

These Journeymen Divine: Interiors of American Spirituality

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Synopsis

Why does humanity have religion—or to use a more current term—a spiritual life? The Enlightenment (1715–1789) helped turn a more critical eye on this universal phenomenon and it has vexed nearly all the great thinkers from the nineteenth century. Some have felt that religion is more for group cohesion. Frederick Nietzsche (1841–1900) wrote of it as a collective effort to remember because it sears memory into civilization (Nietzsche 1887:42–43). Carl Jung (1875–1961) believed it was how the “collective unconscious” emerged (Jung 1954:3–48), with shared metaphors for meaning. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), more relevant to this discussion, wrote of its internal dimension: “Believing means liberating the indestructible element in oneself.... One of the ways in which this hiddenness can express itself is through faith in a personal god” (Kafka 1954:29). Jung’s “collective consciousness” and Kafka’s “personal god” are at odds, however, part of an uncanny paradigm—collective authority versus personal autonomy. These have clashed for centuries. Religion in America today is decidedly personal and autonomous. Originally derived from the Scottish Reformation (1560), it has evolved into something uniquely its own. *How* this happened is hotly debated. Revivalism, it is clear, is part of the answer, since it has shaped and reshaped the culture from colonial times. These tumultuous waves of revivalism have left their marks. Below, I will refer to a few important moments, with figures that indeed are “journeymen divine,” to use Walt Whitman’s (1819–1892) expression from his great poem *Sleepers* (1855) (with Whitman certainly one of them). The awakening of the deepest self, or the divine within, is the center of American spirituality.

Key Words

fundamentalism, evangelicalism, authenticity, deepest self, the divine within, solitary, revivalism, spiritual experience, Anne Hutchinson, John Wesley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman.

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1. Introduction

America's spiritual life, in the absence of any state church, has been a labyrinth of conflicting surges and movements; these have become more complex in the twenty-first century as traditions other than Christianity have also taken root in its fertile soil (Beal 2008:1-4). Still, the origins remain. Here I will focus on only one aspect: the awakening of the deepest self or the divine within. Yet, even this modest goal becomes perplexingly complicated in looking across the scores and scores of movements over many generations created solely for this purpose. Experiencing the divine indeed has been something of a social priority.

The Scottish Reformation (1560) has had the greatest influence on what many have come to call the "American Religion."¹⁾ The Reformation Christianity America inherited from Europe tended to be creedal and Calvinist. In its formative years, while still embracing many of Calvinism's basic tenets, America had moved far from them in practice and by the early nineteenth century began to shed them altogether. Something other than doctrine had captivated the imagination: the inner world of religious experience.

J. H. van den Berg (1914-2012), the Dutch historical psychologist, believed the Reformation leader Martin Luther (1483-1546) discovered—or rather rediscovered—the interior, ever-evolving self. Luther had written of this in his essay *About the Freedom of a Christian* (1520), based on a teaching from Paul of Tarsus (c. 5 BCE-64 CE) (Second Corinthians 4:16),²⁾ writer of at least seven New Testament letters: "The soul can do without anything except God's word, and without God's word it has no use for anything. But if it has God's word, it does not need anything else; in the word it has pleasure, food, gladness, peace, light, art, justice, truth, wisdom, freedom, and an abundance of other good things" (Martin Luther quoted by van den Berg 1961:228). The inner person is pure, a possessor of godliness outside organizations, according to Luther, removed from politics and hypocrisy and all other outward corruptions. Yet, a similar concept came not only from the Reformation and earlier from Paul of Tarsus, but also from African spirituality.

A palpable infusion in this mix is black American spirituality, from the horrifying institution of slavery. Its focus was on the "little me in the big me" (another phrase for the deepest self) (Bloom 1992:240).³⁾ Though white Christian culture considered all African spirituality devilish and began a "spiritual holocaust" from 1800 to strip any vestiges of nativism, the proximity of the cultures (white and black) caused influences to go both ways (Butler 1990:151-163). The early African Americans had an oral tradition and this made it more difficult to trace the influences, but they are clear nonetheless. It may be that like so many aspects of American culture, particularly music, what is considered truly American in fact originated from African Americans (Bloom 1992:237).

William James (1842–1910), in his perennially relevant work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), wrote of this as well, since by his time a priority for religious experience was very much a part of mainstream civic and religious life (James 1902:36):

Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical Organizations may secondarily grow (Italics in original).

William James' statement still crackles with insight: First, the experiences followed by organizations that embody them and theologies that interpret them. Institutions are necessary, if meaning is to be transmitted, but they are always subjected to fresh challenges from new generations who have their own unique experiences of the spirit. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), in his *New Science* (1725), wrote of this as a building up before a subsequent tearing down, in cycles from an age of magic, to a theocratic age, and finally a democratic age before tumbling apart and beginning all over again (Vico called these ages, from barbarism to civilization, the divine, the heroic, and the human—a cyclical rather than a linear history) (Vico 1730:39–74).⁴ This Viconian cycle is definitely part of American denominational life. Seymour Martin Lipset (1922–2006) described it as a “revolution and counterrevolution” (Lipset 1961:309–314).

Identity vis-à-vis institutional (or community) life is fragile, often fleeting, and it is fluid. It is also fraught with peril. Hamlet, in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (c. 1603), tapping deeply into his inner world, discovered an abyss. Hamlet's tragedy, on some level, is that he could not fill his inner coldness with more humane sympathies. To its great credit American spiritual life addresses interior landscapes, thanks largely to the few I will be discussing below. Spirituality in America is decidedly solitary, however, as James elucidated. The myths from the Hebrew Bible that have informed it from the very beginning, particularly the Exodus journey from slavery to the Promised Land, continue to do so today, mostly in individual solitude.

Considering spiritual tendencies, though, is similar to writing on water—it vanishes right away, simply because it is ever changing. This is not to say we can know nothing. The inner awakening I discuss below is connected with “freedom” from bondage (for early Americans it was from European monarchies). Freedom, in the American sense, is the freedom to be alone—to be free *from* other people or groups of people—a consecration of one's life to divine purposes, perhaps, as an ideal. Most importantly it is the freedom *from* oneself (Bloom 1992:37). The Promised Land in the American spiritual cosmos is an elevating, though solitary journey.

2. Floods of spiritual experience

Jon Butler, in *Awash in a Sea of Faith* (1992), details American religious life from its origins in Europe and the first Virginia colony (1609) to just before the American Civil War (1861–1865), much of it by examining census, church, court, city, and state records to demonstrate the complicated frenzy that

was taking place among religious sects. How the general population today reflects back on these times is often through scholarly fictions (Butler 1992:70)—stereotypes that simplify very complicated times and very complicated issues: Butler uses the Great Awakening (c. 1720–1770) as one example (Butler 1992:165) (identified by scholars as the first series of sustained revivals), a term that was invented much later. Was there really a Great Awakening? What have come down to us from those early years are the institutional and denominational legacies. It is a very complex puzzle to piece together, but a common social feature was revivalism (Beal 2008:74–81), a cultural “natural selection” where the masses affirmed some aspects of the young culture while denying others during this nascent time. In all their outrageous manifestations, revivals were the fires that burned away the brush, shaping not only the times but also the underlying beliefs that ironically led to the first secular revolution in world history: the American Revolution (1765–1783).

We look back for small anecdotes that tell the larger story and find these are abundant. Relatively insignificant moments in a distant social context became cultural trends and even full-blown mainstream sensibilities as they have swelled through time. A divine experience became a badge of authenticity in early America.⁵⁹ Psychologists today diagnose it as mental instability, but in a culture like early America where shamanistic tendencies were affirmed, it was quite normal. These mystics or visionaries were not called “shamans,” however, but prophets and prophetesses, following ancient Hebrew traditions. Women have had a venerable place in creating this spiritual cosmos.

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) was among the first to offer an unflinching challenge to religious authorities based on personal revelation, what she called, “The Lord speaking to me.” She insisted at her trial for sedition in 1637 that her revelation canceled out all other (false) religious authority. In 1634, Anne had moved from England with her husband to Massachusetts, following their pastor John Cotton (1585–1652), to be among the “people of God.” As a mid-wife in the small Boston community, she was highly respected as a healer and as a gifted teacher and expositor of scripture; she began holding Bible studies in her home, at first only for women. People crowded to hear her because she spoke with a great deal of conviction and authority (Butler 1990:59–60).

Anne became an outspoken critic of the Boston leadership; they were not preaching a Covenant of Grace but a Covenant of Works, she declared, prompting the leaders to start legal proceedings against her. Anne, extraordinarily articulate, demolished her accusers on the witness stand the first day. The second day, however, she made the mistake of voicing her personal revelations too openly: “God did discover unto me the unfaithfulness of the churches, and the danger of them,” the court transcript recorded, “that not one of those ministers could preach the Lord right..Now I had none to open the Scripture to me but the Lord, [who] brought to my mind another Scripture, ‘He that denies the Testament, denies the death of the Testator,’ from whence the Lord did give me to see that those who did not teach the New Covenant had the spirit of Antichrist” (LaPlante 2004:115–117).

The leaders of colony, bristling at being called “spirit of Antichrist,” banished her, as they had previously banished Roger Williams (1603–1683), founder of Rhode Island, whom they also convicted of sedition and heresy (Roger Williams’ settlement in Providence was the first to separate the state and the church) (Butler 1990:59). Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) wrote of Hutchinson’s conviction in “Mrs. Hutchinson” *Tales and Sketches* (1837–1853) (Hawthorne quoted by LaPlante 2004:130–131):

She tells them of the long unquietness which she had endured in England, perceiving the corruption of the church, and yearning for a purer and more perfect light, and how, in a day of solitary prayer that light was given; she claims for herself the peculiar power of distinguishing between the chosen of man and the Sealed of Heaven, and affirms that her gifted eye can see the glory round the foreheads of the Saints, sojourning in their mortal state. She declares herself commissioned to separate the true shepherds from the false, and denounces present and future judgments on the land, if she be disturbed in her celestial errand. Thus the accusations are proved from her own mouth. Her judges hesitate, and some speak faintly in her defense; but, with a few dissenting voices, sentence is pronounced, bidding her go out from among them, and trouble the land no more.

Hutchinson quickly moved to the New York area where the Dutch governed to escape Puritan threats. She purposed to found her own community where religious freedom was an absolute, near the Bronx, New York (then called New Netherlands). Her small group of sixteen, pooling their money, bought some land from a dishonest European who sold them land belonging to a local Native American tribe, the Siwanoy; they launched a raid on the trespassers, killing Hutchinson and most of her family (Ibid., 236–237).

Anne Hutchinson could not be evaded, however, since she was following the “rights” that the Reformation had claimed for everyone: People should be allowed interpret the Bible for themselves. The New World had to make room for those who claimed a personal revelation. Hutchinson today has receded in the collective imagination as the American Eve, a heroine banished for being herself (Genesis 3:20) (of course, the original Eve was essentially banished for her curiosity). Hawthorne admitted that Anne Hutchinson was the inspiration for his character in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne, set in a time close to hers, from 1642 to 1649. Both heroines successfully subvert male authority that issued from religious hypocrisy. Though Anne’s crime was a thought-crime and Hester’s a crime of passion, both stood firm: Anne on her right to speak on her behalf and Hester on her refusal to speak. The American Eve, fused in these two characters, founder of a new civilization, would reincarnate again and again in American life.

Much did happen in the succeeding generations with revivalism as the catalyst. During colonial times, as church hierarchies and patriarchs formed, revivalism brought society back to an egalitarian mindset, since everyone has equal access to the divine—these were indeed counterrevolutions. The religious pitch was kept high, merging with democracy, as Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), in his classic work, *Democracy in America* (1840), described (de Tocqueville 1840:275):

The greatest part of English America has been peopled by men who, after having escaped—did not submit to any religious supremacy; they therefore brought to the New World a Christianity that I cannot depict better than to call it democratic and republican: this singularly favors the establishment of a republic and of democracy in affairs. From the beginning, politics and religion were in accord, and they have not ceased to be so since.

The American colony produced its first great theologian, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who entered the revival fray in 1731 in his area around Northampton, (central) Massachusetts (revival had been in the air since about 1720). In May 1747 he preached his most famous sermon: *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (Marsden 2003:217–24); Edwards repeated the sermon that centered on the torments of hell again and again throughout the following summer: One eyewitness recalled, “Before the sermon was done there was a great moaning and crying out throughout the whole house. What shall I do to be saved? Oh I am going to Hell. Oh what shall I do for Christ” (Stephen Williams quoted by Marsden 2003:20)? The revival led to years and years of moral and religious invigoration. Yet, it brought deep divisions, too, between those who believed in a personal awakening, and all its emotional spinoffs, and those who did not (Beal 2008:74–75). The established churches, with educated and revered leaders, could not tolerate the swooning, crying, and other forms of excitability, especially since “spiritual rebirth,” rather than education, became the criterion for spiritual authority. Much of the clergy were, shall I say, among the unregenerate.

The patrician Edwards, as was typical of the time, was authoritarian, affirming the clergy’s authority over regular church members to determine proper doctrine and proper worship (Butler 1990:180–81).⁶ Yet here is the conundrum: Revivalism encourages autonomy, but experiences require theologies or teachings for a community setting. As a professional clergy forms, it protects its teachings from corruption, using its authority to excommunicate a new generation of dissenters. People, as Anne Hutchinson, are condemned for thought-crimes, essentially for their prerogatives to disagree. People bolted from mainstream churches in droves during colonial days, often in anger over doctrinal rigidity and, to use an oxymoronic phrase, “conformed to non-conformity.” From the 1740s dissenters created more than two hundred new fellowships, often calling themselves the *New Light* (in distinction to the *Old Light* of the settled and formal communities—but they remained loosely associated, often in name only, with Congregationalists and Baptists) (Butler 1990:180). The distinction is clear: The *New Light* of grace and the *Old Light* of law—the establishment.

Early revivalists also got a big boost from English evangelists who were free of any locality or even of any denomination: George Whitefield (1714–1770), Charles Wesley (1707–1788) and John Wesley (1703–1791), founders of the Methodist Church (Methodism has its origins in the Anglican Church, in reaction to its hierarchy). Immensely popular, they preached the necessity of rebirth. One estimate is that Whitefield gave ten thousand sermons a year, to crowds as large as thirty thousand (Haykin 2014:36); his evangelistic endeavors in America during 1740–1742 may have converted fifty thousand people (Haykin 2014:41) (out of a total population in the American colonies of perhaps five hundred thousand). John Wesley was an unrelenting throughout his lifetime: “Here was a man who from the age of thirty-six onwards traveling 225,000 miles and preached more than 40,000 sermons, some of them to more than 20,000” (Knox 1950:432).

As Whitefield, Wesley had graduated from Oxford University and had been ordained an Anglican priest. Unlike Whitefield, however, Wesley opposed Calvinism’s strict determinism (some to salvation and others to damnation). People can be assured of salvation in their lifetimes, he declared. After rebirth, one entered the “Christian walk,” characterized by a continual awakening of the divine within. Wesley describe it marvelously as “respiration,” of breathing with the divine (John Wesley, *The New*

Birth, quoted by Crutcher 2015:154):

All his spiritual senses are then “exercised to discern” spiritual “good and evil.” By the use of these he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and for all the things pertaining to his inward kingdom. And now he may be properly said to live: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knoweth not of, a “life” which “is hid with Christ in God.” God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of *spiritual respiration*, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to “the full measure of the stature of Christ” (Italics mine).

Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888–1957), himself a former Anglican priest who converted to Roman Catholicism, and as Wesley a graduate of Oxford University (later he became chaplain there), was genuinely baffled by John Wesley. In his classic book, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (1950), an astonishing work on the history of religious ecstasies and dissident groups, Knox devotes three long chapters to Wesley, attempting to isolate what Wesley means by religious experience (Knox 1950:547):

If I have dealt at some length with this single side of Wesley’s character—I mean his preoccupation with strange psychological disturbances, now commonly minimized—it is because I think he, and the other prophets of the Evangelical movement, have succeeded in imposing upon English Christianity a pattern of their own. They have succeeded in identifying religion with a real or supposed experience. I say ‘real or supposed,’ because in the nature of things you cannot prove the validity of any trance, vision, or ecstasy; it remains something within the mind. Still less can you prove the validity of a lifelong Christ-inspired attitude; in the last resort, all it proves is that certain psychological influences are strong enough to overcome, in a given case, all the temptations towards backsliding which a cynical world affords. But, for better or worse, the England which weathered the excitements and disappointments of the early nineteenth century was committed to a religion of experience; you did not base your hopes on this or that doctrinal calculation; you *knew* (Italics in original).

Yes, Wesley turned the world upside down on both sides of the Atlantic, a primary formulator of all that was to come. One is safe in this rebirth of Wesley’s, also in one’s sense of an elevated, spiritual self, as Knox suggests, since no one can prove to another that she or he is mistaken about the experience.

Is it better *to know* based on experience than to have faith based on theologies? One thinks of Karl Jung’s (1875–1961) statement when asked if he believed in God: “I don’t need to believe, *I know*.” American knowing has proven more enduring. A doctrine of “freewill” was part of the package, as

was the turning away from the more mystical Calvinist teachings of predestination, to what is real and graspable in everyday life: Choice.⁷ Americans wanted control—not only of their government—but also over their own salvation, whether one believes this is a wise thing to have or not.

Is truth found in an experience? William James, still America's finest religious critic, affirmed that it is or at least confirms it as true for the person (here "idea" and "experience" can be one and the same): "Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself" (James *Pragmatism* 1907 quoted by Menand 2001:353). Freewill was the everyday philosophy of the land, but more in the North than in South, where Calvinism's sense of destiny worked to justify slavery and where religion tended to be Anglican (or Episcopalian after the Revolution) (Butler 1990: 99-104; 131-151).⁸

John Wesley's theology of freewill to acquire rebirth harmonized with the American sense of expansiveness and its creation of a new kind of person, one with a boundlessness toward new horizons, always moving westward to carve out new civilizations.⁹ "Rebirth," then, is a decidedly American cultural trait—indeed an initiation of sorts into Americanism. Calvinism continued as the theology of the land, if only by default, until transmogrified by one of America's most astounding events: the Cane Ridge Revival.

3. Revivals and rebellions

Though it could never take shape in a uniformed or monolithic way, given the vast geography, American spirituality finally found its "deep force," to use Emerson's term, in the most unlikely of places. During August 6 to 13, 1801 in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, at a small Presbyterian church that could hold no more than five hundred people standing, ecstatic experience was finally given full reign. Here, among scattered pioneer folk, America had its Pentecost, a baptism and resurrection into what truly reflected the climate of its culture. Some estimate that up to twenty-five thousand people attended parts of the weeklong camp meeting revival. It drew over ten percent of Kentucky's population (225,000 according to the 1800 Census, but many also came from neighboring Ohio and Pennsylvania); it was twelve times larger than Kentucky's largest city (Conkin 1990:88-98).¹⁰

The thousands camping out at Cane Ridge felt they were at a New World version of the Feast of Pentecost, the Jewish festival that celebrates God's gift of the Torah, when the first Christians received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-10). The signs then were "a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind" and "speaking in tongues" (suddenly acquiring the ability to speak a language one does not know). In about 30 BCE, according to the New Testament's *Acts of the Apostles*, the Jewish pilgrims visiting Jerusalem from around the Roman Empire understood the "good news" from these first Christians in their own language (they also thought they were drunk).¹¹

In addition to forms of glossolalia, Cane Ridge, true to American over-exuberance, included falling down, shaking, trembling, jerking, dancing, and even barking. "Slain in the Spirit," falling down out of a sense of repentance or renewal, was the most common experience; some were evidently comatose for half a day. One Presbyterian minister who was there, probably James Campbell (the letter was found in someone else's personal papers), sent this description to a friend.¹²

Sinners dropping down on every hand, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convoluted; professors [of religion] praying, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress, for sinners, or in raptures of joy! Some singing, some shouting, clapping their hands, hugging and even kissing, laughing; others talking to the distressed, to one another, or to [those who opposed] the work, and all this at once—no spectacle can excite a stronger sensation. And with what one is doing, the darkness of the night, the solemnity of the place, and of the occasion, and conscious guilt, all conspire to make terror thrill through every power of the soul, and rouse it to awful attention.

The Cane Ridge event had begun as a Presbyterian communion service, an event practiced for about two hundred years in Scotland where followers of John Knox (1514–1572), the Scottish Calvinist reformer and founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, had tried to restore a biblical communion service and took as a guide a section from Saint Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, where communion services were actual meals (*First Corinthians* 11:17–37). Tables with huge quantities of bread and wine had to be prepared, therefore, for worshipers to actually eat together. Since the massive crowds could not be seated at one time, groups were served in shifts and this often took all day. Eventually, communion services became events that lasted several days.

God's presence, they believed, accompanied communion and so ministers prepared the peoples' hearts with fiery preaching. Repentance and conversion came to distinguish the yearly event, which could draw many thousands. The first large-scale service took place in Galloway, Scotland in 1600, with Ulster communions beginning about 1613. Scottish communion revivalism peaked by 1750 (Presbyterian elders were concerned about the "wildness" of the festival-like atmosphere, which reminded many of the medieval Roman Catholic festivals) (Conkin 1990:18).

Revivalism—events for repentance and conversion—flew in the face of Calvinist doctrines, however. Why should anyone convert anyone else when all was foreordained? But there was an alternative perspective. At the dawn of the Reformation Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) had challenged John Calvin's (1509–1564) extreme determinism. Calvin, believing God is omnipotent, had played up justice and sovereignty and humanity's insignificance but Arminius exalted love and human freewill (here God is less omnipotent since he does not interfere with freewill—Calvinists, it goes without saying, see freewill as an illusion).

For Calvinists predestination is a consolation—a "calling" or "election" does not depend on frail humans to live up to divine expectations. Calvin, basing this on Saint Paul's teachings (Romans 8:29–30), believed that before the foundation of the world God had ordained some to paradise and eternal delight—and this could never be taken away—but others he destined to hades and eternal suffering. People could not switch sides—they had absolutely no say in it whatsoever.¹³⁾ Yet, how do people know if they really are among the elect? In fact, no one can ever know for sure. Here is the origin of the Protestant Work Ethic.

Calvinists showed their salvation by their "good works" to prove they were among the chosen and they tended to go overboard, working incredibly hard—today we think of Calvinism and the Protestant Work Ethic as one in the same, as indeed they are. Calvin's determinism did not make anyone passive, quite the opposite. Max Weber's (1864–1920) thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

(1905), and later R. H. Tawney's in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), when taken together, is that Calvinism, more than any other groups from the Reformation, created modern capitalism (Tawney 1926:110).¹⁴

Many in the twentieth century have affirmed Weber and Tawney's thesis: David Riesman (1909–2002) *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William Whyte (1917–1999) *The Organization Man*, Christopher Lasch (1932–1994) *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979),¹⁵ and Francis Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man* (1991) detailed the conflict between individual autonomy that Calvinism had earlier inspired with the extreme social conformism required in modern America; they are just a few who have written of this powerful value system that is still shaping the world, though the religion itself has weakened. Weber described its influence as “the ghost of dead religious beliefs” (Weber quoted by Fukuyama 1991:227). Surely, the ghost remains potent. Arminianism, with human freewill shaping destiny, is the more modern outlook and perhaps most secularists agree this is the ultimate philosophical or empirical reality, though many great thinkers, including Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) (Storr 1989:16), do not. With Arminius, however, one could lose one's salvation by turning away from it.

Presbyterians were among the first to start congregations in Kentucky when land became available for settlers in the late eighteenth century (Kentucky became a state in 1792). This was Daniel Boone (1734–1820) country, the famous frontiersman of American film legend. Boone moved from North Carolina to central Kentucky in 1784 with the Presbyterian minister, Robert Finely, the person who started the Cane Ridge congregation (Conkin 1990:76–77). Cane Ridge had been well publicized in advance and well prepared for. Elevated roofed platforms were built for the preachers and exhorters to stand above the crowds and trumpeters were hired to blast their horns before each was introduced. It was also egalitarian, with many black Americans participating—some were slaves (Ibid., 174–175)—the Methodists and Baptists were the most prominent denominations, after their Presbyterian hosts.

This Big Bang of revivalism was sweeping in its aftermath: it invigorated the more egalitarian Methodists (Arminian) and Baptists (soft Calvinists), the sects of the expanding frontier, who would forever leave the Presbyterians behind in their ethnic Anglo Scottish enclaves (Presbyterians make up about one and a half percent of the population today).¹⁶ Because the wildness of the revival frightened large segments of the Presbyterian clergy, it split the church¹⁷ (another cultural characteristic—America today has about thirty-four thousand different denominations).¹⁸ But many Presbyterians had already become uncomfortable with Calvinist teachings that discounted freewill and cruelly destined the vast majority of humanity to eternal damnation.¹⁹

Cane Ridge finished off a fresh collective vision of God, from one who requires correct belief and justice (the European Reformation) to one who wants to impart an experience.²⁰ Out of it came an “American Jesus,” no intellectual but a gentle, solitary figure with the power to heal and to create the Kingdom of God.²¹ For the isolated pioneer folk, as is true of today's isolated urban dwellers, Jesus is the companion in solitude, who walks and talks continually with his “friends” (John 10). Mutual and progressive “knowing” between God and worshiper, of course, has characterized experiential religion from pre-Christian times (Dodds 1950:299). Also, with Jesus returning *before* the thousand years of peace, the Millennium (the theology is called “Pre-Millennialism”),²² Americans saw themselves in a central role shaping universal destiny,²³ collectively creating a New Eden.²⁴

A creedless religious experience as a cultural absolute set the bar incredibly high for those who attempted to vocalize it and only a few were able to rise to the occasion, but for those who did they more than met the challenge.

4. Heretics divine

The question remains when non-conformity becomes the cultural norm: How can one institutionalize it? The mistrust of language, born out of Cane Ridge and the Burnt Over District revivals (1820–1840) of upper New York State that gave birth to (or the blossoming of) the Mormons, the Adventists, and the Shakers, among many others, stalled intellectual expression (these two revivals combined are often called the Second Great Awakening) (Beal 2008:75–76). In order for the teachings of one’s group (or even cultural sensibilities) to become multi-generational, someone has to put print to page. America was fortunate to have just such a person, at the right time and in the right place: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), founder of what became known as Transcendentalism.

The Transcendental Club (beginning in 1836), part of the fallout from the spiritual experimentation from Cane Ridge and the Burnt Over District, must have seemed to many at the time the eccentricities of a few oddball intellectuals (in fact it consisted of only a few people at first). It was spiritual without any overtones of organized religion and it was more overtly literary and centered on “how to be” from a mysterious “deep force” within. Revivalists had also done this, with baptisms of the Holy Spirit, though with different language. And as revivalism, Transcendentalism focused on freewill and it was deeply anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical. “Transcendentalism” was a rather derisive name given by critics because its ideas seemed similar to Immanuel Kant’s (1724–1804) philosophy, yet Emerson accepted the label (Sweeney 2016:7).²⁵⁾

America, in essential ways that have gone unnamed, has become Emersonian.²⁶⁾ Emerson’s universalism is double-edged, however, summed up in the following passage from *Self Reliance* (1841:1):

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost—and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.... A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages.

Arguably the great wisdom writer of the nineteenth century—and inspired by the sixteenth-century essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)—Emerson declared that universalism begins subjectively, carefully avoiding any references to universal principles written down, say, the Bill of Rights (1791). While his statement does not lack self-confidence, it can easily slip over into a new form of imperialism to thrash people over the head with, from what you feel “in your private heart.” This no doubt is the state of American politics today.

Emerson is the mind of America in all its outrageous flagrancies and contradictions; he not only inspired the great liberal philosopher and humanitarian John Dewey (1859–1952) but also the anti-

Semite and right-wing extremist Henry Ford (1863-1947), founder of the Ford Motor Company (Ford had Emerson's quotes pasted on factory walls and even Adolf Hitler hung a photo of Henry Ford in his office out of admiration). How two universes of thought can come from a single person is to grasp something of Emerson's breath and depth. Undoubtedly of the left, Emerson's work is complex enough and multifaceted enough to affirm both classical culture and the counterculture, whether of the left or the right—to say nothing of the modern Beat Generation or Hippie Movement (surely Emerson's descendants, too).

Both Emerson and his protégé Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) vocally, and even financially, supported John Brown (1800-1859) (Richardson 1995:498-499), the radical and violent abolitionist, who after he and his sons chopped five pro-slavery settlers to death with broadswords in Pottawatomie, Kansas in 1857, led an army of twenty-one to spark a slave revolt in Harper's Ferry, Virginia in October 1859. This left six dead and nine wounded. Brown was convicted of treason and hanged two months later, but Emerson said that Brown made "the gallows glorious like the cross" (Emerson quoted by Richardson 1995:545). Later Emerson, implying that John Brown was something of a Transcendentalist himself (which is doubtful), wrote he "was an idealist. He saw how deceptive the forms are" (Emerson quoted by Menand 2001:29).

Emerson was indeed a universalist for his vision of America, but had he simply parodied something of the South's own misguided universalism in its attempts to recreate the Republic in its own image? The South effectively used the political process until the non-slave states reached a breaking point: the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), and the Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Stanford* (1857) underscored its true intention, prompting Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) to say in 1858 that the country cannot continue to be "half slave and have free..It will become one thing or another." It was on the verge of becoming "slave." The Fugitive Slave Act obligated Northerners to return runaway slaves or face criminal prosecution, the last straw for many, making the Civil War inevitable.²⁷⁾ The religion of the South was also different, despite the fact that the Cane Ridge revival took place in Kentucky (which in fact sided with the Union): The South was Anglican (or Episcopalian), patrician, and hierarchical.

Southern resentment of Emerson continues even to this day—it is still difficult to find a Southerner who admires Emerson—showing the residual trauma from the Civil War over many generations and of Southern identification of Emerson with radical abolitionism and Northern imperialism.²⁸⁾ Emerson reciprocated; he hated the South, surprisingly, coming from so famously a sweet-natured person, called by many an embodiment of the divine. Emerson aged early and became senile relatively young, from this deep loathing.

Emerson's fame came through his lectures and he carried a grueling schedule most of his adult life in a time when traveling itself was grueling. From October 1854 to March 1855, for example, Emerson gave seventy-three lectures (Richardson 1995:526). But he never lectured in the South, for he could not abide its ruthless provincialism. The Southern deities were local deities who supported the patrician way of life, doubtless with ancient Hebrew analogues: William Faulkner (1897-1962) had written that the heart of Southern culture was found in white patriarchs fathering children on their black concubines, in *Light In August* (1932).

Emerson's genius blossomed early, fortunately, in two lectures he gave at Harvard University: *The American Scholar* (1837)²⁹⁾ and *The Divinity School Address* (1838)³⁰⁾—Harvard University, from the offense Emerson gave, did not invite him to lecture for another thirty years (Menand 2001:18). Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935), the future Supreme Court Justice, said *The American Scholar* was “America’s Intellectual Declaration of Independence,” (Kaplan 1980:88) as indeed it was. Emerson had said, “Our day of Independence, our long apprenticeship to learning of the other lands, draws to a close. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” Though Christian Fundamentalists and Evangelicals today consider him heretical, Emerson nonetheless clarified the underlying features of religious experience they embrace.³¹⁾

The American sublime is found here—both lectures overflow with the possibilities for awakening one’s genius (*Divinity School Address*, 1838):

That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great stoical doctrine, Obey thyself. *That which shows God in me, fortifies me.* That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen. There is no longer a necessary reason for my being. Already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creep over me, and I shall de cease forever (Italics mine).

Emerson resigned his post as a Unitarian minister in 1834 (Unitarianism was created by those who rebelled against the teachings of the Trinity in Christian Reformation doctrines, with its origins, surprisingly, in Eastern Europe). Without the Trinity, Jesus becomes more human, but this was not enough for Emerson—no one outside himself would do. While it was an authentic return to monotheistic origins, Unitarianism did not stray very far from other traditional Protestant doctrines that Martin Luther and John Calvin had outlined. After his *The Harvard Divinity School* lecture that stressed the humanity of Jesus, and one’s potential divinity, the Unitarian Church twenty-one years later, as Emerson’s fame continued to skyrocket, felt it must officially refute Emerson’s doctrine of the inner light (Sweeney 2016:10–11).³²⁾ Something in Emerson recoiled from the institutional strictures that placed God “outside” the individual, as he wrote (Emerson 1863 quoted by Sweeney 2016:8):

As long as the soul seeks an external God, it can never have peace, it always must be uncertain what may be done and what may become of it. But when it sees the great God within its own nature, then it sees that always itself is a party to all that can be, that always it will be informed of that which will happen and thenceforth pervaded with a Great Peace.

If God can no longer be found outside oneself—that is, in an organized religion—what will happen to social cohesion? Many have recognized in Emerson what religious bodies have had grapple with from the beginning of colonial revivalism that threatened the status-quo: If everyone is free to follow her or his own inner light, (to do one’s own thing, so to speak) what will happen to social stability, to all authority, indeed, to civilization? Henry James Sr. (1811–1882), father of two of the most celebrated men of the era, William James and the novelist Henry James (1843–1916), captured something of Emerson’s great genius and genuine inspiration, with sincere doubts about the consequences of his

ideas, when a person internalizes a goal to be selflessly self-absorbed (Henry James Sr. quoted by Bloom 1992:41-42):

He was...fundamentally treacherous to civilization, without being at all aware himself of the fact...He appeared to me utterly unconscious of himself as either good or evil. He had no conscience, in fact, and lived by perception, which is an altogether lower or less spiritual faculty. The more universalized a man is by genius or natural birth, the less is he spiritually individualized, making up in breadth of endowment what he lacks in depth. This was remarkably the case with Emerson...No man could look at him speaking (or when he was silent either, for that matter) without having a vision of the divinest beauty...He was nothing else than a show-figure of almighty power in our nature...

Incontestably the main thing about him, however, as I have already said, was that he unconsciously brought you face to face with the infinite in humanity...This was Emerson's incontestable virtue to everyone who appreciated him, that he recognized no God outside of himself and his interlocutor, and recognized him there only as the *liaison* between the two, taking care that all intercourse should be holy with a holiness undreamed of before by man or angel. For it is not a holiness taught by books or the example of tiresome, diseased, self-conscious saints, but simply by one's redeemed flesh and blood. In short, the only holiness which Emerson recognized, and for which he consistently lived, was innocence.

Emerson knew the dilemma people faced in everyday life—a heroic choice really: whether to be fully alive following their bliss or to try to find meaning in social conformity (Emerson felt conformity was a form of suicide); Revivalism's attempts to return people to an experience of the divine only floundered in division and doctrinal idol worship (much of it was seeking the divine outside oneself anyway); religion for Emerson was a morose failure: "I have sometimes thought that in order to be a good minister it is necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers" (Emerson quoted by Mudge 2015:60).

Emerson stood firm on the need for a self-sufficient spiritual life: Everyone can be "self-reliant," Emerson's trope (metaphor) for imaginative independence. Both Emerson and Thoreau used the term "genius" for "inner divinity," similar to what we may call "intuition" today and they democratized it: Genius resides in everyone, awakened through an active introspection. This is the Promised Land, and the commission is to go forth and possess the spiritual terrain that the person possesses already but does not know it. In a twist, Emerson returned to Protestant language to describe this defining moment: "the moment of transition from a past to a new state...in the darting to an aim" (Emerson quoted by Bloom 2002:340); an awakening is indeed a rebirth. Human freedom, in world literature, is uniquely Emerson's landscape, an escape from one's time-bound psyche (the land of Egypt) through communing with the eternal spark of divinity (Emerson quoted by Bloom 1996:25-26):

I am to invite men drenched in Time to recover themselves and come out of time, and taste their

native immortal air.... In the highest moments, we are a vision. There is nothing that can be called gratitude nor properly joy. The soul is raised over passion. It seeth nothing so much as Identity, a Perceiving that Truth and Right ARE. Hence it becomes a perfect Peace out of knowing that all things will go well. Vast spaces of nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea, long intervals of time, years, centuries—are of no account. This which I think and feel *underlay every former state of life and circumstances*, as it does underlie my present, and what is call life, and what is called death (Italics mine).

It was a gigantic step for Emerson to take an ecstatic spiritual experience, shake it loose from any established religious moorings, and to move it within as a guiding light for one's life. Walt Whitman (1819-1892) learned this lesson from Emerson, a John the Baptist for Whitman's Messiahship (Bloom 1994:274). Whitman heard the call, saying: "My ideas were simmering and simmering and Emerson brought me to a boil" (Whitman quoted by Richardson 1995:527-528).

Whitman knew his poetry was too radical a departure from the mainstream to be accepted. It was overtly sexual, in ways that had never been articulated before: imagery of fragmented pieces of the self, or of multiple selves, communing in erotic metaphors with one another: the sexual embrace the "me myself" gave the "self" in Section Five and the rape of the "me myself" by the "soul" in Sections Twenty-Eight to Thirty (Bloom 1996:273) are just two examples. Whitman's poetry can only be described as autoerotic, on endlessly multiple levels.

Whitman was thirty-six when he published his book of poems, consisting of ninety-five pages, at his own expense. He set the type himself, with a little help (he had been a printer, journalist, and editor his entire adult life). The entry of Whitman's genius into literature began modestly, to say the least. He printed only seven hundred ninety-five volumes of his twelve untitled poems (this was all he could afford), had them bound in green clothe, with *Leaves of Grass* in gold lettering printed on the cover (his name as author was omitted). Its frontispiece is a drawing of a person similar in stature to Whitman (Kaplan 1980:40), with a beard, open shirt, of one who labors outdoors—a farmer or a hunter or herder or a carpenter, the average American workingman. Whitman had written a long introduction of what a poet means to America, based in large part on writings from Emerson's *Self-Reliance* (1841) and *The Poet* (1844) (Richardson 1995:588).

Whitman sent Emerson a copy, which he read from cover to cover several times. Deeply impressed, Emerson wrote Whitman on July 21, 1855, and I quote a couple excerpts (Emerson quoted by Kaplan 1980:202-203):

I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy... I give you joy of your free & brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the *courage of treatment*, which so delights us, & which large perception only can inspire...

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but

the solid sense of the book is sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging (*Italics mine*).

Whitman had found his poetic vocation through Emerson, but his courage to publish his work came from Elias Hicks (1784–1830), a Quaker minister, part Black American and Native American, a gifted speaker who preached a heretical gospel (Hicks did not accept the Calvinist tenant of predestination, original sin, Jesus’ death as a personal atonement, or the Trinity). For Hicks, Jesus was the living reality and each person was potentially a living incarnation. Whitman, from a Quaker family and deeply influenced by Quakerism,³³ heard Hicks speak in 1829 (a year before Hicks died) at Morrison’s Hotel in Brooklyn and wrote of him (Whitman quoted by Kaplan 1980:69):

Elias Hicks emanated from his very heart to the hearts of his audience, or carried with him or probed into, and shook and arous’d in them—a sympathetic germ, probably rapport, lurking in every human eligibility, which no book, no rule, no statement has given or can give inherent knowledge, intuition—not even the best speech, or best put forth, but launch’d out only powerful human magnetism.

Hicks had great courage; he was ardently anti-slavery at a time when most Quakers held rather lukewarm views about it: George Fox (1624–1691), founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), had not condemned slavery in 1617 when he visited Barbados, where slavery was at its cruelest—he only encouraged people to treat their slaves well. Hicks radicalized Quakers with his social gospel and he was among the first in history to advocate for “moral purchasing” (Webb 2016:30), to refuse to buy products produced by slave labor: rice, sugar, cotton, and tobacco. He wrote a pamphlet detailing his views, *Observations on Slavery* (1811), declaring that blacks and whites were absolutely equal. From Hicks’ inspiration Quakers later began a Free Labor Society, a group of stores selling products that slaves had no part in producing (Webb 2016:35).

Emerson used the word “courage” to describe *Leaves of Grass*, and it took great courage to openly declare that one is divine to a public that held firm religious views against the concept (only Jesus is divine). As Emerson and Hicks, Whitman gave “Christ within” a new spin, one that has only increased in importance with time: All levels of consciousness, from the mundane to such peak experiences of epiphany Emerson described, are divine. Whitman’s greatest originality, one that continues to inform American identity, is the vision of the self. If poetry and religion are connected to an answering from a place deeper within than everyday consciousness, is it possible that more than one voice answers? What about three answering voices? For Whitman, this indeed is the case.

In one of the most startlingly original visions of selfhood ever put into language, Whitman wrote of three entities: two selves (myself and me myself), the part of the self that is known and the part that knows, and the soul—the soul is connected to nature or body consciousness, filling space as a kind of anti-matter, the unknowable principle (Whitman admits he cannot know the soul, but he knows the self and the me myself).³⁴ *Song of Myself*, then, is an articulation of self-consciousness: of the empirical self and the ontological self engaged with the greater expanse of nature and the wider world, the soul

(Bloom 1994:277). If Kabbalah is an articulation of how the divine came to an awakened consciousness, then *Song of Myself* is a personal Kabbalah, an articulation of how people have come to be themselves, with their own identity, always fragile in Whitman, despite his overt boastings—a defense against losing identity.

Freud is also guide to these interiors, in such classic works as the *Ego and the Id* (1923), of civil war in the psyche. Here the self wrestles with three other forces: the id, the superego, and the objective world (Storr 1989:63–64). Saint Paul remains relevant through his Platonic vision of a tripartite person: the spirit, the soul, and the flesh (First Thessalonians 5:23), writing, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Galatians 5:17).

Song of Myself is a very difficult poem, composed by one of the most sophisticated writers in the English language ever, and its underlying scenario is of a person and a nation moving toward resurrection out of the ashes of inner turmoil and defeat, from “a crucifixion and bloody crowning.” As the Egyptian god Atum, Whitman masturbates to create a new people, which he describes in Section Forty:³⁵⁾

*I troop forth replenished with supreme power, one of an average
unending procession,
We walk the roads of Ohio and Massachusetts and Virginia and
Wisconsin and New York and New Orleans and Texas and
Montreal and San Francisco and Charleston and Savannah
and Mexico,
Inland and by the seacoast and boundary lines. . . . and we pass the
boundary lines.*

Me myself, the occult self E. R. Dodds (1893–1979) eloquently wrote of in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), is in a long line of ancient, pre-Christian Greek and Scythian shamans. Dodds has shown that the Greeks used such terms as the “psyche” and “daemon” to identify inner spiritual realities—these had many manifestations—some that are not so startling for us today since they became part of Christian visions of Jesus’ redeeming work. The shaman took a spiritual journey in order to heal, internalizing the disease of another person into herself and himself and disposing of it in the underworld (Dodds 1951:140).³⁶⁾ Eliade Mircea (1907–1986), in *Shamanism* (1964), shows that the essential function of a shaman is to protect the community from hidden demonic forces out to destroy (Mircea 1964:508–509).³⁷⁾

Early Christians (or Ebionite followers of Jesus), in such esoteric teachings as the New Testament’s *Book of Revelation*, show Jesus doing the same, returning from the underworld and declaring: “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18). Whitman, too, believed *Leaves of Grass* could heal the national conflict over slavery and democracy (Kaplan 1995:300), since as the American Jesus he also suffered multiple crises that gave him the power to heal. This identification foreshadows all Americans as the sacred

The soul and me myself are hostile to each other, as the earthly and spiritual elements of consciousness, each with the potential to “abase” or humiliate the other. Whitman, then, elevates masochism to a sublime interior aesthetic. The “voice” in *Song of Myself* is in fact two voices: the self (which speaks most of the time) and me myself, both in masculine and feminine stances (in the poem the soul never speaks). Whitman is exquisitely the artist of how to talk to oneself (Section Five):

*I believe in you my O Soul.... the other I am must not abase itself
to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.*

*Loafe with me on the grass.... loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want.... Not custom or lecture,
not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.*

*I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue
to my barestript heart,
And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.*

*Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowl-
edge that pass all art and argument of the earth;*

Never, in all literature, has a daemon been so gentle and sweet-tempered. Whitman’s vision of salvation is to be a passerby, affirming the stance of me myself, who is always a passerby. This is precisely the vision of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas*, discovered in 1945 among the Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi, Egypt. Here Jesus said, in Saying Forty-Two, “Be passersby.”

Why does *Song of Myself* remain crucial? It continues (and no doubt will continue) to inform the American sense of self in relationship to the divine. Whitman is in the Southern Baptist hymns of walking and talking with Jesus, he is in the crisis conversion that leads to a new identity—the hopeful transformation that one could be unregenerate one day but be completely transformed the next, in the extreme idealism that an awakened divine people can create a new age. Whitman is in the American Jesus, the mystical personage who is always alone but who is always available to everyone in her or his walk of faith (Bloom 1994:275).

As the artist of the agonistic sublime, since all quests, whether inward or outward, are bound to be both agonistic and sublime, Whitman’s poems of celebration and self-anguish are of everyday life: epiphanies, moments of painful introspection, hostile feelings, erotic longing, and dark motives denied by most of us. Whitman pushes people toward a deeper communion that may indeed heal the war

within or even wars without. All mainstream American denominations and heretical cults affirm a personal divinity, the more heretical the more affirming. Since recent polls (2018) show that ninety percent of Americans believe in God, a divinity within is a reality on some level for the vast majority.³⁹⁾ Here is Whitman at his finest, with me myself, as the American Jesus, encouraging the self in its pilgrimage through American time and space:

*I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your bootsles.*

*You will hardly know who I am, or what I mean;
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.*

*Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged;
Missing me one place, search another;
I stop somewhere, waiting for you.*

5. Conclusion

At its origins American culture elevated revivalism as the pathway to an inner awakening, on a collective level, to “Christ within,” following Reformation teachings. Yet this form of spirituality is closer to ancient ecstatic religions that taught a separation of the spirit (deepest self) from the soul (experiential self) than to Reformation Christianity (Bloom 1992:50–52). The hunger for transcendence is what Otto Rank (1884–1939) called “the eternalization impulse.”⁴⁰⁾ Are people more than their experience? Can people transcend experience to find wholeness? In America these questions are answered in an “experiential” context, realization through moving forward and outward.⁴¹⁾ Yet fulfillment recedes as one draws closer. Even Walt Whitman’s portrayal of a fragmented self ends as a quest, since Whitman’s sense of reality was too expansive for such easy resolutions as complete psychic harmony and bliss. The journey is the only reality.

Where is God? Only in the heart, as American sages and poets taught. America could not create a New Eden but only another civilization outside the presence of God, east of Eden: “So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16). I will end with a quote from J. H. van den Berg (van den Berg 1961:220–221):

God has been removed from reality so thoroughly that it is impossible for Him to appear, it will have to be assumed that He can appear as a physical fact among other physical facts, as a child for instance: as the child Jesus, who plays between the oak tree and the maple tree, and who can be approached in the same biological way as the trees can be approached...For in the first place, reality—which is, above all, a realization of our understanding with God—has been reduced to a system of scientific facts; this means that God has been removed from this reality. And in the second place, if He is then, after all, requested to reappear in this reality, which has become foreign

to Him, in the shape of an “object” fact among other “objective” facts, then this means that God dies.

Notes

- 1) Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), bewildered by America’s untamed spiritual excesses, simply called what he saw “the American Religion” (quoted in Bloom 1992:16), an apt description of a culture that created its own individualized spiritual life based on Judeo-Christian leanings.
- 2) *Second Corinthians* 4:16: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”
- 3) Black Americans may have created this sense of being both human and divine (Mechal Sobel 1979:xix, quoted by Bloom 1992:240):

...It is the reference to “the man in the man,” “the little me in the big me,” “the little Mary in the big Mary,” “the little John in the big John.” For blacks, there was a twofold spiritual participation in the actual conversion experience that was not known to whites and, in each case, it was the “little me” inside the “big me” who traveled to visit God in Heaven during the ecstatic vision experience.

- 4) A civilization at certain stages is only capable of particular accomplishments, according to Vico; one stage of development necessarily comes before another, as steps up a ladder. Archeologists and historians universally apply Vico’s paradigm to determine a civilization’s capacity for art, architecture, poetry, or philosophy. Without the primitive stages, no advanced stage is possible: “magic must come before rational thought” (Berlin 2002:64)
- 5) But the question remained: Is the God within experienced only after the baptism of the Holy Spirit, according to Christian revivalist teachings? Did not Jesus himself point out from Hebrew teachings, “I have said ‘you are gods” (John 10:34)? Paul’s articulation of the God within, which he called “the Christ within,” has analogues in Greek mythology, a calling by the divine for one to become a shaman. Paul democratized the concept, where everyone can awaken “inwardly,” again to use Paul’s terminology.
- 6) Jonathan Edwards’ church members in Northampton, Massachusetts did not reelect him after *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Instead, as perhaps among the most famous Presbyterian ministers of his time, he was offered the job of president of College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), but he died from a smallpox inoculation just thirty-four days after he began his tenure (Marsden 2003:493-494).
- 7) Calvinists founded America. They believed in a series of doctrines under the acronym of TULIP: 1) Total Depravity; 2) Unconditional Election; 3) Limited Atonement; 4) Irresistible Grace; 5) Perseverance of the Saints (Once Saved Always Saved). Several of these points, while early Americans paid lip service to them, became very Un-American ideas, particularly the extreme ideas of election, predestination to either hades or paradise (completely outside of human control).
- 8) I quote Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1840:348): “What is taking place in the South of the Union seems to me at once the most horrible and the most natural consequence of slavery. When I see the order of nature reversed, when I hear humanity crying and struggling in vain under the laws, I avow that I cannot find the indignation to stigmatize the men of our day, authors of these outrages; but I gather all my hatred against those who, after more than a thousand years of equality, introduced servitude into the world once again.”
- 9) Calvinist influence remained pervasive, incidentally: Methodist churches would develop a strong social ethic

from Calvinism's social vision: The primary mission of Christianity is to Christianize society, so everywhere Methodists went they built schools, orphanages, charitable organizations, and made sure prisoners were treated decently. As R. H. Tawney said: "Calvinism was an active and radical force. It was a creed (which) sought, not merely to purify the individual, but to reconstruct Church and State, and to renew society by penetrating every department of life, public as well as private, with the influence of religion" (Tawney 1926:102).

- 10) Some compare Cane Ridge to the 1969, August 15-18, Woodstock Rock Festival, but the numbers relative to the population were so much greater than the half million at Woodstock, New York. Yet, there are parallels. The aftermath of Woodstock on popular culture continues today, as Cane Ridge continues to exert its influence in multiple ways.
- 11) The New Testament writer, Luke, may have been stressing redemption from the mixed languages that resulted from the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).
- 12) Letter from a Kentucky minister included in a letter from Moses Hoge to Dr. Ashbel Green, September 10, 1801, in *Increase Of Piety*, p. 53, quoted in *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* by Paul K. Conkin, pp. 93-94.
- 13) Saint Paul: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (New International Version)
- 14) As David Landes wrote (Landes 1998:178): [Calvinism] "increased of numbers of rational, diligent, orderly, productive, clean, and humorless [people...and] this type created a new economy that we know as capitalism."
- 15) Lasch wrote that Calvinism was a way of life, motivated by a desire to honor God with "good health, good temper, wisdom, usefulness, and the satisfaction of knowing that you had earned the good opinion of others" (Lasch 1979:109-110).
- 16) First, the more traditional churches, the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Anglicans or Episcopalians lost out after Cane Ridge—an irony since the Presbyterians hosted the event—in part because they were not able to adapt to the changes in religious life that Cane Ridge inaugurated. The New Light Movement, stressing an inner awakening, came out of the Cane Ridge revival and directly and indirectly gave birth to several denominations: The Disciples of Christ, The United Church of Christ, and The Churches of Christ, among others. The New Light Movement returned to more simple forms of worship, and broke down divisions between the clergy and members in ways similar to the Quakers (Conkin 1990:132).
- 17) The Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, one break away denomination, essentially became "free will," erasing four of the five tenants of Calvinism, including "double predestination" of "the called" and "the damned" (which to them made the Creator seem intolerably cruel), and keeping only "salvation security" (Conkin 1990:161).
- 18) <http://thecompletepilgrim.com/many-churches-denominations-america-world/>
- 19) These beliefs are manifested in unusual ways in secular life. Conservatives are essentially Calvinistic in their stance toward the "free market," with its aura of shaping destiny with the minimization of "freewill" or government intervention. Surprisingly, liberals are actually more "Arminian" in economic policy by emphasizing government intervention in shaping market forces. This is just one example of a reversal of traditional roles in the complexities of American politics, where socially, liberals are Calvinists (Calvin believed that society should be transformed for the good) and conservatives are Arminian (or hands off). Calvin is arguably the twilight inaugurator of liberalism, since he articulated an ideal of what society should be like, with Christians bearing the responsibility for making it a reality. Some disagree, particularly Karl Barth (1886-1968), *The Theology of John Calvin* (1995), writing that the liberals cannot claim Calvin exclusively as their own, since Calvin was also a bit reactionary (Barth 1995:226). Yet, we tend to look back through the lenses of today's liberalism—All Calvinists were left-wing radicals for their time.

- 20) Out of Cane Ridge sprang three features that have defined religion in America ever since: 1) religion became less formal, less confessional, and more egalitarian; 2) religion became more experiential, with “crisis” conversion the peak religious experience; 3) religion became more evangelistic, with evangelists, heralds of revival, institutionalizing features from Cane Ridge that still determine something of the moral tenor of American life today.
- 21) Like a fire leapfrogs, so did the Cane Ridge revival, roaring to upper New York State, an area called the Burnt Over District. Charles Finney (1792–1875), an Arminian Presbyterian minister and later president of Oberlin College, formalized the Cane Ridge revival and traveled throughout the area, from the Adirondacks to Lake Ontario, with his own show to convert the unconverted, or even to reconvert the converted. This area became the locus of the most sublime heretics America has produced, including the Mormons, Adventists, and other revivalists.
- 22) Matt Taibbi, *The Great Derangement*, mentions the relatively new phenomenon of “*Christian Zionism*,” a widespread belief shared by both evangelicals and fundamentalists of the soon fulfillment of prophecy from the *Book of Ezekiel*, chapters 38 and 39, in which Gog and Magog in an alliance descend on Israel for a climatic battle at Armageddon. This will usher in Jesus’ Second Coming. Gog (Russia) and Magog (Iran) have already formed this alliance. These prophecies, according to Taibbi, directly influenced the Bush Administration’s policies in the Middle East (2008:24–27). According to a 1999 survey (a little dated) by the Associated Press, about 54% of both Americans and Canadians believe Jesus will return within the next thousand years, with about 24% believing Jesus’ *Second Coming* will be in their own lifetime.
- 23) “Pre-millennialism,” the teaching largely maintained among revivalists, means that “the Rapture” (a taking up) of the true Church (First Thessalonians 4:13–17) occurs seven years before Jesus’ return. After the Rapture is the Great Tribulation, prophesied in the New Testament’s *Book of Revelation*, a seven-year horror unmatched in human history.
- 24) This would have a profound impact on America’s social ethic. While individual groups believed their revivals were ushering in God’s Kingdom, established not on the hills of Zion overlooking Jerusalem but in America, they came to feel less obligated for improving general society and the lot of its more destitute members. Since Jesus’ return was imminent, the earth would ultimately be purged of the ungodly with all ungodly conditions.
- 25) The original Transcendentalists, in addition to Emerson, were Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), Amos Bronson Alcott (1799–1888), Frederick Henry Hedge (1805–1890), and Theodore Parker (1810–1860).
- 26) In a sense, all of Emerson’s fundamental ideas came in reactions to the extreme empiricism of David Hume (1711–1776), champion of the Scottish Enlightenment (Richardson 1995:30–31).
- 27) In 1845 Emerson had opposed the admission of Texas into the Union—it had been part of Mexico and then an independent Republic (1836–1845)—because it would destroy American democracy. Sixteen years later, Texas sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War, leading to the great failure of American democracy that very nearly toppled democracy.
- 28) The South still tends to oppose anything that smacks of presumed universalism, more recently the *Affordable Care Act* (2008), in spite of the fact that the South would stand to benefit most (the eleven states of the old Confederacy still have the highest percentages of poverty). Southern patriotism demands a rejection of Yankee plans for the whole country, even if it in reality helps them (West Virginia, Arkansas, and Mississippi remain the three poorest states in the United States).
- 29) <https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/addresses/the-american-scholar/>
- 30) <https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/addresses/divinity-school-address/>
- 31) How inner enlightenment takes place, within a Protestant Christian context, is a source of deep conflict and

is connected with a vision of human nature. It begins with the question: How unregenerate is humanity? Those who believe in the basic “goodness” of people are more likely to have peace with the concept that everyone carries sparks of the divine regardless of religious affiliation—indeed of whether one is even religious. Christian literalists believe that an experience of the divine, of Christ within, can only come through an outward profession of faith, after repenting of one’s degenerate nature—accepting Jesus as one’s Savior—then baptism, emersion in water (for Fundamentalists) but both baptism in water and in the Holy Spirit for Evangelicals. Many groups also claim that speaking in tongues (worshiping in a language one does not know) manifests that one truly has the divine within (Taibbi 2008:190-210). Emerson completely brushed all these prescriptions, formulas, and doctrines aside: The divine is already within, waiting to emerge to redeem the person and the world.

- 32) The Unitarian Church, quoted by Sweeney (2016:11): “We desire, in a denominational capacity, to assert our profound belief in the Divine origin, the Divine authority, the Divine sanctions of the religion of Jesus Christ...that God, moved by his own love, did raise up Jesus to aid in our redemption from sin...We receive the teachings of Christ, separated from all foreign admixtures and later accretions, as infallible truth from God” (Quoted in Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey, *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985:5).
- 33) The Society of Friends (Quakers) is an authentic return to Christian origins before a hierarchy developed. No professional minister leads the Sunday services, but all members, including women at the time, are free to give a sermon, to tell an experience, to offer a prayer, to read a verse of scripture, or to sing a song. Much of Whitman’s poetry is in the declarative statements of Quaker testimonials, using “I know...” repeatedly. This, of course, adds to the power of the verse.
- 34) Genius confirms genius. Giambattista Vico said, “We only know what we created.” We know history (or mathematics) because we created it. Vico had said, but we cannot know nature, except through mathematics. Whitman “knows” the self because he created it—the personality is probably the greatest work of art that people create, engineered through experience, much of which is painful. Me myself is another matter. People did not create it, since it is the ontological knower, but Whitman knows it remarkably well, from his deep communion with it. The poem, *Sleepers*, part of the original twelve poems of the first edition of *Song of Myself*, is about this detached, spiritual consciousness. Whitman’s great poems, in addition to *Song of Myself* are *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, *As I Ebbd With the Ocean of Life*, and the magnificent *When Lilacs in the Dooryard Last Bloomed*. No poet since Whitman has been able to match him.
- 35) Section 38 *Song of Myself*, p. 69.
- 36) E. R. Dodds (1951:140): “A shaman may be described as a psychically unstable person who has received a call to the religious life. As a result of his call he undergoes a period of rigorous training, which commonly involves solitude and fasting, and may involve a psychological change of sex. From this religious “retreat” he emerges with the power, real or assumed, of passing at will into a state of mental dissociation. In that condition he is not thought, like the Pythia or like a modern medium, to be possessed by an alien spirit; but his own soul is thought to leave its body and travel to distant parts, most often to the spirit world...From these experiences, narrated by him in extempore song, he derives the skill in divination, religious poetry, and magical medicine which makes him socially important. He becomes the repository of a supernormal wisdom.”
- 37) Eliade Mircea (1964:508): “The Shaman’s essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community depends above all on this: men are sure that one of them is able to help them in the critical circumstances produced by the inhabitants of the invisible world. It is consoling and comforting to know that a member of the community is able to see what is hidden and invisible to the rest and to bring back direct and reliable information from the supernatural world.”
- 38) For the entire sermon, please see: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett->

sermon

- 39) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/193271/americans-believe-god.aspx>
- 40) Otto Rank quoted by Ernest Becker *The Denial of Death* (1973:141): "Every group, however small or great, has, as such, an "individual" impulse for eternalization, which manifests itself in the creation of and care for national, religious, and artistic heroes...the individual paves the way for this collective eternity impulse."

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