In this way the gathering-hunting way of life shaped human biology so that we became "designed":

- To receive certain stimuli, and to not receive other stimuli.

- To engage in certain behaviors, and to not engage in other behaviors.

- To use our brains in a certain way (basically, to be mentally immersed in the "surround," and to think especially in particularistic terms), and not to use them in other ways (e.g., abstract thinking divorced from the surround).

While humans were gatherers and hunters,[130] and because our ancestors placed a premium on intelligence (because it was useful as a survival tool), brain size increased, and this had at least two important consequences:

- It forced babies to be born prematurely, given an inability of the female pelvis[131] to develop in concert with the human brain.

- It led to technological developments which, in turn, had implications for the gather-hunter way of life.

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[129] Warren A. Johnson, *Muddling Toward Frugality*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1979, p. 33

[130] I use this formulation—i.e., "*gather*-hunter"—in preference to "*hunter*-gatherer" in deference to Richard E. Leakey, who observed that with the !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert in Africa gathering provided the bulk of the food. See his (with Roger Lewin) *People of the Lake: Mankind and Its Beginnings*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978.

[131] The development of bipedalism also had relevance here. Nancy Makepeace Tanner, *On Becoming Human*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 157.

With babies being born prematurely, the species could continue in existence only if infant care became a part of the human behavioral repertoire—which it did. We thus have the first human groups. In that females may have practiced (female-choice) sexual selection,[132] this had the effect of not only bringing males into the group but, specifically, males who would be willing to play with offspring, help with protection, help provide food to mother and child, and be friendly.[133] Thus, a *genetic predisposition* for sociality, cooperativeness, became ingrained in our biology—contrary to the ignorant notion of "original sin" taught in many Christian denominations.

This "happy" situation began to change, however, as increasing intelligence and technological innovations began to have an effect on way of life, so that over a long period of time the gathering-hunting way of life gave way to a sedentary way of life based on cultivation and animal tending. Changes in economic activities helped bring about increases in group size. And although with sedentary peoples the ideal village size is about 130,[134] settlements began to grow beyond that point, an important consequence being that social differentiation began to arise (with its accompanying exploitation of some by others), states (i.e., grouping of settlements) began to develop, along with conflict between nearby states.

The development of evolutionary thinking during the nineteenth century (but not Charles Darwin's ideas *directly*) has enabled us to develop a valuable perspective on this transition from gathering-hunting to agriculture, in that it allows us to think in terms of a *Discrepancy*[135] (a term introduced by David P. Barash) that developed—and has had a number of important implications. The thinking associated with this concept is as follows:

> As way of life was changing (with the Agricultural Revolution and after), human biology tended to remain unchanged—the reason that Barash has referred to the former as the "hare" and the

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[132] A point that needs emphasis here is that *Darwinian* "natural selection" (which provides the "theoretical" basis for "social Darwinism") played NO ROLE WHATSOVER in human evolution! See, e.g., my (partially completed) *Ringing the Bell for Darwin*. Current definitions of "natural selection"—e.g., this—are basically vacuous in that they make no reference to *mechanisms of change*. Darwin's concept of natural selection at least had the virtue of including such a (hypothetical) mechanism—inter-specific competition.

[133] *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

[134] Felicitas D. Goodman*, Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 163.

[135] The term was introduced by sociobiologist David P. Barash, and discussed in his "The Conflict Between Culture and Biology in Human Affairs," pp. 318 – 324 in *Sociobiology and Behavior*. New York: Elsevier, 1977. Later, Barash devoted a book to the subject: *The Hare and the Tortoise: Culture, Biology, and Human Nature*. New York: Penguin, 1988 (a book that I do not recommend, however).

latter as the "tortoise." Put another way, after the Agricultural Revolution there grew an increasing "discrepancy" between the (a) way of life for which humans had become "designed" during the period from 15,000 years ago to 10,000 years ago, and the (b) way of life that they were actually living—a way of life that for most was one *imposed* on them. That is, the "fit" that had existed prior to the Agricultural Revolution gradually weakened, that weakening becoming especially pronounced after the Industrial Revolution (which began about 1750 CE).

On the one hand, **one likely could argue that virtually all—if not all (!)—of humankind's problems over the millennia have their ultimate origin in The Discrepancy** (a point that I made in the Preface). To my knowledge, no one has yet developed a detailed argument to this effect, but certainly my claim here has a high degree of plausibility.

On the other hand, though, one could argue that that this Discrepancy has had various *positive* implications as well—being the reason why:

- Various ancient religions—e.g., the Hebrew religion—developed an *ethical* component (under the influence of the prophetic element that arose).

- Critiques of society have been developed and publicized.

- Research has been undertaken to understand *why* various human problems exist.

- Utopian thinking has arisen (including the brief utopias of the Bible).

- The planning and building "intentional" communities has occurred.[136]

- Reform efforts have been engaged in—some peaceful, others involving violence.

- An effort has been made to identify human "needs"—and "design specifications."

Although I credit David P. Barash with introducing the *term* "discrepancy," I credit Thorstein Veblen with *developing* the concept. Veblen failed, though, to develop a coherent narrative presenting his ideas relative to the concept. But as the concept *needs* further clarification, I have chosen here to present a Discrepancy argument, and support it with quotations from two of Veblen's works, his "Christian Morals and the Competitive System" (1910),[137] and *The Instinct*

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[136] For example, see Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1976.

[137]Published in the *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 20, no. 2 (January 1910), pp. 168 – 185. This article was reprinted in *Essays in Our Changing Order*, by Thorstein Veblen, edited by Leon Ardzrooni.

of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts (1914),[138] placing them in an "argument" that I have developed. The wikipedia web site gives a great deal of valuable information about Thorstein Bunde Veblen and his writings, and I recommend it highly.

The first work (i.e., the article) will be referred to below as "CM," the latter as "IW." If a quotation does not appear under a given point, what this signifies is either that I have placed a relevant quotation(s) under some other point(s), or the point itself represents a "missing link" in Veblen's reasoning that I am supplying for the sake of completeness.

1. Contemporary "savages" (the term used a century ago to refer to gatherer-hunter peoples) have been found to engage primarily in positive behaviors (e.g., working cooperatively with others in the group) and neutral activities (e.g., conversing and/or joking with others in the group).

> While this ["the principle of brotherly love, or the impulse to mutual service"] seems to be a characteristic trait of Christian morals and may serve as a specific mark by which to distinguish this morality from the greater non-Christian cults, it is apparently a trait which Christendom shares with many of the obscurer cultures, and which does not in any higher degree characterise Christendom than it does these other, lower cultures. In the lower, non-Christian cultures, particularly among the more peaceable communities of savages, something of the kind appears to prevail by mere force of hereditary propensity; at least it appears, in some degree, to belong to these lower civilisations without being traceable to special teaching or to a visible interposition of divine grace. And in an obscure and dubious fashion, perhaps sporadically, it recurs throughout the life of human society with such an air of ubiquity as would argue that it is an elemental trait of the species, rather than a cultural product of Christendom. It may not be an overstatement to say that this principle is, in its elements, in some sort an atavistic trait, and that Christendom comes by it through a cultural reversion to the animus of the lower (peaceable) savage culture. [CM, pp. 204 – 205]

> the lower cultures, where the hereditary traits of the species should presumably assert themselves . . . . [CM, p. 206]

> The Christian principles inculcate brotherly love, mutual succor: Love thy neighbor as thyself; *Mutuum date, nihil inde sperantes*. This principle seems, in its elements at least, to

be a culturally atavistic trait, belonging to the ancient, not to say primordial, peaceable culture of lower savagery. [CM, p. 214 - 215]

the golden rule of the peaceable savage has never lost the respect of occidental mankind, and its hold on men's convictions is, perhaps, stronger now than at any earlier period of the modern time. [CM, p. 215]

Its [renunciation's] companion principle, brotherly love or mutual service, appears, in its elements at least, to be a very deep rooted and ancient cultural trait, due to an extremely protracted experience of the race in the early stages of human culture, reinforced and defined by the social conditions prevalent in the early days of Christianity. [CM, p. 216]

the impulsive bias of brotherly love . . . . [CM, p. 218]

2. We can infer from this fact that prior to the Agricultural Revolution—when only "savage" humans existed—similar behavior prevailed with the humans of the time.

3. Given that with the "savages" of the pre-Agricultural Revolution period we can assume that there had been co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life (with associated behavior patterns), we can conclude that the behaviors these individuals engaged in expressed the "human nature" that had developed.

4. With the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life (with associated institutions) began to develop, and with them new behavior patterns (etc.).

5. However, human biology remained relatively unchanged over time. *Because* it was not changing, humans were now engaging in some behaviors contrary to their innate promptings (i.e., "human nature").

A surviving mutant type is necessarily suited more or less closely to the circumstances under which it emerged and first made good its survival, and it is presumably less suited to any other situation. [IW, p. 16]

Changes in the institutional structure are continually taking place in response to the altered discipline of life under changing cultural conditions, but human nature remains specifically the same. [IW, p. 18]

But there is no warrant for assuming that each or any of these successive changes in the scheme of institutions affords successively readier, surer or more facile ways and means for the instinctive proclivities to work out their ends, or that this sequence of change is more suitable to the untroubled functioning of these instincts than any phase that has gone before. Indeed, the presumption is the other way. [IW, p. 19]

the fitness of any given type of human nature for life after the manner and under the conditions imposed by any later phase in the growth of culture is a matter of less and less secure presumption the farther the sequence of institutional change has departed from that form of savagery which marked the initial stage in the life-history of the given racial stock. [IW, p. 20]

history records more frequent and more spectacular instances of the triumph of imbecile institutions over life and culture than of peoples who have by force of instinctive insight saved themselves alive out of a desperately precarious institutional situation . . . . [IW, p. 25]

changes come rarely—in effect, not at all—in the endowment of instincts whereby mankind is enabled to employ these means [e.g., "technological ways and means"] and to live under the institutions which its habits of life have cumulatively created. [IW, p. 35]

6. We moderns still have the same basic biology (including innate behavioral tendencies) as our "savage" ancestors did, but our ways of life (with associated institutions) encourage (if not cause) behavior patterns that are far more deviant than were those of, e.g., the early agriculturalists.

7. Because our modern way of life (with its particular institutions) virtually requires us to engage in behaviors that are contrary to ones that would be in accord with our biological nature, the resulting "discrepancy" has various negative consequences for us: It precipitates pathological behaviors (involving harm to others and/or oneself), physical illnesses (including ones of a psychosomatic nature), mental problems, etc.

> But such an animus as best comports with the logic of the machine process does not, it appears, for good or ill, best comport with the native strain of human nature in those peoples subject to its discipline. In all the various peoples of Christendom there is a visible straining against the drift of the machine's teaching, rising at time and in given classes of the population to the pitch of revulsion.

> It is apparently among the moderately well-to-do, the half-idle classes, that such a revulsion chiefly has its way; leading now and again to fantastic, archaising cults and beliefs and to make-believe credence in occult insights and powers. At the same time, and with the like tincture of affectation and make-believe, there runs through much of the community a feeling of maladjustment and discomfort, that seeks a remedy in a 'return to Nature' in one way or another; some sort of return to 'the simple life,' which shall in some fashion afford an escape from the unending 'grind' of living from day to day by the machine method and shall so put behind us for a season the burdensome futilities by help of which alone life can be carried on under the routine of the machine process. [IW, pp. 318 - 319]

> This growing recourse to vacations should be passably conclusive evidence to the effect that neither the manner of life enforced by the machine system, nor the occupations of those

who are in close contact with this technology and its due habits of thought, can be 'natural' to the common run of civilised mankind. [IW, p. 319]

According to accepted theories of heredity, civilised mankind should by native endowment be best fit to live under conditions of a moderately advanced savagery, such as the machine technology will not permit. Neither in the physical conditions which it imposes, therefore, nor in the habitual ways of observation and reasoning which it requires in the work to be done, is the machine age adapted to the current native endowment of the race. And these various movements of unrest and revulsion are evidence, for as much as they are worth, that such is the case.

Not least convincing is the fact that a considerable proportion of those who are held unremittingly to the service of the machine process 'break down,' fall into premature decay. Physically and spiritually these modern peoples are better adapted to life under conditions radically different from those imposed by this modern technology. [IW, p. 320]

The limit of tolerance native to the race, physically and spiritually, is short of that unmitigated materialism and unremitting mechanical routine to which the machine technology incontinently drives. [IW, p. 321]

Laymen seek respite in the fog of occult and esoteric faiths and cults, and so fall back on the will to believe things of which the senses transmit no evidence; while the learned and studious are, by stress of the same 'aching void,' drawn into speculative tenets of ostensible knowledge that purport to go nearer to the heart of reality, and that elude all mechanistic proof or disproof. [IW, p. 331]

Neither the manner of life imposed by the machine process, nor the manner of thought inculcated by habituation to its logic will fall in with the free movement of the human spirit, born, as it is, to fit the conditions of savage life. So there comes an irrepressible—in a sense, congenital—recrudescence of magic, occult science, telepathy, spiritualism, vitalism, pragmatism. [IW, p. 334] [Other consequences?!!]

8. Still, because humans continue to have the same basic biology that they had when "savagery" prevailed, from time to time (and especially within certain classes of people) behavior in accord with "human nature" occurs on a rather widespread scale.[139]

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[139] Twice in "Christian Morals . . . ." (on p. 217) Veblen used the term "mutual aid," suggesting that he was familiar with Prince Peter Kropotkin's book with that title (published in 1902, but based on a series of articles published several years earlier in *The Nineteenth Century*, an important periodical of the time). (Kropotkin had written the articles to respond to an earlier article in the same periodical by Thomas H. Huxley.) Veblen may also have been familiar with other of Kropotkin's works, such as *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1924)—for, after all, Veblen was a well-read man. Insofar as Veblen was familiar with Kropotkin's works, he would have learned of "mutual aid" behavior in both the animal and human realms—some of Kropotkin's knowledge on the matter resulting from his own research in

[At the time of the origin of Christianity:] The pride of caste and all the principles of differential dignity and honor fell away, and left mankind naked and unashamed and free to follow the promptings of hereditary savage human nature [,] which make for fellowship and Christian charity. Barring repressive conventionalities, reversion to the spiritual state of savagery is always easy; for human nature is still substantially savage. The discipline of savage life, selective and adaptive, has been by far the most protracted and probably the most exacting of any phase of culture in all the life-history of the race; so that by heredity human nature still is, and must indefinitely continue to be, savage human nature. This savage spiritual heritage that 'springs eternal' when the pressure of conventionality is removed or relieved, seems highly conducive to the two main traits of Christian morality, though more so to the principle of brotherly love than to that of renunciation [or "humility," "abnegation"]. [CM, p. 209]

[The brotherly love principle that operated with the early Christians has lost much of its force,] being currently represented by a thrifty charity, and, perhaps, by the negative principle of fair play, neither of which can fairly be rated as a competent expression of the Christian spirit. Yet this principle is forever reasserting itself in economic matters, in the impulsive approval of whatever conduct is serviceable to the common good and in the disapproval of disserviceable conduct even within the limits of legality and natural right. [CM, p. 216]

[The historical development of a period, prior to the Industrial Revolution, during which handicraft and petty trade were the dominant features of the economy involved, one might argue,] a qualified or mitigated (sophisticated) return to the spirit of savagery, or at least as a spiritual reversion looking in that direction, though by no means abruptly reaching the savage plane. [IW, p. 204]

That the eighteenth-century system of Natural Rights shows such a degree of approximation to the scheme of rights and obligations observed among many primitive peoples need flutter no one's sense of cultural consistency. Return to Nature was more or less of a password in the closing period of the era of handicraft and after, and in respect of this system of civil relations it appears that the popular attitude of that time was in effect something of a reversion to primitive habits of thought; though it was at best a partial return to a 'state of nature,' in the sense of a state of peace and industry rather than a return to the unsophisticated beginnings of society. [IW, p. 297]
It is not that the era of handicraft was an era of reversion to savagery, but only that the tone-giving factor in the community of that time reverted, by force of the state of the industrial arts, to habits of peace and industry, in which direct and detailed manual work takes a leading place. [IW, pp. 297 - 298]

Siberia. (Veblen also used "mutual service" twice—pp. 204 and 216—and "mutual succor" twice—pp. 208 and 215—in "Christian Morals . . . ").

9. There is therefore hope that such behavior can come to the fore again, on a widespread scale, if the circumstances are right.

> Except for a possible reversion to a cultural situation strongly characterised by ideals of emulation and status, the ancient racial bias embodied in the Christian principle of brotherhood should logically continue to gain ground at the expense of the pecuniary morals of competitive business. [CM, p. 218]

10. What are those "circumstances"?

The right *institutional situation* (among other factors), I would argue, based on my general reading of Veblen. Veblen, though, was silent on this matter. However, the fact that he perceived the "savage" way of life as "natural" and regarded that way of life as normative means that he would have been supportive of institutions that permitted, and even conduced, behaviors characteristic of "savagery."

Carl G. Jung also demonstrated recognition of The Discrepancy and come of its consequences in his "Approaching the Unconscious":[140]

> I am not denying that great gains have resulted from the evolution of civilized society. But these gains have been made at the price of enormous losses, whose extent we have scarcely begun to estimate.

<div align="center">p. 36</div>

> "Where there's a will, there's a way" is the superstition of modern man.

> Yet in order to sustain his creed, contemporary man pays the price in a remarkable lack of introspection. He is blind to the fact that, with all his rationality and efficiency, he is possessed by "powers" that are beyond his control. His gods and demons have not disappeared at all; they have merely got new names. The keep him on the run with restlessness, vague apprehensions, psychological complications, an insatiable need for pills, alcohol, tobacco, food—and above all, a large array of neuroses.

<div align="center">p. 71</div>

> What we call civilized consciousness has steadily separated itself from the basic instincts. But these instincts have not disappeared. They have merely lost their contact with our consciousness and are thus forced to assert themselves in an indirect fashion. This may be by means of physical symptoms in the case of neurosis, or by means of incidents of various kinds, like unaccountable moods, unexpected forgetfulness, or mistakes in speech.

<div align="center">p. 72</div>

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[140] This is the first of six essays in *Man and His Symbols, op cit.*.

Modern man does not understand how much his "rationalism" (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic "underworld." He has freed himself from "superstition" (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is not paying the price for this break-up in world-wide disorientation and dissociation.

p. 84

Our intellect has created a new world that dominates nature, and has populated it with monstrous machines. The latter are so indubitably useful that we cannot see even a possibility of getting rid of them or our subservience to them. Man is bound to follow the adventurous promptings of his scientific and inventive mind and to admire himself for his splendid achievements. At the same time, his genius shows the uncanny tendency to invent things that become more and more dangerous, because they represent better and better means for wholesale suicide.

In view of the rapidly increasing avalanche of world population, man has already begun to seek ways and means of keeping the rising flood at bay. But nature may anticipate all our attempts by turning against man and his own creative mind. The H-bomb, for instance, would put an effective stop to overpopulation. In spite of our proud domination of nature, we are still her victims, for we have not even learned to control our own nature. Slowly but, it appears, inevitably, we are courting disaster.

pp. 90, 91

Finally, some more recent comments relative to The Discrepancy and its consequences by René Dubos in his *So Human An Animal*:[141]

All thoughtful persons worry about the future of the children who will have to spend their lives under the absurd social and environmental conditions we are thoughtlessly creating . . . .

p. xi

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[141] New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.

Modern man is anxious, even during peace and in the midst of economic affluence, because the technological world that constitutes his immediate environment, by separating him from the natural world under which he evolved, fails to satisfy certain of his unchangeable needs. In many respects, modern man is like a wild animal spending its life in a zoo; like the animal, he is fed abundantly but deprived of the natural stimuli essential for many functions of his body and his mind. Man is alienated not only from other men, not only from nature, but more importantly from the deepest layers of his fundamental self.

<div align="center">p. 16</div>

The kind of life so widely predicted for the twenty-first century is unbelievable in the etymological sense because it is incompatible with the fundamental needs of man's nature. These needs have not changed significantly since the Late Stone Age and they will not change in the predictable future; they define the limits beyond which any prediction of the future becomes literally unbelievable.

<div align="center">p. 20</div>

the very fact that man readily achieves biological and sociocultural adjustments to so many different kinds of stresses and undesirable conditions is dangerous for his welfare and his future.

<div align="center">p. 146</div>

Many of the health problems of modern man, in the present and for the future, have their origin in slowly developing injurious effects of the technological environment and the new ways of life.

Technology should [but does not!] have as its most important goal the creation of environments in which the widest range of human potentialities can unfold.

<div align="center">p. 164</div>

[We are on a] mindless and suicidal course. At heart, we often wish we had the courage to drop out and recapture our real selves. The impulse to withdraw from a way of life we know to be inhuman is probably so widespread that it will become a dominant social force in the future. [It hasn't yet, but let us hope that it does soon—beginning yesterday!]

<div align="center">p. 196</div>

Most of man's problems in the modern world arise from the constant and unavoidable exposure to the stimuli of urban and industrial civilization, the varied aspects of environmental pollution, the physiological disturbances associated with sudden changes in ways of life, the estrangement from the conditions and natural cycles under which human evolution took place, the emotional trauma and the paradoxical solitude in congested cities, the monotony, boredom, and

compulsory leisure—in brief all the environmental conditions that undisciplined technology creates.

<div align="center">pp. 218, 219</div>

to formulate constructive alternatives [such as the NeWF and cooperative eco-community] is more important, though more difficult, than to caricature the present state of affairs or simply protest against social evils.

<div align="center">p. 232</div>

Creating a desirable future demands more than foresight; it requires vision.

<div align="center">p. 238</div>

As I stated earlier (and as the above three thinkers—Veblen, Jung, Dubos—among others have argued), the change from a gatherer-hunter way of life (i.e., the way of life for which we had become "designed"—in both bodies and brains) to a sedentary one—initially one based on agriculture, then one based on industrial and "tertiary" activities, and urban-based—resulted in The Discrepancy, which has had primarily negative consequences for us humans. From a positive standpoint, however, it has motivated various thinkers to identify human "design specifications." Although there is no consensus on this matter, a number of ideas have been generated regarding the matter, which I have discussed in some detail in my *What Are Churches For?* (I give attention to nine thinkers on pp. 47 -107 of that eBook).

Rather than repeating that presentation here, I will present my own ideas on the matter. In doing so I believe that a relatively short list is desirable for three reasons:

- A lengthy list such as that provided by Shepard (discussed in my *What Are* . . .) tends to be too overwhelming to consider seriously;[142] a list of about a dozen is much more manageable for the mind to deal with.

- Given that I conceive their use in planning by a small group, a short list has the advantage that it lends itself more readily for use by a small group.

- A short list has the advantage of *flexibility*; i.e., one group may "operationalize" them in one way, and another group in a quite different way. I see no problem with this, as every individual is unique, so that it should not be surprising that one group would arrive at a certain consensus, while another one would arrive at a rather different one. Although I am perfectly willing to suggest a given set of goals to a given group, I feel no need to

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[142] Not that I regret having presented the Shepard list in *What Are Churches* For*?*, however (or all of the Keltner quotes in that eBook)!

dictate to the group how they choose to *act* on those goals. After all, the plans developed by a group are most likely to "work" if the members of the group have themselves developed the plans, with a minimal amount of guidance.

Below, then, I offer two perspectives on human design specifications, the first one using the language of "needs."

Perspective One

- The human species is one of those species that falls into the category "social." Indeed, not only do most humans have an innate *desire* to be with other humans; they have a *need* so to be: If, upon birth, one is abandoned, one is likely to die within a few days, even if not killed by a predator; if one is provided care by members of another species (a rare, but not unknown, occurrence) one may live, but will not develop into a recognizably human being but, rather, will become a "feral" being.

- Humans have a need to be a part of a small group—e.g., one no more than about 500 persons in size. (See, e.g., Kirkpatrick Sale's *Human Scale*[143]—a huge book on the virtues of smallness!.) A "group" here should be understood as not merely a collection of individuals (i.e., a group in a *statistical* sense) but, rather, a set of individuals who interact one with another (i.e., a *sociological* group)—so that each person knows virtually all other members of the group.

- It is not enough (for a high level of well-being) simply to be a member of a small group, however. Harmonious relationships must characterize the group. This does not mean that all interactions within the group are conflict-free; it *does* mean, however, that when conflicts arise, that fact is of concern to other members of the group—who then "naturally" act to defuse the conflict. That is, there is unconscious "recognition" within the group that all have a stake in harmonious relationships, so that the social fabric must not be allowed to become torn. Given this perception of conflict, when offenses occur, the point becomes to re-integrate the offender into the societal system again rather than inflict punishment—although at times that (and even banishment) may be called for.

- Healthy interaction involves such activities as conversing with others as equals (and in a manner such that individual views are welcomed and respected—rather than treated as, e.g., "heretical"); working together with others to provide sustenance (or other) needs; recreating together; and participating in certain rituals or ceremonies together.

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[143] New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980.

- We humans are "designed" for physical activity, and must have a certain amount of it for good physical and mental health. Physical activity can be associated not only with work, but also play—and includes sexual activity. The latter, of course, will tend to be more strictly guided by mores established by the group than the other activities.

- In working with others one must feel that one is making a contribution to the group—that one is not a "slacker." Conversely, one must perceive *others* in the group as at least *attempting* to make a contribution to the group.

- Related to this point, however: One must feel that one's contribution is one that "fits" one—in terms of one's abilities, interests, etc.

- In addition, one should have an opportunity to develop one's abilities, but come to realize that one has an obligation to use one's abilities for the benefit of others—others within the group, as well as others beyond the borders of the group. Included in this use of one's abilities to help others is helping others to develop *their* abilities (i.e., acting as a "mentor").

- In acting as an individual, one must feel that one is a decision-maker, not just acting out of blind habit or doing the bidding of others. (See, e.g., Elizabeth Boyden Howes and Sheila Moon, *Man the Choicemaker*[144]) One mark of a healthy interactional situation, in fact, is that all members of the group perceive (if but unconsciously) themselves this way, and feel that they have the respect of other members of the group.

- Members of a community would be valued as *persons* rather than as *producers*. A guiding principle accepted by members is that much is expected from those to whom much has been given (Luke 12:48)—a principle that turns the "law" of supply and demand on its head. A principle that asks people to think not in terms of what they deserve, but what they are *able* to do—and therefore *should* do—to contribute to the well-being of others.

- A need for extended periods of close contact with the "surround"—a point developed several years ago by noted scientist Edward O. Wilson (*Biophilia*[145]). Especially important is spending some of that time in solitude.

- I would hypothesize a need for adventure. Given that our existing way of life provides little in the way of adventure, individuals often feel that they must invent adventuresome activities for themselves. If they feel "driven" by this motive rather than an interest in the

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[144] Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973.

[145] Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

well-being of their fellows—and the survival of our species—they would still be welcomed into the Movement, for some such individuals could prove to be an important asset for the Movement.

- In addition, however (and to develop somewhat a point alluded to above), I would like to make reference to Matthew 25 here—with its commands that we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc. What this passage reminds us is that we moderns live in societies that are very unlike "primitive" ones in that many in our midst are lacking in their basic needs—to say nothing of psychological and sociological needs. On the one hand we should feel that we have an obligation to tend to the needs of others, not just "Number One," but look at this not so much as an obligation as a privilege. For although the "love" command common to the various religions ostensibly has its focus on the "other," the activities that one engages in related to that "command" can be expected to have a "rebound" effect. One will, on the one hand, feel good about oneself, but also by treating others well *they* will show appreciation for what you have done. Thus, the giver is also a receiver—and may end up receiving far more than s/he has given. So much of our happiness in life comes from our interactions with others—if, that is, we treat others well, and "minister" to their needs when such is necessary.

- Finally, it is not enough to think in terms of "needs," "design specifications." Biological imperatives are important, but the Good Society should go beyond such imperatives and insist that the members of the society have, ideally, such *personal* traits as the following:

  - Truthful

  - Loyal

  - Courageous (in doing certain things, at any rate[146])

  - With self-control

  - Respectful

  - Honest

  - Helpful

  - With a sense of humor

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[146] The Vikings had a reputation for being courageous, but in contexts that we moderns lack approval for. For an article of relevance see Christina von Noicken, "Egil Skallogrimsson and the Viking Ideal."

- Content with little in the way of possessions

- Open-minded

- Considerate

- Not a "striving" person (for wealth, fame, power, etc.)

- Responsible

- Energetic

- Trustworthy

- Modest/Humble

The Good Society should be structured in such a way that such ("boy scoutish"!) traits are developed "naturally" by the society's members.

The above discussion, then, should provide those interested in initiating and/or participating in a New Word Fellowship (NeWF) with an abundance of ideas to "chew on." Not that the participants should feel obligated to devote their discussions just to building the New Society: A given Leader—the one charged with initiating the discussion, and thereby setting its "tone"—should feel free to speak about whatever s/he feels "led" to talk about. I would hope, however, that enough NeWFs are formed, and enough discussions are devoted to New Society questions, that some good ideas are developed, and those ideas are then publicized and worked upon. There is no guarantee that we humans can escape extinction before the century is out, but if we simply sit back and do nothing, our chances of survival are small indeed!

Perspective Two

In introducing my second set of ideas, let me begin by noting that the *idea* of a "better" society precedes Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516)[147] by centuries, of course, going at least back to Plato's [c428 – 348 BCE] *Republic* [c380 BCE]. In that book (written in the form of a dialogue, featuring Socrates [c469 – 399] as the main speaker), the characters discuss justice, and whether happiness is associated with acting justly or, rather, unjustly; and rule by a philosopher-king is advocated. Since that time numerous other works have been written[148] that present other ideas regarding the "better" society, but I make no effort here to comment further on such works.

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[147] See this, for example.

[148] See, e.g., the massive Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979.

Rather, I would simply like to note that "utopia" has come to be associated with "impractical," and for that reason I avoid use of that word here. It seems clear to me—and is at least *sensed* by many in our society—that our society could use a good dose of improvement. And although I am writing just a few years after the most recent elections—when many in our society (naively) placed their hope in political candidates—I am writing for those who are able to see beyond the superficialities of partisan politics to more fundamental issues.

What are those issues? Different individuals are likely to arrive at different items on their lists, and might prioritize their items differently, but my starting point here is to identify six (6) goals for the "Better"—or "Good," if you will—society, and to present them in conjunction with a 6-pointed star. I make this association for two reasons. First, it calls to mind the Star of David associated with Judaism: Although I am not myself Jewish, I have great admiration for Hebrew Scripture—the Law books and books of the prophets, in particular. I have, however, oriented my star differently than that of the Star of David to make clear that it is *not* a Star of David. Second, use of a star figure helps convey the suggestion that the six "goals" are related one to another.

Given that with a 6-sided star a given point has a matching point opposite to it, one can think of the meaning attached to a particular point as being *paired* with the goal associated with the opposite end. Not that one needs to think of the two parts of a given pair as being *opposites* in a conventional sense; they may, or they may not, be—the point (no pun intended, of course!) being that the members of a given pair are perhaps more related to one another than each is to any of the other four goals referenced on the figure.
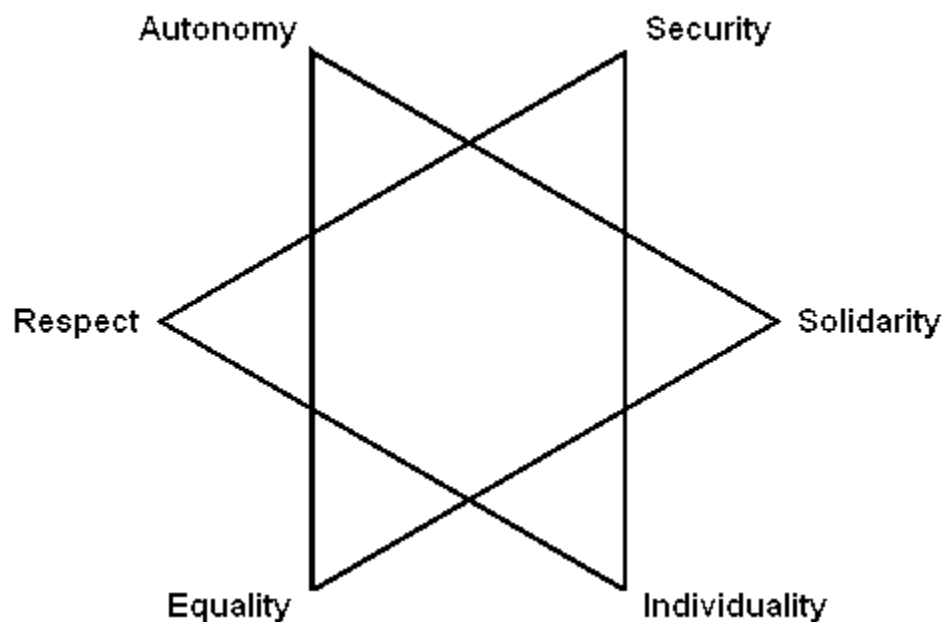
As the figure above indicates, the six goals that I would now identify for the "Better" Society are (in no particular order of importance): Autonomy, security, solidarity, individuality, equality,

and respect. And note how I have paired these goals: Autonomy with individuality, respect with solidarity, and equality with security. In commenting on these six goals, I first comment on each as an individual goal, and then comment on the two components of each of the three pairs.

- *Autonomy* is both an objective condition and a feeling. It refers to an ability to make—or at least participate "significantly" in—decisions that affect oneself (and one's dependents). At present, in our society, I would guess that many feel that they lack autonomy, and are not convinced that voting will make that feeling disappear. Many, I suspect, feel like puppets,[149] with the strings being pulled by the managers-owners of large corporations—working either as agents of those corporations or through government agencies under their control (which they likely think of as including *all* of them!).

- *Security* is also both an objective condition and a feeling. It refers to having one's physical needs met, along with one's need for a certain amount of comfort. And it also refers to the possibility that one will not be attacked physically (or otherwise be in danger) while one is either in one's home or "out in the world."

- Insofar as *Solidarity* is a concept that refers to individuals, it is a feeling that one has relative to other people. If one has a sense of solidarity with others, one feels that one is "on the same page" with them in accepting certain principles for living, and because of that feeling of affinity with others one will be willing to "lend a hand" to others— especially those who one perceives as "on the same page" as oneself. And if one is, oneself, in need of assistance of some type, one feels confident that (at least) a like-minded other person will provide the needed assistance—without even a need to request help from another. "I'll scratch your back when needed, but I also expect that you'll scratch mine when needed."

- *Individuality* is a trait that, if one values it, one will do so both in oneself and in others. One will not impose "unreasonable" standards on others—which does not mean, though, that one will lack any expectations of others. But insofar as one *does* have certain expectations of others, they are ones that have been mutually agreed upon (by the group—actual or hypothetical—to which one belongs). One will allow oneself as much individuality as one deems necessary (for one's own psychological health), but will do so within the parameters established by the group to which one belongs. (The society within which one lives may also establish certain boundaries, of course, such that if one crosses any of them, one will be subject to arrest and some sort of punishment. Given this, one will also pay attention to *those* boundaries!)

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[149] As an aside, I should mention that one of my friends is a puppetmaster!

- *Equality* has both objective and subjective elements, the important one, however, is *feeling* equal to others—and, in turn, regarding *others* as one's equal. An important distinction that comes into play here is differences in *kind* and differences in *degree*. In my interpretation of "equality" here I assume that people will recognize that in terms of some given trait measurable on a *quantitative scale* (such as strength), some will be "higher" than oneself, and others will be "lower." That is, *in*equality will exist—and the general attitude will be "that's just the way it is." However, people will also recognize that others can be thought of as differing in *kind*, in which case no basis exists for declaring that one *kind* of person is "superior" (or "inferior") to another. In the "better" society one will recognize that there are differences in degree, but will *primarily* think of each person as *unique*. In that respect, all would be regarded as *equal*—in both *nature* and in *worth*.

- *Respect* is an attitude, and encompasses both respect for oneself and for others. If one has respect for oneself, one will not be afraid of having one's own thoughts, and of conveying them to others—doing so, however, in a manner that is respectful of those others (i.e., a manner that recognizes that others have *their own* views, and don't want those views criticized in a direct manner). Respect for others involves not just being circumspect in *what* one communicates to others, and *how*, but also how one *acts* relative to others. So that not only does one not inflict any *physical* harm on others (and attempts to avoid inflicting any *psychological* harm as well), but one lends help to others in time of need—but in a manner that does not damage the self-respect of the "helpee."

  That we *should*, as Americans, prize diversity was stated well recently by John Nichols (referring specifically to *religious* diversity-toleration):

  > The United States was not founded as a country that "tolerated" religious diversity. It was founded as a country that embraced that diversity as one of its greatest strengths, welcoming Christians, Jews and Muslims, believers, nonbelievers and skeptics into a polity where, as George Washington explained, "The government… gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."[150]

Having now offered some clarification of the meanings of the six goals, let us next make a few comments on each of the three "pairings" identified above:

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[150] "The Tea Party Constitution Versus the Thomas Jefferson Constitution," posted October 29, 2010. The article originally appeared in *The Nation*.

- *Autonomy – Individuality*

  To have the subjective feeling that one is making the decisions that one is acting upon (while acting within the constraints that one has participated in establishing for one's group—and also the constraints imposed on one by one's society), one needs to have a sense of oneself as a distinct individual. Thus, a sense of individuality is necessary before one can have a sense of autonomy; but as one *exercises* one's autonomy (i.e., actually makes decisions that are then acted upon), one's sense of individuality will increase in strength. Thus, the two goals are interrelated.

- *Respect – Solidarity*

  The concept of solidarity can be applied at both individual and group levels. That is, we can say of a given person that s/he has a feeling of solidarity relative to a certain group, and if such feelings are common within a group, we can characterize the group as a "solidary" one. If a group is to develop as a solidary one, the individuals comprising the group must have respect one for another. Indeed, it is that respect felt by individuals toward other individuals that enables them to form a group in the first place! Once formed, the interaction that occurs among the members—if it continues to be based on respect—likely will lead to a group that becomes more solidary over time. As it becomes such, there is the danger that it will become too much "of one mind," so that tendencies arise to suppress individuality, and deny autonomy to "deviants." On the other hand, a solidary group offers the advantage that it can make decisions for collective action fairly quickly and smoothly, and then act on such decisions in an effective and enthusiastic manner. The "trick" is to find the right degree of solidarity, so that the disadvantages of such a group do not begin to outweigh the advantages—the former impacting particularly certain individual members of the group.

- *Equality – Security*

  Security, as I indicated above, pertains to the satisfaction of one's sustenance and comfort needs, as well as "security" needs in the more common meaning of the words (i.e., being safe from various types of threats on one's person). If one lives in a society within which each person tends to perceive each other person as a unique person, it follows that no basis exists for perceiving one person as more "important"—or in some other way "better"—than any other person. That is, one will perceive the others in one's society as equal to oneself—neither "superior" nor "inferior." This sort of perception will affect how one interacts with others, in that it one will not only be concerned with one's own security needs, but those of others as well. And with (basically) everyone in the society having a sense of security, the quality of one's interactions with others will tend to be high. Insofar as interactions in our society today are so often characterized by feelings of

inferiority-superiority, and those feelings are accompanied by actions involving manipulation, mistreatment, and even violence, I would attribute such actions—ultimately, if not directly—to the actual and felt inequality in our society.[151]

If the above six traits are accepted as ones that one would like to have as common in a "better" society, and the above-mentioned relationships exist within the pairs identified,[152] the first point that I would like to make is that although all six of the above traits can exist in certain individuals (or at least exist in their minds as *ideals*), what's necessary is for them to exist not just in a *few* individuals, but in *most*. In fact, with some of the traits, either they are widespread within a group or they (basically) don't exist at all. For example, it is difficult for one to feel a sense of solidarity toward the others around oneself if their system(s) of values differs significantly from one's own.

As to the "look" of the New Society, what I have in mind is a society that might be thought of as a federation of cooperative eco-communities—a "cityless and countryless" society, to allude to Henry Olerich's old book.[153] Not that I believe that such a society either *can* or *should* be created; but I believe that the *envisioning* of such a society can serve the function of a "Sorelian myth."[154]

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[151] That extreme inequality has negative implications for a society has been argued recently in Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010. Foreword by Robert B. Reich.

[152] It is entirely possible that one will accept the six traits that I have identified, but will "pair" them in a different way. I don't assume that the traits *must* be paired as I have done so. I'm easy to get along with!

[153] Henry Olerich, *A Cityless and Countryless World: An Outline of Practical Cooperative Individualism*. Holstein, IA: Gilmore & Olerich, 1893.

[154] Named for Georges Sorel.

Section VI. Conclusions

We live in an Age of Science. It's not surprising, then, that when problems occur, the common assumption is that they have a *scientific solution*. What *that* means, usually, is that one must first discover the factors that have caused the problem, and then determine the relative importance of those factors as causative agents. Having done this, the "answer" to the problem— "scientifically"—is either to (a) "pull certain levers" in the *opposite* direction (i.e., reduce the magnitude of the relevant causative factor(s) or (b) introduce measures to *counteract* those causes (e.g.., engage in geo-engineering measures).

The problem with the first approach is that the *reduction(s)* in question would likely impact our *way of life* in a negative way—materially, at any rate—and therefore be *resisted*. In addition, the fact that that reduction(s) in question would likely require *governmental* actions makes this approach doubly unlikely.

As to geo-engineering—the sort of approach *most likely* to be pursued by government—Naomi Klein has recently made these astute comments:

> [Geo-engineering measures are the] "ultimate expression of a desire to avoid doing the hard work of reducing emissions, and I think that's the appeal of it. I think we will see this trajectory the more and more climate change becomes impossible to deny. A lot of people will skip right to geoengineering. The appeal of geoengineering is that it doesn't threaten our worldview. It leaves us in a dominant position. It says that there is an escape hatch. So all the stories that got us to this point, that flatter ourselves for our power, will just be scaled up."

The fact that the measures *most likely to be pursued by government* would be ones that would be (a) in accord with our "worldview" rather than be *rational*, and might, thereby, be (b) ones that would *intensify* the problems that face us, rather than solve our problems, should give us pause— and help us realize **that the only rational course of action is for individuals/families to begin engaging in *adaptive* measures—such as the ones advocated in this eBook.**

Klein herself does not evidently—I should note—promote such measures, for in the book that she is currently writing she evidently argues that "our responses to climate change can rebuild the public sphere, can strengthen our communities, [and] can [allow us to] have work with dignity." The fact that she seemingly does not recognize the very strong possibility that global warming will *wipe out most of the world's population within a matter of decades, if not years*, tells me that she has not been able to escape all of the "intellectual boxes" which imprison many in our midst—so that whatever she proposes in that book will lack realism.

Although I believe that we humans are in a dire situation at present, I also believe that there is a glimmer of hope, and that it lies in efforts by *individuals*—acting either as individuals/family units, or such units acting jointly with other such units—to engage in *adaptive* activities. As I noted earlier, this could especially involve two courses:

- Individuals/families choosing to homestead.

- Individuals/families joining with other such units to create communities for themselves designed with both global warming and human "design specifications" in mind.

Only the second course would permit the retention of some semblance of civilization ("good" features only, of course—there *are* some!). In this eBook I have proposed an institution—the New Word Fellowship (NeWF)—not only as the basis for a religion more Biblically-based (specifically in terms of the New Testament gospels) than Christianity, but as a *vehicle* for creating another institution, the eco-community—possibly, thereby, contributing to the "salvation" of our species (along with other species).

I myself lack the resources to initiate the relevant "program;" but even if I *did* have the necessary resources, I don't believe that I have the qualification for making such a program a success. Therefore, my hope is that *someone* will step forward and either (a) initiate NeWFism, (b) initiate an eco-communitarian movement—or (c) both.