

The Coming Age of Personal Religion

“If everybody has a personal religion,
then what is God?” (*Cardinal George, 9/24/97*)

“Individualized spirituality [“unmoored spirituality”]
doesn’t do much to change the world.”

(*Reverend Martin Marty, 6/14/00*)

“There are those who believe they can maintain a personal,
direct and immediate relationship with Jesus Christ outside
the communion and the mediation of the Church.

These are dangerous and harmful temptations.”

(*Pope Francis, General Audience, St. Peter's Square, 6/25/14*)

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The Will To Act

The heart and soul of personal religion is this:

- Man says to God: I will give you all that I am.
- God says to man: I will make you more than you are.

Whether you are a loyal member of a formalized religion or an independent religionist or have no religion at all, the act is the same. This is where it all begins.

Personal religion is not for the fainthearted or the lazy. You can't drift into it like a seed on a wind. There has to be a real hunger in your heart, a will to act. But once you reach out, even with the tiniest fingertips, you now have a handhold on immortality. God takes your extended hand and, while preserving your unique identity, helps you climb step by step toward ever increasing states of relaxed perfection.

Truth, beauty, and goodness are more alive in you than they have ever been, the natural expression of your evolving being. You grow in grace more and more toward the personality you were born to become. This is who you really are.

Dedication

To my friends in many nations
“who found no peace in your hearts
until you fell in love with truth—”

I salute the God within you

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With Gratitude

I am humbled by the many who contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to the creation of this book. It has been a work of love, which would not have been possible without the tireless listening, typing, thoughtful suggestions, and the steadfast support of my wife, Mary, my partner in all things.

1.

WHAT IS PERSONAL RELIGION?

Everyone who has been paying attention knows there is a mounting spiritual hunger rising in the souls of men and women throughout the world, greater in scale than at any time in human history. It is commonly recognized we are hovering on the brink of a new age of religion, what Gabriel Marcel called “a massive transformation of values, a complete change of spiritual horizon, the coming into being of a planetary or cosmic consciousness.” [*Man Against Mass Society*, 1962].

The traditional sources of inspiration – the world’s formalized religions – do not always satisfy this growing hunger. Every religion is sincere and beautiful in its own way, but almost all are heavy with dogma and rituals and traditions that may seem limiting to the spiritually adventurous mind, as though these things in themselves were the only pathway to the heights of glory. To many, something seems to be missing. There is a pervading sense that something more, something vital, is going on in the universe. The hunger grows like an ache in the soul.

Personal religion comes into being to satisfy these longings. It is a way of breaking loose from the fettering bonds

of ecclesiastical authority. It is the compelling stimulus to search for ever deeper and more meaningful relationships with God and fellow man. Personal religion is thus a religion of expanded relationships, of independence from dogma and confining boundaries. It is a new way of seeing old realities. It is a way of gathering new momentum within the soul, even the total mobilization of the soul to press beyond the limits of traditional forms.

Personal religion is the act of man establishing a direct and personal relationship with his Maker and all that flows from the relationship. It emphasizes the essential privacy of the relationship. In that mystical moment when man acts, religion becomes true spirituality

Man says to God: I will give you all that I am.

God says to man: I will make you more than you are.

A personal religionist acts to claim, or reclaim the relationship with God as a personality, to experience the presence of God throughout the wholeness of the life journey. Personal religion is thus a religion of personal experience, a “firsthand religion.” There is no limit to where it may lead, or to the depth of its meanings and values.

The human Jesus (Joshua ben Joseph), even before he discovered he was a dual-origin being and also divine, began his religious life in just this way. So it might be accurate to say that Jesus originated the concept of personal religion.

Imagining the Hereafter

Walter E. Bundy wrote in 1928 (*The Religion of Jesus*) that “Christian theologians have evolved elaborate soteriological systems showing why and how and under what conditions God redeems men. From Paul down they have expounded the necessity of Jesus’ death, the indispensability of the cross, and Jesus as the only mediator between God and man. In the simpler faith of Jesus, however, man stands directly in the presence of his Maker, the child in the presence of the Father.”

Properly understood, personal religion is the same religion Jesus actually practiced and taught throughout his mortal career. In its later expression he taught “sonship with God, brotherhood with man, and ever ascending citizenship in the eternal universe.” What he taught is available to every religion in the world, and to every person seeking to understand God’s higher ways.

So there is no confusion, it should be made clear that personal religion is not egocentric, but theocentric. A personal religionist does not regard the self as the center of all things meaningful, or bask in the false delusion of importance placed on the gratification of private interests. Personal religion is not a libertarian daydream of unbridled liberty. Instead, the quest for the unfolding presence of God by an independent religionist is the highest form of attunement with the central realities of existence.

Personal religion is inclusive, not exclusive. It does not lead to isolation. Just the opposite. You cannot have a personal religion all by yourself. That would be impossible. Unless you are seeking an ever deeper sense of living connection with both God and the human family, you are on the verge of having no religion at all.

Nor does personal religion encourage separation from a formalized religion. No such choice is required. An independent religionist can remain at home, fully within the comforting disciplines of an organized religion, with an enhanced and deepened understanding of the larger meanings of the traditional faith, or develop an autonomous religious identity with no formalized religious affiliations – a stand-alone religionist profoundly connected to the world and to the world beyond.

Either way, the experience can be full and complete. Either way is morally relaxing. Either way can inaugurate greater possibilities for expanded spiritual growth. Either way can stimulate an even more compelling search for truth and meaning.

In common with all others who embark on this journey of discovery, personal religionists believe that God is their loving heavenly father, that all men and women are their spiritual brothers and sisters, and attempt to live their lives in the sublime, relaxed consciousness of these relationships. This is the slowly building wave of the future.

Imagining the Hereafter

It should be clear to every real thinker that the new age of religion is surely coming, moving imponderably through the fog of confusion that still besets much of the human race.

As Victor Hugo said in 1877 [conclusion to *Histoire d'un Crime*] “One can resist the invasion of armies; one cannot resist the invasion of ideas.” Personal religion is an idea whose time has come, galloping like a determined snail.

About the Author

Paul Snider grew up in the back streets and alleyways of Detroit and, alternately, on an apple farm near Georgian Bay, Ontario. He moved fifteen times before he was twelve.

His religious life has often been checkered, with patches



Photo by Jonah Levy

of light and shadow. During the Korean War he was what has been described as “an atheist in a foxhole.” Nevertheless, he survived the war with two purple hearts.

Years later he learned he was not an atheist at all. What he had been denying all along was the clouded, inconsistent, man-made image of God.

As he continued the search for knowledge of God’s higher ways, he met a woman with a shimmering spirit. She told him what she had been taught. “Everything you need to grow is already around you, and within you.”

There seemed to be a deep truth in what she said. This was the beginning of his rebirth.

Paul is the father of seven, husband (to Mary) of fifty-seven years, now retired from a business career, and living in Illinois.