

Religion, Culture and
the Ecological Crisis

Edited by
Siddhartha

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Bangalore - 560082, India

Websites: www.pipaltree.org.in | www.fireflies.org.in

Email: meetingrivers.fireflies@gmail.com

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Coordination: Shabin Paul

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Cultural (not Natural) Selection: Spirituality and Religion's Contribution to Deep Evolution¹

Marcus Bussey

Abstract: This paper offers a cultural and historical overview of the context in which humanity may evolve beyond the current environmental, social, economic and spiritual impasse that frames the issues of food security and food sovereignty. It draws on historical research and futures thinking to expand on the discourse of distributive justice and suggests that for robust human futures for all to emerge the world's traditions (religious, spiritual and secular) have much to offer one another and the planet.

"We live in a world in which we produce more food than ever before and in which the hungry have never been as many" (Olivier De Schutter's Forward to Nierenberg, 2011, p. xvii).

"If the universe evolves within a field of consciousness as I, among increasingly many other scientists, have come to believe, then the most likely single operating principle of such a self-organizing living universe is: anything that can happen will happen. In such a wide open creative universe, what is of greatest interest to me is what is sustainable – what lasts – especially under disruptive conditions" (Sahtouris, 2010, p. 39).

“Change must furthermore persist for all tomorrows if we are to survive as a civilization. Change or perish: that’s the primary code for the continued viability of matter, including life – an essential feature of our cosmic-evolutionary scenario, and a vital message to take from it” (Chaisson, 2006, pp. 437-438).

Food security is a spiritual issue! It lies at the heart of our ability to fulfill our human potential physically, intellectually and spiritually. No individual, community or collective can focus on deeper cultural and spiritual necessities when their food and water is inadequate and under threat. That the minimum necessities of life are a fundamental human right is therefore foundational to any discussion on the issue of food security and food sovereignty. Such an issue transcends national borders, economic priorities, partisan politics and primitive and tribal allegiances to doctrines of value and divine order as collective health is one of the key issues for sustainability in all realms of our planetary system. This chapter will argue that humanity is a species, the only species as far as we know, that has shifted the evolutionary driver from genes to memes and that culture is the form in which mimetic transmission occurs. Thus evolution has become less a matter of genetic natural selection, and more a question of mimetic cultural selection.

Yet selection is the common denominator in both the natural and cultural domain. For the former, selection appears to be random (though Elisabet Sahtouris, 2010) above makes a convincing argument for an underlying order); in the latter, selection is more conscious and hinges on our capacity to choose between alternatives (Inayatullah, 2007). This capacity is dependent on another uniquely human attribute – foresight (Slaughter, 1995). One of the qualities that underwrites foresight is the ability to learn from the past (Bussey et al, 2012). This is a critical faculty that involves distinguishing between adaptive and

maladaptive memes and weighing these up in the context of present needs.

How do we focus on the issue?

Selection and foresight are highly contextual capacities. How we frame problems, ask questions, assess the pros and cons of any situation are all determined by our value sets, our expectations of the world and one another (Lakoff, 2005). It is interesting to survey the powerful work of the Worldwatch Institute in this regard. I recently got my pdf copy of their *State of the World 2011* which focuses on food security and agricultural innovation (Nierenberg, 2011).² What is striking is the wonderful way the book highlights the innovative capacity of humanity when faced with a problem. What is also striking is the focus on how innovation builds resilience and confidence. Yet such is the focus on innovation that the link between culture, agriculture and innovation is, for me, underplayed.

I am not knocking the publication – it is excellent and an invaluable source of stories and data and to be fair they do not pretend to have such a focus. But when we are looking for how to frame the question of food security and sovereignty the link between a people’s traditions, faiths, and spirituality, in short their sets of enabling and constraining memes, and their choices – the *selective* capacity inherent to a context – needs to be made clear.

We need then to examine what role spirituality and religion have in determining this selective capacity as they are central to how the majority of the people on our planet derive their core meanings, sense of purpose and direction. Spirituality and religion of course are not synonymous. When thinking culturally I avoid being too technical with definitions and focus on the function of a concept (Bussey, 2014b), what Deleuze and Guattari so beautifully call its ‘vibration’ (1994, p.

23)³, when deploying them in a narrative. So, for me, spirituality is a cultural phenomenon involving the generally shared sense that there is something more to this existence than meets the eye. It is an awareness of potentiality, possibility, longing, mixed with a sense of wonderment and awe that draws one into striving to reach beyond context – always beyond and always striving in an effort to become whole.

Religion is a culturally and historically derived institutional expression of this sense and this striving (Smith, 2000). It consists of symbols, texts, rituals and collective patterns that ground us in a time and place. Religion is much more about community; spirituality is much more about becoming-whole. Yet they are 'joined at the hip' as partners in the human and cultural journey and have often fought fiercely⁴ but always come back after a heated battle to a mutual embrace. They are, in short, the yin and yang of the majority of the world's experience.

This characterization suggests that when considering the question of food security and food sovereignty spirituality can help us in grappling with the issues of collective justice, connection and the relationship of parts to wholes. Religion, on the other hand, can supply culturally appropriate symbols, a sense of continuity, and also the institutional muscle and legitimacy to carry a community across the difficult terrain any evolutionary change must encounter.

Another way to put this is that the mimetic capital that spirituality encompasses hinges on the expansive urge to overcome limitation, partiality and difference – it is essentially synthetic in nature. This synthetic quality has a spiritually critical edge to it as it offers an assessment of context in which all practices, values and processes are judged on how they facilitate or constrain our ability to *become* whole (Bussey, 2000, 2006a). This critical spiritual faculty will ask of the global energy flows (capital, nutritional, intellectual, political, spiritual): Do we have a just, equitable and whole system? In what ways are we as a

species contributing to the overall wellbeing of the planet and all its life forms? Are the fundamental human needs – the building blocks of optimal life and the launch pad for our becoming whole – available to all? Do we treat this earth and one another with respect as reflections of Divinity? Critical spirituality also demands of us action when we find this is not so – it mobilizes the spirit to engage with the suffering of humanity and its cradle – the planet. It will colonize all forms (political, ideological, economic, aesthetic, technological, institutional, familial) to achieve this end when the spiritual consciousness of relationship is awakened: it is fearless!

The Great Faiths clearly can back this critical spiritual awakening up with institutional muscle, historical legitimacy, a firm hand on cultural symbols and practices, and the necessary nurturance to help humanity grapple with the challenges of *becoming whole*. Religions are essentially structural in nature and hold considerable mimetic capital in the sense that religions are the keepers of the deep stories that shape our collective lives. These stories order and confirm, but should not determine, our roles and can be leveraged to build the cultural context for renewal.

Religions are, however, also constrained by their commitment to the maintenance of order which has often aligned them with dominant power blocks and vested interests.⁵ So if they are to facilitate the deep cultural evolution needed to address the issues of equity and distributive justice which lie at the heart of the threat to food security and food sovereignty, they need to engage in deep reflection on what is core mission: what are the deep stories that bring humanity together and facilitate its becoming whole? What are the stories that keep us divided? This point is important as the secular humanism that lies at the heart of much aid work – reflected in the *State of the World 2011* document I referred to above – sees religion as peripheral (a structural

add-on) to much of the cultural work needed to be done in their struggle to guarantee food security into the future.

Reframing the present-future nexus

This last point underscores the importance of framing in which core traditions have been marginalized by the dominant secular aid paradigm. There is certainly a struggle going on for the authority and legitimacy to reframe current practices and future choices (see Bussey, 2015a). Who controls the way selection and memes function controls the food security discourse. To my mind this should not be a turf war but a negotiated conversation/dialogue in which the best outcome is collaborative. However, we need to be aware that Aid is seen as a structural issue even though, as the Worldwatch document illustrates, more holistic engagements with aid as capacity building are underway. Religion and spirituality have the potential to push the empowerment discourse and practice into the mimetic field thus deepening structure with worldview and myth.

I think one issue that is central to this whole discourse, and it is core business for the Great Faiths, lies in how we understand labour. Religion has the resources and also the mimetic capital to reinforce the dignity of labour.⁶ Spirituality also enhances this by bringing to human endeavour a sense of purpose and of relationship with the soil. Farmers are not valued and their work is poorly rewarded in a global economy that is mobile and fickle. Religious discourse can frame working the land in sustainable ways as a deep service to both community and planet. The spiritual discourse can be one of spiritual service, relationship and healing. To pick up on a Sanskrit phrase that Ananta Kumar Giri uses – the farmer when raised in status and empowered to farm holistically becomes a *shudra bhakti*: a devotional labourer (2006, p. 10).

Similar reframings are essential for:

1. The status of women, who regularly are the backbone of subsistence agriculture
2. The legitimacy of war and violence – which frequently impacts most painfully on women and children
3. The status and value of nature, the natural world
4. Governance structures and accountability in the face of horrific and corrupt bureaucracy
5. The value of things, as a materialist discourse diminishes the intrinsic in favour of the extrinsic.

To redress such areas is core business for the world's religions and spirituality. Such problems arise because of a tension in the cultural mix which is deep and enduring – culture both raises us up and brings us down (Bussey, 2014b). One function for religion and spirituality is to challenge this division by consciously promoting an attack on all elements of cultural practice that diminish human potential. In fact I follow Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar's lead in understanding that maladaptive cultural scripts are in fact pseudo-cultural accretions that have slipped into practice over time and usually promote the vested interests of a section of the collective over the interests of the whole (Sarkar, 1982) – thus we find notions of caste in India, class in the West, national and racial superiority/inferiority everywhere, and gender assumptions that detract from human dignity and purpose.

Evolution and the paradox of culture

I believe that there is an evolutionary push for us to confront pseudo-culture and that if the great human traditions wake up in time they will have a significant role to play in cleaning up the human cultural backyard. It seems to me that our global civilisation, currently cut off from the planet and its systems, will return to the earth, its

myriad life forms and its peoples in conscious relationship (Bussey, 2011). This is a spiritual imperative and is driving humanity, through suffering and deep resistance towards renewal and transformation of self and collective, and is leading to a reimagining of governance, economics, productivity and emancipation. This will happen as we simultaneously keep reaching for the stars and creating more flexible technologies to sustain and integrate humanity into a global system in which the environment is honoured rather than exploited. At this level of visionary emergence, the Great Faiths along with our secular traditions will no doubt both choose to resist and assist this evolution. Such is the paradoxical nature of humanity.

This paradox is historically grounded in our deep past. From a world historical perspective culture can be seen as an adaptive response to the human desire to expand beyond limitations (Bussey, 2013). This desire is essentially spiritual and hinges on our deep need to belong in a universe that dwarfs us, and seems to care little for our efforts. In this I follow Sahtouris (2010), Chaisson (2006), Kaku (2005), Sarkar (1993) and many others who represent the universe as a conscious field in which the Parts are always seeking to return to the Whole (ie at some level they are self-organizing). For me, this is an immensely motivating story and it has relevance for the evolutionary trajectory of humanity as a representative of that conscious field. Culture, and in this lies the tension, is also an adaptive response to the insecurity inherent to being. Culture is therefore risk averse (Bussey, 2014b). So it is driven by two antagonistic adaptive needs: 1) To promote our individual and collective need to transcend boundaries in a move to become *whole*; 2) To reduce risk, ensure continuity which is the cornerstone of identity and to control the world around us. Thus we find in culture a generalized spirituality which furthers the first goal and institutionalized religion which promotes the second.

This paper can be understood as a reflection on this tension. The learning at hand is how to manage a turbulent environment in which the most vulnerable 2 billion plus people on the planet gain the dignity and security the more fortunate take for granted. This is an educative task in which the resilience of our culture is being tested and we are being challenged to move from a culture of fear, mistrust and alienation to one of love, trust and cooperation.

The research

Recently I lead some research with a group of twelve colleagues at the University of the Sunshine Coast,⁷ Australia in 2009-2010 on cultural learning at times of environmental and social stress.⁸ The report was one of a number of deliverables within the South East Queensland Climate Adaptation Research Initiative.⁹ The focus of this research was on how adaptive capacity was enabled or constrained by social and cultural dynamics at work in any historical context (Bussey et al, 2012). In the 33 case studies we generated there were examples of how culture had both enabled and constrained the collective ability of people to *effectively select a sustainable alternative* from a set of culturally defined possibilities in which the choices were always a subset of a wider set of adaptive possibilities.

Based on this work and on my work in both world history (2009b) and in futures studies (2009c) I propose that there is a lot of evidence that cultures and their traditions can respond positively to both the practical and ethical issue of food sovereignty. However, as authors like Jared Diamond (2005) and Ronald Wright (2006) like to remind us, history also demonstrates that there have been catastrophic failures to adapt, so we should not be complacent in the present but we can be hopeful. A central theme throughout the case studies of collective encounters with disruptions to life ways is what world historian

David Christian calls 'collective learning' (2003). In short the level of adaptive capacity in a context is directly proportionate to the level at which collectivities learn. So the bottom line is: when we fail to learn we learn to fail.

In this study we identified a set of nine determinants at play in how collective choices were made. These determinants were common to all 33 case studies though they varied in how they played out and which were decisive for any specific context. It is interesting to contrast what religion, spirituality and secular humanism brings to our understanding of these determinants in order to see what each can contribute to how we understand and engage with food security and food sovereignty. Before we do this I will briefly outline the determinants for you.

The nine determinants

Complexity – refers to the complexity of social systems. Complex social systems are highly energy dependent and reluctant to redirect systems to areas deemed to be low energy producing. Complex social systems also tend to be vulnerable to stress (entropy at work) but can hide weaknesses for a long time.

Leadership – the quality of leadership is an important factor in how complex systems respond to change. Authoritarian leadership and superficial democracy can generate considerable inertia. Good governance is essential for resilience and adaptive capacity.

Institutions - Institutions supply meaningful structure for action. They shape the dominant logic of a context and are instrumental in implementing responses to change. They are values in action.

Values – values supply the logic and form of institutions. We can judge values by how institutions represent and enact them. Robust and inclusive values generate resilience and hope. Inflexible values generate fear, insecurity and lock-down mentality.

Technology – Technology often mediates how we respond to change. Its impact on human experience is profound as it shapes both the physical contexts in which humans live and work and our ways of understanding the world. Social identity and social choices are also often linked to technology, with the result that alternatives to dominant constructions of the present can be sidelined or overlooked.

Imagination – Imagination is usually mediated by technologies but it can also challenge dominant constructions of the 'real' which technologies tend to produce. Imagination is also closely linked to how we engage with values, institutions and is deeply connected to our mimetic capital (language, stories, intuitions).

Information – Decision making, choosing and selecting are all dependent on information and information flows. Information can challenge dominant value systems and assumptions. How information is generated, who gets to see it and how it is deployed in responding to change is determined by knowledge systems that reflect the dominant values of the system.

Knowledge – Knowledge is meaningful information and underpins adaptive leadership. Knowledge systems filter data and information. Adaptive responses are heightened when knowledge systems become more flexible and multidisciplinary and hence open to challenge and redefinition.

Scale – Scale refers to the size and complexity of a system. The more complex a system the easier it is to hide dysfunction for longer. Small systems tend to show stress rapidly and can be considered the canary in the mineshaft for larger systems. System priorities often change across scale and cause turbulence when there is interaction across scales.

Overview

Mapping how these determinants relate to those of us in religious,

spiritual and secular humanist camps produces some interesting results as seen in Table 1 below. We see that there are common threads and occasional diversions and that authority, imagination and knowledge are clearly reflective of different functions within the life world. We can also see that there are overlaps and considerable mixing.

	Religion	Spirituality	Secular Humanism
Complexity	Sense of continuity and purpose; order; control; community	Sense of divine order; expansion; synthesis; center; relationship	Sense of agency; purpose; common cause; analysis
Leadership	Traditional; moral; hierarchical; theocratic	Charismatic; shamanic; embedded; liminal	Legal; ethical; participatory; strategic; democratic; empathic
Institutions	Hierarchical; semi-transparent; structural	Holistic? Co-creative? Immanent	Democratic; transparent; structural
Values	Authoritarian; faith; tradition; order; discipline	Transformative; relational; process; surrender	Reform; participatory; inclusive; faith
Technology	Law & ritual	Meditation & cult	Reason & empiricism
Imagination	Regulatory; critical; symbolic	Libratory; critical; mystical; poetic	Emancipatory; critical; metaphorical
Information	From the past and present; traditional; transcendental	From past, present and future and beyond; intuitional	From past, present, future; empirical
Knowledge	Revealed; critical-traditional; ordered; theological	Devotional; critical transformative; ecological; aporia; multiplicity; cosmology	Humanist; textual; critical politics; social; ecological; philosophical
Scale	Global; regional; communities of practice	Cosmic; individual; samgha	Global; sectoral; communities of praxis

Table 1: Mapping the 9 Determinants

This table is not definitive. The categories arose out of questioning the case studies and identifying themes. What stands out to me is how complimentary these approaches are to the issues facing our globalizing civilization over the coming century. If we can activate the best of these sets in dealing with problems, a new era may emerge in which homo *industrialis* becomes *homo ecologicus*. Evolution occurs through encounters of this kind in the context of changes within the environment and life which, as evolutionary biologists are fond of pointing out, is opportunistic leaps to fill the new context. The change, physical or behavioral, becomes a characteristic and voila we have a new species for a new niche. If the change is mimetic the new species may look exactly like the old one but something significant, elemental, will be different.

The memes required to transcend our current limitations are present in the mix illustrated in the table above. These get grounded, trialed and ultimately internalized through engagement with context. So when religion engages with the issue of food security it draws on tradition offering continuity and security, the legitimacy of authority and the infrastructure to ennoble and enable human action. When spirituality engages with the world it encourages relationship and provides inspiration and expansion beyond limitation. When secular humanists engage the world they focus on agency and empowerment and provide a rational and structural focus, along with an idealism to be the change we want to see in the world.

Conclusions

As a futurist I would be remiss not to engage in some speculations. Yet I felt it necessary to lay the foundations for these in the above reflections which are historical and cultural in nature. The future of course has a trajectory grounded in the past and is not simply a

tabula rasa. It is in many ways an extension of the present, mixed with surprise emergences and sudden reversals. Yet we, all of us, clearly collude in making our futures – we draw them in both individually and collectively through our dreams, aspirations and hard work. So the future is both a field of possibility and a state of mind. This means that it is permissible to interrogate the future via a range of tried and trusted tools (Inayatullah, 2007; Slaughter, & Bussey, 2005). So by way of offering some conclusions to this paper I will present three lenses for extending the cultural thinking that grounds my futures work.

Scenarios

Scenarios are the classic futures tool, I am sure you all agree (Bussey, 2015b). Here are five scenarios for food security and food sovereignty that illustrate possible futures when religion and spirituality are included in the cultural dynamic.

1. **Return of the inquisition.** Following a series of financial crises which dwarf the 2008-2009 dip Aid work is decimated and countries are left reeling, mistrustful and increasingly isolationist. The natural impulse of people is to fall back on what is familiar with a range of religious sectarian fundamentalisms surfacing that suppress spirituality and hold secular humanist aspirations in contempt. The issues of food security and sovereignty are seized on as tribal/cultural/national rights by local theocrats and their political cronies. The farmers in the long run are left to sink or swim on their own and many return to traditional methods of subsistence farming.

2. **Ascendant ecumenism.** As the issues of food security and sovereignty become more precarious due to climate change, increased political instability in vulnerable regions and some dubious activity by seed corporations and other financial institutions, the religious

establishment close ranks and apply strategic and moral pressure in order to get political and financial support for a change of heart in many areas of inequity. This ecumenical force is given spiritual authority through the presence of a range of charismatic and visionary leaders who mobilize and inspire the world to think holistically and rescript the cultural narratives that have bled humanity dry for millennia.

3. **Grass root renewal.** Following the failure of governments and the large religions to tackle food security and sovereignty head on, local religious and spiritual groups join with farmers and other primary producers and 'invent' locally appropriate suites of agroecological practices that rejuvenate the earth and re-inspire these grass root agro-activists. These groups network globally and begin building a new global consciousness in which self-sufficiency and distributive justice grounded in spiritual pragmatics emerges as the new wave of being.

4. **Déjà vu!** The world's great traditions join forces and renew the great stories they carry (the gopis of Vrindavan; Jesus' fishermen; Thoreau's natural idyl) in order to return meaning, dignity and purpose to farmers, primary producers and nature everywhere. This is a robust co-creative activity in which local and global scales all play out. It shifts the ethical core of global socio-economics and challenges all forms of inequity and violence by linking food security with cultures of peace and food sovereignty with cultures of relationship.

5. **Spiritual samaj.** A great spiritual movement emerges after a financial meltdown and a number of spiritual leaders emerge to dramatically challenge and transform the worn out values that have put the basic necessities of life at risk. Food security becomes a primary spiritual objective in the new society and impediments to it such as war and gender disparity are swept aside not through suppression but through a shift in awareness. All institutions, both religious and secular, are transformed to reflect this new value set and uphold the

new order.

Such scenarios are exercises in thinking beyond the norm. Elements of these may emerge but the point is that scenario work loosens the hold of the present on our minds and hearts. According to Jim Dator (2002) there are four basic scenario archetypes: Business as Usual, Collapse, Discipline and Order, and Transformation¹⁰. Elements of all these can be seen in the scenarios presented above.

The 4 quadrant Model

In the historical report I mentioned above we used the four quadrant model devised by Ken Wilber (2001) to map the domains of social action required for a coordinated and sustained social intervention. This is a useful model as it allows us to juxtapose individual subjectivity, structure, culture and chaos on one field and explore possibilities of them interacting. Figure 1 provides the overview of how this works and sets these domains across a range of scales from the micro to the macro:

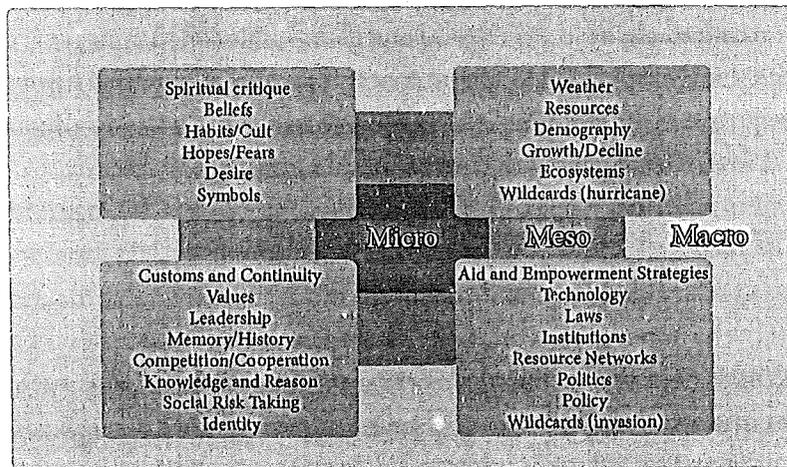


Figure 1: Wilber's Four Quadrant Model

There are a range of ways to read this representation of social order. I propose to pick up on my suggestion that Religion, Spirituality and Secular Humanism can work together synergistically in order to promote food security into the future. There are clear domains in which these three can work to support the work of the whole. These divisions are far from water tight but do allow us to generate Figure 2.

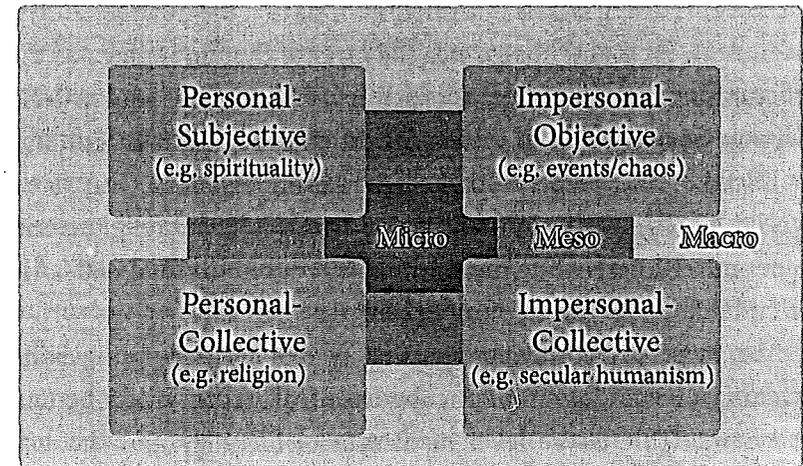


Figure 2: The complementarities of the Religious, Spiritual and Secular

These fields are all mutually reinforcing and all part of social process and emergence. They ground each domain in the context of the others thus, spiritual concerns must be addressed by both culture and secular systems so that it has relevance and impact on the domain of expression (top right). The same is true for the other domains. To bring greater critical capacity to this reading we can turn to Causal Layered Analysis.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

Sohail Inayatullah developed CLA (2004) to help in the analysis

of context. Its analytical flexibility make it an ideal tool for both academic and practical analysis and it allows for actors in context to achieve higher levels of agency through its reflective process. It is essentially a fusion of structural, poststructural, psycho-social and spiritual insights into life (Bussey, 2009a). This method proposes the layer of **Litanies** the surface of the day to day; it consists of experience, random acts, the weather, data. This level is made up of discrete and unorganized information or data – the news headlines, encounters, fears and hopes, etc. The layer of **System** is given as that structural response which makes sense of much of the raw material in litany. Society looks to system for order and holds it accountable for mistakes and places faith in it when under stress. This is the level at which secular humanists are strongest. The religious also functions well here while the spiritual is reduced to ritual and cult – the embodied expression of inner life!

The layer of **Worldview** sustains system by generating belief systems, values and assumptions about the real that provide coherence for system. This is the level of discourse, ideology and theology and the lenses these evoke. Thus we find positivism, empiricism, materialism, holism and a range of cultural values such as caste, class, competition, egalitarianism, socialism etc all working across this space. This is the domain of cultural forms so we find the roots of both religious and secular traditions working here. Spirituality begins to come into focus at this level by adopting specific syntax and symbols.

Finally, CLA also identifies the layer of **Myth/Metaphor** which relates to the deep unconscious cultural tropes that societies and civilizations rely on for inner meaning and sustenance. This is the level of deep cultural forces such as belief in heaven and hell, the drama of evolution, stories of Fall and Redemption, of reincarnation

and of animistic and atavistic intuitions. It can also be, at the institutional and personal levels, the inner stories we tell our selves such as “I am like Cinderella,” or “I am unlucky” or “When the going gets tough, the tough get going”.

A CLA of food security reveals interesting clusters of possibility. Thus at the **litany level** we have food scarcity, biological colonization and imperialism, water shortages and the host of success and failure stories we find in magazines such as Time and works such as State of the World 2011. For more we turn to System. At this level we find both secular humanists and religious agencies working, often in parallel, on structures to 1) Supply food to the starving, 2) Empower local peoples to co-create agroecological food systems. 3) Information and data collection to ensure the survival and resurgence of traditional knowledge and values. At the level of **Worldview** we find the heartland of traditions. Secular humanist’s anthropocentrism is here along with their faith in humanity, their sense of justice and equity, their commitment to democracy, empiricism and emancipatory knowledge and enlightened self-interest which is holistic in nature. Religions also draw sustenance from this level and while commitment is shared for secular humanist values there is a clear commitment also to hierarchy, authority (both personal and textual), service, ministry, and a divine order to things. Spirituality clothes itself at this level with tokens and signs, symbols and syntax, and an aesthetics and vision of transcendent order and liberatory mission. Finally, the deep stories as **Myths/Metaphors**, often unconscious and buried beneath layers of cultural ‘dust’ exist to vivify secular, religious and spiritual traditions. CLA captures this overview in the following thumbnail, **Table 2**, which we can then expand upon this in **Table 3**.

	Religion	Spirituality	Secular Humanism
Litany	Ritual	Ritual	CNN
System	Church	Cult	NGO/Networks/Law
Worldview	Hierarchic	Holistic	Participatory
Myth/Metaphor	Salvation	Liberation	Transform

Table 2: CLA of Religion, Spirituality and Secular Humanism

In Table 3 we find there is more to think about, but for me ultimately the real work is in framing the problem at the different levels. I add another column for food security to help focus the analysis.

	Food security	Religion	Spirituality	Secular Humanism
Litany	Poor soil, costly seed and tools	Ritual – supply what is needed; offerings; blood, sweat & tears	Ritual – sowing and mulching	CNN – supply what is needed; headlines; Nobel Prize; get the message out
System	Violence, War, Poverty, Gender Inequity	Church – Aid; education; ministry; local engagement; lobby state; service	Cult – agriculture; garden and field as spiritual workplace; opening the heart; vegetarian diet; body is mirror of the world	NGO/Networks/Law – education and funding; legislation; partnerships and information; diet for a small planet
Worldview	Competition; struggle; hopelessness; world is a veil of tears; life is meaningless	Challenge hierarchy; Eco theology; Liberation Theology; Increased participation; continuity plus change	Holism – we are all related; nurture our mother earth; sacred planet; sacred soil; critical spirituality	Life is core; sharing resources; dialogue; transmission of knowledge; one humanity; respect and tolerance

Myth/ Metaphor	Life is struggle; it must be my fault; I am alone; we have been forgotten	Greening stories of salvation; garden of delights; bringing in the sheaves; pick up thy bed and walk (mattock and grow)	Lotus; seed as renewal; chakra, the olive branch; synthesis of opposites; joy is green	Transform through reform; heal our wounds; the tree of life; secular saints; war on famine
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Table 3: Expanded CLA of Religion, Spirituality and Secular Humanism

CLA helps us see that problems and their solutions vary from level to level – this is so because there are different kinds of problems but also because problems are experienced differentially across the causal spectrum (Bussey, 2014a). This means that solutions and those who engage these also vary from level to level. We can see the strengths and weaknesses too as the three domains do have specific specialties and also points of resistance.

Case study

I want to offer the socio-spiritual organization of Ananda Marga as a brief case study to illustrate how an avowedly spiritual group can engage in issues such as food security and sovereignty. Prabhat Rainjana Sarkar founded this organization to tackle the inequities of the world so that a lack of the basic human needs would not obstruct any individual on their path to self-realization (Inayatullah, 2002). This was of course an enormous task involving work across scale from local to global to Cosmos. I will use the four quadrant model (Figure 3) to sketch out how he conceived of Ananda Marga and its enactment of a grounded and pragmatic spirituality.

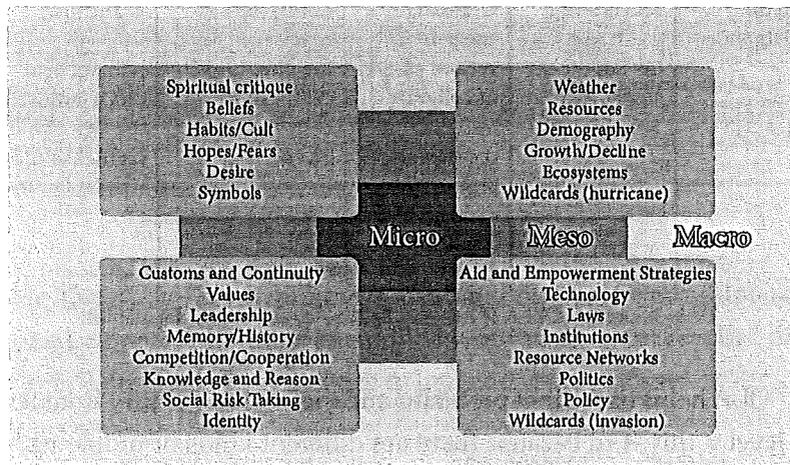


Figure 3 (Repeat of Figure 1): Four Quadrant Model

Upper Right – Impersonal/Objective: This is the quadrant of random action in which suffering is experienced as raw and visceral. This is where aid needs to be direct and immediate so Sarkar founded the Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team (AMURT) to offer appropriate relief to victims of disaster, war, famine and civil disorder. The logic is that when people cannot help themselves others must step in.

Lower Right - Impersonal/Collective: This is the quadrant of system. Sarkar realized that society needs institutions to sustain social innovation and learning into the future. The organization of Ananda Marga is one such system. He created many subsystems with Ananda Marga to focus on education, relief, women’s welfare, health, and agriculture. But systems are only as good as the values that underpin them. In many respects these systems remain aspirational and educative in that they are emergent and in many ways untested. Of relevance here to our discussion on food security and sovereignty

is his system of **Master Units**¹¹ – agricultural cooperatives that act as cultural beacons combining sustainable farming and local industry with education, relief work, health care and the arts. Master units work at the local level with local problems drawing on local knowledge and wisdom and enhancing it with relevant knowledge (eg: permaculture and biofuel) from beyond the local. To enable this work with intellectual rigor and systemic dynamism Sarkar developed the socio-economic theory of Prout (Progressive Utilization Theory) which offers a blue print for the renewal of social systems that is premised on spiritual values and collective action (Karlyle & Towsey 2010). It is the systemic expression of his ethical philosophy of Neohumanism.

Lower Left – Impersonal Collective: This is the quadrant of cultural activity and inspires much of the action of Master Units and Prout. To renew human culture and orient it towards an ethic of relationship and love, Sarkar developed the philosophy of Neohumanism or new-humanism for a new humanity (Bussey, 2000, 2006b). This philosophy is driven by an evolutionary logic and draws together the pro-human elements of culture and an incisive critically spiritual philosophy around a sense of universalism and expansion which is linked directly with the spiritual practice of those seeking to foster this collective shift. Sarkar understood that humanity draws sustenance from the rich variety of cultural forms so offered commentary and direction on everything cultural from art and music to food, landscape, language and dress. One amazing example of this cultural creativity is Sarkar’s writing of over 5000 songs (his Prabhat Samgiita). These songs are now part of a devotional cannon for his followers but in fact they have deep pedagogic and cultural relevance offering insight into spiritual and social philosophy and practice. They are intimations of a new aesthetic science for a new

age.

Upper Left – Personal Subjective: This collective work is nurtured and deepened through individual spiritual practice. For this Sarkar drew on Tantra which he remoulded to meet the collective needs of humanity. He understood that we are approaching a period of acceleration and turmoil in which deep inner strength and a practical wisdom were necessary to sustain humanity. Tantra is decidedly practical and he cleared away much of the cultural accretions of millennia and offered it as a clear spiritual practice, a pragmatic and critical spirituality, so that the inner world of neohumanists and proutists would be in parallel with their activism. For Sarkar the inner and outer are intimately connected and he moved spirituality from individual endeavour into the social world by linking self-realization with service to humanity.

Since Sarkar's death in 1990 the organization of Ananda Marga has struggled to fulfil these goals but it is a work in progress – as are all human activities. The relevance of this case study for our topic of what religion and spirituality can offer the issues of food security and sovereignty is profound. Sarkar drew on religious traditions (Hinduism and Buddhism) and ancient wisdom (Tantra) but renewed them in the context of the global physical and ethical challenges before us. His is a distinctly hybrid and futures oriented mission. Today is an age of incredible cultural and technical virtuosity when immense wealth and power are polarized across international and national boundaries thus elevating some at the expense of others. At such a time inequity becomes brazen and defies us to step beyond the well-trodden paths that have brought us to this point. The concept of Ananda Marga vibrates (thanks Deleuze and Guattari) and emits a powerful signal of hope and transformation. It is not alone in this as all holistic socio-spiritual action will do the same.

Summing up

The point for all these speculations is to explore a range of possible futures and their selective memes that pertain to food security and food sovereignty. The world's religious and spiritual traditions supply a narrative that provides greater choice when considering the future and how we will collectively navigate the issue of food security. Ultimately this will involve a rethinking of distributive justice and the loosening of the strangle hold of tradition, habit and narrow economics. I feel there is a place for secular humanism in this mix as this tradition, an off shoot of Christian humanism disillusioned with the dogmatic squabbles of the 16th to 18th centuries, shares many common goals and a faith in human potential.

The need of the moment is to access the effective mimetic material in our cultures, which means in our global context, so that we can drive our cultures towards a sense of a **singular and common human culture** with local cultural expressions. This common culture has common concerns for human and environmental justice and common cause in working to realize these. I would argue that all our traditions, the great faiths, spirituality, indigenous wisdoms (not touched on here but hovering in the wings) and secular humanism are all committed to the emancipation of humanity from the limitations of context. Yet, such is the weight of tradition that past practices become the object of present purpose and lead many of us to trade off emancipation for comfortable habit.

We must challenge this pseudo-cultural urge with positive spiritual-religious-secular culture. With healthy and resilient traditions we find the expansive meaning and cultural continuity to sustain a radical engagement with a present that fails to meet the needs and aspirations of the majority. Thus through the resources – the syntax, symbols, stories, values, practices and aesthetics –

of their traditions all people can mobilize culture to proactively engage with issues such as food security and food sovereignty. This is the evolutionary edge for humanity as we all strive to meet the future with a deeper sense of our expansive potential and spiritual entitlements.

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¹Paper offered as part of the seminar series: Values and Practices that Promote Food Sovereignty in the Context of Climate Change 16 - 19 February 2011, Fireflies Inter-religious Ashram, Bangalore, India

²I get the same sense of predominantly secular humanist gaze when reading the excellent chapter "Will there be food for everybody?" in (Mayor & Bindé 2001)

³"Concepts are centers of vibrations, each in itself and everyone in relation to all the others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other" (1994. P. 23).

⁴Here I am thinking of the tension within all faiths between those who seek to express a mystical connection with divinity (Sufi's in Islam; the Hassidim in Judaism; The yogis and Tantrics in Hinduism; the mystics (Franciscans, Quakers, etc) within Christianity; Taosists as opposed to Confusians and so on) and those attached to form, processes and the letter.

⁵"...religion serves to codify and sanctify particular spiritual experiences, especially those that serve social needs for order, continuity, and stability... The important distinction here is between spirituality as a dynamic, exploratory process and religion as the structured form that emerges to contain, and to some extent, control the process"(Kesson, 2002, p. 54)

⁶Many people leave farming for the glamour of the city. If farming is raised in status then many would choose to stay – Halweil and Nierenberg make a similar point when discussing the importance of keeping farmers on the land (2011, p. 10).

⁷See <http://www.usc.edu/>

⁸A copy of the Report can be found at <http://www.futuresevocative.com/>

Articles/Marcus/articles-marcus.html

⁹The report, Societal Responses to Significant Change: An Historical Analysis of Adaptive Capacity, is part of the South East Queensland Climate Adaptation Research Initiative, a partnership between the Queensland and Australian Governments, the CSIRO Climate Adaptation National Research Flagship, Griffith University, the University of the Sunshine Coast and the University of Queensland. For more information about this and other projects in the South East Queensland Climate Adaptation Research Initiative visit: www.csiro.au/partnerships/seqcari.html

¹⁰ Continuation: this is business as usual with the future being very much like the present.

Collapse: this is the fear that haunts all societies, the termination of all infrastructural processes and ensuing death and disorder on a massive scale

Disciplined Society: this suggests either a return to the past, as in simpler social forms where authority is clear and life was good; or, the embracing of a Utopian vision of order and balance were life is good

Transformational Society: this points to a fundamental shift in values and organisation for a context

¹¹ Visit <http://www.amaye.org/master-units> for more information on Master Units.

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