In Search of the “Droot”

I spent my undergraduate years trying to balance my academic life with my athletic career. Fortunately, I had a fine group of mentors who understood the needs of the intercollegiate athlete. It never excused me from class work, but it sure made me stand out when I took philosophy classes. I may have been one of the few philosophy students in history to wear a letter jacket. But, I had excellent professors and among them was an Indian scholar named Doctor Kulkarni.

Doctor Kulkarni had a way of explaining a four thousand year old story that kept us as students both transfixed and wondering how we would handle this on a test. After a few weeks, the names of all the characters would mysteriously slide into a Sanskrit jumble…the basic story lines seemed to meet at some points, then leap into completely unseen directions. Studying for this quarter class on Far Eastern Philosophy after reviewing the breadth of the Hindu canons seemed daunting to the whole class. A group of us formed a study group and met in one of the school’s library rooms one Tuesday evening.

As it turned out, only a few of us made it. We began when one student burst out with a monologue discussing a central concept that Doctor Kulkarni would discuss nearly every lecture. He was fascinated by it and wanted our insights. The concept, he told us, of Dr. Kulkarni’s “droot” really made him interested in continuing with the follow up course the next term.
“Droot?” The other students and I exchanged glances. This was unsettling, we had never heard Dr. Kulkarni discuss the “droot.” “Sure, yes,” he told us, “he talks about it every day…the “droot.”

“Droot? Droot? Oh, the “Truth!”” Dr. Kulkarni’s accent, although fun to imitate in the dorms at night often made a word or two hard to fathom. “He is talking about the “truth!”

At that moment, the student completely changed his demeanor and explained to us that he knew the truth from his faith and that his faith’s prophet had explained everything and that was final…for him.

In one moment, he went from excited scholar to stiff “fundamentalist.” For him, the case was closed, the book was finished. He was fascinated by the search for “droot,” but he had no interest in looking for Dr. Kulkarni’s “truth.”

“A man gives a diram to each of four persons. The Persian said he spend his on an angur, while the Arab said he would spend his on an inab. A Turk said he would spend his on an uzum, and a Greek said he spend his diram on an istabil. These people began to fight with one another. The angur, the inab, the uzum, and the istabil are all grapes.”

Jalal-uddim Runi, Masnavi

Our story of the grapes raises one of the key issues of Religious Studies…basically, is one person’s “droot” another’s “truth?” Are we just
talking about the same thing in World Religions with just a variation on the names of God? Or, to put it simply: “All religions are the same deep down.”

This is Religious Studies Professor Peter Kreeft’s personal pet peeve. Kreeft, a very prolific writer and theologian, rarely pulls punches when discussing religion and religions. He notes in his book, Fundamentals of the Faith regarding “All religions are the same deep down:” “That is simply factually untrue. No one ever makes this claim unless he is 1.) abysmally ignorant of what the different religions of the world actually teach or 2.) intellectually irresponsible in understanding these teachings in the vaguest and woolliest way or 3.) morally irresponsible in being indifferent to them.”

Part of the study of Religious Education is to respond to the three challenges of Kreeft: to enable students to overcome ignorance of the teachings of World Religions as well as the intellectual and moral irresponsibility that accompanies this ignorance. At the same time, John Catoir notes in the book, “World Religions,” that all World Religions share two basic concepts, a variation of the Golden Rule and the use of Prayer. Moreover, there is a general understanding of the role of a path or “way” or journey in World Religions. For example, look at the use of terms in these World Religions:
Pathways to Understanding

Lao Tzu  
Buddha  
Hindus  
Jesus Christ  
Moses  
Mohammed  
Sufis  
Lakota Sioux  
Shinto

*Tao*  ‘The Way’  
*Mahayana*  ‘The Great Way’  
*Deva-yana*  ‘The Way of the Gods’  
‘I am the Way’  
Led the way to the Promised Land  
Led the way to Mecca  
‘The Straight Way’  
‘A different Way’  
The Red Road  
‘The Holy Path’

So, we “walk” a bit of a tightrope in the field of Religious Studies: on one hand, we recognize the similarities of World Religions…the concept of the way, the Golden Rule, the use of prayer…and, on the other hand, we must be vigilant in not falling into the trap of believing that all religions are the same…deep down.

One issue that always seems to be forgotten…and has recently resurfaced in the national political dialogue…is that all World Religions place a large emphasis on weddings and marriage. Certainly, prayer and the Golden Rule are evident, but I feel that we often overlook the importance
of marriage as a core of all faith traditions.

So, when looking for comparisons look for the Golden Rule, prayer, paths and marriage…but, be sure to see the glaring differences, too.

**Studying Religious Education**

Unfortunately, most people begin studying Religious Studies with certain prejudices…the most common being the idea that “I know this all already.” Most people enter the classroom assuming that because they attend church on a regular basis, celebrate certain feasts or holidays, and pray for this or that, they have the background necessary to leap into the field of Religious Studies. Like all learning, there is a process, best summarized as the following:

*Unconscious Incompetence*

You don’t know what you don’t know.

*Conscious Incompetence*

You know what can be done, but you can’t do it.

*Conscious Competence*

You think your way through the process.

*Unconscious Competence*

You apply the techniques automatically.

In the learning process of Religious Education, most people (and I’m talking about the bulk of people you meet in your life) simply “don’t
know that they don’t know.” At best, most people understand other faiths with an offensive stereotype of the one billion practitioners…cheap, cannibals, rapists, whatever comes to mind. Obviously, this isn’t the case. This is a common example of **Unconscious Incompetence**…the student knows practically nothing about the basics of religions.

As one begins the journey of Religious Studies, we tend to merge **Conscious Incompetence** and **Conscious Competence** as we work through the basic steps of learning Comparative Religions. Something as simple as determining whether or not a religion is monotheistic or polytheistic takes a lot of time as the student works through the seemingly unbelievable amount of writing that each major World Religion has produced through the ages. Hinduism’s basic Canons nearly fill a bookshelf while the Bible can take a lifetime to discern and understand…yet, we often ask students to “Compare and Contrast Buddhism and Christianity” in a small block of time.

**Unconscious Competence,** in my experience, is often aided outside the classroom. Students who visit other faith traditions or travel in different parts of the world seem to have the skill of instantly linking common elements and themes of the World Religions and the ability to discern the differences. Joseph Campbell seems to have had a
certain brilliance in doing this and I strongly encourage my students to watch the PBS series, “The Power of Myth,” or read any of Campbell’s popular books.

It is literally “imagining” the connections and building upon them. A finer writer than I said it much better:

“The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth,
The Forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”
William Shakespeare
A Midsummer-Night’s Dream

A very practical example of this “imagination bodies forth” was offered by Eugene LaVerdiere on the simple topic of reading Scripture in Church:

Q. You used the expression “engaging the imagination.” What do you mean by that?
A. I mean that we have to put our imagination in gear when we read and interpret, not leave it idle or allow it to wander. Our mind must be filled with the concrete images used in the Scriptures. We have to have a picture which corresponds to

The study of religion requires a truly holistic approach to education. One needs to have a grasp of the arts,
symbols, signs, sounds, smells, history and geography to begin to understand and make the connections between World Religions. However, one does not have to go around the world several times to make these connections, it is possible to do much of the work watching public television, enjoying local opportunities and allowing the imagination to “body forth.” By all means, travel if you can and reap the benefits of first hand experience, but don’t ignore the opportunities to explore the world from the local library, the internet and the television.

**The Basics of Religious Education**

“Father Aloysius Heeg, S.J., of Saint Louis, popularized flip-chart paintings of Bible stories, which for decades were found in the classrooms of almost every parochial school nationwide. He told us once in the 50’s: “If you want to be effective religious educators, you need to do three things: 1) use pictures, 2) tell stories, 3) and ask questions.” We continue to follow this wise advice.”

Carl J. Pfeifer & Janaan Manternach. *Telling stories is the basic religious education method of all World Religions…and education in general.*

**The Most Confusing Part...**

Religion literally means: “to link back.” The word is related to ligaments, the connective tissue of the body. So, by definition, religions need to “link” to something…a founder, usually, or a form of religious writing but something that links them “back” to something else. By definition, it would be literally impossible for someone to “have their own religion,” but one needs only hang around skiers or surfers for a while to find out that many people believe that they do indeed have their own religion.

Simply, a religion needs a “horizontal” and “vertical” community. The horizontal would be the people currently following the religion…the church community. The vertical community would be the
people...both dead and alive...who connect back to the original founder.

**“Joe,” the Volcano Worshipper**

Joe is very faithful and forthright in his beliefs. He holds that all things come from the volcano he has named “Ed.” Every so often Ed erupts and changes things. Joe feels that these eruptions are normal and bring balance to the world. He believes that balance is lost when people expect Ed to erupt more often or less often than Ed desires. Joe believes that we can become one with Ed after our lives end by tossing our bodies into the lava. This will help keep things in balance.

Joe is the only believer.

In a serious discussion, decide whether or not Joe practices religion. What elements are present and what elements are missing? What are the elements needed for Joe’s beliefs to become a “World Religion?”

This is one of my favorite in-class discussions...most students fall into the key traps of religious studies. First, each student will agree that Joe has a belief...he has a faith. A religion? No, not according to the definition, because he has nothing to “link back” to besides his own beliefs. Moreover, he has no community...vertical or horizontal. Of course, to become a World Religion, Joe would
need followers in much larger numbers and a world presence...at least, most of the continents.

So, then, what is belief and faith?

**Faith as a Verb**

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in the book *The Meaning and End of Religion* defined religion as the ‘cumulative traditions.’ The texts, scriptures, stories, narratives, myths, revelations, and history of a group, as well as its visual, audio, and oral traditions are religion. Faith is one’s transcendent relationship with religion. Faith is meant to be religious’ according to Smith. Faith is deep and personal, while belief is holding to a certain idea. Belief can be one of the ways faith expresses itself.

This discussion leaves us with three terms that are often used interchangeably: religion, faith, and belief. Using the terms indiscriminately can lead to problems. One can say, “I believe I am going to have a cup of coffee,” but, unless the person really loves the java, one would not assume this person is discussing religion. Faith can also be used as “trust,” one could have faith that a friend will show up on time to fix a problem with the car.

Beliefs change from person to person in the same faith community or religion. Ideally, there are core beliefs that everyone in the community shares, for example, the belief in Allah and Mohammad is the Last Prophet would be core to all Moslems. However, how one interprets certain dietary laws or moral issues in the community would often reflect beliefs.
Faith is best understood as a “verb” rather than a noun. Like the word “love,” faith is often grasped when seen in its verb form: “I love you” means one thing while “I have love for you” means quite another. “I faith God” seems a more accurate way to explain many person’s relationship with the deity better than “I have faith in God.” Other languages other than English seem to understand this concept perhaps better:

- The Hindu term for faith is ‘Sraddha’ means literally, ‘to set one’s heart on.’
- In Latin, it is Credo or Creder. (From ‘Cor,’ the heart and ‘Do,’ put or place, other words with these roots are: Accord, Cordial, Concord, Cardiac, Electrocardiogram)‘Remember’ in the Romance Languages is best translated as ‘RECORD,’ to put into one’s heart again.

**“Studying’ Faith’**

**Archie Bunker:** “Faith is believing what any damn fool knows ain’t so.”

**H. Richard Niebuhr:** “Faith is a form of our earliest relationships, either trust and fidelity or mistrust and betrayal. Before we have a religion, we have faith. Faith is like a cube: From any angle, you can see three sides, but not all of it.”

**Gabriel Marcel:** “The difference between a problem and a mystery is that we are part of a mystery.”

Sherlock Holmes was a master problem solver. Problems can be solved, given enough time, enough energy, and enough resources.
Losing one’s keys in the kitchen garbage can is a problem. Even if the keys end up at the City Dump, given enough resources, the keys can be found. It might not be worth finding the keys, but they could still be found with enough time, energy and money.

Mysteries may never be solved. “God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son (John 3:16).” Why? Well, we can believe this, chat about this, study this, agree to this, worship this, but will we ever fully understand the Christian concept of love?

The lifelong internal struggle with trying to understand the mysteries of faith is the engine, the driving force that keeps people returning to religious education. Why even ask the great theological questions? Instead, ask about those more common mysteries, why do I love this person or that person and, perhaps more interesting, why do they love me? Sure, we can make lists but these lists seem woefully inadequate. Would someone want to show their spouse the list?

Mystery is core to a believer, but a difficulty for those of us in Religious Studies. Nonetheless, we must recognize the importance of mystery...appreciate our inability to come to grips with the experience of another’s experience of mystery...and hope to understand the systemic and systematic implications of mystery in a religious tradition.

**The Spread of Religion(s)**

Arthur deVany recently retired as a professor of economics from the University of California at Irvine. His most famous work related
to studying the phenomenon of “Box Office Hits” for the movie industry. Basically, the book affirmed what many people believed intuitively: first, Hollywood makes too many “R” movies, and, second, nobody understands the secret to making a hit. Sure, we may all get caught up in the excitement of several megastars in the same movie…or a franchise movie with “Star” in the title…but, as soon as the first show empties, the “word of mouth” regarding the movie begins to really apply the heat for a hit or a flop.

DeVany uses the analogy of emptying a stadium: imagine a typical college bowl game crowd…around 75,000 people. At the end of the game, the stadium will empty fairly quickly without any kind of central organization. Each person makes individual decisions which speeds the flow out of the stadium. Some may decide to take the stairs while others will hop down the seats. Some people will queue up in busier stairwells while those next to them will opt for another exit. By having each individual make multiple decisions, the stadium will empty rather quickly.

If someone decided to organize the stadium emptying process, it would take months of coordinated practices and extreme fine tuning to even approach the speed of the completely uncoordinated normal process of leaving the game. This “chaotic” approach without central programming seems to be the core of successful economic systems…and the secret to movie
successes. Simply, there are many people making lots of individual decisions driving the success of a movie…or the emptying of a stadium.

Understanding the spread of religion is much like the movie success and the empty stadium…most of us look almost immediately for a simple answer. This simple answer may stand up to the basic questions of “how did this become a blockbuster” or “why did everyone leave so fast” but these simple responses won’t stand up to any rigorous questioning. “How did they leave so fast?” “Why this film and not that film…they had the same actors?”

The expansion of a particular religion is complex. There are certainly geographic factors, for example, an island religion would be more difficult to disperse the message than a religion that begins on a well-traveled river. Historical factors also abound…during periods of expansion, both military and economic, ideas move very fast. We must also look at expansion away from the “heroes,” the martyrs, leaders and missionaries. I often argue that Christianity survived and thrived because the population that first became Christian was rather “hidden” from the Roman Empire…women, slaves, Jews, and the dispossessed (not meant to be a pun, but it works).

The serious student of Religious Studies needs to go beyond the simple answers about the expansion of a religion, for example, “they won the
battle and all converted,” and move into the much more complicated issues of individual decisions to join a religion for a myriad of personal reasons. Certainly, it would be well worth the student’s time to write down a list of reasons that a person would leave one faith tradition and join another. How often, like in the movie, “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” have people joined another religion to simplify a wedding or make things easier for their children? Other reasons could be from enlightenment from travel to a mentor to disillusionment of the previous faith tradition…and many, many more reasons, of course!

Like the stadium emptying, the expansion of religion looks simple from the distanced platform of the observer, but can be extremely complicated if one decided to interview all 75,000 fans and discuss their individual decision processes. Now, imagine interviewing a billion believers!

**Misunderstood Core Concepts**

**Mysticism or Monism:** John Catoir’s use of the word, “monists,” in his book, World Religions, notes very simply that this world-view is that “God, man, nature and the
spirit-world are all seen as elements of one undivided whole.” Huston Smith adds an interesting aspect to this concept that we will develop later in regards to the discussion of evil. Smith notes: “In the mystic’s world evil drops from the picture and only good remains. There is only God.”

Mystics, of course, are an essential part of any World Religion. Part of the draw of studying or joining other faith traditions is often the spiritual magnetism of a guru, a monk or a wandering holy person. However, I once heard in a lecture an important issue regarding mysticism…it is important that “mysticism” doesn’t de-evolve into “mist” and “schism!” The mist aspects of guru following is often tragic as in the cases of Jim Jones or Waco or Heaven’s Gate (please notice that we can just toss up these names without any other reference and our memories seem to fill in the rest of the story), yet I would be hard pressed to tell you one aspect of the basic theology of these groups. We seem to remember the death tolls, but not the belief systems. The schism aspect occurs when the “new” worldview contrasts enough with the “old” worldview to cause a split in the groups. Those with any experience in community (simply, think about a family meal with a teenager who has recently discovered a path outside the family) would recognize many moments where schisms have taken place.

I have noted with some interest since the death of Joseph Campbell in 1988, the noted comparative religion professor and foremost scholar in the study of myths, an interesting following
emerging that is a very far cry from anything Campbell would approve of during his life. Certain forums on the internet seem to now assert that one can find the answers to all things in the writings of Campbell…a serious contradiction to the man who encouraged his students to answer their personal questions with “Follow your bliss.” Campbell, who attempted to find the “meta-myth” united all of humanity and World Religions, is now part of a schism; there are people rejecting their own traditions and following him, rather than following the “bliss,” the truth.

Most students recognize Mysticism/Monism from a rather famous character that has the voice of Sesame Street and the vision of George Lucas…Yoda:

“Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? Hmm? Hmm. And well you should not. For my ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere. Yes, even between the land and the ship.” (From The Empire Strikes Back)

One should note that Joseph Campbell greatly influenced the direction of the Star Wars story…in fact; many of his final interviews were done on Skywalker Ranch, the home of George Lucas. The Force, especially in the late Seventies, became synonymous with many Christians as the “Holy Spirit” although Orthodox Christianity would keep separate the “person” of the Holy Spirit. This
is the key to understanding mysticism/monism, the concept of total interrelatedness of all nature, spirit and humanity without boundaries.

The challenge for mystics, as discussed by Smith on page 254, is the challenge of evil. It would be difficult, in fact, it would challenge the Christian’s hopes for salvation, for many of us to walk past a starving child and note “how perfect the world is” and keep on walking.

**Henotheism:** Henotheism may be the most important term that nobody has ever heard of in religious studies. Basically, it is the belief that although there may be many other gods and goddesses, but a henotheist only worships and follows only one god or goddess. It may actually be the most common religious belief system…although rarely do people notice or acknowledge this system.

It is certainly clear in the Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout the story of the Jews, we keep bumping into the lines “The people offended the Lord,” usually by building an altar or worshiping other Gods. Even the Ten Commandments begin with “You shall not have other gods besides me,” (Exodus 20:3) leaves open the argument that there may be other gods, just not besides the LORD. Joshua’s famous “either-or” seems shaded with a form of henotheism: “If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling.” (Joshua 24:15)
In popular fiction and movies, Conan the Barbarian worships “Crom,” whom he learned the basics of “Crom worship from his father: “Fire and wind come from the sky, from the gods of the sky. But Crom is your god. Crom, and he lives in the Earth. Once giants lived in the Earth, Conan. And in the darkness of chaos...they fooled Crom, and they took from him the enigma of steel. Crom was angered, and the Earth shook. And fire and wind struck down these giants, and they threw their bodies into the waters. But in their rage, the gods forgot the secret of steel and left it on the battlefield. And we who found it...are just men. Not gods. Not giants. Just men. And the secret of steel has always carried with it a mystery. You must learn its riddle, Conan. You must learn its discipline. For no one, no one in this world can you trust; not men, not women, not beasts. This you can trust.” (From the movie, Conan the Barbarian written by John Milius and Oliver Stone, from the stories by Robert E. Howard.)

As the books and movies progress, we may venture across the paths of other gods and goddesses, but Conan ignores their requests. He certainly acknowledges their existence, but ignores their requests, demands or wishes.

In modern life, we see henotheism when, for example, a “good” Christian reads their horoscope, throws coins in a well, or any other numerous small nods to religious traditions other than their own. Christians who profess a belief in reincarnation (once, a poll in England showed that one in four
English Christians believed in reincarnation) and practice the spiritual forms of India (the various styles of yoga would be the best example) would probably not acknowledge “henotheism,” although others would draw that conclusion.

Henotheism is not just a Christian issue and one would certainly find this in other faith traditions, too, but perhaps not at the level seen in Western Christianity. Certainly, every television preacher…from the real to Reverend Lovejoy on “The Simpson’s”…has attempted to pull their flock from the worship of the “Almighty Dollar.”

Reverend Lovejoy: “Now, today's Christian doesn't think he needs God. He thinks he's got it made. He's got his hi-fi. His boob tube. And his instant pizza-pie.” To which, of course, Homer replies: “Hmmm, Pizza.”

One man’s key point to a sermon is another man’s yearning for pizza.

**Theomachy:** One of the easiest terms to study and understand, but it assumes one important thing: multiple gods and/or goddesses. Theomachy is war or strife between gods…so, by definition, a monotheist can’t believe in Theomachy unless the monotheist has given enormous power to evil or the devil. Many Christians describe the plight of evil in the world in such a way that the devil/evil is on par with the Triune God. If God and the Devil wage a constant war, we have something more akin to polytheism rather than monotheism.

Notable examples of Theomachy can be found in much of Classic literature. From the
Babylonian Creation Epic, the Enuma Elish (from the opening line, “From the skies above), we find discord and warring among the gods at the start of Creation:

“Discord broke out among the gods although they were brothers, warring and jarring in the belly of Tiamat, heaven shook, it reeled with the surge of the dance; Apsu could not silence the clamour, their behavior was bad, overbearing and proud.” (Tablet One)

Greek mythology is filled with Theomachy, in fact, the root stories are based on one set of gods displacing another, as in the case of Zeus overthrowing Kronos.

**Theodicy:** Theodicy is simple to study and difficult to live with in this world. Simply, theodicy is an explanation of God’s goodness and holiness in the face of evil. Bad things do happen to good people, all the time, in fact. Why? If God is all good, all knowing, all present…why does God allow bad to happen?

For the polytheist, the answer is very simple: a bad god got you! For the monotheist, the answer is much more complex…

**First point for the Monotheist and Theodicy…**

I visited San Francisco a few weeks ago. I spent some time with my brother Gary. He has jet black hair, dark eyes, about my height, but weighs 70 pounds less. In fact, if you saw the two of us
together, you would not think we were related. For those readers who don't know, I'm blonde, blue eyed and built a bit thick.

But, it is funny. Gary looks like my sister, Corinne, so much so that people often thought they were twins. And Corinne looks like my brother Ray. Hang on, there are six of us. Ray and my oldest brother, Richard, look like they came out of the same stamp. My brother Rich could pass for my brother Phil's dad. And, although I may hate to admit it, I look like Phil. So, if you see Gary, who looks like Cor, who looks like Ray, who looks like Rich, who looks like Phil, you may not think he looks like me. When you see all six of us together, you will see how much Gary and I look alike. But, you see, you have to see all six of us together. You have to look at the whole picture.

It is amazing how often when I travel to give a talk, I discover afterwards that a major brouhaha has been boiling around the place the past week. I get hints of it during the questions from the audience. One group recently kept hammering about God and justice, or truly, God and fairness. It turns out that things had really turned down for one of the participants, a good person from all accounts, and, well, it just did not seem right. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Hey, I don't know! I turned to the Book of Job to help fortify for my next talk. I found great wisdom in two lines. When God speaks to Job "out of the
storm," His first words are "Who is this that obscures divine plans with words of ignorance? (Job 38:2)"

Who is this? Maybe part of the reason I can't answer the question perfectly is "who is this?"

Forgive my "words of ignorance," it's the best I can do today. The other line worth thinking about occurs at the beginning of the story: "We accept good things from God; and should we not accept Evil? (Job 2:10)"

How often do I thank God for the good days, the easy commutes, and the wonderful tastes of life? Do I just remember God when "bad things happen?"

Perhaps, we need to remind ourselves to celebrate and be thankful much more often. We need to stand back and look at the "big picture" of life.

If you stand back and look at the big picture, you will see the connections. How some "bad things" turn out to be "good" and some good, bad. And even then, you still won't have enough perspective, you will still "fully know only in eternal life."

I have a family portrait in my hallway. I am surprised how much I look like Gary.

**Point, the Second... “We’ll See”**

Actually, I doubt that this question, "why do bad things happen to good people?," will ever be answered to the happiness of everyone. Why? First, and this was the point of my last article, is that most people saunter merrily through their days ignoring
the miracles of life and the good graces of God. Then one day, something bad happens and they leap on the dung heap and scream "why me, Lord?" The Interstate 15 construction has taught me to be thankful for things I have never even considered before, for example, daily survival. The construction has allowed me to spend literally hours on a ten minute commute and I use this time to talk with my daughters who are hot, thirsty and have to go to the bathroom. See, I'm thankful.

The second roadblock to answering the question, "why do bad things happen to good people?," is a bit trickier to explain. Simply, are you so sure you know when something is good or bad? Are you certain?

A farmer had a horse and a son. One day, the horse died. All the neighbors said, "Oh, how bad." The farmer said, "We'll see." The next day, the neighbors got together and bought the farmer a new horse. They all said, "That's a good thing." Farmer said, "We'll see." The following day, the horse threw the son while trying to break the horse. The son broke his arm. The neighbors all said, "Oh, how bad." The farmer said, "We'll see." The next day, the army came into the town, drafted all the young men, save the son with a broken arm. They all died in the first battle. The neighbors said to the farmer, "Oh, how good it was for your son to have a broken arm." The farmer said, "We'll see."
The Farmer's "We'll see" attitude is something I have tried to adopt as I muddle through middle age. I often use the question "Was World War II a good thing or a bad thing?" Certainly, it was a tragedy, an overwhelming waste of human life and resources. Yet, this young French-Canadian met an Irish girl at a USO dance in San Francisco. They married and he went off to fight in the Pacific. After he returned, they moved to South San Francisco and started a family. No World War II, no me.

Is it good or is it bad? I don't know. Years ago, I heard a presentation arguing that we need to get rid of the "time clock" mentality and adopt the "baseball mentality." The question is simple: when does a baseball game end? Not when the clock ticks down, rather it ends on the last out in the last inning. The losing team can always win in baseball, the clock doesn't run out on the Mudville Nine. Casey strikes out. So, is this the last time I will write about this? We'll see.

**Point, the third…it still hurts.**

I have had a lot of people comment on the "We'll see" story. At my good friend Andrew's birthday party, I heard an interesting point that I am "such an optimist." Well, it is true. I got that from my uncle. My uncle survived falling thirty-six stories off a building. Unfortunately, the building had thirty-seven stories.
Okay, that's a joke. You see, he survived thirty-six, but the building is thirty-seven stories. Actually, passing the twenty-sixth floor a lady looked out the window and asked "how are you doing?" My uncle answered, "So far, so good."

"So far, so good" is not a bad motto for someone born in the Fifties, educated in the Seventies and battling fatherhood and Middle Age in the Nineties. Unlike my father and mother, who were born in a world war, survived a depression, fought in another world war, and had sons battle in another war, my life has been pretty smooth. Yes, as Frank Sinatra would say, "I've had my share of pain and losing," but overall, "So far, so good."

In the midst of writing this series, a good friend of mine killed herself. The glibness of my writing shocked me as a real tragedy begins to settle into my life. For weeks, for years, to come, many people will be asking "Why, Lord, Why?" and my answers are "We'll see" and "So far, so good."

It W.B Yeats wrote: "Never give all the heart, for love will hardly seem worth thinking of ... For everything that is lovely is but a brief, dreamy kind delight." Perhaps we could avoid pain by avoiding love, avoiding passion. But pain brings life. In pain we bring forth children, in the pain on the cross, salvation. And, no, it doesn't make sense always nor does it feel good.
Yeats' words provide an antiseptic life. Clean, neat, and porcelain white like a freshly scrubbed toilet, a life without love could perhaps be safe from pain. Yet, a life without love would also probably be impossible. If we choose love, we choose life and life has pain.

One day, perhaps, this tragedy will make sense. But today is not that day. Today is not that day.

**Point, the fourth…maybe, God just doesn’t get the timing right!**

No matter the topic, it always seems that one question will end up in the final question and answer section. Whether we discuss Comparative Religion, methodologies, or Christian History, someone always insists upon asking a question of Divine Justice. “Why do bad things happen to good people?” “If everything was made good, then why…?”

Just recently, I discovered that the “real” question people want the answer to deals with Divine Timing. Sure, everybody knows that good must come from evil, but when?

Two incidents happened this week that underscored this concept in my life. Each summer, I spend June in Ohio at discus camp. And, each year, at least one event ends up as a topic for a discussion. This year, there were two.
In Granville, there is a wonderful city pool that is filled by a local stream. We take the campers down there to refresh their legs a few times each week. On the way back, two campers just ahead of me began to step into a crosswalk when a young man with a flashy new white car barely slowed for the stop sign and accelerated past the two forcing our campers back on the sidewalk. Although I had seen this driving style daily at my old job, it still makes me want to beat someone up. As I began to open my mouth to lament the lack of justice in this world, the lights of the local sheriff’s car lit up and the young man in the flashy white car incurred the wrath of a very angry constable.

You see from this story that, finally, God got the timing right. That is what most people expect from God: an immediate judgment and a Divine slapping. But, as most people know, this is not the way things usually work out. And, this point brings us to our second story.

We shared our camp cafeteria with the Cheer Ohio people. Basically, these are several hundred young girls in matching uniforms, hair and face glitter. The young ladies in our camp are throwers, certainly beautiful young women but built on the large and powerful side. In the lunch line, one of the cheerleaders asked a high school female thrower: “Are you guys like a fat camp?”

When I was told about this interaction, I was reminded why most people hate high school. The
young woman who was asked if she belonged to a fat camp was an all-state volleyball player and has an excellent opportunity to receive all her education for free because of her athletic talents. Yet, she has self-esteem issues. She is tall, strong and muscular, but she doesn’t fit into the mold of the “miss teeny bikini” model of the glamour magazines. Will she go to Prom? I don’t know, but I would be proud to call her my daughter.

With perfect timing, a huge zit would have emerged on this cheerleader’s nose. But, that is not what happened. Rather, our young cheerleader with her perfect smile marched off to her perfect life. I was reminded of my father’s favorite curse, besides “Pardon my French, but you are a stoop (short for “stupid”).” He would say to someone who was greedy: “I hope you get everything you want.” In my experience, getting “everything you want” is the quickest ticket to unhappiness.

My father’s insight about the needs and wants of this life are worth thinking about. Where balanced against eternity, the search for physical beauty or a new car seem a bit unimportant.

Perhaps the young man in the flashy white car and our young cheerleader will meet and begin a perfect life together. If that is what they want.
And, now, the viewpoint of “Evil”

**Evil:** It's a good question. Why have I let the Supreme Being keep me here in the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness? ... Look, SHUT UP, I'm speaking rhetorically. I let him keep me here in order to lull him into a false sense of security. When I have the Map, I will be free, and the world will be different, because I have understanding...of digital watches. And soon I shall have understanding of videocassette recorders and car telephones. And when I have understanding of them, I shall have understanding of computers. And when I have understanding of computers, I shall be the Supreme Being! God isn't interested in technology. He knows nothing of the potential of the microchip or the silicon revolution. Look how he spends his time! Forty-three species of parrot! Nipples for men! Slugs!! He created slugs. They can't hear! They can't speak! They can't operate machinery! I mean, are we not in the hands of a lunatic? If I were creating a world, I wouldn't mess about with butterflies and daffodils. I would have started with lasers, eight o'clock, day one!

**Time Bandits**

*Written by Terry Gilliam & Michael Palin*

**The Concept of Time**

The concept of Time is perhaps the single most important thing to discuss before ever engaging in Comparative Religions. I have often
noted that although people may think they are saying the same thing when they talk about religion, generally they are miles apart because of issues of time! The four key words are:

- **Eternal**
- **Everlasting**
- **Infinite**
- **Immortal**

**Eternal** is by far the most difficult. It is the concept of something that is “outside of time.” Catholics explain it thus: “Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator. The world began when God’s word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and **time began**.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 338)* Time began at creation…there was no time before creation. Therefore, God is **outside of time**.

“**Eternity is the whole and perfect possession of unlimited life at once.**” Take a moment to ponder this. The Muse is saying that eternity is outside of time. To the extent that eternity concerns time, it is more about the quality of time than the quantity, about the concentration of time than its duration. When we say God is eternal we should not therefore think of him as within time, because this creates all the difficulties.” *(Dinesh D’Souza, “The Catholic Classics” From the selection on Boethius’ “The Consolation of Philosophy.”)*

The old student question, “Can God make a rock so big that even God can’t move it?,” ignores the basic principle that God, outside of time, would
be fully conscious of the effects of God’s actions. If God is eternal, God lives in the Eternal Now…all time is “now,” for God.

An easier way to think of this is to hold your hands apart about one foot. You get to be God, in this example. Your left hand is “In the Beginning,” your right hand is “The End.” In between your two hands is time. You are “outside of time,” so where is “now?” All time is now.

Ponder this for a while.

**Everlasting** has a number of meanings, but generally it simply means a “moment of which the effects of that moment continue (last) forever.” (I guess “forever,” needs a definition, too, but go with the flow here…) For example, one’s birth is an everlasting moment…from a “water breather” to an “air breather,” if you will. However, you are not being born as you read this, but the effects are still with you. Your death would be another one and many other moments in your life would count, too. Think about draft notices, marriage, birth of a first child, moments in school, accidents, or many, many other things could be everlasting.

**Infinite** is a concept from math which has numerous issues for the student of religious studies. Basically, here is the issue:

- How many whole numbers are there? **Infinite**
- How many fractions are there between each two whole numbers? **Infinite**
• So, there are more infinite fractions than whole numbers? YES!

The problem with infinite is that one person can say “I believe in an infinite god” and another person can say “I believe in a more infinite god” and both would be right! This concept, degrees of infinity, are not a problem when a person of a faith speaks to a fellow member, but it can be truly mystifying when talking across religious traditions!

The easiest of our terms is immortal. It is something that has a beginning, but no end on the time line. Mortal things have a beginning and an end. Immortality does assume one thing; time is linear! The following is a short review about cyclical versus linear:

“Cyclical religion goes nowhere because, within its comprehension, there is no future as we come to understand it, only the next revolution of the wheel. Since time is no longer cyclical but one-way and irreversible, personal history is now possible and individual life can have value. This new value is at first hardly understood; but already in the earliest accounts of Abraham and his family we come upon the carefully composed genealogies of ordinary people, something it would have never have occurred to the Sumerians to write down, because they accorded no importance to individual memories.”

Thomas Cahill, “The Gifts of the Jews”