

Chapter Nineteen

THE DUAL PARADIGM THEORY

Thursday 27th April

University of Queensland, St Lucia

‘So that’s the solution? The time factor?’ Kevin pushed his plate away and looked at James with a mixture of amusement and admiration. ‘Fancy you working that out - the man who always runs late. But seriously, if you’re right, you’ll have made a big contribution to the world-wide study of religion. I might be in the presence of greatness.’

‘Oh, come off it.’ James waved his roll dismissively. ‘The idea will have to be published in academic journals and tested before we can be sure about anything. I might be completely up the creek.’

‘Huh!’ grunted Kevin sceptically, ‘I wouldn’t put too much trust in those academics. You’ll probably get a roasting from conservative Protestant scholars on the one hand and present day mystics on the other.’

James tossed his head. ‘You’re probably right. The Sikhs combined the best of Islam and Hinduism and were rejected by both.’

Kevin pointed at James. ‘You see? Middle of the road people always upset the extremes on both sides.’ He sat back and folded his arms. ‘Anyway, it’s good to see you looking better. Julie tells me you weren’t so hot early in the week.’

‘What else did my wife tell Julie?’ James narrowed his eyes as he finished the last of his salad roll.

Kevin sported a mischievous smile. 'That you got your big idea while you were off with the pixies.'

James laughed. 'Not very flattering but basically correct. I prefer to think of it as a revelation during a delirious fever.'

Kevin shrugged. 'Same thing. You might've had a mystical experience. I believe that some people have a mystical experience using drugs.'

James shook his head slowly. 'Hard to believe that anyone could have a valid mystical experience that way.'

'Anyway, you had an inspiration just when you needed it.' Kevin pointed at James. 'You were pretty low there for a while.'

'Maybe that was just the wog coming on.'

'Maybe. But you were really down in the dumps – about your quest. Now you've got your confidence and your enthusiasm back.' Kevin frowned as he drummed his fingers on the table. 'Now, about this new theory of yours, I'm sorry. You're so far ahead of us now, I don't think we'll be able to help you any more. I think that you'll have to justify your theory before some panel of experts, like in a thesis defence or a peer review.'

James shook his head. 'I'm not ready for that yet. I still need you all. You can still listen and pick holes in my arguments. That's a great help to me.'

Kevin shrugged. 'OK. If you say so. Let me know when you want another meeting of your support group.'

James leaned over and poked him in the shoulder. 'Thanks.'

'Well.' Kevin took a deep breath. 'I may as well start the ball rolling. Tell me more about this time-less time, if you've got the time.' Kevin grinned at his own joke.

James gave an answering grin and looked at his watch. ‘I have a bit of time.’ Then he raised a finger. ‘But, I’ve started thinking of it as ‘vertical’ time instead of ‘timeless’ time.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Because I need a spatial metaphor that isn’t just a negative opposite and if there’s no past or future then there’s nowhere to go but up. I think that the mystics’ timeless ‘eternity’, their otherworldliness, could be thought of as stretching above us vertically, but always crossing the horizontal linear time line.’ James drew two intersecting lines with his ballpoint pen on an unused serviette.



Kevin examined the diagram for a moment and then said, ‘OK. For the purpose of the exercise let’s use ‘vertical’ time for the mystical world-view. But what about Paul’s idea of being ‘absent from the body and together with the Lord?’ Kevin raised a finger. ‘It may not be the main teaching in the New Testament, but it’s there isn’t it?’

‘Yes but Paul’s idea is an exception – and may actually be the result of a mystical ‘out-of-body’ experience. Remember in II Corinthians, his account of getting caught up into paradise?’ When Kevin nodded James continued. ‘Anyway, linear time is definitely the traditional Hebrew-Christian world-view.’

Kevin put his hand to his mouth as he pondered a line of thought. 'But you say Hebrew-Christian world-view is not absolute, that it is only a partial 'reflection' of reality. If that is true then most of our Christian belief statements are based on an assumption. Wow!' He opened his eyes wide as the significance dawned on him. 'I think I've just undergone a 'paradigm shift'.'

'What's a 'paradigm shift'?'

Kevin was pleased to be able to explain something to James for a change. 'A 'paradigm shift' is what happens when we realise that something we thought was fact is actually an assumption, like 'Japanese products are only cheap imitations.'

'You mean the 'everyone knows' type of saying?' asked James.

'Exactly. 'Everyone knows that Japanese products are only cheap imitations'. Of course now 'everyone knows' that is no longer true. Similarly, 'everyone knows' that time is linear - moving like an arrow from past to future'. But it 'ain't necessarily so'.'

'That's fascinating.' It was James' turn to realise something new. 'So each of these world-view assumptions could be called a paradigm?'

'I suppose so. Why?' Kevin narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

'Oh! I think you've just given me a name for my theory.' James paused annoyingly.

'Well? Go on man. Don't keep me in 'suspenders'.'

James laughed at his deliberate malapropism. 'The Dual Paradigm Theory.'

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Kevin looked at the ceiling and nodded. 'The Dual Paradigm Theory'. I like that.'

James asked rather belatedly, 'So what's your paradigm shift?'

Kevin looked back at James. 'If our linear time is only an assumption, then I realise now that our Christian beliefs are not absolute. There might be equally valid views elsewhere in the world. That's my paradigm shift.'

James nodded slowly. 'Good, but don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Our beliefs still reflect some reality in this world.'

Kevin screwed up his face. 'OK. But if our Christian beliefs are still valid, why bother about the mystical world-view at all?'

James looked hard at Kevin. 'Probably no need at all for most people, as long as they aren't interested in seeing Ultimate Reality from another angle. Are you one of those?'

'Don't be silly.' Kevin laughed. 'Of course not. But I was generally happy with my beliefs from the old angle.'

James had a smirk on his face. 'Are you sure? Do all your beliefs make sense in linear time.'

Kevin frowned. 'Which ones don't you think make sense?'

'OK. You believe that the saints of the Old Testament are saved? How did they come to be saved when they lived before Christ had even come?'

Kevin looked thoughtful. 'I never gave it much thought. What do you say?'

James pointed at Kevin. 'I say, this is only a problem because of the linear-time assumption. If we switch to 'vertical' time, the death of Christ is a time-less event. 'Before the foundation of the world' so to speak, Christ died for people of all times and all places. So the question of what happened to people before the death of Christ is a non-issue.'

'OK. That's a good example.'

'And what happens to our souls between our death and the resurrection of our bodies?'

Kevin waved his hand deprecatingly. 'As you know, I usually ignore those passages at funerals and talk about the soul going straight to heaven.'

James cupped his face in his hand. 'So you don't remember the traditional solution we were taught?'

Kevin remembered. 'Oh! Yes. You mean they stay suspended until the resurrection, when they are reunited with their bodies.'

'That's the one.' James leant forward to make the emphasis. 'Don't you think that's a bit bizarre?'

'It is a bit weird I suppose. Well what's the answer according to your theory?' asked Kevin.

'Each one is right within its own time framework, and you can't mix up the two. You can use one or the other but not both. They are both reflections of a deeper truth.'

'Which is?'

James remembered Mary asking the same question and he was able to give the same answer. 'Maybe that our real essence survives beyond the grave - somehow, some time.'

Kevin smiled at a memory and leaned forward. 'I remember now, I did solve that problem once, in a different way. I had a tricky pastoral situation at a funeral.'

'Go on. What happened?' James listened in eager anticipation. Kevin's stories were always worth hearing.

'I had to do a funeral for one of my congregation but all the close relatives were Seventh Day Adventists.'

'So?'

'Well, as you know, S.D.A's believe solidly in the resurrection of the body in the last days.'

'So?' said James again.

‘So, I was advised by one of the relatives not to mention the soul of the departed going to heaven immediately after death.’

‘Boy! That was a tough one.’

‘It sure was, but I was devious.’

‘You usually are. What did you do?’

‘I started with the promise of the resurrection of the body of my parishioner and then said, ‘when we die we ‘sleep’ until that day so in our own mind it’s just as if we go straight to be with Christ in the last days.’

James applauded quietly. ‘Well done. Did you get away with that?’

‘Not a word of complaint. They even thanked me.’

‘There you are. But, you didn’t actually solve it in a different way. You mightn’t have realised it at the time but you used your own version of timeless ‘vertical’ time to offset their linear time. Brilliant.’

‘I thought it was.’

‘Your brilliance is only exceeded by your modesty.’

‘If you’re going to be insulting, I’ll have to leave. Anyway, you’re late for your lecture again.’

James looked at his watch and jumped to his feet mumbling garbled words of annoyance. ‘See you later and ... thanks.’

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James just had time to take his seat when Dr Jaclyn Sahid entered the room, arriving late herself, fortunately for James. He had forgotten that she was the guest lecturer for the segment on Primal Religions. He knew he would enjoy the next couple of hours. It was apparent by the murmur of approval among the males in the seminar room that they would too, not necessarily for the same reason.

'Dr Rossiter is unable to be here to introduce me today so I will introduce myself.' She glanced quickly around the group, nodding to a few students whom she knew already from her Islam lectures, including James. 'I am Jaclyn Sahid and my specialties include Islam and Primal or Traditional Religions. We don't call them Primitive Religions because that is a disparaging term.' Dr Sahid had abandoned her usual Sari in favour of a smart business suit for the occasion. James thought it was probably more practical than dressing like a shaman or a medicine 'man'.

While the guest lecturer gave a few more personal details on her areas of expertise, James was thinking about the criticism received by scholars of religion who formed theories that left out the third force in world religions - the Primal religions. So he was keen to pick up anything that related in any way to his theory – especially whether the religions of tribal peoples had elements of theism or mysticism. So he listened carefully.

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Dr Sahid began her lecture on Primal religions with colourful stories taken from the religions of peoples like the Australian Aborigines and the American Indians. She spoke of a personalised universe, peopled with ancestors and a whole range of divine beings that are all perceived as being part of the cosmos. 'The cosmos is seen as being full of divine forces,' she said, 'People are not alone in the universe. Interest in ancestors is not altogether foreign to the modern mind, is it? Just think of modern spiritualism with its séances and mediums.'

She was speaking and supporting her statements with illustrations on the overhead projector, 'There is no doubt that there is a belief in personal divinities and ancestors but what type of personal qualities do they have? In the primal religions, the Gods are not particularly friendly to humans and can even be menacing.' James nodded to himself, as he had always believed that this tended to be the case where

nature was the sole source of revelation. The savage side of nature, 'red in tooth and claw', was seen in feeding frenzies and in natural disasters - floods, earthquakes and bush fires.

'Another major difference from other religions,' she continued, 'is in the number of divine beings. Western theism is mainly monotheistic - one God only. In tribal religions on the other hand, there seems to be a multiplicity of divine forces.

'However, if we look deeper we find that there can be an underlying unity. For example, the divine forces are all identified with the cosmos, which in itself is regarded as sacred. An example in the Aboriginal culture is the close kinship with the land. The land does not belong to them; they belong to the land. Therefore the land or the cosmos serve as unifying concepts.'¹

'In the tribal religions of ancient Israel there was a god 'behind' every part of nature - Sun, Sea, Sky, Storm, and the phenomenon was perceived as 'the god' not as sent by the god. That is, there was an identity of the God with its particular part of the cosmos. For example, one tribe regarded the river that wound through their countryside as the Snake God. When they looked at the river they 'saw' the Snake God.' James thought to himself that the only unifying concept here would be nature as a whole.

'Besides these there were or are polytheistic religions in Egypt, Greece and India in which there is a 'high' god. This is a supreme god who is often thought of as remote and inaccessible, like Zeus, with no interest in humankind. However this was too transcendent for most tribal people so the local personal gods were more useful and more accessible, even if lower in the social hierarchy of the gods. On the other hand we have high gods like the 'One Great Spirit' of the North American Indians. This type of god is usually the creator of all and may be more of a unifying force.'

'The great strength of the tribal religions is that they have an awareness of nature as God's place of activity. This side of their religion tends to favour the 'immanence' - the 'God with us' - aspect of the divine which reflects the mystical traditions rather than the theistic traditions.' The lecturer then quoted from *The Little Book of Native American Wisdom*: 'What is needed is the liberation of all things that support life - the air, the waters, the trees - all the things which support the sacred web of life.'²

'The ideas of tribal religions may seem to us to be vague and logically contradictory. This is because they are non-rational, compared with our Western culture, which might emphasise logic, intellectual ideas, and abstract thinking but lacks something of their consciousness of the divine and their sense of awe and wonder.'

Just as James was wondering about the respective emphases placed on theism and mysticism, the lecturer said, 'Even though we have found strong evidence of theistic strands in primal traditions, we also find significant factors which point to the influence of a mystical tradition. One of these is the unifying factors such as the land, nature as a whole or the cosmos. Another is a sense of the immanence of the divine. Last but not least there was the non-rational element so typical of mysticism.'

That only left the time-less aspect which, according to James' understanding, was the most significant attribute of the Mysticism of the Negative Way. So he asked the lecturer if there was any evidence of a time-less view.

She replied, 'Yes, James. Among the Australian Aborigines, the 'Dreamtime' may seem to us to be a backward view to the time of creation but their stories may actually be describing a world outside of time.' James nodded and smiled in satisfaction.

Dr Sahid continued, 'There is also evidence of a cyclical view of time inspired by the cycle of the seasons.' Knowing that James was looking for signs of mysticism, Jaclyn answered his unspoken question. 'The medicine man or shaman may well be the forerunner of the modern mystic. He specialises in mystical trances in which he is said to travel 'to the world of the spirits to learn from its mysteries'. However, there is not much evidence of a 'unitive' type of experience in the descriptions given by the medicine men. There are some signs of that type of experience when they urge the tribe to live in harmony with each other, with the whole created order and with the spirits. Barbara Boal writes, 'The key to understanding Asian tribal world-views is 'relationship': with gods and spirits; with fellow human beings; with nature'.³

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During the half-time break Dr Sahid followed her usual practice of mixing with the students and encouraging questions. After fielding a few questions from other students about the subject matter, Dr Sahid turned to James and said quietly, 'I got your apology for Monday's lecture. Are you feeling better?'

'I'm quite well now thank you.'

She flashed her usual smile. 'That's good. And how is your assignment going?'

'Very well indeed. Actually I've come up with a possible solution, thanks partly to you.' James was suddenly aware of other students around him looking at Jaclyn and himself with puzzled looks on their faces, became self-conscious and dropped his gaze.

Dr Sahid persisted, 'I'd certainly like to hear it. Could you come to my office after the lecture?'

Before he could answer, one of his male friends in the group walked behind him and spoke quietly so only James could hear, 'Way to go James.'

James flushed but replied, 'I'd love to but, unfortunately, I meet with Phillip at four every Thursday.'

'Well, what about tomorrow at ten?' she suggested.

'That'll be fine.' Dr Sahid looked at her watch and resumed her lecture.

James listened and took notes for examination purposes but he heard nothing further of relevance to his assignment. Thinking back over the first part of the lecture, he decided that Primal religions had so many different aspects that it was impossible to find any evidence of a cohesive theology or philosophy. Primitive theism and primitive mysticism existed side by side with no sense of disharmony. He wished he could learn their secret.

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1. Mircea Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen*, Collins 1967, and *The Sacred and the Profane*, Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London.
2. *Op. Cit.*, Compiled by Steven McFadden, Element Books Ltd., Brisbane, Australia, 1994, p. 41.
3. *The Lion Handbook*, *The World's Religions*, Lion Publishing Co., 1982, P. 128-167, 133.