

DIA^{*} *What story do you see the world through?*

*διὰ (Greek) = "through" (with genitive)

TODAY,

before it occurred to me to write this Thinksheet, I had a number of in/direct experiences relevant to it: (1) A woman who's no longer regular in public worship is now regular in reading Hindu stuff, which she says now "makes more sense to me than the Bible does." What you most practice seeing the world through makes more sense than anything you less often see the world through. One's religion is one's usual way of seeing, & therefore living in, the world. And the story you most see the world through is your own personal **world-story** (Germanic Eng. for "Weltgeschichte," from "Weltanschauung," lit. [mode of] world-seeing/viewing/contemplating). If this Protestant woman continues on her present course of neglect (of Christianity) & attention (to Hinduism), she will interweave her life-story & the Hindu world-story into a seamless garment of sense: she will have the convert's peace & joy (no matter what the convert's converted to).

(2) A friend described his recent experience of a cocktail party in The Hamptons (Long Is.): "face-lifts, rich, viewing the world only through the New York Times."

(3) Lance Armstrong, only American to have won the Tour de France three years running (i.e., biking), told Charlie Rose that "without the cancer [testicular, age 25], I never could have won the Tour de France. It taught me to focus," to see everything in life through the encounter with a disease so far advanced that he was given only a short time to live.

(4) A letter I wrote to a self-described sage had this passage: "Your assumption that human beings are saved by wisdom & that Jesus is primarily a sage, a wisdom teacher, is, from the Christian viewpoint, **false**. 1Corinthians 1.21: "The world did not know God through wisdom." We are saved by repentance & faith, trust in God through Jesus as Savior & Lord. You are self-deluded, wise only in your own eyes. Sorry I must be so flat about it,..... Please think/pray about 1Cor.1.18-31." In the NT, διὰ 76 times means "through God/the Spirit/Jesus/the name of Jesus."

(NB: In this Thinksheet, none of the underlinings in quoted material are in the original material.)

1 You may have heard of that 1930 science teacher I had. She was a case. Against me openly in class, she said that (in effect) she was teaching the world *as it is*, & my Sunday school teacher was teaching the world through a story. But this Thinksheet's title excludes the former possibility: infatuated with Darwin, beguiled by the notion that "natural selection" is not a story, she won an empty victory over me. Sadly, that victory continues to be won in K-12 & most of higher education. A current ad for an upcoming PBS series claims that "natural selection is the greatest idea mankind [sic] has ever had." But what a weak story it is! Without the help of the Sky Father ("natural," remember), the Earth Mother, though impersonal, in a poetic (not scientific) sense, "selects" changes, which (contradictorily to the idea of "selection") are random! The heart of this story's weakness is the **oxymoron** random+selective, which fails to fight off meaningless & thus anomie/accidie/apathy: the story's particulars do not include personality (divine or human), history, or hope.

2 LEXICAL NOTES: (1) Of the 19 Greek prepositions, διὰ alone bears the meaning "through." The teaching visual shows all the prepositions related, each in its own way, to a circle. Our preposition is an arrow through the circle & sticking out on the opposite sides. The visual helps you feel the force of the **literal** reality behind the word/idea/category. (2) Hebrew, in comparison with Greek, has the double disadvantage of having fewer prepositions & no case-endings

on the noun-objects (case-endings permitting a distribution of prepositional meanings--e.g., *διὰ*-with-accusative carrying the nonliteral "because of," "on account of," "for the sake of"; with *τι*, "why?"; with *τούτο*, "therefore," "for this reason"). Hebrew's + side, here, is that one's need to tease out the primary meaning of a text in context exercises one's intellectual & spiritual musculature, both. (3) Hebrew's closest parallel to our Greek preposition is *ba'ad*, literally, "away from," from the semitic root meaning "be remote, distant" & thus "different, distinct." As a noun, "separation." As a preposition, "away from, behind, about, on behalf of"; looking out "through" (literally, "away from") a window (2K.1.2 shows both meanings: somebody fell "out through" [& thus "away from"] a window).

3 The **window** metaphor is worth cogitation. World-stories are windows peoples & persons have on the world, on reality. The more world-aware one becomes, the more windows in the house of one's soul, & the easier it is to avoid commitment to any one story, & the harder it is to discipline oneself to continuous formation through any one story. (Remember the Hindu-leaning woman in this Thinksheet's 1st ¶? She seems about to fall through that window away from her Christian commitment.)

4 "**Trans-**" is from the same root as "through." Most window-panes are transparent; some, trans-lucent. Then there's trans-action (a good translation of the Gk. wd. for "covenant," which begins *δια-*: a covenant (*dia-theke*) is through -between two parties, often with a **mediator** (Moses, angels, Jesus--on the last, see 1Ti.2.5 but especially Heb.8.6, 9.15, 12.24). Our Heb., Gk., Eng. three words here all open on the meanings "by means of" & "by the agency of"--& thus on the Christian doctrine of ATONEMENT. In ¶(4) above, the letter tells the story of the divinely provided atonement through Jesus as mediator-Savior.

The *only* Savior, the gospel says in the teeth of ideological multiculturalism. No other "name" (Ac.4.12), no other "way" (Jn.14.6). To confront the awkwardness of this affirmation in the present Zeitgeist (spirit of our times), UCC Confessing Christ recently had an ecumenical day on "No Other Path?"

5 Now let's note how the "through" idea pervades the Fourth Gospel. I'll tell its story with references but without quotation marks:

Everything came to be through the Word (1.3), & John came so everyone could believe through him (vs.7). The Word was in the world that had its becoming through him (vs.10). Though the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (vs.17). God sent his Son into the world so that the world through him could be saved (3.17). I am the [sheep-]gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe (10.9). I am the way. No one can come to the Father except through me [14.6; compare, in Ac.4.12, "by which"]."

6 Now let's reverse this Thinksheet's title's nouns: *What world do you see the [Bible's] story through?* The woman in this Thinksheet's 1st ¶ is increasingly seeing the Story (capitalized: the biblical story & story-world) through the Hindu world(-story, way of seeing the world). Modernism, through the Enlightenment, which reduced the Story to rational progress, which was the criterion for lifting **out from** the Story the virtues & values perceived to be promotive of humanistic progress. (The resulting loss of the Story's narrative led to the "postliberalism" of Hans Frei & Geo.Lindbeck--on which see Gary Dorrien in this July's first two CHRISTIAN CENTURY pieces.)

As analytic tools, both ways of putting the question are useful in understanding the necessary dialectic tension without which one ends in either humanism or fundamentalism. I believe that in the dialectic, the Story should regain & maintain the initiative, including the Story's **language**, which should not be bowdlerized (i.e., reduced) for "relevance," e.g. in crafting a more usable deity by taking it **out from** the Story. "It": In all of our languages, the **plural** pronouns ("they" et al) transcend gender without sacrificing personness, & none of our languages has any **singular** pronouns transcending gender without sacrificing personness. The Story expresses divine personness, & avoids the "it" threat thereto, by consistently using masculine pronouns (as goddess-worshippers then & now consistently use feminine pronouns). Tabooing the Bible's pronouns for God, as some now do, plays into the hands of (1) the atheist-secular culture, which uses "it" for evolution, & (2) goddess feminism & (3) scoffers & humorists.