Science, Art, and Religion:
An Anthroposophical Perspective on Post 9/11 Global Healing

This September marks ten years from the events known globally as “9/11”. There are wounds left in human hearts and in the heart of the world from these events. The following article offers an introduction regarding how the artistic sphere is uniquely positioned between science and religion to offer a wellspring of healing potential for these wounds. Attention to this healing is ripe for contemplation as we move forward as a global community.

This article is a revised edition of an academic paper I presented at an international religions congress entitled: World Religions after 9/11- A Global Congress. The conference took place in New Delhi, India in January 2009, days before Obama took office as America’s new President. It consisted of scholars and religious leaders from around the world, mostly from countries with a dominant Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist population. The gathering was conceived and hosted by the Islamic university: Jamia Islamia University. We were honored to receive His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the inaugural speaker at this three-day event, along with his blessing on our collective work. As an American it was especially humbling receive the warmth of Islamic hospitality, together with leaders from vastly differing faiths, to discuss this important theme.

Art as Medicine for the World-Soul:

There are countless ways to view the events of September 11th, 2001. In this article I treat them as a battle between two opposing forces, religious fundamentalism on one side and what I
call “scientific fundamentalism” on the other. I assert the attacks of 9/11 are an expression of conflict between science and religion in their fundamentalist forms, and furthermore that art serves as a harmonizing element between the two.

Scientific fundamentalism is a term I coined for clarifying my argument in this paper. Numerous scholars, including Rudolf Steiner, link the scientific revolution of sixteenth century Europe to the dominance of today’s material-based culture. This material-based culture is often characterized by the rise and proliferation of capitalism. ¹ Thus materialism, capitalism, and science share a common thread. Scientific fundamentalism refers to the ways in which the economic-materialist intentions inherent in capitalist theory overflow into social and humanitarian spheres. Said another way, scientific fundamentalism occurs where economic interests seep out of their rightful sphere² to seek authority in political and/or artistic spheres as well.

The World Trade Center was a government-conceived and government-funded complex of business real estate designed to stimulate lower Manhattan’s financial district in the 1960’s and 70’s. The success of this project in the subsequent decades became linked in collective imagination to the success of Wall Street and American consumerism. The towers themselves became a picture of the tremendous, almost super-human power that capitalist drive can wield. This super-human power points toward a conception of reality at times fanatical with respect to

¹ In his popular and influential book The Reenchantment of Nature Morris Berman discusses the link between the scientific revolution and modern capitalist-materialist culture. See his work for additional academic sources and references.

² In this context “sphere” refers to an anthroposophical term connected with Steiner’s Three-Fold Social Order. The Three Fold Social Order is a model of civilization organized into three distinct but overlapping spheres: Economic, Political and Artistic.
material and economic gain. Thus the World Trade Center can be seen as a kind of living symbol of scientific fundamentalism.

Viewed this way one can perceive the events of September 11th, and the clandestine operations on both sides building up to them, as an intimate clashing between religious fundamentalism on one side and scientific fundamentalism on the other.

One path of healing this schism is through that realm which healthfully unites the two poles, namely the arts. In *The World of the Senses and the World of the Spirit* Steiner describes two opposing “directions of thought” that will move in increasingly disparate directions. Specifically, materialistic thinking will go in one direction while spiritual thinking goes in another (5). I posit the growing discrepancy between these two “directions” is responsible for the birth and development of fundamentalism rising from both religious and material-scientific spheres today.

Steiner goes on to discuss the holistic nature of science, art, and religion when the three disciplines are taken together as a unity. He indicates where science is a path leading to material knowledge religion can likewise be a path leading to spiritual wisdom. Thus science and religion represent two ideological perspectives, one pointing toward spirit, the other toward matter. In between these two exists a third realm, the arts, which refers to the middle ground between spirit and matter, namely to the soul (270).

One might refer to science and religion as two forms of consciousness both present in the larger world-soul. In the event of September 11th one sees a dismembering of this soul, as if it were being pulled apart at both ends. Poetically, one might view these events as two aspects of the world-soul becoming so estranged and discrete they no longer perceive the whole to which
they both belong. Perhaps then a renewed medicine, born from the arts, can help bring them back into more rightful unity. If the soul is a means through which spirit and matter find harmony in the human being, then perhaps art is a form through which science and religion can discover new balance on the earth.

Art is a unique means by which to heal the world-soul. It speaks a language inseparable from the human heart. In the same way a human being cannot exist without a soul to harmonize its spiritual and physical members, it is perhaps also true that world being-hood cannot exist without art to harmonize its scientific and religious members.

Efforts in the religious and economic spheres are important components of post-9/11 healing. Humanity has the opportunity to look as well toward the artistic sphere for new insight regarding the health and transformation of the earth. Art alone is that language through which the “heaven-spirit” and the “spirit of earth” unite to awaken the “heart of the world” within the human heart. In this way the arts offer unique kindling for igniting peace and compassion within the soul of the world. Steiner writes:

In times primordial
The spirit of earth-existence
Approached the spirit of heaven.
Beseechingly he spoke:
I know how to converse
With the human spirit;
Yet I wish to have as well
That language
Through which the heart of the world
Can speak unto the human heart.
Then the kindly heaven-spirit bestowed
Upon the entreaty of earth
The arts.

Bibliography:


