

On Binding and Loosening

Once in a blue moon you come across an article or book that impacts your life and opens undreamt of avenues of exploration. Such was my good fortune late last winter when a friend, based on his positive experience of an earlier book by Charles Taylor, recommended his *A Secular Age* newly published in October 2007. I read this formidable tome through on one pass with barely a clue as to the author's identity knowing full well that it would demand a second and perhaps a third read despite being over eight hundred pages long. Rarely you come across a treasure like this, but when you do, you don't want to rush through it like any other book. In fact, when I was halfway through the first read I wished it would extend another eight hundred pages, that's how good I found it. Thus Taylor's hefty book set me on the path of writing this article: not a reflection on his thought but a modest way of exploring some of the ways it impacted me. Also, *A Secular Age* served both to recapitulate and give voice to several books I had read in recent years along with past and current projects. Later on I single out one book in particular which has some bearing upon a key thesis of Taylor which he calls disenchantment. All in all, they point to a familiar though little explored phenomenon I term "binding" which is representative of the ways we're captivated by an idea that comes upon us without hardly noticing it. This is especially true pertaining to religion: it has a way of binding us like nothing else. Actually, religion is supposed to "enchant" us, but this is far from the experience of most folks. Second comes politics which gives validity to the popular saying that religion and politics can't mix...a double-bind if there ever was one. After describing the nature of what it means to be bound I offer an antidote which I call "loosening" and the freedom resulting from it. The source of this freedom turns out to be quite unexpected, for all along it has been right under our noses.

Along with the high praise for Taylor's book allow me to situate it within the current context. In February 2008 I began a long-term project I began which consists in a study of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, an important source for Stoic philosophy. More specifically this project consists of inserting key Greek words (the language in which he wrote while on campaign in Germany) as well as cross references of these terms. The aim is to give a clearer picture of how he uses them within the same text. Admittedly a tedious affair for a small work which today we'd call a pamphlet, yet as I progress (as of now I'm about two-thirds through) I see great value in this project, of coming to know in an intimate fashion the way Marcus thinks. More broadly speaking, I use the *Meditations* as an entry into Stoicism proper and how it impacted Christianity. This ancient school of philosophy is scattered compared with Plato and Aristotle whose teachings can be traced directly to the authors despite various schools which developed later. It was about halfway through writing this article that I came across an Internet posting which said that the *Meditations* is the most popular book in China. Reason? A high-paced lifestyle has taken root there, a new phenomenon, and people are searching for ways to cope with the tension. If that holds true, then Stoicism is entering one of the world's most highly populated countries and stands a good chance of affecting society. If the Catholic Church were

wise, she'd recognize this fact and reflect upon historical precedents or when Christianity came into contact with Stoicism and borrowed elements from it.

I have another study project of a much longer duration deals, namely, Gregory of Nyssa, who drew heavily upon Plato and Aristotle, not to mention Stoic sources. While I pursued the first two in some depth, somehow I had neglected the third. Gradually the sense grew indirectly that I was missing something important. Thus I got the idea that it would be exciting to read key Stoic sources starting late, that is, with Marcus Aurelius. Not only would his *Meditations* be worthy of study unto itself, it would be a take-off point for other texts, but that task lies in the future. The most logical place to go next would be the Greek slave Epiktetus who lived under Nero whose *Discourses* influenced Marcus Aurelius. As for Stoicism in general, Taylor makes frequent mention of its revival as neo-Stoicism in the seventeenth century which was concerned with the conception of natural order. People of that time borrowed from Stoicism in an attempt to re-introduce enchantment into their lives. I might also add that Pierre Hadot gives a fine treatment of the *Meditations* in his two books: *What is Ancient Philosophy?* and *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

Wonderful as all this may be, the most immediate inspiration which motivated me to jot down these thoughts was an excerpt from one of Cardinal Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* which I came across more or less by accident. Here is a sample:

"But there are others who look just the same to the world, who in their hearts are very different; they make no great show, they go on in the same quiet ordinary way as the others, but really they are training to be saints in Heaven. They do all they can to change themselves, to become like God, to obey God, to discipline themselves, to renounce the world; but they do it in secret, both because God tells them so to do, and because they do not like it to be known. Moreover, there are a number of others between these two with more or less of worldliness and more or less of faith. Yet they all look about the same, to common eyes, because true religion is a hidden life in the heart; and though it cannot exist without deeds, yet these are for the most part secret deeds, secret charities, secret prayers, secret self-denials, secret struggles, secret victories."

Newman gets right to the point about genuine sanctity, and his words tend to linger long after I've heard them. Furthermore, he wrote in the nineteenth century, a time when many elements of secularity (as well as new interest in Stoicism) as we know it took root. Despite the brevity of my exposure to Newman I found a sympathy with Taylor whose book brought into focus a desire to relate the divine with human experience. We're familiar with the word "divine" and have ideas about it, yet little do we identify it with that which is completely unknowable. This is the realm of what many call contemplative prayer. The value of the Newman quote is not so much a definition of contemplative prayer but the attitude of one so governed by it. Newman wrote when all the elements of secularity as we know it today were coalescing into a unified force, so he ties in well with Taylor's examination of the influences that brought contemplative

prayer in conflict with secularism. Although he doesn't put it in precisely these terms, you get an intimation of this towards the end of his book when he mentions prominent, modern Catholic authors. It's especially clear with his critique of the Reformation despite pointing out some of the benefits derived from it. When I read Taylor's book both the first and second time, I sensed that if he were to speak more openly of his contemplative bent, he would be criticized roundly. At the same time, from the corner of your eye you pick up the insight that many of the crises Western Civilization had undergone (notably with regard to the loss of the sacred) resulted through a lack of appreciation for the contemplative dimension of life. This indefinable yet real perception lends a certain immaturity to even what the best and brightest of the past several centuries have offered. You don't here this broadcasted, but concerning the same topic Taylor throws out hints here and there which are based on solid Christian (Catholic authors).

So what do I mean by the phrase, "contemplative dimension of life?" Admittedly it's vague, a catch-all for what is not immediately known by our senses and intellect. This vagueness stems from the fact that nowadays traditional receptacles of spirituality (churches, etc) have lost many of their adherents while at the same time thirst for spirituality is on the rise. Those who manage to cultivate a spiritual life do so either in isolation...in a hidden fashion...with occasional access to small groups for support. At the same time the Catholic Church is undergoing a return to conservatism in some quarters where emphasis is put upon right teaching, a movement which can obscure her contemplative tradition. As for Taylor, he says that before the year 1500 talk about unbelief was virtually non-existent whereas today it's part of our social fabric. Within such an environment people could refer to this transcendent feature of life more easily despite being relatively tiny, and even those who didn't subscribe to it knew what was being talked about. Only later when the Reformation's ideas took hold that basic principles of Christianity morphed into a general, deist-type religion which easily gave rise to secularity. Of this Taylor says:

"Our discussion of the modern cosmic imaginary has helped us to understand this further. At our starting point in 1500, the enchanted world, in which nature and social life were interwoven with higher times, left little room for unbelief. Theologians distinguished between the natural and the supernatural level, but it was not possible to live experientially with one's awareness confined to the first. Spirits, forces, powers, higher times were always obtruding. With the disenchantment of the world, and the marginalization of higher times, this kind of extrusion of the higher became in principle possible. But it was held off by the sense that the inspiration, strength and discipline we needed to re-order this world as disenchanted and moral came to us from God. It came as grace in individual lives, and it came as divinely ordained disciplines and structures in public life. And central to both individual morality and public order was a sense of a cosmic disposition of things which was providentially established by God for our good....So the immediate encounter with spirits and forces gives way, but this opens space for that much more powerful a sense of God's ordering will." (p. 375)

Later on Taylor calls this transition an "accomplishment," an unexpected term, but justified because the transition was unprecedented in human history regardless which side you favor. So many practices and tenets of spirituality the Catholic Church holds out for imitation stem from around that time period and lasted pretty much until the years prior to the Second Vatican Council. Such patterns seemed well entrenched until about forty years ago but suddenly have become outmoded despite the rise of conservatism which tends to favor the post 1500 models and foster devotional practices. At the same time contemplative prayer is held in suspicion, even as a threat. Perhaps this tenacity to devotional practices arises from a desire to hold onto what the Catholic Church lost in the post-Reformation centuries or more broadly, from a desire to retain the older world view, and that world view was signified by an ordered, hierarchical cosmos. Anyway, this period differs substantially from the first several centuries of Christianity (and later, the Middle Ages) by reason of its close affiliation with Hellenistic philosophy set within the culture of the Greco-Roman world. Furthermore, that world was permeated thoroughly by a cosmos, similarly hierarchical, though quite different from the ecclesiastical one by reason of the close affiliation of religion with philosophy...and philosophy was virtually indistinguishable from theology.

I have a certain nostalgia for that time, brief as it may have been when you consider the history of Christianity, and see value in it as a pattern we might use today. I get an indirect sense of this in *A Secular Age*, especially when Taylor discusses the transition from a cosmos a universe, a fact to which he refers often throughout the book. The former was based on transcendent realities which manifested themselves in ordered fashion, whereas the latter presents us with a flat, infinite view of space and time. Yet having made the transition, it's impossible to go back; not that a return is desirable, but some elements of the cosmos-based world view may be rehabilitated. Certainly the longing is alive today, but how to do it is another matter. Immediately there comes to mind study of classical authors. That's part of the solution, but how to interpret them correctly is another matter. One feature of kosmos (from now on I'll use the letter "k," closer to the ancient Greek meaning and further removed from the "c" of "cosmological" in the modern sense) lies in the basic meaning of the word, a decoration with regards to a woman's hair but more widely taken as an ordered, harmonious whole. Within this context kosmos is a closed system consistent with the Greek abhorrence for infinity which to us seems alien. However, it has positive ramifications for our modern world as we'll see shortly. Kosmos is equivalent with beauty (to kalon) or at least the manifested order of it, something which tends to be absent from how we perceive the concept of hierarchy. Most people are familiar with this term and equate it with the ecclesiastical variety which is unfortunate. While the Greek notion of kosmos may have aesthetic appeal as when viewing the night sky, we've come to know better because now our perceptions are based upon modern science: what we see up there is infinitely large and our place in it is infinitely insignificant. Certainly the universe has no place for a "personal God" who authored this kosmos as Christian tradition claims. At the same time we have a nostalgia for a world view along the lines of a kosmos, even though it is a closed system, and find it difficult to dismiss regardless of the evidence. Something more

than nostalgia for a lost world is at stake, well worth exploring why this is so, and one key entry into this lost world is through fictive devices as I point out below. From the literature I've read—and that pertains to a wide variety pertaining to our insatiable quest for transcendence—there seems to be recognition of this fact, but whether or not it has validity or a figment of our imagination is another question. Even positions hostile towards transcendence acknowledge it but dismiss this quest as something biologically innate or created within a social milieu. Despite some very good contemporary books on the subject, most of my attention has focused upon literature on the matter from the beginnings of Western Civilization up to or around the fourth century AD. A personal preference, maybe, but testing this preference in light of even outstanding literature of later centuries somehow confines me to that early time frame.

One central insight has been sticking out lately which ties into the theme of this essay because it's a kind of umbrella term. That term is Plato's concept of *eidos* which has a rather confusing, dual meaning as both form and idea. *Eidos* connotes that which is seen (its verbal root applies to seeing) and appears to be that which catches one's eye at a single glance, quite different from a concrete form however ethereal it might be. The attention required for this gesture is immediate and start off with a given corporeal form (in the sense of *morphe*) but goes beyond this to an intuition where all the things approached logically are slammed together into one comprehensive insight. Often such an insight is close to impossible to transmit. Plato was able to do this, but his disciples quickly dogmatized the process which made it difficult for later generations to appreciate his original insight. On top of it we have the problem of translation which loses the subtlety of the original Greek. And so this all-at-once seeing seems to rest upon a series of mis-perceptions lasting up to the present day. If Plato had used the term *morphe*, more specifically for what we designate as a concrete shape, things would have been different. However, his use of *eidos* seems intended to steer clear of that error. We get insight into *eidos* from *Theaetetus* (204a):

-Let the complex be a single form (idea: same as *eidos*) resulting from the combination of the several elements when they fit together; and let this hold both of language and of things in general. -Yes, certainly. -Then it must have no parts (*mere*). -Why is that, now? -Because when a thing has parts, the whole (to *holon*) is necessarily (*ek*, from) all the parts. Or do you mean by "the whole" also a single form (*eidos*) arising out of the parts, yet different from all the parts? -I do.

So *eidos* appears to be something neither applicable to form commonly understood (*morphe*) nor idea in the intellectual sense, the one with which we're most familiar. Thereby it avoids the incorrect perception that *eidos* exists "somewhere out there" which is pretty much what a lot of people think about Plato's philosophy. Later centuries applied this misunderstanding to Christianity which, in turn, led to a distortion of the Gospel depiction of God the Father as being physically in heaven above, far removed from human affairs. Nevertheless, an understanding of

eidos as just presented admittedly is hard to nail down and puts our desire for objective confirmation of a given reality in a somewhat ambiguous situation which necessarily isn't a bad thing. It gives a sense of adventure, that we have the potential of missing the mark, yet somehow remain confident that we will hit home...a modern voyage modeled after that of Ulysses.

Sometimes when you have a constellation of ideas...more than ideas in the usual sense, so let's apply the word eidos...they require a period of time to incubate. This time isn't up to you but up to them as testified by many people sensitive to them. They seem to have an existence independent of ourselves which means they don't exist "out there" according to popular perception. Getting attuned to them is the key which necessitates carrying and nourishing them not unlike an unborn child. It requires openness to the possibility that such a world exists...not as in make-believe but adapting oneself to a reality characterized by order and harmony always waiting to break in upon our limited experience. I could say that Taylor's book was such a reality. It played an important role insofar as it acted as both a release and channel to direct an eidos constellation of what I've been dealing with for some years. One such release took the shape of some insights I wished to make more explicit, namely, a theory of fiction developed by Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933) in a book with the intriguing title *As If* (In the spring of 2007 I had done a brief study now posted on this website and included some passage at the end of that essay). As I had noted there, many of us employ the two tiny words "as if" on a frequent basis in order to express a wistful longing. Actually, it's deeper than wistful even though we make articulate our longing in this fashion. At the same time rarely do we reflect on the value of the process at hand because we're so enthralled with what we're doing. It is a longing based upon here-and-now concrete experiences which we take up and automatically (we could almost say magically) transfer to a fanciful situation. As Vaihinger demonstrates, the small particles "as if" have the capacity to bridge the world of experience and fiction: we keep our feet planted firmly on the ground while at the same time soar not so much into flights of fancy as into worlds of possibilities with direct bearing upon our current situation. The two worlds are not confused; each retains its inherent dignity yet interact for a given period of time to satisfy our inner craving for beauty and order.

Vaihinger defines a fiction as something we fabricate with a consciously false intent. The intent is not so much to deceive ourselves nor others but to open possibilities...one could say worlds of experience...which hitherto had remained sealed off from us. At the same time this world of "as if" is circumscribed, a kind of kosmos, with its own proper order and is the product of our imagination, our image-making machine. A myth differs from a fiction when it starts off in similar fashion but employs a fiction to explain things, for example, the origin of the world. Therefore it is characterized by stability...and serves to stabilize a society...whereas a fiction changes things and is not conducive for building a world order. Once it exhausts its usefulness, we drop it and move on to something else which is a way of respecting that particular approach. Here's a concrete example. A friend of mine loves Hawaii and everything Hawaiian yet has never

been there nor is likely to make the trip. However, he knows much about the culture, history and even a smattering of the language. Often local things and places remind him of Hawaii, and to use his own words, "Every time I see that tall grass under Brian's office I think as if I were in Hawaii." Thus his days are spent in creating conscious fictions which serve to enhance his daily experience. This fellow is fully aware of where he is at the moment, by no means is delusional, and admits that his life would not be as rich if he weren't creating such fictions relative to things Hawaiian.

Vaihinger contrasts the intentionally fictive "as if" with hypothesis and dogma. A hypothesis is provisional and has a certain tension until it's resolved. Thus our minds remain satisfied but tentatively so. We await resolution of this unease which not only affects our inquiry but our whole mode of life. Then we have dogma (in Greek it means both glory and opinion) which is the ultimate goal of our inquiry though we may not be conscious of the fact. We dislike be in an unsettled state, mentally and otherwise, so make a hypothesis into a dogma, an illegitimate enterprise. Let's return to that fellow who is interested in Hawaii. If he claimed that his environment actually was Hawaii instead of "as if" it were Hawaii, not central New England, we'd consider him delusional. If he gathered followers who went around saying that their environment were in truth Hawaii and acted thus, then he has passed into the realm of dogma (let alone being disconnected with reality). He and everyone around him must accept that central New England is Hawaii and not question the fact. At the heart of this is a desire to maintain mental equilibrium, even to the detriment of the truth. Here is where a fiction, made to enhance our lives and reveal unknown options, skips over the unease of a hypothesis and into the security of a dogma. Though Taylor's *A Secular Age* doesn't touch upon this directly, the formidable evidence presented there which led from enchantment to disenchantment paves much of the way to today's dogmatized world.

A dogma represents our adherence to an idea that has captivated us. Usually this applies to both the religious and political areas, two areas which generate the most controversy. However, it applies to any ideology with special appeal to images which captivate us so much they sweep us off our feet. The best way to verify this is by being attentive to what's going on within yourself when you hit upon something that entralls you. It comes in an instant, before you're aware of it, so you have to be very careful here. We go from a relatively normal existence to one which can be described only as a binding to that which has captivated us. One's entire being—thoughts, emotions and soul—is not only caught up but satisfied to a degree rare to find in other situations. In other words, we experience an inner unity akin to some kind of mystical union. One could never get this excited over a fictive device or hypothesis, only a dogma, which satisfied a need for mental equilibrium. Immediately there follows a desire to share this equilibrium with other persons, even to the extend of forcefully subordinating them to you and your captivating ideal. Actually the person so captivated is identified with this ideal that hardly a distinction can be made. Thus we start off by a personal experience which quickly become a social one. There's plenty of documentation out there about this phenomenon which currently

is making the news with Islamic extremism; however, it is one among many throughout history. A quick note: it might not be accurate to associate this binding with addiction though the two seem to share similarities. The former seems to involve the active participation of free will whereas the latter is more compulsive.

By way of contrast is a lesser known experience we may call a loosening, so unlike binding that it's hard to find adequate words to describe. It's not as well known not only because of the quick pace of modern society and all the ideologies floating around but because human nature has a tendency for addiction and compulsive behavior. I don't mean the familiar kind but lesser known, more subtle forms which compel us to have an exclusive one-on-one connection with the outside world. Those who would participate in this connection must satisfy the condition of becoming as devoted to it as we. If they don't accede, then we force them to comply, for how could anyone be so stupid as not to appreciate a value so obvious to us? This tendency is very common that barely do we reflect upon it. Actually, becoming aware of it at a later point in our lives can be quite embarrassing. We marvel that we have stooped so low. Part of the problem is not being prepared to ward off the attraction that has come upon us so quickly, so this requires closer examination to prevent the binding process. Furthermore, there are few recorded precedents to describe this process, so we're involved in a kind of hit-or-miss project. Because spiritual, mental and emotional binding weaves its web tightly around a person, becoming sensitive to an alternative theoretically sounds attractive but in actuality is a very difficult project. Precisely for this reason the constellation of ideas (eidos) leading to awareness of an alternate reality takes long to percolate. The discovery is so novel that it's akin to discovering a new form of life: like passing into a world first intuited by a fictive device but one based on solid reality. At the same time shedding our dependence upon those earlier binding experiences, not unlike leaving Plato's cave, leaves a hole in our lives: it takes time to fill in the void with something positive. Usually an event beyond our control is required...a kairos event...or an appropriate time which presents itself to fill the void.

This is where Vaihinger's little particles, as-if, can play a role. They have the power of introducing us into a world that can be described only as magical, certainly magical in comparison to our innate disposition for being bound. I've found that Charles Taylor's theme of enchantment ties in with this, a term he used to characterize Western Civilization prior to the Protestant Reformation. Enchantment means that the natural world had a specific place in the kosmos which reflected divine purpose and activity. In this environment society and religion were permeated by spirits, both good and evil, along with human interaction. They were thrown into the mix along with God, of course. Their addition softened the relationship between two opposite spheres and allowed for more fluid types of spirituality. Such activity is broader than what is commonly labeled as paganism; everything was charged with a numinous quality that affected the lives of people. Later when the Reformation told hold society became imbued by a more up-down model: God was in heaven and we on earth with no mediating powers in between...not unlike the sun beating down directly overhead during high noon.

Taylor says that the impulse to create this model was positive: a reaction to a hierarchical system which held religious persons (in religious orders) as following a higher call of the evangelical life. With that class distinction abolished, it was possible for everyone man and woman to pursue the evangelical counsels. Sounds fine on paper, but with time it thwarted the religious aspirations of many folks. In brief, the distinction between “up there” and “down here” was too sharp; familiar, mediating elements—or those which had been enchanting—were abolished even though people had an instinctive grasp of them. This primed the pump for the Enlightenment, deism and modern science, all of which made the distance between God and us more distant...so distant that we lost sight of the divine and finally decided we could do without it quite well. The old familiar sliding-scale model of spirituality went by the wayside instead in favor of a stark up-down model. Gone was a spiritual flexibility where now we had to face the weight of responsibility being “just” in God’s eyes. Here was a triumph for the intellect and defeat for the spirit and imagination. It seems that for their religious life people needed something more than “faith alone.” However, a persistent longing for some type of enchantment would not disappear even when confronted with hard evidence that the kosmos had no need for it. Such is the situation we find ourselves today.

We may attempt to re-establish an enchanted world by having recourse to past models, that is, by applying them to our present circumstances. Some mileage may be gotten by these endeavors but won’t pay off in the long run because chances are high they belong to a past permeated by the idea of a kosmos. Better put, a past where kosmos plays a role but one which hasn’t been updated to suit today’s modern world. Clearly those days are over, for we now inhabit a universe where space and time partake of the monotonous sameness which extend everywhere indefinitely. This universe has no room for a hierarchical structure characteristic of a kosmos. Actually, it’s surprising how much people miss such a structure. You’d never guess it by what you hear, but consider the root of this word: hieros-arche or “holy beginning,” that is, a reality (i.e., the kosmos) which had a beginning ordained according to an order of holiness. To maintain this order requires constant attention to the beginning...the arche...which is difficult to effect in today’s modern society. While some people may shun the difficulty (for them, bordering upon an impossibility), being attentive to such an arche means that simultaneously you become sensitive to the end. That, in turn, applies to the middle ground in which we live at present because you have to pass through it to the end. Both beginning and end hang together, so to speak, and maintaining this balancing act can have a positive influence on us right now. One religious example is the sacraments of the Catholic Church: they are rooted in arche, point to an end or telos, yet are designed to slam the two together in this temporal plane. This is far from a closed system. It may appear such to an observer but is rooted in eternity. Without such a hier-arche the stage is set for a life without meaning which translates as a life without beginning or end, much like science’s view of the universe. If these two points are knocked out, the middle—where we reside—is void of meaning. As for this modern phenomenon of a lack of meaning, Taylor points out that people who inhabited an enchanted world wouldn’t have the slightest clue what it meant. They were too occupied not just with survival but with trying to

relate to God and the spiritual world of angels and demons. Certainly pockets of the old kosmos type religious outlook survive which neither are relics of the past nor recreations of the past. Always they will endure as in the form of monasticism and small communities of spiritual seekers which in the Christian tradition will attempt to remain faithful to Gospel values.

So the question arises, if this insight into enchantment is so great and the goal sought by so many people, why don't we try to establish it on a large scale, one larger than those small groups just mentioned? Or better, why isn't there a collective rush to set up such a hier-arche or a running-off to join a monastery? Why not try setting up a republic after Plato's model? This smacks of evangelical fervor of one who has been "bound" as noted earlier. A cautionary note from the past is called for: in so-called hierarchical societies the entire population never was imbued with a sense of the holy. Even then there were relatively small pockets of people who were able to plumb the mysterious relationship between the sacred and mundane. They may have been larger proportionately but still small on the larger scale. However, the difference between now and then is that at least for kosmos-based societies, the notion of hier-arche permeated society much like leaven. While true, the hidden advantage of a kosmos-less society lies in the fact that those intent on connecting with the enchanted world will be left alone to pursue their dream. Those around them won't have much of a clue as to what's going on. At best, they may misperceive such endeavors as belonging to some New Age movement. And so binding and loosening sounds like a formidable task fraught with all sorts of dangers. True, but this is the arena where we all live our lives, so let's treat it as an adventure, not with dread. Some of that dread stems from the scary fact of waking up to the realization of how "bound" we are when we stop and reflect on it...or how easy we can fall into this trap. Usually the spiritual life involves a lot of do's and don't's which, in turn, are loaded with practices that are a bit too mental. The value of situating our bound and loosened states in terms of a fictive device and the re-establishment of an enchanted world is, in my opinion, more attractive. At the same time phrasing it like this does not preclude the serious effort involved.

In sum, I am appealing to our imaginative faculty. Consider those positive childhood memories which from time to time impinge themselves upon us, creating nostalgia for a lost world. Back then spontaneously we gave birth to one fictive device after another; indeed, they formed our lives. Surely everyone knows this and recalls how we considered the adult world removed from reality compared with our childhood one. If it worked then, why not now, albeit in a mature form? Are fictive devices the exclusive domain of children (and thus are inferior), novelists or Hollywood screen writers? That may be true if we stick with images plain and simple, a notion which seems akin to the popular perception of Platonic "ideas" as independent from reality. Here I speak of a realized phrased as a kosmos which, in turn, is composed of eidoi. As was pointed out, this ordered, decorative realm (the original meaning of kosmos) is closed, not infinite, yet allows for freedom to come up with an infinite number of eidoi which contribute to the substance of a potentially re-enchanted environment. This is a paradox: a closed system which enables one to be open-ended. Like any system, this cosmic one needs to be maintained,

else it will fall apart and become un-enchanted, not unlike what we have today which is mild compared with the un-enchanted world after the Reformation as Taylor had described. To effect this requires a balancing act of the three elements: fictive device, hypothesis and dogma. Although a hypothesis cannot satisfy the equilibrium we require, it is better to have recourse to what makes us come up with fictive devices instead of falling into the uniform sterility of dogma. Of course, the Catholic Church has plenty of dogma. At the same time her spiritual tradition, especially through her mystic writings, enlivens these dogmas which, perhaps, is quite unique, even miraculous, by any standard.

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