

The Spirit of God
and
The Times of Our Lives

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Introduction

Our lives have changed. I chose my title in May. Much could have been said then about the times of our lives. But since September 11 all has changed. There is more urgency now concerning the direction in which the Spirit of God points our lives in our times. September 11 did not just change something in our time: the times themselves have changed. That's what we hear most often: After that Tuesday at 8:50 am, the world changed forever. Lenore Skenazy wrote in the New York Daily News that now we are depressed from having to adjust to so much change so quickly. That's how many experience it. Relations in government, trade, health and safety, perceptions of good and evil and much more have changed deeply, widely, indeed globally and for years to come. New times often begin decades before older times fade. This time it happened in a moment, at 8:50 am. Skenazy wrote: ³It's hard to change hairstyles. ... How much harder to change world views!

What is time? St. Augustine knew it only if we didn't ask him. Time is not just clocks and calendars. They tell time dependably, because they measure dependable cosmic motions. When that time changes, say from Daylight Saving to Standard, we know it and move our clocks. But some of the mystery is already in this picture. Time, here too, is a relationship between realities that change. What about hard times? Do they occur in Standard time? Now time has changed meaning. It's in a different world. Still, it points to relationships that change. Hard times occur when sorrow prevents things being done, when hunger saps our energy, when poverty makes people sleep outside at -15 degrees Celsius. None of this significantly relates to minutes, months, or millennia; to clock or calendar time. Sorrow swallows up all time, hunger knows no time of day, poverty does not happen only when it rains.

Time

Time is the moving fabric of all relationships and connections that make up our universe. Time is universal, embracing all relationships in which everything connects to everything else. In time each creature is unique, connected to everything in its own way. In time, each has its own origin, purpose, and destiny. But each creature is not only in time uniquely, but also is caught up in time's fabric, in relational patterns whose

structures allow us to experience unique things as predictable. Time can be specific: the time of Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Time can seem real even when it does not yet exist. Green Peace may say: our time has not yet come.

The simplest things we know are physical. Yet their simplicity is complex. Physics is beyond most of our comprehension. Physicists once thought that the temporal fabric of the universe rendered all physical things so predictable that their universe was called deterministic: events seemed predetermined. A new physics, the physics of chaos, agrees that times have patterns, that no event is isolated from others. The flap of a butterfly's wing in Sierra Leone in time affects the weather in New Guinea. This physics says that time is so patterned that all relationships can be plotted in numerical regularities. It has more reason to be deterministic than the older physics. Why is it called physics of chaos? Because its simple physical world is so complex that though every event can be plotted and numerically expressed, it cannot, in principle, predict the weather accurately. Chaos physics shows the world of the simplest interrelationships transcending our knowledge and power.

If understanding the fullness of physical time transcends our knowledge and power, we will be the more baffled and powerless, the more complex relationships in the universe become. Organic relationships, in which time is sometimes reversible, so damaged relations can be restored to continue in time, are vastly more complex than physical ones. The complexity of our emotional, social, and religious lives is more complex still, that is, even more intensely temporal.

But how can time itself change? What do we mean by "after September 11"? Why are some times called our times? All this is related to the complexity of interrelated connections that can be colored more intensely by some events than by others. At the close of the Last Night at the Proms, the popular English concert series, people wildly wave flags and lustily sing "Rule Britannia". To others that song evokes memories too, but often not happy ones. A complex interrelationship of events characterized by that song can be called "a time." "British colonialism" is a name for it. Such a time also has a spirit. I will come to that in a moment. That spirit was partially expressed by a Brit's lament that youth in the late sixties no longer appreciated that World War II was fought for the preservation of manners.

So a time, a specific time, our time, is a changing complexity of interrelationships with certain dominant themes, forces that stand out, a spirit that moves events along in some direction. In that sense September 11 forever changed our times, because the US, the last remaining superpower, was shown to be less powerful by a handful of individuals who made that superpower feel vulnerable. That affects all of us in every way.

Spirituality and Time

So a time can be characterized by a spirit. When the time has come for Green Peace, it will experience heightened inspiration. Projects are put in motion by things coming together. A way forward is opened. Something more than Green Peace, is showing the

way. This matter of spirit is important for connecting the Spirit of God to the times of our lives.

First a word about time and spirituality. Time, I said, is the moving fabric of the universal network of interrelated connections. Even in the relative simplicity of physics, we cannot oversee time in the complexity of the weather three days from now. History is clearly so much more complex that we are much more vulnerable in shaping our own future. Think of peace in Israel or Ireland. Our own spirituality is at stake in our role in history. It allows us to see things in their interrelationships and to give direction to how they will develop. The more connection we experience, the more we meet our own responsibilities, and the more we need to be in touch with forces that direct time and that transcend what we can grasp and control.

As physicists see a butterfly's wing making waves affecting weather far away, so biologists tell us that what affects owls today will in time affect us. Preserving the spotted owl in Washington State is not to please bird watchers, but attends to interrelationships whose complexity includes us. In world time, we are related to the spotted owl. We need to see things in this light. We must relate poverty and hunger in the world to the concentration of personal wealth in the hands of very few people, the wealthiest of whom live in the United States. Who becomes president of the United States is related to how candidates relate to that wealth. All this shows how powerless we are. It is hard to know how our personal choices influence world history. But if seeing these relationships connects us with a sense of something that guides us, especially as communities, something that speaks to us from a beyond that transcends our knowledge and power, then we are in empowering touch with the spirituality of the universe. For spirituality is connecting all relationships to our sense of what transcends us in these relationships. The harmonious interrelationships of all things in the universe in their relationship to everything else, that universe in balance, is a dynamic state we call shalom, peace, love, or truth. The Greek word *aletheia* (truth) in the New Testament is a translation of the Hebrew word *emeth*, whose root meaning is the fullness of time, the connections between all things rooted in the faithfulness of God. When we are conscious of universal connections that are out of whack and we take responsibility to contribute to more harmony, love, faithfulness, and shalom; to a world in which every flower blooms in its fullest colors and fragrances and every bird lives to sing from its perch; to cities without beggars, cultures in which all people can read, then we are aware of our spiritual responsibility as the meaning of our being in time. For a world of love, shalom, and truth is a world whose spiritual potential has reached the fullness of time. And we are called to direct our times toward a destiny fulfilled with meaning and purpose, satiated with truth and love. That is our spirituality, that is also the spiritual meaning of time. Sometimes we can oversee our time enough to know what spiritually marks our time. Our times as Westerners, some say, are the times of market forces shaped by trust in free enterprise. If we connect that to wealth and poverty, to the environment, to health care, to who has political power and who does not, to what budgets get cut when we need funds to fight terrorism, to how sales might dictate rights for sexual minorities, then we see our times in spiritual perspective and our responsibilities as communities (academic, political, or faith communities) are spiritually attuned. Time and spirit are two sides of a coin.

Being in time is being awarely connected to the changing interconnectedness we know as time. Being in time is knowing our responsibilities as being spiritually attuned in time.

The Spirit of God

How do we know and connect with a force in history that transcends our knowledge and power? If our being in time is the field in which our spiritual flowers can bloom, we must be connected to what, from beyond the boundaries of time, transcends us. Being in time, we cannot be limited to our times. Our times have a past that shapes us and hold promise or peril for a future we must shape in turn. Ancient civilizations and religious traditions have struggled to make sense of how what transcends us nevertheless speaks to us, how this mystery can break into our lives.

Our knowledge of direction as agents of history is tied to traditions that span the ages as sources of our trust while we struggle with what transcends our knowledge and power. They are known as traditions of faith: Hindu tradition, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, or Christian tradition. For Western culture, Humanism is also such a tradition, every bit as religious as the others, because it also trusts a history guiding power that transcends our personal knowledge and control, namely Reason. Reason as guiding spirit makes it hard to recognize Humanism as spiritual or religious. But unless we are spiritually centered and grounded, we cannot give cohesion to our times, whether we call this religious or not. We cannot oversee time, yet we must have some intimation of the spiritual direction of our times, connected with what transcends us in knowledge and power. When we ask about a confluence of events: where did this come from, where is it taking us, especially in context with other visible connections, we are asking a spiritual question whose answer demands more than what we know and requires us to reach out beyond ourselves.

Our own times are always vulnerable, because we cannot know or control how all we do as persons in communities affects the temporal universe that surrounds us. Will we act for good or ill? To be guided in our choices from the perspective of transcendence we need a guiding spirit, whose directing us through time we trust as heading us in the right direction. Christians trust the Spirit of God to give such direction. Humanists trust Reason.

Because I speak as a Christian, my words are limited in their reach. Yet religious traditions aspire to universality. In this situation the speech of one religion can have credibility for another only in the testimony of the life that flows from that religion and of how it recommends itself by the way it fulfills our times.

All Westerners, Christians too, are shaped by the spirit of Humanism, the spirit of Reason that arose in the Western rationality tradition and flowered in the Enlightenment. In our times the spirit of Reason, which is essentially a spirit of criticism, is itself under heavy critique and fights for survival. How does this critique of Reason affect what Christians trust as the Spirit of God?

The Spirit of God in both the Jewish and Christian traditions is God as our guide in time towards shalom. Centuries of experience with living in relation to that Spirit taught Jews and Christians to know that Spirit in love and compassion, patience and long-suffering, joy and peace, goodness and faithfulness, and gentleness and self-control. Any road we

enter that does not lead to these, cannot, according to the Jewish-Christian tradition's normative directions, be a way of the Spirit of God. If in this tradition our lives are not characterized by these "marks of the Spirit", when in our times we consider, for example, how to love terrorist enemies or homosexual neighbors, then we have missed something.

The Spirit of Reason

What is the spirit of Reason, why its fight for survival, and why its importance for our times? The spirit of Reason guides a Western tradition that put its final trust in a human gift, a limited gift within the boundaries of what we can know and control in time. Humanism declared that gift of intellectual power worthy of trust as guiding force. It took many centuries to come to full fruition. But when Christians took up arms to defend and enforce their intellectual insights into their spiritual heritage, a spiritual tradition called the Enlightenment promoted peace by declaring that nothing could be legitimately accepted in public affairs unless permitted by Reason.

This spiritual allegiance to Reason was puzzling, because critique assumes willingness to change. But truths of Reason were thought to be eternal. The Spirit of God in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, however, is related to movements of time. The spirit of Reason is traditionally focused on eternal sameness, the Spirit of God moves with us through change. The spirit of Reason gives a finite human gift absolute and final control of the universe by enclosing the universe in the bounds of Reason and by giving rational capacities privileged access to a fixed universal order of norms and laws.

Many blessings have come from this tradition, not only of tolerance among different religions, but also of science and technology. But there is a temporal gap between the logos of Greek philosophy, the word of Reason that fed the West, and the logos of the Hebrew/Christian tradition, the word of God's Spirit that often continued in the Enlightenment, though uprooted from its spiritual origins. That temporal gap has often been covered over by an interpretation of the dynamic biblical heritage influenced by a static spirit of Reason. In our times, however, the eternal grip of a rational order has come under scrutiny. From the Jewish side it has been found morally wanting by Emanuel Levinas. From the Christian side it was seen as problematic as far back as Pascal and Kierkegaard, and remains exposed as un-biblical by theologians who take the Bible seriously as deposit of God's Spirit's guidance.

The problem with a universe governed by Reason is that Reason freezes time and breaks connections. True knowledge depends on intimacy in relationship between knower and known. Reason seeks truth in disconnecting it into many truths, statements that are true in isolation. The wholeness of knowing becomes dissected into propositional fragments. Since Reason denies that the fully interconnected universe transcends its bounds, Reason as spirit is spiritually closed down. As human gift the intellect is immensely rich. As spirit by which we live, Reason betrays our trust. It transforms the God who is with us in history into a timeless philosophical concept, makes life giving truth look like collections of eternal propositions, misforms norms showing us the way to shalom into sterile rules,

and degenerates rich biblical teachings into frozen orthodoxy. To know the Spirit of God in the times of our lives requires a living spirit to guide us in historical time.

The Spirit of God and the Times of Our Lives

How do we discern God's Spirit in our times? Developed spirituality exceeds traditional elements of public worship and personal devotion. On a hot day at the lake, the heat can dissolve the heavens and the waters into one another. Neither sky nor water surface are visible. The heat has joined them in a veil of vapor that floats on the motionless waters, wave-less without wind. Earth and heaven have become one and no spirit troubles the waters. We feel peace. We can let go and become one with flowers, bees, butterflies, and birds, hardly aware of ourselves. In this state we can focus on any part of ourselves and feel it: the tip of our nose, our right eyebrow. We can lose all sense of time and space, yet experience minor details in sharp focus. We can also sense God's Spirit, whether buzzing with the bees or speaking in the silence. When this state resonates with our tradition of trust, our being one with creation yields spiritual guidance.

When I give myself to this unity of creation I can feel the warm, moist air surround me as a safe womb from which I can emerge a new creature. Such conditions inspire hymn writers and prophets to see the elements conspire together to declare some of the mysteries of God. If the warm wedding of water and the firmament quiet my heart within me and open my inmost self to speech from afar, I, too, can hear declarations of mystery that give me new life. So can we all. We can listen to the stillness and hear the speech of the heavens, coming soundless into our heart when all the earth seems to be a seamless gathering of all that surrounds us into peace.

God's Spirit is our breath of life, giving us life in the truth (emeth) of all relations, the covenant of love. That life comes from music, flowers, bees and butterflies. People as spirits make this all conscious and can move it into the right direction. To know our times spiritually we, as spirits, must search out God's Spirit, to help us to make time for all things, all creatures. Listen to the birds, watch the flowers bloom. A time for everything, for family as well as work, all spiritually enriching each other.

We are spiritual beings called to redeem all relationships in time, since we can know the redeeming Spirit who is all in all, in whom all things move and have their being, whose fullness we are, called to be all things to all people. Though the world is highly structured, it is not rationally predictable. But other ways of knowing: meditation and prayer, being one with creation around us, seeking connection in illness, all help us when times are out of synch. The great connector is love, in which we connect with God and neighbor and which God manifests to us. The fullness of time is the fulfillment of all relationships in a simultaneity of faithfulness: all in all. Truth is fullness of the Spirit of God's emeth.

Awareness of spirit must pervade all experience if time is to be fulfilled. We must learn to be spiritually self-conscious as our way of being-in-the-world, since we are embodied spirits, vehicles for God's Spirit. We must care for connections in their interconnectedness with God and one another.

Here are three examples of connecting love and norms in our times as God's Spirit leads the church in our world, ICS into the future, and the sick to healing.

Love, Responsibility, and Norms for the Church in the World

Where does God's Spirit lead the church in our times in relation to our responsibility vis a vis norms? Norms are temporal indicators of how time is fulfilled in love, truth, and hope, all gifts of the Spirit. No norm, as a clear and understandable directive in our own time, lasts forever. We must always love our neighbor and do justice, but the actual and concrete norms that help us do this come and go both in history and in the Bible.

How, for example, do norms help us fulfill our times in relation to the enemy the gospel calls us to love, terrorism, and the neighbor that gospel calls us to love as ourselves, say neighbors of different sexual orientation. These are spiritual issues in our times. Former governor Cuomo of New York twice said on the morning of September 11 that ours is a time to become more civilized; that, as the stronger in the world, we need to stand with the weaker. That's good timing and spiritually courageous. The time is now for spiritual people to consider an approach to terrorism in this light, rather than as a way to protect our own interests that may themselves lead to violence.

And how will our times be fulfilled in love and God's norms be known as ways of loving unless we seriously reconsider our relationship to sexually different neighbors as we did towards slaves and women?

Love and the ICS Workplace

What about stress and work? No institution can afford stress, because it cuts creativity, productivity, wholesome human relations, and employee health. Good relationships and reduced tension benefit work. Time for one another, for rest and recreation, are essential for a healthy institution. ICS's prime nurturing times are, I suggest: tea time, worship time, retreat time, fellowship time. Without them, our future is undermined. People in leadership need time to personally affirm people, to make both leaders and staff happy and relaxed. Work overload stretches time to create stress and squeezes out connections that create spirit. Spirit requires time devoted to loving inclusion of all. Personal relations, as personal piety, are fundamental for achieving normative relations of justice, morality, and generosity, not only in society, but also in institutions that promote them. May ICS embark on a future without work overload that could damage spiritual moral.

Love and Healing

Finally the times of my life with prostate cancer. Treatment of this cancer affects intimacy, which itself promotes healing. Many suffer this in silence and cannot share it openly. But sharing relieves suffering and helps healing.

Fundamentally, the Spirit of God mends what is broken, reconnects what was separated with love that attracts, and returns damaged realities to wholeness, healing. No relationship can remain unaffected by love's power. God, who is love, is in and with and through all times, moves all relationships towards covenant fulfillment, truth. So God is not timeless or unaffected by events, but suffers with us. From Dean Ornish's book *Love and Survival*, I have learned that, though the interconnectedness of life, world, and experience is transcendent, it becomes available in love. Isolation leads to suffering. Love heals by integrating what fell apart. Love uses the brain to do chemical and organic

integrative work and enhances our immune system to avoid breakdown. Emotional centers of the brain heavily network with cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, and gastro intestinal systems. Quality relationships benefit these systems. Listening lowers blood pressure and enhances the free flow of energy.

Love flows into hearts open to receive that love from others in support groups. Sharing with many others and in detail is not just some people's need, but a necessity for all serious illness. Terminally ill patients without group support or strength from religion die 7 times faster than those who do have these. In the famous 1989 Spiegel study, women with breast cancer in support groups lived twice as long as others. Loving and being loved are life affirming. Support groups break our isolation. Support is the soil medicine must be sown in to produce growth. Love helps people navigate through life, helps finding our place in our time's complexities with integrity and in grounded ways. Healing belongs to most spiritual traditions: we become whole in becoming interconnected. Knowing you are not alone, you belong, is healing. Experience of connectedness is a state of union. The most meaningful connection is our relation to a spirit who connects us all.

We live in times of spiritual stress because of increased separation through individualism. Social isolation is an immense stressor. It increases mortality and cuts off from spirit, from God who is love. A study of people who had attempted suicide found that later attempts were often successful when people were in therapy without connection between client and therapist. Doctors cannot do well without taking time to listen. People who trust their treatment do better. Human life is unthinkable except as interconnected. People need meaning and coherence. Both the open heart and healing are about relationship. Group identity is healing. Tribes have their benefits. Disconnected people are disconnected from themselves as spiritual beings. True relationship experienced as a spiritual path makes for community.

Love is a force that attracts, bonds, attaches. Bernie Siegel writes about a Warsaw ghetto Jew who saw his family killed before his eyes decided that since hatred had done this, only love could save him. He survived the death camp by loving his guards. Siegel writes: "Love makes life worth living, no matter how long life lasts. ... Love and authentic spirituality do increase one's time as well as one's joy."