Wisdom for a New Era
Balancing Nature, Science, and Belief

Part Two: 21 Contemporary Dialogues

Benjamin C. Godfrey
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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to each and every human being on Earth who seeks to balance Nature, Science, and Belief as they journey through life

Benjamin C. Godfrey
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PART ONE

WISDOM FOR A NEW ERA
Of Truth

It is a pleasure to stand on the shore, and to see ships tossed upon the Sea;

A pleasure to stand in the window of a castle, and to see a battle and the adventures thereof below;

But no pleasure is comparable to standing upon the vantage ground of truth,

A hill not to be commanded; and where the air is always clear and serene; and to see the errors and wanderings in the mists and tempest in the vale below;

So always that this prospect be with pity and not with swelling or pride

Certainly, it is heaven upon earth to have a man’s mind move in charity, rest in providence and turn upon the poles of truth.

—Lucretius, Roman Poet and Philosopher
Wisdom for a New Era

It is easy to refer to modern society as a new era. Few would doubt that what happened in the field of communication in the early 1950s—the emergence of televisions in the homes of families across the globe—was the rising curtain to the age of instant mass communication. We are now fully immersed in that new era.

With the touch of a button, in seconds a message can be sent around the globe. Information is shared instantly. Such information can be accessed by third parties just as quickly. In fact, as you read this, Internet communication experts are scrambling to either invade or protect such communications.

This book is about the impact of instant communication upon the “unifying mind” of humankind. The instant communication of knowledge is both fabulous and threatening. It already has and will have profound effects upon civilizations all over the world. Our knowledge and understanding of the natural universe through new scientific research, which we now become aware of immediately, outdates yesterday’s information.

On the fun side, people literally enjoy the one-upmanship of being on top of the latest information, not to mention having the latest version of an iPhone, iPad, or whatever. On the downside of the receipt of continuing communications is the absence of time to digest, share, and/or balance the new information against pre-existing beliefs and age-old “pearls of wisdom.” This situation leaves us constantly in the flux of still digesting information while being pressured to make quick value judgments. This may or may not be in our best interests.
The word *wisdom* implies the application of experience and prior knowledge to current situations. Prior to this new era, even as late as the mid-twentieth century, children were raised to show due respect for the elderly because of their age, experience, and knowledge. Wisdom was shared by older people with younger people as part of their practical education, and common sense was a highly valued asset in the preparation of a child for life.

In this new era of communication, there seems to have been a shift from valuing wisdom to valuing the latest information. In short, the patience necessary to acquire wisdom has been eclipsed by the ability to access the latest news, e-mail, Facebook postings, Tweets, et cetera. One of the more obvious examples of this is the growth of online degree programs, which are replacing four-year on-campus programs at colleges and universities. This is, of course, being driven by the rising costs of tuitions, housing, and more. Those of us who attended a university for our bachelor’s or master’s degrees readily testify that one of the great values of attending an on-campus program was the enculturating experience. Granted, a college experience was affordable then, even to students with working-class parents.

*Wisdom for a New Era* is about understanding the processes and values needed to cope with the ever-changing environment in which we are living. The challenges of adapting new information to our value systems without feeling overwhelmed, passed by, or outdated is very real for all of us. This new age is particularly threatening to our belief systems, which are constantly being challenged by a flood of new information. How do we make sure we are not throwing out our babies with the bathwater?

It is for the express purpose of helping my fellow citizens of the world cope in this new era of instant information that I have written *Wisdom for a New Era: Balancing Nature, Science, and Belief*
Inspiration

There are only a few people in your life who truly change your direction. None affected me more than Thurmon Justice, a renowned defense attorney who seldom used notes in the courtroom. He was the city judge at Cocoa Beach, Florida, in 1965 when I arrived there as the new high school band director. Thurmon knew prominent people and was highly regarded by all. One night he took me out to Ramon’s, a local restaurant. As we sat at the bar having a drink, a very well-dressed gentleman happened upon us. He greeted Thurman enthusiastically and was invited to join us. After my courteous introduction to “Kurt,” I listened intently as the two men carried on a lengthy conversation, discussing various topics about the goings-on at “the Cape” and in Washington, DC. When the man went on his way, Thurmon looked at me and said, “You know who that is, don’t you?” I replied, “I don’t have a clue.” He responded, “That’s Kurt Debus, head of NASA!” (Dr. Kurt Debus was director of the NASA John Fitzgerald Kennedy Space Center from July 1962 until November 1974.) I was dumbfounded! On another occasion Thurmon introduced me to Gus Grissom, not long before Gus’s tragic death in the capsule of Apollo I.

Thurmon showed me what a great chess player truly is; it took all I could muster to study the game and beat him once. He also saw something in me of which I had not been aware: a thirst for truth. He took me into his confidence and during the next two years mentored me. Among other exposures, he introduced me to Thomas Paine’s The Age of Reason. Because of my obedient Trinitarian Christian background, I found Paine’s writings
brash, sacrilegious, and treading a thin line between brilliance and arrogance. After all, my King James Version of the Bible had seemed full and sufficient for me. It was difficult for me to read that:

\[
\text{It is only in the Creation that all our ideas} \\
\text{and conceptions of a Word of God can unite.} \\
\text{The Creation speaketh a universal language,} \\
\text{independently of human speech or human language . . .} \\
\text{It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read.} \\
\text{It cannot be forged;} \\
\text{It cannot be counterfeited;} \\
\text{It cannot be lost;} \\
\text{It cannot be altered;} \\
\text{It cannot be suppressed;} \\
\text{It does not depend upon the will of man whether it} \\
\text{shall be published or not;} \\
\text{It publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other;} \\
\text{It preaches to all nations and to all worlds;} \\
\text{And it is in this word God reveals to man all} \\
\text{that is necessary for man to know of God.}^{1}
\]

Really, Mr. Paine? If we take Paine literally, he seems to be offering a nature-oriented concept of God. Paine’s concept of the relationship between a creator and humankind bordered on defiance of prevailing biblical revelations. This was especially true within the literalist Trinitarian Christian community. History has criticized Paine harshly for his free thinking and literary “license.” However, if one can get past feeling threatened by his brash manner and understand what Paine was implying—that the natural universe comes directly from its source or sources

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and is universal to all humankind, and it can be altered neither by belief nor by any concept of God in the mind of humankind—we have much more to talk about!

Paine, of course, was the father of the American Revolution and the author of *Common Sense*. Despite his delivery, he had the ability to identify underlying principles of human rights, oppression by governments, and the dangers inherent in powerful religious institutions. He was a true activist for a better human condition.

For decades Paine’s writings germinated in my mind. Convoluting the whole process for me was that Paine believed in God and was a moralist. Like Thomas Jefferson, Paine was a Deist and thought the teachings of Jesus to be “the most benevolent moral code ever offered to mankind.” Other prominent founders of the United States of America claimed to be Christian moralists as well, yet many doubted the Divinity of Jesus and were very skeptical of an “afterlife.”

This was a strange type of Christianity to me. They were Christians who believed in Nature’s God, yet in many cases they, like Albert Einstein nearly two centuries later, rejected the notion of a personal intervening god in the affairs of men. On the other hand, they were clearly not atheists. What does one do with that?

In time, I would turn to a serious study of the relationships between nature, science, and belief. That journey would take me through the writings of Aristotle, Socrates, Spinoza, Servetus, Priestley, Jefferson, Parker, Lincoln, Emerson, Einstein, and Lévi-Strauss, among others, and to biographies such as *Out of the Flames* (the martyrdom of Michael Servetus) and Lincoln’s *Herndon*. The fervor of honest, intellectual searching for truth rang through those writings. I had been drawn to a great and noble cause that I now feel obliged to perpetuate.
Science without religion is lame.
Religion without science is blind.

—Albert Einstein\textsuperscript{2}

The biggest problem confronting the world today is the illusion that our differences matter more than our common humanity.

—William Jefferson Clinton, NBC’s Meet the Press, 2006
Introduction to Child of Nature: The Natural Human Mind

The commonality of all races, cultures, nationalities, philosophies, and religions is that we share the natural universe and its ongoing processes. “Child of Nature: The Natural Human Mind” is an analytical look into the mind of the human being. It is presented in first person form, i.e., “I am a child of nature.”

We are all innately human children of the natural world. Though each of us is a unique version of our species, we share common sensate physical and mental processes. For the purposes of this discourse, the natural human mind refers to the commonality of abilities, processes, and experiences within the mind of every human being. It is not a scientific presentation, as one would expect from biologists, chemists, psychologists, social scientists, behaviorists, and other students of the human mind. The intent of this study is to articulate as many of the common natural thought processes as is reasonable to do so—including the imagination, dreams, visions, and even alleged revelations.

The natural creative mind can and does envision communications and events thought or said to be supernatural or paranormal. In many instances these events provide comfort or even inspiration to the host individual. Conversely, some such envisages can be delusional and destructive, depending upon the source of the vision or otherwise unexplained event.

This topic probes deeply into our psyche and has been somewhat off-limits to viable research, due to feared religious
intrusions and repercussions. Consequently, the origin of our natural envisions of the supernatural have yet to be identified by definitive research. The question remains: “Do we humans project these events from within our own creative subconscious mind, or are there actual connections to outside phenomena in the natural universe—or to a spirit world?” For example, is there an actual parallel universe? Is there another dimension to life outside the natural universe?

There are fine lines between rational and irrational interpretations of what one may believe to be a supernatural encounter or revelation. Horrific mass tragedies have resulted from either misconstructions or misinterpretations of such experiences by the host individual and followers. A prime example is the event at the People’s Temple Christian Church in Guyana, South America, in 1978, where 914 people (including 276 children) committed mass suicide in obedience to their deluded leader, Jim Jones.

While many so-called revelations are basically benign, such thoughts become potentially catastrophic if the host believes that he/she has been betrayed by his/her personal or cultural god, or he/she believes that a vision has commanded him/her to commit acts of vengeance or war against nonbelievers, such as what occurred during the Crusades or is occurring now in the crusade of jihad against the “infidels” in the United States of America.

The reading of “Child of Nature: The Natural Human Mind” will no doubt provoke thoughts and feelings that you will want to discuss with others.

There is much to be gained by introspection into the natural creative mind in each of us. In doing so, we may come to recognize, as Lévi-Strauss pointed out, that it is in the paths of our thought processes, rather than in the objects of our beliefs (which vary from culture to culture), that we find the great
commonality of humankind. Through understanding the way all humans sense and think, we can better understand others—especially those who have different beliefs.

My inspiration and trust in writing “Child of Nature: The Natural Human Mind” is that humanity will learn to accept all people as children of the natural world, made from the same stuff, and through the understanding of our commonality, we can come together to bring an end to the senseless hatred and wars that divide us.

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