

The Next Faith System



*By
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I. Introduction

“...if there is a God what the hell is He for?” [William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*]¹

Early in his 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner’s character Jewel poses this question, a timely one to ask in rural Mississippi in 1930, and even more so today. Faulkner applied it to issues as diverse as abortion, infidelity, access to health care, and the stink of an eight-day dead body—both literally and metaphorically.

Faulkner’s question begs to be asked again and again as each day we witness worsening chaos in many world systems, including the faith system in America. I believe this question addresses much more than religious or spiritual issues. What does the word “God” imply for people in America and the world in 2017? Who decides? And what actions does this decision mandate?

Certainly the meaning of this word “God” has evolved in America’s consciousness in the last fifty years as the nation has become more diverse, and this evolution has brought diverse identities and purposes. Yet, if the nation is to endure as one indivisible entity, it must somehow encompass all these identities and purposes.

With this in mind, I have set aside the word “God” and chosen the term “faith system” as a context for exploring Faulkner’s question. I do not believe that America’s current faith system is up to the task of envisioning and creating a sustainable future. To quote the Declaration of Independence, does “...a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence...” imply more than baseball fans simply linking arms and singing, “God Bless America” during the seventh inning stretch? Will the next faith system involve more than just inscribing “In God we Trust” on our currency; mean more than simply concluding every political speech with “May God bless America?”

The answer to these questions must be “Yes” if the United States and the world are to move beyond its current faith system, one that has for 500 years been used to justify racism, misogyny, xenophobia and rampant capitalism, to a new system based on human dignity and universal human rights.

The roadmap to this new system exists. For example, dignity and rights are embodied in the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.² They are enumerated in its Preamble: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” and encapsulated in its first Article: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”³

Faulkner's novels challenged the "faith system" that he observed in the United States during his lifetime, which in the public sphere has only become more entrenched over the course of the last century. By asking Faulkner's question anew, as a foundational question worthy of serious dialogue, my goal is to envision and help midwife a new faith system in America.

I envision this next faith system to be based not on static, obsolete concepts of "god" as a noun, but rather on a sustained and dynamic interplay of dignity, art, education, and collective practices best described by the word "kindness." Through this dynamic interplay, "god" becomes a verb, and is seen in actions, in these collective habits of practice that can redefine America's identity.

This transformation may not be easy. Over the 80-plus years since its publication, school boards throughout the United States have attempted to ban *As I Lay Dying* for (among other reasons) daring to place such a question on the lips of a main character. Parents and school boards have attempted to fire teachers who encouraged students to read such books, to ponder such questions for themselves, and the principals who backed these teachers.

Yet the question endures. Even as efforts to officially censor Faulkner and other great writers and artists have failed, a more subtle type of censorship has emerged in today's America. Many loud voices proclaim an identity that I recognize as what author M. Scott Peck once termed "militant ignorance;"⁴ what Nobel Laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called "the lie."⁵ This identity marginalizes reason and conscience, mocks those who seek civil, rational discourse, threatens teachers who encourage critical thinking, and deliberately spreads "fake news."

Former Vice-President Al Gore sounded the warning against such an identity a decade ago in his book *The Assault on Reason*,⁶ but his warnings appear to have gone unheeded and, at least for the moment, it appears this assault is winning.

But the race is not quite over. As Naomi Klein wrote in her 2017 book *No is Not Enough*, "All this work is born of the knowledge that saying no to bad ideas and bad actors is simply not enough. The firmest of no's has to be accompanied by a bold and forward-looking yes—a plan for the future that is credible and captivating enough that a great many people will fight to see it realized, no matter the shocks and scare tactics thrown their way."⁷

As a person of faith, my goal in this essay is to articulate the faith dimension of this "plan for the future" that Klein calls for, a faith-based "yes" that is credible and captivating enough to unleash the power that will be required to create such a future. I undertake this effort because I believe that such transformations in faith systems characterize the history of humankind, largely unseen as they unfolded, but eventually strong enough to inspire human beings to push back hard against oppression, indignity, ignorance and falsehood, to survive and even thrive against the odds of history. And I believe humankind can do this once again.

II. Definition of Terms

Clear definitions of four key terms (“faith”, “system”, “unstable”, and “art”) are essential to frame the critical dialogue needed to respond to Gore’s warning, to follow Klein’s lead, to restore essential dignity and rights for all humanity.

Faith: In this essay, the word faith, as applied to “system,” is a noun that embodies certain attributes of an adjective (like bike seat or barn dance), and by doing so, becomes a verb. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary identifies seven meanings of faith:

- 1a: devotion to duty or a person: loyalty;
- 1b: the quality of keeping one’s promises;
- 2a: belief and trust in and loyalty to God;
- 2b: belief in the doctrines of a religion;
- 2c: firm belief even in the absence of proof;
- 2d: complete confidence;
- 3: something that is firmly believed; *especially*: a system of religious beliefs.⁸

As these definitions demonstrate, faith sometimes (but not always) relates to God, spirituality and/or religion. In an earlier version of this essay, I used the term “next spiritual system,” but as my thinking progressed, I became increasingly uncomfortable with that term. I dug deeper into both literary sources and my own life’s journey, and finally settled on the word “faith” for its many connotations that extend beyond religion and spirituality.

This definition allows the term “faith system” to express a purely secular understanding of the systems change I propose. While people who self-identify as religious or spiritual can readily envision and participate in the next faith system, so can people who find little or no personal meaning in the words “religious” and/or “spiritual.” As Paul Tillich wrote in *Dynamics of Faith*: “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned.”⁹ This definition is a call for actions—for verbs.

In the 1980’s, I worked closely with author Robert Theobald and some 250 other community organizers throughout the world to help create his book *The Rapids of Change*. We wrestled with the idea of “faith” as a secular, values-based concept, and came up with the term “respect for mystery” to describe what faith meant to us. We agreed that much that is meaningful in the universe lies beyond the grasp of humankind, and as we stretch to learn, to grow and to further understand the universe (and the human condition within it!) we must do so with great respect. Respect, as both a noun and a verb, underlies my understanding and use of the word “faith” in this essay.

System: Webster’s dictionary defines “system” as follows: 1) a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole; 2) an organized set of doctrines, ideas, or principles usually intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole.”¹⁰ Both these definitions

apply to the United States, a complex “system of systems” that includes political, social, economic, educational, public health and safety, faith and environmental systems.

Unstable: The word “unstable,” when applied to systems, has a special meaning that requires a detailed discussion. The “items” or “sets” that define systems interact along a continuum of dynamic balance between order and chaos. If the balance tips too far toward chaos, systems become unstable and may collapse. But systems entering chaos may not collapse, and it’s important to understand why.

My understanding of unstable systems is informed by the scholarship of Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine, and how his work has been applied to complex human social, economic and environmental systems by students, researchers and planners who have utilized it.

Prigogine won the 1977 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his work with thermodynamic systems, which he termed “dissipative systems” because they dissipate energy, and thus require continuing input of energy to remain stable.¹¹ In 1984, Prigogine and Isabelle Stegners extended this theory to social, economic, and environmental systems in their book *Order Out of Chaos*.¹²

Simply put, Prigogine and his colleagues documented how systems spontaneously reorganize in unpredictable ways when they become so unstable (“chaotic”) that they can no longer function with the energy available to them. According to Prigogine (and others who have drawn on his work), unstable systems either collapse as the result of entropy, or spontaneously reorganize to a higher or more efficient way of utilizing available energy, thus recovering the stability and balance needed to continue to function – but at a higher level.

Prigogine, and later Stegner, focused on tangible energies, quantified by thermodynamics and, in the social sphere, by specific social, economic, and environmental indicators. But I believe that other, less tangible energies are available for human social, economic and environmental systems to transform to higher, more stable and sustainable equilibriums.

How shall human societies identify and tap these less tangible energies and apply them to transform these systems? One specific resource that can provide the energy needed to transform the systems of the United States and its spheres of influence is already present in all human societies.

This resource is art.

Art: By its very nature art, as a uniquely human creation, defies a set definition. True art can never be fully understood, and it must be experienced across spectrums of time and space, both human and cosmic, to be understood at all. Books such as *As I Lay Dying* address these questions in deeper ways than science can. Art in its

many forms, including literature, holds the key to understanding and transforming the complex of systems that comprise the human condition, including human social, economic, and environmental systems.

Literature and other art forms profoundly influence the human condition. Bob Dylan has recently been awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature. Horace Engdahl of the Nobel Committee recognized his contribution with these words: “[Mr. Dylan is] a singer worthy of a place beside the Greek bards, beside Ovid, beside the Roman visionaries, beside the kings and queens of the blues, beside the forgotten masters of brilliant standards. If people in the literary world groan, one must remind them that gods don’t write, they sing and dance.”¹³

Dylan’s prophetic voice exemplifies the unique and enduring power of art to counter militant ignorance, to resist the assault on reason. I came to my appreciation of the power of art to transform society’s gods through a film based on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s 1970 Nobel Prize Address. Fortunately, the Nobel Committee received a copy the speech he was forbidden to leave Russia to deliver. His words exemplify the transformative power of art:

Not everything assumes a name. Some things lead beyond words. Art inflames even a frozen, darkened soul to a high spiritual experience. Through art we are sometimes visited - dimly, briefly - by revelations such as cannot be produced by rational thinking. Like that little looking-glass from the fairy-tales: look into it and you will see - not yourself - but for one second, the Inaccessible, whither no man can ride, no man fly. And only the soul gives a groan ...And literature conveys irrefutable condensed experience in yet another invaluable direction; namely, from generation to generation. Thus it becomes the living memory of the nation. Thus it preserves and kindles within itself the flame of her spent history, in a form which is safe from deformation and slander. In this way literature, together with language, protects the soul of the nation.¹⁴

Art releases and taps a different family of energy or energies that affects systems (like nations) beyond such measurable energies as thermodynamics, data and tangible currencies. Writers such as Faulkner or Solzhenitsyn might call this family of energies “God;” others might call it Higher Power(s), magic, Creator, the Great Mystery, or simply “the unknown.”

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Art is the wellspring for my faith in this family of energies, collectively understood as “the unknown.” Art unlocks this family of energies, releasing the power needed to drive the transformation of America’s (and the world’s) faith system.

To understand the specifics of how this power is set free, the next section of this essay examines Faulkner’s critical question from three systemic perspectives:

1. **Faith Development:** Healthy systems, like healthy people, go through stages of development. Developmental stages can be applied to faith development and faith health. Stages of faith development affect other systems, including social, economic, and environmental systems. The United States is currently experiencing a period of faith instability and potential collapse; but with intent, it can experience a transformation to a healthier faith stage.
2. **Education:** Grounded in art and art’s capacity to foster truth through critical thinking and true actions, community-based education (not schooling!) is essential for this transformation to occur.
3. **Kindness:** Kindness is the faith model for active systems change that can be intentionally applied through education to create positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes for the whole system of systems that comprise the United States and the world.

III. Faith Development

Human beings create gods to solve problems, absorb blame, and reciprocate emotions. They assign these gods human attributes, including creativity, inflated to superhuman dimensions. Over millennia, these creative attributes have varied according to the human societies and cultures that created the gods, depending on the problems they experienced in their lives, their lenses on the human condition. Societies living in deserts might create different gods than those living in rainforests, or on fertile plains, and so on.

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Over time, as societies and their gods came into conflict with each other, the winners’ stories tended to endure, along with their gods. This observation sheds light the first part of the question, “...if there is a God...” because if a sufficient proportion of the society, or especially of those who wield power within the society, creates and promulgates a particular god, they can then ascribe any purposes they want to this god, and force these purposes on populations with less power in that society.

This has been the case in the United States since its founding and continues today. The stories of the gods told by various dominant elites within the United States over the last 500-plus years have been used to justify enslaving Africans, perpetrating genocide against Native Americans, and desecrating the environment. But this system is now breaking down; its stories no longer ring true. As a society begins to falter – to experience “chaos” – so do its gods. The always-subjective “truth” of its stories gets stretched to the breaking point.

At this point, repressed stories may re-emerge, or entirely new stories may emerge. The enduring stories of the United States originated with the gods created by Western Civilization that include attributes of Greek, Roman, Norse, Hebrew, Muslim and Christian gods. As Eurocentric societies set out to conquer what they called “America,” West African, Native American, and Asian gods influenced the stories of the United States according to the cultural diversity of the particular neighborhood telling the story.

The more diverse the neighborhood, the more powerful its stories become.

Ara Norenzayan documents these processes in his book *Big Gods—How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*.¹⁵ Norenzayan traces the history of humankind and the development of religions from the dawn of history through to the present. He applies E. O. Wilson’s concept of “consilience”¹⁶ to the ascendance and dominance of world religions with “big gods” that appear able to address basic existential fears of death, loss of control, and loneliness. He demonstrates how some advanced societies have climbed the ladder of religion to develop secular codes of morality and ethics, and then been able to “kick the ladder away” and live in peace and prosperity without resorting to religion, while others (notably the United States) continue to embrace increasingly fundamentalist beliefs in the power of a god on high to monitor behavior, punish deviance, and reward adherence to orthodoxy. Norenzayan documents how continued allegiance to such big gods poses a barrier to the worldwide cooperation needed to address worldwide problems, but concludes, “We don’t know enough to forecast religion’s future, but we can be certain that the tension between various competing religious movements, and between religion and secular ways of life, will continue to shape the world in the coming century.”¹⁷

I take Norenzayan’s argument one step further, expanding it to faith beyond what is understood to be simply religion. I believe that humankind needs to quickly get to know enough to forecast faith’s future, because if the United States continues to subscribe to the obsolete faith systems that have characterized Western Civilization over the last 500 years, humankind is doomed.

This belief has been percolating for more than forty years. In the 1960’s, my undergraduate work led to a thesis on the influence of West African religions on the cultures of colonial America, specifically the Carolinas, Louisiana, and Brazil.

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In my graduate work I studied world religions, and compared Hindu cosmology with that of the Hopi Nation. I embraced Tillich's understanding of faith as the state of being "ultimately concerned,"¹⁸ and followed his reasoning to his assertion: "The extreme nationalisms of our century are laboratories for the study of what ultimate concern means in all aspects of human existence, including the smallest concern of one's daily life. Everything is centered in the only god, the nation—a god who certainly proves to be a demon, but who shows clearly the unconditional character of an ultimate concern."¹⁹

Contemporary observers and activists are assisting humankind to forecast the future of faith. Two such activists are Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, who in 2012 published their prophetic book, *Active Hope*.²⁰ They begin by quoting another prophetic voice, that of David Korten: "When the stories a society shares are out of tune with its circumstances, they can become self-limiting, even a threat to survival. This is our current situation."²¹ They build on Korten's insights, and detail how to transcend the situation he identifies, charting "...four empowering shifts in perception...four discoveries: a wider sense of self, a different kind of power, a richer experience of community, and a larger view of time."²²

At the level of day-to-day human interaction, George Lakoff examines the systems that create and worship the faith systems that characterize the United States in great detail in his seminal work, *Moral Politics*. In this book, he identifies two mutually exclusive nationalist moral systems, based on what he calls the "Strict Father" and the "Nurturant Parent" models.²³ He analyzes these in detail and concludes: "Strict Father morality and Nurturant Parent morality are opposed moral systems; they define incompatible moral worlds."²⁴

Many people in the United States agree that they have the answer to the "if" part of Faulkner's question "...if there is a God...", but as they proceed further, Lakoff's "incompatible moral worlds" tell them vastly different versions of what this god is for.

Lakoff documents how their differing responses to this portion of Faulkner's question reflect their moral systems.

This entrenched difference defines the political, social, economic and environmental conversations in the United States today. It becomes clear that both the “Strict Father” and the “Nurturant Parent” systems are now unstable, as an ever-larger proportion of the population observes the real world wherein social conflicts, economic insecurity and climate change dominate the news. The “gods” the United States has created are no longer adequate to solve the problems or absorb the blame for these real world phenomena we witness today.

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Western Civilization’s Eurocentric gods are about to collapse. I believe that the nation as a whole experiencing a faith crisis as the systems that embody its faith become unstable. Today, per Prigogine’s model, as William Butler Yeats expressed in his famous poem “The Second Coming,” things in the United States and the world are “falling apart:”

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?²⁵

In this poem, Yeats envisions an entire faith system becoming unstable, and, like Faulkner, he poses a question that his readers must answer. But before we brand our leaders as Yeats' rough slouching beast, we citizens need to accept our personal responsibility as falconers. As Prigogine documented, unstable systems can reorganize at a higher level, but for this to happen, each citizen must take responsibility for the systems that define mere anarchy in the United States today, and decide to move beyond to a healthier system. As the comic strip character Pogo famously said on Earth Day 1971, "We have met the enemy and he is us."²⁶

Fortunately, over the course of the history of the United States, other faith systems, which grew out of African, Asian, and Native American civilizations (some of which are much older and more mature than Western Civilization), infiltrated the Eurocentric faith systems, despite efforts to destroy them through genocide and slavery. Drawing on this wisdom, the United States can transform to a healthier faith system.

What can be done to encourage this transformation? How can more citizens tap the energy of these rediscovered stories? Can a new power or powers emerge, that are not destructive of community, but nurturing? And, what is the nature of these powers?

In the United States, the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag is the vehicle for the necessary transformation:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

I see three elements in the Pledge of Allegiance that represent hope for a transformation in America's faith system:

1. "God;"
2. "Indivisible;"
3. "With Liberty and Justice for All."

God: For Macy and Johnstone's vision of a "richer experience of community" to blossom, those who recite the pledge need to come to share a new understanding of "god." The "God" that the nation purports to be under in the Pledge of Allegiance characterizes a specific point of development of the society and culture of the United States. The words "under God" were inserted into the official Pledge on June 14, 1954, by an Act of Congress, initiated and encouraged by President Eisenhower. Eisenhower's "God" was the liberal Protestant Christian God, the Presbyterian, Capitalist God. Eisenhower was brought up in Texas as a Jehovah's Witness. As an adult, he rejected the apocalyptic teachings of that faith, and was eventually baptized as a Presbyterian when he was nominated for the Presidency, shortly before these words were inserted into the Pledge at his urging.²⁷

Without going into great detail about the state of religion and politics in America in the 1950's, two important forces were in play. The first was the widespread fear of Communism and the Soviet Union (this was the height of McCarthyism), and the second was the broad appeal of the sort of liberal religion espoused by Christian theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr and Jewish theologians like Abraham Joshua Heschel and Maurice Eisendrath.

Pledging allegiance to this liberal god was an effective strategy to avoid being labeled a Communist by McCarthy and his ilk. This god stayed up in heaven and didn't meddle in politics and religion. This is the same god that America came to "trust in" on our currency during this same era, and the god that was proclaimed dead by *Time Magazine* in 1966,²⁸ the god that Lakoff might term the "Nurturant Parent."

But while all this was happening, another very different god was gaining traction in America: the god of Billy Graham and his protégées, who attracted and inculcated millions of Christian evangelical followers. This god is ready and eager to meddle in politics and religion, and is proclaimed to be "personally with" the politicians most influential in "Strict Father" circles.²⁹ So when various politicians end their speeches with "May God bless America" they are sending that prayer out in decidedly different directions. This matters, because both gods are nouns, both are external to those who proclaim them ("over" in the Pledge of Allegiance), and thus by definition both interpretations exclude all other possible gods.

Even though both gods are now obsolete, the Pledge of Allegiance still retains its power because it is intensely personal. Those who decide to recite it (or decline to recite it) make, or decline to make, a personal promise. They don't pledge allegiance to any particular god or president or political party. The Pledge, and by extension the country to which it is made, slides back and forth along a continuum from the first word of the Pledge - "I" - to the last word - "all." The Pledge embodies the country's movement along that same continuum throughout our history.

As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes famously wrote, "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins."³⁰ The Constitution begins with the word "We," implying a community of shared concern, but most of its 27 amendments enumerate individual rights. Individual interests, and the political parties organized to give voice to these interests, have staked out positions along this tightrope for as long as human beings have lived together; in the United States, these positions define the course of our history. The positions people choose depend upon how secure they feel with and about each other. Fear drives people toward the individual or "I" end; trust toward the community or "all" end.

The United States can embrace its next faith system in its shared pledge. But neither of the current gods or faith systems has genuine power—both the "Strict

Father” and the “Nurturant Parent” are essentially political creations. The United can transform its understanding of the god – the faith system – envisioned in the Pledge of Allegiance to one that empowers and loves all people.

A next faith system is not only possible, but inevitable.

Indivisible: In a stable system, the “God” in the Pledge must be seen as representing the same “all people” that are promised liberty and justice in the pledge, or else the Republic for which the flag stands excludes lots of its citizens. Historically, nations that endured have successfully overcome chaos and embraced new understandings of gods and faith systems to guide them back to sanity. The United States did so with the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, when Lincoln was President, an outcome he had expressed hope for in his Second Inaugural Address (that this hope got him shot, however, hasn’t escaped my notice).

As Lincoln’s assassination proved, transformation to the next system may not come easily. We have role models in 20th century prophets such as Gandhi, John Lennon and Martin Luther King, Jr., who met similar fates. Contemporary prophets such as Pope Francis, Alice Walker, the Dalai Lama, Bill Moyers, Marian Wright Edelman, Vine Deloria, Jr. and hundreds of others (some of whom can be identified in my bibliography) provide guidance. Scriptures from Buddhism, the Tao, Baha’i, and Abrahamic Religions offer models for love, inclusion and tolerance. Native American concepts of God make lots of sense in a time of transformation, when much of the population of the United States is experiencing a taste of the sort of betrayal that Native Americans have experienced for 500 years.

A next faith system is not only possible, but inevitable. The resources these prophets have envisioned can take root as the United States comes to a new understanding of the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. The pathway to this new understanding arises from the third affirmation contained in the Pledge of Allegiance, “with liberty and justice for all.”

Liberty and Justice: The concepts of liberty and justice are foundational to this Pledge and to the future of the United States. Uncertainty regarding what these concepts meant historically, and what they mean now, contributes to the instability of the current faith system.

In America the concept of “liberty” has gotten paired with that of “rights” over the last half-century, to the detriment of both. I believe that liberty and justice are the two essential components of a singularity that is more than the sum of its parts, the concept of dignity.

Dignity is the antidote to both unstable gods. Consider the use of this word in both the first sentence of the preamble and also the first Article of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights.³¹ This document, with its core concept of dignity, was born in response to the horrors of World War II and nurtured by the United Nations through the turbulence the world has endured for the last 68 years. It is the one written document that can withstand any assault on liberty and justice.

Dignity infuses the entire document. Worldwide, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has eclipsed the United States Constitution, which is the document that elected and appointed governmental officials swear to uphold and defend.

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Dignity remains the inalienable catalyst for the next “faith system” to be born.

Even though with the willing support of only 34 state legislatures, the United States may decide to “uphold and defend the Constitution” by discarding it completely and starting over from scratch, as prescribed in Article V of the Constitution, even as “liberty” and “justice” might still fall victim to political whim, parochial politics can’t crush dignity or negate International Law without garnering the support of all the other signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This close examination of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag provides a clue to how the transition to the next faith system will proceed. To understand how systems change applies to faith systems, we now turn to stages of faith development. In his ground-breaking book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Emory University professor James W. Fowler applied developmental theory, based on the earlier psychological work of Erik Ericson, Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, to faith life.³² Many curricula have been developed to teach Fowler’s understanding of one pre-stage and six further stages of faith. One fairly succinct summary is provided by the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship:

- Undifferentiated Faith (birth to age two)
- Intuitive-Projective faith (preschool children)
- Mythic-Literal faith (ages 6-12, or beyond)
- Synthetic-Conventional Faith (teen years, sometimes all of life)
- Individuative-Reflective Faith (late adolescence, sometimes called “owned faith”)
- Conjunctive Faith (midlife)
- Universalizing Faith (rare...people like Ghandi or Mother Teresa).³³

Many scholars have built on Fowler’s work. For the practical purposes of systems change and transformative community development, M. Scott Peck’s book *The*

Different Drum: Community Making and Peace condenses Fowler's seven stages to these four:

- Stage I: Chaotic, antisocial
- Stage II: Formal, Institutional
- Stage III: Skeptic, Individual
- Stage IV: Mystic, Communal.³⁴

To identify where much of the country's faith life was in 1987 when Peck's book was published, Peck drew on his long experience as a psychiatrist, author and teacher, and concluded, "Most all young children and perhaps one in five adults fall into Stage I. I call it antisocial because those adults who are in it (and those I have dared to call 'People of the Lie' are at its bottom) seem genuinely incapable of loving others. Although they may pretend to be loving (and think of themselves that way), their relationships with their fellow human beings are all essentially manipulative and self-serving."³⁵

Peck believes that many of the remaining four-fifths of adults develop no further than his second stage, choosing to retreat from the chaos that would characterize further faith development by submitting themselves to an institution—be it a formal (institutional) religion, the military, their employer, or in some cases, the prison system.³⁶

Stability characterizes Peck's Stage II. Of people in Stage II, he writes, "Although their love may be a bit legalistic and unimaginative at times, they will still generally treat [their children] lovingly because the Church [he also includes other religions besides Christianity] tells them to be loving and teaches something about how to be loving."³⁷

The greatest difference between Fowler's and Peck's analyses is that Fowler understood all stages of faith to be valid, whereas Peck clearly believes that growth beyond Stage II is more desirable for faith to be useful to a community. Whichever analysis one chooses (and there are literally dozens of competing models) the point is that different people answer Faulkner's question in vastly different ways, and that neither of the two ways that Lakoff identifies political morality seems to work very well in the wake of the 2016 election. This is because Lakoff analyzes the concept of morals within the political system, wherein ideologies form along the continuum from liberal to conservative and then take on the role of gods.³⁸ For many citizens, politics has become a religion, political platforms dogmas, and politicians the humans that interpret (and even embody) gods.

But political parties and systems are dissipative systems. They require ever-greater infusions of energy (in the form of cash) to keep stable. And as Prigogine demonstrated, long-term stability in a dynamic, evolving universe is impossible for any dissipative system. Peck confirmed that the stability provided by institutions, and the people who feel safe in such institutions, is illusory; people and institutions

eventually become chaotic, arriving at a level of complexity where the institutions no longer provide the safety they were once thought to offer.

That's the situation today in the United States with its gods. The major institutions that have provided safety for citizens over the last generations can no longer provide it. Children are shot at Bible study, abortion-providing doctors are gunned down while attending church, employers ship jobs to China, the military loses wars, and prisons overflow. Just at the moment when the nation needs to envision and create the "next faith system," fearful forces emerge to redouble the efforts to push the country back.

Skilled con artists polish their messages to appeal to individuals and groups at their moments of indecision. The con promises safety, and it can be adapted to a promise to make their nation great again, to assure them eternal life in heaven, or to return 50% on their financial investment, especially if they can come up with the cash immediately. It's the same con. From a faith system standpoint, the moment of indecision is the equivalent of deeply troubling chaos for Peck's Stage I and II individuals.

The major institutions that have provided safety for citizens over the last generations can no longer provide it. Children are shot at Bible study, abortion-providing doctors are gunned down while attending church, employers ship jobs to China, the military loses wars, and prisons overflow.

But the promised great outcome excludes all possible threats to the con artist's vision, and in political cons the pitch quickly descends into excluding, marginalizing and dehumanizing whole categories of people. Citizens of free and open societies have a responsibility to resist such cons in every possible way, including providing models for healthy faith development.

Traditional religious institutions, their leaders and the many generally good people who comprise them are vulnerable to these cons too, as are hermits, atheists and agnostics, because con artists are moral chameleons who possess the ability to tailor their message to the audience at hand. This ability is especially dangerous in the area of faith development, because there are few metrics to reliably measure outcomes: if ten peoples' cancers go into remission, they are the ones who live to tell the story, while the other ninety who drank the con artist's snake oil and died anyway molder silently in their graves.

As a medical doctor with a peer-reviewed track record, M. Scott Peck offers a workable model in *The Different Drum*. To develop beyond Stage II, Peck believes that people and institutions need to undertake a life-transforming struggle, which itself goes through stages, which he terms “pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness, and community.”³⁹ He draws on evidence-based group dynamics research to identify strategies (fight, flight, pairing and dependence) that people in “pseudo-community” use to avoid transformation to “true community.”⁴⁰ These strategies may temporarily con people into feeling safe, but actually add to the instability of the system, making the transformation that much more difficult.

But systems – in this case, people and societies – can reorganize at higher, more stable levels, what Peck would term “Stage III or IV.” The transformation from our current impotent lower-case “g” political gods to the sorts of gods that can answer Faulkner’s full question requires intentional community-building, including a willingness to travel through chaos and emptiness to true community. This faith development process for the entire society is essential to include in any conversation about the future.

What does true community look like? I rely on both academic and artistic definitions. Barbara Israel, PhD., a professor specializing in community-based participatory research at the University of Michigan, defines it as follows:

Community is characterized by a sense of identification and emotional connection to other members, common symbol systems, shared values and norms, mutual—though not necessarily equal—influence, common interest, and commitment to meeting shared needs. Communities of identity may be centered on a defined geographic neighborhood or a geographically dispersed ethnic group with a sense of common identity and shared fate.⁴¹

The poet Starhawk describes it like this:

Community: Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words stick in our throat. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us. Eyes will light up when we enter; voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter; a circle of healing, a circle of friends. Someplace we can be free.⁴²

These two definitions capture the essence of healthy community. Practical models for building healthy community as understood in both these definitions is essential work for organizations seeking to foster faith health. Such a healthy community will rely on the World Health Organization’s definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”⁴³

Physical, mental and social well-being are all threatened by abject poverty, inequality, racism, climate change, environmental collapse, police brutality, mass incarceration, gender disparities, expropriation of farmland and sacred land from indigenous people, corporate power, class divisions, unemployment, militarism and war. These all characterize failing elements of the current system.

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All these elements can be measured and tracked by specific social health (well-being) indicators, and their performance can determine the ultimate success of any effort to foster a sustainable world for human and other life forms.

Throughout the world, many current systems are failing to improve key social health indicators. I recommend adding “spiritual wellness” to the list of failing elements, and therefore would include indicators to measure spiritual wellness in dialogues about the future health of the planet we share.

There is ample precedent for this recommendation. The tools for measuring outcomes include standard assessments over time, such as those used by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services “Healthy People 2020” project to track social health determinants.⁴⁵ Along these same lines, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.⁴⁶ SAMHSA has identified spiritual wellness to be major social health determinant.⁴⁷ SAMSHA understands addiction, not as a social or moral problem, but as a chronic, treatable illness that affects entire systems such as families and communities.

An “addictive system” characterizes the United States and its world today, evidenced by dysfunction and crisis in the many areas of health identified above.

Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel analyze addictive systems in their 1988 book *The Addictive Organization*, which begins: “Everyone in this society lives and works in some kind of organization, group or system.”⁴⁸ Schaef and Fassel document that addictive systems cannot be changed without addressing the fundamental spiritual bankruptcy at the core of such systems:

Ethical deterioration is the inevitable outcome of immersion in the addictive system. It is easy to understand how this happens. If your life is taken up by lying to yourself and others, attempting to control, perfectionism, denial, grabbing what you can for yourself, and refusing to let in information that would alter the addictive paradigm, then you are *spiritually bankrupt*. [Italics theirs]⁴⁹

System change is very difficult and often painful for those experiencing it. Truth comes in blows, and blows to one's spiritual health system can seem life threatening, especially when the system is already chaotic. That's the nature of addiction. And that's why a "next faith system" based on recovery from this addiction is essential to transforming the entire system of the United States.

Humankind has no other choice. In 1987, drawing on a wealth of social, economic and environmental data, Robert Theobald recognized this dilemma in his book *The Rapids of Change* when he wrote: "We need to start our thinking from the assumption that *healthy* human beings want to grow and want to help others to grow [italics his].... The history of earth is of evolutionary dead-ends where organisms failed to learn from experience and adapt to changing conditions. One core question now facing us is: will the human race be counted among the evolutionary failures?"⁵⁰

New York Times columnist Charles Blow contends that America faces an "existential threat" in the "system" of its current leadership.⁵¹ In the face of such an existential threat, what are we to do, and who will do it? If there is a God, what the hell is He for?

In the 21st Century, this question cannot be answered in terms of who, where, when and what! As explained above, these interrogatory words only apply to the unstable god-systems currently in force, and spending time and energy on these will only exacerbate the instability.

Instead, Faulkner's question must be answered in terms of how or why. "God" will cease to be an externalized noun, and become an internalized verb. Education is this how and why.

IV. Education

The English verb "to educate" derives from the Latin verb *educere*, meaning "to lead out."⁵² The challenge and opportunity of leading this transformation of understanding god from an externalized noun to an internalized verb must be embraced and accomplished by educators who are prepared and committed to do so.

Humanity's faith crisis is an integral component of all the other social, economic and environmental crises that characterize our world. In a healthy system, the task

of leading a community beyond its faith crisis to the next stage of stability and health might fall to religious institutions. But these institutions are themselves in crisis. The Abrahamic religions are all struggling with apocalyptic, fundamentalist factions that thrive on chaos. Outside these anarchic fringes, most settled congregations rely on the support of Stage II individuals, for whom the idea of transformation is threatening.

Human beings will undoubtedly continue to create and use gods and their religions as a form of life insurance, but the hope of a pleasant afterlife for their own individual souls is hardly a viable option when human beings are threatening to end much of the life on their home planet.

While progressive religious institutions in the United States will undoubtedly play a role in providing palliative care to their members experiencing pain as a result of the failing system, they can neither prevent nor heal this pain without killing themselves in the process. Human beings will undoubtedly continue to create and use gods and their religions as a form of life insurance, but the hope of a pleasant afterlife for their own individual souls is hardly a viable option when human beings are threatening to end much of the life on their home planet.

Despite the chaos, many fantastic, capable individuals still work in and through religious institutions all over the world, even as prominent religious leaders in the United States are becoming increasingly divergent from the rest of humanity. Judaism preserves traditions of scholarship that can understand the emerging transformation, but fighting resurgent anti-Semitism in the United States must occupy much of its energy in the near future. Islam contains a rich treasure of wisdom, but this faith is increasingly demonized or caricatured by many rural and small-town Americans, most of whom have never knowingly met a Muslim. With the exception of historically Black Christian churches, Christianity, at least as it is proclaimed by many of these same rural, small-town citizens as the religion of the United States, is all but unrecognizable to Christians in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, many of whom may be well on their way to the next stage of faith development.⁵³

What these three Abrahamic faith traditions, as well as a multitude of other religions in the United States, can do is to inform and mobilize their capable leaders to enable systemic faith transformation. But the work of these leaders can't be religious—it must be educational, so that they can work side by side with educators who can't embrace traditional religious or spiritual practices, doctrines and dogmas that they experience as irrelevant, dead or dying.

All effective education, formal or informal, begins with dialogue. Dialogue was defined and illuminated for a generation of progressive educators by Paolo Freire in his classic 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.⁵⁴ In his introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of this book in the year 2000, University of Massachusetts (Boston) professor Donaldo Mercedo quoted Freire:

...dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indisputable component of both learning and knowing.⁵⁵

I envision a great diversity of educators, in deep, consistent and honest dialogue with one another and with their communities, to be a strong catalyst for humankind's transformation to a more coherent and stable level of faith, a level that can and will sustain and nourish human beings in this world in this lifetime.

Thanks to the Constitutionally-mandated separation of church and state, students in U.S. public schools are at least theoretically sheltered from the excesses of specific religious institutions. But who will protect public and faith-based school students from mis-education at the hands of the chaotic political and faith systems that sponsor them, promulgating systemic lies that threaten all aspects of human social life, the economy, and the environment? Such protections remain beyond the reach of the Constitution, and opportunities for faith development are also under assault by similar lies across entire fear-based political, religious and social spectra. Formal education is under siege everywhere in the United States, chipping away at the truth that education is a fundamental human right, guaranteed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁵⁶

Therefore, formal education will not be up to the task. But fortunately, informal education happens everywhere, all the time: human beings are fundamentally learners. We learn from one another, from our environment, from the way we encounter power and community. All these elements of informal education are the components of transformation to the next faith system.

Education is not synonymous with schooling. This educational work must be undertaken by a diverse, broad and deep cross-section of community members, block-by-block, neighborhood by neighborhood. The capacity to learn and grow has sustained our species for millennia, and will do so again. Institutions that foster healthy dialogue have a unique opportunity to be the catalyst for a multitude of diverse, informal, community-based educational actions designed to promote humankind's transformation.

The key role of all educators, activists and activist organizations in cultivating faith systems change is to create and sustain space for this community-based educational system to emerge and flourish.

Positive role models abound. Solzhenitsyn, Freire, Peck and a multitude of other writers, educators and community organizers have explored the process by which system change catalyzes true community through education.

Education is not synonymous with schooling....The key role of all educators, activists and activist organizations in cultivating faith systems change is to create and sustain space for this community-based educational system to emerge and flourish.

One example of how an innovative faith system can transform education can be found in the history of the Waldorf Schools. Over the last hundred years, the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, an independent philosopher, scholar and teacher working within the Theosophical Society of Germany, has led to the development of a transformational educational system of practice in “Waldorf” and “Steiner” Schools throughout the United States and the world.⁵⁷

The first Waldorf School in the world was founded in 1919 when both labor and management at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany requested that a completely different sort of school be established for their children. In response to their request, with guidance from Rudolf Steiner, the company created such a school, and within the next decade twenty such schools were created, in eight countries, including the United States.⁵⁸ Less than a hundred years later, there more than 1,000 Waldorf schools throughout the world.

Waldorf schools don’t teach religion; rather, they embody spiritual wisdom in teaching everything. Their pedagogy weds process and content to engage a wide range of learning styles, incorporating the “Theory of Multiple Intelligences,” as articulated by Howard Gardner’s 1983 book *Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*⁵⁹ and its 1999 sequel, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*.⁶⁰

Gardner’s work has guided a generation of educators and educational practice to consider a broad range of learning capacities. What I refer to as faith development, Gardner, cognizant of public schools’ need to avoid religion, termed “Existential Intelligence.”⁶¹

Educational systems such as these are laboratories for progressive, practical faith transformation. Steiner applied rigorous scientific analysis to faith development,

engaging art in its many forms as the fundamental component of education at all levels. In 1909, Steiner wrote, “We begin with a fundamental mood of soul. Spiritual researchers call this basic attitude *the path of reverence* [italics his], of devotion to truth and knowledge.”⁶²

Steiner’s words remain relevant today, and can be applied far beyond Waldorf Schools. The work of transforming the material, religious and/or secular systems of education, designed to produce consumers of material goods or religious dogmas, into a next system designed to produce informed citizens committed to critical thinking, requires citizens to be engaged in every educational opportunity.

Growth to this next faith system will require transforming the “mood of the nation’s soul” through community-based education. In an age where falsehood has become a political, religious, social, economic and environmental habit, truth must characterize every facet of this educational process. Such deep truth can best (perhaps only) be conveyed through art. Therefore, art must be the primary resource for the next educational systems.

V. Art

Art, of course, includes literature, and literacy is fundamental to all education. But there are a tremendous variety of literacies. Among the many whose writings have influenced this essay (see the bibliography), five contemporary writers (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Margaret Wheatley, Paul Hawken, Vine Deloria, Jr. and Robert Kelly) are especially worthy for further comment to reinforce the critical role art must play in meeting this educational challenge.

Art conveys the essential “how and why” of truth. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn writes,

And the simple step of a simple courageous man is not to partake in falsehood, not to support false actions! Let that enter the world, let it even reign in the world - but not with my help. But writers and artists can achieve more: they can conquer falsehood! In the struggle with falsehood art always did win and it always does win! Openly, irrefutably for everyone! Falsehood can hold out against much in this world, but not against art. And no sooner will falsehood be dispersed than the nakedness of violence will be revealed in all its ugliness — and violence, decrepit, will fall.⁶³

Dissemination of truth through art cannot be legislated or regulated. Art springs from the human soul. True art is spontaneous, decentralized, consistent, redundant, and compassionate. The artist’s highest calling is to inspire the creativity of others.

Margaret Wheatley is at the apex of a long career of education and community organizing. From her earliest books — dense, social-scientific tomes — her pedagogy has evolved to artistic and poetic offerings, which she has learned are far

more effective in purveying truth. She charts the course for those seeking truth to follow.

Over the last 15 years, I have shared her book *Turning To One Another—Simple Conversations To Restore Hope For The Future*⁶⁴ with hundreds of students of all ages who find themselves in transition to a deeper understanding of their world. She writes,

Real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about. Do they notice a dangerous street crossing near their child's school? Cancer increasing in a neighborhood? Landmines maiming their children? Deaths caused by drunk drivers? It only takes two or three friends to notice that they're concerned about the same thing—and then the world begins to change.⁶⁵

The world is indeed changing. A multitude of community-based organizations have followed Wheatley's work, even as she herself has become an elder and reduced her active involvement in community-building over the last decade.

A generation of activists continues to carry the torch. Among these is Paul Hawken, author of *Blessed Unrest*.⁶⁶ Hawken takes his title from a letter written by Martha Graham to Agnes de Mille, wherein Graham writes:

There is vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique.... You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.... [There is] no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than others.⁶⁷

This “divine dissatisfaction” is the central component of the spiritual awakening that is evoked by art. Hawken's Appendix spans more than a hundred pages, and catalogues thousands of organizations from the “World Index of Social and Environmental Responsibility” (www.wiserearth.org), including 1,381 arts organizations.⁶⁸ These organizations are communities on the forefront of education across the spectrum of art, and each of them can be a node for faith transformation.

Difficult to achieve as the next faith system might be, it is essential to life itself, and worth whatever human striving it takes to overcome whatever obstacles arise. Hawken identifies a multitude of obstacles, but like the other educators who are encouraging humankind forward, he sees no choice, and offers a clear vision of the outcome:

Some say it is too late, but people never change when they are comfortable. Helen Keller threw aside the gnawing fears of chronic bad news when she declared ‘I rejoice to live in such a splendidly disturbing time.’ Time. In

such a time, history is suspended and thus unfinished. It will be the stroke of midnight for the rest of our lives....Ecological restoration is extraordinarily simple: You remove whatever prevents the system from healing itself. Social restoration is no different.⁶⁹

Vine Deloria, Jr. makes a clear distinction between Native American education and (Western) religion in his masterpiece book *God Is Red*. He understands the role of art and ceremony in education, leadership and spiritual transformation, and identifies essential elements of Native American life that will define the next system. He writes,

Long-standing prophecies tell us of the impious people [read “Europeans”] who would come here, defy the creator, and cause the massive destruction of the planet. Many traditional people believe that we are now quite near that time. The cumulative evidence of global warming, acid rain, the disappearance of amphibians, overpopulation and other products of civilized life certainly testify to the possibility of these prophecies being correct.⁷⁰

Yet despite the threats the world faces, Deloria finds hope in the art expressed through Native American ceremonies, which embody a transcendent vision of the next faith system. He concludes,

Their [the ceremonies’] underlying theme is one of gratitude expressed by human beings on behalf of all forms of life. They act to complete and renew the entire and complete cycle of life, ultimately including the whole cosmos present in its specific realizations, so that in the last analysis one might describe ceremonials as the cosmos becoming thankfully aware of itself.⁷¹

If human life is to continue on this planet, we need to change. We can change, and art is the universally available resource that educators must tap to inspire the necessary change.

Archaeologist Robert Kelly, in his 2016 book *The Fifth Beginning* reminds humankind that we have achieved major systems change before, and can once again. As one explanation of how the entire system that defines humanity has transformed multiple times over the last 100,000 years, he writes:

The point is that once a *population* is capable of thinking symbolically, we can expect some members of that population to be supersymbolers [italics his]. And they will likely produce symbols in the form of art because they will not be able to help themselves. George Bernard Shaw said that ‘without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable...’ Art is an effort to make sense of the world, to reconcile the crudeness of reality with a cultural vision of the world.... This is why art is often a tool

of revolutionaries. It's why Mao Zedong said people should sing only patriotic songs. It's why Pete Seeger was blacklisted during the McCarthy era. And it's why Russia's President Putin put the female rock band Pussy Riot in prison.⁷²

The most exciting contribution that Kelly makes to the potential of a “next system” is his realization that “...for archaeologists, imagining other worlds is precisely the point.”⁷³

He chronicles the myriad challenges humankind faces, from climate change to nuclear weapons to (quoting Mark Twain) prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.⁷⁴ Kelly concludes,

...if we have the power to destroy the world, then perhaps we also have the power to create it. This means geoengineering and new ways to produce, store, transmit and use energy. But it also means devising new ways to organize ourselves, ways that will release the best in us and restrain the worst. This is a difficult task, but not an impossible one.⁷⁵

Although Kelly does not reference Prigogine in his book, and may not have encountered this scholar's work on systems transformation from a previous generation, I hear echoes of Prigogine's work in Kelly's conclusion. Prigogine also began with thermodynamic energy, and was led to envisioning systems change and the possibility of a fundamental reorganization of the entire human condition.

In 2016, possibility becomes necessity.

These authors offer a very small sampling of the artistic feast of system change opportunities that the present era offers, along with roadmaps to get us there. Many more resources are included in the bibliography. If human life is to continue on this planet, we need to change. We can change, and art is the universally available resource that educators must tap to inspire the necessary change.

Thus education through art becomes the “how” of the next faith system.

VI. Kindness

If the answer to “how” in the next faith system is “education through art,” the “why” can be summarized by one word: “kindness.”

Kindness in action can take root and grow in communities. Evidence for this assertion is the multiple, diverse communities that comprise Tucson, Arizona, a paradoxical “small town” of about a million inhabitants.

Tucson is the kind of town where a sizable corps of volunteers coordinated by the YWCA is always on call to immediately respond (with the outspoken support of the

Mayor and the Chief of Police!) to reports of hate speech or hateful actions, anywhere in the city or county.

Tucson's kindness culture is thanks in part to its history, and in part to its continuing commitment to its existential (faith-based and spiritual) practices.

Tucson was founded by Native American agriculturalists who began a continuous 4,000-year practice of cultivating the fertile soil along the Santa Cruz River. The Spanish and Native American cultures that inhabited Tucson for millennia somehow escaped some of the worst aspects of Western Civilization, and managed to retain the better angels of all their cultures. A combination of historic social, economic and environmental factors enabled Tucson, and the Sonoran Desert region that surrounds it, to retain a healthier faith system than most of the rest of the United States. This healthier faith system is characterized by a culture of kindness. Tucson is no utopia, but it understands itself well enough to meet itself kindly most of the time, and to catch itself when it misses the mark.

A practical manifestation of this kindness in action is the story of Jeanette Maré, the founder of Ben's Bells in Tucson, and her son Ben.⁷⁶ The system the Maré family developed to respond to the unexpected death of their three-year-old son Ben is proof that kindness can indeed take tangible form to transform the social, economic and environmental systems humans inhabit. Artistic bells, murals, and mosaics created by children of all ages, colors, creeds and nationalities grace Tucson's streets, parks, schools and neighborhoods. Ben's Bells has developed a school curriculum, "The Be Kind Challenge," that has expanded beyond Tucson, all the way to the east coast of the United States, when families from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut drew upon its wisdom in response to the violence that school and community experienced in 2012.

The Ben's Bells system is a prototype of how organizations and groups of caring, empathetic people can foster change in the world. School curricula and support groups grew out of Ben's Bells' leadership. If this transformation can happen in Tucson, it can happen throughout the world.

A second example of kindness in action draws on extensive research about violence and dignity. "Love Trumps Hate" is a slogan that has taken root on social media since the 2016 election. From an academic perspective, this translates as "Kindness Transforms Evil," an outcome that can be research-documented. Bad things do happen to good people, but good people are not thereby destroyed. If sufficient protective factors are present in community, citizens do not necessarily become bad as the result of their bad experiences.

Even more significant for the purposes of organizations comprised of compassionate, activist citizens all over the world, systems change can transform bad people into good people.

This deceptively simple claim finds support in the work of Philip Zimbardo, Ph.D., who has studied and written extensively on the nature of evil. Research by Stanley Milgram at Stanford, analyzed by Zimbardo, with reference to My Lai, Abu Ghraib and other recent violent events, identifies ten systemic strategies that identify “how good, ordinary people can be recruited, induced, seduced into behaving in ways that could be classified as evil.”⁷⁷ Zimbardo writes, “Motives and needs that ordinarily serve us well can lead us astray when they are aroused, amplified, or manipulated by situational forces that we fail to recognize as potent.”⁷⁸ He rejects the notion that “one bad apple spoils the barrel,” and instead contends that the barrel itself — any system that defines a group as “other than fully human” — spoils the people in it.

In other words, evil originates in systems, not in individuals.

Zimbardo’s research confirms that violence does not emerge in a vacuum. It is cultivated in an environment – a system – that often includes poverty, abuse, inequity, injustice, and, most of all, indignity.⁷⁹

Jonathan Mann, MD, MPH, maintained in the *International Journal of Health and Human Rights*, “Injuries to individual and collective dignity may represent a hitherto unrecognized pathogenic force with a destructive capacity towards physical, mental and social well-being at least equal to viruses or bacteria.”⁸⁰

But injuries to indignity can be healed. Art is the most effective tool to confront systemic indignity and violence, and can catalyze systemic transformation. Consider the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in ending slavery, of Pablo Picasso’s painting *Guernica* in ending the Spanish Civil War, of John Lennon’s song *Happy Xmas* on ending the Vietnam War.

A third example of how kindness can catalyze systems transformation is drawn from neurochemistry research conducted by the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley.⁸¹ They report results of theirs and others’ research in their Journal “Greater Good:”

A study by James Fowler of the University of California, San Diego, and Nicholas Christakis of Harvard, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, shows that when one person behaves generously, it inspires observers to behave generously later, toward different people. In fact, the researchers found that altruism could spread by three degrees—from person to person to person to person. ‘As a result,’ they write, ‘each person in a network can influence dozens or even hundreds of people, some of whom he or she does not know and has not met.’ Giving has also been linked to the release of oxytocin, a hormone (also released during sex and breast feeding) that induces feelings of warmth, euphoria, and connection to others. In laboratory studies, Paul Zak, the director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University, has

found that a dose of oxytocin will cause people to give more generously and to feel more empathy towards others, with ‘symptoms’ lasting up to two hours. And those people on an ‘oxytocin high’ can potentially jumpstart a ‘virtuous circle, where one person’s generous behavior triggers another’s,’ says Zak.⁸²

Through social media, the existence of “mirror neurons” is becoming better known outside academic circles. The function of these neurons, which fire when they “see” other people experiencing an emotion and cause the viewer to experience the same emotion, has been used to explain mob violence, but it also explains empathy.

Thus kindness is the “why” of the next faith system.

VII. Transformation

Imagine envisioning this transformation, not with a symbol of torture but with one of floating flight. The image of a butterfly would dance in people’s minds when they recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

When I was a child growing up the Sonoran Desert, my parents occasionally threatened to send me to “reform school” when I had broken some rule (as was the practice in those days). They pointed out classmates who purportedly had been or should be sent to “reform school.” My rejoinder was always, “Did it work?”

The current social, economic and environmental systems of the United States and the community of nations requires something stronger than a “reformation.” I use the term “transformation,” as defined by the Business Dictionary: “In an organizational context, a process of profound and radical change that orients an organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness.”⁸³ Thus, when applied to systems, transformation implies the emergence of completely different systemic forms and functions. Transformation is difficult and painful, archetypally involving “trial by fire” or “trial by water,” metaphors for painful, but necessary, change.⁸⁴ Indeed, metaphors or symbols express the concept of transformation much better than words, which is way the first step in organizational rebranding often involves developing a new symbolic logo that expresses what the organization is and does through art.

An appropriate metaphor or symbol for systems transformation could be a butterfly. Who could imagine that the blueprint for such a change in form and function could be hidden in the DNA of a worm-like life form? And yet, there it is.

Who can imagine what blueprints lie hidden in human DNA?

At the level of our DNA, humans know how to do this, because we have done it before.⁸⁵ We can begin by doing something we know how to do, such as making a conscious choice to adopt and apply kindness as the primary guiding principle within social, economic and environmental systems.

Enlightened observers can identify inklings of such a transformation in current systems. One such enlightened observer is Ellen DeGeneres. DeGeneres provides a straightforward rationale and job description: “If we’re destroying our trees and destroying our environment and hurting animals and hurting one another and all that stuff, there’s got to be a very powerful energy to fight that. I think we need more love in the world. We need more kindness, more compassion, more joy, more laughter.”⁸⁶

This choice to adopt and apply kindness in the here and now, which defines Ellen DeGeneres’ life and, by her example, may influence the lives of innumerable other citizens of Planet Earth, can motivate people to transform the systems that define their human condition. In this way, kindness can become the “ground of their personal being” and part of the social fabric of their culture (i.e. whatever they experience when they think or say the word “god,” whether in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag in the United States, or at any other time in any other culture).

Imagine envisioning this transformation, not with a symbol of torture but with one of floating flight. The image of a butterfly would dance in people’s minds when they recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

As kindness takes root within existing social, economic and environmental systems, new systems can emerge from the chrysalises that trap the current systems. There are precedents for this sort of global transformation. The Waldorf model discussed above is just one example of an innovative pedagogy that can spark a transformation in a system. It was offered herein simply to demonstrate that transformations in educational systems, based on understandings of the power of qualities such as kindness, can and actually do occur when people advocate for them at a fortuitous time and place.

Many such times and places are emerging today. This can be hard, even dangerous work and will require lots of new energy, but as has been the case for millennia, when faced with existential threats, humankind has no other choice. In her book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein named the “system” that embodies such energy “Blockadia.” In a 2014 interview with Joshua Holland, Klein identified how this system is based on love:

The best moments for me researching the book were just hanging out with people who really love where they live. I have a chapter in the book called *Love and Water* and I quote an activist named Alexis Bonogofsky in Billings, Montana. She’s a rancher and an environmental activist and she

talks about taking on the coal companies and she says, “You know, the thing that Arch Coal doesn’t understand is that it’s not hate and anger that will save this place. Love will save this place.” And so often when I was in this transnational space called Blockadia, I felt that this is a genuinely positive movement. It’s a movement driven by people falling in love with where they live because they’re faced with the prospect of losing something as fundamental as clean water or clean air.⁸⁷

As Klein put in the same interview, referring to her 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine*:

Here I’m arguing that we need to get smart in the midst of crisis, and the truth is that it either goes one way or the other: One of the things I learned while I was writing *The Shock Doctrine* is that crisis either makes us grow up fast or fall apart. And I’m saying that we can grow up really fast — that we can come together in this crisis. We’ve done it before.⁸⁸

Klein’s words echo Prigogine’s model of systems transformation and Kelly’s insights.⁸⁹

This sort of transformation was in evidence worldwide in September 2015 through “The Ground Beneath Our Hearts” project of *Radical Joy for Hard Times*.⁹⁰ In 2013, a small group of community activists in the United States began to discuss the meaning of a new word, “solastalgia,” proposed by Glenn Albrecht, a Professor of Sustainability at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia. Albrecht used this word to describe the feelings of grief and loss that Aboriginal people experience when their earth is desecrated. The concept resonated with indigenous groups all over the world.

This group, of which I was a member, decided to take concrete action to address these feelings. Over the next two years, we organized and sponsored “The Ground Beneath Our Hearts” — described in our press release as “a global spectacle to honor the creativity, dignity and resilience of people living in communities affected by mining and oil and gas development, on Saturday, September 12th, with acts of art and ceremony to celebrate the human spirit and love of place.”⁹¹

We commissioned a song, raised money and provided small grants to groups all over the world to enable them to develop their own local ceremonies based on their cultures’ art forms. On September 12, 2015, hundreds of people, most of whom we organizers had never met in person but with whom we had corresponded via phone, internet and social media, created local celebrations in more than a dozen sites worldwide, some of which still remain secret for fear of reprisal by governmental or corporate adversaries.

Sites publicized included Gloucester, Australia; Sumgayit, Azerbaijan; Araracuara, Colombia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Bunmahon, County Waterford, Ireland;

Ballycastle, Northern Ireland; and in the United States, West Virginia; Longmont and Durango, Colorado; and Joshua Tree National Park in California.⁹²

These examples from present-day social, economic and environmental systems document how the power of what Steiner calls “path of reverence,” Klein calls “love,” Trebbe Johnson calls “radical joy,” and I call “kindness,” can transform faith systems in today’s world.

To immerse oneself in this work means that one must continually cycle through all the stages of grieving which Elizabeth Kübler-Ross defined (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance).⁹³

Kindness is a choice. Most people encounter other people each day, whether in family systems, their community (as broadly defined), their workplace or where they recreate. Each such contact involves a choice as to how we interact.

Those who by fortunate birth, life-long striving, or both, possess a modicum of power in their family, their community, their workplace or where they recreate, can and must use their power on behalf of marginalized people who have less power. As noted above, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that not just some, but “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood [emphasis mine].”⁹⁴

Anyone who cares about the future and who is willing to struggle to create a “next faith system” can claim, own and apply the power of kindness. Passionate people abound in the United States and throughout the world, in every stage of the grieving process. Some are still in denial, hoping for the best from the current regime. Others are angry because they have been ignored or humiliated for generations by the social, economic and environmental system in the United States, and they will stay angry until that system is transformed.

Still others believe they can bargain with the current chaos, make a tweak here and there to survive. Many are depressed, some suffering so severely that they contemplate taking their own lives. But some accept the necessity of transformation, and are coming together through non-violence: a path of reverence, love, radical joy, and kindness, to create new systems through art. They can be inspired by the art of contemporary prophets like Steiner, Klein, Johnson, and the many others I have referenced in this essay. Effective community-building can listen effectively and compassionately to these people, empathize with and transform their anger and passion by providing multiple, redundant opportunities for inclusive education using the power of kindness to transform the faith systems of the United States and, with it, the human condition of billions of people these systems impact every day.

The world may be closer to the next system than we think. Community groups can build on tested resources from systems theory and group dynamics research to make decisions that increase the whole emerging system's chances of success. Progressive social, economic and environmental practices that embody kindness are already integral within some other societies, including co-working, opportunities for rest and renewal, maternity and paternity leave, and fair labor practices. These concepts are quietly beginning to take root in the United States in progressive companies and systems.

So many unexpected events have altered human and national histories that it is entirely possible that something totally unexpected might happen. While some social scientists have given up on humankind, others are putting their best ideas into the public conversation, and a synthesis may yet emerge that turns the tide toward reason, conscience and community. As Thomas Jefferson wrote in the midst of an earlier era of transformational thinking and action: "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference!"⁹⁵

To summarize, it makes sense to trump hatred with love, fear with community, despair with kindness. As Zimbardo documented, evil systems create evil outcomes, but, in the absence of demagoguery, few people will choose to be evil, although as Edmund Burke famously said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph in the world is for good men (*sic*) to do nothing."⁹⁶

Good people need to act!

Given the opportunity, and with positive role models, almost everyone has a valuable skill or a good story to share, and they can encourage neighbors to share stories of transformation, home by home, neighborhood by neighborhood, school by school, community by community. Thousands of educators across the United States need these stories to counter with kindness the toxicity of the current systems, thus enabling students to rise above toxic behaviors.

Anyone who cares about the future and who is willing to struggle to create a "next faith system" can claim, own and apply the power of kindness.

These educators and their students can repel the assaults on reason that the chaotic current systems can be expected to continuously mount.

Good people can act to support such educators, and good leaders can do more. When Hitler invaded Denmark and required Jews to wear the Star of David, the King of Denmark and many non-Jewish Danes wore the Star as a symbol of solidarity. This sets an example for the present day for those who chose to share

power with those who need it, to speak out against indignity when they see it, and to set a positive example to children, who will readily invent ways to support one other that respect dignity.

Most of all, based on humankind's history and ideals, almost everyone can believe that a next faith system is possible. The good news is that it doesn't take everyone, or even almost everyone, to create a faith systems change. Research documents that ten percent of a population is enough to do the trick.⁹⁷

It may be the end of the world as we know it, but out of the ashes a better world can emerge if enough people—one in ten!—own their power, find each other, and organize to honor the dignity of all. It will take time, it will be messy and painful, and it will certainly take lots of thought and work. If we stay true to our “better angels,” as Abraham Lincoln put it, or to the capacity for change imbedded in our DNA as Robert Kelly might term it, a stable new human faith system can arise. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn summed it up when he concluded his Nobel Prize Speech: “Proverbs about truth are well-loved in Russian. They give steady and sometimes striking expression to the not inconsiderable harsh national experience: One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world. And it is here, on an imaginary fantasy, a breach of the principle of the conservation of mass and energy, that I base both my own activity and my appeal to the writers of the whole world.”⁹⁸

I believe that with faith in the power of kindness, in the art that embodies kindness, and in education grounded in such art, the United States and the world can and will move on from our current “not inconsiderable harsh national experience.”

If there is a God, this is what God is for.

VIII. Afterword

Kindness (Naomi Shihab Nye)⁹⁹

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

Notes

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- ⁸ <http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/student?faith>
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- ²² Macy *et al.* p 81
- ²³ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996; 2002), 13.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 222.
- ²⁵ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43290>.
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- ²⁷ For an in-depth consideration of Eisenhower and other presidents' views, see <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/god-in-the-white-house/>.
- ²⁸ <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835309,00.html>.
- ²⁹ Billy Graham's teachings have had great influence on the politics and culture of the United States and the world. His son, Franklin Graham, now leads this movement. See, for example, Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 342.
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- ³¹ c.f. 1, and <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.
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- ³⁵ Ibid., 189.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 189-193.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 191.
- ³⁸ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 246-252.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 86.
- ⁴⁰ Peck draws on British Psychiatrist Wilfred Bion's work as analyzed by Margaret Rioch, *Psychiatry*, (Washington, DC, Vol. 33, No 1, (Feb 1970), 56-66. See also Peck, *Different Drum*, 107-165.
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- ⁴² Miriam Simos [Starhawk], *Dreaming the Dark* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 92.

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- ⁴³ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948. The Definition has not been amended since 1948. <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html>.
- ⁴⁴ This sample taxonomy of threats is derived from the work of “Next System Project,” (<https://thenextsystem.org/about-next-system-project>) and the Democracy Collaborative (<http://democracycollaborative.org/>), which inspired me to write this essay. <http://democracycollaborative.org/>
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- ⁴⁶ <http://www.samhsa.gov/about-us>.
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.samhsa.gov/wellness-initiative/eight-dimensions-wellness>.
- ⁴⁸ Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel, *The Addictive Organization* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988) 1.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Theobald, *The Rapids of Change* (Indianapolis, IN: Knowledge Systems, Inc. 1987) 16.
- ⁵¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/opinion/campaign-stops/trump-is-an-existential-threat.html>.
- ⁵² <https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=etymology%20of%20educate>.
- ⁵³ For an in-depth exposition of this claim, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2011): “If we imagine a typical Christian back in 1900, we might think of a German or an American; in 2050 we should rather turn to a Ugandan, a Brazilian, or a Filipino.” p. xi.
- ⁵⁴ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (30th Edition)* New York: Continuum International Publishing Co., 2002).
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ⁵⁶ 1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. 2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. 3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr_article_26.html.
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- ⁵⁸ Johannes Hemleben, *Rudolf Steiner: A Documentary Biography*, (E. Grinstead, UK: Henry Goulden Ltd., 1975), 121-126.
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- ⁶⁰ Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999).
- ⁶¹ Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: ASCD, 1999), 14. Armstrong quotes Howard Gardner: “[Existential intelligence] has been valued in every known human culture. Cultures devise religious, mystical, or metaphysical systems for dealing with existential issues; and in modern times or in secular settings, aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific works and systems also speak to this ensemble of human needs.”
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- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 22.
- ⁶⁶ Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest* New York, NY: Viking Penguin Group, 2007).
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 208-9.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.
- ⁷⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr.: *God Is Red*, (New York, NY Putnam, 3rd Edition, 2003) 280.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷² Robert L Kelly, *The Fifth Beginning: What Six Million Years of History Can Tell Us About Our Future*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016) 48.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.
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- ⁷⁶ <https://bensbells.org/about-us/founder>.

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- ⁷⁷ Philip Zimbardo, The social psychology of good and evil: Understanding our capacity for kindness and cruelty. Published in *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*. Arthur Miller (Ed.). (pp. 21-50). New York: Guilford. In <http://pdf.prisonexp.org/powerevil.pdf>, p. 2
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- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Jonathan Mann, "Dignity and Health: The UDHR's Revolutionary First Article." *Health and Human Rights*, V.3 #2, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard School of Public Health, 1998) 36.
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- ⁸³ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/transformation.html>.
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- ⁸⁵ Kelly, *Fifth Beginning*, 2016, 48.
- ⁸⁶ <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/74353>.
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- ⁸⁹ Kelly, *Fifth Beginning*, 2016, 48.
- ⁹⁰ See entries by Trebbe Johnson, founder of Radical Joy for Hard Times, and her colleagues https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPH8Rvlp_EM&feature=youtu.be; <https://www.facebook.com/groundbeneathourhearts/?fref=ts>.
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- ⁹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.
- ⁹⁵ William Peden (ed.), *Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1954) 163.
- ⁹⁶ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/e/edmundburk377528.html>.
- ⁹⁷ <https://news.rpi.edu/luwakkey/2902>: Scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have found that when just 10 percent of the population holds an unshakable belief, their belief will always be adopted by the majority of the society. The scientists, who are members of the Social Cognitive Networks Academic Research Center (SCNARC) at Rensselaer, used computational and analytical methods to discover the tipping point where a minority belief becomes the majority opinion. The finding has implications for the study and influence of societal interactions ranging from the spread of innovations to the movement of political ideals. - See more at: <https://news.rpi.edu/luwakkey/2902#sthash.r5epyHlh.dpuf>.
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