A New Modernity
Living and Believing in an Unstable World

Part Three

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Our series based on the 2005 Anthony Jordan Lectures that Schreiter delivered at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, continues with an exposition of four quests for the whole that still fail our attempts to make sense of our current situation. He then sketches the prospects of “second modernity” to provide some direction in dealing with the complexity and the instability of the world as we are experiencing it.

In the previous installment of this series, I analyzed the frameworks of post-modernity and multiculturalism. While these both had descriptive value, authenticating in some way the sense of diversity, difference, fragmentation, and instability, they did not of themselves have much explanatory power to help us interpret the world we live in, especially when that world became fundamentally unstable. Nor did they suggest much by way of action to address that instability, other than affirmation of those same experiences they were intended to describe. And given the fact that the instability they herald provokes anxiety, the response we do give may grow out of our worst instincts rather than our best lights. We may well find ourselves falling back into a “default” position that will not permit us to deal with these realities in a creative fashion. I argued that a more fruitful approach is to posit that human beings are constantly searching for the whole, that is, a quest to take disparate experiences and craft them into patterns of intelligibility.

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I would now like to very briefly sketch four such quests for the whole that end short of the goal and often very badly. They are: fundamentalism, romanticism, universalism, and what I shall call “splitting.” These last attempts are presented as bulwarks against anomie. Each will be described and, to the extent possible, their allure identified and their point of weakness examined. Then, I will turn to the emerging model discussed principally in Europe today that goes by different names: reflexive modernity, new modernity, second modernity. I believe this model can help us overcome the misfires that turn quests for the whole into oppressive forms of totalitarianism. I conclude by returning to the four features that are causing global instability I identified in the first installment (February 2007).

Search for the Whole: Detours and Dead Ends

Fundamentalism

Certainly the most talked about of these quests for the whole today is fundamentalism. The term originates from struggles within conservative Protestantism in Britain and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, a series of pamphlets circulated in the United States, describing the “fundamentals” of Christian belief; hence the name. Today, the term is used somewhat indiscriminately, especially by nonconservatives, for any kind of conservative faith with which they disagree. It is extended also beyond Christianity to include a wide range of Muslim revival and reform movements, some forms of Judaism, and Hindu communalism.

Despite numerous extended efforts to define and to map out the forms of fundamentalism (notably the University of Chicago Project conducted jointly with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in the early 1990s), there is still not any agreed-upon definition of fundamentalism (see especially the opening and final volumes of Appleby and Marty). The definition I have found most useful was developed by Bruce Lawrence. He sees fundamentalism first of all as a modern phenomenon. It arises in modernity as a reaction against modernity. It establishes its sense of the whole by lifting up elements from a religious tradition that are specifically antimodern in character and then making them a boundary of identity that separates the true believer from the apostate and the infidel. Thus, in early twentieth-century Christianity, the five “fundamentals” were the literal interpretation of Scripture, the virginal conception, the substitutionary atonement of Christ’s death, his bodily resurrection, and his physical return at the end of time—all beliefs difficult to reconcile with modernity. Other Christian dogmas like the Trinity, for instance, are not included here.

Similarly, in contemporary Islam, the prescription for literal application of the sharia and the sequestering of women from the public sphere have nothing to do with what have long been considered the five pillars of Islam: the oneness of God,
the duty to pray five times a day, giving alms, maintaining the fast during the
month of Ramadan, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Again, in asserting
sharia and the sequestration of women, one sees a reaching for distinctively anti-
modern elements to bolster an antimodern outlook, thereby striving to create a
community that will stand over against the corrosive acids of modernity.

The fundamentalist quest for the whole sees modernity as incapable of ever
fulfilling that dream, either because of the hubris of its claims for science and
technology, the immorality of its rank individualism, or its lack of normative
behavior because of its being driven by consumption. Only by creating a sectarian
group, clearly bounded by antimodern markers, can one hope to live in integrity
and wholeness within a tradition. Fundamentalism comes in degrees, of course,
but it is its adherence to the explicitly antimodern—and privileging those anti-
modern elements of a tradition over what might be considered the principal ele-
ments in other settings—that gives it its attraction. In the confusion of a pluralist
world, it provides clarity, if not truth.

**Romanticism**

It was the late Sir Isaiah Berlin’s studies in the early German and French
Romantics who proposed a Counter-Enlightenment view of the world that first
alerted us to the power—and destructive potential—of this worldview (see Berlin
1993 and 1999). Starting with Johann Georg Hamann in Germany, a powerful
reaction grew against the universalizing tendencies of the Enlightenment. Rather
than stressing the general, the universal, and the rational, Romanticism emphasized
the genius of the solitary individual who had special insight into the nature of
reality. Only by following uncompromisingly the true genius could one arrive at
beauty and truth—which was not generalized but particular. The power of the un-
conscious to reveal this reality ultimately superseded what conscious rationality
could attain. It is the Dionysian, not the Apollonian, path that lead to true reality.

Recently Richard Wolin has traced how this late eighteenth- and nineteenth-
century strand of quest for the whole leads through Nietzsche to right-wing move-
ments in the twentieth century: the cult around the analytic psychologist Carl
Gustav Jung and the German and French New Right—including some of the
scions of postmodernism (see Wolin). Other strands flowing out of this cult of
the personal and the irrational, and drawing in different ways upon Nietzsche, are
to be found in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and in National Socialism. To
be sure, these are not direct genealogies, but the family resemblances are there.
The irrational and the poetic, the singular and the particular, and the solitary
genius are seen to triumph over the pedestrian ministrations of the bureaucratic,
the universal, and the rational.

It goes without saying that this Romanticist strain in Western thought has tried
to create its senses of the whole, either in esoteric readings not open to less dis-
cerning minds or even in outright fascism, where violence is seen as purgative
of the banal and the impure. It creates its own kinds of purity over against the hybridities of modernity. In emphasizing the ineluctable, the pure, and the particular, it develops an especially aesthetic reading of the truth, which at times is counterintuitive to what otherwise would be held as moral truth.

**Universalism**

If Romanticism, in its search for the whole, counters the central tenets of the Enlightenment, and with it, modernity, then universalism is an attempt to find the whole precisely in the very tenets of the Enlightenment. The Western Enlightenment arose, as Stephen Toulmin has reminded us, out of an effort to overcome the sectarian feuding of the churches in the seventeenth century. The murderous outcome of holding in uncompromising fashion each to one’s own dogma, thereby not allowing any common ground where all parties could stand, but by insisting rather on the irreducibility of one’s own position to any other, can only lead to the most powerful winning the day (see Toulmin). Only when all accede to the rules of reason, common to all human beings, can such tribalism be overcome. These powerful ideas did much to shape a new sense of the whole in their French forms of rationality and in their Scottish forms of polity and economy. They appeared to free Europe from the rivalries of the churches and the unchallenged authority of their hierarchs. Science, not religion, would hold the day.

The confidence (some would say the hubris) in rationality helped free the powers of scientific and technological innovation that religious authorities had to some extent held in check. It made the technological and political progress of Western society possible. It also helped move it into colonizing much of the rest of the world, where the “benefits” of this Enlightenment civilization would then raise the benighted peoples of the rest of the world from their darkness. Inasmuch as any rational person could participate in this process made this universalism in principle open to all, not merely to those who by birth or rank would control the levers of power.

Much can be said for this quest for the whole. It dwells especially on cognitive, scientific understandings of the truth that are, in principle, accessible to all reasonable people. But it, too, has had its overreach, notably in three areas.

First of all, it posits a single and sole rationality, without retrieving the nuances of cultural difference. In its cruder nineteenth-century forms (echoed in Kant’s and Hegel’s comments about the irrationality of Africans), it fails to understand that there are fundamentally different ways of organizing the whole. This fact
continues to plague Christian theology today at a time when the majority of Christians live outside the Western sphere, yet their own theology and efforts at inculcation are largely ignored by the West.

Second, and in the most tragic instance, “sciences of society” were devised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that have utterly crushed individuals and cultural lifeways. The depredation of Marxism in its various forms—be it Stalinism, Maoism, or Maoism’s offshoots in Peru, Cambodia, and Nepal—can hardly be seen by most as a new whole in which human life flourishes.

Third, and perhaps less obviously (at least to some), the negative dimensions of globalization—its relentless innovation, its brutal competition, its utter restlessness—go hand in hand with this universalism and continue, in Habermas’s words, to colonize the lifeworld. Habermas himself has not always been clear that the universalism of his ideal communicative situation, in which all will be resolved by rational argument, might have cultural and class biases (see Schreiter 1995). In recent years, he has accorded a greater role for religion itself even in these idea societies. Given that, one cannot foreclose a judgment on just where all of that will end up. But it is noteworthy that even the most rational of quests for the whole does not automatically yield the desired human flourishing.

While such universalism might seem to be the single best candidate for seeking the whole—because of its democratic access, its universalized rules, its shared criteria for evaluation of outcomes—it, too, potentially falls short in a complex, pluralistic world. Nonetheless, its distinctive advantages should not be underestimated.

**Splitting**

A fourth way of seeking the whole is what I would call splitting. This entails splitting off the problematic parts of the perceived reality and trying to construct the whole out of what is left. The construction is then regarded as a bulwark against the anomic that threatens a society because of its complexity, pluralism, and conflicted situation.

Muslim scholar Bassam Tibi gives a useful example of how this is done by some Muslims who face Western modernity but find parts of that modernity incompatible with their sense of Islam. He distinguishes between institutional modernity and cultural modernity. Institutional modernity is the modernity evident in the achievements of science and technology. It is based on a mathematicalization of nature. This kind of modernity Muslims can accept, as is evident by the number of Muslim immigrants to North America who are engineers, physicians, chemists, and workers in the natural sciences. This is the modernity created by the scientific worldview.

Cultural modernity, on the other hand, is problematic; it grows from the results of accepting values such as individual free will, the freedom to change one’s social or cultural environment, and the acceptance of relativism as a principle for dealing with pluralism. Such cultural modernity is rejected by some Muslims. In other
words, they live in the modern West as workers in institutional modernity, but try to continue their lifeworld as opposed to cultural modernity (Tibi, 24).

This is not something that besets only Muslims. One finds it among other religionists as well, including among Christians. The point here is the attempt to wall off part of modernity and to live in a way that accepts only parts of it. This is different from taking a critical stance toward aspects of modernity; here, we see an attempt to simply ignore or suppress a dimension of it altogether.

Splitting happens in many other ways. One sees it in politics where one is willing to ignore unpleasant aspects of a political program in order to embrace other, cherished values. This has been pointed out in a recent study in the United States, where it was shown that some of the poorest sectors of the United States consistently voted for the Republican Party because of that party’s commitment to “family values,” even though that same party’s economic policies toward poor families were actually harmful (see Frank).

Yet another way is found in nativist reassertions. Samuel Huntington did this in 2004 in his controversial book, Who Are We? The Challenge to America’s National Identity. Huntington asserted that the United States’ identity is based in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and the influx of Latinos from the various countries of Central and South America (especially Mexico) constituted a threat to the nation. Similar voices can be heard today in Germany, with the assertion of a national Leitkultur or guiding culture that is under threat because of immigration. “Germany is not a land of immigration (Zuwanderungsland)” is frequently heard there. In these instances, reasserting a reified version of the national culture is seen as a hedge against the complexity emerging because of the entry of people who cultures are fundamentally different.

Perhaps given the complexity of the world we live in, some such splitting is difficult to avoid. Difficult choices have to be made. But to simply cordon off attitudes or policies, rather than critically engage them, seems to be short-circuiting, in the long run, the search for the whole.

A New Modernity

Given the fact that people are likely to continue to seek the whole—that this is something inherent to the meaning-making, symbolizing process that makes us human beings—are there strategies for creating a way of living in the complex, plural realities we live in that can take into account the shifting factors in our existence, that can deal with the instabilities that are created without giving in to ways of seeking the whole that may be deeply flawed, either morally or socially?

What I would like to sketch out here are some attempts being made in that direction, that going beyond simply reveling in plurality (what Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby designated a number of years ago as “mosaic madness”) or a kind
of Balkanized multiculturalism that collapses at the first sign of stress. It goes by a number of names and is being constructed especially by thinkers in Great Britain and in Germany. It was initially called “reflexive modernity” (Beck, Giddens, and Lash). Somewhat later, Scott Lash called it a “second modernity.” Most recently, Ulrich Beck has been calling it a “new cosmopolitanism.” Let us look at each of these names to explore how they are reading what needs to change in our perception of modernity.

“Reflexive modernity” refers to an attitude in our reading of modernity. It is intended to convey that our experience of modernity is no longer simply a phenomenological one, accepting the principles and promises of modernity at face value. Rather, we take a reflective, even critical posture toward it. For example, that progress and innovation are taken for granted as defining features of modernity is no longer assumed. We have been experiencing the limits of progress and innovation as values that can be accepted uncritically. This is most evident in debates about the environment: is drilling for oil in wildlife reserves to be accepted because of the West’s insatiable hunger for petroleum, even if it is a potential danger to the environment? The threat of global terrorism likewise compels us not to take our security for granted any longer. Our sense of risk in general has been heightened, be it for reasons of ecology, the volatility of financial markets, or the spread of communicable diseases such as SARS or avian flu. Reflexive modernity, then, means that we experience reality increasingly at one remove. We now question what we once took for granted.

“Second modernity” is an attempt to seek the whole, using the framework of reflexive modernity. It reflects the fact that we have moved beyond the first modernity, but are not mired in a fragmented postmodernity. One of the features of a second modernity is a sense that many of the boundaries that defined the first modernity have been shifted. These shifts are sometimes experienced as a deterritorialization, that is, boundaries that once defined and even protected us are no longer fulfilling these functions. This is most evident in the experience of the pluralization of our societies through migration. Not only are dominant culture people confronted with a multiplicity of ethnic identities, the situation has become such in some places that there is no longer an ethnic majority. For instance, that is the case in Los Angeles, and it is becoming

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increasingly so in other urban centers of immigration. Ecological threats in the atmosphere—be they the hole in the ozone layer or the cloud of smog hanging over South Asia from the cooking fires—know no national boundaries. Thus boundaries that define identities are found to be shifting as are those we thought once protected us. The United States thought it was largely safe from global terrorism because of the expanse of two oceans on its eastern and western frontiers. September 11 changed all of that.

Deterritorialization is experienced also in the fact that boundaries that once defined purity are being replaced by concepts of mixing and hybridity. As people migrate, mix, and marry, racial identities become blurred. Jacques Audinet has called this “the human face of globalization.” To be of mixed race was through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a sign of being impure, even of weaker stock. But things are changing rapidly in this regard. The golfer Tiger Woods has become an icon of this new hybridity: not only drawing his identity from African and Asian resources, but also by being the very opposite of a scion of a debilitated stock. He is the number-one golfer in the world. *Mestizaje, métissage, creolization*—whatever it is called—represents now a new and positive way of being in the world.

The second modernity not only forces us to rethink boundaries; it calls forth new decisions. The debate about genetically modified crops and the divide between North America and Europe on this matter represents one set of such decisions to be made. The capacities of biotechnology to prolong life have created another. The line between medicinal supplements and doping in professional sports raises yet another. This second modernity raises, therefore, a whole set of questions that must be addressed now in a way that was not the case even in the immediate past (see Beck and Lau, where these questions are explored in a variety of fields).

Finally, the most recent term introduced for this new modernity is *cosmopolitanism*. This is of course an older term, usually intended to convey the sense of being (as its etymology implies) a world citizen. It was typically used of elite populations, who had the means to travel frequently and who as a result of this felt at home in many places in the world. In this newer usage that older meaning is not denied, but has been supplemented in two key ways. First of all, the new cosmopolitans are not so much an elite as they are the mass of migrants moving around the world today. Some are professionals and middle class, but the great majority of them are working-class people. They are cosmopolitan in their capacity to negotiate multiple cultures—in their current place of residence, their workplace, and their
country of origin and in their use of communications media to hold all this together. Cultural critic Paul Gilroy sees them creating a new sense of convivência or capacity to live together and interact with the great deal of difference that surrounds them. (Convivência is a Portuguese term referring to the capacity of people from different backgrounds to live together.) They do not experience cosmopolitan life as tourists or sometime visitors, but as those who must encounter and interact with difference every day of their lives. They do not have the luxury of experiencing the different as exotic or romantic; it is part of their ongoing struggle for survival (see Gilroy; Sundermeier is credited with introducing the term convivência into theology).

The other dimension of this new cosmopolitanism is that its thinking and decision-making is increasingly characterized by a “both-and” rather than an “either-or” approach. Modernity was marked by its capacity to differentiate and make distinctions. That is, after all, a key aspect of critical thinking. Confronted as it is with increasing plurality and complexity, the new cosmopolitanism is more keenly aware of the need to capture that sense of complexity in its decision-making. A simple differentiation is less useful to explain phenomena in the world today. For example, the early stages of globalization were often characterized as a homogenization of the world: global flows from the media would gradually erase differences, and we would all come to be more and more alike. Experience has shown, however, that such is not entirely the case. While some things have become more the same, the reaction against this homogenization has been new emphases on the local. English may be becoming the universal language of commerce and education in Europe, but this has also led to a revival of many local languages—such as Breton, Frisian, and Ladino—that once were considered doomed to extinction. Globalization has become, in the words of Roland Robertson, “glocalization,” a mixture of the global and the local (for further discussion, see Schreiter 1997).

It is this “both-and” attitude that is most characteristic of the new cosmopolitanism. Ways need to be found to incorporate the plurality we experience into our decision-making, our policies, and our ways of life. Taking an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, attitude is a major way of doing this.

**Conclusion: A Second Modernity**

What I have tried to outline in the last installment (May 2007) and this one is how terms like postmodernity and multiculturalism have become less useful, especially for any analysis of the world we live in today. They both pointed to important dimensions of contemporary experience: a sense of pluralization, of fragmentation, and of irreducible difference. Both terms did describe for a time these aspects of our existence. But we can now see they were best suited to a relatively stable set of social conditions. One can revel in plurality and fragmentation
when one feels secure that the larger world will hold together without any great effort on our part. One can celebrate cultural diversity when encounter with those cultures is a choice or an exotic excursion to an ethnic restaurant. But the instability of the last years has shown that these concepts are not resilient when put to the test. People quickly seek a new whole when they cannot presume that the erstwhile arrangements are going to stay in place. The rhetoric of multiculturalism has collapsed under social stress in a number of countries today. People need some sense of the whole in order to know how to navigate a crowded and confused world. In the words of Reginal Bibby, they need frameworks for moral and social judgments.

I examined briefly four such quests for the whole that mark the current landscape of our world. Fundamentalism, romanticism, universalism, and splitting present a series of options for such quests for the whole. Each has certain advantages, but often also glaring disadvantages that do not address the complexities of our time.

Because of those shortcomings, I suggested a look at a new viewing of modernity that is increasingly being called a second or new modernity. It is marked first of all by a reflexivity that has tried to learn from the shortcomings of high modernity with its sometimes overweening self-confidence, its unexamined belief in innovation and progress, and its tendency to believe in the efficacy of its utopian social engineering. Second, it is aware that boundaries that had provided relatively stable identities and becoming more porous and are being redrawn. Some boundaries that we thought would protect us are disappearing altogether and creating new senses of risk. Third, as a result of these shifting, porous, and disappearing boundaries, older concepts of purity are being replaced by a sense of mixing and hybridity. Where once multiracial identity was seen as debilitating (especially by Europeans), such hybridity today means resilience and capacity to survive and even flourish in pluralistic and difficult circumstances. The capacity to see the positive dimensions in such mixing creates also the possibility of a new convivência, a capacity for an engaged living together amidst, and indeed with, people and identities that are quite different. Fourth, these aspects of reflexivity, shifting boundaries, and hybridity call forth a new cosmopolitan view of the world that tries to encompass and interconnect the various dimensions of this complex world. This view recognizes that, if left to itself, a pluralized, complex world will seek the whole in ways that might become pathological and detrimental to the well-being of society. It realizes that decisions will
have to be made, that moral and social judgments cannot be suspended or postponed indefinitely.

Let me conclude by returning to the four major features that have been creating instability in the world and looking at them briefly through the lens of a second modernity.

• **Globalization.** The interconnectedness of communication and the global flows that such communication creates will continue to be with us, barring a political cataclysm that pulls countries back, fortress-like, behind high walls. But a second modernity realizes that there is no “invisible hand” guiding globalization and making it socially responsive. More and more in the coming years, multilateral ways will have to be found to see that globalization does not collapse under its own excesses. While not an example of the second modernity I develop here, one case in point is the work of a group of economists known as the Copenhagen Consensus, which has examined some of the major problems of globalization and what can be done about them economically (see Lomborg). Recent concern about Africa among some of the developed countries is another heartening example.

• **Migration.** Migration is likely to continue as long as there is economic inequity and political instability in the world. It is creating multicultural societies that will have to find more explicit ways of negotiating difference, of promoting cultural interaction, and of continuing to seek what will bind all of this together in some kind of a whole. The crisis now surfacing in a number of European countries (and also in Australia) is indicative of this need. A second modernity realizes that the question is not whether we will be multicultural; it is, rather, how we will be multicultural. Here new patterns of engagement and a logic of “both-and” will likely be part of the response.

• **Resurgence of Religion.** The resurgence of religion has called into question secularization as the sole paradigm for dealing with diversity or at least is prompting a critical review. That religion is resurgent at a time of instability is itself evidence of one of the quests of searching for the whole—either as fundamentalism or in revival movements. Simply to try to re-privatize religion is not an option. The question is rather how to encourage the positive dimensions of religion for the sake of a second modernity and how to curb those totalizing tendencies that threaten the well-being of others. I will be returning to this in the final installment.

• **Global Terrorism.** Global terrorism is not likely to go away anytime soon. Large groups of unemployed, disaffected males will provide a steady demographic stream into its ranks for at least the next thirty years. Reducing the conditions that feed and sustain the turn to terrorism—poverty, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness—will reduce its attractiveness. The “both-and” thinking of a
second modernity is likely to provide better intermediate resolutions than ever
greater disjunctive policies and discriminating practices against certain popula-
tions.

The prospect of a second modernity is only now being sketched out. But it
seems likely to provide some direction in dealing with the complexity and the
instability of the world as we are experiencing it. The question now comes: How
do we as Christian believers direct the resources of our faith to this kind of world?
That will be the subject of the final article in this series.

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