PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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FOLLOWING the first steps in exploring what I have called 'Archetypal Theology'[1] it is timely to widen the exploration into the other processes of the mind in deep consciousness. Exploration has meant analysis of one's own experience of consciousness and proposing it to another to see whether the results of their own self-exploration matches the original.

In *The Deep Within* consciousness was imaged as a well with successive layers of perception. At the surface is the consciousness which we use in everyday life and in which we hold discourse in areas as diverse as science, history, philosophy, politics, technology, commerce, industry, economics *etc*. Less often do we penetrate deeper layers of consciousness and less familiar are we with how it works and how we can use it (I use the term 'deep consciousness', rather than 'subconscious' or 'unconscious', to underline that there is no discontinuity between the two, but one can pass readily from one to the other).

Surface Consciousness

Without repeating the detailed critique of surface consciousness as found in *The Deep Within,*[2] one might summarise it as follows. The other is known by its external qualities (shape, colour *etc.*) through the five physical senses (sight, hearing, touch *etc*.), reconstructed in the brain, objectified in the mind as concepts (abstract universal ideas), expressed in words (spoken, written). Concepts are linked by the identification of subject and predicate (A is B) and can be further extended by syllogistic chains of reasoning (A is B, B is C, therefore A is C). The inclusion of class A in class B gives rise to a hierarchical structure of knowledge, and so to a hierarchical world view.[3] Information is linear in that it grows by the addition of successive 'bits' of knowledge. Degree of difference ('how much') is quantified by number, allowing for unlimited differentiation. Thinking is highly analytic and discriminative. To the dualism of subject and object is added the dualism of true or false (whether the statement of fact corresponds to reality), good or bad, right or wrong and other sets or dyads of contradictory opposites.[4] I call these dialectic attributes, in that one delineates, or sets the boundary of, the other. Thinking and discourse in this ordinary mode of consciousness is rational and objective. It represents knowledge *about* the other.

Playground

This is the area of the arts, music, storytelling—the work of creative imagination. Here metaphor and other figures of comparison ('types') supply form to the formless feelings arising from deeper down in the consciousness and allow their endless juxtaposition in playful mode. Certain juxtapositions of types are seen to give new meaning to actual events, patterns of experience or life directions on the way to human intentionality. The types thus juggled in creative playfulness include metaphor, allegory, symbol, ikon, maxim, parable, myth—indeed the whole spectrum of figures covered by the Hebrew *mashal* or Greek *parabole*. Some types are casual and ad-hoc for the player's immediate purpose. Many, including biblical types, are cultural, varying from culture to culture. Some are universal, common to all humankind. With a suffix denoting superiority or anteriority, archetypes are powerful forms for feelings arising from primordial experience. Besides the visible and audible forms objectifying feelings there are

also mental images or sounds which swirl around in the mind as one 'plays with ideas' in seeking a solution to a problem.

A distinctive characteristic of the Playground, by contrast to the rational discourse of the surface, is the non-dualism it shares with deep consciousness. Since there is no statement of fact, which might or might not correspond with reality, there is no question of truth or falsity. Opposites are not contradictory but complementary. The True, the Good, the Beautiful, the One are not dialectic values (delineated by their opposites) but transcendental, merging as the positive goal of human intentionality.

Deep Consciousness

Psychologists terms 'subconscious' or 'unconscious' suggest discontinuity between ordinary conscious and what lies deeper within. Yet these depths are readily accessible in meditation and in the habitual deep awareness of certain people. This is the 'heart' in biblical language (followed by patristic and spiritual writings), and it has its own internal senses, analogous to the physical senses, 'the ears and eyes of the heart'. The Chinese word *Xin* can be translated 'heart-mind', so that to know with *Xin* means to know intuitively, with passion and commitment. The experience of the other gives rise to distinctive feelings with their own emotional tags. Some biologists, such as Charles Birch,[5] propose that all things have a certain subjectivity or awareness of their environment, that is, they behave not only as separate particles, but as waves interacting with their peers. So perhaps my heart-mind resonates with the subjective experience of the other and registers that internally as a feeling, which remains formless until given form in the Playground. Unlike the abstract objective concepts and their rational identification at the surface (A is B), deep consciousness recognises the patterns of things and the assimilation of like patterns (A feels like B, A suggests B). Such knowledge is not objective but subjective, intuitive, relational. One no longer knows about the other, but knows the other.

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The experiences which give rise to feelings probably operate at successively deeper levels. At one end of the spectrum are trivial, passing experiences, at the other are deep primordial experiences, which in the Playground take the form of archetypes. Whereas Jung and his disciples posit the collective unconscious as the ground of such feelings, to me sufficient grounding can be found in the experiences of early childhood ('unremembered memories'[6]), in possible ancestral experiences (as suggested by epigenetics) and even in the primitive drives of the limbic system.

Intuitive Knowing

In this kind of knowing the knower is felt to be engaged with the known. One's subjectivity resonates with the subjectivity sensed in the other. The knower can be likened to an amoeba which consumes a nutritious particle by encircling it with its pseudopodia, an embrace which makes it part of itself. The following stages of engagement were originally proposed for the engagement with God in prayer, but were seen applicable to other forms of engagement, such as eating and sexual intercourse, and are here applied to knowing (to the degree that subjectivity is sensed in the other).

1. Setting out. The knower goes out of him/herself and relates to the other as 'I-Thou'. There is a certain losing of self, or ego-death, as one opens out in wonder at the other. One is freed from the bond of self so as to freely reach out to the other.

2. Communion. More than simple union, the knower and the known are bonded together

in a mutual indwelling. The one is in the other, and the other is one. This commingling of the two changes the 'I-Thou' relation to 'we', in a parallel and shared subjectivity.

3. Oneness. The knower and the known become one. 'We' becomes 'I' in a single subjectivity. I know myself as part of everything I know. In memory of something, I recall myself at the instance of that merging. (How much are feelings part of ones identity? In English the subject is identified with a feeling; 'I am fearful', whereas in French and other European languages the feeling happens to self: 'I have fear', 'J'ai peur').

Intuition in Scientific Investigation

Surface rationality plays such an important role in the gathering and processing of scientific data, in practical problem solving and in devising advanced technology, that it would seem that these intellectual pursuits are conducted only in the upper levels of consciousness. Yet many researchers will affirm that there has been an intuitive pre-conceptual stage in their enquiry, showing that several levels of thinking have complemented each other in the overall task. So, for example, an archaeologist gets the 'feel' of an artefact, of the placing of a site in its environment, of the stratification read from the section of a trench, of the observed changes in the assemblages and of the signs of technological development through time, all leading to the reconstruction of the life of a people in the past. Such intuitions must then be translated into objective, scientifically acceptable language in the final report, so as to fix the information in a form verifiable by peers.

Earlier,[7] I had proposed that in scientific research there is a pre-rational stage of assembling data, each represented by a 'mental image' (or some other mental analogue of sense perception). There follows an important stage of 'playing with images' in the Playground. The mind's eye rapidly re-arranges this assemblage in different juxtapositions, like the changing shapes and colours of a kaleidoscope, until it sees a right 'fit' and calls a halt. Once the right juxtaposition has been perceived, then follows the difficult task of translating it all into words, with logical form and sequence. I described the valuable advantages of pre-conceptual thinking:

> It is, typically, wild and lateral, intuitive and creative and, therefore, very free. It offers expandable categories and free associations of ideas, before settling down to the restriction and dogma of established discourse. It complements the more respectable rational approach in various disciplines by giving the right hemisphere of the brain an active role in problem-solving. I suspect that pre-conceptual thinking is responsible for the intuitive leap of genius (which, of many areas of human intellect, computers cannot duplicate) that can recognise patterns and, hence, parallels between otherwise dissimilar data. It opens up possibilities which might otherwise be unsuspected, but which can be tested empirically.

Primal Thinking

Worlds apart from our own modern thinking, with its advanced science and technology, is the thought world of traditional tribal people, well exemplified for us in our Aboriginal people recently emerged from a stone age culture. For them all parts of the cosmos are alive, conscious and paying attention to each other, and the individual, as one of those parts, engages in mystical union with the rest.[8] I believe that primal people, together with monks and mystics of all religions, live habitually, or almost habitually, at a deep level of consciousness, powerfully aware of the numinous surrounding them and of the myths in which they consciously take part. Against the highly abstract and scientific language of the West, there are languages expressive of such consciousness which are thoroughly concrete and earthy, more poetic than factual, alive with deep-felt symbols and metaphors. Better known are ancient Semitic languages, such as classical Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, whose vocabulary is built on tri-consonantal roots, based on verbs (therefore more relational than particulate). It can be said of Semitic languages that they do

not *express* meaning (as in the West) but *suggest* meaning. Often numbers express, not a mathematical value, but an emotional value (often with exaggeration). It is commonly remarked that the Hebrew verb 'to know' does not designate an intellectual knowledge, but an intuitive experience of what is known, coming to grips with what is subjective in the other, like an intercourse between knower and known so that the two become one.

The language of the Bible is highly typological. The Fathers of the Church recognised biblical types as persons, things or events in the Old Testament which prefigured, and found fulfilment in Jesus Christ (N.T. anti-type). But this use of typology ranges more widely than the doctrinal concerns of the Fathers. This usage is consistent with the biblical predilection for *mashal* (Hebrew) or *parabole* (Greek), words whose meanings can cover proverbs, maxims, riddles, metaphors, allegories, similitudes and other forms of comparisons, even by way of extended narratives such as gospel parables. These figures of comparison highlight the similarity between patterns of experience, such that one throws light on the other to give it greater meaning. This mutual illumination, or what I call projection, can be emphasised between sets of relationship such as macrocosm and microcosm, phylogeny and ontogeny, type and anti-type, myth and experience. The logic of imagery in the Bible as distinct from that in rationality, can argue from one image to another:

—*a pari* (if A, then B)

—*a fortiori* (if A, how much more B)

(Both types are famously found in Romans 5).

Reading the Bible

If the language of the Bible shows it came from the deep consciousness of the inspired authors, it makes sense to read the Bible with the mentality of the People of God, who produced and cherished it. It must be emphasised that bible reading is a cross-cultural experience, linking the reader to a very different culture, with its own language, concerns and literary genres over 2,000 years ago.

Fundamentalist Christians are mistaken in seeing the Bible as 'the Word of God' (an Englishman, of course), written to them in plain language all could understand in their (Western) common sense, embodying infallible factual truths to be taken literally. Equally mistaken in seeing the Bible as a compilation of factual statements are the sceptics who cast doubt on the canonical text on the grounds of contradictions, inconsistencies and impossible events (miracles, resurrection *etc*.). Likewise misguided were the early biblical archaeologists and other scholars who attempted to bring science to bear on 'proving the Bible true.' Also somewhat departing from the ancient Semitic mentality is the modern tendency to psychologise or rationalise the text.

The mentality of the people who authored the sacred books and those who received them is summed up in the example of Mary, the great woman of faith: 'Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke.2:19,51). The reverent wonderment of the child, rather than the mastery of the expert, is what marked off the Fathers of the Church in their commentaries on sacred scripture. St. Benedict began his Rule with the words 'Listen, my child, with the ears of your heart'; and the monks learned to apply the same contemplative listening to monastic *Lectio Divina* on the sacred text.

Intercultural Dialogue

Just as reading the Bible is a cross-cultural exercise, most fruitfully conducted in the depths of one's consciousness, so any cross-cultural encounter is more fruitful at depth, rather than in the rationality of the mind's surface. In the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry both Father Frank Fletcher MSC and I experienced the striking contrast between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal thinking[9] and the fruitfulness for both of drawing on each others spirituality at the deepest level. Father Frank's life, work and writing—especially his last book *Jesus and the Dreaming*—are eloquent testimony to

the value of heart-felt encounter between Aboriginal and European Australians. A similar encounter between the Christian Gospel and native animism in 6th Century Ireland and Scotland gave rise to a vibrant Celtic Spirituality.[10] Again the experience of the Blue Mountains Interfaith Group shows the value of heart-felt meeting of different religious cultures.

At the surface level there are serious barriers to cultural exchange. The most notable is the dualism between perceived true and false. The language and thinking at this level is very judgmental and discriminatory, leaving no room for opposites to co-exist. We readily see ourselves as 'us and them'. Deeper down these sharp divisions are replaced by approximations, where opposites are found to be complementary, offering welcome to mutual enrichment.

'Heart Speaks to Heart

Out of the depths of the Godhead, God speaks to the heart of the believer. Revelation is not given to us in concepts and rational discourse, after the manner of theological conclusions. After the Covenant on Mt. Sinai, God continued to reveal God-self to the Chosen People in their historical experiences, in which the prophets reflecting saw the hand of God guiding his people, until finally the Word of God, the full expression of the Father, came among us as man. That was the fullest experience of God for humankind.

At the personal level I come to know God through my experiences brought to light by personal reflection. What about the stream of doctrine which come to me in the words of teachers, preachers and reading? Yet all these words come alive only after and confirm the direct intervention of the divine companion in my life journey. How many words, spoken or printed, even the inspired language of the bible, have gone over my head without making any impact? It is simply because they strike no resonance in my life to date. There is no firsthand experience, no emotional echo to give them, for me, a concrete and personal reality. It is only when I have had the appropriate experience, that is God moving in my life, that then the words of the bible, the preacher or the teacher ring true and confirm the revelation, providing a form of words to capture it. The words coming after help the faith-inspired reflection to recognise and canonise the felt movement of God in my human experience.

The experience of the Word of God is not only in the occasional, life-shaking thunder clap, but often and constantly in barely heard whispers. As we the People of God come together in all kinds of socialisation, we experience each other as God whispering his Word in the ear of our heart, with the Holy Spirit tuning our heart to the wavelength of God. Jesus said 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst'. So if I meet you in his name, Jesus is present to both of us: I make him present to you as you present the Word to me. Likewise are the presentations of the Word in the sacraments, my reading, my flashes of insight, my appreciation—whatever moves me in my daily life. He is ever coming to me.

It can be said, with Meister Eckhart, that the Word of God is becoming incarnate in my life through the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit moves in the deepest part of my consciousness. It is there, in whatever mysterious way, that a spiritual experience or theophany takes place, accompanied at times by a mental image ('vision') or sound ('a voice'). St. Johns Gospel records the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman (John.4). By contrast with the well (*pege*) of Jacob, to be drawn on repeatedly and with effort, the Gift of God which Jesus offers the seeker is:

> 'living water...which will become in him...a spring (*pege*) of water bubbling to life eternal' (John.4:10,14).

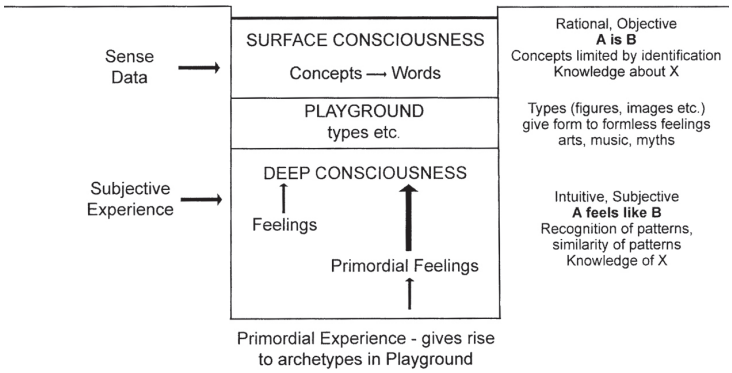
Later, in John 7:37-39, Jesus is recorded as crying out:

> 'If anyone thirst let him come to me and let him drink who believes in me. (As scripture said) 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water'. This he said of the Holy Spirit, which they would receive who believed in him.'

ENDNOTES

[1] E. Stockton *The Deep Within: Towards an Archetypal Theology.* Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, Lawson 2011; 'Archetypal Theology' *Compass* 46/4 2012, pp.34-7.
[2] *The Deep Within*, pp.38-41.
[3] E. Stockton *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation,* Millenium Books, Alexandria 1995, p.46.
[4] For different kinds of opposites see E. Stockton *Wonder: A Way to God,* St. Pauls Publications, Strathfield 1998, p.26, f.17.
[5] C. Birch, *On Purpose*, NSW University Press, Kensington 1990; *Feelings*, NSWUP 1995.
[6] *The Deep Within,* p.45.
[7] E. Stockton, 'A Bush Theologian goes his Way', (in ed. P. Malone), *Developing an Australian Theology,* St. Pauls Publications, Strathfield 1999, pp.254-5.
[8] *The Aboriginal Gift,* p.102.
[9] *Ibid.* pp.37-8.
[10] *The Deep Within,* p.17.

Well of Consciousness



ABORIGINAL CONVERSATION

'Dadirri' I have defined as an Aboriginal form of contemplation which goes out to the environment', while Aboriginal mysticism 'seeks oneness with the environment, in which every part is felt to be alive, conscious and alert to every other part'. The contemplator absorbs, and is absorbed by, the other (which other is the interface with the Totally Other, *i.e.* God). Using the word 'engagement' as a communion by which the one is in the other and the other is in the one, I see dadirri as an engagement with the other at the deepest level of consciousness. There are no words, no discussion, no noting of attributes—simply a mindfulness of the other in a timeless moment overwhelmed by a wave of oceanic wonderment.

There is a dadirri in the company of others, an environment of persons. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr gives examples of a campfire setting and of ceremony, but it can also be a case of one to one, a going out to a person in the depths of consciousness, a mutual absorption. Unlike the frequent exercise of talking *at* a person, as if a glass wall separated the speakers, Aborigines in conversation are able to speak directly *to* one another—in the words of Newman's motto '*cor ad cor loquitur*'—heart speaks to heart. Aboriginal conversation is, I believe, the highest art form of the people. It is sometimes accompanied by words (wording which on the face of it may be inconsequential, even banal), or most potently by body language (in which Aborigines are past masters). It is the deepest sharing of feelings.

Judging by his writings, Father Frank Fletcher was evidently at home with this kind of encounter with Koories. From the early days of the colony of Sydney, a beautiful example of such encounter between the races is instanced in the story of Patyegarang and William Dawes.

Offered as a postscript to 'Plumbing the Depths of Consciousness' by way of tribute to Father Frank Fletcher MSC, remarkable for his empathy with Aborigines in the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry.