

**DEVELOPING A SPIRITUALITY OF EXILE**  
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- I. Introduction: Refer to Mary and “turn to us in our exile.”
- As a Capuchin, I am guided by three passages that deal with the notion of exile that informs my approach as to how I live:
- A. On this earth in this universe: “On how the brothers shall go about in this world.”
  - B. In the political economy of this nation. They shall “go about as pilgrims and strangers.”
  - C. In the male-controlled institution of this church: “repair my house; you can see it is falling into ruin.”
  - D. I am discovering that the notion of “exile” is increasingly becoming an apt metaphor for what is happening to me.
  - E. Outline what I want to do: 1) examine a few things I have learned from two sciences: cosmology and physics that have led me to be increasingly alienated or exiled from the way I was taught about how this world and the other world is; 2) how I am finding, in our political economy, less and less with which I can identify, especially as our lifestyle as citizens of this country is increasingly threatening the planet itself and 3) what it means for me to be a cleric in this church whose leaders seem intent on preserving a system that seems increasingly identified with abuse of power.
  - F. I’m going to begin by articulating why I am finding my grounding in creation and the universe easier than in my nation and church, then suggest that this invites us to consider a new way of spirituality that finds us consciously seeking an alternative “spirituality of exile” where we can find a home.
- II. **How we are to go about “in this world.”**
- A. What is this world?
    1. *Wall Street Journal* interview with Edward O. Wilson: “The conflict over the origin of humanity and ethics—this will be the struggle for the souls of women and men.
    2. WSJ: You wrote some years ago in “On Human Nature” that the predisposition to religious belief is the most complex and powerful force in the human mind.” (Note “God Gene). How can religion possibly survive what science is doing?
    3. Dr. Wilson: “make no mistake about it: The expansion of human knowledge with science and technology, especially neuroscience, genetics and evolution, renders traditional religious belief less and less tenable, more and more difficult to justify and argue logically. The more we understand from science about the way the world really works, all the way from subatomic particles up to the mind and on to the cosmos, the more difficult it is to base spirituality on

our ancient mythologies.” Let’s examine “the way our world really works” to see how far away we can get from its wisdom and ways:

- a. “From subatomic particles. . .” What we know from physics.
- b. “. . . Up to the mind.” How am I able to think. I cannot think without the earth. I ate food today so that it would “feed” my mind, but this earth came from the earth through photosynthesis in a way that transferred matter into energy for my brain.
- c. “. . . On to the cosmos.” This week a new discovery about humans’ age, 195,000 years old, was revealed. But now, regarding the cosmos itself, it seems it has no end; it is every expanding.
- d. Given all this, more and more people are not able to find themselves “at home” in this nation and in our church.

### III. **Finding ourselves in exile in our nation.**

- A. The U.S. Bishops: U.S. Bishops: “Not being at home” in this nation. “At this time, some Catholics may feel politically homeless, sensing that no political party and too few candidates share a consistent concern for human life and dignity.”
- B. The phenomenon of the last election.
  1. Republicans: feeling that the messiah had come. Values would be restored.
  2. Democrats: went into a funk.
  3. And these were Catholics. How have we made the nation our heaven-on-earth?
- C. As I examine why the Republicans won, I know that there may be a basis in the fact that they spoke to the “moral values” in ways that resonated with people in this country better than the Democrats, but I think there is something else that makes me very worried about our nation’s soul: we are feeding on the basest instincts and these are being able to be exploited by politicians. What do I mean:
  1. Over the last few years, maybe because George W. Bush is so overtly grounded in deep religious convictions, there seems to have been developed, without his protests or that of his handlers, a kind of “cult of the presidency” that finds anyone not falling into full lockstep with his agenda as, somehow, being unchristian. This sense of mission is getting translated day-after-day.
  2. Ten days ago Condoleezza Rice, on her first trip as Secretary of State, took Europe by storm; the first stop in the effort of this Bush Administration to “transform the world.” I would suggest you listen to the religious images that are contained in the news item that appeared in . . .
    - a. Article in *NYT* 02/07/05: “As secretary, she says her calling is ‘transformational diplomacy,’ meaning the goal is to transform the world, not simply to deal with it,--to press

American ‘values’ as well as American interests while insisting to sometimes skeptical audiences that those two goals do not conflict.”<sup>i</sup>

- b. Follow-up article by the same reporter in NYT 02/ 09/05: In Paris on Tuesday, Feb. 8, Ms. Rice declared: If we make the pursuit of global freedom our overarching organizing principle for the century, we will achieve historic global advances for justice and prosperity, for liberty and for peace.”<sup>ii</sup>
- c. All of this sounds great and it can be seductive. But, returning to the skepticism noted above between our overarching “American ‘values’ as well as American interests” I could not help but think of how this great value of freedom was trumped in this election by the “American interest,” indeed, obsession with security as the way we are able to preserve our “Pax Americana.” In this I thought of Edwin Gibbon’s insight into what led to the Fall of Athens: He writes: “In the end, more than they wanted *freedom*, they wanted security. They wanted a comfortable life and they lost it all—security, comfort and *freedom*. When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them, when the *freedom* they wished for most was *freedom from responsibility*, then Athens ceased to be free.”
- d. In a society preoccupied by security, and fears around ensuring that security, people can be easily manipulated to find “enemies” everywhere, so personal rights and freedoms can easily be sacrificed, as we have seen.
- e. Then, when I examine how our need for comfort and security can be manipulated by the advertisers and, especially the drug companies, who are increasingly being revealed as being more concerned about their short term profits than our long-term health we, indeed, can find ourselves walking as “pilgrims and strangers” in this land.

IV. **Finding ourselves “in exile” in our church.** This will be more difficult to talk about because, while we know, despite what we hear so often, God is not blessing America more than any other nation, we find it somehow ungodly or disloyal to critique the institutional church. Yet Francis was told that it was falling into ruin and, for many of us, apart from Mary, we consider him our favorite saint.

- A. Let’s think of the generations that have succeeded people like me. How many have become exiles or, really “drop outs” from our church? How many justify this because they say something like: “It doesn’t mean anything any more?” I think this is critical, because meaning involves faith. Quote Sharon Parks.

- B. How many of you know women who have worked for the institutional church who have been “mobbed” or violated by the priests for whom they worked? How many people wonder where in the world the monies will be coming to pay for the victims of priestly abuse and the deeper abuse of the authority of some bishops?
- C. Just as I talked before about the way many have created a kind of “cult of the presidency” that allows no alternative voices, so I believe we often find a kind of “cult of the papacy” that finds us increasingly alienated, not from the pope himself, but from those dynamics around the pope with which we can no longer identify. It seems the Pope himself is aware of this.
- D. Last September, Pope John Paul II seemed to speak to this sense of alienation because of clerical and Episcopal power abuse when he told the bishops of Pennsylvania and New Jersey: “Saintly reformers like Gregory the Great, Charles Borromeo and Pius X understood that the Church is only authentically ‘re-formed’ when she returns to her origins in a conscious reappropriation of the apostolic Tradition and a purifying re-evaluation of her institutions in the light of the Gospel. In the present circumstances of the Church in America, this will entail a spiritual discernment and critique of certain styles of governance which, even in the name of a legitimate concern for good ‘administration’ and responsible oversight, can run the risk of distancing the pastor from the members of his flock . . .” He continues by stressing the need for bishops “to develop ‘a pastoral style which is ever more open to collaboration with all’ (*Pastores Gregis*,’ 44), grounded in a clear understanding of the relationship between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized 9cf. *‘Lumen Gentium*,’ 10).”<sup>iii</sup>
- E. When we come to a place like this and days like this, we get the sense that there can be a place and time we feel like we are in an oasis in the middle of a desert, but why does this have to be?
- F. As I noted yesterday, we have been seduced by a royal and clerical consciousness that has numbed us psychically. But, increasingly, the more we “know how the world really works, all the way from subatomic particles, up to the mind and on to the cosmos” we find it increasingly difficult to base [our] spirituality on [our] ancient mythologies regarding living in this empire and life in the institutional church.
- G. So what happens? We know we do not find meaning in these places like we once did, but know we must carry on. In this I’d like to return to a little-known song of decades ago that was sung by Peter, Paul and Mary. It’s entitled: “Sweet Survivor.”
- V. Principles for a “Spirituality of Exile”
- A. Yesterday I talked about Isaiah’s religious experience that preceeded the exile; in my new book on religious life, *Can Religious Life Be Prophetic* I have a chapter on Isaiah 6 and its implication for our spiritual lives and another chapter offering elements from Ezekiel that might be called “A spirituality for exiles.” However, here, I’d like to summarize some of the things I said in that chapter and offer some other ideas.

1. Next we need to be grounded in another notion of freedom that is truly evangelical. To this I turn to the notion of *exousía* in Matthew's gospel.
  - a. In Mark, Anne Dawson writes in her wonderful book, *Freedom as Liberating Power: A Socio-Political Reading of the Exousía Texts in the Gospel of Mark*, this word for "authority" or "power" proclaims a concept of freedom which is radically different from the concept of freedom that was espoused by the dominant culture of the Mediterranean world<sup>iv</sup> that was ordered by the notion of "Pax Romana." "In doing so," she writes, "Jesus in fact subverted the notion of freedom that Rome proclaimed."<sup>v</sup>
  - b. In Matthew's gospel, we find all these same texts about the *exousia* of God that is God's, which is given to Jesus and then to the apostles. However, Matthew shows how they are now given to "the church" of the baptized and that this is the liberating power that, we disciples are to take into "the whole world" (Mt. 28:16-20) as the Great Commission commands.
2. This demands another kind of transformation different than that envisioned by Condoleezza Rice. This is evangelical conversion: change you way of thinking about empire and religiously entrenched systems, for the reign of the Trinitarian God is at hand.
3. Secondly, from this, we need to be centered in truth in a way that will free us from the myths that still sustain so many around us but from which we find ourselves increasingly alienated and estranged. Alexander Solchenytnyn: "The first step in personal liberation rests in non-participation in the lie."
4. Coming together in the midst of the violence and abuse that seem so endemic, I'd like to suggest we follow a model that I have only recently discovered in Matthew. It outlines a traditional Matthean triad: awareness of the violence and conflict, *anachorein* as "withdrawal" or strategic exile and, finally, doing our withdrawal in the midst of the violence, not to escape or drop out but in a way that will have "the scriptures fulfilled in us."
5. This must be done in community, with each other, in a zone of safety. My experience in Nevada with the woman. She thanked me, after the liturgy, for enabling her to feel "safe."
6. Building on the notion of safety, I suggest it is our goal to create a "safe house" that offers house-pitality or hospitality to ever-widening circles of people whom we see as brothers and sisters.
  - a. Sharon Parks
  - b. Thomas W. Ogletree: hospitality to the stranger as metaphor for the moral life; I suggest it will characterize an "ethic of responsibility" (so we don't end up like the Athenians) and a

spirituality of compassion for those who are in exile. We don't want anyone to be "put out," "left out," or "out of it."

- c. For Emanuel Levinas, "freedom as such is arbitrary and unjustified until it has been subjected to the claims of the other. Justice is thus prior to freedom in moral experience."<sup>vi</sup>

VI. Conclusion: Share "Pilgrim Companions" by Dan Schutte

- Defecting in Place
- Edward Said
- How do we "go about" in our world, in our nation and our church.
- Welcome. Irish: "You are very welcome." New kind of community.
- Distinguish between religion (where God's word is proclaimed) and spirituality (where God speaks to our hearts)
- Reciprocity: extending the groups coming under the umbrella
- Culture of Death; Culture of Clericalism
- Cult of the President; Cult of the Pope. The presidency and the papacy.

Exile: defecting in place.

A place/space of safety.

A place of homecoming.

A place of hospitality for those rejected.

"You have heard it said: 'Love your neighbor, hate your enemy.'"

A place free of violence.

<sup>i</sup> Steven R. Weisman, "Secretary Rice, the New Globetrotter," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> Condoleezza Rice, quoted in Steven R. Weisman, "Rice Calls on Europe to Join in Building a Safer World," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to Bishops of Pennsylvania and New Jersey: "Every Act of Governance Must Be Aimed at Fostering Communion and Mission," September 11, 2004. Zenit News. Sept. 12, 2004.

<sup>iv</sup> Anne Dawson, *Freedom as Liberating Power: A Socio-Political Reading of the Exousia Texts in the Gospel of Mark* (Freiburg, Schwiz und Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 5.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>vi</sup> Emanuel Levinas, *totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 84.