**An Ecumene in Saipan**

I was ordained clergy with the United Methodist Church (“United” got added at the General Conference 1968 in Dallas, Texas where I ushered) for thirty years, though only five of that spent attending to a local Church and parish, the last one being the English language worship service of the Immanuel KMC that related to a UMC conference in the Hawaii District and the Annual Conference of Southern California.

Most of my ordained life was spent with an ecumenical group that promoted and demonstrated human development in villages and communities around the world regardless of their religious affiliation. We had Hindus in India’s Maharashtra by the Deccan plateau; we lived with the non-reserved locals called *Metis,* the mixed blood whose parents cohabited with European trappers in North America; and doffed the “salaam” with the Muslims in Malaysia.

My ordination was hardly noticeable other than the methodical way of my expenditure in the various assignments I took, but that came more as a choice rather than with the profession.

After three years in Saipan as a Methodist cleric way out of episcopal supervision, the local congregation’s support was evidently untenable; the congregation was one of the small 60% of the denomination that depended on the support of the 40% larger ones. My predecessor also institutionally separated from the graciousness of the Korean host, a product of arrogance, I decided to a strained self-support structure that ignored authentic faith and practice.

Disregard the previous paragraph. It was not material, more like whining than anything else. For those who grew up under the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Jewish affirmation that the Way Life Is (YHWH) is the way life is, is deep, and regardless of how Saipan’s IUMC came, not unlike the countless stories in the Old Testament, life as it is given can be lived.

The New Testament added the caveat, witnessed to by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who we labeled with the title of the Jewish Messiah and Greek Christ, that life is nothing but expenditure. Our lives are not for saving as it was for spending, spent to the last drop even when it leads to a Cross! So I led the United Methodists in that direction.

The above messages from the Old and the New Testaments when taken at what they say rather than as object of adulation and idolatry, grab the *angst* of any existential creature of the 20th century. In the “Lord and Master” metaphor of the Medieval Ages conveniently adulated one for accomplishments, or blame another for failures but in the process, we lose Moses to Hollywood’s Cecil de Mille and Charlton Heston, and Jesus to the cute angels of the heavenly realm in the chapel.

NASA’s probes of outer space accidentally provided us with an authentic icon for our time, the earthrise, and instead of quibbling whether my description of deity in the sky was more sovereign or accurate than anyone else’s, we looked at the Earth and the creatures in it, and guess who we end up looking at? You and I, humanity, and the planet Earth.

The Greeks called the inhabited world, *Ecumene,* appropriated by the Christian Church as the area of one’s discipleship and expenditure. My colleagues of the Interior Mythos Journeys group focus on the experience with and against the Ultimate Reality, no longer upward looking but directed to the edges of the extremes of human experiences. Still, Ultimate Reality could not shake shades of the God-talk, and the illusion the later held remained the same.

My responsibility is to accept the given-ness of my existence, and heeding statistical probability, I decided that 86 years of existence was my due. My genetics favors longevity but the lungs got terribly nicotine-clouded a while back so I chopped a decade off my life expectancy, and buckled down to being solely responsible for the time I chose, alive till 2031. Shortness or longevity of probability is *c’est la vie,* and having appropriated *j’aime la vie* as my *nom-de-plume,* I am on to rock-and-roll with the pen.

The temporality of the finite is all I’ve got. It is my assigned responsibility, the arena of my ecumenicity. I would not mind the company of the Mythos group when it looks this way.

It was fun writing for the dailies, the *Saipan Tribune,* and the *Marianas Variety.* I quit writing for both in August thinking that being a teacher at one of the private schools was going to be time consuming. I thought only of teaching students, be a productive part of a school, and contribute to the evolution of pedagogy.

Ligaments and cartilages in the joints started to freeze fingers; the leg calves cramped badly and the spondylosis of the cervical vertebrae bothered again. I quit elementary school end of September.

I still guide NMC students to learn their English, start their classes with repeating: “This is the day we have. We can live this day, or throw it away. This is the day we have.”

Living on earth is a choice. I’m back to being a Saipan ecumene.

**Reflections**

John and Lynda Cock, US volunteers, brought their family to Indonesia and other countries to help catalyze human development among willing local villages and communities.  We first hailed each other as we often crossed paths in Chicago in the 70s.

Since 2004, they have sent out a daily blog called *Journey Reflection—*a few minutes reflection with an image, a noted person’s quote, and dialogue between “Journer” and guru “Nez”—adding up to 3.8 million reads in some 200 countries and territories since 2004.

Once in a while, when I send feedback, or an article about to be published in one of our Saipan dailies, they quote a part of our musing.  So a symbiosis has developed. Their reflections I support, especially their earthrise. Important to me is the word “earthrise” itself that I chose as the title of my column five days a week in the *Marianas Variety.*

My image of “reflections” is curved arrows pointing back to where they originated. Pictorially, a mirror image is a powerful picture of a reflected figure, though of course, the quality of the mirror affects the quality of the image.

Image is a key. It is a holding category of our experience, internal response, objective discourse, and decided deed. Reflection happens on each and on all before the deed.

The sudden change of image in the last US Presidential election is a good example. AOL and Google, aided by Safari, get Internet allowed by WiFi from IT&E. Since I write for the *Marianas Variety,* the paper provides me local and regional news, but the national and international events are carried by whatever AOL and Google offers since the AP services that feeds into my paper tends to get stale by the time it finds ink.

Anyway, the image projected was a stable Hillary about to break into the misogynist character of the American people. Now, I had not encountered the word “misogynist” since College but during this election, my friends pointed it out as one reason Hillary might not make it. TG, the competition was acting like a buffoon, they averred. That’s the other image – The Donald unable to control his twitting and his tongue, alienating the women and the people of color. But he sure had the angry and frustrated “low income white American male” eating off his hands.

The media, it appears, wanted to keep the reporting “balanced” without appearing to favor one side against the other. After all, media collectively does not have an independent mind other than what it discerns to be the will of the masses. Or, so we thought. The Hillary-Trump election fest suggested something different, indigenously American media, lively and rambunctious.

Media had its own agenda. All throughout the campaign, Hillary was projected as a virtue-less “criminal” capable of deeds to forward a singular political interest. Trump on the other hand might have been an Albino buffoon but he reflected the mind of a “silent majority” whose interests, it is said, has been stepped and stumped on since the War in Vietnam and Civil Rights movement. The voting reflected such division.

Seven revolutions simultaneously occurred since the 60s by my count: women, youth, Third World, international business, education, minorities, and local communities. If MLK got the Civil Rights focused early on, some of us wanted to educate the Third World not to grovel under the First World’s table for scraps and droppings, the youth took placards and stones to further their cause particularly in the Universities, local village and community participation in decision making in Town Meetings and Community Forum, “women’s rights as human rights” was Hillary’s forte, and Trump represented a Wall Street version of international business.

In the midst of all these came the assault of our image of home. Heretofore, heaven provided the escape from the vicissitudes of common existence, and the enlightened religious groups tried to reform their structures to embody the change that needed to happen, but the earthrise consciousness pulled us out of looking skyward on divine benevolence, and looked earthward for the creativity and innovation of humans.

Sheer expenditure out of unadulterated freedom came strong. It does not make humans any more special than they already are, “winner and free” from conception.

Obviously, reflections do not come on measured steps one-to-four. It often happens in a flash without the neat categories of how images are formed, or the nature of the seven revolutions.

In one of the Cock’s *Journey Reflections,* they located a photo of the Earth papered by the symbols of nations on one side, and a NASA picture taken from one of the Apollo missions, both held up by human hands with the national identities as what people “think” the Earth is, and the NASA photo as what the Earth “really” is. They said to me in one graphic what I might write a whole book for, were I to portray the same message.

In our time, to be human is to reflect on being the earthrise! I chose to be earthbound. That’s all.

**Interior MYTHOS Journeys (IMJ)**

Michael May and his crew have created a website ([www.interiormythos.com](http://www.interiormythos.com)) and the IMJ that promotes images of images, from the serious mythos flying around every culture, most in the tradition of Zeus of Olympus, transcendent more than immanent.

Something happened in 1968 when one of the Apollo missions shot a photo of an image of the Earth rising over the lunarscape, and an earthrise consciousness was born. Well, it had always been there in human imagination but this time, a physical turn occurred where the looking was no longer directed skyward, where the metaphor of Zeus, Deux, Dios prevailed, but earthward, replaced by the flesh-and-blood reality of the humans, Gaia reborn into the 20th century.

While the image of the earthrise, according to guru Joseph Campbell, provided the new mythological icon of our time, the appreciation of previous mythos has been on-going and had not actually left the metaphor of the English language though it used the imagery of bygone days when Lords pranced over their ladies, and Masters ruled over their slaves.

YHWH that is the Torah’s word for living life “the Way Life Is”, had a long history of correspondence with the Ra of Egypt that established patterns with the flooding of the Nile, which then birthed the worship of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, and justified the claim of Pharaoh that he was first and there is no equal. YHWH remained the “IS-ness of reality” in the same way Allah is the “no-thing that cannot be idolized” but nevertheless, was the inevitable reality that humans have to live with, enshrined in well decorated mosques. *Salaam* kept in common.

I joined the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago in 1972 that I met earlier on a snowy February 1967 on the Westside in a geography the group delineated as Fifth City, a play on the four sociological make-up of the Metropolis as consisting of the Inner City, the Center, the Suburban, and the Exurban. The fifth city cut across all four, appropriating their gifts and limiting their contradictions. Michael May cut his teeth working with the group and when it dissipated, started his Indiana-based IMJ operations with other colleagues that has since decided to take the digitized technology of the website as its presentation medium. The graphics are lively.

It also quotes Joseph Campbell’s conviction that One Mystery cannot be expressed in words of thoughts and is beyond human concepts of time and space, but nevertheless, its contemplation connects us individually and collectively. The encounter is of utmost value because one encounters the Mystery of the Ultimate Reality.

Ultimate Reality rather than the nature of temporality and finitude is its focus, and though the website exploration fits our method of earth-looking rather than sky-gazing, exploits the human creation of MYTHOS, it is nevertheless, too close to the transcendent God-talk of a previous era to give comfort to the earthrise that affirms and grounds the wisdom that “there is no one else coming.”

Myth is the discourse, used to reflect the interior journeys that keeps the discourse on concrete subjects of human and cultural reflections, and in that, we are colleagues on a similar journey. It is the focus that differs. Methodologically, we go in the sequence of objective sense, impressionistic feelings, reflective thoughts, and decisional deeds.

I ran the classic four terms, God-Christ-Spirit-Church in an October series in this paper. However, the articles were more of a “farewell” to a previous orientation than a “welcome” to a new one. Not unlike the IMJ group, articulating the new reality does not come easy as our metaphors are indelibly linked to that of a previous era when “deity and divine” were still up in the sky, and the profound reality of humanness was scorned, muddied in the earth’s surface.

Still, the IMJ group’s depth study modules follow the four categories of our familiar. It takes religious of the up-against-ness called G-O-D, the permission giving reality in the midst of life, the Christ, the lifestyle of freedom called the Holy Spirit, and the gathered people who embody a sociological understanding, the Church.

What is Reality? What is the Inner Journey? How do I live in Flow? How do I serve? The IMJ do not simply build on the wisdom of Judeo-Christianity, it also takes on the meditative and contemplative ways of Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism and Islam.

The curriculum of IMJ articulates and explores contemporary mythic language in the life-lived-in-depth context of the 21st century, the global, quantum scientific and universal reality in which we live. It delivers the possibility of “authentic life” for those who chose to spin the myth congruent to reality.

We might part ways at this fork. I no longer dabble in the Ultimate Reality of the universe, though the depth intensity of experience may push us further than what we are used to. I grew up with the speculative. I now retail simply in the realm of the temporal and finite.