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		Page
	Religion and Consciousness	<i>Neville Symington</i> 2
	Concretization of the Spiritual	<i>Alan Mann</i> 8
	Travellers Tales from Japan	<i>Margot Mann</i> 9
	Letters	
	Gebser	<i>George Schloss</i> 11
	John de Ruiter	<i>John Hamilton</i> 11
	Meetings – Workshops - Gatherings	12

Editor's note

The heart of this month's issue is a paper by Neville Symington which I heard at a University of Western Sydney seminar last year. It was one of two papers which, for different reasons, made a big impression on me. This one is closest, I believe, to what the Nowletter is about in that it tackles the issue of what might be involved in direct experiencing of the spiritual as opposed to talking and writing about it or adopting a belief system in lieu.

Neville Symington is a Psycho-Analyst and the author of several books including Emotion and Spirit, which was my introduction to his work, and, most recently A Pattern of Madness. In 1999 he was elected President of the Australian Psychoanalytical Society, a position he held until 2002. He studied Philosophy and Theology before taking a degree in Psychology. He believes that the relationship between Psycho-Analysis and Religion requires special attention and the linking area is in the phenomenon of Narcissism which is a focus of concern both for clinicians and those concerned with a religious solution to emotional problems.

We had a very interesting time in Japan where Margot and I enjoyed the hospitality of John Toler at his hermitage-temple of Seisen-An in Ouda. I made some tapes of our talks with John, which I plan to transcribe and put in future Nowletters. Margot has prepared her Travellers' Tales Column again which appears in this issue. As most of you are aware, the Nowletter is limited to 12 pages for reasons of postage limits for the 45c stamp which explains why some issues, like this one, seem very cramped. I'm hoping that we will be posting the email edition to a website from January onwards. The present list comprises 45 postal subscribers and 75 email subscribers.

Thank you for recent contributions some of which are held over because of temporary overload – please keep them coming.

The Nowletter appears between 10 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. Contributions from readers are considered the most valuable content so please think about letting me have your thoughts, experiences, discoveries and any responses to what you read here.

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Religion and Consciousness by Neville Symington

I believe that Revealed Religion is antithetical to consciousness whereas Natural Religion is conducive to it. This paper is an attempt to substantiate this statement. In order to do this I need first to define the difference between Revealed Religion and Natural Religion. Then it is necessary for me to elaborate my theory of how something comes to consciousness and then to show how Revealed Religion prevents it whereas Natural Religion favours it. As each of these elements in the argument are in themselves huge topics and each open to debate, this paper is necessarily a sketch or an outline which requires considerable elaboration.

When people say that they are religious or not religious they conceptualize religion according to one particular form of it. This is the form of religion which has been transmitted into Western civilization through agency of the Judaeo-Christian community of the faithful. I include Islam in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The idea that this one particular form constitutes the whole of religion is such a deeply-rooted assumption that I have found it usually takes more than just intellectual argument to open people to the notion of any religion other than this one. I shall try first to outline what is meant by Revealed Religion.

My easiest path is to take the most extreme example of it. This has the advantage of highlighting the fact that it is rare in the real world to find either Revealed Religion or Natural Religion in the pure state. Within much Revealed Religion there are traits of Natural Religion and within the latter the tendency to degenerate into the former is always present and I use the word 'degenerate' advisedly.

In Revealed Religion an almighty being suddenly overpowers an individual who becomes enslaved to this extraneous force. This almighty being is referred to as God. This God is revealed in a moment of ecstasy. The clearest example of this is the way in which Allah was revealed to Muhammad. In the midst of an ecstatic trance the teachings of Allah were revealed to Muhammad, who dictated them, and had them transcribed onto tablets, which became the Koran. Muhammad himself was a slave in submission to the Voice of Allah. It was believed that there were permanent tablets of stone in the heavens which became transcribed into the Koran through the human agency of Muhammad. Any possibility of thinking, which is an inner creative process, is crushed under the force of such an ecstatic experience.

An authority on Islam has this to say about Muhammad:

*'From the books of tradition we learn that the prophet was subject to ecstatic seizures. He is reported to have said that when inspiration came to him he felt as it were the painful sounding of a bell. Even in cold weather his forehead was bathed in sweat.'*¹

However this same ecstatic seizure of the individual or sometimes a group of individuals is a re-appearing theme in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Judaism one needs only to consider these two passages - the first from the Book of Exodus and the second from Isaiah:

*Now at daybreak on the third day there were peals of thunder on the mountain and lightning flashes, a dense cloud, and a loud trumpet blast, and inside the camp all the people trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. The mountain of Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because Yahweh had descended on it in the form of fire. Like smoke from a furnace the smoke went up, and the whole mountain shook violently. Louder and louder grew the sound of the trumpet. Moses spoke, and God answered him with peals of thunder.'*²

I saw the Lord Yahweh seated on a high throne; his train filled the sanctuary, above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying.

And they cried out one to another in this way, 'Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth. His glory fills the whole earth.'

*The foundations of the threshold shook with the voice of the one who cried out, and the Temple was filled with smoke. I said: 'What a wretched state I am in! I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have looked at the King, Yahweh Sabaoth.'*³

Then, within Christianity one need think just of the Pentecost experience, as it is described in the Acts of the Apostles:
When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded

¹ Guillaume, A. (1976). *Islam*. p. 56. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin Books.

² Exodus Ch. 19 vv. 16-19. In *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966). London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

³ Isaiah Ch. 6. vv. 1-5. In *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966). London. Darton, Longman and Todd.

*like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.*⁴

and also in the same book, the incident which has become known as the Conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus:

*Suddenly, while he was travelling to Damascus and just before he reached the city, there came a light from heaven all round him. He fell to the ground, and he heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' he asked, and the voice answered, 'I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me ...'*⁵

These are all shamanistic experiences, where a transcendent power is believed to have taken possession of the believer, and in whose power the priest, prophet or shaman becomes the automatic translator of the godly message. Yahweh tells Jeremiah:

*There! I am putting my words into your mouth,*⁶

and much of the Quran is a record of what Muhammad said while in ecstatic states.

How is one to understand the psychological process behind these experiences? I think what I have been describing would be formulated by a psycho-analyst as a split-off part of the self taking possession of the whole personality. I think it occurs because in the narcissistic part of the personality a wound has been incurred and the God arises as an epiphenomenon of this insulted self. It is then the insulted self that takes over the personality. God is the insulted self. An example comes to mind from an incident that a colleague described:

*The analyst had a moment of deep empathic understanding of this woman's deprived childhood. She conveyed this to the patient and there were a few moments of emotional 'togetherness' of a ~~q~~ kind. Then the cruel event occurred: the session, like an insensate executioner, came to an abrupt end. The woman was hurt to the quick. The next day she would not come into the consulting-room, she declared with emphatic certainty that there were hidden microphones in the room and no rational argument could dissuade her from her conviction.*⁷

An irrational God had taken over. So the irrational God is the insulted self puffed up into the full majesty of an awe-inspiring God. I think the kernel of ecstasy lies in the psychological process whereby one part of the self inflates and overpowers the rest of the personality. This part is named 'God' in the Judaeo-Christian culture. It is such a violent marauder to the personality that it is ejected and experienced as outside the self. We know that the voices heard by a schizophrenic are thought by him to come from outside whereas they are from within the personality.⁸ This part of the personality which is called God is bribable. If I offer sacrifice to this great power I may buy his mercy. In this lies the basis of magic and superstition. This I believe is the origin of the God revealed in Judaism, in Christianity and in Islam. Although there are great differentiations through the cultural colourings within these three great historical religions yet I believe the psychological origins of the powerful God who dominates all three are as I have described. I dare to say what I have described is the psychological explanation for what is known as Revealed Religion. What makes it so enduring is that it is always intertwined with Natural Religion. Disentangling the two is, I believe, an urgent task for our present time.

Natural Religion arises out of ontological reflexion. Ontology is that branch of philosophy whose sphere of enquiry is reality itself. One might put it that the rest of philosophy and of science are concerned with specifics: the nature of time, the origins of life, the nature of consciousness, epistemology, perception, cognition, the historical process, chemistry, physics,

⁴ Acts of the Apostles Ch. 2 vv. 1-4.

⁵ Ibid. Ch. 9 vv.3-5.

⁶ Jeremiah Ch. 1 v.9. Ibid.

⁷ Personal communication

⁸ The experience of God as immanent as testified by mystics is in truth existence in all its absoluteness and is the result of ontological reflection.

astronomy, biology, sociology, religion, aesthetics and so on. All these disciplines seek understanding of a circumscribed section of reality. Ontology studies reality itself. Its goal is to comprehend reality. In the way that Archimedes had a sudden insight into what we call volume, so the goal of Ontology is that the student of this subject acquire insight into the nature of reality, or more accurately, have an act of comprehension whose object is reality itself. This is something which each person has to do for himself. The teacher of Ontology can lecture upon it, giving perspectives from different angles, using analogies but the act of comprehension has to occur within each individual. One thing is certain: that this act will never occur if there is some background assumption that there is a powerful Creator responsible for the world we see around us which is named his creation or this belief has to be banished to another part of the personality in order for it to be possible. Inner creative acts cannot occur in the presence of a powerful judging God. The doctrines that come out of Revealed Religion prevent an act that comprehends reality. They lay down a system of belief that interferes with the possibility of that act of comprehension. Banishment of this belief is I think a precondition for an unprejudiced inquiry into the nature of reality. Rather in the way that a painter needs to banish his knowledge of the structural forms which are in front of him if he is to represent faithfully the coloured sensations he perceives so the ontological enquirer needs to banish those beliefs in order to see (in the mental sense) existence itself. Only in this way will a new world of comprehension come into being. These are remarks about what might be called preliminary methodology essential for ontological reflexion.

In this reflexion upon existence itself the first thing that strikes the mind is its absolute character. One cannot say that existence *is* but it might just as well might not be. The conclusion that existence might just as well not be is derived from belief in a God as is revealed in Judaism, Christianity or Islam: that such a God could click his fingers and annihilate existence. This belief prevents the act of comprehension that I am talking about. It is very difficult for people to banish such a belief system; get behind it, as it were, to what immediately confronts the mind. There is another class of thinkers who, so keen to alienate themselves from such a supernaturalist belief system, that they restrict the sphere of knowledge to that alone which is processed through the senses. This is the obverse side of the same belief system deriving ultimately from Revealed Religion but if the ontological inquirer can detach himself from these beliefs then the mind is able to let itself be confronted with existence in all its starkness. In such an insight it becomes clear that intrinsic to existence is that it is necessary, it is absolute, it cannot not-be. It just is. There can be no explanation for it. The idea of an explanation is that there is something outside of existence but the only such category is non-existence. To suggest that non-existence explains existence is absurd. Existence is its own explanation. This is what we mean when we say that existence is absolute. I am not sure if I am understood? I cannot say it more clearly. The task is to comprehend it.

If, by a fiction, I place my own self outside the object of my scrutiny then I call what I am doing philosophy. If I abandon this fiction and place my own existence into the melting-pot of the object of my scrutiny then my endeavour is religious. Philosophy becomes religion at the point when I put my own self into existence. I exist so it is by a fiction that I remove myself from the object of enquiry. It is irrational, it is an arrogance of mind, an absurdity to extricate myself from existence as if I could, by some sleight of hand, pretend that I do not exist. I exist; so my own self is in the existence which I comprehend in a simple act of insight. This fundamental act of comprehension is the foundation stone of natural religion. It has been defined by C.C.J. Webb thus:

*Those things in religion, the appeal of which meets a universal response, whether they be statements about the essential and eternal nature of reality, apprehended by the reason as true in their own right, from whatever source they have been learned, or whether they be precepts of conduct, the moral obligatoriness of which, when once propounded, is also perceived, as Kant would say, a priori, these will constitute, so it has seemed to some, Natural Religion.*⁹

If this is accepted then this insight into my nature has consequences for the way I live my life. I am learning something about myself through this ontological reflexion. It is not something which is outside of myself and therefore of no personal relevance. When people refer to an ethical system that is non-religious they mean one that is not rooted in Revealed Religion but I believe that all ethics has a religious basis but of the kind that I am defining here. Religion has been defined in many ways but, although restricted and limited to *praxis*, the most simple and the one that, in its simplicity, holds conviction for me is that of Tolstoy:

Religion is concerned with how one lives ones life.

If I live it according to the principles of Revealed Religion the over-riding principle is that I act in accordance with the ordinances of the God who has revealed himself to me via his representative, be it Moses, Jesus or Muhammad. I am of course

⁹ C.C.J. Webb. (1915) *Studies in the History of Natural Theology*. pp. 33-34. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

able to think and elaborate within the boundaries that have been set me by what has been revealed. I am not free however to generate thoughts that are in contradiction to the divine dictates. My belief has limited the scope of my enquiry. In Revealed Religion the origin of enquiry is in an imposed dictum; in Natural Religion the origin lies in a rational act of creative insight. The person who passed from being a believer in Revealed Religion to being rationally convinced in the ontological basis of Natural Religion was Tolstoy. Having been brought up a devout believer in the Russian Orthodox Church he came utterly to repudiate it but he embraced Natural Religion on the basis of his own rational conviction.

* * *

Now I want to examine as closely as possible that primordial act of understanding in which existence is comprehended. My contention is that this act by which a reality becomes a possession of the mind is a creation. At first sight it may seem impossible that a reality which exists and which has existed prior to the advent of a human mind, before what paleontologists call *hominization*, could in any way be the object of a mental creation. Yet, one has to ask, was the act by which Newton 'discovered' gravity a creative one? Does the fact that the forces which became described by Newton as gravity pre-existed him and pre-existed any such formulation gainsay the fact that his insight was a creative act of mind? That he created the form which we know as gravity. I wish to contend that all those forms of reality from Archimedes' insight into volume to Einstein's Theory of Relativity are the creative acts of seminal thinkers. One could think of ways in which this contradiction might be resolved; in particular Hume's and Kant's formulations but I prefer not to go down that path but to propose that there are certain antinomies in our apprehension of reality that are beyond the capacity of the mind to grasp. I realize that this principle has its dangers: that we might fall back upon this comfortable nostrum every time we encounter a difficult-to-grasp contradiction. However, there is a danger the other way also: that we deny a bit of experience because we cannot make it fit the limitations of our minds which are unable to integrate two pieces of experience that appear to be contradictory. The failure to recognize the limitations of the mind can lead to an arrogance that ultimately distorts our comprehension of reality. Of these two errors I believe the latter is particularly current among contemporary thinkers. The former was more in evidence in that cultural epoch in Europe known as *Christendom*.

You might ask 'On what ground do I state that the act of insight is creative in its nature?' I would define a creation as a reality whose origin is generated in the mind. There is the view that the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a waxen tablet, upon which reality imprints itself. I cannot refute this view although I think it is false. Let me correct this categorical statement. I think that there are elements existing in the mind in this form but that there are also elements which have been created by the mind and that in every mind there is a mixture of these two elements: the imprinted and the created.¹⁰

Now it should be clear that the key elements in the mind deriving from Revealed Religion are of the imprinted kind. 'Does God exist?' Yes. 'Why?' Because he has told us so. 'Is murder wrong?' Yes. 'Why?' Because it is against the sixth commandment. And so on. As I said a while back there is concurrent with this kind of mental presence of elements a dictatorial figure to which the mind is in servitude. The greater this figure's empire over the mind the more numerous and more dominant are such imprinted elements. So, for instance, in a religious fundamentalist this servitude is almost total but in what is known in Anglican circles as a *Broad Church* it is much less so. But my contention is that it is the dominant and circumscribing form, the form legitimated by what we know as Revealed Religion. The presence of a harsh dictator is familiar to psychiatrists in the mental disorder which has been given the name of *schizophrenia* where a powerful voice commands the individual to act mentally and practically in this way, or that way. It is my contention that this is present with particular clarity in *schizophrenia* but it is also present in other conditions which are categorized as pathological such as *bipolar disorder*, *obsessive compulsive disorder*, *psychopathy* and *hysteria*. This oppressive dictator forbids thought, forbids the generation of thoughts, forbids creation.

You will see from the way I am developing this argument that I am making an equation between Revealed Religion and those mental conditions which psychiatry designates as pathological. A discipline which designates this mental condition as pathological in contrast to another which is sane is a very powerful authority in the land. We all know the gross mis-use to which this power has been put in certain societies. What we need to ask however is what is the principle governing the diagnosis?

There is a judgment that certain mental conditions are pathological. On what ground is the observer standing who makes this judgment? I believe it comes from the standpoint of someone who has had an Archimedes type of insight either into being itself or one of its modes. One needs to think of the huge revolution in scientific thinking that occurred in the epoch which has been named understandably *The Enlightenment*. That epoch could be defined as the period during which the great insights into the workings of our world were first formulated in a thorough way and that this form of thinking became, in this era, legitimated by Society. The names of these thinkers are known to all: Copernicus, Galileo, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Newton

¹⁰ The British Psycho-Analyst, Wilfred Bion, called these two modes of presence in the mind as *beta elements* and *alpha elements*. The former are imprinted and the latter created.

and many others. The scientific insights that lay behind these great developments were all creative in nature. The capacity of the human mind to understand the workings of the world through creative insights was the foundation stone of *The Enlightenment*. It was the core value that structured thinking during that epoch. It is against that backdrop that a series of mental conditions were defined as pathological: i.e. because they handicapped the creative mental functioning.

The core scientific insight is the comprehension of reality itself. As this is also the foundation stone of Natural Religion then Science and Religion are differentiated according to the principle that in the latter the focus is upon the consequences for the observer and in the former the use to which the insights can be put for the sake of the observer.

I shall need to come back to the relationship between Natural Religion and Revealed Religion but I want now to substantiate my statement that Natural Religion and consciousness are concurrent partners whereas Revealed Religion is antithetical to consciousness.

When I speak of consciousness I mean consciousness of one's own self. I mean the process whereby I become aware that I am shy, courageous morally but not physically, jealous, good judge of character, snobbish, patient with young people but intolerant with older people and so on. In other words I come into possession of a picture of my own character. How is this possible? It is the outcome of a scientific observation. But how do I manage to be a scientific observer of myself? The Spanish mystic, John of the Cross, has this line in one of his poems:

*Vivo sin vivir en mi*¹¹

which translates:

I live without living in myself

What on earth does he mean? I resort to a psycho-analytic piece of understanding to answer this question. Psycho-analytic research is confident that I am able to put myself into another individual, into an ideology, into a group, into my body, into a sexual activity, into an auto-generated ecstasy. For our present enquiry I take just the last of these: that I can put myself into an auto-generated state of the particular type which we call ecstasy. I quote an example of this from Marion Milner's book *An Experiment in Leisure*:

*I was one day driving over the mountain road to Granada in the spring, the cone-shaped, red-earthed foothills all covered with interlacing almond blossom. Also it was the first sunny weather after days of rain, so that I was filled with exultation as we climbed higher and higher into the clear mountain air. I was full of that kind of exultation which makes one above oneself, I felt powerful and important, as if it was somehow my doing that the country was so lovely, or at least that I was cleverer than other people in having got myself there to see it - I was certainly thankful that I was not as other men are. Then I noticed the character of the country was changing ... but as soon as I tried to look back in my own mind, I found there was nothing there, only a rather absurd memory of my own exultation but no living vision of what had caused it. Then I remembered the Pharisee and the publican ... at once the look of the country was different, I was aware only of it, not of myself at all, and always afterwards it was that bit of Spain that I seemed to possess in imagination ...*¹²

In this passage she puts herself into her exaltation and then extracts herself from it. When John of the Cross says that he does not live in himself I think he means he does not live in an exalted self. The matter to note here is that when Marion Milner was *in* her exalted state she neither saw the object nor herself. When she came out of her exalted state she both saw the object and also the state she had been in. My thesis is that the core of the person is reality in its absoluteness but the comprehension of that is a creative act and that a product of it is awareness of oneself. One could put it that when Marion Milner was in that exalted state she was mad but became sane at the moment that she withdrew herself from the exaltation and observed the state she had been in. Therefore I am drawing a parallel between the ecstatic state as instanced in the cases I have quoted in Revealed Religion and the act of comprehension inherent in Natural Religion; that the latter is sympathetic to the development of consciousness whereas the former is antithetical to it. I would go further than this and say that Natural Religion is a necessary foundation for the development of self-awareness whereas Revealed Religion strangles the possibility of it.

My rationale for saying this is that an inner creative act is responsible for both the presence of the object and awareness of the state of the self: that the two are interdependent upon each other: that the object is known through being created and here it is necessary to formulate my theory as to how objects in the outer world are known. There are, I believe, two independent sources of information. The senses process sensations which are registered as colour, shape, noise, touch,

¹¹ ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. (2000) *Poems: Coplas del Alma que pena por ver a Dios*. Translated by Roy Campbell. London: The Harvill Press.

¹² MILNER, Marion. [Joanna Field] (1987) *An Experiment in Leisure*. pp.208-209. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc. {Originally published under the pseudonym 'Joanna Field' in London by Chatto & Windus}.

smell and taste. The act of insight grasps reality in itself. An act of belief or what Collingwood¹³ calls a 'metaphysical presupposition' puts the two together. An inadequate analogy would be someone seeing a bird sitting on a telegraph wire and, at the same time, hearing birdsong and believing that what is heard comes from the object seen. As the act of comprehension is a creation so it endows this quality to the object observed. The mind is the constructive organizer but then the question arises 'Why does this endow the personality with awareness of itself?' I think it is that the mind can only grasp itself through its activity. Its activity gives, as it were, a peephole into the nature of the mind. If the mind is inactive then there is no window to its nature. In the ecstatic condition typical of Revealed Religion the mind is in passive servitude to the tyrant God.

I have mentioned the presence of an exalted power in Revealed Religion which I have suggested originates in an insulted self that puffs up into a God that paralyzes the rest of the personality. It blinds the self to the object and also to awareness of the self's state as instanced in the quote from Marion Milner's autobiographical work. This blindness to the self's nature is therefore always to be found when this ecstatic state is present. As Revealed Religion is founded upon such ecstatic experiences the conclusion is that it smothers consciousness of the self.

I said earlier that neither Natural Religion nor Revealed Religion ever exist in the pure state. Some further reflection upon this is necessary. As already stated the origin of Natural Religion lies in an act in which existence itself is comprehended. This act is ahistorical. There is no taint of the particular in it. Just as this act always becomes conjoined to the sensory input through a metaphysical predisposition so this ahistorical act always accretes to itself historical and cultural forms. So Natural Religion always exists in a place and time which colour its expression but this is not central to it; its essence is ahistorical whereas Revealed Religion originates in a specific time and place and is therefore historical in its essence. So also in Revealed Religion there is some admixture of Natural Religion. The more the latter is present within it the less fundamentalist it is and vice versa. So, for instance, if a sacred text is believed to have been given by God as it is and any scientific exegesis is forbidden then we have Revealed Religion in a very pure state. However, if it is held that the meaning of the text can only be elucidated faithfully through textual analysis and historical re-construction then there is a considerable presence of Natural Religion. However if the core of the religion lies in an ahistorical ontological act in which existence is comprehended and that states of mind are judged in relation to that then we are in the presence of Natural Religion which is also the standard from which mental states are judged to be sane or mad but if that core lies in the ecstatic experience of a particular individual or group at a particular point of time and in a particular place in which a powerful God reveals his message then we are in the presence of Revealed Religion and this form crushes creative insight and therefore consciousness of the self.

I have spoken as if Revealed Religion were confined to the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is here I believe that we see it in its purest form. A God chose this People; a God revealed himself to this man; God became Man. This Man was God. It is in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition that these doctrines have been unashamedly spelt out as official doctrines. However the same phenomenon is to be found in the Eastern Religions. It is said that the Buddha told his followers before he died that they were not to take what he said because he had said it but to test what he said against their experience of life. However, degeneration set in and the Buddha became unofficially divinized in many places. Revealed Religion begins to emerge as soon as a single person or group of people become divinized and the dictates of this person are substituted for my own creative thinking activity. So these two religious forms exist in the atheist as much as in the theist. They are mental modes existing in all of us. Revealed Religion and Natural Religion exist also in the individual. Consciousness of the self emerges in direct ratio to the extent to which Natural Religion displaces Revealed Religion.

It is my contention that Natural Religion is necessary for the development of awareness of the self. Here lies the true bridge between religion and consciousness.

Neville Symington

¹³ COLLINGWOOD, R.G. (1969) An Essay on Metaphysics. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Concretization of the Spiritual from Alan Mann

In the last issue I mentioned how Gebser's notion of *concretization of the spiritual* captures the essence of what the Nowletter is about. I finished reading his *Ever Present Origin* nearly 12 months ago but it was as if finally getting down to writing something about it pulled a cork out of the bottle. I was enveloped by the genie of concretization for I seemed to be finding examples everywhere I turned. First, I was reminded of the paper by Neville Symington which appears in this issue in which he speaks of insights into the nature of reality as something which each person has to do for himself and which I see as an example of what I'm trying to communicate although I would prefer to call it 'actualization of the spiritual' rather than concretization.

Then, during our recent travels, Margot passed on to me Saul Bellow's book Ravelstein in which the narrator says:

"He used to quote me to myself." He had dug up a statement I had made about modern disenchantment. Under the debris of modern ideas the world was still there to be rediscovered. And his way of putting it was that the gray net of abstraction covering the world in order to simplify and explain it in a way that served our cultural ends has become the world in our eyes. We needed to have alternate visions, a diversity of views — and he meant views not bossed by ideas. He saw it as a question of words: "values," "lifestyles," "relativism." I agreed, up to a point. We need to know — our deep human need, however, can't be satisfied by these terms. We can't climb out of the pit of "culture" and the "ideas" that supposedly express it. The right words would be a great help. But even more, a gift for reading reality — the impulse to put your loving face to it and press your hands against it."

Well, if that isn't an attempt to describe what Traherne means by 'enjoying the world aright' I don't know what is. There are readers of the Nowletter who believe or see that this wider dimension is always the case and that all that obscures it is our determined overlooking of it.

Here upon Earth souls love what God hates, and hate what God loves. Did they keep their eye open always upon what He loves, and see His love to them, and to all, they could not choose but love as He does. And were they mirrors only that return His love, one would think it impossible, while He shines upon them, to forbear to shine, but they are like the eye, mirrors with lids, and the lid of ignorance or inconsideration interposing, they are oftentimes eclipsed or shine only through some crannies; so that here upon earth having free power to hold open or shut their lids, to send or turn away their beams, they may love me or forbear. Traherne Cent. 4/86

What I like about Traherne is his insistence that action is both possible and necessary, that spiritual life is participatory not passive, rather like Neville's point that each person has to do for himself.

In our wanderings around central Japan and enquiries into Zen, which I intend to cover separately, we heard quite a lot about the tea ceremony and tea masters. However, nowhere did I make the connection between what seemed a formal aesthetics-driven ritual and concretization until I read the following in a book entitled *The Way of Tea* by Dr. Soetsu Yanagi which I picked up by chance from a table in Kawai Kanjiro's house in Kyoto:

Though everyone says he sees things, how few can see things properly. Among these are found our early masters of Chan-no-yun (We call them Tea Masters) They could comprehend intuitively. And because of their penetration they saw truth.

.....Those who employ their intellect before they see are denied a real comprehension of beauty.

There was a special exhibition at the Kyoto National Museum on the tea ceremony – its history and examples of the ceremonial utensils from all periods. A whole building was devoted to the exhibition yet no mention of the fundamental purpose outlined by Dr. Soetsu Yanagi. In this case, I cannot assume they have forgotten because within the Zen tradition there seems to be a convention of not 'spelling it out'. That is, it is left to the interested observer to work at whatever is on offer until the light dawns – life as koan? This made me wonder to what extent Christian communion has fallen away from an original aim of 'concretization'.

For me, the master of concretization is Douglas Harding who has provided anyone interested enough in the concretization of the spiritual with a fool-proof means of realization and which offers the possibility of life as 'Tea Ceremony'. I thought I would give him the last word on the subject as far as this note is concerned. This is what he said in his Melbourne talk in 1991.

There are two worlds and they are vastly different: the 'as if' world and the 'as is' world. The first world is the world we are told we live in – the world of convention, a make-believe world a world which is determined by language, culture and convention. But we don't live in that world of convention when we are little we live in the as is world, the

world as given. And as we grow up we trade in our 'as is' world, the real world as presented, for the as if world of convention. And nearly all of us live and die convinced that the 'as if' world, the world of convention mediated to us by teachers and parents and language is the full picture, as if that was the real world. Well, why should we distinguish between the 'as if' world and the 'as is' world? It's my theory that the 'as is' world, the world as given before I start mucking about with it – trying to control it for the purpose of getting power over others and so forth – the world as given to me when I'm simple enough to dare to look at what's presented, I say, in my experience, that world is woven of blessings, it's a world full of blessings. It's a world built to a fabulously beautiful design. Conversely I find that the world of the 'as if' or conventional world that we are asked to believe in is a pretty awful place. Some of you will remember a very fine prose writer called Thomas Traherne, a seventeenth cent. English cleric, a mystic and poet. He said there were two worlds, man's world and God's world and the thing is to get out of one into the other and, in my experience, he got it right. This evening, with your permission, we are going to have a look at the other world, God's world if you like, if you don't mind that word. I should be careful when I use the word God. I can use the word Buddha till the cows come home but I get into trouble when I use the word God. Substitute your own synonym! (DEH – Slightly modified transcript. - Melbourne 1991)

Most of what appears in the Newsletter has to do with what I think Gebser means by concretization of the spiritual. Many contributions are descriptions of personal, spontaneous and often unsought experiencing which seems to be the most usual way in which the transformation occurs. My interest lies in the possibility of opening up to this wider dimension without relying solely on what is commonly understood as grace. To discover whether it is possible to align oneself with the totality – a possibility that I think Gebser, Symington, Harding and others are pointing to – if not insisting on – as the necessary action.

Alan Mann

Travellers Tales from Japan – from Margot Mann

We can't ever live in Japan for long: the top of Alan's head is covered in scar tissue from forgetting to duck under low lintels, and his reconstructed knee doesn't like him sitting on the floor. And I think I would find it difficult to live in a country where there is no word for "no": you have to work out, from the degree of attitude and negativity in the person's tone, what their "yes" means.

We were shown kindness wherever we went in Japan. Perhaps people thought we were lost because (a) we were walking, (b) we were old, and (c) we weren't in a group. One hot day we were sitting in a park in Ouda and a woman who was looking after her grandson came over with a can of cold sweet milky tea, which tasted better than it sounds. Another time, a young woman, exquisitely dressed in traditional style kimono, helped us with translation. One hot day when we had walked a long way, an elderly man offered us a drink from his garden hose. It sprayed all over Alan causing the good Samaritan much embarrassed mirth. In the same district, a woman opened up the local historical museum especially for us, and the caretaker later came running after us with a short printed potted history of the area.

The school kids were wonderful, and we saw hundreds of them, every day of the week, mostly in large groups, being "enculturated" by visits to temples and shrines. They were usually following an adult who held high an identifying flag, while other adults took videos of them. Occasionally one would say "helloooo" to us, to which we would reply "konnichiwa". Much giggling behind hands. "Konnichiwa means "greetings": my other Japanese word is "arigato" – thankyou. Trendy schoolgirls wear very long thick white socks which they concertina to fit up to the knee, then they glue them to their legs so they won't fall down. The socks are so thick, the girls have to tread down the backs of their shoes so they can walk.

All teenagers of both sexes when not in school uniform wear T-shirts with English words printed on them, sometimes very long complex sentences in small print. Very often the English is strange, or meaningless, or romantically philosophical, but it doesn't matter. On one T-shirt, worn by a teenage boy, the message "NOISE NAVEL" was printed across the chest, and underneath, in a different font, "A Golden Rule." The effect can be quite incongruous at times, such as when a young mother with a couple of small children walks around a supermarket with "PORNSTAR" printed across her chest.

The Japanese obviously believe that anything written in French has clout: in the window of a shop in a wealthy street in Ise was a printed instruction that this shop was for "Meilleurs Personnes", and many shops we saw were named, rather bizarrely, in French. Mind you, many shops were named slightly bizarrely in English too.

We got some funny looks walking around the streets and temples of Japan. Alan was usually taller than everyone and very often wearing his tweed peaked hat. Once we saw a very similar hat on a hip young Japanese boy. Maybe it was my scrawny arms in an orange t-shirt that attracted attention: most older women in Japan cover their arms and wear fairly muted tones.

We spent a lot of time on trains and buses, especially trains. The bus drivers all wore immaculate white gloves, pressed white shirts with a knife edge down the short sleeve, and peaked hats. The trains were as punctual as we had been led to expect, and always clean. However, we were often confused because a local train, a limited express or a bullet express could all be going to the same place at roughly the same time from different platforms. The costs were all different and we had no way of knowing which was the best option at the time. Nearly everyone sleeps on trains. This could perhaps be a way of avoiding eye contact! I saw one young woman asleep, leaning across another sleeping woman. I thought they were mother and daughter but they got out at different stops and didn't speak. The only sign I ever understood on a train was one which said 'Please don't use your mobile phone on the train. It disturbs the other passengers.' It is significant that this message was in English as we never saw Japanese people using mobiles on public transport. Young people were sending text messages on an amazing state of the art phone/computers, but there were no loud conversations.

The bath house in Ouda, the town where John Toler lives, is quite new – one side for men, and the other side for women (I early learned to distinguish the signs for men and women in Japan) and they regularly swap sides because one side is supposed to be better than the other. It's great fun, even if to western eyes there seems to be a reckless disregard for water consumption. I half expected it to be like the bath house in the recent Chinese film of that name. There were women of all ages and a few young children of both sexes, all getting very clean indeed. You must make sure you have washed off all traces of soap and unguents before you finally step into one of the hot pools. You can choose from a spa; a pool which gives you little electric shocks (I didn't try that one); an outdoor hot pool; a sauna and a cold bath. When you get out, you can blow dry your hair, have a cool drink and then go to the café on the premises for some noodles. Japanese people go to the bath house the way westerners go to a movie – and it costs about the same. And speaking of cleanliness, when we were in a western style hotel in Kyoto for a couple of nights, there was a variety of push-button sprays and jets on the (western) toilet.

We stayed in Japan at John Toler's Hermitage in beautiful countryside near the small town of Ouda. In the distance, the mountains and dark green of the forests formed the background for the yellowing rice fields, just then being harvested, bunches of red spider orchids, and the quaintly clipped trees with their isolated clumps of traditionally shaped foliage in many domestic gardens. The trade-mark persimmon trees were dropping their heavy orange fruit. John is a Zen monk who has lived in this village for many years in his wonderful 300 year old Temple. He told us that in 1979 Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall stayed with him and that Caroline Kennedy and her husband stayed when they were on honeymoon. Close to the Temple is a small building called the Altar Hall.

On Fridays John travels a couple of stops on the train to teach an English class for his friend and sponsor, Dr. Motomeia, so we went with him and met about a dozen of his students, three of whom had been to Australia. We asked them why the Japanese like Ian Thorpe so much, and they said because he is handsome and a good swimmer, which I guess is a good enough reason. At other times while we were with John in his Hermitage, we travelled to various places in Japan to see the temples and shrines the country is famous for: Ryoanji, the temple with the famous fifteenth century fifteen stone garden where you can never see all the stones at once, no matter where you stand; Naiku shrine with its five-storied pagoda temple; the gold temple; the silver temple; the longest wooden temple in Japan; the oldest wooden temple in Japan; the temple with the biggest statue of Buddha; Nijo Castle in Kyoto, with its nightingale floor; the house of famous potter Kawai Kanjiro; the temple in Kyoto where John did his training. At this temple, Daitokuji, we saw the inscription, in English as well as Japanese, for once:

Do not take the monastic for granted.

For underneath that robe may be a badger in sheepskin.

While we were at Ise, visiting the Genku and Naiku shrines, we stayed at a Japanese inn, or ryokan. When we were paying the bill, we discovered that the owner had overcharged us to the equivalent of A\$150. She gave it back quickly when we pointed out her mistake. One of our pleasant memories is of an evening at Ise when we didn't know where to eat and nothing seemed to be open. We stuck our heads around the door of a small bar with room for about 8 people to sit around it while the owner, a woman, cooked and served food.. We were saved by Kyo, on holiday from Tokyo, who spoke good English because he used to have an American girlfriend. Kyo translated and we ate and socialized, and at the end of the evening the hostess, Sumiko, gave me a metre high cardboard and paper Japanese doll, which amazingly travelled back to Sydney in one piece. We were somewhat shocked that the food cost about \$75, even after explaining to Kyo that we wanted something cheap, but as we were to discover, this was quite reasonable compared with the sushi bar we ate at, once, where a few small mouthfuls cost roughly \$100. Sumiko made for us mussels in butter and garlic, raw tuna with raw egg in a weird stringy dressing, rice balls with salmon wrapped in kelp, tofu with ginger, chives, garlic and soy, and miso soup.

And also: in Japan there is no tipping, no begging, no mugging, no ripping off (mostly), no litter, no street names, no post cards (except, occasionally, at a temple), no English except place names at railway stations, free public toilets, no

touching, no shoes on wooden floors, only socks on tatami matting, no ear-rings worn by women (usually), a lot of smoking (no butts), too many bikes on the footpath in Kyoto.

Postscript 1: We read in the Japan Times that special carriages on some commuter trains had been set aside for women only, to avoid gropers.

Postscript 2: I read a book by an Italian diplomat called Maraini, who was interned with his family in Japan from 1943 – 45. He said that the 4 guards of the group of internees he was with consistently presented a harsh, united, detached front, unlike most captors who tend to bond quite closely with their captives.

Margot Mann

LETTERS

Gebser from George Schloss

Just received your latest and as usual am most appreciative. Thank you, especially for your remarks on Gebser who tends to get overlooked these days. I first read him when he came out in English - I don't know, must have been fifteen years ago or so - and he bowled me over even then, even before I discovered Headlessness. And he still does when I dip into him from time to time, now that his theoretical findings have been confirmed by the experiments. A really seminal work and quite remarkable in its range - literature, the arts, philosophy, archaeology etc. - and it should be brought to people's attention, or at least those who concern themselves with these things (I asked George if I could include this note as a comment on the last issue and, in agreeing he added, the following Ed.). I have nothing to add other than to point out, as I always do, that though I may have been excited by and illuminated by his (Gebser's) work when I first read it, I still had no sure, no absolute gauge by which to measure his work until I discovered the experiments. As Plato pointed out, it's that absolute certainty - which distinguishes truth, knowledge, from opinion. And I might add before I start receiving the usual flack, "absolute certainty" is only applicable to that which is absolutely certain. Hence, though the things of this world in all their infinite variety - politics, tastes in hair styles etc. - are up for grabs, the infinite is not. Which is what makes it infinite.

George Schloss

John de Ruiter from John Hamilton

John Hamilton writes:

John de Ruiter of Edmonton, Canada, is visiting Sydney early December. I went to listen and sit with him when he was visiting Perth in March. Because of what I had seen and heard of him on video and tapes, I had the view that he is in a state of 'at oneness'.

The trip across from Melbourne was very rewarding. I see him in the image of a master. He epitomises Truth.

Perhaps a quote:

“When there is awareness that has no agenda; no agenda for something and no agenda for nothing, then you get a blossoming of the personality... a blossoming of the mind; the blossoming of life. And because the awareness that is blossoming is clean and pure, then whatever expression it takes, it is genuinely free...and the expression is life giving”.

“What you are is the absence of having anything. The absence of holding anything, the absence of being anything. What you really are is absent of identification. What you are is something that's completely alive without an identification”.

John will be at the SBW Independent Theatre, 269 Miller St. North Sydney,

5 Dec. 7 to 10 pm

6 to 9 Dec. 2 to 5 pm and 7 to 10 pm

John Hamilton

Further information is available at www.johnderuiter.com also *John Hamilton Ph: 03 9639 2249* www.speak.com.au

Academy of the Word Seminar Programme - Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504 – 2nd & 4th Tuesdays– Under St Peter's Church, Devonshire St., Surry Hills.

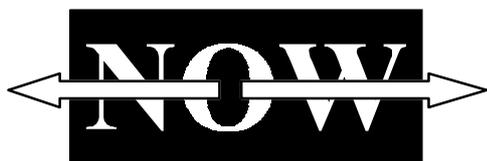
Second Tuesday 6.15pm - Healing & Well-being - **Fourth** Tuesday 6pm - State of the World

Blavatsky Lodge of The Theosophical Society

Level 2, 484 Kent St., Sydney (near Town Hall Station) Talks Programme Every Wednesday at 2.30pm and 7pm – Printed programme available 02 9267 6955 and at - <http://qmtech.com/blavatsky/index.html>

Melbourne Evening dialogues with **Penny Fenner**: are the last Sunday each month. To register and for more information on weekends, etc., please contact **03 9885 0119** - **E: penny@fenner.org** **W: www.skilfulaction.com**

John de Ruiter visit to Sydney – see page 11



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<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>DAY</i>	<i>MEETING PLACE</i>	<i>TIME & CONTACT</i>	Phone Nos.
<i>Self-Discovery Melbourne</i>	Third Saturday	St Stephens Anglican Church Church St., Richmond	12 Noon to 3pm Gary Hipworth	0352 581119
<i>Dialogue Sydney City</i>	Third Saturday	Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
<i>Dialogue Chatswood</i>	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd) Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
<i>Dialogue Clontarf</i>	Fourth Sunday	49 Peronne Avenue Clontarf	11am Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
<i>Dialogue Nowra</i>	First Saturday	The Tea Club, Berry Street, Opposite Roxy Cinema	4-6pm –Riche Riche du Plessis	4423 4774
<i>Dialogue Nowra</i>	Third Sunday	3/117 Berry Street Nowra	10.30 am Riche du Plessis	4423 4774