

Highland

Continued from Page 1D

ly writes,

“We consider bibles and religions divine – I do not say they are not divine, I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,

It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,

Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed out of you.”

And the next stanza begins,

“The sum of all known reverence I add up in you whoever you are ...”

Walt absorbed religion because he was saturated with humanity, loved humanity, had reverence for humanity. Maybe humanity was his religion.

In “Song of the Open Road” he gives us his “test of wisdom”:

“Now I re-examine philosophies and religions,

They may prove well in lecture-rooms [and sanctuaries], yet not prove at all under the spacious clouds and along the landscape and flowing currents.”

A seeker of wisdom, truth, goodness or God must cycle back time and again to the “ground of all being,” namely, the ground, the earth, Nature itself. Whitman, perhaps more than any other po-

et, philosopher, priest or prophet, understood how intricate and intimate is our relationship with everything.

“I do not despise you priests ...,

My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,

Enclosing worship ancient and modern ...” (“Song of Myself”)

The poet felt he could enclose and embrace religion, faith and God in whatever form or cultural expression because “I am not contain’d between my hat and boots.” Religion tends to stick a hat and boots on God, dressing Deity in dogma and doctrine—when the Ultimate is naked, uncontainable.

Walt was content with his own limitless existence. In fact, “divinity” or “God” for him may simply have been convenient terms for The Uncontained, the Universal – Absolute Nature of which we are only a lilting leaf of grass ourselves.

Late in life, Whitman said goodbye to his “Fancy” – the life he cherished and worshipped.

“Good-bye my Fancy!

Farewell dear mate, dear love!

I’m going away, I know not where ...

If we go anywhere we’ll go together ...

Maybe it is yourself now really ushering me to the true songs.”

Even at 200, Whitman’s resonant, resounding voice sings with us today.

Chris Highland served as a Protes-



Whitman the Singer of Life COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

tant minister and interfaith chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer, freethinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at chighland.com.