

What once seemed right may now be wrong



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

Someone quoted the French film director Claude Chabrol: "The truth today is not the truth tomorrow." I'm not sure the context for that claim, but it made me take a moment to reflect on the truth of it. As most statements on Big Subjects, it matters if we're talking about individuals or something greater. While considering that quote, I came across another thought that seemed to intersect: "What was once right may now be wrong." This was from Adam Grant's book, "Think Again," where he explains: "We often prefer the ease of hanging on to old views over the difficulty of grappling with new ones." We have a "resistance to rethinking." Our tendency is to

pay closer attention to viewpoints "that make us feel good, instead of ideas that make us think hard." Adam Grant certainly makes us think harder, to question ourselves and the assumptions that shape our opinions and worldviews.

It's not difficult to apply this to religious beliefs. I suspect these two quotes about the evolution of what's true and right may be complementary. We might say: what "seemed" to be true or right may no longer be true or right as we see it now, in the present time. We change our minds about some things (hopefully) as we experience more, learn more. We let go of some notions we once could swear were true and right but now look on them as outdated, insufficient or even nonsense. As Adam Grant writes: "Reconsidering something we believe deeply can threaten our identities, making it feel as if we're losing a part of ourselves."

Those of us who have changed our religious beliefs or let them go altogether, may go through a serious period of self-

doubt, uncertainty and instability, facing some fears about the loss of faith or even the loss of God. We can feel stranded in an unfamiliar wilderness. Yet this transitional time can present wonderful opportunities to explore a world of alternative paths that are true and right for us. We may have a chance, perhaps for the first time, to "think again."

What once seemed right and true for me was something better than this natural world — a supernatural reality. I became so distracted by invisible things I almost lost sight of the value of the visible, the here and now, the only world I can actually experience with my reason and senses. It seemed right and true to turn from present reality and the real needs of others, and spend valuable time reading and preaching one ancient book. Instead of using my "God-given" mind and "gifts" to make the world a better place, my attention was drawn up and out, captive to the unseen "spiritual world." Thankfully, that distraction

didn't narrow my vision for too long. Though I still believed in God, my renewed focus was centered on what I could do for others around me, not "right and true" beliefs. I could leave old scriptures aside and simply "live the message" of human concern. Eventually, when I chose to "think again" and let go of faith, the feeling of loss lingered, slowly fading, before dissipating in the satisfying sunlight of a brighter and more meaningful way of living.

That's part of my story, but everyone has their unique narrative. Some "think again" and choose a new faith. Others "think again" and choose no faith at all. Yet others reconsider the true and right for themselves, deciding to be open and curious, to face forward into the search for what is good, to discover the best way of living for themselves. As I see it, it doesn't matter much which path a person chooses, as long as they are freely

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choosing their direction, and the path is not exclusionary. If the path we choose welcomes the process of rethinking our views in the light of reason, chances are we will be alright regardless of what we

may believe.

Thinking isn't the answer to everything, as we know, though it has to be central. Taking positive, healthy action for personal progress follows from daring to allow new viewpoints to emerge. If what we thought was true before just doesn't make sense any longer, our understanding of truth has grown. If what we thought was right in the past doesn't

work for us anymore, we make adjustments and keep moving. That seems to be fundamental — keep moving while thinking; continually thinking while moving. Where our free thoughts may lead us, who can say. What we hold to be truth, what we imagine is right, will undoubtedly change, and so will we, as we learn not to hold too tightly to the yesterdays and once-upon-a-times.

It may be a good time to think again.

Chris Highland was a minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, the Rev. Carol Hovis, live in Asheville. His books and blogs are presented on "Friendly Freethinker" (www.chighland.com).