

# The Three Crises of Our Time

An excerpt from Vern Barnet's *Thanks for Noticing: The Interpretation of Desire*, La Vita Nuova Books, 2015  
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THE DISEASE of our desacralized culture presents three symptoms: our environmental crisis, the uncertainties of personhood, and a destructively partisan, exploitative society and world civilization. Each corresponds to three realms in which the world's religions have discovered and emphasized the sacred, on which our lives depend.

- In Primal faiths (such as the American Indian, tribal African, and Wicca are examples, and the ancient traditions of Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Maya and the Inca), we find ecological awe: nature is respected more than controlled; nature is a process which includes us, not a product external to us to be used or disposed of. Our proper attitude toward nature is wonder, not consumption.

- In Asian religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) we rediscover the awe of genuine personhood as our actions proceed spontaneously and responsibly from duty and compassion, without ultimate attachment to their results.

- In Monotheistic traditions (including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the awesome work of God is manifest in history's flow toward justice when peoples are governed less by profit and winning and more by the covenant of service.

Now traditions are encountering each other and perhaps we may learn that religious pluralism is gift, not a threat. This interfaith promise is nothing less than the restoration of nature, the recovery of the whole self, and the life of a community of love.

In the context of metaphors from the magnificence of a Primal vision of nature and the oppressive structures of our society subverting the Monotheistic vision of peace and justice, most of these sonnets record the sometimes torturous, sometimes ecstatic, exploration toward the Asian wisdom of personhood, through the perils of desire and attachment leading to surrender and compassion — and the gift of awe.

Another word for secularism is denial, and another word for awe is authenticity.

We will perish without authenticity in the three realms of nature, personhood, and community. We are beginning to see that these three realms interpenetrate and compose each other, different dimensions of a single reality, largely hidden from previous generations, and still today we are distracted and benumbed by particular and competing agendas instead of noticing what might often may seem peripheral in such a way as to behold at least a sense of that whole reality. Still, gaining skill at truly noticing anything can lead us to beholding the sacred in all its expressions; an exploration of one dimension may improve our fragmented and prejudiced vision of the others, and of the larger sacred reality awaiting our troubled and fearful world. In muddled, modest, and minute ways, these sonnets show one person's several stations seeking the sacred path of unitive vision.

Only by *noticing* can we recover the sense of awe that leads to gratitude, and the gratitude that matures into service. The Tao Te Ching warns, "Where there is no sense of awe, there will be disaster." Greed, exploitation, and the lust for power crowd out awe. But Rumi writes, "Awe is the salve that will heal our eyes."



This way of looking at religions of the world is presented in greater detail elsewhere, such as in *The Essential Guide to Religious Traditions and Spirituality for Health Care Providers*, edited by Steven Jeffers, Michael Nelson, Vern Barnet, Michael Brannigan, Radcliffe, 2013 (p12-16).

The detail of the following chart of the Three Families of Faith is mine, working from hints found in places such as Eliade's 1957/1959 *The Sacred and the Profane*, where he discusses **cosmic**, **personal**, and **social** contexts (p93-94), and the "**individual, social, and cosmic**." (p170).

In Roland Bainton's 1964/1966 *Christendom* (Vol 1, p3-4), we find "Judaism is a religion of **history** and as such it may be contrasted with religions of **nature** and religions of **contemplation**. ¶ Religions of **nature** see God in the surrounding universe; for example, in the orderly course of the heavenly bodies, or more frequently in the recurring cycle of the withering and resurgence of vegetation. This cycle is interpreted as the dying and rising of a god in whose experience the devotee may share through various ritual acts and may thus also become divine and immortal. For such a religion, the past is not important, for the cycle of the seasons is the same one year as the next. ¶ Religions of **contemplation**, at the other extreme, regard the physical world as an impediment to the spirit, which, abstracted from the things of sense, must rise by contemplation to union with the divine. The sense of time itself is to be transcended, so that here again history is of no import. ¶ But religions of **history**, like Judaism, discover God 'in his mighty acts among the children of men.' Such a religion is a compound of memory and hope. It looks backward to what God has already done. The feasts of Judaism are chiefly commemorative: Passover recalls the deliverance of the Jews from bondage in Egypt; Purim, Esther's triumph over Haman, who sought to destroy the Jews in the days of King Ahasuerus; and Hanukkah, the purification of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. And this religion looks forward with faith; remembrance is a reminder that God will not forsake his own. The faith of Judaism was anchored in the belief that God was bound to his people by a covenant, at times renewed and enlarged."

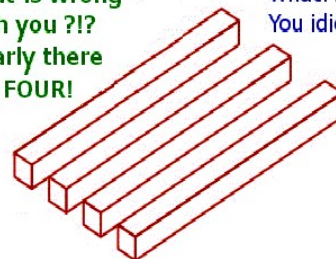
In Huston Smith's 2005 *The Soul of Christianity*, he says that "[B]ecoming God" happens **individually, communally, and cosmically**" (p124).

Sociologist Robert Bellah's 2011 *Religion in Human Evolution* notes that meaning obtains in "**cosmos, society, and self**" (p175); this triad appears in varying forms throughout the book, as for example where he claims that music is "related not only to **inner reality** but to **cosmic** and **social** reality as well" (p25), and that it can attune "the **individual to social** and **cosmic** order" (p26); he also uses the triad "**soul, society, and the cosmos**" (p27). He does not relate these terms to the triad of Primal, Asian, and Monotheistic faiths; rather he believes that "Both tribal and archaic religions are 'cosmological,' in that supernatural, nature, and society were all fused in a single cosmos" (p266).

All emphases are mine.



What is wrong with you ??  
Clearly there are FOUR!



What?!  
You idiot!!



Can't you see – or even count?  
There are THREE!!

You must be perverse or evil, and maybe I should simply rid the world of your kind.