

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING: THE WORD¹

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THE PURSUIT of knowledge is going on in many fields in everyday life—in science, history, journalism, forensic investigation, *etc.* The intention is to establish facts, truths, through the exercise of the rational mind. A truth, a statement of fact, is formulated by identifying a predicate with a subject (A is B), which may or may not correspond with reality, and so the demand is for evidence to prove the stated fact. Truth in this sense can be described as a dialectic value (like good, right) which is delineated by its opposite, *i.e.* falsity. Such dualism is characteristic of the ordinary rational surface of consciousness.

To Patterns of the Truth

At a deeper level of perception such dualisms dissipate, where opposites are complementary, rather than contradictory. Whereas rational thought deals with essences, expressed as concepts, a deeper level of consciousness attends to relationships. Things in their relatedness constitute patterns. So at depth one recognises patterns, and the similarity of patterns, in subjective data registered as feelings, and expressed in art and similar figurative forms. The affirmation of likeness between patterns (A feels like B) is not true or false, but more or less. At depth the pursuit is not for truths, but for the True, a certain fullness of being. The True can be described as a transcendental value. It has no opposite to set its boundaries, for that would be non-being. It draws the seeker to itself, for the sake of itself. The True is akin to other transcendentals, the Good and the Beautiful. A seeker can possess something which is true, good or beautiful, but Beauty,

Goodness and Truth are in themselves beyond our possession, reaching beyond our hands but drawing us towards themselves for no other reason than themselves. Enjoyable but unattainable, they are sheer gifts. One can only gaze in wonder.

The True, the Good, the Beautiful converge sublimely on the One. The One is nameless, simply affirming 'I am'—though different religions use titles of convenience such as God, the Lord, Allah, *etc.* The Three in One draws us to reach out beyond ourselves, to transcend ourselves. This is the trajectory of all religions, even of the 'religious atheist' (!), as distinct from those whose sole concern is the here-and-now materialistic, seeking to become their own god, by enhancing their ego through the pursuit of wealth, power, pleasure or fame.

In the pursuit of the transcendent, it is imperative to find meaning in the multiplicity of the here-and-now. There is a simple sense of the word 'meaning', as in consulting a dictionary, of finding a synonym or paraphrase equivalent to the word in question. More broadly, for example in life situations, the search is to recognise patterns out of the jumble of elements which make up the situation in question. Meaning is not a definition (as in surface rationality), it does not establish or prove a truth, it does not add to what is already there. Where initially there is a meaningless jumble of conflicting feelings and their figures, meaning seeks to extract order from disorder, to relate parts to parts and parts to the whole. Meaning instinctively looks for direction ('the way ahead') and for value ('is it worthwhile'). It uses one pattern to throw light on another, so that the second is seen to have meaning in the light of the first. This

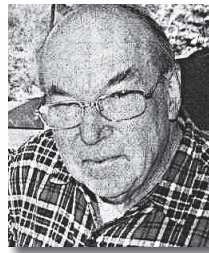
meaning is a new way of looking at a (confused) situation, ending with the reflection ‘Now this makes sense to me’. It is as when a cacophony of sound is rearranged into elegant music.

The pianist, from the range of notes in a piano, chooses some in a harmonious arrangement to create something meaningful. The painter, from the collection of pigments on his palette, chooses and mixes certain colours and arranges them in a meaningful whole.

Psychology

Modell² links the metaphoric processing of feelings in creative imagination to meaningfulness in human behaviour through human intentionality. All living beings show some kind of intent, the urge to survive and procreate. In humans the intent is of a higher order, namely self-actuation, which in some cases may over-ride the instinctive urge of animals. The human selects what is of value that is congruent to the chosen goal, guided by feelings as markers of value. Hart shows that intentionality is found in all human perception, that is, the capacity of the mind to be directed to a goal, filtering out of the flood of experiences only what is conducive to its purpose.³ So one moves forward in a confident, sure-footed way.

A similar parallel can be seen in the intuitive, pre-conceptual stage of scientific investigation.⁴ Once the scientist has assembled the mass of data, each represented by a ‘mental image’ (or some other analogue of sense perception), he seeks to find order in the chaos. Then he ‘plays with ideas’, arranging and rearranging the assemblage in different juxtapositions, until he sees the right ‘fit’. This he then translates into words in rational sequence. Once he has found meaning in the mass of data, then he can go ahead to verify empirically what intuition has already presented as a possibility. So the scientist might propose a model or paradigm which can be tested by experimentation, to the satisfaction of his peers, towards



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the intended goal. Meaning has shown the way to the end and recognised the value of the exercise.

On a very different plane of thought, Paintner claims that spirituality can be considered a search for meaning in life: ‘it can provide an orientation to our lives, a set of values to live by, a sense of direction and a basis of hope’.⁵ She quotes Viktor Frankl in describing this search for meaning in one’s life as ‘the primary motivational force’ in persons. In his classic *Man’s Search for Meaning*⁶ Frankl recorded his experiences in a concentration camp and his observation that those who created a sense of meaningfulness were better able to survive the horrors of camp life. From this he developed a school of therapy dubbed ‘logotherapy’ (from the Greek *logos* understood as ‘meaning’) to assist patients to find meaning in their lives (‘what he longs for in the depth of his being’), emphasising the role of responsibility in taking charge of one’s life, forgetting self in reaching out to something/someone other than self (in creativeness, love, triumph over tragedy). It is saying ‘Yes’ to life in spite of suffering, guilt or mortal transitoriness.

Our inner life is a seething cauldron of formless feelings, each registering our subjective experience of the world outside us. These feelings take on form in types or figures, like the mental images in the playground of the mind, where we can play with ideas to put forward various configurations in the search for meaning. The arts play an important role in supplying possible patterns of meaning. The

myths of different cultures, far from being blatant lies, bring together their story elements in patterns which meaningfully mirror those of human or natural behaviour. Jesus in his teaching made use of similar devices, his parables, to portray patterns of moral behaviour leading to meaningful life under God, his vision of the Kingdom of God.

Biblical Typology

The Bible is largely a typological narrative to understand one's own spiritual journey. I like to describe it as a map of life, as one might consult a map to locate confidently one's position and direction.⁷ A prime example is the Paschal Mystery, foreshadowed in the Exodus and fulfilled in Jesus' passage through death to resurrection, which is a pattern one can resort to in times of suffering, sorrow or hardship: the deadliness is not taken away, but is made bearable, or even desirable, in the vision ahead.

The Long March to the Promised Land, both in the biblical account and in Maoist ideology, has been an inspiration to millions, not least in Negro Spirituals and in the longing of the Pilgrim Fathers in America. Job querying God over the affliction he suffered as an innocent man, received an answer, which was not a direct answer, when God showed him the wonders of creation. All he could respond was, in effect 'Now I see'.

So in the light of patterns depicted in the biblical narrative, puzzles in one's life begin to make sense. The Fathers of the Church richly drew on the typology of the bible in their commentaries. *Lectio Divina* was a monastic exercise contemplating the sacred text to make sense of their lives as they corresponded to biblical patterns.

The word 'contemplate', to reflect, to look at attentively, is said to be derived from the Latin *templum*, the place where this happens. One might offer another etymology, namely *template*, a pattern or mould, so that contemplation brings together templates as described

above. The verb also has a future orientation, to have a purpose, to have something in mind as a probable intention. So meaning not only makes sense of the present but also points to direction in the future.

St. Luke's Gospel lends itself to contemplation. Often Luke explicitly records Jesus at prayer (Lk. 3:21; 4:42; 6:12; 11:1; 22:41-6) and how he taught his disciples to pray as John the Baptist had done (Lk. 11:1-13). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is set before us a prime example of the faithful follower of Jesus: twice it is emphasised that she 'remembered all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Lk. 2:19,51).⁸ This Gospel records a number of incidents which stand out from the general narrative as scenarios or tableaux to be pondered. They are like parables reflecting the communal life of the infant Church.

—The Temptations in the Desert (Lk. 4:1-13): Jesus spurns the temptation to usurp the authority of God, redressing the fall of Adam (Gen. 3, cf Phil. 2:5-11).

—The Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36): a vision of Jesus' future Resurrection glory, the culmination of the Law and Prophets (the O.T.).

—The Feeding of the Multitude (Lk. (9:10-17): Jesus in his compassion providing for the needs of many, making use of the poor resources and ministry available—an image of the Church as a whole on one level, and of the Eucharist on another.

—The Visit to Martha and Mary (Lk. 10:38-42, itself a prelude to teaching on prayer Lk. 11:1-13): an allusion to the institution of deacons in the early Church (Ac. 6:1-7), underlining the distinction between *logos* (word) and *diakonein* (serve).

St. John's Gospel is even more the stuff of contemplation, from the one aptly named the Theologian by Christians of the east. His is the classic use of biblical typology, where the O.T. types are seen to prefigure and be fulfilled in Jesus, the Word of God.

—The sacrificial lamb (Exod. 12:1) fulfilled in the Lamb of God and his Paschal Sacrifice (Jn. 1:29; 19:34).

—The new temple (Ezek. 40-44) fulfilled in the resurrected body of Jesus (Jn. 2:13-22).

—The brazen serpent raised up in the desert (Num. 21:4-9) and the raising up of Jesus for all to behold for healing (Jn. 3:14; 12:32).

—The manna in the desert (Exod. 16) prefigures the *true* bread from heaven (Jn. 6).

—The rock-source of water (Exod. 17:1-7; Ezek. 47) is fulfilled in Jesus, the fountain of living water (Holy Spirit), (Jn. 7:37-9).

—Moses wrangling with the Israelites in the desert (Exod. 32: Num. 11; 14) mirrors the controversy of Jesus with the Jews (Jn. 5:19-47; 8:12-59).

—The shepherd-kings of Israel (Ezek. 34) and the Good Shepherd of N.T. (Jn. 10:1-21).

These signs, identified in the Book of Signs (Jn. 1-13), converge on and are seen fulfilled in the Book of Glory (Jn. 14-20). The Discourse of the Last Supper can be read as a reflective response in the heart of the Beloved Disciple, echoing the heartbeat of the one against whose breast he reclined (Jn. 13:22-25). In this discourse Jesus is revealed as ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’ (Jn. 14:6). The Greek can be paraphrased ‘The Way (*hodos*), both as Truth and Life, to the Father’. In this context, the Spirit of Truth is promised ‘to guide (*hodosesei*) you into the whole truth’ (Jn. 16:13).

The Word

The Fourth Gospel begins with the majestic Hymn of the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-18)⁹ in whom is found the fullness of meaning. What-

ever the origins of the N.T. term, undoubtedly Jewish Christians would have equated it with the *Sophia* of O.T. wisdom literature, while Gentile Christians would have heard echoes of the *Logos* of Greek philosophy, the principle of intelligibility in the world. The nameless ‘I am’ of the Godhead in uttering the Word, eternally expressed Godself, and in time by the Word gave rise to finite creation: ‘all things through him . . . and in him came to be’. That is, the Word was God’s instrument and blueprint (or template) of creation, and ‘in him was the life . . . and light of man’. From the womb of the deity ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth’. Those who accepted the light of the Word, becoming God’s children, ‘received of that fullness, grace upon grace’. The final stanza of the hymn, recapped the mounting stanzas preceding it, proclaimed that the incarnate Word from the bosom of the Father has revealed . . . (?). The Greek verb *exegesato* (from which is derived our word exegesis, explanation) has no object and so is open ended. I am inclined to translate it ‘he (Jesus) has made full sense’, so suggesting that the Jesus of history is the exegesis of the Word.

For Christians, our search for meaning, our pursuit of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, finds its fulfilment in the Incarnate Word, Jesus. He is the one for whom we hunger (Jn. 6) and thirst (Jn. 7:37-39). The great Sign of the Gospel, in which all the other signs are subsumed, is the Glory as Jesus is ‘raised up’—on the cross and in resurrection.

‘And I, when I am lifted up from earth, will draw you all to myself’ (Jn. 12:32).

ENDNOTES

¹ This is the latest in a series of studies in deep consciousness, stemming from the author’s *The Deep Within—Towards an Archetypal Theology*, Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, Lawson, 2011. This was followed by articles in *Compass*, ‘Archetypal Theology’ 4/46 (2012) pp.34-7, ‘The Miracle of Life’ 2/47 (2013) pp.32-

4, ‘Plumbing the Depths of Consciousness’.

² A. Modell, *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain*, Bradford Books, MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006.

³ D. B. Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2013, pp.191-7.

⁴E. Stockton, 'A Bush Theologian goes his Way', (in ed. P. Malone) *Developing an Australian Theology*, St. Pauls Publications, Strathfield, 1999, pp.254-5; 'Plumbing the Depths of Consciousness', *Compass* 2014.

⁵C. V. Paintner, 'The Relationship between Spirituality and artistic Expression: Cultivating the Capacity for Imagining', *Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter*, 3/1 January 2007, pp.1-6. Other dimensions of spirituality she lists are (2) cultivating a relationship to mystery, a hunger for something beyond the limits of our capacity to fully describe in language, and (3) transformation as we are challenged to stretch and grow through a commitment to a set of practices or disciplines, a way of being intentional about our spirituality.

⁶V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning, Revised and Updated*, Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, New

York, 1985.

⁷E. Stockton, *Landmarks – A Spiritual Search in a Southern Land*, Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, Lawson, 2013, pp.5-7.

⁸Literally 'Mary remembered all these things throwing, casting (them) together in her heart'. The participle *syballousa* is derived from the verb *syballein* 'to throw together', which also gives us our word 'symbol'. In like vein 'parable' is derived from *paraballein* 'to throw alongside, compare'. These two figures of comparison, symbol and parable, suggest a similar process proposed above for contemplation, a comparison by bringing together patterns or parallels.

⁹For a literary criticism and translation of the Prologue of St. John's Gospel see E. Stockton, *The Deep Within*, Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2011, Appendix I, pp.95-9.

*In the beginning was the Word;
the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came into being,
not one thing came into being except through him.
What has come into being in him was life,
life that was the light of men;
and light shines in darkness,
and darkness could not overpower it.(...)
The Word became flesh,
he lived among us,
and we saw his glory.*

—John 1:1-5, 14