

A NEW INNOCENCE?

Only the Mystics will survive

Several times throughout his long and illustrious life, the great teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti made the comment that: “If Man doesn’t radically change, fundamentally bring about a mutation in himself - we will destroy ourselves”¹. More than thirty years ago Raimon Panikkar began to describe, and write about, what he termed the emergence of a new *mythos*. This new *mythos*, he wrote, will come about because Man is now creating an artificial empire from which there is no exit.²

This artificial empire is not just a technological empire, it is a completely conditioned mental/emotional attitude that incorporates all that we believe, think, feel, and do. It manifests as a physical reality, but its power lies in ideas and the conditioning influence of propaganda, which is firmly tied to the past. The citizens of the megamachine,³ now believe that because of so-called political democracy they have freedom, because of material wealth they are superior, and because of rational science they can be all-knowing.

Education, as it now stands, is the commonly accepted method of conditioning successive generations into accepting and participating in their respective societies and all that they entail and encompass. Along with family and general social conditioning, education remains supreme as a means to control regulate and prepare citizens for their useful life in the System. Panikkar maintains that this System *is* ‘abuse as a System’⁴ It is this widespread abuse at all levels that has become incorporated into what we quaintly call normalcy, what we will fight and die for, kill others and destroy nature. This ‘normalcy’ has become so ingrained that we rarely see how bizarre it all is.

And yet this illusory empire, does in fact, have one escape hatch – insanity. And an exponential rise in mental illness in so-called developed societies reflects that an

¹ Lutyens, M. *Life and death of Krishnamurti* New Delhi: Srishti, 2004 p.186

² Panikkar, R. The Destiny of Technological Civilization: An Ancient Buddhist Legend, Romavisaya. *Alternative X* (Fall) 1984 p.246

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increasing number of people are becoming so traumatised by modernity that they are escaping from their own usefulness to the 'System' through mental breakdown.

Human consciousness is now trapped within the *mythos* of rationality to such an extent that any attempt at revolution simply moves the bits and pieces of the same illusion around. The revolutions, political changes, protests, evolution of new age spiritualism simply replace one aspect of the old consciousness with another: progress is an illusion. Krishnamurti maintained that 'we have been barbarians for centuries and we are still barbarians'. All our attempts at civilisation have not eradicated human conflict. Peace remains as distant as it ever was. A fundamental change in human consciousness is required. Nothing less than a radical *Metanoia* – a total transformation of the mind - will bring a new consciousness and a new innocence, so urgently required.

The current autonomic *mythos* - the law of the self – has the potential to eventually create a global civilizational collapse so immense that only the mystics may survive⁵ the psychological and physiological shock of the almost complete destruction of meaning brought about by the collapse of dualistic materialism – or what we quaintly call modernism. Panikkar wrote:

It is not therefore a question of just reforming the technocracy or of returning to a pre-technological lifestyle, or of finding a convenient escape hatch. Neither is it merely a question of wresting the reins of the historical process from the powers that be and taking them into our own hands, but rather of attuning ourselves once again to the rhythms of reality, of relearning to cooperate with the entire universe in and around us for the survival of being⁶

At that time, Panikkar did not dare to fully outline the myths and symbols of the *mythos* of ontology - the law of Being - because the myths and symbols had not yet emerged. Perhaps one of the more extraordinary aspects of the contemporary era is the speed at which fundamental elements of a worldview change. In heteronomous societies, change was usually steady and intergenerational. Technology and communications systems - not to mention weapons – have facilitated an increasingly rapid rate of

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⁶ Panikkar, R. *The Rhythm of Being* Unpublished Manuscript, 1989 Gifford Lectures (p.138)

adjustment. Effects-far-away are now visible close-at-hand. Cultures are intertwined; ignorance of the 'other' is manufactured rather than self-existent; geographical barriers are no more. Great disasters wait to strike at all peoples, whatever their culture, religion or geographical location. At the same time, new myths are emerging of a 'new age' and while many of these may be simplistic and openly populist, they point to an underlying desire for some kind of unity.

One of the primary elements of a *mythos* of ontonomy is holism. The whole is paramount. It is a cosmic principle; nothing is disconnected; no dualism of any kind can be permitted to obscure or deflect the progress of any one being at the expense of another.⁷ The law of Being is neither purely religious nor purely secular. Rather, an ontonomic attitude fully accepts the insight of secular consciousness into the 'ultimacy' of temporal history, and its consciousness of the 'sacred' is such that it refuses to be enslaved by time or historical forces.⁸ This is not an intellectual synthesis where traditional religions and sacred worldviews are somehow 'fitted' into a concept of secular movements or an evolutionary schema. It does not focus on autonomous rights or declare a heteronomous hierarchy, but rather suggests an abandonment of predetermined concepts of religion and secularity. In effect, the law of being requires an end to the polarised conception of a sacred/profane dualism, and the end of comparative religion.

However, the blurring of all differences is not the goal, otherwise the quest fails and falls back on the undifferentiated unity of some universalistic process. An ontonomic *mythos* points towards a truly holistic conception, which recognises that Being in its entirety holds ontological primacy, where aspects of temporality, individuation, materialism, rationality, etc., are of secondary importance, but not necessarily negated.

The emergence of a new *mythos* requires new symbolic disclosures. Some of these may be revitalised and reinterpreted symbols that have in previous times presented similar meanings. A new *mythos* does not require that all previous meanings and presentations be discarded. What is required, and what is evolving out of the apparent chaos of modern times, is a new mystical approach to reality. A holistic and inclusive mysticism. This mysticism is eclectically intelligent, flexible and above all Advaitic.

⁷ Panikkar, R. *Worship and Secular Man* New York: Orbis Books 1973, p28

⁸ Hall, G., *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis) University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 1994, p.193.

The ontonomic attitude seeks to improve on the positive contributions of both heteronomic and autonomic modes. Each attitude represents the other's blind spot; each reveals much that cannot be seen from the other perspective. The sacred reverence for nature now includes the whole Earth; 'people' are now all peoples; 'life' means all living beings. The tools of secular science and philosophy can be used to enhance the well being of all life and in every environment. National boundaries can be disregarded for the purpose of conservation and protection of natural environments as well as the evolution of a truly responsible global society. Cessation of the war between sacred and secular conceptions of reality would allow dialogue to become the natural way of sharing knowledge and wisdom between worldviews, both religious and secular.⁹

A mythic horizon which can give rise to a truly ontonomic attitude needs to include essential linking myths, symbols and concepts. These links may arise from dialogue between worldviews or as wholly new inspirations. They may be drawn from traditional sources that can be revitalised within contemporary contexts. One example of a concept that linked people with nature can be drawn from the European tradition. The ancient Stoic notion of *oikeiosis* - how people should act appropriately, and in accordance with how the house (Earth) unfolds its Being - may be a preferable means of inquiry for environmental concerns than the current use of scientific ecology, deep ecology or even ecosophy.

The vision of how the Earth unfolds its Being is essentially ontonomic, whereas ecology - how the house works - is an anthropocentric conception. An 'ecological' crisis seems to carry less weight because it can easily be separated from human involvement. The ecological crisis is 'out there', it is not 'us'; "we can solve it with more technology and more applied knowledge" - is the claim of scientists, economists, managers, and most ecologists. A crisis of *oikeiosis*: a crisis of the unfolding of 'our' house; i.e., the 'house' which is the very ground of *our* being, seems at once more urgent and important. Currently, science and technology simply cannot approach the entirety of this problem because it involves us all, in all our ways. And a purely religious response may not be adequate either.

⁹ See Raine, P. *Who Guards the Guardians? Intercultural Dialogue on Environmental Guardianship*. Lanham: University Press of America 2003, for an in depth study of dialogical dialogue based on Panikkar's conception of dialogical dialogue.

Transforming the world

The ontonomic vision can be approached regionally as well as globally. The need is to draw people together to find ways of facilitating understandings that can generate positive outcomes for people and their places wherever they are situated. In the final analysis, an ontonomic vision requires nothing less than a radical *metanoia*. Not just a change in the direction of thinking, rather a transformation in the way we think about ourselves and the world, indeed the entire cosmos, of which we are undeniably part.

What is the basis of these radical calls to attend to the foundation of our so-called modern ontological constructs? What is the real and present danger that modernism presents? And, perhaps more importantly, in what form will a new *mythos* emerge?

The need for a radical *metanoia*; a transformation of the way the human mind approaches reality is not a modern appeal. Jesus of Nazareth repeatedly called upon those closest to him to undertake *metanoia*, (mistranslated through Latin into English as repentance.) Why *metanoia*? Because Mankind has a deeply entrenched habit of misinterpreting reality by allowing social conditioning to shape each new generation in a universalistic manner, effectively compounding former misunderstandings. We have individually and collectively arrived at a point of crisis due to the power that technology has placed in our hands – a power that mankind cannot handle. The law of self, secular materialism, the scientific revolution, as well as devaluation of the spiritual quest have all led to a tremendous loss of meaning for modern people. The exponential rise in mental illness and stress related dis-eases in so-called developed societies reflects part of the collective crisis facing humanity as meaning is stripped away from all aspects of life and people become increasingly machine-like¹⁰. The replacement of meaning with manufactured realities in the form of continuously replaceable representations of reality compounds the steady decline of the human endeavour.¹¹

The desire of modernism to completely overwhelm reality by replacing it with hyper-reality is expressed quite openly in the double-speak and innuendo currently

¹⁰ See Heidegger. M, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (Trans W. Lovitt) Bloomington: University of Indiana Press. 1977

¹¹ See Baudrillard. J, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (trans I. Grant) London: Sage Publications 1993 p.72

emerging from the latest attempt at formation of a world empire. Hyper-reality as it is emerging is almost entirely destructive.¹² It is limiting the horizon of human inquiry to a single anthropocentric focus that is counter-intuitive to diversity inherent in the cosmos.

As early as 1896, Rudyard Kipling lamented: “The curse of America – sheer, hopeless, well ordered boredom – will one day become the curse of the world.”¹³ The need to escape such crushing boredom in highly regulated and increasingly stagnant modern societies has created a hyper-reality that now threatens to endanger the very foundations of Being. Frederick Nietzsche prophesied the coming of the last men:

The earth has become smaller and on it hops the last man who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea beetle; the last man lives longest. ‘We have invented happiness’ – say the last men and they blink.¹⁴

The last men now rule the world spreading happiness, that great promise of modernity, to all peoples. The benefits of modernity are rapidly being outweighed by their negative consequences. These are legion. In many respects, the end of history¹⁵ is approaching rapidly and some massive adjustment is imminent. Whether this will be caused by the internal collapse of civil societies, war, ecological disintegration, disease, or resource scarcity, remains to be seen. That some change is inevitable is becoming increasingly obvious to many people around the world.

Symbolically we could present the current situation as a great old tree, which has its roots in the European tradition, reaching back into Cartesian dualism, Aristotelian metaphysics and Judaic monotheism. This tree still looks fresh from the outside, and not all its fruits are bitter. Yet the heart of the tree is rotting, some branches have come off and the time is nearing when a great fall must occur. This collapse will certainly destroy many other things living in the forest. It will also open up the canopy to allow more light

¹² Baudrillard. J, (*ibid*)

¹³ Mumford. L, *City in History: Volume II* New York: Vintage Books 1945, p.240

¹⁴ Nietzsche. F, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A book for all or none* (trans T. cannon) London: George Allen and Unwin 1967 pp.72

¹⁵ Panikkar. R, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 1998. 79-133

so that the seeds now germinating can begin to grow. These seeds are of course, the manifestations of the emerging *mythos*¹⁶.

While the majority of the world's people appear to worship the tree and do not see the hidden decay, an increasing number of people from a great diversity of cultures and worldviews are aware of the demise of the law of the self and the delusion inherent in the divinisation of the concept of human freedom within such a limited framework.

SEEDS – The Mythos of Ontonomy

What will be the shape of new worldviews arising from the mythos of ontonomy? What, or perhaps, who are the seeds? How will we embrace Being at a cosmic level? How shall we find true human freedom while at the same moment respecting all other forms of being? These are not just metaphysical questions nor are they entirely theological, even though there is no doubt that the “theos” needs to be reintroduced into the equation at a far deeper level of understanding than many of the current proponents of new age ideas are prepared to realise.

Panikkar wrote of a cosmotheandric experience, which like the Vedic experience, has to be lived to be understood.¹⁷ Within this way of being is a requirement to rise above the hegemony of time to reach what Panikkar termed a transhistorical consciousness. He writes:

The cosmotheandric vocation is also a calling to the inner discovery of a lifestyle that is not exclusively historical. You do not postpone everything for the future; you do not become entangled in the world of means. May I call this transhistorical consciousness, the mystical awareness? It is a consciousness that supersedes time – or rather reaches the fullness of time since the three times are simultaneously experienced.... The meaning of life is not something you can make a career out of, nor yet something you postpone until after death. And this is the paradox: I am all the more myself, my self; the more my ego has disappeared. I am then everybody and everything – but from a unique angle so to speak.¹⁸

¹⁶ Panikkar states: “Man cannot live without myths”. See Panikkar. R, ‘Myths and History’ in *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* New York: Paulist Press 1979 p.100

¹⁷ Panikkar. R, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (op cit)

¹⁸ Panikkar (*ibid*) p.132-133

Here we can clearly see the difference between true human freedom and the manufactured temporal delusion that is currently defined as freedom. The emerging *mythos* will be free from the hegemony of passing time. It will be based on a mystical awareness.¹⁹ Its fundamental parameters are derived from the understanding that strengthening the ego by consuming the world is not the direction that leads to a meaningful life.

Overcoming the limitations of temporality go hand in hand with the emerging realisation of the unity that lies hidden within the seemingly endless diversity of the living cosmos. The principles of unity overcome all kinds of divisions currently exploited to pit one group against another or one form of life against another. There is an emergent conception, and indeed, existence of global citizens: Those that feel at home anywhere, who do not find any solace in nationalism, religious fundamentalism, racism, or indeed speciesism. These people are not lost, nor are they unconcerned by the fate of others; rather they are intimately involved in, and concerned with, creative and workable solutions to the ever-growing crisis that humanity faces. They represent all age groups, all levels of education, and artistic expression. They are emerging from many different societies and cultures, and they are generally united in their recognition of the importance of a spiritual reality, and in particular, a mystical pathway that overcomes the dichotomy of the current secular sacred divide. These people are drawing inspiration and spiritual practices from all the world's great traditions eastern, western and shamanic.

The Ontonomic *mythos* needs neither prophets nor solitary great masters to create its horizon of intelligibility. The new age is a collective age. Experience is shared; knowledge is freely given. There are few rules. Individuals govern their own behaviour out of the respect they have learned for Life, not because it is dictated by any secular or sacred authority. Government and its form is not an important issue, politics as a form of social change is effectively irrelevant, and social control undesirable. Ontonomy is profoundly ecological, but does not deny the needs of people, nor is there any residue of fear in relation to nature and her random manifestations.

¹⁹ Hazrat Inayat Khan outlined a pathway to modern mystical awareness in the early part of the twentieth century. His teaching presented a mix of Sufi, Islamic, and Hindu religious principles. See Keesing, E, *A Sufi master Answers: On the Sufi message Of Hazrat Inayat Khan*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1997.

Intuition, inspiration, and revelation are valued more highly than rationality and reason. Prayer, sacrifice, self-purification, and love are evolving spiritual aspirations of the 'seed' people. The socially and culturally conditioned 'I am', 'we are', and 'they are' is giving way to the realisation that it is the relationship 'Thou art', which defines reality. And perhaps more radically, is the growing intuition that human consciousness is the 'thou' and the 'I' is the loving intelligence that sustains the entire cosmos for which we are the 'thou'.²⁰

Perhaps one of the strongest manifestations of the new *mythos* now appearing is the revitalisation of the spiritual feminine and the recognition that while historical spiritual revelations were necessarily patriarchal, the supremacy of purely masculine gendered divinity is drawing to an end.²¹ The feminine principle is a constitutive part of the polarity inherent in the manifestation of reality into existence as beings. And suppression of half of reality must be declared an act of past ignorance. Full revitalisation of the feminine principle will bring many changes to societies everywhere. Symbols of male dominance will fade; the artistic, nurturing, and creative side of humanity will be promoted, not at the expense of the male, but as its compliment.

An ontonomic attitude is neither gender based nor political; it is profoundly spiritual in essence and practical in its manifestation. Its attitude is inclusive, holistic and reverent. On a practical level it is based on needs, not 'wants'; it is for good healthy living and long life as part of a clean and vibrant natural world. It is not against technology or trading, but is deeply rooted in pacifism and dialogue as a counter to current aggression and competition.

The spirituality of the ontonomic attitude is profoundly cosmotheandric. Human consciousness, as part of all living consciousness, is as central to reality as is the material and the divine aspects.²² The three principles are inseparable and ultimate in themselves; there is no inherent hierarchy. Humans are co-creators of reality and therein lies the real

²⁰ See Panikkar. R, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari* New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1994 p.788-790 for a commentary on the Vedic interpretation of this understanding of 'I and Thou'.

²¹ Here we can cite the example of Jesus of Nazareth who obviously loved women, but was restricted by the severe patriarchal Judaic society that he was incarnated into. He created the image of a loving father to replace the tyranny of the wholly male Judaic God. Mohammed faced an even fiercer patriarchy among the desert Bedouin of Arabia. The Vedic Gods had consorts at least, and it is only certain shamanic societies that allowed for predominately feminine spirituality. See Fraser. J. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* London: Penguin Books, 1996. for interesting examples.

²² Panikkar. R *The Cosmotheandric Experience (op cit)* 137-152

value and meaning of being human in the first instance.²³ We are collectively responsible for what happens to our world. There are no guarantees that everything will work out, or that God will ‘save’ us from ourselves, and our own power-plays. It is fair to suggest that the very existence of Being is now threatened by modernity and its exploitative ontology. The ontonomic attitude is a direct counter to such irresponsible actions carried out in the name of ‘progress’ and ‘enlightenment’.

Furthermore, ontonomic spirituality is founded upon inter-faith dialogue and the evolution of belief, faith, and practice that is fully inclusive, respectful, and profoundly intercultural. The search has begun for hermeneutic models that can bring the teachings of enlightened masters such as Jesus of Nazareth, Mohammad, Gautama Buddha, Lao Tzu together with the *sruti* of Yajnavalkya and the Vedic rishis while at the same time incorporate the living wisdom embodied by the remaining shamanic traditions. This is no longer a dream or an academic projection; it is the living experience of an increasing number of people worldwide who choose, or are forced, to re-engage life at a deeper level as a response to the current attempt to level all human experience to the lowest common denominator under the banner of equality and so-called democracy.

These people are not perfect; their vision is not yet unitary; there is not even a consensus, yet the seeds are growing, developing and exploring an entirely new way of living on this, our World, our Home.

Ontonomic symbols are gradually emerging. The symbol of ‘One World’, especially images of a blue-green earth spinning in the vastness of empty space are now common. Global communication systems such as the Internet are becoming increasingly symbolic. The feminine is emerging in symbols, particularly those presenting nature, and ecological purity. The colour green is an emerging symbol for all matters pertaining to the natural environment. Symbolic presentation of the unity of human beings is increasing as racial and cultural barriers become less significant.

Philosophical, metaphysical and religious symbols are harder to detect. The emergence of modern cosmology and the understanding it has derived of the nature of the physical universe is beginning to present certain cosmic linking symbols such as spiral

²³ Panikkar. R. ‘The Pluralism of Truth’ in *Invisible Harmonies: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1995, p.97

galaxies.²⁴ Quantum level science is also approaching the mysterious and indeterminate nature of material reality. Bioscience has detected that the genetic code is common to all life and is likely to be universally interchangeable. DNA is now a symbol.

New metaphysical symbols are also emerging from the interlinking of concepts. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields, the ecological concept of supernature, Martin Heidegger's *dasein* and Goethe's Faustian bargain, all present metaphysical ideas about the nature of reality that are becoming symbols in the current era.

Ontonomic religious symbols remain much more elusive, probably because the emerging spirituality is still forming. There is a glimpse of commonality in traditional symbols that are now being discovered in many cultures. The Star of David, for example, the Swastika, the Endless Knot, Cosmic Tree symbols, are common to many traditions that have radically different presentations of divine reality. It is perhaps to the past that we still have to look for linking symbols. These may need to be revitalised and reinterpreted to suit present conditions, yet they do exist.

Interfaith dialogue

One such example of an ontonomic prayer can be drawn from the Indic *sruti*. It is an unusual prayer in that it seems to be God speaking to Man rather than the reverse. Additionally, these sentiments could have issued from the heart of Jesus of Nazareth, the Prophet Mohammad, Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, or Lord Krishna and could just as easily have slipped from the pen of Lao Tzu.

This selection is from the Atharva Veda.

1. Of one heart and one mind I make you,
 devoid of hate.
 Love one another, as a cow
 loves the calf she has borne.
3. Never may brother hate brother,
 or sister hurt sister.

²⁴ See Davies. P, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning*. London: Simon and Shuster 1992 for many examples of evolving cosmic myths.

United in heart and in purpose,
Commune sweetly together.

4. I will utter a prayer for such concord,
among family members
As binds the Gods,
among whom is no hatred.
5. Be courteous, planning and working,
in harness together
Approach, conversing pleasantly
Like minded, united
6. Have your eating and drinking in common
I bind you together.
Assemble for worship of the Lord,
Like spokes around a hub.
7. Of one mind and one purpose, I make you,
following one leader
Be like the Gods, ever deathless!
Never stop loving.²⁵

The urge for holism, loving harmony, and rhythm underpin the emergence of an ontonomic *mythos*. Panikkar calls this growing urge, and its associated attitude, loving Advaita.²⁶ Not only is his Trinitarian (cosmotheandric) vision included in a loving Advaita, it is also an image of a loving and intelligent cosmic consciousness, which, in any other tradition can be called God, the Gods, the divine Spirit, the supreme Intelligence, pure Consciousness, or more simply: Life.

Never stop loving!

Perhaps it is this realisation, which allows for a new innocence.

²⁵ Artharva Veda II, 30 (1, 3-7) Translated by Panikkar. R, *The Vedic Experience (op cit)* p.857

²⁶ See Panikkar. R, *Rising Sun and Setting Sun Diogenes 50(4) 5-13*