

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 19

Imagining a Different World

Most of us today find ourselves in a very different and difficult situation. We are in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, a new economic recession with millions of people out of work and a world-wide climate change becoming more dangerous as the days go by.

We have grown up confident that our scientific capabilities and technology will keep us safe. But it is very apparent that they are not keeping protecting us from certain things. In fact, some of the technologies that scientists have helped develop are at the root of our problems. We are in a situation that psychologists call cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is a tension between two opposite ideas. On the one hand we believe that we have the intellectual capacities and expertise to deal with any situation. On the other hand scientists are now telling us that the systems they have helped us develop are now the cause of our problems. (Recently more than a hundred scientists published a paper indicating that the major cause of climate change is the "[carbon economy](#)").

So we have a huge disconnect. What do we do? Einstein has noted what we can't do. *We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.*

In this chronicle I'm suggesting that for a new kind of thinking we turn to the insights of two singer song-writers: Brandi Carlile and John Lennon. One has written a song that presents useful images and the other gives us visions of an ideal future.

Carlile's song is about finding a place of security—the eye of the hurricane and taking the time to see what is going wrong—how we are actually causing the hurricane. Lennon's song is about thinking of the future—imagining a different kind of world that is already beginning to develop in some individuals and communities.

Brandi Carlile's "[The Eye](#)"

“The Eye” is the story of a broken love relationship. In the song she says, “ I wrapped your love around me like a chain. You can dance in a hurricane, but only if you're standing in the eye.”

The challenge we are facing from the pandemic, the recession, and climate change might be described as a hurricane. The impact this challenge is having on our life and happiness is re-occurring in different ways around the world: floods, droughts, forest fires, polluted waters, monsoons, diseases and so forth. It is especially damaging to those with lower incomes who can't pay the rent or can't put food on the table or can't afford to pay for medical services.

In contrast, many of us in the more developed countries may seem to be dancing in the eye of this hurricane. We may feel fortunate because we are still well-fed and have our lifestyle. But we don't feel secure because we know that the eye will eventually move on leaving us to deal with the storm and its impact. For many of us our love of the Earth may turn into fear.

John Lennon's [“Imagine”](#)

John Lennon of Beatles' fame was writing this song during the war in Vietnam. Here are some of the lyrics.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

You, you may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you will join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man

Lennon wrote this song in a time of great turmoil in the United States. I remember it well. At the time I was working on a degree in communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I experienced the turmoil when I finished my degree and took a job with the Lutheran Church working as a community organizer in Milwaukee's East Side counter culture community. Many GIs were returning from Vietnam with heroin problems and life in the community was turned upside down. Much of our time was involved in demonstrations against the war, raising money at rock concerts to bail out anti-war demonstrators and doing acid rescue.

What has always struck me about the song was how it could apply to the challenges faced in any era. Lennon was asking us to look at our way of living and develop a new/old vision to take us forward. He wasn't asking us to join a different political party or develop new systems. But how else can we make a world where there are no countries or religions and where all people will be as one? His references to "join us" indicates that there are others already engaged in imagining and living this new kind of commitment.

Given my background, I had a special interest in his comment about "no religion." There is no doubt that religion was the driving force behind the crusades, the burning of heretics at the stakes and many other injustices. Shortly after Columbus discovered America, Pope Alexander VI wrote his Doctrine of Discovery. This proclamation encouraged explorers to subjugate the indigenous races by violence if necessary. They were considered "less than human" with no rights to the land.

But religious peoples also have a long history of caring for those in need. Today the issue is not really about religion. It is apparent in North America, Europe and in other parts of the world that traditional religions are very much in decline. But what Lennon may have hoped for is the emergence of a new kind of spirituality and that people would be free to look for itsometimes within a religious framework sometimes outside of it.

I saw the difference between religion and spirituality many years ago in a conversation with my Dad.

This took place in 1965, shortly after I was ordained a priest. Rome had decided that the Mass could be celebrated in a people's language. We young priests were very excited about this. But the English Mass was used in Canada six months before it was adopted in the United States. So I was still saying the Mass in Latin. One day Dad came down from Canada to visit me in the monastery.

I said to him, "Dad, what do you think of the Mass in English?" He said, "It's okay." He didn't seem enthused so I asked him once more. Again he replied, "It's okay." By then I knew he was holding something back. So I said to him, "Dad you seem to have a problem with it." He sighed, paused, shook his head a bit and said, "Don't try to say your rosary during Mass anymore. They won't let you. They are always talking at you." Religion was interfering with Dad's spirituality.

Summary

Brandi Carlile's song "The Eye" suggests seeking a vantage point where we can stand to better see the hardships we are facing. John Lennon's song "Imagine" seems to describe a vision that can support us and give us a sense of hope.

I started this chronicle talking about the psychological problem of cognitive dissonance. I thought it would be appropriate to give the last word to someone who understood cognitive dissonance very well—the psychiatrist Carl Jung.

At one point in his life Jung wanted to do something to give hope and encouragement to the patients who came to see him at his home in Kusnacht, Switzerland. So he carved these words, borrowed from the Delphic Oracle, over the door of his house:

"VOCATUS ATQUE NON VOCATUS DEUS ADERIT."

In English translation: "Summoned or not summoned, God will be there." (God, hope, life....it's all good.)

Mike Bell, Comox Valley Climate Change Network.

