

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

**The Burning Mirror:
A Christian Encounter with Shamanism**

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The Burning Mirror

Introduction

This book is offered as a work of Christian theological reflection. It arises from active listening, by a person committed to Christian faith and life, to another very different faith tradition, that of shamanism. In terms of method, the work occurs in the second person more than in the third. Listening to another tradition cannot be done with proper respect if the basic orientation is towards setting out the facts of the case from the supposedly universal viewpoint of the author. In dialogue, more than one view can be presented in its own terms. This allows for the possibility of meeting the alien tradition at its strongest rather than at its weakest point. This allows us to reflect on what we hear in terms of what it shows us about our own shadow. Active listening leads to active imagining of how to make sense of what we hear. To achieve these things, we need to travel into the alien perspective, at least for a time.

For many Christians, this will seem like an invitation to abandon our Christian commitment. It certainly is an abandonment of the stance of warrior Christianity which sees no possibility of benefit from non-Christian traditions. Yet I have found that what seems like a recipe for the disintegration and abandonment of traditional Christian faith has in practice had quite the opposite result. I have discovered that the spiritual resources of shamanism confirm and illuminate many features of traditional Christian faith of which I had become doubtful. Prayer, prophetic inspiration, encounters with angels and demons, miracles and spiritual healings are illuminated by what we find in shamanic stories. The shamanic world view challenges us Christians to draw on our faith if we are to stand and not be overcome by the forces that we encounter. An appreciation of positive qualities in shamanism also challenges us to revisit the history of misunderstanding and persecution of shamans and shamanic communities by Christians. There is need here for a readiness for repentance and even restitution, as we recall that our God is a God of justice and not the tribal God of western civilization.

The specific spiritual power of this method arises, as the title suggests, from this confrontation with the shadow side of our own tradition. Where injustice has been done and not made good, there is unhealed trauma on all sides which produces its own need for repression and constriction of spiritual possibilities. The current revival of warrior Christianity in politically conservative

manifestations does nothing to deal with this kind of trauma from the sins of the past. It is understandable that Christians should react against social disorder and failed liberal policies, but to return to the days when the state favoured the Christian church and suppressed other faith traditions is not a good answer. We need to recognize the evils that were perpetrated within this framework, such as the Crusades and the execution of witches, heretics and tribal peoples.

Yet the task is not only critical, to deconstruct the tradition so that its shadow lies exposed to the light of day. Theology also has a constructive role, in seeking the healing of trauma through confession and repentance, as well as in reminding us that God is the One with whom we have to deal. The essential role of theological reflection is to bring all things into the light of consciousness so that we see clearly. This can only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit, but it can be done. This is where our enemies help us, with their remorseless attack on our points of weakness. So uncovering and dealing with what is in the shadow can be done, but not easily, not without pain and struggle, not without the grace of God and the journey into darkness and loss of identity. Perhaps there is no method but faith, following the leading of the Holy Spirit into further dimensions of truth. While the shadows are crucial, they are not salvation, but merely an important part of God's creation in need of healing and restoration. Once the shadows are exposed, we have a new freedom for relating to our historical enemies. So this internal dialogue is both a fruit of, and a pre-condition for, effective inter-religious dialogue.

Essential to an understanding of shamanism is the experience of spiritual encounter. This book offers a reflection about the general character of human spiritual experience. It seems hard to imagine a full and dignified view of human nature which does not have a place for those aspects of our experience traditionally referred to as spiritual. Yet concepts of 'spirit' have become problematic for us, particularly when we adopt the materialistic perspectives of modern western culture. We therefore need to address questions about the nature of 'spirit' and about how the realities to which it refers can be studied. Religious traditions refer to spiritual as well as ethical and social dimensions of human experience. Shamanic traditions are noteworthy for their focus upon intentional encounters with the world of spirit. My concern is with what can be learned about the world of spirit from these traditions rather than with an exhaustive account of the traditions themselves. As I am, however unwillingly, treading in the footsteps of Hegel in addressing the notion of 'spirit' in a general sense, I note at the outset Kierkegaard's judgement of Hegel's project.

If Hegel had written the whole of his logic and then said, in the preface, that it was merely an experiment in thought in which he had even begged the question in many places, then he would certainly have been the greatest thinker who had ever lived. As it is, he is merely comic.¹

It is indeed comic to be proposing that it is possible to discern patterns in the subjective experiences of people which reveal something important about reality at superhuman as well as human levels. The humour emerges from the disparity between our best accounts of our personal experiences and the putative metaphysical realities to which they sometimes seem to point. We should nevertheless reflect seriously upon our own lived experiences despite their objective inadequacy because these experiences will always shape who we are. It is also true that certain of our experiences have a compelling importance for us which is intuitively discerned. The possibility of gaining an understanding of spiritual realities draws us on. In studying shamanism, we Christians may come to find that it is spiritual reality itself which we have locked away in our unacknowledged shadow.

This comical inadequacy of personal reflection seems less injurious when we reflect upon the equally comical spectacle of our dominant knowledge industry busily reducing the world to the unidimensional status of information. Is it more delusional to think that whatever lies beyond the limits of our present official knowledge can only be more of the same, or to believe that official, third-person knowledge needs systematic supplementation from the knowledge that we have in first and second-person experiences? I prefer the latter option, which is why this book includes story and dialogue as well as expository text. Stories cannot be appreciated without an imaginative identification with the protagonists. Dialogue allows us to listen to a variety of viewpoints at once. It is also powerful in exposing and stretching our own horizons through the encounter with the perspectives and horizons of others. These are living forms of thought. They are also central to objective and scholarly forms of investigation, however carefully concealed behind scholarly method and third-person language.

My own perspective is formed by the Christian tradition, particularly in its Reformed Protestant manifestations, as well as by the western philosophical tradition. I find myself drawn to the practice of a contemplative theology and philosophy which seeks the realities that are met with in our experiences, realities that exist independently of all propositions about them. Verbal formulations, contemporary as well as traditional, are at best pointers to this independent reality, pointers which

¹ The Journals of Kierkegaard, 1834-54, Ed. and Trans. A.Dru, Fontana Books, Collins, London, 1958, pp.90-91.

progressively refine and qualify each other. It is not that there are no wrong ideas, but rather that all ideas have their areas of validity, however limited. In this book, I am writing as an insider to Christian tradition, which includes advocating certain stances and reformulations. I am writing as an outsider to shamanic traditions, even though I would acknowledge shamanic elements in some areas of my own experience.

I am sufficiently formed by western philosophical tradition to acknowledge the need for critical questioning of human experiences, particularly spiritual experiences which seem to confirm metaphysical and/or religious beliefs. If David Hume's arguments concerning the possibility of miracles² are accepted, we would find it very difficult to listen sympathetically to the stories that shamans tell. I find his arguments persuasive in establishing a presumption against any particular event from being 'special', in the sense of being a focus of spiritual action and presence not to be found elsewhere. Yet my general experience of life convinces me that some events are indeed 'special' because of the way in which they touch the meaning of our lives. Birth and death are 'special'. The fact that they are very common does not reduce their specialness, for the people concerned and for all who care for them. The same is true for fundamental decisions, relationships and turning-points in our lives. The same is true for theophanies and for the spiritual encounters that are formative for shamanism. Critical questioning should allow for the possibility of 'yes' as well as 'no'.³

The topic of miracles is important because it deals with the possibility of discerning spiritual causation within our world. The English word 'miracle' comes from the Latin *miraculum*,⁴ meaning 'sign', or *semeion* in Greek⁵. This is the word that is mainly used for miracles in the New Testament. These are seen as the events in which God's action can be discerned, because they are of more than human origin, being overwhelming, gracious and beyond natural possibilities. Whether

² Hume, D, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Chapter X, "Of Miracles". Cf. Wohlheim, R, Hume on Religion, Fontana Books, Collins, London, 1963, pp.205-29.

³ For a thorough discussion of Hume's arguments, cf. Beckwith, F, David Hume's Argument Against Miracles, University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1989. Beckwith's arguments seem to me persuasive in pointing to Hume's reliance upon natural law as his frame for reality, which does not allow room for the particularity of our experiences within the regularities of nature. He is also persuasive in advocating the methods of the law court in the weighing of evidence, including testimony, to guide our reason in this area, rather than the more generalizing methods of natural science.

⁴ Glare, PGW (Ed.), Oxford Latin Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982, p.1115.

⁵ Kittel, G & Friedrich, G (Eds.), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Trans. Bromiley, GW, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, pp.200-61.

miracles are truly contrary to the laws of nature, representing occasional interventions, or whether they are special events caused by a confluence of many distinct forces, whose miraculous nature depends upon their timing (for example, delivering the Hebrews from Pharaoh's forces at the Red Sea), remains open. In terms of method, I believe that we should stay close to the stories of the original experiences and compare what various ways of thinking can make of them. In similar vein, I see value in the phenomenological method of starting with what people say they experience. The challenge for us who listen to these stories is to make what sense of them we can.

Shamanism has long been thought by westerners to be a dying spiritual tradition. It is therefore somewhat surprising to us to find that this tradition, like some other pre-Christian traditions, is on the rise in the modern world.⁶ Shamanism⁷ is both a central part of re-emerging archaic traditions, associated with the survival and cultural re-establishment of specific indigenous peoples (Africans, North and South Americans, Asians and Australians), and also part of the so-called New Age spiritual pathways. Admittedly, both these developments are fragmentary and fragile at this time. The future of New Age developments remains quite unformed and the primal communities which carry shamanic traditions are struggling for survival and adaptation in the alien and corrosive atmosphere of the modern world. This spiritual heritage, which has somehow survived colonial domination, deserves respect for the positive gifts which it can bring to the world community.

While the nature of the primal religious experience of humans can only be a matter for speculation, it is plausible to think that contemporary shamanic religion is our closest living witness to its character. At a time of intense self-assessment by virtually all religious traditions, a recognition of how our tradition may have developed from religious pre-history should have some value for us. Even children who think that their parents had it all completely wrong will find, if they choose to look, significant gifts that they have nevertheless received from those same parents. Christian assumptions that shamanism is an altogether negative and alien heritage are simply incorrect. Christianity also knows ecstatic worship and mystical prayer in which God encounters us. It is only in recent church history, under the shadow of the European Enlightenment, that such experiences have been systematically marginalized.

⁶ Cf. Adler, M, Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and other Pagans in America Today, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979 and Hunt, D & McMahon, TA, America: The Sorcerer's New Apprentice, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1988.

⁷ Cf. Eliade, M, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964.

Shamanism and Christianity have not always been clearly separate traditions. One place where they have clearly run together is in the Irish Christianity that arose on the basis of St. Patrick's mission to Ireland in the fifth century. Thomas Cahill⁸ has given us a stirring account of the novelty of Patrick's work in bringing the gospel to a people outside the circle of Greco-Roman civilization. Patrick did not require of the Irish that they become Romanized before they could become Christian. The result was a Christianizing of Druid culture which can today be viewed as a novelty in world history, a shamanic culture dedicated to Christ. This is the tradition to which I have felt personally restored by the work that lies behind this book.

This magical world, though full of adventure and surprise, is no longer full of dread. Rather, Christ has trodden all pathways before us, and at every crossroads and by every tree the Word of God speaks out. We have only to be quiet and listen, as Patrick learned to do during the silence of his 'novitiate' as a shepherd on the slopes of Sliabh Mis.

This sense of the world as holy, as the Book of God – as a healing mystery, fraught with divine messages – could never have risen out of Greco-Roman civilization, threaded with the profound pessimism of the ancients and their Platonic suspicion of the body as unholy and the world as devoid of meaning.⁹

The burning mirror of our title symbolizes a difficult pathway to difficult self-knowledge, individual and collective. I suspect that it will seem an apt title only to those who share something of the Christian, western history in relation to shamanic communities and experiences. Others may find it unproblematic to encounter shamanism. Shamanic traditions offer us stories and images of personal encounter with spiritual dimensions of the natural world through shamanic journeying¹⁰, supported by tribal rituals and practices. These dimensions have been largely lost to us through the cultural processes of urbanization and the secularization of our spiritual traditions, a secularization which has emerged from Christian sources as well as from the European Enlightenment. Stories of initiation into spiritual experiences are useful for those of us who lack shamanic awareness because they show how awareness can grow from non-awareness.

The shape of this book is intended to reflect the structure of human journeying, involving the identification of a gateway or entry point, the passage through to the new experience and the return to the startingpoint with new knowledge. The early sections identify shamanism as a potential

⁸ Cahill, T, How the Irish Saved Civilization, Sceptre, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1995, esp. pp.101-44.

⁹ Ibid., p.133.

¹⁰ Cf. Halifax, J, Shamanic Voices, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979.

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gateway for Christians. The sections that deal with European witchcraft explore some of the traditional difficulties that Christians have had with shamanism. This exploration leads to a wide range of issues critical to an understanding and evaluation of shamanism by western Christians, with some attention to my Australian location in raising these questions.

The central thinking of the book takes the form of dialogue commentary upon the expository sections. This dialogue is between four characters, of whom 'Sandy Yule, the author' is one. I have always found it hard to be content with a theology which settles upon the most plausible of a range of human viewpoints as if the others ceased to matter once the choice had gone against them. Giving them a continuing voice may not do full justice to them, but it does at least keep them alive. My conversation partners are Rachel, a traditional Protestant, who has had experience of deliverance ministry and who continues to pray for me, despite my intellectualism and liberalism: John, who teaches Religious Studies in a university and is a fellow-traveller for all the religions: and Beth, a science graduate who has been initiated into shamanic practice by native American elders. I was surprised, as well as pleased, to get them all together.

We may as well complete this introduction by allowing readers to eavesdrop on our preliminary conversation. More of these will follow the formal expositions pertaining to the main chapter headings. They will act as Interludes.

Conversational Beginnings

Sandy: Thanks to each of you for agreeing to help me with this project. Do you all know each other?

Rachel: I know John from way back, but I don't know ... Beth, is it?

Beth: Yes, pleased to meet you.

John: I am pleased to have the opportunity for dialogue with such an interesting group of people.

R: Perhaps you could explain how you think we can help you, Sandy.

S: Well, as I said to each of you, my project is mainly an investigation of what Christians can learn from shamans.

R: If you are trying to learn from shamans, I can understand why you might want Beth's help. I am still puzzled why you need John and me.

S: I need you to help me stay in touch with Christian views. I need John to help me with his scholarly, rational reflections.

J: I take it you want us to present our real disagreements, so that your readers can see how things look from four points of view rather than one.

S: Yes, exactly. Reality is always more than any one view of it.

B: So, what do you want to know?

S: My main question is about the world of spirit. This question can take many forms. For Christians, God is Spirit, so the question concerns the reality of God. Shamans experience 'spirit' on the basis of conscious encounters. Western common-sense has become quite sceptical of spiritual realities, though we find it hard to deny that humans display 'spirit' in some sense.

J: This is a question of great interest to me, though I share the common-sense suspicion of much that passes for spirituality. For example, I doubt the usefulness of the idea of 'spirit' as a quasi-physical substance that survives the death of the body. I find it better to think in terms of energy of various kinds.

R: I think I understand what you want us to do now. I shall try to listen to what John and particularly Beth have to say, though you know that I have a Biblical view of spiritual realities.

S: I have invited each of you because your point of view is different from mine and from each other.

B: So, what do we have in common, apart from being in the same room and all knowing Sandy?

J: I would hope that we can respect our common humanity and that we can trust each other enough to speak honestly.

R: 'Common humanity' is good. We are all using English. I assume that we all know who Jesus is.

S: We meet in Melbourne, so our conversation has an Australian, Victorian setting.

B: True. That raises the issue of Australian Aboriginal culture. If you are interested in shamanism, Sandy, why not seek dialogue with Aboriginal elders?

S: I would be happy to have further opportunity for that. Aboriginal Christian leaders whom I have met are maintaining traditional Aboriginal culture, but I am not able to speak for them. My project began as an academic exercise in Philosophy because of my interest in shamanic stories which challenge western common-sense views of reality.

B: To traditional shamans, you look like a dilettante academic. Still, you do recognize that shamanism is completely experiential in nature.

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J: White Australians - and we here all inherit consequences from their attitudes - missed the opportunity of learning from traditional Aboriginal people when we chose to take over their land by settlement and force. Our ancestors didn't recognize the nature of Aboriginal society and were certainly unwilling to submit to Aboriginal law. We are still looking for a proper basis for national reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australians.

R: I don't see what this has to do with your project, Sandy.

S: The spirits encountered in shamanic practice relate strongly to place. Beth is correctly pointing out to us that we need to take our own place seriously in studying shamanism. If we are to come to terms with the spirits of this land, I doubt that we can ignore the forms in which Aboriginal people have recognized these spirits.

R: I can see that Aboriginal religion is relevant, but do we really need to review two hundred years of race relations?

S: Maybe. It certainly makes it clear why white people have not generally been granted access to Aboriginal spiritual traditions.

J: The focus on shamanism may seem to lead away from socio-political struggle into an inner world of mystical experience, but this is not so. Spiritual reflections may start in mysticism, but they cannot avoid the real issues of justice. I assume that these issues will come back later?

S: Yes. For white Australians, Siberian shamanism and modern neo-shamanism will be a more neutral point of entry for this study than Aboriginal shamanism or European witchcraft, though similar issues arise throughout.

B: Well. let's start, then.

Shamanism¹¹

Shamanism properly refers to the ancient religious beliefs and practices of north Asian (Ural-Altaic) peoples, focusing on the figure of the shaman who is able to enter the world of spirits in order to bring back benefits of knowledge and health for his or her people. The term 'shamanism' is also used more loosely to refer to a wide array of archaic spiritual traditions and contemporary practices which are based upon the ability to enter the spirit world at will.

The term 'shamanism' comes from the Tunguso-Manchurian word 'saman'. The noun is formed from the verb 'sa-' ('to know'); thus, 'shaman' literally means 'he (sic) who knows' ... There is no single definition of shamanism that applies to the elements of shamanistic activity found in North and South America, in southeast India, in Australia, and in small areas all over the world as well as to the phenomena among the north Asian, Ural-Altaic and Paleo-Asian peoples. It is generally agreed that shamanism evolved before the development of class society in the Neolithic Period and the Bronze Age; that it was practiced among peoples living in the hunting-and-gathering stage; and that it continued to exist, somewhat altered, among peoples who had reached the animal-raising and horticultural stage.¹²

Dioszegi argues for restricting the use of the term 'shamanism' to the religious systems of the north Asian peoples with whom the term originates.

Opinions differ as to whether the term shamanism may be applied to all religious systems in which the central personage is believed to have direct intercourse through an ecstatic state with the transcendent world that permits him (sic) to act as healer, diviner, and psychopomp (escort of souls of the dead to the other world). Since ecstasy is a psychosomatic phenomenon that may be brought about at any time by persons with the ability to do so, the essence of shamanism lies not in the general phenomenon but in the specific notions, actions and objects connected with the ecstatic state.¹³

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, it is sensible to retain this specific meaning and reference for the term 'shamanism' because distinctions between the beliefs and practices of various groups are the main concern. As it is precisely the general human psychosomatic phenomenon of ecstasy and the associated intentional encounter with spirits which is of interest for this study, I

¹¹ Most of this section has already appeared as a separate essay in the Festschrift volume for Feliciano Carino. Cf. Yule, S, 'Honour Your Father and Your Mother', in *Ecumenism in Asia*, Ed. Abraham, KC, ATESEA and BTE-SSC, Bangalore, 1999.

¹² Dioszegi, V, "Shamanism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p.638.

¹³ *Ibid.*

propose to join those who use the term 'shamanism' to refer to the general phenomenon. What is of particular interest to me is the recent enthusiasm for shamanic tradition among some 'post-Christian' western people, for whom it offers a pathway that dignifies our immediate lived experience and revivifies our contact with the wider world of nature. The impetus for this development has come from people like Michael Harner, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, who has established the Foundation for Shamanic Studies to teach 'core shamanism' to interested people.

The shaman journeys in non-ordinary reality to what are technically called the Upper Worlds and the Lower Worlds – or, in some cases, to parts of the Middle World – for the purpose of helping others. In these journeys the shaman collects valuable information, makes contact and talks with teachers, works with power animals or guardians, helps the spirits of the dead, assists people to make the transition over to a land of the dead, and generally has adventures that he or she consciously experiences and can later recall and interpret to members of the community. Hence, being able to remember what happened in the Shamanic State of Consciousness is crucial to the shaman's function in his or her society. The shamanic journey is therefore really the centrepiece of shamanism. In order to find out whether people are doing shamanism, at least in the classic sense, it is necessary to find out whether they journey – which may be very clear or very subtle – and also whether they can remember later the details of what happened to them on their journey.¹⁴

Harner contrasts shamanism with mediumistic practice in which the medium does not remember what occurs while they are in trance. Similarly, he contrasts shamanic dialogue with spirits in non-ordinary reality with the activities of priests who address the spirits in long prayers while operating in an ordinary state of consciousness. His view, conforming as it does with the classic scholarly formulations of Mircea Eliade, offers us a conveniently distinctive definition of shamanism with which to work. Nevertheless, as Harner himself acknowledges, these distinctions are somewhat theoretical, as shamanic journeying requires the use of trance and may include mediumistic elements as well as public rituals and spoken prayers. A further obstacle to precision is that the essential element in our definition of shamanism, that of conscious entry into that place where spirits can be encountered directly, refers to an event within the experience of the shaman which is not accessible to other people (unless we acknowledge the possibility of telepathic sharing of spiritual encounters).

¹⁴ Harner, M, "What is a Shaman?", in Doore, G (Ed.), Shaman's Path: Healing, Personal Growth and Empowerment, Shambala, Boston, Mass., 1988, p.8.

In the everyday world of the conscious ego, there is typically an inner monologue in which 'I' do all the talking, deciding and initiating, apart from outward encounters with others. In the spirit world, which western common sense would prefer to call the world of the active imagination, 'I' meet other beings capable of speech, decision and initiative, which at least seem to come from sources other than 'myself'. If we ask which name is the more accurate description (spirit world or active imagination), we have removed ourselves from the actual encounter. This is a 'third person' question which is important but – seemingly – systematically unresolvable from within the experience itself. Shamanism requires of us the willingness to treat our encounters with internal figures as if they are distinct beings with which meaningful and productive relationships may be possible. The shamanic experience unfolds on this basis, rather like the interactions that we have with the rest of the world of our everyday experience.

The effective way to learn the shaman's system is to use the same basic concepts they do. For example, when I speak of 'spirits', it is because that is the way shamans talk within the system. To practice shamanism, it is unnecessary and even distracting to be preoccupied with achieving a scientific understanding of what 'spirits' may really represent and why shamanism works.¹⁵

The shamanic spirit world is a non-ordinary dimension of this world.

The 'ecstatic' or altered state of consciousness and the learned perspective that characterize shamanic work may be usefully termed the Shamanic State of Consciousness (hereafter referred to as the SSC). The SSC involves not only a 'trance' or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state.

The learned component of the SSC includes information about the cosmic geography of non-ordinary reality, so that one may know where to journey to find the appropriate animal, plant and other powers. This includes knowledge of how the SSC provides access to the shamanic Lowerworld.

This knowledge includes an awareness by the shaman that he (sic) must have a specific intended mission while in the SSC. Non-ordinary reality is entered not for play but for serious purposes. The shaman is a person with work to do in the SSC, and he must know the basic methods for accomplishing that work.¹⁶

Shamanic journeying has much in common with lucid dreaming; there is the same combination of open reception of images with intentional shaping and responding to the images. The difference lies in the willingness of shamans to treat the events of non-ordinary reality as greater in effect and

¹⁵ Harner, M, The Way of the Shaman, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1980, p.xvii.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.21.

significance than those of ordinary reality. The Lower world is the world of the power animals or guardian spirits. There is also the Middleworld, the non-ordinary dimensions of our everyday world, and the Upperworld, the realm of the spirit teachers.

Shamans – whom we in the ‘civilized’ world have called ‘medicine men’ and ‘witch doctors’ – are the keepers of a remarkable body of ancient techniques that they use to achieve and maintain well-being and healing for themselves and members of their communities. These shamanic methods are strikingly similar the world over, even for peoples whose cultures are quite different in other respects, and who have been separated by oceans and continents for tens of thousands of years.

These so-called primitive peoples lacked our advanced level of medical technology, so they had excellent reason to be motivated to develop the non-technological capacities of the human mind for health and healing. The basic uniformity of shamanic methods suggests that, through trial and error, people arrived at the same conclusions.¹⁷

Harner tells us that shamans have found essential human capacities that need to be developed in a person if they are to be of use, but which are part of our nature. He also claims that because this is so, we can all discover these capacities in ourselves if only we know where and how to look. In his view, this information is sufficiently general, objective and straightforward to be communicable through a book. This is a radical departure from archaic shamanic initiation practices, though we should note that in many cultures, apprenticeship to a shaman was less important than learning directly from the spirits.

In shamanism, the maintenance of one’s personal power is fundamental to well-being. The book will introduce you to some of the basic shamanic methods of restoring and maintaining personal power, and using it to help others who are weak, ill, or injured. The techniques are simple and powerful. Their use does not require ‘faith’ nor changes in the assumptions you have about reality in your ordinary state of consciousness. Indeed, the system usually does not even require change in your unconscious mind either, for it only awakens what is already there. However, while the basic techniques of shamanism are simple and relatively easy to learn, the effective practice of shamanism requires self-discipline and dedication.¹⁸

Simply to use these techniques is to begin to become a shaman. Indeed, so intimately are these processes bound up with our individual consciousness that merely to think about these techniques is to begin to enter into them, at least at an unconscious, unintentional level where something in us begins to wake up and take notice.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

And at what point are you a shaman? That status can only be conferred on you by those you attempt to help in matters of power and healing. In other words, it is recognized success in shamanic work that determines whether you have indeed become a shaman.¹⁹

Harner's credentials for talking about shamanism are experiential. He has worked as an anthropologist with – among others - the Jivaro and Conibo Indians of South America and has apprenticed himself to shamans from those tribes. He also asks us to make our own judgements after we have tried out the shamanic techniques that he teaches.

Finally, I should state, if it is not already obvious, that I practice shamanism myself: not because I understand in OSC [Ordinary State of Consciousness] terms *why* it works, but simply because it *does* work. But don't take my word for it: truly significant shamanic knowledge is experienced, and cannot be obtained from me or from any other shaman. Shamanism is, after all, basically a strategy for personal learning and for acting on that learning.²⁰

This primacy of direct personal experience can be seen in accounts by shamans of their initiation, such as the following account by the Eskimo shaman Aua, which was given to the Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen.

Everything was thus made ready for me beforehand, even from the time when I was yet unborn; nevertheless, I endeavoured to become a shaman by the help of others; but in this I did not succeed. I visited many famous shamans, and gave them great gifts, which they at once gave away to others; for if they had kept the things for themselves, they or their children would have died. This they believed because my own life had been so threatened from birth. Then I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song, with only room for the one word, joy, joy! And I had to use the full strength of my voice. And then in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way. I had gained my *quamaneq*, my enlightenment, the shaman-light of brain and body, and this in such a manner that it was not only I who could see through the darkness of life, but the same light also shone out from me, imperceptible to human beings, but visible to all the spirits of earth and sky and sea, and these now came to me and became my helping spirits.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xvi.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xviii.

²¹ Halifax, J, *Op. Cit.*, p.118.

If there is a negotiation with spirits for this new power, Aua does not know of it. His account asserts that it is possible that a powerful shamanic connection with the spirit world can come about quite spontaneously, at least from the perspective of the shaman. This would also seem to be true where shamans have a more conscious experience of initiation at the hands of powerful spirits. Eliade recounts the following story, originally told to the Russian anthropologist Popov by a Samoyed shaman. The shaman was sick with smallpox and unconscious for three days, during which time he was initiated as a shaman through visionary experiences, including an encounter with the smallpox disease, which culminated in his making as a shaman.

Then the candidate came to a desert and saw a distant mountain. After three days travel, he reached it, entered an opening, and came upon a naked man working a bellows. On the fire was a cauldron 'as big as half the earth'. The naked man saw him and caught him with a huge pair of tongs. The novice had time to think, 'I am dead!' The man cut off his head, chopped his body into bits, and put everything into the cauldron. There he boiled his body for three years. There were also three anvils, and the naked man forged the candidate's head on the third, which was the one on which the best shamans were forged. Then he threw the head into one of three pots that stood there, the one in which the water was coldest. he now revealed to the candidate that, when he was called to cure someone, if the water in the ritual pot was very hot, it would be useless to shamanize, for the man was already lost; if the water was warm, he was sick but would recover; cold water denoted a healthy man. The blacksmith then fished the candidate's bones out of a river, in which they were floating, put them together, and covered them with flesh again. He counted them and told him that he had three too many; he was therefore to procure three shaman's costumes. He forged his head, and taught him how to read the letters that are inside it. He changed his eyes; and that is why, when he shamanizes, he does not see with his bodily eyes but with these mystical eyes. He pierced his ears, making him able to understand the language of plants. Then the candidate found himself on the summit of a mountain, and finally he woke in the yurt, among the family. Now he can sing and shamanize indefinitely, without ever growing tired.²²

The theme of death and rebirth at the hands of a powerful spirit figure is prominent here, as is the context for initiatory experience in which a life-threatening illness is overcome. It seems that such initiatory experiences may befall someone through accident or illness; alternatively, they may arise in the context of a vision quest which a person may undertake in the hope of having such an experience. The crucial action comes from beyond the person themselves, at least as far as their conscious knowledge is concerned, though there is probably an essential role for the person's will in accepting their new status and abilities.

²² Eliade, M, *Op.Cit.*, p.42.

This priority accorded to the action of the spirits in the making of a shaman is also central to shamanism in Korea. The Korean word *sinbyong*, ‘spirit sickness’, refers to a socially recognized condition which confronts the sick person with the unenviable choice of becoming a *mansin*, a shaman, or dying. *Sinbyong* is experienced by the sick person as something that befalls them. It is clear to them that the spirits take the initiative throughout. Suwon-mansin’s story, which is paraphrased for us by Youngsook Kim Harvey, is an example of this pattern.

She had a normal post-operative recovery in the hospital, but upon discharge developed a ‘paralysis of her stomach and intestines’ that required rehospitalization. Once in the hospital, however, her symptoms disappeared spontaneously and completely, leaving the doctors perplexed and unable to diagnose. As soon as she was discharged, the same symptoms recurred: dizziness, clammy skin, nausea and inability to pass gas or stool. She was hospitalized several times with the same complaints, and each time, the same thing happened. Her hospital expenses were taxing the family resources. It was about this time that she had her first hallucinatory experience. Retrospectively, Suwon-mansin identifies this and the symptoms that had required her post-operative hospitalizations as her first round with *sinbyong*.

She was urinating one day when she saw a giant. He grabbed her long hair and flung her out across the courtyard. Family members, roused by her screams, found her sprawled in the courtyard with both shoulders dislocated. They took her to a hospital to have them set but when she returned home, they again became dislocated. She claims the experience was repeated three or four times.²³

The story goes on to tell of her bizarre behaviour which thoroughly alienated both her marital and her natal families, culminating in her removal to Seoul and taking up the life of a *mudang* or shaman. Mad behaviour is traditionally seen as typical of *sinbyong*, along with strange depressions and physical symptoms. In Suwon-mansin’s story, the encounter with the giant leading to the dislocated shoulders seems, in shamanic terms, to be a significant encounter in non-ordinary reality. This encounter and the associated sickness marks her out as ‘someone the spirits want’. Another feature of *sinbyong* is the emergence of paranormal abilities. In Suwon-mansin’s case, while running away from her family dressed only in her underwear, she crossed a mountain, entered a town and went straight to the police station to announce that if they didn’t have a shamanistic service in their police station, something bad would happen in three days. The police threw her out, but the police station burned down in three days time. After that, people thronged around to request her shamanistic help, much to the embarrassment of her family. We should note the commercial value of a good story about the paranormal abilities of a shaman, so that stories such as this will be

²³ Harvey, YK, Six Korean Women: The Socialization of Shamans, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minnesota, 1979, p. 190.

told and retold many times, though this hardly justifies a blanket denial of the occurrence of wondrous events in the lives of shamans.

Harvey comments on the general Korean folk view of shamans as follows:

From the popular literature, my personal observation and memory, and informal conversations, it appears to me that the Korean folk concept of shamans does not concern itself with the issue of the practicing shaman's state of mental health. It does recognize, however, that during the possession sickness, *sinbyong*, the behaviour of the potential shaman-recruit can be mistaken for that of a 'crazy' person or *mich'in-saram*. It also holds that a shaman-recruit, i.e. one who is possessed by spirits, can actually *become* crazy if she is not appropriately initiated into the shaman role.

A more pervasive and dominant stereotype of the shaman depicts her as a charlatan who exploits the weak, the oppressed and the unsuspecting, much in the manner in which Americans talk of medical doctors as quacks and lawyers as shysters. This negative view, however, does not prevent people from seeking the services of shamans but perhaps only fosters an ambivalence towards them as a social category.

In general, Koreans regarded recruitment into the shaman role as an unfortunate (or even the most unfortunate) act of predestination over which human beings have no control. They point as evidence of predestination by supernatural ordination to the afflictions that befall potential shaman-recruits and that defy natural explanations or conventional remedies. The victims, it is believed, can be relieved of these afflictions only if they assume the shaman role. At the same time it is also believed that spirits possess those human beings whose soul/heart (*maum*) is already in a weakened state, i.e. under psychological stress.

The initiation rite which marks the transition from the status of afflicted victim to that of shaman is called *naerim-kut*, a rite in which the possessing spirits are officially invited to descend (*naeri-da*) and enter into the novice. Thereafter, the relationship between the shaman and the possessing spirits is explicitly transactional: the shaman provides the spirits with access to human beings and their affairs and is in turn relieved of the afflictions which had plagued her before assuming the role and which can again plague her and/or her family if she neglects her role. When the shaman is not sufficiently dutiful to the spirits, they retaliate; when the spirits are insufficiently protective of the shaman, she challenges their right to possess her.²⁴

Kut rituals are dramatic presentations comprising a controlled and scripted structure along with set places at which spiritual inspiration and improvisation are required. In this, they are not unlike services of worship in Christian traditions. One set piece within the ritual for the dead is where the shaman allows the spirit of the dead person to speak through them. Korean friends have assured me that it is normal for the shaman's presentation of the returning spirit of their dead family member to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.250-51.

be perceived as lifelike by the family. It is hard to see how the tradition would retain credibility were this not generally so.²⁵

From the outside, it seems that possession states exclude the normal consciousness of the shaman. This is probably not the case in general, particularly for the more experienced shamans, as we see from this account by Wangsimni-mansin.

When you start doing your own *kut*, you just feel your own spirits stealing into you and taking over; the sensation is incomparable. ... You just know that you've got the spirits in you ... that it's them inside you, not you. ... You're just a medium and you feel marvellous. Otherwise, how could anyone do the things a *mudang* does in her sober mind? You lose all sense of embarrassment ... all inhibition ... you are suffused with the feeling, 'I'm the number one, the best – there is none else like me in the whole world.'²⁶

This is a striking statement of ecstatic submission to the spirits and a frank enjoyment of the actions of the spirits which break out of the confines of socially approved behaviour. Maybe the actions of the spirits are intrusive into the personal space of others rather than vicious or malevolent. Maybe shamanic practice redresses gender balances in a patriarchal society. There does seem to be a liberation of sorts behind this account. Yet there is also the whiff of ego inflation here that should be noted.

Wangsimni-mansin is clearly conscious of what the spirits are doing through her. This makes it easier for us to accept that this Korean tradition is shamanistic despite the predominance of mediumistic spirit possession. Korean shamanism is also similar to Siberian models in the use of drums, dancing and public ritual performances. If there is a spirit journey in this Korean tradition, it would seem to occur within mediumistic practices. The initiative and responsibility for contemporary Korean shamanic practices is said to lie with the spirits rather than with the human agents. Harvey has offered an interesting explanation for this attribution of responsibility in terms of the relative personal power and authority of family members.

By coming to its full symptomatic flaring at just such times when interpersonal relationships of the victim with significant members of the family are at an impasse, *sinbyong* forces the adversaries to mobilize their efforts in collaborative attempts at rescuing the victim from the

²⁵ In 1995, I was privileged to attend a *kut* ritual for the family of an elderly woman who had died. In this ritual, the spirit of the dead woman, speaking through the shaman, communicated information to the family that they accepted as authentic and found disturbing. This is clearly a difficult matter to investigate.

²⁶ Harvey, *Op.Cit.*, p.32.

afflictions of *sinbyong*, thereby momentarily bypassing the unresolved conflicts which in the first place had locked them into the impasse. In the process there occur changes in the power positions of various significant members of the family with reference to the shaman recruit, the transformation coming to a culmination when she assumes the shaman role. Everyone, including the shaman, seems to make a conscious effort to maintain the conventional social structure of the family, but it is in fact radically altered even when such efforts are successful in presenting a conventional facade.

Since the possessing spirits are often the ancestral ghosts of the shaman's husband and since, for those who believe in their reality, spirits in general are superordinate to human beings, the possessing spirits of the family occupy the apex of the newly formed triad in the family; namely, the spirits, the shaman, and the shaman's significant others in the family. Inasmuch as only the shaman has direct access to the spirits, in any disputes between the shaman and other family members, the spirits are likely to be in coalition with the shaman. Thus, *sinbyong* functions as a pathway out of an impasse in the relationships which can no longer be tolerated, and the assumption of the shaman role serves as a mechanism for stabilizing and maintaining the altered power positions in the family social structure. In other words, *sinbyong* provides a mechanism whereby the oppressed can turn the tables on the oppressors with the latter's co-operation and support while the shaman role provides a mechanism for maintaining it or, failing that, of permitting the shaman a viable means of escaping from the family situation. The most remarkable feature of these strategies is that they are face-saving, blame-free pathways out of impasses, which leave no individual burdened with guilt.²⁷

This is an elegant explanation which rightly highlights the psychosomatic factor in sickness and the importance of family dynamics in understanding human behaviour, particularly for those who are victimized by oppressive family patterns. It also begins to account for the mysterious initiative displayed by the spirits, as western common sense can stretch to recognize the power of self-assertion in each of us, a power which is quite capable of taking devious and unconscious forms. We can affirm all this without going on to discount the role of the spirits within the subjective experience of the shaman. The theory of western common sense, that the manifesting spirits are no more than unconscious creations of the person themselves, is one possible explanation. This explanation does not deal well with the paranormal features in these stories. Each individual story recorded by Harvey includes significant paranormal experiences which have clearly been of central importance for the shaman and for the wider community. Whatever their objective status, the spirits are subjectively real and powerful for the shaman.

In Korea, the role of shaman has been overwhelmingly occupied by women since shamanism fell out of official favour over five hundred years ago. The Korean court at that time embraced a neo-Confucian ideology which found no value in the irrationalities of shamanism. Since then, shamanic

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.238-39.

practice has been socially marginalized and largely restricted to households, the province of the women.²⁸ In this socio-political context, shamans were deprived of the positive status traditionally accorded to those who negotiated with the world of the spirits on behalf of the human community. This lowered status would seem to correlate with the emphasis upon the initiative and inescapable power of the spirits in the making of a shaman. Speculatively, it may also correlate with the mediumistic form of shamanism in Korea today, as this form highlights the initiative and power of the spirits and shuns displays of power over the spirits by the shamans. The recent public support for shamanism as part of Korea's national heritage marks a major change in this socio-political context.

What seems important here, despite the socio-political history, is the offer of power to individuals by the spirits in personal, paranormal and social forms. The offer is conditional upon the shaman 'letting in the spirits', which means letting them speak and act through her body in the *kut* rituals, as well as maintaining a shrine for them and generally keeping them in mind. The shaman maintains ongoing contact with her spirits in which daily occurrences are interpreted in terms of the activities and wishes of the spirits. In the *kut* ritual, it is the manifestation of the spirits in the shaman which gives rise to the belief that she is 'spirit-possessed'. The fear that we have of the very idea of spirit possession is that we cease to be in control of ourselves and that we are ousted from that control by the strange possessing spirit whose activities we have to watch powerlessly from within. The reported experiences of the *mansins*²⁹ seem a little different from this fear. They seem to maintain a willing co-operation and dialogue with the spirits, including a voluntary surrender of control of the body within the limited context of the *kut* ritual. Provided that the spirits are honoured and mostly obeyed, they can be called upon for very concrete forms of help. It would seem that Korean shamans achieve a significant increase in personal power through their relationship with spirits, even if this power has had to be concealed for social reasons until recently. How the spirits and the shaman's subjective negotiations with them enhance the personal power of the shaman remains mysterious.

Familiar intercourse between an individual person and a disembodied spirit is hardly a new idea to western culture. Much of our English terminology for such things comes from ancient Greece (for

²⁸ Cf. Grayson, JH, Korea: A Religious History, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

²⁹ Cf. Kendall, L, The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman, Uni. of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1988 and Harvey, Op. Cit.

example, the word ‘enthusiasm’, ‘being filled with divine energy’). Even a rational hero like Socrates was known for his sense of relationship with a *daimon*, or familiar spirit. Yet since the time of the European Enlightenment, we find the disappearance of a positive approach to such realities in the main stream of scientific western culture. It is striking to observe that this remains true despite the fact that many western thinkers acknowledge having such experiences. Some have made their experiences in this area the basis for much of their work, such as William Blake, Emmanuel Swedenborg and Rudolph Steiner. For others, it has been a more private matter. One particularly thoughtful guide to this phenomenon is Carl Jung.

Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche that I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force that was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. He said I treated thoughts as if I generated them myself, but in his view thoughts were like animals in the forest, or people in a room, or birds in the air, and added, ‘If you should see people in a room, you would not think that you had made those people, or that you were responsible for them’. It was he who taught me psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche. Through him the distinction was clarified between myself and the object of my thought. He confronted me in an objective manner, and I understood that there is something in me which can say things that I do not know and do not intend, things which may even be directed against me.³⁰

Jung’s account of ‘Philemon’ presents us with a distinct psychic entity. Are such entities to be understood as a manifestation to us of disincarnate spiritual entities or, reflecting Jung’s language of ‘archetypes residing in the unconscious’, as a manifestation of the depth of our own psyches? Different ways of talking reflect these distinct theoretical perspectives. My focus is upon the phenomenologically given nature of these encounters. We can note that these theoretical alternatives are not as far apart as they might seem. If we think in terms of spirit beings as disincarnate entities, we still have to remember how intimately they relate themselves to us. If we think of them as bearers of messages from our own unconscious, we still need to recognize when this message brings objectively new information and perspective concerning the wider world. These experiences are mysterious. The reality of spirit is ultimately an existential matter which we address (or fail to address) in our practical living, whether we have achieved a satisfactory conceptual theory or not.

³⁰ Jung, CG, Memories, Dreams and Reflections, Trans. Winston, R&C, Vintage Books, Random House, NY, 1965, p. 183.

Psychologically, Philemon represented superior insight. He was a mysterious figure to me. At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality. I went walking up and down the garden with him, and to me he was what the Indians call a guru.³¹

Similar figures and experiences occur in a range of religious and spiritual traditions, including shamanic traditions, for which they are of central importance. Jung tells the story³² of learning from an Indian friend that his friend's guru was Shankaracharya, a famous commentator on the Vedas who lived and died centuries ago. Apprentice shamans may or may not learn from established, living shamans, but what is considered more crucial is their relationship with spiritual beings encountered as inner figures. Despite Christian affirmations that Jesus is a living Lord, mainstream western Christians have traditionally interpreted this relationship rather rationalistically, with the Lordship of Christ mediated through the Bible and/or the Church. Many individual Christians experience a personal, spiritual relationship with the living Lord, in which they have regular conversations about daily events and problems. This conversational relationship sounds very like what Jung is talking about and it also sounds shamanic in form. Shamanism, Hinduism and other religious and spiritual traditions challenge us rationalistic western Christians to reconsider what might be involved in an active spiritual relationship with a teacher who is not now living on this earth. Christian teachings about the sovereignty of God and the uniqueness of the Risen Christ are not necessarily under threat if we think that beings other than Christ are also alive and well in the world beyond death.

Shamans typically see and hear things that other people do not. Within shamanic cultures, what shamans experience is treated as knowledge of the spirit world. It is quite likely that the hearing of voices that others don't hear and the seeing of hallucinations is a widespread if not universal human potentiality. Whether these experiences are treated as encounters with the spirit world or as pathology would seem to depend on the culture of the interpreter. The modern western understanding of shamanism has noted the similarities between shamanic and schizophrenic experiences, leading to the labelling of shamanism as pathological. This is part of a wider pattern of western misunderstanding in this area.

Until recently, even states of exceptional joy, bliss, or compassion have all too often been interpreted as the unfortunate products of pathological or primitive minds. Mystical

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p.184.

experiences, for example, have been interpreted as neurotic regressions, ecstatic states viewed as narcissism, and enlightenment dismissed as regression to intrauterine stages... In short, Western psychiatry has a long history of viewing mystics as madmen, saints as psychotics, and sages as schizophrenics. And this in spite of the fact that the great saints and sages may represent the heights of human development and have had the greatest impact on human history.³³

Walsh, a medical doctor writing about the emergence of shamanism as a spiritual pathway for westerners, goes on to note that the above prejudices, while now less common with respect to saints and sages, continue strongly in western views of shamanism. He identifies epilepsy, hysteria and schizophrenia as the (imprecise) diagnostic labels typically attaching to shamanism in the anthropological literature and shows the general inappropriateness of these labels in medical terms. Where shamans hold a position of responsible leadership within their community and function better than non-shamans in everyday terms, it seems unjustifiable to describe their experiences as pathological. Walsh identifies the initiatory phase of shamanism as the area in which analogies with western definitions of mental illness may have some application and discusses the criteria for an appropriate use of these terms.³⁴ The point about traditional shamans is that they have been sick (physically, mentally and/or spiritually) and that they have healed themselves or been healed from sources in the spirit world.

As well as benevolent guardian spirits, the shamanic world also contains malevolent, harmful spirits whose intrusion is one main cause of sickness. Harner's healing instruction covers the removal of such intrusions as well as the recruiting of a power animal for the patient.

The procedure for extracting or removing an power intrusion is the same as undertaking a journey [to find a power animal] for the patient, up to a point. That point is usually very early in the journey before the shaman has gotten very far away from the entrance into the earth and while he is still in the Tunnel to the Lowerworld. If the patient has a harmful power intrusion, the shaman suddenly sees one of the following: voracious or dangerous insects, fanged serpents, or other reptiles and fish with visible fangs and teeth. He immediately stops the journey to deal with these intrusive powers. That is, the simple sight of one of these powers in the Tunnel is a signal that it should be removed immediately by sucking. *This work, however, should only be undertaken by a shaman who possesses two spirit helpers identical to the spirit of the power intrusion he has just seen.* If a shaman is not ready for this work, he either returns from the Tunnel or passes by the intrusive power

³³ Walsh, R, The Spirit of Shamanism, Jeremy Tarcher Inc., Los Angeles, 1990, p.75.

³⁴ Ibid., p.76-88.

spirit and proceeds to get a guardian spirit for the ill patient, which is essentially supportive treatment, until extraction of the intrusion can be done.³⁵

Harner goes on to describe a procedure for the removal of the spirit intrusion by sucking. It is important to remember that the physical ritual is a vehicle for the spiritual action. The shaman remains in control of the situation with the aid of his own spirit helpers and through careful visualizing of each step, which is where the ritual actions are helpful. We can speculate that this visualization somehow brings the shaman into contact with the patient's own struggle with the illness. The shamanic world-view posits a spiritual dimension to bacteria, to cancer cells and to the bio-chemical elements of plants, so that the shamanic intervention could involve some kind of interaction with this spiritual dimension.

This approach addresses two causes of illness which are always present together to some extent. There is the weakening of our defences against illness, which shamanism pictures as a loss of personal power. There is also the expansion of the unwanted agents of the illness, whether these are bacteria, cancer cells or something else. The recruiting of a power animal could be seen as helping to strengthen the patient's immune system and other defences, while the removal of spirit intrusions could be seen to break the power of the unwanted agents of the illness. Harner tells us that the removal of spirit intrusions requires spirit helpers who are plants in ordinary reality.

The shaman uses the power offered to him not only by the animals, but also by the plants of garden Earth. All of these, of course, derive their power from the sun. While the animals usually act as guardian spirits, the plants tend to serve as spirit helpers. Unlike guardian spirits, spirit helpers are only possessed by shamans. Nonshamans do not normally have the plant power at their disposal. Just as the powerful guardian spirit animals are usually wild, untamed species, similarly the vast majority of spirit helpers are wild, undomesticated species of plants. It appears that most of the domesticated animals and plants simply do not have the spiritual power necessary to be of significance in shamanism. From a shamanic point of view, the very fact that certain animals and plants have been tamed and domesticated for food and other forms of exploitation is symptomatic of their lack of power.³⁶

This is highly suggestive as a criterion of spiritual power. Wild nature has a spiritual power for us (and probably in itself) which domesticated nature cannot have. It is those inner experiences which are wild, in the sense of being 'too much' for us, which require of us spiritual growth if we are to

³⁵ Harner, M, The Way of the Shaman, Op. Cit., pp.117-18.

³⁶ Ibid., p.113.

deal with them. Not all thoughts are the same spiritually, just as not all plants and animals are the same. This would help to account for the special spiritual significance of illness, as well as for the special qualities attaching to a select few of our inner figures.

According to Harner, then, shamans believe that a spirit being of the same kind as the one that has intruded into the sick person is needed for its removal. As with medical practice in general, knowledge of cures implies knowledge of how to cause sickness. The shamanic principle is that the spirit which causes the illness is best placed to remove the illness if such is its wish. Wallace Black Elk, a contemporary Lakota shaman, tells a story of a shamanic healing in which this principle is on display. He was called in to help a four year old boy who could not eat, walk or talk properly. The boy had been in hospital virtually since birth. The ceremony was held in the hospital ward of the Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center in Denver. A doctor and a nurse were present. Wallace Black Elk and his helpers sealed off the room from all light so that they could operate in 'black light'. This included taping over the monitor lights on the medical equipment.

So we began. We explained to the doctor and the registered nurse what was going to take place, what was to be expected there. Then we sang those songs - honoring song, the Four Winds and callings songs. About that time we heard a thunder – boom - like that. And then there was a flash of light, and somebody came in. It was like a ghost. You know, at Halloween you see a sheet with arms out. It was not exactly like that but there was a glow of light there. It was shaped like a man. It came in and came to the altar.

He said, 'Well, what's the purpose of calling me?'

So I answered his question, 'Tunkashila [Grandfather], we have a little boy here. There is something wrong with him. Nobody knows what it is. He's been suffering here for many years. So we ask that you help us to help this little boy.'

So he went over to that little boy. ... He told us what was wrong with that little boy. He talked about the brain and two nerves that branch out right at the neck. The unknown power had taken a spider web and tied a knot around one of those nerves. ...

Then that spirit revealed to us the instructions for healing this little boy. He told us we would have to call a spider spirit in, an *iktomi*. Right away we sang that *iktomi* calling song. So that red spider, he came in. He's the leader of all the spiders. So the leader came in.

Then he asks, 'What do you want?'

So I answered him, 'Well, some unknown power used your web to tie up this little kid. So he's been suffering. The medical science, they have no answer, because they don't know what is the matter with him. ...

So that red spider understood what I said. Then we sang a song. So he goes over to that little boy, and he untangles the web around his throat. He does it, just like that. He knows how because that's his web. So he could climb it. He knows about that because that is a part of him. That's part of his ingenuity.

Then he came back and said, 'I took that web off. So that boy is going to educate his muscles now, and he is going to make sounds. So you are going to hear his voice now for the first time.'

By that time, that kid had started moving around. You never heard him talk or cry. But now there was a sound coming out of him – awwwk, awwwk – like that. So he didn't know how to make sounds.³⁷

The boy ate and drank voraciously, scaring the nurse. He eventually stopped and began to move around just to learn how. The story goes on to tell of the spider spirit taking the offerings of food, tobacco ties and robes, which greatly perplexed the doctor who was taking notes and trying to account for everything. I can sympathize with the doctor and the nurse because this sort of event is beyond the limits of my experience also. In this account, the spirits have no difficulties in exercising the physical causation that continues to trouble our western common sense.

Despite the very real power of western medical interventions, one of the most used prescriptions is rest, which acknowledges the mysterious self-healing properties that we possess. There is that in us, as embodied beings, which is beyond our conscious awareness and control, but which does respond to suggestion. It is intriguing to find that less conscious mental forces can have success where normal consciousness fails. This was brought home to me when I went to have two wisdom teeth removed by a dentist who uses hypnotism. I was surprised by the casual yet reassuring approach, with a few suggestions that seemed unlikely to take me far from my normal state. Yet the effect was an absence of pain and the sensation of a finger moving around in my mouth, despite the fact, as I found out later, that one of the teeth had broken, necessitating cutting down through the nerve canal to remove the roots. I now believe in the power of suggestion, thinking and trance states to redefine how pain is experienced.

As well as the shamanic journey to encounter relevant spirits, shamanic interventions involve ritual behaviour that speaks powerfully to the unconscious mind, such as physically sucking out the spirit intrusions or physically blowing a power animal into the patient through the top of the head. In this ritual behaviour, the force of suggestion strongly conveys the intention for healing. Western common sense has a deep need to find ordinary explanations, such as the power of suggestion in promoting psychosomatic healing, for any positive effects from shamanic therapy. This can be accepted as part of what is going on, but it is not what shamans believe is the important part of what they are doing. It hardly fits Wallace Black Elk's story of the Iktomi spirit's action in healing the

³⁷ Wallace Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks: The Sacred Ways of a Lakota*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, pp.174-76.

four year old boy. The traditional story is that the spirits are the main actors in their own right, with the bodily behaviour, the rituals and the prayers a way of increasing our human power to deal with them.

Another dimension of shamanic practice relates to ways of entering the shamanic state of consciousness, which involves a form of trance. Shamanic communities around the world use many methods, including chanting, dancing, hyper-ventilation, rattling, whistling, drumming, ingesting psychotropic plants and rituals in general. While it is important to consider the risks and benefits of the various methods, we should note that, for shamanic purposes, these are all a means to an end, which is entry into that reality where spirits are consciously encountered. I like the use of drumming, rattling and whistling, which seem less risky than some of the other methods. I have personally never felt the need to take mind-altering drugs, including tobacco. I have also been wary of certain breathing techniques, having heard warnings about the dangers of hyper-ventilation (avoidable with proper care, according to some). I admit to being conservative and cautious in these matters. I was therefore impressed by the fact that I found shamanic journeying and other meditative imaging experiences possible, which I take to be evidence that such experiences are indeed part of our natural endowment.

It is hard not to be positively impressed by some of the published accounts written by those who have used psychedelic drugs, such as John Lilly³⁸ and the brothers McKenna.³⁹ Without going into the larger issues of socio-political policy and the current state of various national laws, I would note in passing Terence McKenna's plea for legalizing naturally occurring plants, as opposed to synthetic drugs⁴⁰. One of his most telling arguments is that a society that can allow the use of alcohol has ample experience with which to deal with the ill-effects of psychotropic plants. The completeness of personal involvement and the baroque extravagance of many of the worlds encountered in psychedelic experiences do compel us to ask important question about reality. Those who have somehow integrated such experiences into their world view live in a world wider than that of rational waking consciousness. In shamanic terms, they are likely to be people with enhanced personal power.

³⁸ Cf. Lilly, JC, The Center of the Cyclone, Julian Press, NY, 1972.

³⁹ Cf. McKenna, D&T, The Invisible Landscape, HarperSanFrancisco, 1975/93.

⁴⁰ Cf. McKenna, T, The Food of the Gods, Bantam Books, NY, 1992.

As with shamanic realities more generally, not everyone who entered into psychedelic experiences was able to return to everyday life to tell the story. There are real dangers for those who fail to integrate such experiences or who lack a safe context for the experience itself. The widespread use of psychedelic drugs in the hippy era would seem to have catapulted many unprepared people into the oceanic world of spirit without map or compass. Unprepared journeying too far from shore is perilous. Spiritual traditions and communities of support greatly reduce the risk of becoming lost or overwhelmed by the encounter. Shamans are those who survived and integrated their initiatory experiences. Failure and non-survival are possibilities. My concern with the use of psychedelic drugs outside the context of a spiritual community with adequate traditions about such use is that they take unprepared people a long way out of their depth very quickly. Many people do learn to swim by being thrown in at the deep end, but this method also leads to tragic traumas and casualties.

I can probably best convey my own sense of this shamanic cosmology and practice, which guides my presentation, by describing some incidents from my own introduction to the shamanic world in a weekend workshop. The workshop was led by my friend Jill Bathgate, who has studied with Michael Harner. In telling something of my own experience in this area, I am aware of the comic quality involved in claiming serious attention for what some will consider insubstantial daydreaming. I can only say that the experiences did have a serious and a positive effect on me, through providing a gentle encounter with spontaneous images that still convey discernible energies to me. These experiences do not constitute proof of the shamanic world view, but they do have sufficient coherence and impressiveness for me to deny that the shamanic account of them can be summarily dismissed.

The setting was a small carpeted room in a suburban house in Melbourne. The group was small, totalling four. The first goal of our work was to find a power animal for ourselves. Entry to the Lowerworld was by finding an opening in the earth and going down. Assisted by the drumming, I was able to take myself in imagination to a favourite spot near a waterfall. Walking out from there, I met a wombat who accompanied me to a tree with a hole beside it. We went into the hole and found a large chamber underneath with a tunnel along which we could walk. After a time, the tunnel opened onto a large space like Wilpena Pound, an area in South Australia surrounded by a ring of hills. The sun was shining and there were kangaroos and other animals grazing. The wombat stayed by the tunnel entrance like a gatekeeper, perhaps to help me find it again. So I went off looking for

a power animal. The kangaroos and rabbits avoided me and I eventually found myself in total darkness, feeling quite frustrated. I decided that I needed to wait. Suddenly, a boar appeared, as if presenting itself. Following instructions, I asked, 'Are you my power animal?' (three times) and waited to see if there would be a positive answer. The boar responded to the questions with three different but vigorous actions which I took to mean 'Yes'. We spent more time communicating and then I took my leave, retraced my steps and returned to tell the story.

The other event at this workshop worth recounting here concerns my first journey to the Upperworld to make contact with a teacher. Following the instruction to find a way to go up, I mentally went to another waterfall which can produce a spray that seems to hang in the air. I found that the drumbeats took me up on this spray so that I was soon in midair, where I met the boar and other animal helpers. The boar took off to a place where there was a hole in the sky through which we could go to the world above. This world turned out to be quite featureless at first, so we hung about a little uncertainly. Then a magician figure, complete with symbol-encrusted robe and pointy hat, appeared in front of us. As instructed, I asked him three times, 'Are you my teacher?' He didn't exactly answer, but looked equivocal. I decided that he was not my teacher, though he didn't want to say so. I concluded that he was another gatekeeper. He then pointed me in a direction in the emptiness which we followed. After a time, we came to an oasis, a pool surrounded by trees. I sat down under a tree to wait, again feeling uncertain and a bit frustrated. After a time, the figure of Jesus appeared. I was appalled. I quite forgot about asking if he was my teacher because what I urgently wanted to know was whether he was the same Jesus that I met in church. The problem as I saw it was that I couldn't ask him because I wouldn't know how to trust the answer. This situation was sufficiently sticky for me to fail to return from this experience when the signal was given (a change in the drumbeat). Jill had to go through the return ritual twice to get me back and I felt quite rushed and unresolved.

Jill was not surprised that it had been Jesus that I met. 'Jesus has always been your teacher', was her response. This was reassuring to me, but I still felt conflicted. My conflict was coming to seem like a question about the degree of coherence between my Christian and my shamanic experiences. I was also aware that I had been quite open to developing a relationship with a power animal because that did not seem to be a space already 'spoken for' in my life, whereas this was not the case with the role of teacher. I had been quite happy to visit the Upperworld, but the notion of taking on a new teacher had produced some vague concern. The fact that Jesus had appeared

unbidden in a shamanic context was a challenge to me, both in terms of taking the shamanic context more seriously and in terms of being vulnerable to the freedom of Jesus, who conceivably was there to admonish me about straying from the tried and true Christian path.

I have found that entering the shamanic world lays down mental tracks that can be retraced, with sufficient concentration and intent. To recall the metaphor of the ocean, each journey gave me a particular route to somewhere interesting – but above all, somewhere now safe and familiar – so that I have been content to travel on these routes towards the next piece of exploration. That night, I decided that I needed to revisit that place in the Upperworld and the figure of Jesus in order to ask ‘the question’. So I retraced my steps to the oasis in the Upperworld and waited. It was not long before the figure of Jesus appeared. He was again standing in front of me, dressed in the long robe of pious portraits. There was an associated image of him on the cross, which I connect with my church-based experience of him. So I asked the question, ‘Are you my teacher?’, with all of the above resonances. There was a slight pause and then he turned to one side where there was a shamanic drum. Smiling slightly, he reached over and touched the drum – and it lit up golden. I took this to be a full answer to my question, meaning both ‘Yes’ and ‘I am also to be found through shamanic piety’.

The graciousness of this answer impressed me sufficiently to resolve my conflicted feelings and to lead me to accept the proffered basis for integrating my Christian and shamanic experiences. This general integration has proved durable and productive, leading in practice to a renewed attention to prayer and a willingness to wait in the silence before answers come. On the basis of my limited experience, I can say that Harner’s techniques seem to be effective in opening up a coherent world of inner experiences. For me, it was strictly comparable with other meditative experiences in Christian and other traditions, though quite distinctive in its orientation towards encountering spirit in nature and in the myriad beings of the natural world. I conclude that the shamanic world can be entered and that, phenomenologically, it does involve encounters with spirit or spirits. It is indeed intermediate between our everyday world of which it is an extension and the more transcendent dimensions that lie beyond our present areas of experience. The everyday ego is transcended, but our experience of the shamanic world is still based in what might be considered an extended ego, one that is more open to spirit and thus more conscious of its own limitations and inadequacies. Much of this seems to parallel traditional Christian spirituality, in which dying to self and rising to newness of life involves a newness of the self. There is real and significant transcendence of the old

ego or self, but the new person is not totally disconnected from the former being. The mystery of initiation is the mystery of this change from one state of being to another.

The Christian churches have often had difficulty with the special spiritual experiences of individual members. These difficulties have sometimes had schismatic consequences. It is hard, but necessary, to find a balance. If we take this kind of experience too seriously, we are tempted to reject any traditional approach which counsels caution. If we choose not to take such experiences seriously, we risk severe impoverishment of our spirit and a loss of sensitive openness to what God may be saying to us through these experiences. The need for balance is not new and we can gain help from looking at how people in other times and places have managed. Successful shamans are one group who have achieved some kind of balance in this area.

Interlude: Summoning Animal Spirits⁴¹

Rachel: Sandy, I am thoroughly alarmed by your opening up to animal spirits. In our experience of deliverance ministry, these are always demonic.⁴²

John: When you say 'demonic', I presume that you mean 'satanic', thoroughly opposed to the whole of God's plan for the world in Christ?

R: Yes. I would like to hear from Sandy why he thinks that the animal spirits he met in this journeying can't be satanic.

Sandy: Well, I admit that I don't know what the reality behind these inner figures might be, so I can't say for sure that they are not satanic. As a Christian, I accept the teaching that we should 'test the spirits to see whether they are from God' (1 John 4:1). This is where I want help.

⁴¹ An earlier version of this dialogue has been previously published as 'Encountering Animal Spirits', in *Asia Pacific Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 1, Institute for Christian Studies, Hanil University, Korea, 1998.

⁴² 'Certainly we have seen many demons manifest during deliverance as snakes and scorpions. People have finished up slithering across the floor in an incredibly snake-like manner, or with their backs bent so far over that the tail of their spine resembled the sting of a scorpion. It seems as though these are the commonest animalistic manifestations, being part of the basic character of the demonic. In addition to these, we have experienced almost every possible animalistic manifestation you can think of.' Horrobin, P, *Healing Through Deliverance: 1. The Biblical Basis*, Sovereign Word, Tonbridge, Kent, 1991, p.103. The generalization that animalistic spirits are always demonic was made during a seminar in Melbourne led by Peter Horrobin in which I participated in September, 1996. Cf. Also Horrobin, P, *Healing Through Deliverance: 2 The Practical Ministry*, Sovereign World, Tonbridge, Kent, 1991.

Beth: For me, it is pretty straightforward. If these animal figures are helpful and benevolent, they are guardian spirits, like the guardian angels of the Christian tradition. There are malevolent spirits which cause disease. These need to be removed for healing to occur. Shamans use these same malevolent spirits as helpers for healing, as western medicine uses vaccinations and small doses of poisons for healing.

R: Demonic spirits often look good, but they want your soul. They use humans for their own gratification.

B: This could also be true of your Christian God. As I hear you tell it, the benefits of the Holy Spirit only come to those who pray and sincerely open their lives to God, repudiating whatever is sinful and unpleasant in God's sight. While my experience of animal spirits remains benign and not coercive of my freedom, I don't think that I am in a very different kind of spiritual relationship from you.

R: Maybe, but God created us to be free and in loving relationship with each other as well as with God. This is what demons always distort, through their desire to take over the central place that rightfully belongs to God alone.

B: I don't use God language much, but I share your concern for our spiritual freedom in this spiritual work. There are demonic entities that feed off human distress spiritually, but it is important not to fear them. They are powerless in the face of love and light. You give them too much power when you consign all animal-like behaviour to them. We should be in harmony with all our non-human relations. This can only happen when the energies of interest to these demonic entities are not present. Do you Christians extend fellowship this far?

S: I would want to include harmonious relationships with all living creatures as part of our understanding of the kingdom of God on earth. This can be seen in the prophecies of Isaiah, for example.⁴³

⁴³ 'The wolf shall lie down with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.... They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.' (Isaiah 11:6-9).

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B: I am attracted to your idea of fellowship between ourselves and the Great Spirit, beyond our harmony with all creatures, though this fellowship seems unduly familiar to me.

J: Yes, the emphasis upon fellowship with God in recent Christian thought is very different from older ideas of the transcendence of God in Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. Rachel and Beth, my difficulty lies in understanding demonic spirits as actual spiritual entities. Are we talking about things like the malevolent internal voices which tell some people to kill themselves?

R: Yes, those voices are demonic. By the time the voices are coming the person is already quite far gone in the process of demonization. The obvious malice of the voices might push the person to get help. Christians who can see what is going on could pray with the person and point them to the power of Jesus, which is their only real hope.

S: Rachel, I have no quarrel with you about the power of Jesus. Christian tradition tells a very concrete story about how Jesus has won the victory over all evil spirits through dying on the cross. I don't fully understand this story, but I do share the faith of the church that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he has been made Lord over all things.

R: So how do your animal spirits react to the name and the presence of Jesus?

S: I have used this test and I saw no adverse reaction or expression of concern from the animal figures.

R: You realize that this is not fully definitive?

S: Yes, but all the tests that I used have come out the same way. These figures never prompt malicious or inflated reactions. I feel no attempt from them to dominate or seduce me.

R: So what do you get from them?

S: Well, initially they provided a framework for what I thought of as more intentional work with internal images. This led me into a form of intercessory prayer through visualizations. It does seem

important to me that they spontaneously led me to a visualized encounter with the figure of Jesus. Also, they focus a helpful feeling of energy in taking the next step in life when I feel down.

R: You aren't sure that it is spirits that you are dealing with, are you? Images with this amount of life of their own are hardly of no account. Still, I do hear what you say about testing them. It is a surprise to me that they seem so comfortable with the figure of Jesus. If you ever need to make a clean break with them, you know that I'd be happy to help.

S: You don't consider it possible that these animal figures might have some link with our guardian angels, do you? Remember what you said at the start, 'In our experience of delivery ministry, these are always demonic'. Your generalization is based on your deliverance ministry work, where you are – by definition – confronting the demonic.

R: Many of the people we have helped thought the animal figures were friendly when they started.

S: Thank you for being so uncompromising. You are a guardian of the narrow way. For those who have lost their faith in God and who cannot clean up their chaotic lives without renouncing everything but God, your way has great value.

B: I'm confused. I thought you two were in serious disagreement.

S: Oh, we are. I am not agreeing with the general demonizing of all non-human inner figures, which is the down side of Rachel's admirably pure approach.

J: Yes, I think I followed the twists and turns to that point. People request deliverance from demons when they suffer internal disorders, as part of a serious quest to clean up their lives and achieve inner freedom.

R: I thought Beth spoke well about demons feeding off human distress. I want to avoid the distress stage by getting rid of the demons before they take over.

B: You want the wisdom without the pathway to it.

J: We human beings have a deep need for purity, that sense of independence and coherence in ourselves from which graceful living is possible. This is the origin of our deep attachment to the supposed innocence of children. I once had a garden which I allowed to become unpleasantly tangled. I still remember the satisfaction that I felt in rooting everything out so that I could start again. I can imagine how much deeper would be the satisfaction resulting from a transformation of my very self.

S: That's good for those who can stop themselves from making others into sacrifices to their sense of purity. Even Christian households could become quite grim places where the puritan spirit became too strong and many political movements use 'purity' arguments to justify all sorts of repression, injustice and terror.

R: Purity is not an optional extra for Christian living.

S: Neither is it a simple matter for us to achieve. It is a gift of grace involving forgiveness and cleansing. Your own account of the centrality of prayer and of the gracious action of the Holy Spirit in deliverance from demons says as much. We don't need deliverance from human community, only from wrongful domination by others. Why do we need deliverance from inner images that seem quite benign?

R: What about the second commandment, against having idols⁴⁴?

S: If I were worshipping these images, I would have to agree with you. We relate to inner images in many ways, only some of which amount to the idolatrous worship.

B: What do you mean by 'idol' here?

R: An idol is any created thing that is given the place of highest honour in our hearts, the place that rightly belongs to God alone.

S: Yes, and the danger of this kind of attachment to something less than God is that we stop listening to God, we turn away from God and we lose sight of our own insufficiency.

⁴⁴ Exodus 20:4-6, Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

J: The Psalmist gives us to believe that the non-human order can praise God. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands’ (Psalm 19:1). This should probably be taken to refer to their created spiritual dimension, as this is what the Psalmist would think capable of praising God.

S: Christians believe that we live in a world created good which has somehow fallen from grace, yet is capable of redemption. Animal spirits, like ourselves, participate in this structure.⁴⁵ We should therefore distinguish between those aspects of the natural order which await redemption and those which actively resist it. The natural self-assertion of all living things is not evil in itself, but only when it goes beyond its proper limits.

B: Rachel, the rest of us seem to agree that your view of animal powers as always demonic is too global. What worries me is the use of the fear button. You seem caught up in fear and loathing of demons. This fear is itself very dangerous spiritually. I am no Christian, but I am impressed by Christian ideas about how perfect love casts out fear.⁴⁶ In shamanic work, we know that we must confront the monsters that we encounter. Loving acceptance of the monstrous reality is crucial, as fear only magnifies the threat from the monster.

R: I think you’d better tell me a story if I am to understand what you mean here.

B: I had a dream once in which I saw a bear about to attack me. I woke up screaming with fright. I went to speak with my teacher about it and was told that the bear did indeed want to break my heart open, but only so that I could feel the pain of the earth. I was told to approach the bear as a teacher and a healer. Overcoming my fears, I did this and found that it was as my teacher said. The bear did indeed break me open, but to my surprise, I immediately became aware of the surrounding world in

⁴⁵ ‘The Amerindians continue to perceive the universe as the habitat of spiritual powers associated with the Great Mystery and with the cycle of human existence. The Amerindian universe is a spiritual universe where there is no clear separation between all the living beings which compose it. The Amerindians maintain a mystical relationship with the animals, the herbs, the trees, the rocks, the water, the sky, and with all other ‘natural’ elements. While the western and Christian world views see God as the absolute being who is at the beginning and at the end of the world, the Amerindians concentrate on the unlimited abundance of spiritual powers within the universe itself. These spiritual powers freely enter into the cycle of human existence. The main function of most native rituals, therefore, is not to establish new relationships with these powers, but to become more aware of their influences and the orientation they may give an individual’s life.’ Peelman, A, Christ is a Native American, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1995, p.50.

⁴⁶ 1 John 4:18.

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a much more direct way. I was also aware of watching the bear from above as it put my broken body back together again. My new level of awareness has persisted to this day.

S: Beth, did your dream come as part of your initiation into shamanic realities? It sounds like a major encounter.

B: Yes, it did come at a critical time for me. It was an important part of my becoming a shaman.

R: So you seriously expect to be able to receive gifts from demons with impunity?

B: Demons don't give gifts, they merely take. They are malevolent spirits which feed off the distress created by gratuitous cruelty. They are awful. We resist them by refusing malicious thoughts and actions. Demons are aroused by our own meanness of spirit. Powerful healers like the bear are not demons, though they attack us to liberate us from our meanness.

J: You tell a good story, Beth. The figure of the bear is clearly a powerful inner presence for you. I believe that we constantly create these inner images in order to make sense of our everyday experiences, as happens in dreams. This is why I deny that these inner figures are spiritual presences from beyond ourselves.

B: If we make it all up ourselves, why are these inner figures so alien and frightening to us?

J: Good question. We do seem to be divided in our self-awareness, don't we? Yet you have told us how the alien quality is overcome through our courage in facing whatever they bring.

R: That's all very well, but both of you seem happy to rely on your own resources in facing real evil. This strikes me as sinful self-sufficiency and pride.

J: 'Happy' is a bit strong. 'Resigned', for lack of an alternative, would be closer to the mark in my case.

B: Rachel, if you are thinking that shamanic traditions lack an awareness of evil, I can assure you that this is not true. In building a sacred fire, some North American Indians place four logs north/

south, representing the black road of our wrongdoing. They then place four logs east/west on top of them, representing the red road of goodness. This symbolizes the continuing fact of our human wrongdoing, together with the continuing superiority of goodness. The intention is for the purification of the energies behind the wrongdoing so that we may walk the red road.⁴⁷ This seems similar to Christian ideas about human sin, repentance and divine forgiveness.

R: Yes, there is a similarity; the main difference lies in where we see the answer.

S: Rachel, what Beth is describing reminds me of the Jewish publican in Jesus' story, who makes the valid prayer that God hears, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner' (Luke 18:13).

R: Maybe. What disturbs me is not the genuineness or otherwise of people's repentance, but the practice of calling upon animal spirits such as the eagle, the buffalo, the bear and the kangaroo for help, rather than the true God.

B: And what disturbs me is the hypocrisy of a white settler society which calls on God for the forgiveness of its sins in general, with no repentance for the historic wrongs done to indigenous peoples and to all our non-human relations.

S: Let's not get into name-calling. You both have valid concerns, though I don't yet see how to resolve them.

J: Rachel, what do you think of Ezekiel's vision of the Glory of God served by the four living creatures with four faces, only one of which is human? The other faces are of a lion, an ox and an eagle. In the book of Revelation, these same four figures surround the throne of God.⁴⁸ Also, what are we to make of all those wings? To me, it seems that angels can appear in animal guise.

⁴⁷ In October 1996, I participated in a sweat lodge led by Lesley Crossingham, from which this account is drawn. Lesley Crossingham is founder of the Dawn Star Medicine Lodge based in Melbourne. Her teachers were Cree and Lakota elders. Cf. Crossingham, L, The Sacred Circle: Ocean of Stars, Spirit Vision, Kallista, Australia, 1994.

⁴⁸ Ezekiel 1:10, Revelation 4:7.

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R: Perhaps. God can work through animals, such as the ravens who brought Elijah food while he was living beside the brook Cherith.⁴⁹ My warning is about spiritual encounters with animal figures that respond to our calling.

S: I accept your warning. What I don't accept is that animal figures are automatically evil. In encountering these figures, I prefer to live with uncertainty until the matter becomes clear one way or the other. I am not ready to reject these figures when they behave so differently from the animal spirits in your deliverance ministry stories.

R: Well, we shall just have to agree to disagree, I suppose.

B: That's all very well for you comfortable Christians, but I don't think you quite realize the seriousness of the problem that you pose for the rest of us.

R: What do you mean?

B: The real world doesn't stop while you deliberate about whether or not we shamans are demon-worshippers. We have had much more realistic help from people like John, even though he doesn't believe in the reality of the spirits.

J: Rachel, what Beth is talking about is the arrogant imperialism of European Christians who colonized shamanic communities – and others - around the world. Even closer to home, she is talking about the persecution of witches in European societies from mediaeval times.

S: Yes, we need to look at that more closely.

⁴⁹ 1Kings 17:4-6.

Christian Europe and Witches

It is tempting to approach this topic in terms of the history of a text, “A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones, their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:27, cf. Exodus 22:18 and Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The societies of Christian Europe lived for centuries with hardly any official action against witches, yet in the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were large numbers of people tried and executed as witches across Europe⁵⁰. There is today a growing literature devoted to understanding this phenomenon, under the impact of the secularization of European societies and the emergence of neo-pagan religious traditions⁵¹. Increasingly, individual men and women are calling themselves witches and challenging western societies to accord them religious freedom. This is an area of confusion for Christians which is in urgent need of clarification. In these pages, I can do no more than some introductory ground-clearing.

Western minds, when confronted by the problem of what we term sorcery or witchcraft in primitive or non-Western cultures, assume most comfortably the attitudes and categories of formal or informal cultural anthropology. We know, and we find nothing unusual in this, that in a number of worldviews men and women, when they are fearful and helpless before the awesome forces of the visible world, traditionally seek to reach normally inaccessible forces beyond that world in order to increase their meager human powers and their abilities to control their own destinies.

Confronted with the problem of ‘witchcraft’ in Western culture, however, we feel ourselves faced with a much more complex problem. It seems to us far less comprehensible that *after* our own alleged period of primitive experience in the West, after our ‘Dark Ages’, during the centuries of dynamic intellectual experimentation, the Renaissance, the Reformations, and, more perplexing still, during that seventeenth century which we continue to consider the ‘Age of Reason’ and the ‘Age of Scientific Revolution’, Europeans engaged in a systematic and furious assault upon men and women believed to be diabolical sorcerers and witches manipulating the forces of the supernatural to effect evil in the world and bring Satan’s kingdom to a complete and terrible fulfillment. The otherwise calm and analytic language of the social sciences suddenly appears inadequate to the task even of description alone, and the

⁵⁰ “It is impossible to calculate exactly the total number of convicted witches, women and men, who were executed between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries by burning at the stake or hanging. Historians have been astonishingly casual with their estimates in the past (some of the least competent estimating as high as nine million victims), but the most recent scholarship rarely allows more than a total of 50,000 victims over the entire period, a number that must, of course, be compared wherever possible with local rates of conviction and execution for other capital crimes. However great the actual count of victims was, witnesses all convey the impression that the witches existed in incalculable numbers and that convictions and executions consumed them in great numbers.” Kors, AC & Peters, E (Eds.), *Witchcraft in Europe, 400 – 1700*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pa, 2001, p.17.

⁵¹ Cf. Adler, M, *Op.Cit.*, and Hume, L, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997.

terms 'craze', 'mania', 'superstition', and 'aberration' record our recoil from our culture's past far more than they clarify and explain that part of the past.⁵²

This problem is particularly acute for educated Christians who cannot be fully content with the categories of cultural anthropology, which bracket out the normative questions of the truth and acceptability of cultural beliefs and practices. Even the description of the problem provokes disagreement about major issues. Was there, in fact, a systematic and furious assault across Europe against witches?

Witchcraft... did not refer to some well-defined, universal system of magical belief or behaviour but to a complex interdependency of local beliefs and practices which might, under certain, locally influenced circumstances, be interpreted as witchcraft and brought to court as such; and throughout the whole period of its existence in a community it would pass through several layers of scrutiny and interpretation. Members of that community would constantly be asking themselves whether such and such an act constituted 'witchcraft', and if so whether they wanted to have it prosecuted. Officialdom in the shape of lawyers, doctors and clergy would try to decide whether the acts brought to their attention constituted prosecutable witchcraft or owed more to physical sickness, psychological disturbance, fraud, personal malice or a dozen other possible motives or causes. At some point, demonological theory might be taken into account and the expectations of learned discourse brought to bear on the details of an individual case. Should the magical operator find him- or herself in court, the judge or jury would have to consider whether or not the acts presented to them constituted punishable witchcraft according to the relevant statute; and in some cases political considerations might also play a part in the way the available evidence was assessed. Nothing could be further from some hegemonising totalitarian reaction to witches and witchcraft on the part of authority.⁵³

Maxwell-Stuart points to the episodic, local character of witch trials. He presents a picture of local communities in which accusation arises against an individual or group on the basis of a law which proscribed witchcraft without clear definition of what was proscribed. The learned leaders of opinion in mediaeval European societies became involved in these local cases and formulated general teaching which informed the thinking of people involved in future cases. Maxwell-Stuart also cautions us to remember that these were legal trials at which many people were in fact acquitted.

It is commonly supposed that a majority of those who were accused of witchcraft and came before the courts were automatically found guilty and executed. This is, in fact, not so. Given that there were different legal systems in operation within Europe and North America, some

⁵² Kors & Peters, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁵³ Maxwell-Stuart, PG, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400-1800*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, pp.12-13.

depending on the decision of a presiding judge or inquisitor, others upon the voting of a jury, and given that the opportunities for appealing against a guilty verdict also varied within that same geographical spread, it would be unwise to make too many generalisations. But acquittals there were, sometimes on a surprising scale; for example, fifty per cent of the witchcraft cases which came before the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland, whose outcome is recorded, received a 'not guilty' verdict.⁵⁴

This account seeks to explain witch trials in terms of local tensions which eventually lead to complaints by one part of a community against another. Another account needs to be given for the trials and executions which were led by zealous officials of church and/or state. It is this latter scenario which has given rise to the image of the witch hunter. It is important to note that, in general, the central legal apparatus of state and church restrained over-zealous officials through insistence on careful procedures and concern for the proper weighing of evidence. This central supervision did not mean that there could be no convictions and executions, but it did limit their extent.

The importance of central supervision in English witchcraft prosecutions can be illustrated by the effects of its failure in the 1640's, when England experienced the largest witch-hunt in its history. Between 1645 and 1647 the self-defined witch-finders Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, acting with considerable support and encouragement from towns and villages in the south-eastern part of the country, discovered and assisted in the prosecution of large numbers of witches. In their work of detection they used procedures of highly questionable legality, including the torture of enforced sleeplessness. Under normal circumstances the justices of the assizes would have prevented the use of such evidence at the trials. At the Essex assizes in the summer of 1645, however, where most of the early convictions in this witch hunt took place, the circuit judges from Westminster were not in attendance.⁵⁵

The crime of witchcraft was rarely defined by the relevant statutes in the careful manner of other criminal statutes⁵⁶. This reflects the nature of the Biblical texts (quoted above) which prescribe death for witches without very much further definition. There is some reference in these texts to the abominable practices of the nations living around Israel and to divination and sorcery, but the nature of witchcraft seems unfortunately open to a wide range of interpretations. We can note that the outcome of a witch trial would seem to depend at least as much upon the concept of witchcraft held by the accusers and judges, as upon the deeds of the accused.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.72.

⁵⁵ Levack, BP, 'State-building and witch hunting', in Barry, J, Hester, M & Roberts, G (Eds.), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p.109.

⁵⁶ Cf. Maxwell-Stuart, *Op.Cit.*, pp.9-13.

Witchcraft is itself a reification, an imposed category whose boundaries are anything but clear. It's not just that witchcraft and the legal persecution of witches need to be distinguished, as they certainly do. The persecution also needs to be broken down into its components, not treated as if it obeyed a single set of laws. Perhaps the most crucial distinction is that between the endemic trials of individual witches and more concentrated episodes of witch hunting. These latter in their turn differ sharply when conducted by members of the ruling elite from outbreaks whose main inspiration lay among the people; and possession cases form another distinct category. In any detailed study it is desirable to multiply these divisions further, classifying accusations and accusers as narrowly as possible.⁵⁷

This caution about the nature of the process of witch trials should also extend to the historical nature of witchcraft itself. There is little agreement about whether there were any genuine witches who were guilty of that of which they were accused. Those who have written on the subject, like those involved in witch trials, bring their own beliefs in this area to bear. This seems unavoidable due to the occult, or hidden, nature of the phenomenon of witchcraft. Robin Briggs has given a brief survey of published interpretations of European witchcraft.

...any serious interpretation of European witchcraft must be multifactorial, relating it to a number of discrete, or at least separable, causes. Any attempt to suggest that there is a single cause, or even a dominant one, a hidden key to the mystery, should be treated with the greatest suspicion. There has been no shortage of heroic attempts in this direction, of course. Some have thought witches really existed, whether as devil worshippers (Summers), heretics (J.B.Russell), pagans (Margaret Murray), or social rebels (Michelet, the early Le Roy Ladurie). Others have seen the conspiracy as lying among the persecutors, whether benighted clerics or avaricious judges (Lecky, Lea, Robbins). Even Trevor-Roper's sophisticated analysis has a strong anti-clerical tinge. There has been a rash of medical pseudo-explanations, invoking syphilis, ergotism and magic mushrooms. A feminist myth has come into existence, usually accompanied by wild inflation of the numbers, in which women were the real target, particularly in their role as healers. ... Many of these explanations do have some validity, of course; the objection is to giving them an exclusive or dominant role.⁵⁸

The various explanations offered relate closely to the world view of the writer. If we believe in the real existence of evil spirits and of Satan as their leader, we can begin to appreciate the fears of the Christian defenders of pious, ordered society. If we have no such belief, it is very hard to avoid seeing witch trials as the imposition of social control against deviants of one sort or another. Starhawk, writing as a Wiccan, presents a picture from the perspective of the victims, which seems to be an example of what Briggs calls 'a feminist myth'.

⁵⁷ Briggs, R, "Many reasons why", in Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, Op.Cit., p.53.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.51-52.

Long after city dwellers had converted to Christianity, the Witches were the wise women and cunning men of the country villages. They were the herbalists, the healers, the counsellors in times of trouble. Their seasonal celebrations established the bond between individuals, the community as a whole and the land and its resources. That bond, that deep connection, was the source of life – human, plant, animal and spiritual

The history of patriarchal civilization could be read as a cumulative effort to break that bond, to drive a wedge between spirit and flesh, culture and nature, man and woman. One of the major battles in that long war of conquest was fought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the persecutions of the Witches shattered the peasant's connection with the land, drove women out of the work of healing, and imposed the mechanist view of the world as a dead machine. That rupture underlies the entwined oppressions of race, sex, class and ecological destruction.⁵⁹

My concern is not to add to the 'definitive' explanations of what occurred but to recognize the importance of this history for our topic. Whatever else it may be, witchcraft involves magic and ritual. Our consciousness is activated in spiritually charged ways and we ourselves are open to whatever forces are at work. It seems intuitively plausible to consider that witchcraft and shamanism operate in similar general terrain, whatever the historical relationships between the two⁶⁰. It remains unclear why European Christian societies slowly moved from a relatively non-persecutory to a persecutory relationship to witchcraft.

Before 1100 or so, churchmen generally professed scepticism concerning the alleged activities and magical powers of witches, although they strongly condemned certain kinds of activities as deviant practice from their concept of normative religious life. Churchmen, after all, by 1100 had virtually disarmed the last bastion of pagan beliefs by convincing men and women that 'the gods of the pagans were demons in disguise' (Psalm 96:5), that all pagan religious practices (whether Mediterranean or northern European) were superstitions (a much stronger word then than now), and that some pagan religious practices constituted forbidden magic. Churchmen also argued convincingly for a long time that belief in the Christian god and normative religious practice protected the faithful from the inept assaults of malevolent, but increasingly ineffective, demons.

.....

From 1100 on one can observe (and sometimes even date rather precisely) the appearance of certain common elements of both sorcery and witchcraft and the emerging realization that the victory of Christianity had not, after all, been complete and that something new and dreadful in the history of Christendom had appeared. Many contemporary observers from the fourteenth century on looked upon manifest diabolical sorcery and witchcraft as quantitatively and qualitatively the single greatest threat to Christian European civilization.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1982, pp.xxvi-ii.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kors & Peters, *Op.Cit.*, Footnote p.3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

Many kinds of explanation are offered for this historic change of attitude. Some draw attention to the increasing divisions within Christendom⁶². Others point out the impact of certain events, such as the illness and early death of kings⁶³ or the trial of leading citizens for witchcraft⁶⁴. There are clearly many factors at work here. One of the more important developments was the gradual coming together of the peasant fear of ill-will magically expressed with the church's teaching about the reality of Satan and his demons. When the idea that witches deliberately chose to serve Satan took hold, the very existence of Christian civilization was seen to be under attack. This is the importance in the trials of witches of the pact with the devil and the gathering of witches at a sabbat to idolatrously worship the devil.

In the increasingly systematic thought of Aquinas and his contemporaries, ... folklore became complex and rigorous ecclesiastical doctrine. The demons were evil angels who had the ability to unite themselves to bodies and to communicate their knowledge and commands to men and women. They were a hierarchically organized army in the service of Satan working collectively for the perdition of the faithful. Satan and his hosts could tempt human beings into their service, thereby making them commit the twin sins and crimes of apostasy and idolatry. They could also secure both present and future service by written contracts with humans, leave distinguishing marks as tokens of that service on the bodies of their human servants⁶⁵, gather their servants in nocturnal assemblies called 'sabbats' to pay homage to the devil and plan new assaults on the human community, have sexual relations with humans, and give humans the powers of flight and morphological change. Such human servants of Satan became the witches of the theologians and inquisitors, the visible agents of demonic power. Once the diabolical sorcerer and the witch had come to be understood in this new context, the logic of the witch-hunt and execution of the convicted sorcerer or witch became manifest and compelling. There could no longer be simple superstition or simple magic performed by self-proclaimed cunning-folk, wizards, wise women, or magicians, even if such rites were aimed to relieve human suffering and anguish – there could only be the diabolical sorcerer or witch.⁶⁶

This theological schema was clearly devastating in its impact upon the clever folk, whose being was redefined without opportunity for rebuttal. It is here that the analogy between racial genocide and witch hunts begins to bite. Restraint on killings comes only from the judgement of those in power,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kieckhefer, R, European Witch Trials, University of California Press, Berkeley, Ca, 1976, p.12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.13-14.

⁶⁵ Polyps (small growths on the skin) were called 'witches teats' in mediaeval times and were believed to be a means of perverted physical/spiritual communication with evil spirits. Cf. Russell, JB, A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans, Thames & Hudson, London, 1980. Another important belief was that the devil left a mark on a person, where they became insensitive to pain. This led to the test of 'pricking', where the discovery of a place where pain was no longer felt was thought to indicate diabolical connection. Cf Maxwell-Stuart, Op.Cit., p.50.

⁶⁶ Kors & Peters, Op.Cit., pp.8-9.

not from some countervailing power or set of acknowledged rights enjoyed by the accused. For us today, it is hard to take seriously some of the beliefs about witches, particularly the interpretation of bodily marks as signs of intercourse with the devil. If a pin prick cannot be felt, we naturally think in terms of inoperative nerves rather than Satan. We have no difficulty in thinking of flights of the imagination, but we struggle to give much sense to spiritual flights which go beyond the framework of clairvoyant seeing of distant vistas. In this, we are heir to scepticism about the reality of the powers of witches and of their diabolical connection, a scepticism which was finally responsible for curtailing the witch trials.

Voices opposed to persecutions ... were never entirely silenced. Earlier ecclesiastical insistence ... that night rides and carnal pacts with the devil were illusory found individual echoes in ... the treatise *Le songe du vergier* in the fourteenth century and the sixteenth century bishop of Cuenca, Fray Lope de Barrientos.⁶⁷

The physician Johann Weyer⁶⁸ is generally credited with beginning the process of formulating this scepticism into a basis for public policy which led to the virtual cessation of witch trials in Europe in the eighteenth century. This development owes more to the Enlightenment than to Christian theology as such, though we can perhaps see a supportive role for this development in the re-emergence to centrality of the Augustinian understanding that God does not allow evil spirit power over humans other than through temptation⁶⁹. If we become subject to the devil, it is through our own free choice, as Aquinas also taught. The same is true if we continue in subjection to the devil. Temptation comes to us all, so that officials who are zealous for the extermination of witches may find themselves demonically tempted to take short cuts which lead to the execution of innocent victims.

We could argue that it is a sign of grace that there were not many more mass executions, though this is to neglect our first duty in this matter, which is to acknowledge the wrong done to those who were victimized according to the dictates of this demonology. Where there is some kind of evidence of diabolical malevolence in addition to traditional practices, the injustice may be lessened. Without this additional evidence, it seems spiritually perilous to act upon this diabolism when it is at such variance with people's own self-understanding. We would seem to be in the presence of the power

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.19-22.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.44-47.

of ‘one idea’ that, out of fear, cannot allow place for other perspectives. Can this really be the wisdom of God?

Interlude: Witches and Malevolence

R: Some of those burned as witches could have been quite innocent of the charges against them,⁷⁰ which is an evil thing in itself. Still, some of the witches might have been guilty of using their powers to harm their neighbours. It was wrong to burn them, though secular society doesn’t seem to know what to do about malevolent witchcraft.

J: I’m glad that you think it was wrong to burn even the malevolent witches, but I have to ask you how you deal with the biblical texts that seem to require the death of witches, such as Leviticus 20:27, “A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones, their blood shall be upon them” (NRSV).

R: Well, for me the Bible is the Word of God, but it needs interpreting. I find this a hard text, like those near it which require the death of anyone who commits incest or adultery or homosexuality between men or sexual relationships with animals or who sacrifices their child to Molech or who curses their mother or father. I am a follower of Jesus, who taught us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44) and to withhold judgement (Matthew 7:1). But I accept the possibility that God might raise up executioners to carry out these death sentences.

J: So perhaps you can understand why Beth is worried about your position, as you seem to leave the door open for some nutter who might read these texts and take it into his head that God wants him to kill her as a witch.

R: Yes, I can see that. I can’t control what God does or does not say to other people. All I can do is stay away from dubious spiritual practices.

⁷⁰ For what follows, cf. Russell, JB, Op.Cit..

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

B: Your heart is in the right place, as you think it was wrong to kill the witches. I won't hold you responsible for what is in the text of Leviticus, even though I do want to ask for your help in stopping people from acting on those texts that call for the death of the sinner.

S: We seem to be close to the heart of the problem here. For Christians, God is one, so there should be a resolution of the conflicting voices in the Bible. Yet I don't easily see this resolution.

J: Rachel, thanks for acknowledging the problem. It seems to me that we need to clarify a few issues if we are to see more clearly. For example, what does Leviticus mean by the words translated as 'medium' and 'wizard'? What do we understand by the word 'evil'? What is 'sin'?

S: Thank you, John, that is a good list of questions for us to work on. I would add one more, which is to ask about how sin defiles not only the people but also the land, so that the land vomits out the wicked communities (Leviticus 18:24-25).

J: I don't know about the land, but evil is a real problem for any society. Our society struggles to know what to do with real criminals. I am grateful that we have mostly turned our back on capital punishment in Australia. No matter what the conservatives say, I think capital punishment legitimates murder. The Christian idea that God wills the redemption of those who do evil is an important source of our modern liberal policy.

B: So, Rachel, you don't want to see me burned because you think capital punishment is wrong, not because you see any good in my religious practice?

R: I don't know enough about your religious practices to say, Beth.

S: Rachel, be fair. You know that none of our Christian practices can guarantee their own purity. As Protestants, we know that our righteousness is a gift of God's grace rather than a secure possession of our own. It may surprise you to learn that a very similar dynamic is evident in the sweat lodge ritual, where people are required to humble themselves, lay down their unsatisfactory past and receive a fresh life and direction from the inner ministrations of spirit.

J: You two may not realize it, but you are repeating one of the classic Christian debates, which is how to recognize the activity of evil spirit. This was a very practical problem for the witch-finders in mediaeval times. There were two main criteria used, leaving aside the strange beliefs about things like moles and polyps. The more sensible criterion was malevolence. No pact with the devil was thought to be in place unless the witch showed strong ill-will to neighbours. The other criterion, which led to the worst excesses of religious zeal, was idolatry.⁷¹ Subtle changes to orthodox religious practices were thought to indicate satanic connections because Satan is the ape of God. While both criteria could lead to the persecution of eccentrics and misfits, the criterion of idolatry condemned every religion - except your own - as demon-ridden.

S: I do have more sympathy with malevolence than idolatry as a mark of evil, but even malevolence has its completely natural side. The animal defending its territory can be quite terrifying to the unwitting human victim of its attack. Our view of a police raid at dawn depends upon whether we see the police as maliciously harassing innocent people, as blundering or as doing what is needed to apprehend criminals.

J: The persecution of witches stopped in the eighteenth century because of liberal concerns about human rights and the proper processes of law. The European Enlightenment cast doubt upon the reality of the spirit world, which made it very hard to prove charges of consorting with the devil. The Protestant Reformation made little impact on the persecution of witches, comparatively speaking. This common-sense restraint is actually quite fragile and is easily swept away when prejudices and fears run rampant in a society.

B: This is what troubles me about what you are saying, Rachel. Your readiness to identify people as demon-ridden is very likely to be misunderstood by simple-minded people around you, triggering their fears and defensive-aggressive responses.

R: I do recognize these dangers. I don't talk about demonization much. I am only talking about it now because you have asked me what I think and I don't want to lie to you.

⁷¹ For the distinction between malevolence and idolatry as criteria for evil, cf. Burkhart, LM, [The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico](#), The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1989.

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

J: It is a sad fact that not all your fellow believers are so restrained, Rachel. Spiritual teachings cast a long shadow. Anyway, I don't know whether witchcraft and shamanism are genuinely linked with psychic powers or not. I do know that it is a lot easier to keep the lid on public fears when it is generally believed that psychic powers cannot affect anything beyond the attitude of the person exercising them.

B: The powers are real, but I prefer not to say this to any but trusted colleagues for the reasons that you have mentioned, John.

J: In a world of active psychic powers and real, disembodied spirits, we non-psychic people are vulnerable to the use of these powers against us by malicious people and spirits. I do not believe that this world is our actual world, though I am open to being persuaded otherwise.

R: I know that the powers are real, which is why I am concerned. Thanks for the expression of confidence, Beth; you seem to be including me as a trusted colleague!

S: So where does this leave you, Beth?

B: I am trusting you all to see that non-Christian spiritual paths are not victimized by special Christian ideas about evil spirits. 'Agreeing to disagree' about these Christian perspectives worries me.

R: I believe that animal spirits are demonic, but I do accept that demonic powers have rights to inhabit humans who welcome them. I see my responsibility in keeping an eye on what they are doing and to pray.

B: It is irritating to be patronized as a foolish child who doesn't realize that she is playing with fire. Still, I accept your prayers as a gesture of friendship and concern for me as a person. As a new-found friend, let me say that I am genuinely worried that conservative Christians will find out about shamanism and re-invent the mediaeval witch-hunts.

S: Now it is my turn to tell a story.

The Burning Mirror (Story)

Some hundreds of years ago there lived in a small European village a young boy called Paul D'Aintrie. He lived happily with his father, mother, brothers and a sister, along with their horses, goats, chickens and a cow. As naturally as breathing the air and watching the grass grow, Paul came to know all about the other people in the village, as they knew about him. He played around the house and went to the fields to take lunch to the men. On Sundays he went to church with his family.

One day it occurred to him that there was someone in the village about whom he didn't know very much, old Magda Pothergault. She lived by herself in a small cottage with a herb garden, next to the forest on that side of the village. When Paul asked his father about her, Mr. D'Aintrie looked thoughtful, scratched his head and said, 'She has lived there for as long as anyone can remember and never did anyone any harm, that I can tell'.

His mother told him that Magda was a clever woman who knew a lot about herbs and helped to heal sick people and animals. Paul noticed that she didn't seem keen to say more. Later, he remembered hearing that Lisbeth Gold's daughter had died despite being seen by old Magda. On the other hand, his friend Claude Robinet once told him that old Magda had saved the life of a great-uncle. Paul decided to go for a walk and sneak a look at her cottage.

He made his way through the forest to the edge of the clearing in which the cottage stood. He could see old Magda's cat sunning itself on the back step, not far from the gate to the fenced herb patch. He watched for ten minutes, not wanting to move. Suddenly, a hand took hold of him by the scruff of the neck. Magda led him inside and sat him in a chair. Looking sternly at him, she asked why he was watching her house. Paul was terrified. He did not know what to say, so he said nothing. Magda took a deep breath and said, 'I don't mind if you want to come and visit, you know, but I won't have you spying on me'. She offered him a drink of apple juice, but Paul just wanted to go home, so Magda saw him to the door.

Paul did not tell anyone about his visit to old Magda, but he thought about it constantly. After a week, he decided that he had been silly to refuse the apple juice, so he went back and, heart in mouth, knocked on the door. Magda showed him in, sat him in the same chair and again offered him some apple juice, which he accepted. Thus began a slow friendship which Paul took care not to mention to anyone, least of all his parents. One afternoon, he asked Magda how she had known that he was watching her house from the forest. She looked thoughtfully at him and then seemed to take some inner decision before fetching an ordinary-looking mirror which she set down in front of him. At first, he simply saw his own reflection, but just as he was about to lose interest, the image unexpectedly changed and he saw the kitchen of his own home where his mother was preparing food. He was so surprised that he stood up quickly and when he looked at the mirror again, the image was back to normal. He noticed that Magda was watching him closely, with a secret smile. She said nothing, however, and put the mirror away 'for another time'.

Some weeks later, he heard his parents talking about the arrival of the witchfinders in the nearby town. It was clear that his parents were worried, though they said more than once that there was no reason to think that there were any witches in their village. When they talked about the next village, however, their voices were lowered so much that Paul could not hear what they said. That afternoon, his friend Claude said to him that he had heard for sure that the witchfinders would soon deal with old Magda, for her name had already been presented. Paul did not know what to say, so he said very little and shortly took his leave of Claude. He quickly made his way to Magda's cottage and knocked on the door. When Magda let him in, he was about to blurt out what he knew, but she waved her hand and said, 'Yes, my name has gone in and they will come for me; I'm too old to run, so I shall best face them'. She wrapped the mirror in a green silk cloth and gave it to Paul. 'Hide it until all this blows over. Perhaps you can learn how to use it'.

Paul took the silk-wrapped mirror in an automatic manner. His thoughts seemed to have fled into the corners of his mind where he could no longer find them. Somehow he was able to say, 'I do hope you will be all right'. At this, Magda laughed, not very pleasantly, but all she said was, 'Hurry home and don't come here again'.

Paul found a box that was just big enough for the mirror. He carefully placed the mirror in the box and hid it behind the rafters at the very back of the barn. It was two days later that he saw the witch-

finders and their men come for old Magda. He went into the forest to cry. Some days later, much to his surprise, they also came for him.

‘Come and see what I’ve got’. Jim Daintree was carrying an old box as he entered the kitchen. His wife Jenny looked up and said, ‘Can you open it?’

‘I already have. We found it in that ancient barn we were pulling down. I was the only one who was interested in it.’

Jim put the box down, opened it and took out a large, flat object wrapped in very old green silk. He unwrapped the silk and revealed a substantial mirror, though the glass was completely black and opaque. Jenny was fascinated by it. She picked it up and looked more closely at it. Though it was not physically cold to the touch, she felt strangely cold. ‘What do you think it is?’ she said.

‘It’s a mirror, but why it’s all black has got me puzzled’, said Jim.

‘Yes, the glass itself is black. It isn’t just black behind the glass. Why would anyone make a mirror and then fill it with black glass?’

‘Beats me. I just felt drawn to it somehow, as if it were some kind of family heirloom.’

‘Maybe it is, from the time when some of your father’s family lived on that place. Let’s take it to someone who knows about antiques.’

They showed the mirror to a few antique dealers, who confirmed that it was probably some hundreds of years old. No-one could account for the black glass. One dealer offered to buy it as a curio item, but Jim and Jenny were both unwilling to sell despite the fact that it had no apparent use. It rested in a corner of their bedroom, draped in the green silk cloth.

One night, Jim awoke from a nightmare. Jenny, awakened by his ragged breathing, took a moment to realize that it was a nightmare and not a physical emergency. Jim told her of the horrible scene of which he had been a part. He had been dragged to an unlit bonfire and tied to a post in the middle of the faggots. Then some well-dressed people had declared him proven guilty of the crimes of

witchcraft and heresy, for which the punishment was death by burning. The fire was kindled and he struggled against his bonds as the flames set his clothes alight and seared his flesh. Just as the pain became completely unbearable, he found escape by waking.

After telling the story, he regained his composure. Jenny, however, was much affected, as the story reminded her of pictures of the burning of heretics and witches that she had seen at school. Suddenly, her eyes were drawn to the old mirror in the corner. Jim saw that she was seeing something deeply disturbing. He looked at the mirror, but it had not changed. Jenny had covered her face in her hands and was sobbing profusely. It was only after some minutes that she was able to explain to Jim that the mirror had been engulfed in flames, though without effect on the curtains next to it. She was quite surprised to find that he had seen no flames. Jim was quite surprised to learn that she had. The calming effects of a cup of tea and much further talking led them to think of it as a strange, hallucinatory image brought on by Jenny's memory of lurid pictures.

They did not move the mirror from its place in the corner, but before long they noticed that, on entering the room, their eyes would go to that corner before anywhere else. Jenny also found that, where she had first thought the mirror cold, it now seemed sometimes hot to the touch. This did not occur when she focused her attention on it, but only when she was thinking of something else. Another odd thing was that neither of them had much appetite. They were both off their food, to the point where Jenny began to need rests during the day and Jim became visibly thinner. They consulted the local doctor, though without positive results.

One day, Jenny met Jim on his way in from work with the proposal that they put the whole story in front of someone else. 'We have no idea what's happening to us, but something is not right and we need to find out what it is', she said.

'OK, but who can we tell? More importantly, what can we tell them? What have you told your mother, for example?'

'Only our health problems, so far. Still I would rather confide in her than in anyone else in the family.'

'There is the village priest', said Jim.

‘He’ll probably put it down to the work of the devil and we’ll be much worse off than we are now’, replied Jenny.

After careful thought, they decided that they should look for someone who was not local, who was a spiritual person, preferably a Christian like themselves, who was not given to fear of the devil. They eventually located a Mme. Lisette Antoine, an acquaintance of Jenny’s mother, who some years before had left a convent to marry. This woman was intrigued by the mysterious story and she made arrangements to stay with them for a few days. Upon her arrival at their house, they sat down and went over the whole story.

When they had discussed everything that seemed relevant, they went into the bedroom, where Lisette picked up the mirror, inspected it carefully and then looked into the black glass for a long time. As if waking from sleep, she heaved a deep sigh and put it back against the wall. She looked at Jim and then at Jenny in a measuring kind of way and suggested that they go into the other room to talk.

‘That black glass is really extraordinary. Did you notice how it is very far from uniform in the density of the blackness, with a smudgy, almost shifting quality? Areas of the really dense black seemed to shift around inside the glass while I was watching. It does seem to me that, whatever is going on, the mirror is involved; though as to how, we need more information. Perhaps we can sleep on it and make some plans in the morning. One further question, though; have either of you had experience with the practice of meditation?’

‘I know nothing of meditation, apart from prayer and worship in church’, said Jim.

‘Yes, that goes for me, too, apart from learning to pray meditatively at school’, said Jenny.

They all slept well that night. Jim and Jenny were obscurely relieved by Lisette’s calm and matter-of-fact approach to them and to their story. The next day, Lisette told them that she thought it would be useful to use the mirror as a meditation object, in the hope of finding more clues about what was happening to them. She explained a method for doing this, which seemed to Jim and Jenny to

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amount to sitting in front of the mirror and staring at it until something happened. ‘Which could be a very long time’, said Jim, but only to himself.

‘Before we do any of that, though’, said Lisette, ‘you need to be clear about your spiritual anchor’.

‘How do you mean?’ asked Jim.

‘I mean that meditation involves opening yourself up to the potentially terrifying mysteries at the heart of human existence. The resources that you need to face the reality of your own death are what you need for meditation.’

‘Well, we believe in God’, said Jim.

‘Yes, that’s the kind of thing I mean’, said Lisette, ‘though I suggest that you fix your belief in one or two words or pictures so that it is there when you need it. Also, we shall use a ritual to ask for positive spiritual resources in case something frightful comes up.’

‘You are getting me scared already’, said Jenny.

‘Good, I have succeeded in catching your attention. It is perhaps helpful to think that anything that we meet in this sort of work already exists in the world, so that letting it into our consciousness is not such a big deal. As long as we can stop it obsessing us and taking over our actions, it is unlikely to harm us.’

‘That is comforting, when you put it like that’, said Jim in a wry tone of voice. ‘Are you going to do a ritual around our looking in the mirror?’

‘Yes, exactly. I want to clarify our intentions and assemble our guardian angels and other protective figures’, said Lisette.

They decided that they would first go for a walk in preparation, connecting themselves to the everyday world that seemed oblivious to all strangeness. When they returned, they agreed that they were ready to start. Lisette suggested that Jim and Jenny sit on the couch. She went into the

bedroom and returned, bringing the mirror. She placed the mirror on the floor in front of them. She then walked slowly around the room, stopping every so often to call on specific heavenly powers for help and protection. When she had completed a circle around the mirror and the couch, she sat down on the other side of the mirror from Jim and Jenny. Picking up the mirror and holding it so that it faced Jim and Jenny, she prayed again, stating their need and their desire as well as renewed requests for help and protection. At a certain point, she fell silent, staring at Jim and Jenny, who were looking fixedly at the mirror.

For a while, nothing happened, except that Jim shifted his position on the couch. He was having trouble concentrating on the boring task at hand. He became aware that Jenny was sitting motionless beside him. Lisette was watching them both quite calmly, which he found reassuring. Jenny started to make strange groaning sounds. She began to move with a slow, sinuous swaying of the torso. Then she stood upright and started bouncing off the ground, her hands waving in rhythm. Jim was alarmed by this and he glanced at Lisette. He noticed that she was perspiring freely, with her attention fixed on Jenny.

‘Take the mirror, reclaim it, confound the witchburners, hold to the earth’, said a voice from Jenny unlike any that Jim had ever heard.

‘Speak your name and purpose’, said Lisette, loudly and clearly.

‘They racked me and they burned me, poor old Magda’, said the voice. ‘Cruel and unjust, they even killed children. But I can teach you a thing or two, if you want to learn.’

‘We’ll have to think about that’, said Lisette. ‘But don’t you want to do yourself a favour and let go of all that pain?’

‘Never forgive! Oh, the cruelty of them. What’s that you say, let go?’

‘Let me point you towards the light’, said Lisette, in an impossibly calm and tender tone.

‘No!’ shouted the voice. Jenny was suddenly thrown down to the floor and Jim saw the mirror engulfed in flames. Lisette gasped and quickly lowered the mirror to the floor, clapping her hands

together in pain. For a moment, no-one moved. Then Lisette shook herself and went to Jenny, who was not breathing. Lisette administered an efficient version of first aid and it was not long before Jenny was again breathing and conscious. Jim realized that he had been holding his breath for far too long. The mirror was returned to its normal blackness.

‘Spirit of Magda, turn yourself to the light’, said Lisette, in a stern, reproving voice. Jenny twitched a bit as she spoke, but then shook herself and looked around. Lisette continued to hold her quite firmly and then asked, ‘Are you back with us, Jenny?’

‘I think so’, said Jenny. ‘That Magda is very angry. I think she was burned as a witch.’

‘Yes, it would seem so’, said Lisette. ‘She wouldn’t listen to me, so I think that means it is up to you to point her to the light’.

‘I’ll need a lot of help with that’, said Jenny.

They were so busy talking that they had not noticed Jim, who had again become entranced by the mirror. He had stood up so that he could gaze into it more deeply. When Lisette finally noticed this, she reached over to take his hand. He blinked and then looked at Lisette and Jenny.

‘What did you see?’ asked Lisette.

‘Well, when Jenny was talking strangely and getting up, the mirror was full of flames. There was something behind the flames, but I could hardly see it at all. When she fell down, the mirror went black. Just now, I glanced at it again and I could see the flames again, but this time they were deep inside the mirror. They were still all over it and I could make out what else was there. On one side of the mirror, there were four separate bonfires for four people. One of them was a young boy, one was a middle-aged man, one was a pregnant woman and one as an old woman. On the other side there were two hanged people, an old woman and a teen-aged girl, with the flames all around them. At the top of the mirror, I saw three figures on crosses on a hillside, also engulfed in the flames. Despite the flames, the whole picture felt dark, desolate and despairing.’

‘How exceedingly fascinating’, said Lisette. ‘Well, it does seem that we have succeeded in our attempt to gain more information’.

‘What do we do now?’ asked Jenny.

‘We finish our ritual, have lunch and go for a walk. This needs some careful planning.’

At this point, Lisette was not the only one to need inspiration. This story was getting out of control. Despite the clarity of what had so far emerged, I nervously decided to consult some friendly experts.

I gave a copy of the story so far to nine other friends to see what they could suggest. I was pleased that they all replied promptly. Here is a summary of their replies:

1. Fred, a minister of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Jim’s vision is a valid reading of the spiritual history of the witch burnings in Europe, in which hell was inflicted in this life. Whatever their human failings, these victims were most probably innocent of the charge of witchcraft. The activity of Satan is much more evident in the actions of the witch hunters than in what we know of the actions of their victims. The conjunction of the image of Jesus on the cross with all these other victims of execution shows the hidden solidarity of Jesus with the victimized people of all times and places. The story should therefore go on to show how Lisette, Jim and Jenny discover a vocation to work for Amnesty International’s Campaign against Capital Punishment.

2. Oneira, a Wiccan Priestess.

As can be seen from her proficiency in the ritual casting of a circle for the raising of spiritual power, Lisette is a modern Wiccan priestess. She sees the mirror, even in its present fixated state, as an object of power from ancient sources which has withstood Christian onslaughts. She would also like to learn from old Magda, though she is not yet sure if Magda has retained enough balance in her sufferings to function as a conscious teacher. She intends to introduce Jim and Jenny to the spiritual

life, so the story should go on to feature the initiation of Jim and Jenny and the acceptance by this newly forming coven of old Magda, who resides in the mirror, as a spiritual teacher.

3. Tony, a conservative Christian.

Old Magda is clearly aided by the Devil Himself, so that all attempts to negotiate with her are doomed. Under Lisette's inept leadership, things will go from bad to worse, leading to a fairly complete possession state for Jenny, Jim and Lisette. Their behaviour brings them to the notice of the wider community. No-one quite knows what to do, apart from restraining our friends from injuring themselves and others, until the local priest, Father O'Hare, is brought to the scene. He performs a successful service of exorcism, during which the mirror is burned and the glass melted, congealing as ordinary glass. Jim, Jenny and Lisette are all most grateful for their deliverance from Satan.

4. Moira, a radical Feminist.

Lisette is clearly the most competent person on the scene and she seems to be moving towards a successful resolution of the mysterious situation. Unfortunately, as so often happens in the real world, the agents of patriarchy get wind of what is happening. Father O'Hare chooses this time to make an unannounced pastoral visit (acting on the basis of information received from nosy neighbours) and discovers evidence of unorthodox religious activities. While he does not burn anyone, he does safeguard the general purity by precipitating a public stigmatization of Jim, Jenny and Lisette, as devil-worshippers. The story concludes with an exorcism led by Father O'Hare in which the mirror is publicly pulverized by a jackhammer.

5. Karen, a New Age Psychic.

Jenny will discover that she is a reincarnation of Old Magda and that she has, without her conscious involvement, brought the mirror to herself in order to purify it for fresh use. Jim is, of course, the reincarnation of Paul D'Aintrie. Lisette is in the way, so she is eventually thanked and sent home. Jenny/Old Magda then proceeds to reclaim the mirror as a manipulable instrument of power. With the help of the mirror, she identifies people in the modern world who are the reincarnations of her persecutors. Seeing herself as an agent of karma, she works her vengeance upon them. The story

concludes with Jenny/Magda's dawning recognition that there is another turn of the wheel around the corner and that it is time for her to draw a line on vengeance.

6. Daniel, a sceptical Scientist.

These people are clearly confused about reality. It would be nice if they could be brought to realize how delusional their perceptions have been without treating them as sick. For example, have you considered the possibility that the mirror has holographic properties so that, under certain conditions of light, it really does display odd scenes that are reflected from somewhere nearby? Jenny needs to come to terms with her traumatic childhood encounter with that vivid book about the burning of witches. The story should go on to show Jenny's successful therapy. Lisette and Jim have shown themselves incapable of supporting this more realistic approach, so the story should conclude with the arrival of the family doctor who clears up all the confusions.

7. Kim Ok Ul, a Korean student of shamanism.

The sickness experienced by Jim and Jenny is clearly *sinbyong*, the sickness sent by the spirits as part of the calling to a person to become a shaman. Should they continue to resist this calling, they will die. Lisette, being a shaman, knows this well. The story should go on to show how Lisette facilitates the emergence and training of Jim and Jenny as shamans. Old Magda is Jenny's tutelary spirit and the mirror is a centrepiece for her altar. It becomes cleansed once Jenny accepts her vocation and Old Magda is 'fed'. Old Magda is powerful enough to include Jim in this work, though in a supportive role. Provided that Jenny continues to welcome Old Magda to use her body to speak and to dance in rituals, the needs of other people, 'clients', will be met. The story should conclude with a public ceremony with people from their community in which Jenny, with Old Magda's help, amazes everybody with her powers of knowledge and healing.

8. Franz, a Jungian Psychotherapist.

It is the apple juice that is the key to this story, recalling as it does the eating of the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The focus is therefore upon the enhancement of consciousness through struggle against the necessary oppositions (Divine Commandments, a sense of wrongdoing, a sense of vulnerability to wrongdoing by others). The central symbol of the mirror

manifests awareness of self and, in the flames, the painfulness that can attach to self-knowledge.

The story should therefore go on to show the completion of Jenny and Jim's respective journeys to enhanced self-knowledge through further encounters with the mirror. Lisette figures as a guide and psychopomp on this epic journey of self-discovery.

9. Old Bob, an Aboriginal man.

I thought I might get to hear about one of your white ancestors, but she turned out to be just as confused as the rest of you.

It will be appreciated that the ensemble of these responses left me feeling considerably more confused than before. I decided that my inner guide was not without merit after all. I also decided to press on with the story without taking up any of the proffered suggestions, at least, not consciously.

'Well, we'd better get started', said Lisette.

It was a week later and there had been much talking and planning. Jim and Jenny had fully recovered from their shock and exhaustion following the encounter with Old Magda and the mirror. Through close questioning by Lisette, Jim had been able to remember noticing a fierce expression on the face of the old woman as she was being consumed by the flames. None of the other figures had discernible expressions. They had decided that further negotiations with Old Magda were required. The mirror would be propped up so that they could all look into it and they had discussed their approach in great detail. Lisette had prescribed some concentration exercises, particularly for Jenny.

'What do I do if Jenny starts talking like Old Magda again?' asked Jim.

'Don't do or say anything unless something constructive occurs to you', said Lisette. 'Stop her if she looks like hurting herself or one of us. Otherwise, watch and listen. That is the most important thing. Your caring attention is a powerful help to Jenny.'

Jim wasn't sure he was satisfied by this, but he was obscurely pleased to be told that his attention was supportive even if he did nothing else, which was a new thought for him. He sat down on the couch next to Jenny while Lisette walked around the room and prayed. She then sat down in a chair near Jenny where she could watch them both and also see the face of the mirror. This time, she had an improvised drum on which she beat a steady, monotonous rhythm. Again, nothing happened for some minutes. Then, quite suddenly, Jim noticed that the darkness in the glass was moving in a twisted, writhing pattern. At the same moment, similar movements and inchoate sounds started to emerge from somewhere deep inside Jenny. She again stood up, stretched out her arms and bounced up and down on the spot.

Lisette and Jim also stood up, watching Jenny from outside the arc of her flailing arms. Lisette put the drum down and said, in a carefully calm and penetrating voice, 'Old Magda, speak to us if you are there'.

'Make them suffer, they were wrong, oh, the pain!' Again it was the voice of Old Magda speaking through Jenny, who was totally in trance.

'Who should we make suffer?' said Lisette.

'The witchfinders, of course, and Rob Marle who gave them my name'.

These people have been dead these four hundred years', said Lisette. 'They have already met their reward'.

'Dead, you say? But I'm not dead, so how can they be?'

'You are dead, though perhaps you don't know it. You are in the spirit world, not in a body, which is why you need to use this person to speak.'

There was no verbal response to this, but Jenny's movements became even more energetic, contorted and knotted.

'You really are a gutsy lady, Magda', said Lisette, in an admiring and appreciative tone. 'You have defied your enemies for centuries. They have not destroyed you; you have seen them off instead.'

'How can they be dead when I see them in front of me still, full of hateful words?' shouted the voice of Magda.

'Look around you. They are in your memory only.' Her tone dripped with a honeyed sympathy. Lisette took a step towards Jenny and slowly patted her back. Jenny's movements slowed down, creating a disoriented impression, though the bouncing up and down continued.

'You were very strong to hang onto the mirror so well', said Lisette. 'Can you also feel how you have been holding onto the pain?'

There was a harsh laugh from Magda, but she said nothing.

'Are you ready to go to the light?' asked Lisette. For a moment, there was no response. Then slowly Jenny's movements subsided. She began peering around. She took a deep breath and looked at the mirror. Lisette and Jim both turned to follow her gaze. Jenny suddenly slumped to the floor as though her strings had been cut. Lisette and Jim were quick to attend to her and make her comfortable.

'I think that's it', said Lisette. 'Magda seems to have gone'.

Jim was too concerned about Jenny to say anything. Fortunately, it was not long before she opened her eyes and sat up. 'Has she gone?' she asked.

'Perhaps you can tell us that, if you feel up to it', said Lisette. 'But let's finish the ritual and have something to eat and drink before we talk about it'.

Lisette concluded the ritual. They went to the kitchen and busied themselves preparing a meal.

'This time, I was aware of everything that was said', said Jenny. 'I did what you told me to do. I actually found it easy to accept Magda as a lovely but confused person and to let her know that I

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felt that about her. The other bit was strange. I visualized bright light streaming down on both of us. I then concentrated on getting her to see it and turn towards it. She paid no attention at all until you said, 'Look around you', when she suddenly turned and seemed to catch sight of it for the first time. Then she just stood there, looking thoughtful, until you said that bit about holding onto the pain. She burst into tears and started running upwards into the light. She quickly disappeared and I did feel that she was gone. Then I found myself on the floor, waking up.'

'Oh, well done!' said Lisette. 'Are you feeling quite solid again?'

'Yes, I feel much better. I do feel famished.'

'What did you notice, Jim?' asked Lisette.

'Mostly, I was engrossed in what you and Jenny were doing. I still don't understand what happened. One thing that I did notice was the mirror. Just before Jenny fell and I forgot everything else, I saw the same scene as last time, but somehow shrunk into a thin layer just under the surface of the glass. There seemed to be an ordinary reflection on the surface, then a layer of flames and then the executions below that. It seemed that there were more layers below that which were quite clear.'

'How strange', said Lisette. 'I wonder whether new scenes might now appear in the lower levels of this interesting mirror'.

'I suppose we could take a look some day', said Jenny. 'Not today, though'.

Interlude: Through the Looking Glass

Rachel: What has all this science fiction about an incandescent magic mirror to do with shamanism?

S: I was hoping that the story could speak for itself about that.

R: Well, I'm sorry, but you'll have to spell it out for me.

S: Why take what I say now more seriously than all those comments from my friendly advisers?

R: The privilege of an author, I suppose. As a theologian, you are committed to clarifying everything.

S: Everything except the essential mystery of things! It does seem like failure if a story has to be replaced by an explanation.

J: You are being a bit hard on him, Rachel. The story does show an encounter between everyday people and the troubled spirit of a dead person who could have been a shaman during her lifetime. It makes suggestions about our historical relationship with shamanism. The mirror, holding the undying pain of the victimized witches, does little more than focus our attention on this historic injustice.

R: I suppose it makes a good story to talk in terms of images that appear spontaneously.

S: People do see queer things if they look too long in mirrors. Psychologists talk about this as the projection of inner tensions into these images, but that leaves it unclear how we come to have this capacity.

J: I like the baroque imagery. What worries me, Sandy, is the suspicion that you really believe in that theosophical metaphysic of light and goodness.

S: So you know that there is no light at the end of the tunnel, John? I do find it helpful to have imagery that gives a map of spiritual directions.

B: Your story is very optimistic. Malevolent evil really doesn't come into it at all.

S: The evil is there, but largely off-stage. The witch hunters had a very clear picture of malevolent evil. Witches were believed to procure babies for gruesome sacrifice in satanic ritual, which was all part of a systematic attack on the very existence of ordered, Christian society. The counter-

malevolence with which the authorities sometimes tortured and executed witches was driven by fear.

J: There does seem to be a persistent history – or perhaps I should say ‘rumour’ – of satanic ritual practice which continues to this day. To some, it seems no more than playful mockery of Christian ceremonies. To others, it promotes a malevolent, anti-social intent which leads to great crimes and to the corruption of civil society.⁷² I think both views pick up something important about these rituals. Any orgiastic behaviour – to say nothing of human sacrifice – would normally be a matter requiring deep secrecy from all involved. This makes it difficult to know whether there is any substance to the more horrific stories, as eyewitnesses without personal involvement are usually not available.

R: Some people are disturbingly malevolent. Many are simply embittered by painful experiences, but some are more wilfully destructive. I believe that this malevolence comes from demonic spirits which have entered these people. Deliverance ministry is all about helping people to expel these spirits through prayer.⁷³

B: Those executed in Europe as witches included many kinds of people. I can identify with Starhawk’s perspective, that you quoted earlier.

S: Maybe she idealizes the past, but you are right to point us to her concern about the fateful loss of connection between people, communities and the land in modern western societies.

R: I shall have to think about all that. I am used to blaming the ills of our society upon the drifting away from Christianity in private and public life, but I can see that there are other viewpoints.

J: Christianity certainly contributed to the shaping of the modern world and it must carry some responsibility for the disconnections that Starhawk notes. The view that earth-based religions were spiritually controlled by Satan was undoubtedly powerful in breaking the sense of human embeddedness in the cycles of nature. You do seem to be continuing this traditional understanding, Rachel.

⁷² Cf. Hunt, D & McMahon, TA, Op.Cit..

⁷³ Cf. Horrobin, P, Op.Cit.

R: Maybe. I find it hard to believe that no-one ever sought a spiritual method of venting their hatred against their neighbours. Still, the persecution of the witches was sometimes done in an oppressive, malevolent and even demonic manner.

S: This whole area is difficult even to think about. I notice that in this conversation, we are tending to make judgements about others rather than naming our own fears. It is comforting to think that there is no reality to occult powers, so that we don't have to worry about malevolent use of these powers against ourselves. Christian problems with shamans and shamanic communities relate to these fears as well as to Christian arrogance and the imperialism of western Christian nations.

R: My confidence does not come from denial but from trust in the greater power of Christ. Lisette impresses me. She doesn't seem worried about dealing with spirits, good or evil. She has a Christian kind of confidence, though I don't know where she gets it.

B: She has the courage of a shaman, as well as a good sense of how to use ritual.

J: Modern western culture works on the assumptions that there is no reality to the psychic powers and familiar spirits of witches and that the worst evils that we meet come from cruel and bloody-minded people.

S: Malevolent evil is a fact of human experience. As you say, John, western culture uses common sense to cope with the spiritual dimensions of malevolent evil. Common sense tells us to deal with reality. This leads us to concentrate on the outward expression of evil in criminal violence or politically motivated genocide. Secular society struggles to understand, let alone deal with, these things.

B: Western common sense is actually quite powerful in terms of magic. Not believing in the reality of spirits and magical powers allows westerners to act in terms of what is in front of them and this is sometimes effective. If western people start to believe that the powers may be real, fear can take over from common sense, with unfortunate results.

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R: For Christians, God is more powerful than any created spirit. When we are able to trust God, we have the confidence to face whatever comes.

J: Western common sense owes something to this Christian trust in God to bring us through all troubles. Even secular westerners continue to share the Christian belief that humans can be free from evil powers if they choose not to give in to them.

B: I find that assumption naively optimistic. I have some respect for Rachel's confidence based on faith in God, who is by definition more powerful than the malevolent evil of creatures. I consider anyone naive who thinks to survive an encounter with malevolent evil on the basis of their own everyday, human resources.

S: I think the average westerner might agree with you on that, Beth. In time of war, people return to the churches.

J: I have a question for you, Rachel. How does the power of prayer relate to psychic powers?

R: How do you mean?

J: Well, is prayer itself a form of psychic power that you can use at will?

R: You can use it at will, though I suspect that we are sometimes prompted to remember to pray by guardian angels. I don't think of prayer as a psychic power, because we don't control how God answers our prayers.

J: When people look for answers to prayer, don't they turn God into some kind of familiar spirit?

R: I would have thought that familiar spirits are either below us, so that we can tell them what to do, or at our level, so that we negotiate with them as we do with friends and enemies. God is above us, so that if there is any negotiating, it is only because God graciously allows it.

B: John, I suspect you of changing the subject because it is uncomfortable. I want to hear more about Sandy's idea that western Christian consciousness is traumatized by what was done to the witches and that this is having a continuing effect.

S: Well, I am simply coming at it from my own experience. Whatever the truth about the powers of witches, it is obvious that they were stigmatized and condemned by Christians in Mediaeval Europe. I find that I inherit this condemning attitude through my socialization as a western Christian. This leads to a fear of doing anything to arouse the suspicion that I might actually be one of those thought to be a witch. Many who were condemned as witches were known to use their powers (mostly) for healing. The fact that they had those powers was enough to make them suspect and all too often executed.⁷⁴ So earth-based spirituality, rituals celebrating our natural being and the exercise of psychic or occult powers necessarily triggers this fear.

J: This is a real fear for you?

S: Not while I could believe, like you, John, that there is no significant reality in occult and psychic powers. I find that all these old fears come back when I seriously consider these powers as real. I end up close to Rachel's position, which is to acknowledge the reality of evil spirit but to rely upon the superior being and power of good spirit, the Holy Spirit.

B: This is the world we shamans live in. Malevolent forces that would destroy us are always there. We learn to find spiritual allies who help us to overcome our attackers or we die.

R: Does it matter to you how you survive, Beth? Will you accept help from anywhere?

B: Yes, it matters. Some of us choose unwisely and find that our spiritual allies destroy us. I think I know something of the good spirit that you worship, Rachel. We also find spiritual allies that remain benevolent.

R: Hmmm. Perhaps we need to talk more about that.

⁷⁴ Maxwell-Stuart, PG, Op.Cit.

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J: Sandy, I noticed Beth's comment, that your story was overly optimistic. Why did you spend so much time making everything come out right?

S: This is my way of trying to live in both worlds. I am happy with common sense while it works. When it breaks down, I want another approach. I accept the reality of malevolent evil, but I doubt that it can ultimately be fully real if God is as we Christians believe. Fear seems to be part of the problem and I believe in that perfect love which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Lisette seems to be exercising the power of this love, whatever she may call it.

R: Doesn't it matter to you that we Christians can put a name to it, 'God's love'?

S: Yes, of course it matters, but there must be some differences in the ways in which people from different backgrounds encounter and draw on God's love.

B: That speaks to me. There is deep wisdom in letting be. This is what we should be doing for our non-human relations, all the other living creatures.

R: Well, you have given me something to think about.

The Image of the Burning Mirror

One drawback to using a story in theological writing is that the creative writer in me wants to leave the story to speak for itself, whereas the theological author wants to express all important meanings in general language. The creative writer's device of quoting invented general meanings is a powerful attack on the theologian, whose preferred meanings cannot but figure as an insubstantial addition to the welter of possibilities. Despite having set myself up in this way, it does seem important to point out that this story tells about a spiritual encounter in which Jim and Jenny come to a quite new awareness of non-ordinary realities. It is not overtly a story about shamanic initiation because there is no clarity about a future shamanic role for them or about an encounter with a spirit guide. They do learn to encounter the presence of old Magda intentionally, which is shamanic. The story requires the paranormal phenomena associated with the mirror in order to bring the history into focus.

Mirrors provide a literal experience of self-awareness, which is widely accepted as one of the human capacities fundamental to the development of thought and culture. Mirrors provide visual access to parts of our bodies otherwise inaccessible to our sight. The very activity of thinking is often called 'reflection', where the derivation from time spent in front of a mirror seems clear. The image of ourselves that we see in the mirror guides our attempts to adjust our appearance, from which would seem to derive the Shakespearian usage, where 'mirror' means 'a model to be copied'⁷⁵. Mirrors provide us with one picture of the shape of our conscious awareness as a focused image in a frame.

Mirrors can show us the world as well as ourselves. This is literally true of the periscope that shows us what lies above the waves. Spiritually, the mirror can be seen as a portal to another world. Lewis Carroll's Alice went through the looking glass to encounter the strange world on the other side. In Stephen Donaldson's two-volume fantasy "Mordant's Need"⁷⁶, mirrors transport people from one world to another and malign mirror makers use two mirrors to bring horrible monsters from another world and immediately redirect them to distant places where they attack innocent

⁷⁵ "A person or thing embodying a feature or characteristic deserving of imitation: a pattern, an exemplar; a model of excellence; a paragon." Brown, L (Ed.), The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 1786.

⁷⁶ Cf. Donaldson, S, Mordant's Need: Vol. 1. The Mirror of Her Dreams & Vol.2. A Man Rides Through, Fontana, Collins, Glasgow, 1986-88.

people. For the victims, the monsters appear out of thin air, with horrifying effect. If a mirror can show scenes of other places, we can imagine it as a portal allowing a body to pass from one place to the other. The seamless appearance of our everyday world hides other worlds which merely await the right kind of interface to be revealed. In the older Christian traditions, as well as in shamanic experience, this is how we relate to the world of spirits.

Fire symbolizes such things as physical and mental energy, intuitive insight, destructive anger, overwhelming power, transmutation of elements through refining, pain, suffering and the punishments of hell. The image of fire is thus related both to the pain of conflict and to its resolution, which may come through the refining of whatever resists being burned or through the emergence of intuitive insight into the causes and possible solutions of the conflict. The symbol of the burning mirror therefore suggests both a painful barrier to knowledge (of the execution of the witches and their pain and anger) and the possibility of a spiritual pathway to this knowledge through this barrier. The fire both announces and prohibits knowledge of the transcendent realities to which the mirror is a portal. At the end of the story, we glimpse the possibility of Jim and Jenny passing through this increasingly familiar barrier as a stepping stone to things beyond.

While the image of the burning mirror emerged intuitively as a good image with which to focus this study, I can, in retrospect, identify four sources for it. One is the title of a documentary film by Di Bretherton, an Australian peace educator and friend. The film is called The Glass Burns and it features a recent visit by an Australian team to Vietnam to record the communist Vietnamese view of the war there. The suggestion of the title is that our enemies carry negative projections that we put on them, so that it is a gain both for our sense of objectivity about the conflict and for our self-understanding when we can, with their assistance, use them as a mirror in which to recognize these projections for what they are, thereby dealing with them. The parallel between this situation and that pertaining between western Christians and witches, as well as shamanic people in general, would seem clear.

The second source that I can identify is the title of William Johnston's book, The Mirror Mind.⁷⁷ Johnston writes as a Christian in dialogue with Buddhism. The mirror is a traditional Buddhist image for the properly functioning mind. An objectively focused mind knows its images and

⁷⁷ Johnston, W, The Mirror Mind, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1981.

perceptions with the same clarity as the images that we see in a mirror. Johnston's discussion of this image illustrates the value for dialogue of exploring such images.

Some zen masters, referring to the text, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3), compare the mind of a child to the mirror mind about which zen constantly speaks. One of the aims of zen is to come to possess the mirror mind. Just as the pure and polished mirror is completely transparent, receiving everything into itself without distortion and reflecting all objects as if they were appearing in it for the first time, so the enlightened mind is completely receptive and filled with wonder, seeing everything as if for the first time. ...

Only I would add to this zen interpretation a dimension that is peculiarly Christian. When Jesus uses this image he undoubtedly thinks not only of the unsullied, receptive and open mind of the child but also of the child in relation to its father. When the child asks for bread, the father does not give it a stone but pours into the child's mind and heart an abundance of love and compassion. And so in this context the child – yes, possesses the mirror mind but a mirror mind that is totally open to receive love.⁷⁸

My third source of the image of the burning mirror is the fate of the *palantir* held by Denethor in Tolkien's epic fantasy Lord of the Rings.⁷⁹ The *palantiri* were crystal globes, ancient tools for telepathic communication and clairvoyant vision, that had been made for beneficent purposes by the heroes of old. Use of a *palantir* opened the user to the possibility of mental contact with other users, which became extremely perilous when Sauron, the principal evil power, gained possession of one. Mental contact with Sauron led to immediate mental domination (as almost happened to Pippin) or to a twisting of what was seen (corrupting Saruman and leading Denethor to despair). On his suicidal funeral pyre, Denethor held the *palantir* to his chest and an image of flames was thereafter all that anyone could see in that *palantir*. While the warnings against foolish entry into the domain of such powers were paramount, I was also aware that the wise, such as Gandalf, were not only able to enter such arenas but were required to do so in defence of goodness. The mirror (in water) of Galadriel provided Frodo with clairvoyant visions which seemed beneficial even if hard to interpret. The underlying message for me was the perilous nature of the power of these gifts.

The fourth source for this image is the biblical connection between fire and God, which we see particularly in the strange stories of Moses' encounter with God in the bush that was burning but not consumed (Exodus 3:1-6), of the pillar of fire that led the Israelites by night away from Egypt (Exodus 13:17-22) and of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Fire seems a fit

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.36-7.

⁷⁹ Tolkien, JRR, The Lord of the Rings, 3 Vols., Allen & Unwin, London, 1954/5.

symbol for the holiness and transcendent power of God. The judgement of God against human unrighteousness is said to be a refining fire (Malachi 3:1-4). The Judaeo-Christian tradition would endorse the idea that we meet God when we open ourselves up to the pain of acknowledging our individual and corporate wrongdoing.

The mirror was not a particularly doctrinal item in the world in which I grew up. Mirrors had a good function in assisting us to prepare our appearance so that we could leave the house without embarrassment. Occasionally, intimations of a less ordinary function for mirrors did come my way, usually through stories. The wicked stepmother of Snow White saying, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?’ was probably my introduction to the notion that mirrors could focus clairvoyant visions and answer extraordinary questions. This malevolent and murderous character, consumed by vanity and self-absorption, clearly discredited the use of such powers, not least because she couldn’t even use the mirror to see herself as she was. My personal experience of mythical and religious meanings associated with the mirror would seem to be typical of western Christian culture in general. It is surely significant that there are not many references to mirrors in the Bible.

Any surface so smooth and regular as to reflect uniformly the rays of light, produces, by the operation of simple optical laws, images of objects in front of or above it, which appear to the eye as if they were behind or beneath it. This property has been valued and applied as an aid to the toilet from very early times. The surface of a transparent substance like glass or still water may thus act as a mirror (Proverbs 27:19), and even a black surface if highly polished may do the same. The higher the reflecting power of the substance, however, the brighter and clearer the image which it gives.⁸⁰

Mirrors were known and used by the Hebrew people from early times, as we see from the making of the laver (a bronze basin) from the mirrors of the serving women (Exodus 38:8). These mirrors were made of polished metal, which tarnished over time, so that the resulting images were at best imprecise in comparison to modern glass mirrors. In Isaiah 3:23, some translations name hand mirrors among a long list of items of female luxury to be stripped away in punishment for pride on the Day of the Lord. In Job 37:18, God stretches out the sky and makes it as hard as a polished metal mirror. The mirror seems to be identified primarily as a metal object of no religious significance, except possibly as a temptation to vanity. There is one text, noted above, where the analogy is made between seeing one’s reflected image in water and in the response to ourselves

⁸⁰ Hastings, J (Ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol.3, p.396.

from another person. 'Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another' (Proverbs 27:19). Religiously significant self-knowledge imaged by physical mirroring would seem to make an appearance in Judaeo-Christian tradition at this point, notably within the Wisdom literature.

Things are hardly more exciting for the mythic imagination in the New Testament. In James 1:23, it is the man who listens to the Word of God but does not do it who is likened to a man looking in a mirror and seeing himself as he really is, but then doing nothing to change his sad state. The mirror brings true self-knowledge, as in the passage from Proverbs, but the point is that even true self-knowledge does not, of itself, bring salvation to the person. More positive, and more characteristic of New Testament themes, is the use of the image of reflecting. 'All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an even greater degree of glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18). This 'reflection' seems like a direct exchange of energy from God to us, which we can then reflect, energy which is powerful for our transformation. The point is that, for Christianity as for Judaism, it is the knowledge of God that is mainly required of us. Self-knowledge either occurs as part of the knowledge of God or it is not important.

Mirrors are not limited to providing knowledge of ourselves. Carefully arranged, in periscopes or in cars, they extend our visual perception of the world. In many traditional stories such as Snow White, magic mirrors provide knowledge of arcane aspects of our world through the images which appear. These magic mirrors can be imagined to function as a focus for clairvoyant visions or as a metaphor for our conscious framing of a new way of seeing the world. In what is arguably the most significant occurrence of the image of the mirror in the Bible, Paul uses this image to comment on our knowledge of reality.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

Paul asserts that our present knowledge, however exalted, is imperfect, like the dim image in a mirror that remains enigmatic despite our best efforts to clarify it. The word translated above as

'dimly' could be literally translated as 'in enigmas'. We have echoes here of divinatory images, such as those of the notoriously ambiguous Delphic Oracle. Paul is not denying that there can be such knowledge of the future; he is emphasizing that, even at its best and most complete, it remains essentially limited and partial.

Since the European Enlightenment, western Christians have tended to share its cultural understanding of knowledge in terms of what comes to us through our senses. Paul's emphasis on the limited and partial nature of human knowledge certainly applies to our direct, sensory knowledge of our world. Yet Paul also has in mind the less ordinary knowledge that we gain through prophecies and other forms of revelation. He uses the Greek word *gnosis* for knowledge, which cannot be limited to our modern, one-dimensional sense of 'information'. We should perhaps take a warning from Paul that even our most spiritually inspired knowledge has an inescapably finite structure. He gives us a picture of the contrast between our present limited, earthly experience of knowing and the envisioned fullness of knowing when God is all in all. Knowledge gained from mirrors, whether of a common visual or a mystical kind, is firmly on the limited and partial side of this contrast.

Where the mirror does occur in the Bible, then, it generally provides us with a natural avenue to direct knowledge of ourselves which is of no particular relevance to our relationship with God. The self-knowledge that matters is the recognition of the truth about our relationship with God. It is only the light of the Word of God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit which enables the critical judgements to be made of our natural affections and perceptions. In biblical perspective, proper self-knowledge requires these critical judgements, without which we are quite vulnerable to the destructive effects of our sinful nature upon the quality of our awareness.

In marked contrast to the biblical picture, the mirror has significant symbolic and technical roles in a variety of shamanic and related traditions.

A vast range of beliefs and rituals connect the mirror with shamanism. The mirror enables the shamans to see and drive away spirits, and to look into the future. Buriat shamans explain that mirrors came down from heaven as gifts from heavenly beings, and mirrors and their fragments have been used by shamans as a means for healing. The ceremonial garb of the Mongolian shaman includes hanging mirrors, generally nine in number. They have been called 'the blue bees of heaven' and 'the mount of the shamans', for the white steed of the shamans is said to dwell in a mirror.

One shamanic use of mirrors has been the warding off of evil spirits and evil power. Sculpted humans with mirrors in their hands were placed near the stone tombs of the Liao dynasty (the northern adversaries of China in the tenth and eleventh centuries), apparently to ward off spirits that might disturb the peace of the dead. ... Finally, the shaman's mirrors reflected not only what was outer but also what was inner, including people's secret thoughts. The shamans' omniscience stemmed from the power of their mirrors.⁸¹

Shamanic traditions point to the mirror as a tool for focusing powers of clairvoyant perception and spiritual action. The possibility that our mental powers themselves may stand in need of correction is considered primarily in the context of failure to achieve the desired results. It could perhaps be suggested that for these traditions, the successful person is the measure of all things. This theme of personal power in connection with mirrors finds echoes in the role given to mirrors in the imperial Shinto tradition of Japan. The fact that ancient mirrors were frequently round or oval, together with their ability to focus the rays of the sun, led to perceptions of a close connection between mirrors and the sun.

In ancient Japan, a bronze mirror was revered as an image of the sun and as an embodiment of Amaterasu Omikami, the supreme deity, whose name means 'great goddess shining in heaven'.⁸²

The regalia of the Japanese Emperor includes a mirror as one of the gifts from his ancestor, this same Amaterasu Omikami.

Later she (Amaterasu Omikami) dispatched her grandson Ninigi No Mikoto to pacify the Japanese islands, having given him the sacred mirror, sword and jewels that became the imperial regalia. His great-grandson became the first emperor, Jimmu.⁸³

There is a connection here between mirrors, the sun, sunlight and the power of mental objectivity (including self-awareness). One theme is the analogy between the sun as the source of life on earth and the emperor as the source of life, through the divine energies which constitute the imperial person, for the citizens of the empire. There is also the theme of aseity, of having one's being from oneself, which is associated with the possession of one's own image in a mirror. Images in a mirror seem to have independent existence, which raises questions about connections with the things

⁸¹ Eliade, M (Ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol.9, Chicago UP, p.559.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.558.

⁸³ *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, p.34.

imaged. These questions do not always have such positive and expansive answers as in the imperial Japanese tradition above.

...the mirror was thought to depict a person's spiritual double – his (sic) soul, which existed within him and was vitally essential to him. An encounter with his double could have positive, neutral or negative consequences. Or it was believed that if a person looked into a mirror his soul, which existed within him and was vitally essential to him, would be torn from him and would disappear through the mirror; this would have negative or fatal consequences for the person. ... The recurrent motif of the lost shadow-soul ... makes it clear why among the Russians, Tajiks and many other peoples a broken mirror is a clear portent of misfortune, usually of death; the broken reflection of the soul means its disappearance.⁸⁴

This is presumably the origin of the (softer) saying that I learned in my youth, that a broken mirror would bring the person who broke it seven years bad luck. An aspect of the person lodged in the mirror and so 'died' when it broke. It is, of course, not only the self which appears in mirrors. Quite apart from the images of physically reflected scenes, the mirror is a natural frame into which any kind of image can appear, in a manner analogous to the appearance of thoughts in our awareness. The idea that mirrors might come to possess strange powers would then seem a natural extension of this analogy.

The concept of magic mirrors has been widespread among the most varied peoples. Tales of clairvoyant mirrors are known in several variants: mirrors foretelling the future, mirrors showing far-off places and objects, mirrors answering questions, mirrors helping to find treasures, and so on. Magic mirrors may also be a cause of blindness, and there are mirrors that make objects invisible, mirrors that kill enemies, mirrors that grant wishes, and even mirrors that restore youth to those looking in them. Some mirrors, functioning as bad omens, turn black and become turbid. Many stories of magic mirrors recount the awakening of love by means of reflection in a mirror. All these functions of magic mirrors are based on the religious associations discussed above.⁸⁵

As well as a tool for accurate physical self-knowledge, then, mirrors are a tool for facilitating visions and clairvoyance, with a full connection between the images seen and the desires, fears and choices of the one seeing the images.

My conclusion is that certain obscure facts are, or may be, at the bottom of many folklore beliefs. Since psychical research investigates the alleged facts, as a folklorist I welcome her as an ally. Already, in my opinion, psychical research has explained the world-wide practice

⁸⁴ The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Op. Cit., p.557.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

of *specularii*, the tales of magic mirrors, by showing that as a matter of every-day fact, a proportion of persons can provoke hallucinations by looking into a clear deep.⁸⁶

The fact that some people see internally generated images in a mirror does provide a clear point of contact with the traditional folk beliefs in the power of mirrors outlined above. What remains mysterious is the issue of whether the powers of clairvoyance, telekinesis and so on that are claimed to operate in conjunction with these internally generated images are effective or not. Magical powers concern the use of such images when they arise, not the mere occurrence of the images. Similarly, some of the powers attributed to mirrors suggest spirits at work beyond our normal observation, which was a basic tenet of the mediaeval world view. In 1318, Pope John XXII apparently ordered a special inquiry into the behaviour of certain members of the Papal court, who were ‘accused on good authority of necromancy, geomancy, and other magic arts... invoking spirits in circles, confining spirits in mirrors...’⁸⁷

It would seem, then, that the mirror has widely functioned as a symbol of consciousness itself through being a frame for the manifold contents of consciousness. Perceptions of the natural world sit alongside perceptions of ourselves and of images from memory, dream, fantasy, vision and perhaps also from clairvoyant perception of strange and distant places. Through all this, the mysterious presence of spirit, in us and, by analogy or projection, in the images that we see in mirrors, is constantly felt as an extra dimension.

Interlude: Self-awareness

Rachel: I’m a bit overwhelmed by all this self-reflection. Mirrors are for practical use in my world, not for mystical visions. Do shamans really use them for spiritual purposes?

B: I don’t, but I could. Didn’t you grow up with stories about the gypsies who could tell the future in a crystal ball? A mirror gives the conscious mind something to focus on while the more interesting things get ready to appear.

⁸⁶ Andrew Lang, *Folklore VI*, 1895, pp.246-7. (Quoted in De Martino, E, *Primitive Magic: The Psychic Powers of Shamans and Sorcerers*, Prism Press, London, 1989(1942), p.169.)

⁸⁷ Williams, C, *Witchcraft*, Faber & Faber, London, 1941, p.94.

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R: What do you mean by that?

B: I am not saying anything difficult. Shamanic work is based on intentional processes which build on our ordinary ways of tapping intuition. These processes establish spaces for the arrival of new items from unconscious sources, at least, that's how it seems when you do it.

J: I doubt that non-shamans will find that easy to believe. There is surely something else going on for you which is not going on for others. The connections between your imaged experiences and our wider reality involve those mysterious forces that you call spirits. This is what excites our interest and attention.

R: I seem to understand all the words and yet miss the most important bits.

J: I imagine that you don't amplify the imaginative and intuitive thoughts that come to you, Rachel.

R: Not really. Once I have worked out what needs doing, I concentrate on getting it done.

S: For us Protestants, too much time spent on reflection can seem like theft from those who need our service. 'The devil finds work for idle hands to do'. This is a recipe for mistrust of the natural self.

J: As an academic, I am thoroughly committed to achieving understanding. While this includes self-understanding, I can agree with Rachel's statement about having a practical focus. I think I am like many Australians in treating myself on a 'need-to-know' basis. I resist indulging in direct self-exploration unless there is a problem or occasion, such as someone else's questions. Still, Religious Studies gives me plenty of opportunity for surreptitious self-exploration in the guise of the objective study of other people's traditions.

S: This pragmatic attitude is both necessary and limiting. We need to cope with life, which means having a practical focus. This leads to limitation, to the extent that we are shaped by our fears and vulnerabilities. I find it sad that so many of us seem fearful of our own less sociable feelings and thoughts, which are a part of what I mean by 'the natural self'. Beth, your account of consciousness is deceptively simple. For you, whatever comes into consciousness is somehow valuable to us.

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Destructive anger can be valuable to us if we see it as information that the world is not in good shape – and don't allow the feeling to push us into violence.

B: That's a philosopher's reading of what I said. I am talking about spiritual journeying that is intentional as well as receptive.

S: Maybe shamanism is different, but Christian tradition knows the difference between contemplative prayer which can be quite passive and petitionary prayer which is not.

J: Be that as it may, I think you have brought us an interesting set of questions, Sandy. What importance does self-knowledge have for Christians? Does Christian theology offer us access to an unproblematic form of self-knowledge? Do Christian reservations about the natural self lead to doomed attempts to live only from the heavenly, cleaned up self that we get from God when we surrender control of our lives to Christ?

B: It sounds to me as if you Christians create your own problems by declaring total war on essential parts of yourselves.

R: I don't think we are different from any moral person who struggles with temptation. We are full of possibilities and some possibilities are wrong. You and I seem to use different strategies in our moral struggles. My view is that we tend to follow what we think about, so we should avoid bad thoughts and concentrate on good ones.

J: You realize that this strategy recommends leaving all the bad thoughts unconscious, where they can sometimes grow strong and seep out into our lives unchecked?

R: I do recognize this, which is why I believe that we need constant prayer and God's help in dealing with these sinful tendencies.

J: I know people for whom this turned into repression of so much of themselves that they became sick and eventually left the Christian faith.

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R: And I know people who have won great victories through prayer, including healing and deliverance from the demonic sources of their evil tendencies.

S: Prayer for me includes the psychotherapeutic strategy of welcoming unconscious material into consciousness. We should try to see whatever is troubling us as God sees it. Divine assistance is needed if we are to deal with difficult and horrible matters so that they do not destroy us morally and psychologically.

B: Do you see shamanic journeying and psychoanalysis in the same light?

S: Yes, I do. All these approaches open us up to whatever emerges from the natural self. They all aim for the strength of mind to face overwhelming, crushing realities. They all celebrate the learning and personal integration achieved by success in these encounters.

R: You won't persuade me to trust any method which puts aside our ordinary moral standards.

J: Don't you have any desire to know why we humans can find it difficult to live by these standards at times?

R: No, because I don't find this puzzling. We are continually subjected to demonic attack. We don't make progress by contemplating demons – they thrive on the attention and will eventually take us over.

B: Rachel, I agree that it is perilous to pay too much attention to demonic entities, though you lump in many helpful spirits with the demons. I also disagree with you about morality. I don't accept your legalistic view of sin, so it is hard for me to take seriously the idea that someone is demonized because they celebrate their sexual nature.

R: Sexual sin is a prime point of entry for demons.

B: Sexual expression based on cruelty or contempt for others can certainly manifest a demonic dimension, but I deny that this attaches to sexuality as such. We are sexual beings. Touching should never be demeaned as dirty. Of course, those of us who were socialized in a puritan version of

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Christian sexual morality will feel deeply uncomfortable with any expression of sexuality outside marriage.

R: So you think it is all right to exploit children sexually?

B: No, of course not. I don't agree with exploitation in general and adult sexuality is quite inappropriate for children. Child abuse is awful and unacceptable. It creates the kind of distress that attracts demons and is definitely harmful.

R: I feel sure we disagree about something very basic, even when we agree.

B: Yes, that's my feeling, too. I think we disagree about how to know that something is evil. You seem happy with traditional Christian teaching about what is evil. While I do accept the usefulness of traditional teaching, I don't accept it as an ultimate spiritual guide. I thought my bear was evil because it was merciless in its attack on me. Yet I now know it to be an agent of a wider goodness that attacks us in order to purify us. There are other spirits that seek to seduce and destroy us, but I don't see how we can know that without encountering them.

R: That's all very well, but people are good at twisting behavioural standards to suit themselves. There is always some exceptional circumstance which seems to justify wrong-doing.

B: What matters to me is not the conventional standards of society but the spirit which is at work. It is the whole process that matters, not the individual bits.

S: When you two argue, I always seem to find myself in the middle somewhere. I like what you say about the importance of the overall process, Beth, but I also share Rachel's respect for biblical standards of behaviour.

R: Look, Beth, I accept that you shamans encounter spirits, however you do it. What worries me is that many of these spirits are demons. We are normally controlled by demons without realizing it.

J: Rachel, we established earlier that you understand people's destructive internal voices as coming from demons. Would you include glamorous and seductive images in their repertoire?

R: Yes, and much more. Beth, I would like to know how you deal with demons.

B: It will probably cost us a lot of trouble and pain if we follow destructive voices. Still, I don't divide up the spirit world into goodies and baddies the way you do. When our focus is pure, we can encounter monstrous spirits in a way which releases something of their power for healing.

J: That's all very well at an individual level, but how does it help us recognize and deal with destructive forces in society and the wider world?

B: In spiritual terms, I don't see much difference between the individual and the collective levels.

J: You look at making your own judgements at all levels, which makes it possible to apply the same standards. My point is that your judgement changes your individual consciousness very directly, but not the broad social context.

B: This is where you are too much the rationalist, John. You underestimate the social effects of changes in consciousness.

R: Societies can be demonized when the leaders are demon-possessed. You only have to look at societies that worship demonic spirits to see how destructive that can be.

J: Can you give us an example?

R: A classic case was the Aztec society, which was founded on human sacrifice to demons.

S: We should look at the Aztec society, which seems like a shamanic society that went wrong somehow.

Meeting the Aztecs

The affinity between shamanic traditions and mirrors comes to particularly clear expression in the figure of the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca, whose name can be translated ‘Smoking Mirror’. Brundage suggests that the meaning ‘Speaking Mirror’ is also present, as the mirror has oracular power.⁸⁸ This figure is also closely associated with the religiously mandated practices of human sacrifice which have blighted the European view of shamanic communities ever since the Spanish *conquistadores* overthrew the Aztec empire.

In Toltec legend the end of droughts could be foretold by a mirror, no doubt a mosaic surface of black obsidian (commonly known as *tezcapoctli*, ‘mirror smoke’). Tezcatlipoca was said to have stolen this mirror and secreted it for a time, thus withholding relief from a serious famine then in progress. But even more sinister powers of the magic mirror were called into play in Tula, when Tezcatlipoca persuaded Quetzalcoatl to gaze into it; the mirror revealed that mild deity to be repulsive and misshapen beyond belief. It was this meretricious self-revelation which helped to finally destroy Quetzalcoatl; in fact, the eerie Tezcatlipoca carried the title Tezcatlanextia, He Who Causes Things To Be Seen in the Mirror.⁸⁹

In his classic contemporary account of the Aztec gods, the Franciscan friar Sahagun suggested comparisons between specific Aztec and Roman deities in which Tezcatlipoca is Jupiter, the king of the gods. Sahagun also equates Tezcatlipoca with Lucifer, the demonic archangel of Christian tradition.⁹⁰ This accurately suggests both the leading role and the generally evil character of Tezcatlipoca when viewed from a Christian perspective.

Tezcatlipoca (‘the smoking mirror’) was one of four Aztec creator gods who arranged the universe and set the cosmic ages in motion through periodic celestial battles. Tezcatlipoca was sometimes cast as the supernatural antagonist of Quetzalcoatl, the deity associated with cultural creativity, urban order and priestly wisdom. Yet Tezcatlipoca has the most overwhelming power and protean personality of any Aztec deity. Among his aspects were Iztli, a calendar god; Tepeyollotl, an ancient jaguar-earth god; Ixquimilli-Iztlacoaliuhqui, a god of punishment; and Omacatl, the spirit of revelry. His many forms reflect the omnipotent character of numinous forces in Aztec religion. The range of Tezcatlipoca’s power is perhaps best represented in his designation as ‘the enemy on both sides’. As in all pictorial representations of Mesoamerican deities, Tezcatlipoca’s costume contains elements crucial to his identification. His primary emblem, a smoking mirror made of

⁸⁸ Brundage, BC, *The Phoenix of the Western World*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1982, p.238.

⁸⁹ Brundage, BC, *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1979, p.81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.80.

obsidian, is often depicted as a circular disk with a shaft through it and two curling forms representing smoke attached to the edges. The mirror emblem is located either in the deity's headdress or in place of one foot. According to one source, his foot was bitten off by an earth monster during the struggle for the creation of the world. On the social level, this emblem of the smoking mirror was intimately associated with the divine power of the Aztec *tlatoani* (king).⁹¹

The deities had various human surrogates, sometimes including an *ixiptla*, 'deity impersonator', who was killed in sacrifice after an appointed time. It also seems that the historical doings of priests and rulers could become legends of the activities of the gods. If the struggle between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl in Tula mentioned above is indeed an example of this, we may catch a glimpse of how human sacrifice came to be so centrally entrenched in Aztec society.

According to the sacred historical traditions of the Aztec, which trace back to the paradigmatic kingdom of Tollan (900-1100 CE), Tezcatlipoca, a great sorcerer, drew uncanny powers from his obsidian mirror in a struggle against the Toltec priest-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl ('our young prince the feathered serpent'). Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was tricked into drunkenness and sexual incontinence, which led to the utter collapse of his well-ordered city-state. Several primary sources suggest that the conflict between the great king and his magical antagonist was centred on Tezcatlipoca's desire to replace animal and insect sacrifice with human sacrifice.⁹²

It is inescapable that human sacrifice formed the all-consuming *raison-d'etre* of Aztec culture.

Wars for conquest were common enough in the Aztec world. ... The Aztecs, however, knew of another and quite different kind of war, the justification for which was wholly religious. This was the well-known *xochiyaoyotl*, 'war of the flowers', a type of tournament almost unthinkable to us who conceive of war as an exercise in hostilities with the sole object of obtaining victory over the enemy. The flower war was not part of the policy or international relations of any Aztec state; it existed solely to produce sacrificial victims.⁹³

The word 'sacrifice' derives from the Latin words *sacer*, 'sacred' or 'holy' and *facere*, 'to make', giving the basic meaning 'to make sacred'. Human ambivalence in the face of spiritual reality can be seen in the fact that the word *sacer* can mean 'sacred' in a positive sense, but it can also mean

⁹¹ The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol.14, Op. Cit., p.415.

⁹² Ibid., pp.415-6.

⁹³ Brundage, The Fifth Sun, Op.Cit., p.205.

‘accursed, devoted to destruction’.⁹⁴ The Aztec notion seems to have been something else again, based upon the value and power of the deities who needed human deaths for food.

In fact sacrifice formed an integral part of daily life, on the one hand because it was the central point of the ceremonies that so completely absorbed the population, on the other because individuals had the right to sacrifice on their own account. For example, a rich merchant who gave a banquet could well afford the luxury of buying slaves in order to have them killed by a priest and then to share the cooked morsels among his guests.... But nothing gives a more precise picture of the role of human sacrifice in Aztec society than the bare list of rituals with which the ruling divinity was celebrated every twenty days: ‘...On the calends of the first month ... they killed many children, sacrificing them in many places and on the hill tops, removing their hearts in honour of the gods of water... ...On the first day of the second month they held a feast in honour of the god named Totec ... in which they killed and flayed many slaves and captives... ...On the first day of the third month they held a feast to the god named Tlaloc ... At this feast they killed many children in the hills... ...On the first day of the fourth month they held a feast in honour of the corn god ... and killed many children... ...In the fifth month they held a great feast in honour of the god called ... Tezcatlipoca ... in his honour they killed at the feast a chosen youth who had no blemish on his body... ... In the sixth month ... they killed many captives and other slaves, decked with those ornaments of the gods called Tlaloques... ...In the seventh month .. they held a feast to the goddess of salt ... in honour of this goddess they killed a woman decked with the ornaments they painted on the goddess herself...’⁹⁵

Sejourne is struggling with the extreme ambiguity of Aztec culture, a struggle that we need to share. She notes the existence, alongside this extreme barbarity, of what she calls ‘undeniable moral greatness’ to be found in Aztec culture. For example, powerful Aztecs would sometimes offer their own blood to the gods, though (we assume) without having their hearts ripped out.

What proves conclusively, however, that the spiritual development of the pre-Spanish peoples had reached a high level is the existence among them of the concepts of baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Though evidence for this is usually looked upon with indifference by investigators, as if they were just simple rituals among many others, these sacraments imply an unsuspected level of inner development: purification and humility being the fundamentals of any true religious life.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Cassell’s *New Latin Dictionary*, Cassell’s, London, 1959, p.528.

⁹⁵ Sejourne, L, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*, Grove Press, NY, 1960, pp.11-13.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.9.

Sejourne concludes that the earlier spiritual tradition was corrupted by a dominant elite who imposed the sacrificial system by force.

Clearly, the spirituality of some aspects of Aztec life must have sprung from an old pre-Aztec tradition, later betrayed in its most sacred essence so that the interests of a temporal structure ruled by an implacable will to power might be upheld. A careful reading of the historic texts confirms this view.⁹⁷

In support of this conclusion, she points to the iron disciplines imposed on all members of Aztec society.

According to the testimony of all the chroniclers, Spanish and native alike, it appears on the surface that any freedom of thought or action was inconceivable in the Aztec world. Laws, penalties, and innumerable prohibitions, indicated to each person in detail the behaviour he (sic) must follow in all circumstances of his life; in such a system personal decision did not exist, dependence and instability were absolute, fear reigned. Death lurked ceaselessly everywhere, and constituted the cement of the building in which the individual Aztec was prisoner.

There were those who, by their social status, were by law destined to extermination: the slaves - and anyone might become one through losing his fortune or civic rights; captive warriors; children born beneath a sign favourable for sacrifice and offered to the gods. Capital punishment was another constant threat: to anyone who dared without authority to wear a garment that reached below the knee: to the official who ventured into a forbidden room in the palace: the merchant whose riches made him too proud: the dancer taking a false step....

Judging by the laws the rulers were apparently obliged to pass, this mechanism for breaking men down was not established as easily as might be supposed. We know, for example, that every person – priest or spectator – who retired from the ceremony before the child sacrifices to Tlaloc had been consummated was held to be despicable, declared unworthy of all public office, and converted into a wretch without the law.⁹⁸

Sejourne (writing in 1960) would seem to be drawing on the examples of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia in this account of Aztec religio-political terror. It is plausible to view these near-contemporary regimes in terms of the corruption and betrayal of socio-spiritual traditions from earlier times and to look for the same pattern in the history of Aztec society. The appalling cruelty of these regimes does seem to be correlated with the need for extreme forms of social control, amounting to political terror operating within and without the law. Yet this account seems to require

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15.

that we see the ruling Aztec elite as acting mainly from a cynical will to power and not from loyalty to the real spiritual forces to which the elite was committed.

The Aztecs, I believe, produced one of the most outstanding examples of piety in the whole history of man (sic). Their passion for the supernatural may well be called extreme. They seem to have had a constant need to reach out and touch their gods...⁹⁹

Taking the mythological basis for the sacrifices as a genuine reading of the spiritual situation as experienced by the Aztec leaders, the Aztec religion could be called a very public form of shamanism in the grip of malevolent spirits. Their religious practices were legitimated in terms of the needs of the deities. We should remember that there were a group of Aztec gods who provided individuals with inner visions through hallucinogens.

There were a number of these hallucinogens, the most common being *yetl*, 'tobacco'; *teonanacatl*, 'the narcotic mushroom'; *ololiuhqui*, 'morning glory seeds'; and *peyotl*, 'peyote'. The first was said to be the very body of the goddess Snake Woman, the name of the second means 'flesh of the gods', the third was depicted in Teotihuacan sprouting from the body of a goddess of fertility, and the last could appear as a small black being.¹⁰⁰

Without going into a deep discussion of hallucinogens, a field rife with our own prejudices and projections, I would note that, with such assistance, the experienced reality of the gods would be quite overpowering. Brundage also tells us that Snake Woman, Cihuacoatl, presided over and personified the collective hunger of the gods for human victims. Her priests would go to the palace every eight days and formally complain that Cihuacoatl was starving.¹⁰¹ Perhaps we should take another look at the use of tobacco in our own culture!

The horror that we feel about blood-lust and human sacrifice is very real. I was once in a workshop where we were hearing a part of the story of Coatlicue, mother of Quetzalcoatl. The story was rather beautiful, but the description of this goddess, drawn from a famous statue in the National Museum of Mexico, came across to me as quite outside the comforting and safe world of Christian providence. She was presented as a gigantic figure clothed in human skulls and snakes, representing death in life, where life did not have its customary Christian pre-eminence. As part of the work of

⁹⁹ Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, Op.Cit., p.220.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.184.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.168-71.

this workshop, we drew pictures of these divinities. I was so overwhelmed by Coatlicue that I was quite unable to contain her image on the page. This made me aware of just how difficult I was finding it to contemplate her nature. So I tried a second time to draw her – and again failed to contain her image on the page. By focusing on this as the main aspect of the task, my third attempt was successful. I then made a picture of the feeling that I had developed in response to this goddess. This picture turned into an image of Aztec priests performing human sacrifices, with slaves awaiting their turn to be killed. I put myself in a corner of the picture, turning away and shedding tears. Aztec practices of human sacrifice had not been mentioned in the workshop to that point, but my memory of these practices had clearly added an extra dimension of horror to the reality of death as I had encountered it in this figure of Coatlicue.

I believe that this story suggests something of how difficult it is for us optimistic westerners to understand the Aztec warrior.

The Aztec warrior was surely unique in history, not in the fact that he was devoted to war, for many cultures have produced such men, but in the source of his devotion. It is difficult for us to grasp his fervid commitment and to realize that it was part of a cosmic vision – that it was the pinnacle of a very real faith. We can understand the *teuctli*, the elite Aztec knight, as a kind of priest. Just as a priest is trained in a peculiar and trying discipline and accepts an orthodoxy, so the *teuctli* took vows, accepted certain austerities, and lived under the constant injunction of his god. This is not to say that he did not relish the adventure, the colour and the rewards of a life of war, for he would not have been human if he had not done so. But the orthodoxy that he accepted was monstrous and demanding to an extraordinary degree, and only the most ardent faith could possibly have sustained it. All Aztecs shared in the cosmic vision, but only the *teuctli* lived it out in sustained action, anticipating constantly that he would end his life as food of the gods. That this warrior was psychotic in some sense seems evident.¹⁰²

This cosmic vision focused upon the deities, which brings us back to Tezcatlipoca. It is highly significant that he figures as a sorcerer or shaman. His shape-shifting into the form of a jaguar is a shamanic ability that is already recorded in Olmec statuary. He is also known as Yaotl, ‘The Enemy’, who sows discord between people, fomenting war.¹⁰³

Tezcatlipoca had several facets to his personality, but I believe him to have been originally and most persuasively modelled on the American Indian shaman. ... By any analysis Tezcatlipoca was an invisible and omniextensive god, a sorcerer, a trickster, a manic, a seer

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.200.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.85.

and a shape-shifter – all these pertain to his shamanic origins and they are still crucial elements in his later appearances. He does not, however, function as a socially cohesive force or as a reassurance to his people – as did the typical shaman in the primitive band or tribe – rather he deals mockingly and menacingly with men. He was almost exclusively the practitioner of black magic, as one might guess from the fact that he was left-handed. If the nodal being upon which Tezcatlipoca was modelled was indeed the shaman, it was not that shaman who was accustomed to mediate between the people and the supernatural but the sorcerer of disruptive magic and furtive mind.¹⁰⁴

This image of the shaman dedicated to disruptive magic has plagued many communities. It is analogous to the European image of the malevolent witch who launches murderous attacks on good Christian neighbours. Where such images hold sway over the collective imagination, fear is likely to loom large in the resulting communal responses to this perceived threat. The occult source of the threat makes it very hard to deal with in ordinary ways. Those rash enough to oppose a malevolent human sorcerer expose themselves to crushing reprisals against which defence seems impossible. Opposition would be even more impossible in dealing with a deity such as Tezcatlipoca.

In a careful study of the culture contact between Nahua¹⁰⁵ people and the friars of New Spain immediately after the *conquistadore* victory, Louise Burkhart shows that the relative success of the missionary effort of the friars was due to their knowledge and use of the Nahuatl language and thought forms. It seems unsurprising that people who had experienced a situation in which Tezcatlipoca was the greatest power would be interested in a message about a power even greater. Despite this positive reception, some aspects of European Catholic Christianity proved to be incommunicable.

The indigenous deities did not, as a group, represent moral authority: there were tricksters, harlots, and drunkards, as well as virtuous priests and benevolent grandmothers. The same being could incite immoral behaviour and then afflict the wrongdoer. Deity, like creation

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁰⁵ ‘After the Spanish Conquest, aside from some temporary privileges granted to Cortes’s closest allies, all of these peoples shared similar experiences. It is here more fitting to speak of Nahua culture, the culture of peoples speaking the Nahuatl language, than to distinguish the Mexica from their neighbours or to speak of “Aztecs” – a vague term that is better applied to the pre-conquest Mexica empire than to the particular ethnic groups that composed, and outlived, that organization.’ Burkhart, L, *The Slippery Earth* Op.Cit., p.4.

The friars took the trouble to learn the Nahuatl language in order to make Christianity as intelligible as possible to the Nahua, unlike the later practice of the clergy in New Spain. There is dialogue and conversion here, however much surrounded by the realities of Spanish power. The friars were, for a time, a significant voice against the marginalization and expropriation of the Indians by the colonial society. Using a criterion of maleficence to identify demonic activity, the friars were able to see Indian religious practices that were similar to Christian practices as positive. Later clerics, who were more involved with the Inquisition, used a criterion of idolatry, according to which non-Christian mimicry of anything Christian was a sign that Satan, the ape of God, was at work. This led to the persecution, including a significant number of executions, of those who followed penitential, self-sacrificing Indian traditions.

itself, embodied order and disorder; the priestly culture-bearer Quetzalcoatl was forever challenged by the dissolute sorcerer Tezcatlipoca.¹⁰⁶

Burkhart shows how the friars used the general term for deity, *teotl*, to refer to the Christian God and chose *tlacatecolotl*, meaning ‘human owl’, for the devil and demons in general. This term would have been applied to the Aztec deities in general and to Tezcatlipoca in particular. As well as having no place for the dualistic separation of good and evil, Nahua thought had no equivalent to the angelic/demonic realm of created spirits in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The idea of evil spirits, therefore, had to be categorized as either divine or human. Insuperable difficulties in establishing the superiority of the good God faced the friars if they allowed demons to be thought of as divine, leading to the choice to treat them as human. One result of this approach was to render the identification of Tezcatlipoca as a malevolent Indian shaman virtually literal.

Christian teaching attempted to redefine *teotl* in terms of moral order while placing all the anti-structural aspects into the category of demon. Although the concept of *teotl* was adopted, all the individual beings who had been called by that name had to be stripped of their divine status. The friars, for whom devils were very real creatures, assumed that the indigenous deities were devils – not products of pagan ignorance but minions of the Prince of Darkness. And Tezcatlipoca was Lucifer himself.¹⁰⁷

It is hard not to be sympathetic with these friars, despite the problems arising from their general identification of order with goodness and disorder with evil. While it is plausible to see order as mostly good, it can become oppressive and unjust. Equally, chaos and creativity go together without necessarily involving malevolence. Individual freedom is generally thought to be of positive value, yet it often challenges social order. This issue aside, the missionary approach of the friars seems exemplary. They were confronting a culture in which the dominant group had organized itself for war on its neighbours to ensure a regular supply of captives who could be killed in sacrifice in order to feed the various gods with blood. Even today, Aztec society prompts perceptions of demonic forces at work. It does still seem appropriate to regard malevolent spirits which require human sacrifice as demonic and evil. Negative western views of shamanism in general would seem to have been significantly influenced by the Aztec realities.

¹⁰⁶ Burkhart, L, The Slippery Earth, Op. Cit., p.39.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.40.

Interlude: Evil and Holocausts

Rachel: You seem surprisingly ambivalent about the Aztecs, Sandy. You are careful to insist on the unacceptability of their practices of human sacrifice, but you also go out of your way to explain and even justify their culture. As far as I am concerned, their leaders and priests were demonized, as the friars said.

S: I agree that they were demonized, whatever this means. I want to understand them in order to learn about what it is to be demonized.

J: I was strongly reminded of the reign of terror and the sacrifice of human lives to the ideological obsessions of the Nazis. They were serving their own idealized society, divinized as a cosmic reality,¹⁰⁸ by ridding it of ‘evils’ in the form of people whose fellow humanity and citizenship they obscenely denied. The Aztecs were serving their gods, who kept the cosmos in order. The widespread use of the word ‘holocaust’¹⁰⁹ for the Nazi brutality should alert us to its religious dimension.

R: Do you want to ‘understand’ the Nazis, as if they were merely a religious movement?

J: The unacceptability of both Nazi and Aztec societies is clear. In both societies there are almost tangible forces of evil that operate as a form of demonic spiritual possession of the leaders, as you say. We need to recognize these evils and we need to understand the socio-political dynamics in which such evils become deadly.

¹⁰⁸ “The *Endlösung*, the ‘final solution’, was not primarily understood by its cruel initiator (Hitler) as a political or socioeconomic force. It was not an expression of class struggle or nationalism in any recognizable sense. It was intended as, and received its enormous power from, the fact that it aimed at nothing less than restructuring the cosmos. ‘Those who see in National Socialism nothing more than a political movement,’ Hitler unflinchingly observed, ‘know scarcely anything of it. It is more even than a religion: it is the will to create mankind anew’.” The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol. 6, Op. Cit., p.423.

¹⁰⁹ “Holocaust: ... 1. A sacrifice wholly consumed by fire; a whole burnt offering. 2. *transf.* and fig. a. A complete sacrifice or offering. b. A sacrifice on a large scale. c. Complete destruction by fire, or that which is so consumed; complete destruction, esp. of a large number of persons; a great slaughter or massacre.” Ed. Onions, CT, The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1944, p.912.

The word ‘holocaust’ derives from the Greek words *holos*, ‘whole’ and *kausis*, ‘burning’, referring to the completeness with which the sacrifice is consumed by fire, as in the ancient Hebrew burnt-offering.

“The most regular offering was the burnt-offering, best spelled with a hyphen, since it represents one word (*olah*) in Hebrew. ‘*Olah* means ‘that which ascends’, either to the altar or in smoke from the altar. ... it was entirely consumed by fire, no part of the flesh being available for human consumption. The original gift-idea is more transparent in the burnt-offering than in any other sacrifice.” Ed. Richardson, A, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, SCM Press, London, 1957, p.206.

R: Look, if you try to understand something, you usually look for points of sympathy. Because these points of sympathy are already in you, the demons that dominated the Aztecs and the Nazis could do the same for you. Recognize how wrong they were and reject their way! What more understanding do you need?

S: We should reject the practices of these societies not only because we don't like them or because we are scared of them. It is the specifically evil dynamics which shaped them that we need to reject. I agree that it is hazardous to dwell on our sympathy for such people because there is demonic temptation involved, but understanding is not all sympathy. It should worry us that some people look on Hitler as a 'strong leader', even though we can see how our individual weaknesses lead us to seek strong leaders. The shocking realities of Aztec and Nazi oppression show the end results of regarding others as non-persons. Christian tradition names our human co-operation with evil forces as sin. It also tells us that the propensity for sin can be present in all kinds of societies, whether ancient or modern, culturally Christian or shamanic.

J: Evil, including the reality of our own sin, is usually experienced as too much for us, requiring that it be consigned to God for safe disposal. It must be removed from the human sphere to limit its contaminating effects and to allay our fears. Burning has been widely accepted as a natural means to this end. This idea of destroying evil through fire was probably behind the practice of burning heretics and witches.

S: This theme of destroying evil re-emerges in modern societies around support for the death penalty for particularly vicious evildoers.

J: Yes. Liberal opposition to capital punishment tends to see only revenge and blood-lust as motives for the death penalty. These motives are not open to reason. The belief that it is appropriate to destroy evil is a different motive which might be open to reasoned discussion.

S: I am persuaded by the liberal Christian vision which looks for the redemption of all beings through the love of God. Any created power can be faced by those who trust in a benevolent Creator. Cruelty and brutality are incomprehensible affronts to God. When we have the strength to respond to such affronts from love rather than from fear, we contribute to redemption.

B: That's all very well for you altruistic Christians, but not everyone is ready to tolerate, forgive and forget like you. Surely we need to restrain evil behaviour and provide justice for the victims of cruelty and crime. Political liberalism has not been very successful in delivering the conversion of criminals. In practice, it has become a weak avoidance of harsh measures, providing neither justice for the victims nor spiritual redemption for the criminals.

J: So, are you proposing a return to the punitive approaches of the past?

B: I welcome the emphasis that you people have been placing on recognizing evil in Christian as well as shamanic societies. I never thought of the Aztecs as a shamanic community before, though it is obvious enough when you point it out. I can see that Christian Europeans would have developed a negative view of shamanism from this example. No, I think we need to recover an appreciation of the spiritual significance of sacrifice.

J: What particular aspects do you think we need to recover?

B: The link between sacrifice and spiritual purification is central, though whether this is the same as 'destroying evil', I doubt. Equally important is the link between us and the spirits.

J: So what do you say about human sacrifice?

B: For a start, the only valid sacrifice is self-sacrifice. I am enough of a modern to agree that ritual killing of humans and animals is unacceptable, because we don't own other beings. What we can sacrifice are those things we do possess, including our rights and expectations of others.

J: That sounds sensible enough. How does sacrifice establish links between us and the spirits?

B: The spirits are real. We do relate to them through prayers and offerings. They can do things in our world.

R: I agree that the spirits are real entities, even if John and Sandy are not convinced of this. What I can't understand is how you cope with unacceptable demands from the spirits, Beth.

B: That's a difficult question. Fortunately, it doesn't often arise because I focus on healing and the enhancement of life. If you do get disturbing or dubious messages from the spirits, you look for further guidance. Isn't that what you do?

R: I suppose so. We Christians seem to spend a lot of time waiting on God. After we have prayed about something, we often have to wait because no answer seems good enough to act on.

B: We shamans sometimes misinterpret what spirit is saying to us, too. Purification applies to our hearing as much as to our wills. Sacrifice is important for purification because it involves real giving and the release of something that has been holding us back.

J: So how do the spirits benefit from sacrifices, in your view?

B: Sacrificed items are released into the wider environment and are made available for the use of spirit through this release. We use fire, earth, air and water for this. Fire is the quickest, air is usually the slowest.

J: So the pieces of cloth strung together with tobacco in them, that we see hanging from trees, are sacrifices that have been given an air burial?

B: Yes, that's the idea.

R: For Christians, Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice. God does not require any other form of sacrifice from us.¹¹⁰ The idea that deity might require tobacco, or even human death, is quite alien.

S: Yes, God is not needy as we are needy. God's will is for righteousness in human behaviour and for fullness of life on earth. Jesus himself lived a life of faith, doing the will of God, which led him to the cross – and we Christians believe that this was fullness of life, not least because of the

¹¹⁰ "According to New Testament teaching, which is developed especially in the Letter to the Hebrews, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were only provisional and had to cease under the new covenant. The self-giving of Jesus in his death on the cross is understood as the definitive and perfect sacrifice that has the power in itself to effect expiation and redemption and that therefore makes all earlier sacrifices superfluous." *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol.12, Op.Cit., p.555.

resurrection. Maybe sacrifice is needed, not by God, but by us, if we are to become free from our dependencies and addictions, free for Jesus' way of suffering love.

J: Sacrifice in Christian cultures has come to refer to gifts of goods and services to meet the needs of the human community. People make such sacrifices all the time. These gifts can be offered with varying degrees of grace. Sacrifice as gift is the idea behind the New Testament stress upon the willingness with which Jesus accepted his death.

S: Personal purification, whether through rituals or through restraint of our less worthy impulses, is admirable. It is also spiritually opposed to the evil of sacrificing others that we see in the Nazi and Aztec regimes.

B: Perhaps you can tell me what you Christians mean by 'evil'. Sometimes it seems to refer to any spirit which opposes the will of your God, yet it can also seem quite shadowy and negative, referring to an absence of goodness.

J: Your question is a good one. Christianity holds in uneasy tension two approaches to the existence of evil in the world. On the conservative side, there is the Manichaean dualism¹¹¹ of the story of Satan and the rebellious angels who oppose the will of God. Human choices commit people to one side or the other in this deadly, cosmic struggle. Yet for Christians, good and evil are not equal. There is a mystery of created freedom in which evil emerges from within the created order and somehow sets itself up in opposition to the will of God. On the liberal side, there is the Parmenidean monism¹¹² of the absolute sovereignty of God. Evil is therefore ultimately illusory, insubstantial or a step towards some wider good. Satan is God's creature. Behind the events of history, the providential hand of God ensures that, eventually, all shall be well. For this view, evil is classically defined as *privatio boni*, the absence of the good.¹¹³

¹¹¹ By 'dualism, I mean all world views which provide for an ultimate opposition between two contradictory forces. 'Manichaeism' is a tradition deriving from Iranian Mazdaism in which 'good' and 'evil' are two more or less equal opposing forces.

¹¹² By monism I mean all world views in which there is an ultimate unity, whether spiritual or material in nature. Parmenides was a Greek philosopher in the generation before Socrates who taught that reality is complete and perfect already. Change is therefore an illusion.

¹¹³ Cf. Russell, JB, The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity, Cornell UP, Ithaca, NY, 1977.

B: As I thought, it's confused.

R: Unless we start with the reality of Satan, we'll never see straight. Of course there is an absence of goodness in evil, but this is because it has been intentionally removed.

S: How can created reality seriously oppose its Creator? I feel that all aspects of our experience are ultimately coherent, despite appearances to the contrary. This means that I see monism as the ultimate reality, when God will be all in all, because God is one. Yet dualism makes sense in our present context, where there is conflict, division and uncertainty. There is a deep conflict between good and evil, seemingly throughout human history, where evil is not only the absence of good but also its perversion and corruption. Sin is both separation from God and actions destructive of love and life.

R: Sin is disobedience to God's requirements. God will be all in all when those who are evil and unworthy are removed. This is the work of the angels at the end of the age, as we see in Matthew 13:40-50. The Devil is a creature, a fallen angel, and therefore anything but equal to God. Satan does initiate evil in our lives, in opposition to God. His role as enemy is somehow permitted, but also limited, by God.

J: So how do you show that God can remain perfectly good and loving while being the ultimate author of all the evil in the world?

R: Well, God shows his love for us by giving us freedom to oppose his will.

J: God does seem a self-contradictory being, busily creating all kinds of wonderful things with the right hand while supporting and even empowering all kinds of resistance to this gracious order with the left hand. You leave us with a deeply mysterious picture of God.

S: I'm glad you don't try to wriggle out of this difficulty, Rachel. If we give up on the power and the goodness of God, it would seem pointless to believe in God at all. In the New Testament, the general picture is one of acute spiritual warfare, but behind this warfare is the unfailing and unshakable rule of God, in whom we are invited to put our trust. This can be seen as a three-tiered arena, with God, superhuman spirits and humans forming the levels, as we see in Ephesians

6:11-12. "Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

R: Well, maybe you and I are talking about the same thing, Sandy.

J: You can hold to both dualism and monism if you apply them to different spheres. This simply means that they can't both be ultimate. Sandy, I quite like your three-tiered schema of our ordinary world, the spiritual forces that move in and through this ordinary world and the transcendent reality that holds everything together in a mysterious, ultimate unity. I think you are sneaking in trinitarian doctrine (where Jesus is at the ordinary level, the Holy Spirit at the extraordinary level and God the Father as the ultimate source and goal of unity). Perhaps this schema reflects the way our knowledge of the world is structured, if you allow the possibility of revelation to give us some kind of access to ultimate truth.

B: That's my problem. If there is an ultimate harmony, then the evil that we meet in our experience is not absolute. Indeed, it is not really evil, any more than bacteria are evil, despite the suffering that they cause. I can accept that there is a cosmic, created harmony established by the Creator, in which case I find it hard to take cosmic dualism seriously. Yet you seem to take Satan as some kind of ultimate reality, Rachel.

R: Yes, indeed. Our salvation depends upon turning away from Satan and turning to God in Christ.

J: Satan is a figure in Christian mythology. This figure makes powerful sense in situations of dualistic conflict between good and evil choices. Yet there are other kinds of situation in our world. We may experience peace and harmony, where differences are discussed and negotiated. Alternatively, there are polymorphous ways of experiencing the world that are neither dualist nor monist, where we encounter a diversity of many powers. This changing multiplicity of forms of experience is well represented by polytheistic mythologies such as the Aztec pantheon. At the level of our experience, there seems no obvious way of showing that one pattern is more fundamental than another. Each way of experiencing the world seems complete in itself, until we move into a different world.

R: Does all that mean that we shouldn't try to make sense of the figure of Satan, or track his actual presence in our lives?

J: No, but it does mean that we shouldn't expect to rationalize the figure of Satan because myths derive a part of their power from the genuine ambiguities of our world.

B: Are you trying to tell me that I shouldn't worry about the fixation that Christians seem to have with Satan because they need a sharp story to stiffen their resolve?

J: Yes, something like that. In a national war, friendships with people from the enemy society become potentially treasonous.

B: It is very dangerous for non-belligerents to get caught in the cross-fire. I feel like that around Christians like you, Rachel.

R: You realize that we don't have an option to be non-belligerent.

B: That's what all belligerent groups say.

R: You are involved in resisting demonic behaviour; you just don't think of it in those terms.

B: If I don't think straight, how would I know if I stopped resisting Satan, in your eyes?

S: Rachel, I agree with Beth in being suspicious of warrior ideologies that divide the world into the virtuous heroes (who just happen to be ourselves) and the evil, despicable villains (who just happen to be our enemies). Most human conflicts are morally murky, so that warrior ideologies frequently lead to a distorted and self-serving view of what is actually happening. There is a place for dualism, but only in contexts that are dominated by one over-arching conflict.

J: You seem to be building an alliance between the monism of radical monotheism and the pluralism of polytheism against the artificial simplicity of dualism.

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S: Yes, I think so. It is the ultimate claims of dualism that I reject. Every society has a line that it draws between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, though many things hover around the boundary. So dualism is natural to us. It is also natural for us to want divine support for the line that we happen to have drawn. We pretend, in my view, that it is not our line but a line drawn by God, preferably from the beginning of creation.

R: So you don't think God draws any lines?

S: I accept that God is our judge, so of course God draws lines. Yet we are also told that God is a merciful judge (e.g. Psalm 145:8-9). If we really hear that message, it should make us aware that we don't know where the judgement or the mercy will fall.

R: So for you, it doesn't matter that we have the Ten Commandments?

S: Of course it matters. The Law is a good gift of God¹¹⁴, through Moses and the people of Israel. For me, it does not follow from the existence of the Law that there can be no redemption for sinners. I take dualism, as an ultimate viewpoint, to lead us to this false conclusion.

R: Maybe I can understand what you are saying here. You think that, because God is One, and because God made all things visible and invisible,¹¹⁵ we shouldn't teach that anything can ultimately fall outside God's love?

S: Yes, exactly. That's well put, because it is a negative point. In the same way, we shouldn't teach that, because God is love, God can't oppose and condemn evil.

J: The way I hear what you are saying, Sandy, is that you are opposed to a 'warrior' mentality among Christians, as well as the belief that God is simply on our side, not the side of our opponents.

S: I am opposed to this 'warrior' mentality as the central Christian attitude, because it focuses on the enemies, not on God. Christian identity should, in my view, begin with our turning to God for forgiveness and life. I affirm the warrior virtues of courage, respect for justice and willingness to

¹¹⁴ My view here is modelled on what Paul says about the Law in Romans 7.

¹¹⁵ This phrasing is from the Nicene Creed.

die for the higher cause, which are all virtues needed for the Christian life as such. Still, to me, warriors seem all too ready for a fight. The way of Christ is the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice and the non-violent resolution of conflict.

R: So what don't you like about warrior Christianity?

S: I don't like the way it tempts Christians to scapegoat and attack non-Christian groups. This attitude goes together with the view that evil can and should be destroyed wherever it appears, as well as the belief that our way is so right that it cannot be questioned.

B: Warriors deserve respect for their willingness to face personal dangers by standing against opponents who may be powerful, evil and unjust.

S: Yes, warriors come into their own when there is real oppression to resist. My concern is that the warrior attitude goes out looking for enemies and may end up creating them where they were not previously to be found.

R: We have always honoured those who have died defending the community and Christian civilization. Still, it is hard to reconcile the brutalities of war with the teachings of Jesus about loving our enemies, going the second mile and not taking revenge (Matthew 5:38-48). The way of Jesus is the way of the cross, not the way of domination. So I don't think we should be supporting actual warfare, except perhaps in self defence for a community. Spiritual warfare against demonic temptations is necessary if we are to follow Christ.

B: I do take your view of demonic attack on us seriously, Rachel. Where people lack freedom due to inner compulsions, I have sometimes been able to see spiritual agencies at work. These agencies can be addressed and dispelled.

J: I don't know about actual demons. For me, this language refers to interpersonal forces that stand over against us as individuals. Powerful groups in society can make life intolerable for minorities through rejection, discrimination and persecution. These forces become more powerful when they are unselfconscious. I am impressed by Jung's analysis of this kind of force.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ For the discussion that follows, cf. Sanford, JA, Evil; the Shadow Side of Reality, Crossroad, New York, 1981.

B: Where does evil come from, for Jung?

J: He sees evil in terms of the shadow which is formed by the repression of our own unacceptable characteristics into the unconscious. It is this shadow that we then project onto other people who display elements of these unacceptable characteristics of ourselves which we do not consciously acknowledge. 'Evil' for Jung is therefore what we hate in ourselves and in others. This is anything but an absolute, as it can change when we adopt a less rejecting attitude towards these unacceptable features.

R: That sounds wishy-washy. Is he saying that there is no such thing as evil except what we don't like?

S: Jung's strategy for dealing with evil is to bring our full experience of it into consciousness. This is heroic and also effective in lessening the evil done by people of good will. It can lead to new openings for communication with our enemies, possibly turning them into friends. Yet to me, it is not a complete theory of evil. We simply lack the power to deal with all the evils of our world, even if we can make a start with Jung's symbolic methods.

R: Please be more specific. I am getting lost here.

S: Bringing evil into consciousness makes us aware that we need to choose. As an antidote to evil, it can be helpful with evils in which we unconsciously participate. Our awareness does not directly affect the evils that others do. Our positive mental state can only be of limited help to the victims of injustice.

B: I like your emphasis on choosing, but I also like Jung's idea that we need to deal with our own shadow.

J: Jung's approach is monistic and liberal in presenting wholeness as an ideal. He sees us as somehow part of all that we encounter, though we initially lack awareness of our mutual co-involvement. He thinks that our increases in awareness do spark similar increases in awareness for other people. There is a mystery here, about how new ideas and attitudes propagate.

S: The evil that I see in another person is partly a matter of projection as Jung describes it. I can and should deal with this evil as it exists in me. This leaves me free for a more realistic approach to the other person, not one governed by my own prejudices and projections. What Jung fails to deal with, in my opinion, is the reality of injustices and conflicts of interest when they are perceived without our projections distorting the picture.

R: So how does all that help us to deal with powerful spiritual evil in society?

S: I think it challenges us to start with the horror that we feel, so that we notice and filter out whatever elements of shadow projection we can. These need to be dealt with separately from our considered, objective assessment of the situation, particularly where we are personally involved. The issue of projection seems to me a complicating factor in the much tougher problem of how to deal with the unacceptable realities.

R: The discernment of spirits that are distinct from human beings allows me to see more of the reality of both. This projection stuff sounds like another area of demonic activity to me.

J: There was a compulsion at work on the Aztecs, whether it was through unquestioned religio-cultural imperatives, the tyranny of the society over individuals within it or these spirits you talk about. Unconscious and/or collective forces that control our behaviour do operate in a very similar fashion to biblical demons.

R: I think we could be talking about the same things here. What really matters is what we do about these evil forces, whether we think of them as demons or as unconscious or collective requirements. We sin by doing what these voices want.

S: Moving from 'thinking about doing' to 'actually doing' is important because it creates all sorts of additional problems that you didn't have before. But I was brought up to think of sin as originating in self-absorbed thinking, which is our most basic experience of being separated from God. This is one of the reasons why we Protestants have generally not been keen on meditation and monasteries for contemplatives (or navel-gazers, as my uncle George would say).

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J: Yes, this whole question of sinfulness has made it hard for Christians to reach a positive understanding of shamanism. Serious attention to the inner life has been pictured as sinful, narcissistic self-absorption, from which Christ is the only hope of rescue.

B: So are you going to tell us that the Christian doctrine of sin has all been a big mistake, Sandy?

S: No, though I do think that sin is primarily a theological term, which is why I prefer to think of sin in terms of separation from God rather than as a particular action or attitude. One popular explanation of human sinfulness is that it is self-centredness. This is reasonable enough in theological terms because we can oppose being self-centred to being God-centred. Where it seems to come unstuck is when we try to turn this teaching into a piece of common human wisdom, where sin becomes equated with complete self-absorption. We might go on to note that this is often labelled 'narcissism'. Can we really define sin as narcissism?

J: Well, can we?

S: I don't think so. There would seem to be plenty of gregarious and social forms of sinfulness.

B: But you think that those Christians who think of sin as self-absorption will be all too quick to condemn shamanism as sinful because it seems self-absorbed to them?

S: Yes, I think so.

Narcissism and Sin

Water is the original mirror; the image conveyed is also that of the moon floating over the dark sea, watching her reflection in the waves. A faint echo can be heard in the opening of Genesis: 'The earth was unformed and void, and the spirit of God floated on the face of the water'.¹¹⁷

The Wiccan perspective that Starhawk presents can be seen as a variant of neo-shamanism or modern shamanism. She offers us a creation myth, attributed to the Faery tradition of Witchcraft, in which the energies of self-love and the mirrored self-image have a central place.

Alone, awesome, complete within Herself, the Goddess, She whose name cannot be spoken, floated in the abyss of the outer darkness, before the beginning of all things. And as She looked into the curved mirror of black space, She saw by her own light her radiant reflection, and fell in love with it. She drew it forth by the power that was in Her and made love to Herself, and called her 'Miria, the Wonderful'.

Their ecstasy burst forth in the single song of all that is, was, or ever shall be, and with the song came motion, waves that poured outward and became all the spheres and circles of the worlds. The Goddess became filled with love, swollen with love, and She gave birth to a rain of bright spirits that filled the worlds and became all beings.

But in that great movement, Miria was swept away, and as She moved out from the Goddess, She became more masculine. First She became the Blue God, the gentle, laughing God of love. Then She became the Green One, vine-covered, rooted in the earth, the spirit of all growing things. At last She became the Horned God, the Hunter whose face is the ruddy sun and yet as dark as death. But always desire draws Him back toward the Goddess, so that He circles her eternally, seeking to return in love.

All began in love; all seeks to return to love. Love is the law, the teacher of wisdom, and the great revealer of mysteries.¹¹⁸

This is a grand, naturalistic vision, reminiscent of the spiritual monism of Hegel and based on the Greek concept of *eros*, the desire to join and possess. In this creation story, the connection of the mirror with self-absorption is on full display. Union is positive, separation is negative. In terms of this picture, it is hard to think of our actual lives as a good gift, unless we can feel the eventual blessing of the inevitable final reunion. This picture of the universe is a spiritual analogue to the current materialist cosmology of the big bang, from which our universe is expanding to unimaginable dimensions before, just possibly, collapsing back in on itself in the big crunch. Both

¹¹⁷ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, Harper & Row, NY, 1979, pp. 38-39.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

pictures leave aside the idea of a transcendent Creator who creates out of nothing because of a generous love, expressed by the Greek concept of *agape*, self-giving love.

Starhawk's story contains a strong affirmation of narcissistic self-love as the basis of life itself. Can narcissistic self-love really be so shameless and unproblematic? For Starhawk, knowledge is literally self-knowledge in some sense. In western culture, it is Greek wisdom (with qualified support from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament) that tells us to know ourselves and so to accept ourselves as we are. Nevertheless, self-knowledge remains a conflicted area for western culture and not simply for Christianity. The importance for mental health of having a positive self-image is widely recognized, yet pre-occupation with ourselves is equally widely regarded as unhealthy. The social world of interaction with others tends to be privileged above the private world of our own thoughts. In the world in which I grew up, talking to yourself was seen as the first sign of madness. Talking to trees was thought by some to be the second sign.

This suspicion of the natural self has been particularly strong within Reformed Christianity, fuelled by the global condemnation of the natural self in the Christian doctrine of original sin.

There is no-one who is righteous, no-one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God; they have all gone wrong; no-one does what is right, not even one. (Romans 3:10-12, quoting Psalm 14).

Paul's message is that, paradoxically, there is no way to become righteous by human efforts. Righteousness is offered to us as a free gift of God's grace, through turning to God in Christ and receiving the forgiveness of our sins. There is a pathway to peace (which I take to include a measure of self-acceptance – accepting that we have been accepted by God even though we can see that we are unacceptable), but this path lies exclusively through God. Our everyday, natural self is therefore a very dubious quantity for Christian faith.

Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants. Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants. To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

This suspicion of the natural self is enshrined in the idea of original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve, which affects the status before God of all humanity. Sin, in Judaeo-Christian understanding, is initially an action, a disobedience to the explicit command of God, which breaks the primordial

naturalness of our relationship with God our creator. For Christians, Christ's death on the cross figures as a counter-action which restores our collective human relationship with God. Sin is largely defined through its polar opposition to grace, the original grace of God in creating us to live in the beautiful garden of Eden and in redeeming us through the death of Jesus. Sin is also attached exclusively to us humans, whereas grace attaches to God, and to us only as God lives in us. This leads to the scandalous paradoxes inherent in the wholesale condemnation of the best of human actions as strictly equivalent to the worst when they are not included in the gracious forgiveness of sins by God¹¹⁹. These paradoxes are hardly sustainable as ethical theory, though they are understandable when considered in terms of right relationships.

In Jewish tradition, the idea of sin has maintained its original ethical focus. Sin is a quality of human actions that are contrary to the commandments of God; such actions constitute a breach of the covenant between God and Israel as well as of specific laws. The legal/judicial framework is not regarded as problematic. Christians who want to continue to use such a framework do face problems in reconciling it with Christian tradition. One problem is that it has become quite unclear which of the biblical commandments remain in full force and determine which actions are sinful. More fundamentally, many strands of the New Testament move beyond a legal/judicial framework through concentrating on the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins and faith in Jesus as the Christ, for which human actions are of minor importance compared to right relationship with God. St. Paul's famous opposition between the righteousness that comes to us by grace through faith and the righteousness stemming from works in obedience to the law¹²⁰ is only one of the more obvious places in the New Testament where reliance upon the legal/judicial framework of Jewish tradition is called into question.

For Christians, the teaching of Jesus and the grace that we see in Jesus both show us the inadequacy of actions not motivated by the love with which God loves us. Sin becomes actions which fall short of this gracious love (and it is notoriously difficult to find human actions in which no shadow can be discovered). This removes the usefulness of the framework of law and commandment which prescribe actions, except as continuing ethical guidance, because specifically commanded actions can be performed without grace and love. 'Sin' has here shifted from being primarily an ethical notion, defined as disobedience to the revealed set of commandments, to being a mainly theological notion, where it figures as the shadow side of our human reception of God's grace. It is only in the encounter with the living God that the fact of human sinfulness comes into view. This in part accounts for the paradox that great Christian saints often manifest a sharp (and humanly quite unrealistic) sense of their own sinfulness. Our own individual and collective unworthiness becomes apparent, as a shadow in the mirror of the gracious love of God for all creation including ourselves.

¹¹⁹ Cf. I Timothy 1:15.

¹²⁰ Cf. Romans 1-3, among many possible references.

The more flagrant offences against love in our world appear as a darkness which blindly resists the light.

In liberal Protestant Christianity, self-love is not so much wicked as immature, to be set aside in favour of altruistic love for God and neighbour. The outward orientation of Protestant values is very strong, turning us away from attention to inner experience (dreams, meditation) as well as from bodily satisfactions of all kinds. Of course, as social beings we benefit from the outward orientation of others. As children, we find that certain aunts and uncles can be counted on for the provision of biscuits and sweets. We need social permission in order to indulge. All this is swept aside as demeaning to the self by Starhawk, who challenges us to look again at the ways in which we have made self-love ugly. In reviewing this issue, the story of Narcissus, whose name has entered our language to designate unhealthy preoccupation with self, is a good place to start.

I remember the story of Narcissus as telling of the youth who, wandering alone in the woods because of a preference for his own company, looked at his reflection in a pool of water and was so enamoured by his own image that he died. This seemed a clear warning against self-absorption and even against spending too long in front of a mirror; self-love could cloud our judgement so that we would relinquish our hold on life and die. It could also tempt us to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, setting us up for a painful fall. Self-knowledge therefore became caught up with critical and negative perspectives even while we longed for praise and affirmation. I was therefore impressed to read a deeper interpretation of the story of Narcissus offered by Thomas Moore.

The one-sidedness and moralism of the various attacks on narcissism suggest that there may be some soul lying around in this rejected pile of ego and self-love: anything that bad must have some value in it. Could it be that our righteous rejections of narcissism and love of self cover over a mystery about the nature of the soul's loves? Is our negative branding of narcissism a defence against a demanding call of the soul to be loved?¹²¹

Moore looks in detail at Ovid's version of the story to show how the fate of Narcissus should be seen as fulfilment rather than as punishment, even though there is a real death involved. Narcissus was the son of a nymph and a river god, giving him a watery nature. Yet he grew up to be hard, untouched by the feelings aroused in others by his beauty. The story is about how he discovers love through encountering his own image in a mysterious pool that has never been touched by human or animal. He encounters his image as if it were another, belatedly realizing that it is himself that he sees. The awakening of this love restores him to the world of feeling, dissolving his previous hardness. He descends to the underworld to continue to contemplate his reflection in the River Styx, while all his companions find of him is a flower with a yellow centre and white petals, hereafter called the narcissus.

¹²¹ Moore, T, *The Care of the Soul*, Harper Collins, NY, 1992, pp.55-6.

The story begins with rigid self-containment and ends with the flowering of a personality. Care of the soul requires us to see the myth in the symptom, to know that there is a flower waiting to break through the hard surface of narcissism. Knowing the mythology, we are able to embrace the symptom, glimpsing something of the mysterious rule by which a disease of the psyche can be its own cure.¹²²

What we call narcissism is a superficial and loveless preoccupation with self. As such, it is indeed unsatisfactory. The way forward, however, is not merely to ‘snap out of it’ and recognize that other people exist, relevant as this would be were it to happen. Moore argues that what is needed is a properly based love of self which has acquired depth through recognizing the ways in which the self is ‘other’.

If we can be instructed by the myth, narcissism is the unlucky situation in which we have yet to discover that we have a pool in us where a deeper sense of ‘I’, another ego, may appear for our attention and affection. The narcissistic person simply does not know how profound and interesting his (sic) nature is. In his narcissism he is condemned to carry the weight of life’s responsibilities on his own shoulders. But once he discovers that there are other figures who surround the ‘I’ personality, he can let them do some of the work of life. Narcissism may look like an indulgent pleasure, but beneath the facade of satisfaction lies an oppressive burden. The narcissistic person tries very hard to be loved, but he never succeeds because he doesn’t realize yet that he has to love himself as other before he himself can be loved.¹²³

As a pathology, then, narcissism is based on deficiencies in the person’s ability to love and accept themselves rather than upon superfluities of self-love. The anxious self-concern points to what is lacking. Psychological investigation of narcissism stemming from Freud has also treated it as essentially pathological despite the fact that it is also a stage which we have all gone through as infants (‘primary narcissism’).

Freud describes a *primary narcissism* in terms of an initial libidinal investment of psychic energy in the (predifferentiated) ego - a state of symbiotic bliss, which inevitably becomes altered with separation/individuation..... *Secondary narcissism* refers to the condition in which libido is withdrawn from external objects and turned anew onto the ego.... Finally, Freud elaborates the concept of the ego ideal, which he conceives as possessor of the lost perfection of primary narcissism.¹²⁴

This orientation to narcissism as essentially infantile and pathological was challenged by Heinz Kohut in 1971.

¹²² *Ibid.* p.65.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.68.

¹²⁴ Morrison, AP (Ed.), *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, New York UP, New York, 1986, p.13.

Kohut's seminal work on narcissism represents a major departure from views of previous authors in that he questions the assumption that narcissism is fundamentally pathological. Kohut argues that narcissism may lead, not only to object love, but also to more mature forms of narcissism, which he elaborates in terms of humor, creativity, empathy and wisdom.¹²⁵

For Kohut, love and enjoyment are 'of the self' throughout life, whether shared and confirmed by others or not. Pathological narcissism occurs when this enjoyment has been threatened or stifled by early experiences. Jungian thinking has reached similar conclusions. Primary narcissism is pictured in terms of the ancient image of the ouroboros, the serpent with its tail in its mouth. This self-enclosed world constantly expands as we meet new challenges, but the structure of self-enclosure still plays a role in the mature personality.¹²⁶ Without going more deeply into the continuing controversies within psychology about the nature and treatment of narcissistic pathology, there is one line of thought which is of interest because of its employment of the image of the mirror.

To be mirrored is to be understood, to feel that someone empathetically follows our thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc. It is a glaring deficiency in our culture that being right is more highly valued than being related. Yet to mirror another person requires a willingness to enter into his or her world, to suspend critical judgement and reflect what is being offered. The need for mirroring from another is lifelong, and represents the inevitable incompleteness that accompanies growth. For mirroring is an externalization of an internal, psychic reality. It is based upon the fact that consciousness and the unconscious exist in a relationship of mirror symmetry.¹²⁷

Schwarz-Salant sees mirroring as virtually determinative for the pattern of development of the young child.

Mirroring is especially crucial in early childhood, the time when a symbiotic relationship must exist between mother and child. Since they then partake of a common energy field, processes in the child penetrate the mother and vice versa. But most important, the anxiety the child experiences as part of its emerging consciousness must also be experienced, and to some degree absorbed, by the mother.

... A mother must be sensitive to, and capable of mediating, the disorder that accompanies her child's emerging consciousness. For she is the first carrier of the archetypal Self image, the central source of order in the personality. Properly containing the child's anxiety helps

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹²⁶ Cf. Neumann, E, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Princeton UP, Princeton, NJ, 1954.

¹²⁷ Schwarz-Salant, N, *Narcissism and Character Transformation*, Inner City Books, Toronto, 1982, pp.45-6.

constellate the positive Self as an internal reality for the child, and with this an inner sense of security and actual inner functioning of the archetype of order.¹²⁸

For Schwarz-Salant, pathological development occurs when this positive mirroring of the child's reality, including all the exhibitionist, fearful, demanding and vulnerable behaviour, does not take place.

Narcissistic characters have generally experienced a chronic lack of mirroring, often stemming ... from parental envy. When parents lack a sense of their own identity they become sensitive to how their child likes *them*, or how it adds or detracts from *their* sense of esteem. Not only will they be unable to mirror the child's emerging personality, but they will want to be mirrored by the child, who feels this keenly.¹²⁹

Narcissistic symptoms can thus be seen as a defence against this demanding, insupportable reality. In adult life, such people can be experienced as 'energy drains' who will demand and soak up, without apparent effect, whatever attention they receive from others. In the typology of narcissistic personalities developed by Bursten, this would be particularly characteristic of the craving type. He also distinguishes paranoid ("Why them rather than me?"), manipulative ("Can I put something over this person?") and phallic (given to attention-getting self-display) types.¹³⁰ These types can obviously be combined in a given individual.

This variety of anti-social behaviour, with its frustrating insatiability, is largely responsible for society's negative reactions to narcissism, including our widespread moralizing against the demanding self. What seems obvious from Schwarz-Salant's analysis is that these negative reactions from society are both correct in identifying immature forms of behaviour which can create further pathology in vulnerable people, and inadequate as a response to the people afflicted by this immaturity and neediness. The rejecting response repeats the non-mirroring behaviour at the heart of the problem, confirming for the narcissistic individual the importance of whatever defences are in place. It also confirms the alienation of the narcissistic individual from the mutually affirming human circle.

This alienation, together with the neurotic quality of narcissistic behaviour, has resulted in the plausible use of narcissism as a metaphor for sin. Narcissism, which is damaging to the human relationships of the narcissistic person, is itself caused by damaged relationships. For Christians, narcissism seems a clear image of the sinful human state because it displays the brokenness of relationships. In sin, we are incapable of a trusting relationship with God. Donald Capps

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.46-7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.47-8.

¹³⁰ Cf. Bursten, B, "Some Narcissistic Personality Types", in *Essential Papers on Narcissism, Op.Cit.*, pp.377-402.

challenges the understanding of sin in terms of pride, self-assertion, transgression and guilt which was classically formulated by Reinhold Niebuhr¹³¹.

In our times, we are much more likely to experience this ‘wrongfulness’ according to shame, rather than guilt, dynamics. Thus, to speak meaningfully and relevantly about sin, we have to relate sin to the experience of shame - not only, not primarily, to the experience of guilt.¹³²

Guilt occurs when there is a transgression of a law, whereas shame results from a perceived inadequacy or failure of the person. Guilt leads to punishment and/or forgiveness, whereas shame leads to rejection or acceptance.

Shame...is about the whole self, and its failure to live up to an ideal; as such, it is a ‘narcissistic’ reaction. A typical defence against shame is hiding, or running away. Hostility against self is experienced in a passive mode, and therefore leaves the shame-prone individual subject to depression. Guilt, on the other hand, refers to a transgression, an action, and therefore has a more specific cognitive or behavioural antecedent than shame, referring less globally to the subjective sense of self.¹³³

Capps shows how the dynamics of shame can be seen as problematics of the self, using the categories of the divided self, the defensive self and the depleted self. Sin figures primarily as a state rather than as destructive actions, apart from some of the more aggressive strategies of the defensive self.

So perhaps one can say that as theologies of guilt focus on the sin of pride, here viewed as the inflated sense of self that leads to the misuse of human freedom, a theology of shame centers on the sin of apathy, and explores the manner in which the Christian tradition has supported, but also frustrated, the work of self-repair.¹³⁴

Apathy typically leads to inaction, so that active transgressions are easy to avoid. Failure to care for genuine needs is a typical expression of sinful apathy. Where pride responds negatively to divine invitations, apathy seeks not to know that they have been issued. The Promethean self is nothing if not strong, requiring taming by divine law. The Narcissistic self is weak, requiring strengthening before anything substantial can happen. Grace comes to the Promethean self as the power of *metanoia*, the basic reorientation. Grace comes to the Narcissistic self as a firm centre around which to coalesce and build.

¹³¹ Cf. Niebuhr, R, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 Vols., Nisbet, London, 1941-43.

¹³² Capps, D, The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p.3.

¹³³ Morrison, AP, “Shame, Ideal Self and Narcissism”, in Essential Papers on Narcissism, Op.Cit., p.350.

¹³⁴ Capps, Op.Cit., pp.99-100.

The hunger of the depleted self is, at root, the hunger for loving and being loved. ... Our real self is discovered through the recognition that we receive from one another, in the moment that our self-affirmation is affirmed by the other. The source of self-knowing is not private introspection but the mutual mirroring of selves.¹³⁵

Mirroring is here presented as powerful for the building of community and the mutual upbuilding of the members. The social and psychological importance of this kind of loving and meaningful interaction is unquestionable. While Capps is in agreement with Starhawk and the shamanic tradition in moving the self (and the associated 'shame' dynamics) to centre stage, he continues the strong Protestant tradition of suspicion of the natural self in looking to narcissism for an understanding of sin. This is also evident in his unnecessarily strong opposition to private introspection. It is true that our introspected view of ourselves is always limited and biased by our current pre-occupations and our ever-active defences, but it remains a source of self-knowledge with which to check what we receive from elsewhere. When the Christian doctrine of original sin is explained in terms of narcissism, specific patterns of narcissism become a metaphor for human selfishness in general. Christopher Lasch offers a warning against this generalization.

Theoretical precision about narcissism is important not only because the idea is so readily susceptible to moralistic inflation but because the practice of equating narcissism with everything selfish and disagreeable mitigates against historical specificity. People have always been selfish, groups have always been ethnocentric; nothing is gained by giving these qualities a psychiatric label. The emergence of character disorders as the most prominent form of psychiatric pathology, however, together with the change in personality structure this development reflects, derives from quite specific changes in our society and culture - from bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and in the last analysis from changes in family life and from changing patterns of socialization. All this disappears from sight if narcissism becomes simply 'the metaphor for the human condition'.¹³⁶

Part of the problem here is that narcissism has both a universal sense, as a stage of infantile self-absorption, and a specific pathological sense which is only useful if it can pick out recognizable categories of people in distinction from others. Lasch's cultural analysis is helpful in drawing attention to the prevalence of psychic depletion in people in our culture and to difficulties in dealing with this. His general picture is one of the loss of realistic and workable ego ideals and of role models around which to build a sense of what it is to be a good person. There is a decline in culturally accepted moral and behavioural standards in western societies, leaving people to do what seems good in their own eyes - as long as they don't hurt their neighbours and fall foul of the civil law. Widespread anxiety, cynicism and despair are predictable consequences. These are culturally specific features of late twentieth century western societies.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.166.

¹³⁶ Lasch, C, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Norton, New York, 1978, pp.32-3.

More plausible than an attempt to identify narcissism directly as a sin, or to construe the notion of sin as essentially narcissistic, is Scott Peck's proposal that narcissism play a central role in a psychology of evil. He writes as a Christian psychiatrist and is concerned that evil be properly named and so unmasked. Explicit identification of evil in psychological terms would allow us to conclude that continuing, conscious co-operation with evil propensities in ourselves is sinful. He starts with identifiable behavioural characteristics which have manifestly destructive outcomes for which the agent is responsible. He argues for naming evil as a disease, a mental illness. While evil in a person has destructive effects on those around them, it also has destructive effects on the person themselves.

If evil is to be named a psychiatric disorder, is it sufficiently unique to stand in a category all by itself or does it fit into one of the already existing categories? Surprisingly, in view of the degree to which it has been neglected, the present system of classification of psychiatric illness seems quite adequate for the simple addition of evil as a subcategory. The existing broad category of personality disorders currently covers those psychiatric conditions in which the denial of personal responsibility is the predominant feature. By virtue of their unwillingness to tolerate the sense of personal sin and the denial of their imperfection, the evil easily fit into this broad diagnostic category. There is even within this class a subcategory entitled 'narcissistic personality disorder'. It would, I believe, be quite appropriate to classify evil people as constituting a specific variant of the narcissistic personality disorder. ...

One related issue, however, must be addressed. ...

many of the evil people seen by psychiatrists are diagnosed as having ambulatory [non-disabling] schizophrenia. Conversely, many we call ambulatory schizophrenics are evil people. ... The reality of the matter is that the naming of evil is still in a primitive stage. Be that as it may, the time is right, I believe, for psychiatry to recognize a distinct new type of personality disorder to encompass those I have named evil. In addition to the abrogation of responsibility that characterizes all personality disorders, this one would be specifically distinguished by:

- (a) consistent destructive, scapegoating behaviour, which may often be quite subtle.
- (b) excessive, albeit usually covert, intolerance to criticism and other forms of narcissistic injury.
- (c) pronounced concern with a public image and self-image of respectability, contributing to a stability of life-style but also to pretentiousness and denial of hateful feelings and vengeful motives.
- (d) intellectual deviousness, with increased likelihood of a mild schizophrenic disturbance of thinking at times of stress.¹³⁷

Whether 'evil' can be used as a descriptive, diagnostic term is a matter for the psychiatric profession, though I would have thought that the strongly evaluative and even emotive elements properly associated with the term would tell against it. The term would certainly shift in meaning if it were to be used as a classification for mental illness. Peck defines evil as opposition to life. This

¹³⁷ Peck, MS, *People of the Lie*, Simon & Schuster, 1983, pp.128-9.

is close to the definition of evil in terms of malevolence which the friars used in coming to terms with the Aztec deities.

Evil, then, for the moment [as a working definition] is that force, residing either inside or outside of human beings, that seeks to kill life or liveliness. And goodness is its opposite. Goodness is that which promotes life and liveliness.¹³⁸

There is some congruity between traditional Christian values and the value commitments implicit in the ideals of health that guide the psychiatric profession. The psychiatric notion of a pathology of mental symptoms is already a strongly normative term, which might make the adoption of 'evil' as a category seem no more than an intensification of existing categories. Whatever the terminological outcome, Peck properly reminds us that some forms of narcissism, unchecked, can have devastating personal and social consequences, for example, in a political or military leader. He also links this discussion with the question of the role of parents in the development of schizophrenia in children¹³⁹. There is evil in the world, however difficult it is to define it satisfactorily; and intentional co-operation with evil behaviour is sinful, at least in Christian terms.

The Christian doctrine of original sin does accord with our general experience of the world as somehow broken. This brokenness does not mean that we can define sin in terms of general human characteristics or patterns of behaviour, whether as a general tendency towards self-centredness or towards listless inaction in the face of injustice or towards pride or towards violence or towards the arrogant domination of others. Original sin is an aspect of our experience of the revealed grace of God which itself becomes distorted when God is not explicitly in view. Pride and self-reliance, for example, may indeed be common basic ingredients in human attempts to live life without God. They are not obviously bad characteristics in themselves, so that it is only when their effect upon our relationship to God is taken into account that we can see why they might be considered an essential ingredient of sin. Similarly, if sin is understood in terms of human attempts to live life without God, there is plausibility in seeing narcissistic behaviour as sinful. This plausibility derives legitimately from the brokenness of relationships in which narcissism is a symptom and illegitimately from the conflation of the neurotic (and therefore unacceptable) character of specific narcissistic symptoms with the self-referring quality of all human experience in general.

The focus of the New Testament is largely upon the promised Kingdom of God, perfect and eternal, which is coming. The natural self would seem to be embedded in this present world which is passing away. When the Kingdom seems imminent, issues about natural endowments and natural developments are largely irrelevant. Who knows what perfections and glories will be the lot of those who are found anew in this coming Kingdom? The attempt to live this future life even now

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Footnote

amid the age that is passing away is possible and desirable, a worthy response to the overwhelming grace of God. Over the two thousand years since this radical message was first announced, the ardour of expectation has understandably cooled and Christians have found value in revisiting some of the developmental wisdom gained from attention to the patterns and conditions of this passing age. Christians have sponsored cultural formation and reformation. Throughout this cultural creativity, however, the suspicion of the natural self and the natural powers of this world has generally been maintained lest we forget the promise of the new heaven and the new earth.

At first glance, the world of shamanism seems completely innocent of all such convoluted ideas. Shamans live in communities embedded in the threatening and nurturing world of wild nature. The role of shamans is to contribute to the survival of their community through dealing with the mysterious world of spirit as it manifests itself in illness and in the natural environment. Self-doubt would seem a dangerous weakness and a distraction from the business at hand. Shamans exercise their wills in gaining help from the spirit world, however this is achieved. Ideas of good and evil are largely determined by the needs of the community. Basilov traces the development, among Siberian peoples, of a distinction between white and black shamans.

The categories of 'black' and 'white' shamanism formed gradually. At their heart, they are related to the conceptions of the 'upper' and 'lower' worlds, which the shaman was supposed to visit. Among the Altaians, a *kam* [shaman] who did not perform prayers to the sovereign of the underground realm, Erlik, was considered a 'white' shaman. He would appeal to the celestial deities and the 'pure' spirits of earth. A 'black' shaman was able to consort with various spirits. Nonetheless, the 'black' shamans were not believed apt to occasion harm.¹⁴⁰

Basilov goes on to show how black shamans in some areas were thought to bring harm to people, leading to the need to call in a white shaman to deal with this threat through a shamanic battle. More recently, he argues that white shamans have evolved into a priesthood, leaving the name of 'shaman' with those willing to associate with the spirits of the lower world, who also carry the opprobrium of the term 'black'. We should note that ideas of sinfulness have no relevance to this distinction between black and white shamans and that a separate judgement is made about the good or evil of what shamans do, presumably in terms of the perceived needs of the community. Healing is good, even if with the help of the powers of 'evil spirits'. Destroying other members of the community is evil, unless as punishment for evildoing. Shamans need to be powerful in order to carry out their role.

The movement from distortion and pathology towards healing and wholeness is found in the initiatory story of shamans, who typically encounter spirit through sickness and unbalanced behaviour, which then somehow turns into healing, insight and power. Throughout such stories,

¹⁴⁰ Basilov, VN, "Chosen by the Spirits", in Balzer, MM, Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia, M.E.Sharpe, London, 1990, p.36.

there is a commitment to the integrity of the experience and of the self which is the subject of the experience. In this context, anxious concerns about the natural self focus on unsatisfactory symptoms, not upon the resources for life and health that are naturally available to the self. General self-acceptance provides the base upon which specific unsatisfactory aspects of the self can be addressed. Self-love refers both to this self-acceptance and to the specific feeling of love for aspects of ourselves which can be viewed objectively, such as, for Narcissus, his beautiful reflected image. This general approach marks a major point of congruence between psychologically informed aspects of western culture and shamanism. It is also evident that there is tension between these ideas and the Christian doctrine of original sin.

There is a contrast between the strong stance of the shaman vis-a-vis the spirits and the humble stance of the Christian before God. This should not blind us to the underlying similarities, starting with the fact that both are encounters between humans and spirit experienced as other than human. Much of the difference in stance between Christians and shamans results from the relative power and holiness of the spirits encountered. Where shamans deal with spirits such as humans who have died, they use ordinary political and commercial patterns of interaction. If the shaman needs knowledge, this should somehow be paid for, just as the shaman gains the ability to ask for favours through providing various kinds of help to the spirits. By contrast, the God encountered in the Judeo-Christian tradition is not needy as we are needy. God is holy, meaning that encounters with God happen purely on terms set by God. Human needs and desires are quite secondary. Were it not that God is gracious to us, we would be lost.

Yet even within this sharp contrast, there are important similarities. Shamans learn to encounter the world of spirit and survive through help from specific spirit allies without whom they are helpless. This seems ambiguous, involving both grace from the ally and power from the shamans in gaining control, somehow, over the ally. The process of gaining allies is described in great detail by Carlos Castaneda¹⁴¹, who pictures it as a life-or-death struggle in which the outcome is by no means certain. Allies are spiritual beings which we encounter through becoming aware of them. Provided that we can stand in the face of these beings, we can somehow fix our will or intent upon them so that they respond to our questions and directions. Here the emphasis is upon the strength of the shaman. Nevertheless, we should note that the ally provides the shaman with entry into a previously forbidden world, which involves both enhanced power and a kind of grace. The Christian experience could be pictured as the gaining of one enormous ally purely through the grace of that ally, quite without any human element of control. In the practice of prayer, manipulating God is not possible and bargaining doesn't work too well either. Common sense tells us to pray for greater conformity to God's will and the empowering presence of God in our lives - or to cease to pray at all.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Castaneda, C, The Teachings of Don Juan & A Separate Reality, Simon and Schuster, New York.

There is, then, an important contrast in personal stance towards the world of spirit between shamanism and Christianity, though a contrast on the basis of significant common ground. Shamanism tends to adopt an ‘unbroken’ personal stance to the world of spirit where Christianity, in common with Judaism and Islam, adopts a ‘broken’ stance. “My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart” (Psalm 51:17). This apparently clear difference should not be overstated. Some shamans have been impressed by the dignity of Christian prayers and the respect with which Christians address God, so that they have adopted elements of Christian language, particularly in the respectful recognition they accord to spirit for things which they cannot achieve on their own. For example, Wallace Black Elk, who is explicit about not being a Christian, uses the language of humility to address “tunkashila’ (grandfather).

Tunkashila, have pity on me. I pray through the Chanunpa [sacred pipe] for my People, all life, for health and happiness. Grandfather, Grandmother, hear my prayer. I humble myself, help me.¹⁴²

Viewed from the standpoint of human encounters with the world of spirit, then, Christians and shamans do share significant common ground despite the differences between the traditions. There are major differences between the spirits encountered, though both traditions deal with spiritual encounters where a purification of the human participants is required. There are also significant differences in the status accorded to the natural self. There is some agreement that the created world is originally good yet somehow broken or distorted in our experience. At issue is the degree to which society’s ideologies, on the one hand, and the natural self, on the other, are implicated in the brokenness. It seems clear that Christian accounts of shamanic practices which are couched in terms of human sinfulness, idolatry and demon-worship are at best inappropriately one-sided. Comparable inadequacies can be found in Christian practices and there is significant positive spiritual validity in shamanic practices even when judged from a narrowly Christian perspective.

My early hearing of the story of Narcissus in the Christian schema of sin and punishment, with the emergence of self-love appearing as an idolatrous fixation upon a creaturely reality, would seem to be characteristic of recent Reformed Christian attitudes to the self and to selfishness. Narcissus’ removal to the banks of the River Styx is seen as death and punishment rather than the achievement of a place in the world of immortal spirit. This Christian stigmatization of self-love as guilt is not really sustainable. Self-absorption can be a factor in specific actions which we later discern as sinful. Repentance itself ultimately requires that we accept forgiveness, in which self-acceptance is implied. The natural self may be twisted by all sorts of factors, but it is that self which we are. It is the natural self through which we have to live our lives and through which we encounter God. Mysteriously, redemption purifies rather than destroys the natural self and all its elements. This purification removes our choice for destructive actions, not the feelings that alert us to the unsatisfactoriness of these actions.

¹⁴² Black Elk, Wallace, *Op.Cit.*, p.vi.

Interlude: Discerning the Spirits

R: I'm sorry, but I am going to need a simple explanation of what you are saying here, Sandy. Are we sinners before God or are we not?

S: Well, the answer to that is yes and no. The Christian gospel is that while we were still dead in our sins, Christ died for us. Through God's grace, we have forgiveness for the specific things that we have done wrong. This forgiveness re-establishes our relationship with God.

R: Well, that's all orthodox stuff. What was all that about mistrusting the natural self?

S: I am arguing about how we have applied orthodox Christian teaching to everyday life. Christianity has traditionally treated the natural self with deep suspicion because it prompts evil behaviour. I am arguing that this suspicion has been too global. We need to monitor what our natural self prompts us to do so that we can choose to follow the better suggestions. We need the energies of the natural self if we are to live our lives. The dynamics of purification of the self are part of Christian discipleship. This is where we need to listen to shamanic traditions, which are rich sources of insight into these dynamics.

J: I like the way you resist identifying specific human features as sinful. You show that a definition of sin in terms of a brokenness in our relationship with God allows us to see how sin opens the door to evil without falling into moralism.

R: What's wrong with a bit of moralism to challenge people to stop their wrongdoing?

J: Some 'challenges' to people who are caught in bad situations simply blame the victim, which does not usually help to improve things.

S: My main objection to moralism is that it is not really compatible with the Christian gospel. It is all too human to want to tell other people how they have got it wrong without acknowledging how we have also got it wrong. Even in pointing things these things out, we should know that we may stand in need of correction ourselves.

R: That's true, but you still haven't shown me how to accept my natural self without worrying about all my immoral impulses.

J: I thought Sandy made that fairly clear. Traditional Christian language seeks to pursue the root of evil deep into the self, as our angry and destructive impulses do come from somewhere. Our anger shows us that something is unacceptable, so that it is to be welcomed as a messenger, though we should not act thoughtlessly from anger. We also find generous and constructive impulses in

ourselves, so that we should avoid simple generalizations about the human self as all bad or all good. This allows us to use our constructive impulses to counter and control the destructive ones.

R: Are you saying that I should continue to worry about the bad impulses but not get worried about what sort of a person I am for having them?

S: Yes. That's how I understand the biblical teaching about human sin. God loves us all and so we are all people who can be in an active, positive relationship with God. Our natural selves are part of God's good creation, however distorted by specific wrongs in society and in our own lives. Being a Christian is a matter of belonging to a community which is seeking to develop this relationship with God. How God relates to other religious traditions is a mystery to me, because it is not mine to know. What I do know as a Christian is that God made the world and loves the world, which includes all people, all living creatures and all created spirits.

B: So why am I surprised to hear you talk like this? What should I make of all the condemnation that I have received from Christians for not being Christian and for communing with demonic spirits?

S: Have you never heard supportive comments from Christians? One judgemental statement will crowd out everything else. Still, the Judeo-Christian tradition does give warnings against witchcraft and magic. Practitioners of magic are warned against using spiritual powers for unworthy ends, which will amplify their negative impulses or demons. People are warned that they can become victimized or even demonized through contact with some of these spirits.

B: Let me get this straight. You are saying that your tradition warns against the shamanic spirit journey when encounters with evil spirits are involved because this is a form of magic?

S: No, not at all. I am saying that the warnings mostly relate to the ends for which such journeys are undertaken and to doing what the evil spirits suggest. I quite like the statement, 'To the pure, all things are pure', even though we don't usually meet such complete purity. I believe that we can survive encounters with evil spirits provided that we hold fast to good and valid intentions. This proviso can also be put in terms of the help of God's Holy Spirit. The warnings relate to an entry into this perilous terrain with unworthy intentions, whether as a shamanic practitioner or as a seeker for help.

B: Some Christians seem to think that any goals that we shamans choose are unworthy. Is this simply prejudice or does it flow from their assumptions about how we do things?

S: Both. They identify shamanism as a form of magic, defined as the psychic manipulation of the world in a controlling way. This fits snugly with the traditional understanding of sin as a non-trusting, self-willed approach to the world. It is also prejudiced, in not really listening to how you do things, which may or may not be manipulative.

R: I think I am beginning to understand what you people are saying. Are you wanting to make room for the specific discernment of spirits, without assuming that they are all good or all evil?

S: Yes.

J: Yes, that's what I want. We are really talking about the mystery of human evil; there is something deeply wrong with our world, particularly in certain times and places. We know that some individuals manifest a disturbing degree of malevolence and vicious behaviour. We find it very hard to track down the precise nature of this evil, let alone its origins. While it manifests itself in people, it does not seem to be adequately explained by the human choices or cultural patterns or biological structures that are involved. The traditional Judaeo-Christian picture of independent spiritual beings includes some which are concentrated agents of malevolence and viciousness. This way of thinking does help us to recognize the entrenched malevolence in some people and even in whole communities.

R: I don't understand why you say that.

J: Well, evil is a mystery to me. It is quite specific, manifesting in all kinds of cruelty, yet it is also general, showing some common features across many examples. I speculate that there is some definable common pattern in human nature which explains this commonality and helps us to see how it comes about. Yet massive research has so far failed to provide us with much. Looking at all the obvious natural factors of genetics and upbringing has not provided a reliable profile enabling us to predict which person will offend. Stories about the activities of evil spirits at least highlight the peculiar intensity of this malevolence, as well as the diminished self-control of these people.

R: You seem to be agreeing with me without agreeing with me.

J: Yes, that's right. I accept the usefulness of your Christian language about evil spirits in describing certain strange experiences involving spirit possession and the loss of personal self-control. I am not persuaded that there are independent metaphysical entities which cause these phenomena.

R: So what does happen to people in the grip of demonic forces?

J: I wish I knew! I don't doubt the reality of the demonic dimension as it shows up in human experience. Some people are caught in the grip of dehumanizing beliefs and practices over which they seem to have little control. What may start as a free choice can become a matter of addiction or coercion by powerful socio-spiritual forces for which 'evil spirit' is a powerful metaphor. I doubt the existence of a superhuman causality which transcends the human forces at work. While there are unanswered questions here, human evil seems a mysterious intensification of ordinary human failings rather than something completely inhuman.

S: So you regard inhumanity, in the forms of cruelty and ruthlessness, as all too human?

J: Yes, in the sense that these things show up in most human societies. Also, they can be seen as extensions of predatory animal behaviour.

R: We are capable of intensifying animal behaviour in ways not open to other animals. This produces our distinctive capacity for evil.

B: I think you are on the wrong track if you don't see the depth of our connections with the animals, Rachel. I don't know about your picture of independent spiritual beings, angelic or demonic, with distinctive roles in managing creation. The spirits that I meet are mostly deep aspects of nature. I don't mind if John wants to think of these as within me, as long as he doesn't think that 'I' am limited to what is inside my skin. We all participate in the one world, spiritually as well as physically. Western culture likes to simplify our mental functioning to what occurs within the confines of our conscious ego, but we are much more than that.

S: So are you saying that each of my mental images is not only part of a concept of something real, but that it activates my spiritual contact with that reality?

B: Potentially, yes, though we have our ways of minimizing this contact.

R: And maximizing it, through idolatrous worship. I suppose I do think that your nature spirits are some of the angels and demons of Christian tradition. It is the forces of Satan who mostly rule this world and oppose God, but maybe some nature spirits are guardian angels. Perhaps there are spiritual aspects of our physical bodies which are our guardian angels and our tempting demons.

J: Why should the one physical body give rise to such contrary spiritual forces?

R: Our physical body is a natural unity, but made up of many different parts. We need sight as well as sound, touch, taste and smell in order to make sense of the world. Spiritual struggle occurs where there are two or more forces in contention, such as our hunger for food and our need to act responsibly as a member of a group. For some people, their god is their belly¹⁴³.

B: Rachel, I don't understand why we can agree in so many spiritual judgements and yet so easily find ourselves on opposing sides.

R: We agree about the reality of spirits, but not about their ultimate nature and their intentions towards us. Why do evil spirits seem so interested in possessing people if they already have other physical beings to which they are essentially connected?

¹⁴³ Cf. Philippians 3:19.

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

B: Well, maybe spiritual dominance relates to eventual physical dominance. We are not separate from the life cycle of other species, just as they are not separate from our life cycle. This is pure speculation, but if your demons are intent upon sapping the human will to live, this could be to redress the ecological imbalances that have come about from human dominance. Maybe they have no interest in us rotting in hell, but they do have an interest in us rotting in the ground.

J: I am interested in your idea that evil spirits are antagonistic nature spirits, Beth. Do you really think that inner voices come from plants and animals?

B: Both the good and the bad, yes, though this is probably not the only source.

R: Malevolent and destructive behaviour clearly exists. Some people hear inner voices urging murder and suicide. Christian ministries involving prayer and deliverance seem sometimes to be effective in freeing people from bondage to these things, whether independently existing spirits are involved or not. What intrigues me is that shamanic practices may also be effective, like therapeutic counselling.

J: I am getting a picture of powerful spirits at work in troubled people. I do find it hard to build a case on the subjective experiences of such people.

S: The Christian Church has collective experience of this area through the use of the rite of exorcism. Judgements about exorcism are deeply divided, but it seems clear that something extraordinary is involved.

B: What has exorcism got to do with shamanism?

S: Wouldn't you see meeting and overcoming powerful and malevolent spirits as part of shamanic work?

B: Yes, but we approach powerful spirits with rather more respect than a Christian exorcist does.

R: How do you mean?

B: If a person is controlled by a powerful spirit, that person has somehow allowed this to happen. We might accept a call for help from that person in undoing the damage, but it would be unusual for us to focus on forcing the spirit out of the person.

R: Why don't you see that as the real need of the person?

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

B: We see this as a matter between the person and the spirit. Our approach is to strengthen the person to the point where they can deal with the spirit. It is quite different from the cases where the spirit is causing bodily illness, where we have procedures for removing it. As Sandy explained earlier, we need spirit helpers which are the same as the spirit causing the illness in order to do this.

R: Your spirits must be very different from the demons confronted by Christian exorcists.

B: Yes, indeed.

Exorcism

During the two years of research for this book, I was asked to present this work to a range of church groups. At a presentation in Darwin¹⁴⁴, I was asked what spiritual crises had occurred for me in this research. This question is interesting because it recognizes that any investigation of things spiritual is inevitably a spiritual journey in itself. The points of greatest significance in a spiritual journey are usually the points at which we are least in control. How we come through these situations usually determines the overall shape of the journey. The answer to the question asked of me in Darwin is simple; there was only one major crisis and it focused upon my appreciation of the reality of evil spirits.

In March 1996, my reading took me into a consideration of exorcism. I have had no direct experience with exorcism as such; my knowledge of it is from reading, films and biblical accounts, particularly the stories of Jesus healing people by casting out evil spirits. Two books (The People of the Lie, by M. Scott Peck¹⁴⁵ and Hostage to the Devil, by Malachi Martin¹⁴⁶) were important at that time in impressing upon me the inadequacy of my previous rationalistic ideas about evil spirits. An earlier draft of this book, which had been unfolding nicely, suddenly foundered at this point. I remember the peculiar feeling of spiritual exhaustion, in which I was not able to address the tasks of everyday life, including writing the book. I have suffered a much more minor version of the same thing in revisiting this material for the writing of this chapter. Two parallel processes, often unconscious, were going on for me while in this distracted state. One was an anxious review of my life for instances in which I have unwittingly been an agent supporting or not opposing the demonization of others. The other was a preoccupation with people close to me who have committed suicide. This was the overt shape of my spiritual crisis, which has eased with the completion of this writing.

Peck starts with the existence of people whom he would call evil.

We cannot begin to hope to heal human evil until we are able to look at it directly. It is not a pleasant sight. Many observed that my previous book, The Road Less Travelled, was a nice book. This is not a nice book. It is about our dark side, and in large part about the very darkest members of our human community - those I frankly judge to be evil. They are not nice people. But the judgement needs to be made. It is the principal thesis of this work that these specific people - as well as human evil in general - need to be studied scientifically.¹⁴⁷

Peck describes some people whom he met through his work as a psychiatrist, including one couple who pushed their teenage sons towards suicide, and he builds a descriptive profile (previously

¹⁴⁴ This conversation occurred while I was visiting Nungalinya College, Darwin, in 1996; I was asked to present a seminar on my work.

¹⁴⁵ Peck, MS, Op.Cit.

¹⁴⁶ Martin, M, Hostage to the Devil, HarperSanFrancisco, 1976/92.

¹⁴⁷ Peck, Op.Cit., p.10.

presented) which is both recognizable and compelling. He then goes on to raise the question of the existence of evil spirit. He tells us that, like the majority of educated westerners, he did not believe in the existence of the devil. In order to test this belief, he decided to go looking for cases of possession by an evil spirit. He eventually found two cases which he came to regard as involving Satanic possession.

The vast majority of cases described in the literature are those of possession by minor demons. These two were highly unusual in that both were cases of Satanic possession. I now know Satan is real. I have met it.¹⁴⁸

Peck gives us his eye-witness account of the successful exorcism of these two people with the clinical detail that his medical training has assisted him to note and record. He emphasizes that exorcism is analogous to major surgery and requires the same levels of preparation and consent from the 'patient' as does surgery. He offers the judgement that both people had a 'core personality' quite distinct from the possessing spirit.

While both these patients demonstrated blatantly evil secondary personalities, they were *not* evil people. I never experienced either of them as evil. Unlike Charlene [a person earlier profiled who was important in generating Peck's concept of the 'evil person'], they did not *feel* evil to me. Although I said that Charlene might have been a candidate for exorcism, it is likely she would not have been. I suspect that even if I had been able to tease apart her healthy from her sick self, I might have found her secondary personality to be the healthy one and her core personality to be evil. I am not sure that exorcism can be conducted with such a configuration.¹⁴⁹

Peck's analysis is in terms of multiple personality disorder, in which the body of the patient can be the vehicle of expression for more than one personality, which may have varying degrees of awareness of each other. The work of exorcism can then be seen in terms of the identification of a distinct, evil persona and its removal. When Peck says that he has met Satan, he is mainly referring to his encounter with this Satanic persona in these two patients during exorcism.

When the demonic finally spoke clearly in one case, an expression appeared on the patient's face that could only be described as Satanic. It was an incredibly contemptuous grin of utter hostile malevolence. I have spent many hours before a mirror trying to imitate it without the slightest success. I have seen that expression only one other time in my life - for a few fleeting seconds on the face of the other patient, late in the evaluation period. Yet when the demonic finally revealed itself in the exorcism of this other patient, it was with a still more ghastly expression. The patient suddenly resembled a writhing snake of great strength, viciously attempting to bite the team members. More frightening than the writhing body, however, was the face. The eyes were hooded with lazy reptilian torpor - except when the reptile darted out in attack, at which moment the eyes would open wide with blazing hatred. Despite these frequent darting movements, what upset me the most was the extraordinary sense of a fifty-million-year-old heaviness I received from this serpentine being. It caused me to despair of the success of the exorcism. Almost all the team members at both

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.183.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.194.

exorcisms were convinced they were at these times in the presence of something absolutely alien and inhuman. The end of each exorcism proper was signaled by the departure of this Presence from the patient and the room.¹⁵⁰

I see little reason to doubt the accuracy of Peck's reporting on the presenting features of these experiences. Such manifestations do indeed seem to fill out the Biblical, shadowy figure of Satan with a full persona. For practical and therapeutic purposes, the reality of this persona is quite enough to substantiate Peck's concern with evil in people as a palpable spiritual force. It is likely that this overt manifestation of the previously hidden evil persona was a vivid demonstration to the patient of what they were harbouring in themselves. Peck believes that, in the last analysis, it is the possessed person rather than the team of exorcists who expels the evil spirit.

Human free will is basic. It takes precedence over healing. Even God cannot heal a person who does not want to be healed. At the moment of expulsion both these patients voluntarily took the crucifix, held it to their chests and prayed for deliverance. Both chose that moment to cast their lots with God. Ultimately it is the patient herself or himself who is the exorcist.¹⁵¹

Peck suggests that the effect of the exorcism was to shift the patients from a situation of demonic possession to one of being under demonic attack.

The tempting, threatening, and frightening voices that each heard were at least as active afterward as before. But, as one patient said, 'Before, it was like I was a little embryo, totally surrounded and hidden by them so that I could not be me. Now I am me, and while I still hear the voices, they're coming from outside of me.' Or, as the other said, 'Before, the voices were in control of me; now I'm in control of them.'¹⁵²

That such a strengthening of these people had indeed taken place can be confirmed by their subsequent psychotherapeutic progress.

The voices only gradually faded away for these patients. But what was not gradual was their improvement. Given the severity of their psychopathology before their exorcisms, the rapidity of their progress to health is not explainable in terms of what we know about the ordinary psychotherapeutic process.¹⁵³

The evil persona was, in each case, perfectly capable of verbal dialogue.

The spirit I witnessed at each exorcism was clearly, utterly, and totally dedicated to opposing human life and growth. It told both patients to kill themselves. When asked in one exorcism why it was the Antichrist, it answered, 'Because Christ taught people to love each other'. When further questioned as to why human love was so distasteful, it replied, "I want

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.196.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.197.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.198.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

people to work in business so that there will be war'. Queried more, it simply said to the exorcist, 'I want to kill you'. There was absolutely nothing creative or constructive about it; it was purely destructive.¹⁵⁴

Peck's explanatory framework has a bet both ways, which is intellectually unsatisfactory as a general schema, yet plausible as a construct based on the experiences recounted¹⁵⁵. He is happy to talk in terms of 'evil spirit' for the evil persona, but he also thinks in terms of multiple personalities. The notion of multiple personality (a number of separate personalities serially manifesting in the one body) does provide the basis for an account of the exorcism of an evil persona which does not presuppose non-human spiritual agency. On this view, exorcism is no more than the banishment, temporary or long-term, of one persona from manifestation, analogous to someone learning to control their expression of temper.

Multiple personality is itself a controverted notion within psychology. The issue is not whether people can manifest distinct personalities under the pressure of changes in their immediate environment, but whether they do so without any consciousness or control of the process. We are here dealing with what must be a general human possibility. We all take on different personae in different circumstances. We can remain unconscious of the shifts that we make, while these shifts are obvious to others. Multiple personality seems to be an extreme version of these general human possibilities, typically associated with childhood trauma. The specific quality of the experience of multiple personality is evoked in autobiographical accounts by people who can look back from the perspective of integration after therapy. Consider the reflections of 'Joan Frances Carey'.

I had multiple personalities from infancy until I was almost thirty years old. My sense of identity changed drastically as I began to accept my diagnosis and progressed through successful treatment. Even my ability to say 'I' in a self-referential way is a relatively new experience for me. I have been integrated - well - for six years.

Before my integration, 'I' meant, at various times, any of twenty-four personalities. It's a confusing way to live and, with twenty-four points of view, a confusing tale to tell. My story is told here through the perspective of one major, growing, and changing personality - a personality who called herself Renee.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.204.

¹⁵⁵ A more theologically oriented case for acceptance of the existence of demons, in a traditional sense of the word, can be found in G.Twelftree, *Christ Triumphant*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1985.

"To a large extent general medicine, psychology and psychiatry have explained much of what was once called 'demon-possession'. However it is generally acknowledged by some quarters of the medical profession, and reinforced by the work of anthropologists that there is an unexplained residue of human experience so far unaccounted for so that the question of the existence of evil spirits or demons remains open. ...

So, the inability of the prevailing contemporary secular world-view to explain adequately the complex range of man's (sic) experience of evil, sickness and healing, along with the positive arguments for the existence of demons or evil spirits, leads us to conclude that it remains legitimate and meaningful for twentieth-century people to use such categories as 'demons', 'possession' and 'exorcism' even if less frequently and with different content to those who used them in the first century." *Ibid.*, pp.169-70.

¹⁵⁶ Casey, Joan Frances, with Wilson, L, *The Flock*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1991, Author's Note.

The story that emerges features memories held in the bundles of the different personalities. The separations would seem to have begun from an incident at the age of six months when Joan's mother deliberately trod on her hand. Three personalities were born at that moment: Missy, who hurt and wanted comfort, Joan Frances, who knew that Mummy was the source of all good things so that Joan Frances would just have to change in order to become acceptable to Mummy, and Jo, who hated her mother and wanted the love and acceptance of her (equally unsatisfactory) father. New personalities emerged when the external world seemed to require things from 'Joan' that she could not provide. For example, when her father made it clear to Jo that she was quite unsatisfactory to him for not having been a boy, the 'male' personality of Rusty was born. The Renee personality was born in adolescence to manage daily life when it became too complex for any of the existing personalities. This personality had more information about the other personalities than most because of this managerial role, which is probably why she was chosen as the narrator for the autobiography.

Anyone can walk a tightrope. All it takes is practice and luck.

I had the practice. For as long as I can remember, I had walked cautiously through life, careful to please whoever might be near. I was so expert that hardly anybody noticed I didn't have feelings or thoughts of my own.

Practice and luck. I used to be very lucky. School was easy; I never had a job that I couldn't handle. It used to be that everybody always liked me.

It was different now. Keith wanted us to separate. Maybe he didn't want to be married to anyone, certainly not to me.

I leaned back and jerked reflexively to gain my balance, startling myself awake. I was no longer sitting at my desk. The typewriter I had been working at continued to hum, but now I was ten feet away, sitting on the wide windowsill.

I had no memory of leaving my desk, of crossing the room, of climbing onto this perch. Nevertheless, I was now tucked against the old mullioned window, chilled by the March cold that seeped through the pane.

'Damn it,' I muttered, 'what's going on?' The blankness throbbed within, so I looked out at the gray urban sprawl. My life was centered here, at the University of Chicago.

I was working on a master's degree in political science. My lover was a biology professor; my job was secretary in his department. I could see my apartment, clearly visible in the afternoon sun.

Then I looked down.

'Jump!' I heard the voice, felt the nudge. 'Jump!'

As if I had been mentally rehearsing a part in a play, I envisioned myself pushing the large window open, hopping to my feet, pausing briefly in exhilaration, and then diving strong and hard at the parked cars five stories below.

I shook my head to flick away the mental scene and hopped back down quickly from the window, as though the ledge itself might compel me to leap.¹⁵⁷

Renee here recognizes the danger of committing suicide without in any way wanting to, becomes scared and has enough executive capacity to seek help.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

I continued to go twice weekly to see Lynn. The suicidal urges had ended, but the more I listened as the inside part of me talked, the more intrigued I became. The part of me who spoke without my input felt special, validated by Lynn's attention. Lynn's questions often made that inside part uncomfortable, because there seemed to be so much that that part didn't really remember. But for the first time I heard that part of me sound safe in saying, 'I don't know.' Lynn didn't call me a liar, as so many other people had, and she didn't laugh when that part of me who liked being called Jo admitted not knowing what clothes I was wearing without looking down to see.

I listened attentively but apathetically - interested but with no desire to act - and thought that Lynn must be incredibly naive. She acted as though she believed me. And her belief in me made me feel confused. After I left Lynn's office, I felt guilty about not doing a better job to control what I was saying.¹⁵⁸

The inadequacy of Renee's self-knowledge becomes apparent when the possibility of personal multiplicity is raised.

Early in my first appointment in April, Lynn told me that she suspected that I suffered from Multiple Personality Disorder. 'Oh, brother,' I thought, 'what's this lady's problem?' She might as well have told me that I was possessed by demons. I was more worried about her mental state than my own when she said that, but I refrained from expressing any derision. Professionals don't like their diagnoses questioned.

I spent the evening ticking off why I wasn't a multiple. Sure, I forgot things sometimes and failed to pay attention to everything I was doing. So did everybody else. Occasionally I heard myself saying something I didn't believe, something that seemed to pop out of nowhere. Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis explained it perfectly: we all have various parts - parent, adult, child - within us.

People said I had a flair for the dramatic, but what Lynn suggested was just plain weird. Multiple personality was some sort of mental illness. I certainly didn't need psychiatric care.

I was fine unless the pressure of doing so much or being rejected put me off balance. And I *had* done a lot. I had completed my B.A. at the University of Virginia in three and a half years - longer than I expected because Keith and I didn't have the money for me to take as many courses as I wanted each semester - *and* I worked full-time. I had interned with a state legislator, completing my teaching certification here in Chicago, was doing graduate study, again working full-time - and still pursuing my hobby of breeding, training, and showing springer spaniels. Now I was applying for high-school teaching jobs.

People called me compulsive, a workaholic, overenergized, an over-achiever, too intense, but no-one would call me crazy.¹⁵⁹

The outward competence of this person is most impressive, particularly in the light of the inward blocks against coherence. We should note that for such a person, the apparent removal of a personality due to the disapprobation of others is the most natural response. Personalities are designed to please rather than to resist, except where this is essential for coping with wider responsibilities. Psychologically sophisticated observers of exorcisms who see the phenomena in terms of multiple personality are therefore not surprised that a personality can be 'banished' through the interventions of others. The question is whether the needs that have been met by that

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

personality can be handled by other personalities. A further question is whether or not the banished personality is merely socially unacceptable and in no way demonic. It would be easy to mistake the temporary suppression of an unattractive personality for the exorcism of an evil spirit.

To the extent that each of the many personalities is somehow a form of the one human person, however limited in memory, role and social competence, no one personality is an evil spirit as such. It would seem that theoretically each personality could be independently attacked or possessed by a range of demons, or to use the secular language of psychology, take on specific pathological characteristics. It seems that the facts of multiple personality disorder do allow us to consider the possibility of the co-existence in the one person of a range of psychic entities or personalities as a normal human situation. What Peck presents as the 'evil personality' is in fact one of the person's personalities which has become possessed by evil spirit or deeply controlled by pathological symptoms, depending on your metaphysical preferences. The facts about multiple personality do not resolve the question of the nature of evil spirits considered as non-human spiritual entities.

The voice of demonic temptation does not come from what most of us would like to think of as our normal self. Nevertheless, we do use the language of our 'lower self' in describing the more unworthy thoughts that we entertain. Similarly, our good impulses are sometimes attributed to our 'higher self'. Is this the same reality as our 'guardian angel'? Some of these inner figures display uncanny knowledge and ability, whether benign or demonic. I am impressed by Peck's description of the 'extraordinary sense of a fifty-million-year-old heaviness' associated with the serpentine persona. There is a coherence and intentionality displayed by this personality such that it is natural to think of it as a distinct entity. What is systematically unclear is whether the entity is created, unconsciously, by the possessed individuals according to a 'Christian script' or whether the entity has an independent spiritual existence beyond this secondary personality.

In practice, we can work as if both viewpoints could be correct. If we can identify a secondary personality, it needs to be brought into the consciousness of the patient as something separate from them which can be confronted. The voice or voices of this personality need firstly to be reduced to voices heard by the person as external to themselves, even if inside their internal awareness. This is the normal situation of temptation or 'demonic attack' to which we all seem to be subject at various times of indecision and weakness. This process is aided by the clear picturing of the alien presence and voice as an entity which thereby is made into an object within consciousness. To this extent, it is helpful to work with the traditional idea of independent spiritual entities. Yet it is very frightening to be in the presence of a powerful, malevolent and independent spiritual entity. Without the aid of an even more powerful benevolent spiritual entity, we are all vulnerable because we find echoes for the demonic voice from within ourselves.

It is therefore a source of mental strength to think that it is possible that such entities are unreal, at the same time as we picture them clearly. The idea that they are ultimately events within our awareness over which we potentially have control is encouraging. This is to call upon the powers

of our own reason and western common sense. A more Christian approach builds upon this foundation by also calling upon the power of God in prayer. To the extent to which we find ourselves doubtful of our human ability to deal with the unwelcome entity, we need positive spiritual help which in Christian terms is available through prayer and faith in God. This prayer can at times seem no more substantial than the demonic images that it opposes; sometimes prayer seems to be empty words. What is mysterious is that the spiritual world does seem to respond to these human thoughts and actions.

...it is terribly important to understand that Satan is a spirit. I have said that I have met Satan, and this is true. But it is not tangible in the way that matter is tangible. It no more has horns, hooves and a forked tail than God has a long white beard. Even the name, Satan, is just a name we have given to something basically nameless. Like God, Satan can manifest itself in and through material beings, but it itself is not material, nor is it even its manifestations. In one case described it manifested itself through the patient's writhing serpentine body, biting teeth, scratching nails, and hooded reptilian eyes. But there were no fangs, no scales. It was, through the use of the patient's body, extraordinarily and dramatically and even supernaturally snakelike. But it is not itself a snake. It is spirit. Herein lies an answer, I suspect, to a question that has been asked through the ages: Why do demonic spirits have such an attachment to bodies? During one of the exorcisms I witnessed the exorcist attempted to so enrage Satan that it would leave the possessed's restrained body to attack him, the exorcist. The maneuver did not work. Despite its obvious homicidal fury at the exorcist, nothing happened. And slowly it dawned on us that the spirit either could not or would not leave the patient's body under such conditions. This led us to two conclusions. One ... is that ultimately the patient had to be the exorcist. The other is that *Satan has no power except in a human body.*¹⁶⁰

Malachi Martin gives us grounds to think that Peck is perhaps too sanguine here. Father Gerald, one of the exorcists whose story is told¹⁶¹, suffered just such a physical attack from the possessing spirit. Injuries were inflicted on him which caused his death within a year and interrupted the exorcism for about four weeks¹⁶². Martin presents the view that, in his discussions with the evil spirit, Father Gerald was lured into the trap of confronting the spirit in his own person rather than as the authorized agent of Jesus and his Church.

Martin's book is based upon the extensive experience of the Roman Catholic Church with exorcism¹⁶³. He presents five case studies (all from New York State) in which he was able to interview all the principals involved and some of the other people who were present at the exorcism. In addition, he had access to the tape recordings made at each of these events. He gives a biography of each exorcist as well as of the exorcee. While he would agree with Peck that no one

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.206.

¹⁶¹ Martin, *Op.Cit.*, pp.173-248.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.173-7.

¹⁶³ In August 1999, I was told by a Roman Catholic bishop that his church had introduced a revised liturgy for exorcism which did not involve the direct dialogue with the possessing spirit that is such a central feature of these accounts. Martin's book certainly provides evidence to support that view that the previous rite was too hazardous for the exorcist.

can undo the effects of a conscious relinquishment of the will and acceptance of a possessing spirit except the possessed person, Martin stresses the crucial importance of the exorcist in giving the possessed person the possibility of regaining self-control. He also shows how real the risks are for the exorcist and for all present. There is a very genuine requirement for self-sacrificing courage in any attempt at exorcism. These stories show us how the exorcist places his (in this context) own life in jeopardy by confronting the entity which controls the possessed victims. As the crucial intervention by the exorcist is to bring the power of Christ to bear upon the evil spirit through prayerful invocation, this intention is severely tested.

Exorcism is a rite of last resort for the Church. The full gamut of medical and psychiatric possibilities are exhausted before a decision for exorcism is taken.

They [the investigating authorities of the Catholic Church] believe that there is an invisible power, a spirit of evil; that this spirit can for obscure reasons take possession of a human being; that the evil spirit can and must be expelled - exorcised - from the person possessed; and that this exorcism can only be done in the name and by the authority and power of Jesus of Nazareth. The testing from the Church's viewpoint is as rigorous in its search as any medical or psychological examination.

In the records of Christian Exorcism from as far back as the lifetime of Jesus himself, a peculiar revulsion to symbols and truths of religion is always and without exception a mark of the possessed person. In the verification of a case of possession by Church authorities, this 'symptom' of revulsion is triangulated with other physical phenomena frequently associated with possession - the inexplicable stench; freezing temperature; telepathic powers about purely religious and moral matters; a peculiarly unlined or completely smooth or stretched skin, or unusual distortion of the face, or other physical and behavioural transformations; 'possessed gravity' (the possessed person becomes physically immovable, or those around the possessed are weighted down with a suffocating pressure); levitation (the possessed rises and floats off the ground, chair or bed; there is no physically traceable support); violent smashing of furniture, constant opening and slamming of doors, tearing of fabric in the vicinity of the possessed, without a hand laid on them; and so on.¹⁶⁴

Many of these signs occur in the five exorcisms reported in detail. I find the telepathic powers about religious and moral matters to be particularly compelling as an indication that we are dealing with something beyond the bounds of human possibility laid down by western common-sense. If we are dealing with 'another personality created by the individual' rather than a demonic entity, this personality has acquired a degree of psychic power. The demonic persona shows knowledge of private matters known only to the person concerned, leaving us with the enigma of an entity (human or non-human) that not only has this knowledge but is intent upon deploying it as a weapon for maximum antagonistic effect.

It is up to the exorcist to make sure that his assistants are not consciously guilty of personal sins at the time of the exorcism, because they, too, can expect to be attacked by the evil spirit, even though not so directly or constantly as the exorcist himself. Any sin will be used as a weapon.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

The exorcist must be as certain as possible beforehand that his assistants will not be weakened or overcome by obscene behavior or by language foul beyond their imagining; they cannot blanch at blood, excrement, urine; they must be able to take awful personal insults and be prepared to have their darkest secrets screeched in public in front of their companions. These are routine happenings during exorcisms.¹⁶⁵

Quoting a priest whom he calls Father Conor, Martin presents the process of exorcism in terms of stages which can be taken as a guide by exorcists.

Conor, as I call him, spoke of *Presence*, *Pretense*, *Breakpoint*, *Voice*, *Clash*, and *Expulsion*. The events and stages these names signify occur in nine out of every ten exorcisms.¹⁶⁶

The Presence manifests as a feeling, possibly evoked in response to the intention for exorcism.

From the moment the exorcist enters the room, a peculiar feeling seems to hang in the very air. From that moment in any genuine exorcism and onward through its duration, everyone in the room is aware of some alien *Presence*.

Invisible and intangible, the *Presence* claws at the humanness of those gathered in the room. You can exercise logic and expel any mental image of it. You can say to yourself: 'I am only imagining this. Careful! Don't panic!' And there may be a momentary relief. But then, after a time lag of bare seconds, the *Presence* returns as an inaudible hiss in the brain, as a wordless threat to the self that you are. Its name and essence seem to be compounded of threat, to be only and intensely baleful, concentratedly intent on hate for hate's sake and on destruction for destruction's sake.

In the early stages of an exorcism, the evil spirit will make every attempt to 'hide behind' the possessed, so to speak - to appear to be one and the same person and personality with its victim. This is the *Pretense*.

The first task of the priest is to break that *Pretense*, to force the spirit to reveal itself openly as separate from the possessed - and to name itself; for all possessing spirits are called by a name that generally (though not always) has to do with the way that spirit works on its victim.¹⁶⁷

The evil spirit cannot be exorcised until this Pretense is shattered, probably because the breaking of the Pretense means the beginning of a clear separation of the person from the possessing spirit. It may be that the clear emergence of a persona quite different from that of the possessed person assists the person to mobilize his or her will against this entity.

...as the *Pretense* begins to break down, the behaviour of the possessed usually increases in violence and repulsiveness. It is as though an invisible manhole opens, and out of it pours the unmentionably inhuman and the humanly unacceptable. There is a stream of filth and unrestrained abuse, accompanied often by physical violence, writhing, gnashing of teeth, jumping around, sometimes physical attacks on the exorcist.

A new hallmark of the proceedings enters as the *Breakpoint* nears, and ushers in one of the more subtle sufferings the exorcist must undergo: confusion. Complete and dreadful

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

confusion. Rare is the exorcist who does not falter here for at least a moment, enmeshed in the peculiar pain of apparent contradiction of all sense.

The *Breakpoint* is reached at that moment when the *Breakpoint* has finally collapsed altogether. The voice of the possessed is no longer used by the spirit, though the new, strange voice may or may not issue from the mouth of the victim.¹⁶⁸

The new voice typically sounds alien and inhuman, referring to the possessed person as a separate being. This voice is not, however, what Father Conor refers to as the 'Voice'.

The *Voice* is an inordinately disturbing and humanly distressing babel. The first few syllables seem to be those of some word pronounced slowly and thickly - somewhat like a tape recording played at subnormal speed. You are just straining to pick up the word and a layer of cold fear has already gripped you - you know this sound is alien. But your concentration is shattered and frustrated by an immediate gamut of echoes, of tiny, prickly voices echoing each syllable, screaming it, whispering it, laughing it, sneering it, groaning it, following it. ...

If the exorcism is to proceed, the *Voice* must be silenced. It takes an enormous effort of will on the part of the exorcist, in direct confrontation with the alien will of evil, to silence the *Voice*. The priest must get himself under control and challenge the spirit first to silence and then to identify itself intelligibly.

As in all things to do with Exorcism of Evil Spirit, the priest makes this challenge with his own will, but always in the name and by the authority of Jesus and his Church. To do so in his own name or by some fancied authority of his own would be to invite personal disaster. ...

Usually, at this point and as the *Voice* dies out, a tremendous pressure of an obscure kind affects the exorcist. This is the first and outermost edge of a direct and personal collision with the 'will of the Kingdom', the *Clash*.¹⁶⁹

The Kingdom here refers to the Kingdom of Satan. The detailed stories provide intriguing but dreadful glimpses of what this Kingdom may be like.

Painful as it will be for him, the priest must look for the *Clash*. He must provoke it. If he cannot lock wills with the evil thing and force that thing to lock its will in opposition to his own, then again the exorcist is defeated.

The issue between the two, the exorcist and the possessing spirit, is simple. Will the totally antihuman invade and take over? Will it, noisome and merciless, seep over that narrow rim where the exorcist would hold his ground alone, and engulf him? Or will it, unwillingly, protestingly, under a duress greater than its single-track will, stop, identify itself, cede, retire, disappear, and be volatilized back into an unknown pit of being where no man wants to go ever?

Even with all the pressure on him, and in fullest human agony, if the exorcist has got this far, he must press home. He has gained an advantage. He has already forced the evil spirit to come out on its own. If he has not been able to until now, he must finally force it to give its name. And then, some exorcists feel, the exorcist must pursue for as much information as he can. For in some peculiar way, as exorcists find, the more an evil spirit can be forced to reveal in the *Clash* and its aftermath, the surer and easier will be the *Expulsion* when the

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.20-1.

moment comes. To force as complete an identification as possible is perhaps a mark of domination of one will over another.¹⁷⁰

As well as establishing domination, this quest for information builds a more complete picture for the possessed person of the action of the evil spirit and of their past acquiescence, which makes their choice for future freedom increasingly clear. One thing that makes the work of an exorcist so difficult is the lying nature of evil spirit. After enduring hours of Pretense, lies and manipulations of the truth, we can wonder how exorcists recognize when the evil spirit finally tells truth in submission. It is perhaps important to stress that this discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Exorcism itself is a work of the Holy Spirit which requires the full and willing co-operation of the humans involved. We are here in the presence of spiritual mysteries which remain opaque to us despite exhaustive detail being given.

Exorcists build up a detailed picture of how the process of demonization takes place. We should note the importance of the conscious invitation or invocation of spirit in initiating a relationship which may prove to be a matter of demonic possession. Choosing to do wrong is also an open invitation to the entry of evil spirits. Martin offers a four-stage account of the process of demonic possession from Father Conor.

First, the actual *entry point*, the point at which Evil Spirit enters an individual and a decision, however tenuous, is made by the victim to allow that entry.

Then, a stage of *erroneous judgements* by the possessed in vital matters, as a direct result of the allowed presence of the possessing spirit and apparently in preparation for the next stage.

Third, the *voluntary yielding of control* by the possessed person to a force or presence he (sic) clearly feels is alien to himself and as a result of which the possessed loses control of his will, and so of his decisions and his actions.

Once the third stage is secure, extended control proceeds and may potentially reach the point of completion - perfect possession.¹⁷¹

His concern with such processes as the ones taught by Harner is that, in the absence of spiritual protection, they provide clear opportunity for demonic spiritual entry.

In the context of Possession, all disposing factors [such as seances or open-ended meditative practices] produce within a person a condition of those two faculties of the soul - mind and will - that is most aptly described as an *aspiring vacuum*. *Vacuum*, because there is created an absence of clearly defined and humanly acceptable concepts for the mind. *Aspiring*, because there is a corresponding absence of clearly defined and humanly acceptable goals for the will.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.436.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.xxi.

Spiritual individuals are tempted to think that they are superior to common morality. The desire for psychic powers is itself dubious, as is illustrated by the case of Carl¹⁷³. Martin characterizes demonic possession in terms of a recognizable loss of humanness which isolates the victim from easy and positive communication with other people. Our highest ideals, particularly when linked with our desire for power, can be twisted and corrupted by evil spirits.

Martin's account of exorcism stresses the clash of wills between the exorcist and the dominant evil spirit and the extreme nature of the procedure. A more clinical approach is proposed by Peter Horrobin, director of Ellel Ministries¹⁷⁴. He prefers the term 'deliverance ministry' for the freeing of people from demonic possession and control, using the term 'exorcism' for the expulsion of demonic holds upon places, buildings and objects.¹⁷⁵ His model is that it is necessary to minister to people in the power of the Holy Spirit and in full reliance upon the biblical promises and examples. Unless a person is fully committed to Jesus and is living a clean life, they cannot be involved in deliverance ministry. The ministry itself requires that the person lay hold of the promises of God and commit themselves to live a godly life. Deliverance is seen as a late stage in a process of cleaning up the life of the person, which progressively removes the rights by which demons claim access. The minister, claiming the authority of Christ, prayerfully addresses the evil spirit and orders it to leave. This can happen in a quite straightforward manner when the preparation has been thorough.

When Jesus told the disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons, I believe he intended the disciples to do just that - heal the sick and cast out demons! However, in common with most of my contemporaries who were nurtured and reared in the post-war church, I was taught nothing about the deliverance ministry.¹⁷⁶

What I like about Horrobin's approach is that it is based upon ten years of practical experience in deliverance ministry with teams of trained people. He offers us the fruits of a rich experience, with highly detailed guidelines. He has clearly made contact with the real struggles and sufferings of those who have come to his agency for ministry. His concept of the demonic recognizably touches addictions, compulsions and destructive behaviour that frequently resist the normal forms of medical treatment and prayer ministry. Perhaps most significantly, he stresses the need for teaching about Christian discipleship as the basis for prayer and deliverance. We need to know what the promises of God are if we are to lay claim to them. His interpretation of Scripture is very literal and conservative. This is in keeping with his focus upon purity of teaching and of life.

I saw that even though we did have to take up authority over the powers of darkness to cast out demons, it was the truth that Jesus taught that had the potential to set people free. But

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.321-406.

¹⁷⁴ Ellel Ministries is based in Britain. An account of its history is given in Horrobin, P, *Op.Cit.*, pp.9-15.

¹⁷⁵ Horrobin, P, *Op.Cit.*, p.193.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 1, p.17.

that truth had to be taught in such a way that people were not bored by dry theology or left feeling they had been rejected or condemned by a God who was far too distant to be interested in them. They had to be captivated by the love of a God who had made such provision for them, in spite of the rebellion of sin that was in their hearts. And it worked - the teaching struck home and miracles of healing began to take place.¹⁷⁷

He is able to tell stories of encounters with spiritual entities that speak through people before departing, as in stories of Jesus' deliverances and in Peck and Martin's stories.

There was a time, some years ago, when I was preaching in a fairly typical Anglican Church. I was five minutes into my sermon and beginning to teach about the power of the Name of Jesus over all the powers of darkness, when a lady stood up on her pew and started shouting at me, 'Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!' The demons within her could not stand what was being said.

She tried to tear a Bible up into small pieces to throw at me, but then the Holy Spirit fell upon her and she, like the man in Capernaum, was thrown down on the floor and finished up lying between the pews, with her head on a hassock, before she was delivered of an evil spirit! That church has never been the same since! Her deliverance marked a major turning point in the life of the church, which has since become a focus for renewal, personal counselling and healing ministry in the district.

Later that day there was a somewhat challenging discussion in the church about whether or not Christians could have demons. In the middle of the debate this lady got up, came to the front, took over the microphone and ended the discussion with one of the most profoundly brief statements on the subject I have ever heard. 'Now listen' she said, 'I'm your church secretary. I've been born again five years, and I didn't think I had a demon, but I did. And now I don't, so there!'¹⁷⁸

I was privileged to participate in a three day workshop on deliverance ministry led by Peter Horrobin and his team in September 1996. It was for me an ecumenical experience, as most of the participants were conservative evangelical and charismatic Protestants. I had less trouble with the teaching about demons than I did with the narrow and categorical teaching about sins. I can accept that, for people who have been very lost and who need to put their life on a morally and spiritually firm foundation, it is proper to offer them as clear a path as possible. I also accept that we need to exercise great care in any departures from traditional teachings. Horrobin himself recognizes the danger of demonic religious spirits that take Christian forms. Narrow moral teachings in the church frequently lose sight of the love of God upon which they are based, so that we cling to the Law and lose the Gospel¹⁷⁹. I am also, unlike Horrobin, in the liberal stream of the church with respect to the interpretation of the Bible. I take the literal text very seriously, but within its historical context. What impresses me about Horrobin's interpretation of the texts involving deliverance ministry is that he can show parallels between what is in the text and what he and his team have experienced in their ministry.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 2, p.34.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, p.88.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, p.73.

A woman on one of our training courses had a streaming cold which was clearly causing her some distress. When I asked her how long she had suffered from it, she shocked me with her reply, 'Twenty-five years!'. The condition was medically diagnosed as rhinitis, a chronic form of sinusitis, which necessitated her using two to three boxes of tissues every single day. ...

A few minutes counselling established that her aunt had died twenty-five years previously and that her aunt had also suffered from sinusitis. Clearly the spirit of infirmity that had afflicted the aunt had transferred to the niece at death. I addressed directly the spirit of infirmity that had come from the aunt, in much the same way as Jesus must have dealt with the 'fever' in Simon's mother-in-law.

Immediately the demon manifested itself and she began to blow out all the mess from her sinuses. Within a few minutes she was completely healed as the demon left her. That night she had the first uninterrupted night's sleep for twenty-five years and later in the year she wrote to me saying that her consumption of tissues had fallen from two to three boxes a day to just one in six months.¹⁸⁰

Horrobin is quick to point out that not all sinusitis, or the particular symptoms of other deliverance stories, are demonically controlled. The point is that some are. There are some things which Horrobin is prepared to generalize about; pressure for suicide is one.

In our experience there is always a demonic dimension to suicide attempts or desires. In most cases the person has been so hurt by the way he (sic) has been abused or treated that the future seems utterly hopeless. And if there is no hope for tomorrow, it is but a small step towards saying, 'I might as well die today'. In these cases the demonic entry point is invariably the trauma or pain associated with the experiences a person has been through.¹⁸¹

Horrobin refers with approval to C.S.Lewis' warning not to ignore the devil nor to give him too much attention¹⁸². This is important advice because, as we have seen, our primary attention should be upon God. To be too scared of the devil is to magnify his power over us. Denying the existence of the devil also leaves us vulnerable to demonic influence and possibly control. I am now ready to admit that the biblical language of 'evil spirits and demons' does refer to clear features of human experience with which we need to deal, though this should not lead us to succumb to the triumphalist Christian demons of moralism, fundamentalism and legalism through anxious desire for security in the face of spiritual threat.

One of my friends committed suicide after six years of struggle in coming to terms with apparently buried memories involving sexual abuse by her father, with associated scenes of satanic ritual and infanticide. She was unsure whether to treat these scenarios as memories or as fantasies; it seems that either way, suicide became attractive. She presumably heard internal voices which used these scenarios to attack and ultimately destroy her ability to see life as viable. She suffered a sad and

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, pp.145-6.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp.79-80.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1, p. 22.

mysterious breakdown of her defences against mental trauma. For Peter Horrobin, she was the victim of demonic attack that achieved its aim.

There would seem to be that in us which rises to attention in the presence of stories of horrific abuse and satanic orgies, something which, however covertly, lusts after such possibilities. One voice says “Did they really do *that*”? Another voice says that it is all impossibly evil and not even to be entertained in thought. Yet another voice says that it is all quite natural and a shame only that people have made honest, biological sex and dominance into something dirty. Another voice says that ordinary people are not at all like that - but what if they are? Another voice says that my friend had it right, because life is not worth living when such abuse and betrayal can exist. It is deeply confusing at a number of levels - and another voice says that confusion is a mark of demonic presence. In the story of my friend’s experience, we would seem to be witnessing ‘evil spirit’ afflicting and destroying a good person. ‘Evil spirit’ here refers to a disturbing element within the psyche of an individual person, whether this is thought to be an independent spiritual entity or not. It is both confusing and perilous to become transfixed by what such an element presents to us. One curious aspect of all this is that, in the enigmatic and mysterious territory of spirit, specific images acquire unnatural power both to heal and to hurt.

Some Christians attempt to deal with the figure of Satan by pointedly ignoring him and refusing to allow his name to be mentioned. My difficulty with this strategy (apart from commitment to discussion as a method for thinking about hard questions) is that the idea of Satan can become locked away in the shadow of the individual consciousness of pious believers where it may gain strength. The strategy is correct in seeing that the very image and idea of Satan poses a threat to Christian faith and that discussion amplifies all this. It is also correct in relying on the power of the positive to carry us through situations of demonic attack; prayerful concentration upon God does bring the light of divine energies into our lives, showing up what is lurking in the shadows. The strategy is flawed if it leads us to refuse to discuss resources for resisting demons when we meet them. Stories of suicide show the spiritual and physical risks that dubious ideas can represent.

I have always resisted the notion that Satan is an actual spiritual entity. I know that for some Christians, this admission simply indicates how successful Satan has been in deceiving me. I use the word ‘resisted’ rather than ‘denied’ because my view has been agnostic rather than clearly negative. I continue to be fully persuaded that there are forces of evil at work in the world, though these forces are mostly visible in blatantly destructive events in which ultimate agencies and motivations defy comprehension. Satan features in the New Testament as a spiritual figure leading hordes of demons in instigating human opposition to Christ and his church¹⁸³, as well as in the victimization of possessed people. I am not comfortable with the reductionist conflating of Satan with the actual evil thoughts and deeds in people, as there are additional dimensions discernibly at work. Cultural patterns and genetic makeup play a part here; I see value in retaining the mythic

¹⁸³ For an historically elaborated account of Satan as a shadow figure created along with the figure of Christ, cf. Pagels, E, *The Origin of Satan*, Random House, NY, 1995.

perspective which includes all these dimensions and more. Nevertheless, prior to undertaking this study, I have not felt compelled to assert a fuller reality to Satan than that of this image, which is part of the general biblical message calling us to follow Christ.

My view of the reality of Satan and of evil spirits as distinct entities has now shifted to a third, intermediary position. There is some kind of reality behind those voices and numinous images that we experience in consciousness as other than ourselves. These voices and images hover mysteriously on the margins of our experience and do seem to have an intentionality of their own. It is systematically tantalizing that we lack ultimate knowledge of the reality behind our images and other experiences. The common sense understanding that inner experiences are all dissociated aspects of ourselves emerging from our own unconscious activity is a good explanation. Yet if they are our own construction, how do they come to be encountered as such distinct entities over against 'us'? Alternatively, if they are genuinely independent spiritual entities, how do they come to be so intimately entangled with our own thoughts and so dependent upon our mental actions when our intentions are clear and strong?

For practical purposes, I now think that much the same strategies are appropriate whichever metaphysical view is adopted. Practically, we should deal with what we see and hear in ways which preserve our integrity and which respect the truth as we know it. Even if the memories of my friend do refer to her lived experiences of satanic ritual and sexual abuse by her father, we are no closer to resolving the metaphysical question concerning evil spirits. We can tell the story in terms of human actions and their horrific meaning with or without the idea of demonic spiritual agency. The same is true if we are dealing with her childhood fears and fantasies remembered in adulthood or with her freshly experienced adult 'false memories'. What we see in my friend's story is the power of the nexus between abuser and victim, even in the reduced form of graphic images. We also see the damage that these mental images can cause when they take root in a person's sense of reality.

Using the language of demonic agency in connection with such images and voices is helpful in noting their apparent objectivity and controlling power for the person experiencing them. It also suggests a wider context of meaning in which to understand and hopefully resist them. Spiritual realities seem somehow to hide even within the specific experiences in which they manifest themselves. It remains unclear whether a demonic persona, which may even verbally identify itself as such, is governed by an independent demonic entity or whether it is somehow created by the person in whom it manifests. The rationalistic doubt that we are encountering anything more serious than our own thoughts in dramatic guise cannot be removed. It therefore seems to me appropriate to deal with whatever is before us in complete spiritual seriousness (which includes the grace of humour and levity) and to recognize that a demonic persona manifesting in an otherwise ordinary person is a fact of human experience with which we may need to deal. In dealing with such realities, we should avail ourselves of whatever metaphysical views seem most applicable to what we are experiencing, while recognizing that we may also need the resources of theoretical insight and practical strategy that are contained in other views.

Interlude: Demons

J: Well, the detailed stories are riveting, Sandy, but they prompt a whole new set of questions without resolving anything significant. Peck's account of the snakelike persona must have been terrifying to face; yet we can all mimic the physical action of a snake if we choose. I do so every morning to relieve a painful stiffness caused by spinal degeneration. I know I wasn't there, but the overwhelming feelings of evil in Peck's account do seem like shadow projections to me.

R: If you met God face to face - and lived - you would probably analyze the experience in terms of your ecstatic feelings. Do you ever admit to participating in spiritual realities, John?

J: Oh, yes, but I am not ready to mistake a beautiful sunset for the presence of God just because it makes me feel exalted. I think that we encounter spiritual evil in the terror-inducing images of our deepest fears rather than in dramatic physical movements.

R: The 'dramatic physical movements' induce terror in me. An encounter is more than the feelings or the particular physical movements. You miss the vital points with all this analysis. Please talk about what is really going on here.

J: That's what I am trying to do. There is an encounter here, but whether it is an encounter with evil spirit, or whether it is no more than a peculiar encounter with a disturbed human being, is unclear to me. The exorcism stories seem like the ritualized social rejection of a vicious persona. This could be a recipe for further trauma if the needs around which this persona formed are not touched.

S: I sympathize with John in wondering how we can tell what dimensions of invisible spirit may be active in particular situations. The source of the energy which animates the person into intensely hostile, snakelike behaviour is transcendent, in the sense that it lies beyond what we can see and touch. This source may lie in a spiritual being which is an entity separate from the human person whose body is animated or it may lie within the person.

B: I don't agree that spiritual sources of energy are always invisible to us. I find it hard to comment upon events at which I was not present, but I am doubtful about your Christian reading of these exorcisms. I notice that you didn't look at any shamanic parallels here.

S: I know that some people can see more deeply than others, but my point is that ultimate sources are beyond our perception, no matter how much of the manifest energy and

behaviour is observed. I really don't know what would count as shamanic parallels, Beth. Perhaps you can enlighten me.

B: The animalistic symptoms might have had more healing potential than was discerned. Alternatively, it is possible that the exorcists were encountering spiritual entities associated with the dark side of our collective dreaming which manifested in the afflicted individuals. Shamans sometimes encounter destructive entities which I would equate with your Christian idea of demons. These frequently seek to dominate. Without spiritual strength and loving support for the afflicted individual, it is very hard to survive such encounters intact. But what these exorcistic stories most likely tell about are the spirits of the dead who attach themselves to us. The exorcists that you have introduced do very well, considering the depth of their fears and their ignorance about what they were encountering.

R: It seems self-evident to me that such extraordinary behaviour can only be explained in terms of the activities of a malevolent spiritual being.

J: If I were thinking primarily as a participant, I could find these viewpoints helpful. We need the clarity of a single point of view when we have to act in emotionally fraught situations. Yet Beth suggests more than one framework in which to approach these strange manifestations. For myself, I prefer to think in terms of 'multiple personality' and 'expanded human psychic perceptions', which don't require us to add extra-human spiritual entities to the metaphysical furniture of the world.

R: It is your stance as a participant that I care about. I expect that your explanations will improve as your spiritual discernment develops.

J: Maybe. I am not very optimistic about spiritual discernment, except as the mystical illumination of a person. Historically, it seems to fill in the gaps for powerful religious oppressors who cannot prove their case in more ordinary terms. The witch-finders, judges and juries who were called upon to administer laws against witchcraft are a cardinal example.

B: Genuine spiritual discernment is no worry to me. You are alerting us to what can happen when unspiritual people are coerced by social pressure into acting on their fears.

J: Surely there is not such a clear line to be drawn between spiritual and unspiritual people, Beth.

B: You draw whatever lines you like, John. For me, there is all the difference in the world between people who are driven by their fears and people who rise above them. Shamans

are made by finding new life on the other side of death. This is a matter of experience, not hope.

J: The original Christian view of God came from the disciple's experience of the resurrection of Jesus.

B: I do wonder about Christians who believe without having such an experience themselves. Anyway, the point is that when spirit restores you after death, you find yourself on the other side of the most evil possibility of all.

R: The resurrection of Jesus is not merely another visionary experience, Beth.

S: No, but maybe we Christians should see God at work in visionary experiences of life beyond death whether they wear a Christian label or not, Rachel.

R: The name of Jesus is more than a label.

S: Yes, but we can't put limits on where the risen Jesus may act. Anyway, we seem to be dealing with the actions of other spirits which are agents of God. The really interesting and difficult question is whether demonic spirits are doing God's work despite everything.

B: I don't put it in those terms, but that's what I think. Spirits do what they were created to do, augmented by what they have learned thus far. Some of them are pretty awful beings at this point, but they can become untwisted when they are brought into the light.

R: I am more interested in the people who are possessed by demons, as I don't share your expectation that demons will repent. How do you help demon-possessed people? I mean people spiritually dominated by an alien entity, not people who are made sick by what you call a spiritual intrusion.

B: It depends on the nature of the spirit dominating them. Generally speaking, we help the person to face and confront such spirits so that the domination can be broken.

J: Beth, you said before that you had experience of the spirits of the dead attaching themselves to particular people for a time. How far do you think that a person's experience of an alien spiritual presence may be explained in this way?

B: It is one solid class of unusual spiritual experiences, but no one kind of experience explains everything.

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

S: Perhaps we need to look into this area more closely.

The Spirits of the Dead

This is a vast and mysterious topic. It is tantalizingly close to us, as we are psychologically formed by those who have gone before us and we are linked by strong ties of memory and feeling with those whom we have known who have died. It is also shrouded in mystery by the veil of death which may seem to lift in certain areas of unusual experience but which also resists all attempts at exposure and knowledge. Where the dead purport to speak directly to us, usually through another person acting as a medium, we are caught between acceptance that this is indeed what is happening and the natural scepticism that we are experiencing anything more unusual than a person talking in a funny voice. This set of incompatible possibilities seems systematically unresolvable.

The whole idea of life on the other side of death seems like a vast canvas on which many different scenarios have been painted and which is completely open to any new picture that may come along¹⁸⁴. While we remain in our present state of being, we seem to lack all possibility of deciding between the various scenarios offered by the cultures and religions of the world. We may start to choose on the basis of recognizable points of contact between a scenario and some important features of our present experience, but the logic of all this is the leap of faith. It seems that the bridge of reason is systematically incapable of taking us over to the other side. One logical reaction to this situation is general scepticism about all scenarios. Yet it is also true that our view of what lies beyond our present life has real consequences for how we live now. Any view of the transcendently spiritual needs to be integrated with the present realities of our experience, preferably in a way that sustains life. I conclude that in general terms, faith in a particular view of the spiritual (acknowledged as such) is no more - nor less - reasonable than the most thoroughgoing agnosticism.

I find this general attitude confirmed by the interesting fact that the Christian Bible seems to contain more than one kind of picture of the life beyond death. It also seems to contain a

¹⁸⁴ Eg. Castaneda, C, The Eagle's Gift, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981, The Tibetan Book of the Dead and The Egyptian Book of the Dead.

diversity of pictures of the spiritual makeup of the human person. The old Hebrew idea of life after death was of a shadowy, depleted being that went down to Sheol, very like the ancient Greek picture of Hades. "Turn, Oh Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?" (Psalm 6:4-5). Righteous and unrighteous alike went down to Sheol, where they were inactive and ineffective.

The New Testament is full of resurrection hope. "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ... It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:42, 44). This text does not support the idea of a naturally immortal soul, though other texts do. "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling – if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked." (2 Corinthians 5:1-3). While this text does not explicitly say that 'we' will survive the death of the physical body, this seems the most natural interpretation. It is not stated that 'we' are naturally immortal, but the language fits well with that view. This contrasts with the picture of graves opening for the physical resurrection of the saints. "The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his (i.e., Jesus') resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many." (Matthew 27:52-53). A close reading of these and related texts suggests a diversity of cultural views about human nature and life after death, a diversity unified only by the common theme that God is the one who gives life to the dead. In the Bible, the idea that we are immortal souls accidentally clothed with a perishable body until these elements are separated at death is a secondary, cultural idea, not a primary teaching.

Shamanism offers us a range of stories about the spirits of the dead which mostly come from specific experiences. We need not accept any particular metaphysic to receive and appreciate these stories, beyond a certain openness to things which we have not personally experienced. We do need to distinguish as clearly as we can between what

people experience directly and the metaphysical constructs that are then erected to account for the oddities in these experiences. One 'New Age' example of this can be found in the work of Edith Fiore, a psychologist and counsellor.¹⁸⁵

...I am not attempting to prove that spirits exist nor that my patients were possessed. Rather, I will be showing you what goes on daily in my office and introducing a therapy that, although not a panacea, is effective and embodies ancient concepts within the context of twentieth-century hypnotherapy. My patients and I use the working hypothesis that personality *does* survive the death of the body.¹⁸⁶

From her work in Saratoga, California, Edith Fiore presents us with stories of significant changes in the lives of troubled people, through the use of hypnotism and negotiation with the strange personalities which emerge in the hypnotic state. Her interest in hypnosis for therapeutic purposes grew out of her discovery that it provided a speedy access to the unconscious mind. Fiore used hypnosis in 'past life therapy', during which her patients would encounter fantasy experiences which they identified as memories of former lives. She began to find that the patient's presenting symptoms would mysteriously disappear after a vivid experience of a previous life.

The third and decisive case involved a young woman with a snake phobia who suffered nightmares of snakes at least twice a week...
...Within seconds [of hypnotic induction] she was vividly describing an ancient ceremony, probably in Central America, involving native priests dancing in front of a pyramid with poisonous snakes in their mouths. The snakes represented all that was evil and terrifying, and, at one point, when the priests threw them to the ground, she shook violently - then relaxed with a glorious smile, as the priests beheaded them. Still in hypnosis, but back to the present, she disclaimed 'believing all that stuff'....
With this case we have both an unbelieving patient and an unbelieving therapist! Yet she too came back the next time elated because she was free of all the fears she had had.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Fiore, E, The Unquiet Dead, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1987.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.9-10.

It is possible to see the therapeutic value of this practice in terms of real symbolic encounters. Fantasy experiences are very involving, so that the decisions and the recognitions that occur within them have emotional reality. They seem particularly well suited to the overcoming of phobias through providing the person with the experience of overcoming the fear. This was Fiore's initial orientation, leading her to encourage the expression and elaboration of whatever contents presented themselves.

In the early years, I found many patients slipping into other personalities while in the hypnotic trance. I assumed these were multiple personalities and dealt with them as though they were. It did seem peculiar that some patients would have so many 'personalities', some who just flitted through. ...

None of these patients seemed to benefit from the investigation of these 'personalities', except to feel more comfortable with the various aspects of their personalities that were, at times, making a mess of their lives.

Instead of feeling that they were acting out of character, they began to accept it as another part of themselves. They came to grips a little better with some of their strange behaviour. But there was very little change in that behaviour!¹⁸⁸

As a result of her researches into the literature associated with reincarnation, Fiore became aware of the idea that 'earthbound' spirits of those who had died might attach themselves to a living person without that person's awareness. She developed a set of questions to put to people under hypnosis which would sometimes reveal the presence of other distinct personalities. She also developed, or borrowed from her reading, ways of helping such personalities to leave the person. Her claim is that such departures usually correlate with a cessation of the troubling psychological disturbances in the person. This therapeutic success pragmatically justified her experimental therapeutic approach. It is both significant and startling that conversations which treat a particular voice from a hypnotized person as a discrete persona should prove therapeutically effective. We are left to ponder the metaphysical implications of Fiore's clinical experience.

I view the possessing entities as the true patients. They are suffering greatly, perhaps without even realizing it. Virtual prisoners, they are trapped on the earth plane feeling exactly as they did moments before their deaths, which may have occurred decades before. They do not seem to profit from any positive activities or education

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.10.

that their hosts have experienced throughout their lives since the possession. Moreover, they are keeping themselves from being in the spirit world which would offer them a beautiful life and afford them the opportunity to make spiritual progress.¹⁸⁹

The simplest language for describing the general shape of these stories is that of spirit possession and depossession. Nevertheless, what we are talking about are inner figures and personalities that show up in an individual under hypnosis. It would be easy to conclude that these figures are produced by the suggestions of the hypnotist, were it not for the correlation between what happens to these figures within the consciousness of the patient and the subsequent change in the patient's presenting symptoms.

Another patient reported that the morning she seriously committed herself to start a diet, a voice in her head said, 'I'm not going to let you diet. Forget it! I'm in charge.' The possessing entity, which had dominated her for many years, departed only when convinced she could eat all she wanted in the spirit world. The compulsion to overeat vanished with her.¹⁹⁰

For practical purposes, it doesn't much matter whether we think about such stories in terms of objectively real spiritual entities or in terms of symbolic interactions within the fantasy life of the person. Fiore's therapeutic approach seems to work whichever metaphysical story we accept. Once a possessing personality is manifested, it is pragmatically effective to adopt Fiore's map of the spirit world.

What does seem essential to the success of Fiore's methods is the engagement with the possessing entity or persona as the real patient. Fiore would seem to speak, act and think as if there really is an independent possessing entity at work behind the personalities that manifest under hypnosis. She also assumes that this entity is constantly surrounded by friends and loved ones who have died who are there to be called on as helpers. She also assumes that 'the light' will be there for the entity as a doorway into the higher spirit world and that this higher world is where they should be. These assumptions create the scenario in which the therapeutically impressive transformations occur. Once the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.

manifested personality makes positive contact with the helpers and goes into the light, the personality reportedly vanishes from our human level and Fiore's patients report feeling lighter, as well as free to follow their own decisions.

The area of 'New Age' therapies is protean and vast, so that I prefer to note the many issues raised by Fiore's account of her work rather than to explore them here. We should mention in particular the ideas of reincarnation, of earthbound spirits which can attach themselves to the spirits of the living and of the spiritual world as a series of planes of increasingly subtle vibrational energy as central issues for further exploration. What does seem evident is the congruence of Fiore's therapeutic stories with both humanistic and religious values. Her work seems to offer support and comfort to at least some versions of traditional Christian understandings and practices. It also challenges modern liberal Christians to rethink their acceptance of the Enlightenment scepticism about spiritual models of reality. What it most obviously supports, however, is a traditional shamanic approach to people troubled by earthbound spirits.

Shamans who experience regular contact with powerful spirits move in a spiritual realm which is not touched by the death of the physical body. If we can have real communication with these spirits even while in the body, how much more immediate will our communion be when we are no longer dominated by the physical world? Wallace Black Elk tells of a ceremony that he held for one of his nephews who had committed suicide in prison.

Then that spirit returned and brought my nephew in. As he was coming, he was crying.

..... So when my nephew came into the lodge, he told me everything that went through his mind until the very end. Then he said, 'Then, when I hanged myself, it was like taking off your coat and hanging it on a clothes rack. My robe [body] was hanging there and I was still standing beside it. Then I looked around, and I could see the wonders of the Great Spirit. I could see the wonders of Grandmother, the Earth. When the black light approached me, I could see all these creatures around me. That scared me. I didn't know where to go. I tried to call, but no-one answered. I went to those places where they have churches. I went inside those churches, in

and around those churches. But it was empty and cold. I had a cold feeling. Emptiness. There was nobody.

There were people that went there. I tried to talk to them. I tried to tell them to pray for me. But these people never saw me. They just ignored me. They just kept walking back and forth. So I was scared. Like all this town made a lot of noises, but they were empty noises. But through this Chanunpa [sacred pipe], I heard loud and clear. I heard that eagle-bone whistle. That sound you made was so beautiful. I heard it four times. Then the powers started coming all around me. They herded me and brought me here.¹⁹¹

We are then told how this person was reunited with his parents, at least for a time of reconciliation, and how the spirits forgave him and set him free. Wallace Black Elk knows from experiences such as this that there is a spiritual existence for persons beyond physical death. Western common sense calls this fantasy. In fairness to western common sense, it must be said that most stories from mediumistic experiences are not as detailed, coherent and compelling as this story. Fantasy and fraud do play a role here; yet the false gives its own kind of testimony to the true.

Western common sense provides the cultural 'home base' for liberal Christian thinking. Liberal Christian theologians don't speak with one voice about spirits, though they mostly adopt a humanistic viewpoint which places a high value upon the achievements of the human spirit. A theologian in this tradition who also makes great use of the category of Spirit in his Systematic Theology is Paul Tillich.

Man (sic) experiences himself as having a world to which he belongs. The basic ontological structure is derived from an analysis of this complex dialectical relationship. Self-relatedness is implied in every experience. There is something that 'has' and something that is 'had', and the two are one. The question is not whether selves exist. The question is whether we are aware of self-relatedness.¹⁹²

For Tillich, human nature (irrespective of gender) is finite freedom. We experience ourselves in terms of a polarity between self and world. We live in a particular world which is finite, leading to inevitable tragedies as we aspire to improve our world. We are

¹⁹¹ Wallace Black Elk, *Op.Cit.*, pp.165-7.

¹⁹² Tillich, P, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.1, Chicago UP, Chicago, 1951, p.169.

free to dream, to entertain visions and to follow these visions. This view of our human nature proposes an open materialism in which spirit is a mysterious dimension of matter rather than a separate, immaterial substance.

In the Semitic as well as in the Indo-Germanic languages, the root of the words designating spirit means 'breath'. It was in the experience of breathing and above all in the cessation of breathing in the corpse that man's attention was drawn to the question, What keeps life alive? His answer was: breath. Where there is breath, there is the power of life; where it vanishes, the power of life vanishes. As the *power* of life, spirit is not identical with the inorganic substratum which is animated by it; rather, spirit is the power of animation itself and not a part added to the organic system. Yet some philosophical developments, allied with mystical and ascetic tendencies in the later ancient world, separated spirit and body. In modern times this trend came to its fulfilment in Descartes and English empiricism. The word received the connotation of 'mind', and 'mind' itself received the connotation of 'intellect'. The element of power in the original meaning of spirit disappeared, and finally the word itself was discarded. In contemporary English it is largely replaced by 'mind' and the question is whether the word 'mind' can be de-intellectualized and fully replace the word 'spirit'.

According to some, it is possible, but the majority of those who answer this question take the opposite position. They see the necessity of restoring the term 'spirit' to denote the unity of life-power and life in meanings, or in condensed form, the 'unity of power and meaning'.¹⁹³

This identification of spirit as the power of life which includes our experience of meaning through self-expression in culture is attractive. It is posited as a dimension of our embodied lives without reference to any kind of disembodied state. Tillich is explicitly critical of this supernatural element in the concept of 'spirit'. He distinguishes four dimensions which we find in ourselves. These are the inorganic, which all beings share (relegating any kind of non-material being to the metaphysical scrap heap because it does not show up in our experience), the organic, (particularly plants), the psychological (manifesting self-awareness, as in the higher animals) and spirit (humanity). These dimensions are all potentialities of matter which are only actualized under certain conditions.¹⁹⁴ We should note the assumption that non-material beings do not exist. This assumption is not accepted by more traditional Christian approaches which posit a real

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, Vol.3, 1963, pp.21-2.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.17-30.

existence for angels and demons, which are by definition disembodied spirits. It also creates significant problems for Tillich's view of God, who is Spirit. His famous definition of God as 'Being Itself' comes close to positing the world as the body of God.

Shamans also stay close to physically embodied experience, but they do not turn their backs on non-material possibilities. Tillich talks in terms of the 'multidimensional unity of life' and presents this conception as the basis on which to resist both closed materialism and supernaturalism. If he intends an 'open materialism', we can ask whether he has not placed too narrow limits on openness. He opposes the notion of discrete 'levels' because – in his view - we experience reality as a seamless unity. This means that he must discount any possibility that experiences which show discontinuity can be ontologically fundamental. He seems to think of such experiences as being like the amnesia of an individual who suffers a blow to the head. Nobody else is persuaded by the discontinuities in the experience of such a person. The intellectual power of his general approach can be appreciated from considering his brief comment on what western philosophers have identified as the 'mind-body problem'.

Another consequence of the use of the metaphor 'level' appears in considering the relation of the organic and the spiritual, usually discussed as the relation of body and mind. If body and mind are levels, the problem of their relation can be solved only by reducing the mental to the organic (biologism and psychologism) or by asserting the interference of mental activities in the biological and psychological processes; this latter assertion produces the passionate and justifiable reaction of biologists and psychologists against the establishment of a 'soul' as a separate substance exercising a particular causality.¹⁹⁵

Tillich wants to reconceptualize the mind-body issue in terms of dimensions of a being that is an ontological unity. Reductionism is resisted by the careful delineation of the dimensions. Doctrines enshrining ultimate separations within our nature are also resisted by asserting that the higher dimensions are emergent properties of matter itself. The parallels with the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin were also noted by Tillich¹⁹⁶. Tillich's

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

view – which is committed to affirming the existence and reality of God in some sense - requires the continuing acknowledgement that we are confronted by mystery at the heart of our being, despite the ongoing advances in our scientific knowledge. A current example of such an advance is the neuro-psychological mapping of correlations between brain functions and mental functions which do suggest that there is a physical basis (or at least correlate) for many things previously thought to be non-physical. The discovery of detailed correlations between events in consciousness and brain events is a striking confirmation of the unity of our being, based upon inorganic matter, which Tillich affirms. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how Tillich can seriously avoid viewing human freedom - that he acknowledges - as a kind of causality from beyond the purely organic. Also, the possibility of life beyond death would seem to rely upon some agency beyond the purely physical, as our everyday experience provides nothing more than a big blank here.

Tillich's approach is attractive in its conformity to the shape of our everyday experience. He has also shown us how to discern the spiritual depths in the heart of our cultural life, including the life of the mind in all kinds of artistic, scientific and technological achievements. Yet when we ask how Tillich's approach deals with experiences which are discontinuous with the everyday world, such things as mediumistic, telepathic, clairvoyant and out-of-the-body experiences, we find that he effectively dismisses them from serious consideration. He relegates them to a marginal status requiring further investigation but denies that anything of metaphysical import hangs on the outcome. His picture of the multi-dimensional unity of the person is specifically opposed to all forms of dualism in relation to human nature.

If spirit is a dimension of life, one can certainly speak of living beings in which this dimension is actualized, and one can call them beings with spirit. But it is extremely misleading to call them 'spirits', because this implies the existence of a 'spirit' realm apart from life. Spirit becomes somewhat like inorganic matter and loses its character as a dimension of life which is potentially or actually present in all life. It assumes a 'ghostly' character. This is confirmed by the so-called spiritualistic (in Continental languages, spiritistic) movements which try to make contact with the 'spirits' or 'ghosts' of the deceased and to provoke physical effects from them (noises, words, physical movements, visual appearances). Those who assert such experience

are thus faced with the necessity of attributing physical causality to these 'spirits'. The way in which their manifestations are described points to a somewhat transmuted psycho-physical existence of human beings after death. But such existence is neither Spiritual (determined by the divine Spirit) nor identical with what the Christian message calls 'eternal life'. Just like the question of extra-sensory perception, it is a matter of empirical investigations the results of which, whether positive or negative, have no direct bearing on the problem of man's spirit or of God as Spirit.¹⁹⁷

This all follows from Tillich's definitions of life in terms of a multi-dimensional unity. It also represents a full acceptance of the critical perspective of the European Enlightenment with respect to disembodied spirits. Yet the definition of ourselves as a multi-dimensional unity could lead us to other ways of differentiating the dimensions. Esoteric traditions that treat out-of-the-body experiences as astral travelling picture us as having an astral or subtle, mental body, which quasi-physically detaches from our material and etheric or energy bodies in order to go elsewhere for actual experiences. These metaphysically idealist traditions present their view of the world as a multi-dimensional unity in which there are increasingly subtle levels of the vibrations from which everything material and spiritual is made. Our being is therefore a multi-dimensional unity of aspects which can potentially relate to the world at each of these dimensions. Edith Fiore provides us with a convenient account of such a view.

...there is an entire world, the astral plane, that exists between the physical and the highest spiritual worlds. It is not a place, but rather an incalculable number of planes, subplanes and divisions of subplanes, which rise in a gradually ascending scale, as a result of the increasing frequency of vibratory rate.

The lower astral plane is the world of earthbound spirits. In the higher planes of the astral world reside the spiritually evolved entities that are known as guides, masters or teachers.

It is believed that living human beings often 'travel' in their astral bodies to the astral plane during sleep, in certain trance states, and deliberately, by willing a part of themselves to leave the physical body. The latter is referred to as 'astral projection' or 'out-of-the-body experiences'.

The Vedas describe death as the sloughing off of the physical body. The individual continues, journeying into higher planes of existence, bringing along memories. After a stay in the astral world, the soul continues to rise to the mental plane, again

¹⁹⁷ Tillich, *Ibid.*, p.23.

leaving behind a corpse - the astral shell. Later, the individual goes to a still higher level of the astral plane, awaiting rebirth in a physical body.¹⁹⁸

Fiore stresses that she is using this view as an heuristic map for therapeutic purposes, which seems to work very well.

I explain to my patients that I am not trying to prove that spirits exist or are possessing them, but that this technique works. I even add that I am not a total believer myself. We agree to use it as a 'working hypothesis'.¹⁹⁹

Despite Fiore's disclaimers, we can wonder whether this Vedic view is not more consistent than western materialism with a physics in which matter has been dissolved into subdividable atomic particles which themselves recede into ghostly fields of probability waves. As the New Age physicist Wolf argues, these probability waves seem to determine which of a range of possible manifestations of the particles will occur when observations are made.

In my study of quantum physics I had discovered that there were even more subtle vibrations present. These were contained in the 'probability' waves of subatomic and atomic matter. These waves are called probability waves, *quantum waves*, or *quantum wave functions* because they have a vibrational pattern and they determine just how probable physical events are to take place. Wherever in space and whenever in time an event manifests are governed by the strength or amplitude of these waves.²⁰⁰

Tillich's common sense concept of our material unity therefore rests on an uncertain physical as well as metaphysical foundation. His view of the structure of our everyday experience is acceptable, but not if it is taken as a complete metaphysical account of reality. He treats non-ordinary human experiences as no more than an inner impression or fantasy. The issue is whether some of our inner experiences are more than subjective fantasy, providing us with direct encounters with spirit. Tillich would label such ideas as occult, which he dismisses as irrelevant to the religious situation.

¹⁹⁸ Fiore, *Op. Cit.*, pp.18-9.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²⁰⁰ Wolf, FA, *The Eagle's Quest: A Physicist's Search for Truth in the Heart of the Shamanic World*, Summit Books, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1991, p.25.

Occultism is the epitome of all those ideas and actions which refer to a reality which is hidden to the natural consciousness. The question whether such a reality exists cannot be raised here; at all events it is impossible to disprove its existence. But what is important for our evaluation of the religious situation is the question what the relationship of such an occult world-between-the-worlds would be to the religious sphere. On this point it may be said that what religion means - that is the divine - is the absolutely hidden, that which transcends all experience, including occult experience. In the presence of the eternal, even the occult is temporal, this-worldly, finite. In and of itself the occult sphere has no religious meaning. Like the world of experience it is subject to the judgement of the eternal and it is like the former also in that it may serve to veil the eternal.²⁰¹

When Tillich is busily discerning the religious values in secular culture, we can wonder why he consigns occultism to a more lowly status, that of having 'no religious meaning'. Perhaps we should interpret 'in and of itself' to qualify this rejection, placing occultism on a level with secular culture by denying any claims that occultism might make to reveal religious truth. Tillich is in fact able to find an ambiguous religious significance in the work of Rudolph Steiner, while criticizing him for his reliance upon occult intuition rather than religion for inspiration. Tillich also finds indirect significance in occultism in the way that it "puts primitive materialism to shame"²⁰².

What has been said about Anthroposophy applies, with some limitations, to all movements in which occult and religious elements are amalgamated. Groups such as the Christian Scientists, the Healers (Gesundbeter), Mazdanan, etc., which are founded on the mysticism of the will, on breathing technique and similar bases, probably reach the occult but not the religious world in principle. In this mysticism of the second order, intensification of human consciousness is always confused with the religious attitude. Self-sufficient finitude has been split; it is divided into a higher and a lower sphere, but it is not transcended, for even the higher world remains *world*, while in genuine mysticism the world in all its degrees vanishes in the presence of the invisible Beyond, of the Eternal itself. Occultism cannot overcome the spirit of self-sufficient finitude. It can loosen the hold of that finitude at many places, but it cannot go beyond that. Significant as it is for the religious situation of the present, so limited is its fundamental religious meaning.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Tillich, P, The Religious Situation, Trans. Niebuhr, HR, Thames & Hudson, London, 1956, pp.130-31.

²⁰² Ibid., p.131.

²⁰³ Ibid., p.135.

This judgement could also be applied to many 'New Age' cults and spiritual activities in more recent times. I support Tillich's concern for fundamental religious issues about our relationship to a transcendent God. There is an ethical prophetic judgement to be given against a religiosity which ignores the confession of sins and reconciliation with God and with neighbours. I also support his distinction between the world of occult experience which remains essentially finite and the infinite which transcends all experience. Our earlier discussion of a three-tiered structure for spiritual experiences is essentially similar to Tillich's picture here. There is in our experience an intermediate sphere between the everyday and the transcendent, infinite context of the everyday, which is the arena of human encounters with spirit. Yet Tillich doesn't treat his own experiences in this arena as being on the same footing as the experiences of those he criticizes, even if many of his particular criticisms can be supported. The trouble with Tillich's criticism that occult experience is still finite is that Christianity itself requires the possibility that the infinite can somehow be validly experienced within the conditions of our finitude. The incarnation of Christ and the hearing of the Word of God are only two of the salient points at which this is obvious. Tillich stretches his categories to breaking point in articulating these Christian mysteries and we can ask why the same privilege cannot be extended in principle to the claims made for psychic experience.

Whether the spirits of the dead are legitimately encountered through mediums is clearly of religious importance, as is the question of the reality of extra-sensory perception. At stake is the question of whether there is in us that which remains coherent and competent after the death of our bodies. Traditional ideas of an immortal soul or spirit that lives on after death make clear metaphysical claims about the nature of reality from which Tillich distances himself. He is at best agnostic about the possibilities of our human survival of death in a living spiritual entity of any description. What is interesting and important here is that, despite the fact that Tillich's system has no place for an occult realm, he does acknowledge that experience of such a realm is possible, even if he ultimately deems such experiences to be subjective and without religious significance. Tillich's view is characteristic of liberal Protestant theologians since the European Enlightenment.

Although he does not make much reference to him, Tillich's theology can be seen as an attempt to lessen the damage from Hume's criticism of the possibility of miracles. Tillich works very hard to find universal foundations for his theology. He is keen to minimize dependence upon accidental events of human history (such as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth). He is properly concerned to safeguard the coherence of his picture of God and the unity of God's relationship with our historical reality. This leads him to accept the general Enlightenment view, following Hume²⁰⁴, that all special events that might show something of God (signs or miracles) are treated as marginal and problematic, not as foundation stones. Positively, he uses such concepts as 'depth' and 'the demonic' to refer to the area of special spiritual experiences in general. His strategy is partly apologetic, to leave it open to the reader to fill in the general, open category with whatever specific experiences the reader accepts as real.

Tillich has been a very important theologian for people who have accepted the materialist, naturalistic ethos of contemporary western culture. He does provide something of the challenge of the Christian gospel within the terms and limitations of this culture. This should not prevent us from recognizing the extent of the limitations that he seems to have accepted for himself. Protestantism bases itself as exclusively as possible upon the Bible. It is therefore an embarrassment for liberal Protestants that the Bible assumes the reality of paranormal events such as bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven, miraculous healings and divine communications with people through dreams, prayer, prophetic inspiration and visions. Morton Kelsey points out how much the Bible has to say about people's contact with non-ordinary reality.

²⁰⁴ A full discussion of Hume's treatment of miracles is beyond the scope even of this many-faceted book. Briefly, Hume takes his stand on his empiricist epistemology which allows him to argue that there can never be evidence sufficiently compelling for us to assert that a miracle has occurred. If we accept, as an *a priori* assumption, that events contrary to the laws of nature cannot occur, then we can see that, for any claimed miracle, we can continually look for naturalistic explanations for ever. This strategy has been called a 'naturalism of the gaps', where naturalistic faith covers any case where a genuine naturalistic explanation is currently lacking (cf. Beckwith, *Op. Cit.*, p.37, footnote 82). In terms of rationality, naturalistic faith would seem to be on a par with other kinds of faith which admit of the possibility of spiritual transcendence. I conclude that rationality requires scrupulous weighing of evidence, not *a priori* denials of the possibility of miracles.

The Bible is a mine of information on ESP or psi phenomena. Nearly every book of the Bible shows the belief that human beings have contact with more than just the physical world and that there are other ways of influencing the world and people besides physical means. Divination and works of power are found throughout the Bible. There is even discussion about what kind of practices are forbidden and why.²⁰⁵

Kelsey explores the view that Christians can accept paranormal psychic abilities as a naturally given (or acquired) power that certain people have. He does not accept the view that such powers do not exist or that, outside the context of Christian practice, they are inherently demonic. Like all powers, these can be used for good or evil.

Finally, there is the view that extrasensory perception is a natural part of human knowing which the modern world gradually forgot in its effort to develop as much objective understanding as possible. Most people have some sensitivity to this non-sensory kind of knowing, and it can probably be developed in all but a very few of us. On the other hand, only a few rare individuals have great gifts in this area.²⁰⁶

Kelsey is right about the Bible assuming the reality of spirits, though his talk about psychic gifts places the emphasis on us rather than on the spirits. The Christian life requires spiritual discernment and prayer if we are to hear God's voice and recognize it as such. So does any serious spiritual or religious tradition.

Tillich supports the Hebrew view of us humans as a psycho-physical unity (requiring the miracle of the resurrection of the body for survival of death) and denies the Greek view of us as a dualistic combination of a mortal body and an immortal soul. It is possible to interpret his philosophical view as making space for the physicality of the old Jewish faith.

²⁰⁵ Kelsey, MT, The Christian and the Supernatural, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1976, p.83.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.21.

O Lord, you have always been our home. Before you created the hills or brought the world into being, you were eternally God, and will be God for ever. You tell man (sic) to return to what he was; you change him back to dust.²⁰⁷

We are filled with spirit through the grace and mercy of God who treats us with favour. Without this favour, we are dust. On this view, our very possession of spirit is dependent upon grace from beyond ourselves in which our receptivity to the higher possibilities is all-important. St. Paul's view is not dissimilar with respect to God's action, though as we have seen, he can use dualistic language. His teaching about a spiritual body which is immortal is not a fully natural, present endowment, but a gift of grace from God. Nevertheless, he does not identify us with our mortal, physical body except as we are dead in our sins. He is in fact subsuming our actual constitution under the dynamic of our spiritual formation through the reception of spirit from God. For Paul, we receive a spiritual body to replace our material, mortal body through God's power beyond our physical death.

Tillich picks up this formative dynamic in his broad, historical schema, though with reference to the general emergence of spirit in humanity rather than to Paul's teaching of the specific reception of the Spirit from God through faith in Christ.

The actualization of a dimension is a historical event within the history of the universe, but it is an event which cannot be localized at a definite point of time and space. In long periods of transition the dimensions, metaphorically speaking, struggle with each other in the same realm. This is obvious concerning the transition of the inorganic to the organic, of the vegetative to the animal, of the biological to the psychological. This is also true of the transition from the psychological to the dimension of the spirit. If we define man as that organism in which the dimension of spirit is dominant, we cannot fix a definite point at which he appeared on earth. It is quite probable that for a long period the fight of the dimensions was going on in animal bodies which were anatomically and physiologically similar to those which are ours as historical man, until the conditions were given for that leap which brought about the dominance of the dimension of the spirit. But we must go one step farther. The same struggle of the dimensions which finally produced the sharp division between those beings who have language and those who have not now goes

²⁰⁷ Psalm 90:1-3.

on within every human being as a lasting problem for the basis of the predominance of the spirit.this is the essence of the moral problem.²⁰⁸

The arena of this struggle is that of social relations and outward behaviour; but it is also, more intimately, within the consciousness and decision-making of each human being.

Instead of separating the spirit from the conditioning psychological realm, we shall try to describe the rise of an act of the spirit out of a constellation of psychological factors. Every act of the spirit presupposes given psychological material and, at the same time, constitutes a leap which is possible only for a totally centered self, that is to say, one that is free.²⁰⁹

For Tillich, the action of spirit in us is essentially mysterious. We recognize its presence in our freedom and in our inner control of the psychological forces at work in us. It is a very short step from this position to that of naming the 'inner voices' which illuminate and guide our freedom as spirits which may be other than ourselves. This personal centre seems, for Tillich, to function like the psychological ego. It is the vehicle through which spirit centrally manifests itself in us in the form of our conscious knowing. Tillich is not identifying this centre as 'spirit', but as the point of manifestation of the power of spirit. It is also not distinct in kind from the other psychological material in us, as it is also the psychological centre of our being. That this psychological centre can manifest spirit seems like an abstract, generalized miracle. This is the mystery that, according to Tillich, we are.

Tillich discusses norms to which spirit subjects itself in order to be free of psychological compulsions, together with the problems about how to recognize which norms are valuable. This outward, third person orientation does take account of first and second person approaches, though we can ask whether encounters with Spirit are really in view when we talk about norms of behaviour.. We can ask whether Tillich offers us an adequate account of prayer, which could be identified as the activity in which our personal centre most clearly encounters and is informed by Spirit. Tillich's focus is more on deliberation and decision, which makes it likely that we become a self-enclosed ego considering

²⁰⁸ Tillich, P, Systematic Theology, Vol.3, Op.Cit., p.26.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p.27.

various ideas and norms in isolated freedom. Spirit for Tillich seems to occupy a permanently ambiguous place somewhere between that of a quality of the life process and that of a free and transcendent source of creativity and emergent novelty. It is hard to see how Spirit as defined by Tillich can meet and address people in the way in which the Spirit of God meets and addresses people in a wide range of biblical stories.

The Lakota shaman Wallace Black Elk talks in terms of an openness to the power of spirit and a willingness to call humbly upon the spirits for help²¹⁰. He also tells of receiving gifts from the spirits as well as teaching from his tribal grandfathers and grandmothers. The gifts are of knowledge and healing, but above all, of access to the spirits with requests for specific help. The critical issue then becomes what kind of help to request.

For the Lakota shamans who believe in and use the spirits, sacred power seemingly has no limits. What may seem unusual, even paranormal to us, is an everyday part of their world. They do not question the existence of power, only its application. That is a universal concern among shamans. An African anthropologist once told me about taking a famous psychic to visit the Bushmen shamans of South Africa. The psychic demonstrated for them his ability to bend spoons with his mind. They only laughed, asking if that was all that he knew how to do with his power.²¹¹

Wallace Black Elk's stories are full of dialogue between himself and the spirits (including the spirits of humans who have died) in a ritual context. These dialogues are like intercessory prayer, in which this pattern of calling, petitioning and waiting on the spirit occurs. Under the impact of the Enlightenment, western Christians have had a hard time accounting for what happens in prayer. From the outside, private prayer looks like talking to yourself as if you were talking to someone else. At times, it can feel like this on the inside, too. Yet there is also the experience of receiving new energy and insight in response to what is said in prayer. One of the essential elements in prayer seems to be a 'movement outward' in which you address the wider world of spirit, or God. This dialogue can take the form of words or of images or of feelings. While prayer is a common human possibility, it is also the subject of important teachings in most spiritual traditions.

²¹⁰ Cf. Wallace Black Elk, Op.Cit.

²¹¹ Wallace Black Elk, Op.Cit., Introduction pp.xix-xx.

In this sense, prayer can be thought of more generally as the arena in which the struggle of people to be formed by spirit - and not by the imperatives of biology and psychology - takes place, which brings us back to Tillich's schema.

If spirit is a dimension of reality that is potential in all matter, as Tillich suggests, then a potentiality for spirit is inbuilt in our human nature. This potentiality manifests itself as the ability to be open to spirit beyond us and to receive its gifts. We need to be spirit in order to be able to contact spirit, yet we are empty and powerless until spirit somehow reaches us with power and direction. I conclude that we need to look at experiences of the reception of revelation, of the divine spirit, or perhaps of the spirits, in order to learn more of what spirit may be. Tillich warns us against confusing spirit with the ego or psychological centre through which spirit manifests itself. We can ask whether he does not lose touch with the reality that spirit (or Spirit) does manifest itself and that we can investigate specific points when this does occur. Wallace Black Elk offers us a vivid picture of encounters with spirits which are quite other than ourselves, in which preparation, ritual and prayer play key roles. In their very different ways, both tell us that spirit is mysterious as well as powerful. For me, Tillich's third person ontological analysis of spirit needs to be supplemented by the first and second person stories of people like Wallace Black Elk if we are to gain guidance for our living.

If this conclusion is accepted for our understanding of ourselves in our everyday functioning, it should also be clear that we need not follow Tillich's limited approach to a wide range of stories of encounter with spirit. We are free to listen sympathetically to what people tell us they have experienced, whatever we make of their story. Even if we agree with Tillich about the uncertainty of any claims to knowledge of life beyond death, we are free to enter into specific experiences in openness to what the experience will bring. We are free to live in the faith that the dead are in the care and keeping of God. We are free to treat the figures of our active imagination with respect, in acknowledgement of the possibility that these figures connect with realities of which we are quite unaware.

Interlude: Spirit in Humans

R: That Tillich is a shifty writer. He is so abstract that he can affirm and deny any traditional idea without looking uncomfortable.

S: He would say that he is bringing out the inner meaning of the tradition.

R: He puts the Christian tradition into his saucepan and cooks it over such a hot flame that it turns into a mess in the pan, leaving you with nothing useful but the aroma. I hate it when theologians think that a few molecules on the nostrils are as good as the true bread.

J: I think you enjoy coming across as a crusty and bigoted person, Rachel. Some of Tillich's abstractions are brilliant. He catches the essential tensions in human experience with formulations like 'finite freedom'.

R: Maybe. I suppose I could get interested in abstract understanding if I was a philosopher.

B: It is good for me to see you laying into one of your own, Rachel. I don't feel so bad about consorting with what you call the demonic when I know that I have some Christians for company. Of course, I tend to agree with you about Tillich's abstractions. 'Spirit' floats above us unless we encounter it somehow.

S: Modern thinking since the European Enlightenment has redefined the spirit world in terms of human feelings, where it has not sought to abolish it altogether. The redefinition in terms of feeling does offer a translation for traditional ideas of spirit, but it leads to complete agnosticism about any dimensions of spirit that might transcend our everyday experience. Tillich opposes this modern reductionism through his abstract categories.

R: Well, he may be very helpful to philosophers like you in retaining your grip on Christian faith, but you are right, I do find the shamans more helpful than him. They tell such interesting stories.

J: Perhaps you are right about Tillich's uneasy relationship to traditional Christian faith, Rachel. He is trying not to accept the metaphysical constriction of reality to the world of everyday waking consciousness, which is a powerful assumption of modern materialist world views. Yet he supports the relegation of non-ordinary experiences to the insignificance of the purely personal domain, with only marginal and equivocal exceptions.

B: We see a world wider than ourselves when we open our eyes. Why would you think that inner encounters with spirit beings do not also provide us with information about a wider world, particularly as we can check on the validity and usefulness of what such spirit beings communicate to us?

The Burning Mirror: Sandy Yule

R: My goodness. My worries with Tillich were that he denies the reality of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as well as the healing miracles and the angels and demons. You are showing me that he can't be more positive about these things while he adopts the Enlightenment assumptions about reality.

S: That's right. Still, he does show us a way of using those assumptions without being completely captive to them.

R: You think the glass is half full, whereas I think it is empty.

S: If you take into account Tillich the chaplain in the First World War and Tillich the participant in western culture, you see how he makes space for our personal experiences within his seemingly abstract categories. He is deeply influenced by the Hebrew prophetic tradition with its ethical analysis of everyday life, though he is also sensitive to mystical experience, as long as it remains subservient to this prophetic orientation.

R: I want to ask how all this relates to knowing God and knowing Christ, but I suspect that this is quite a different topic.

S: For Tillich, the experience of self-knowledge links closely with knowledge of God.

B: Shamanic experiences of the spirits do happen through our human consciousness, but why you think that everyday self-awareness will illuminate special experiences of powerful spirits is beyond me. If you don't start from the special experiences, no amount of rational manoeuvring will bring them into view.

J: That's a bit hard, Beth. I think Tillich is suggesting that the mystery that we naturally find in the special experiences is not absent from our everyday consciousness when we look deeply enough. I think his questions about mystical experience are really important. I agree with his suspicion of spiritual experiences that take people away from community and from everyday responsibilities.

B: That's all very well in general, but you couldn't say that if you had been through a shamanic initiation.

J: Why not?

B: Because shamanic initiations take you out of the everyday world for a time of testing and of personal change. After that, the everyday world doesn't look the same.

J: Well, maybe my question is about the value of shamanic initiation where there is no return to everyday responsibilities, either because the candidate doesn't survive or because the spirits decide that the person will remain solitary.

B: You couldn't ask the question if you had the experience. Shamans can regret any number of specific things about the change in their lives, but I don't see how a shaman could repudiate the gift of heightened contact with reality which comes with their spiritual awakening. Responsibilities and the whole everyday world are simply different for shamans.

S: It is important to acknowledge the potentially overwhelming nature of encounters with spirit. Spirit typically destroys who we have been. Moses went to meet God on Mt. Sinai alone because the people were afraid that if God spoke to them, they would die²¹². This fate did overtake Uzzah for touching the Ark of the Covenant while trying to transport it back to Jerusalem by oxen²¹³; this story is particularly chilling for those of us who think that good intentions are enough.

J: Perhaps you are right. I find the ethical demands of the Judaeo-Christian tradition quite overwhelming. Those of us who can eat regularly are guilty of the death by starvation of famine victims whether we had good intentions or not; information about their plight and the means to help are available in the modern world.

S: In shamanic communities, the shamans are those who survived; many others died or were otherwise destroyed by the spirits. In modern western cultures, encounters with spirit that have not been satisfactorily confronted by the person are treated as mental illness. Yet however scary, encounters with spirit are not to be avoided.

B: These encounters address who we are. Resistance and avoidance may put off the time of the full encounter, but this only intensifies the impact when it finally happens. Any theory of human nature which doesn't include this dimension is quite static and deficient.

J: How do you account for the fact that only some people seem to get the shamanic experience?

B: I don't really think it is a fact. I think everyone meets the shamanic experience, though only some go through the full-on encounter. Also, there is a collective dimension to it. Spirit seems to single out particular people from any given community for special attention, but their mature shamanizing is usually on behalf of the community.

R: I still don't see why you take Tillich seriously. He revels in ambiguity. Either we are in touch with the transcendent power of God or we are not. Of course we have a spiritual nature - that's why it is possible for us to have fellowship with God.

²¹² Exodus 20:19.

²¹³ 2Samuel 6:6-8.

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J: Surely it is a puzzle even for you, Rachel, why some people live in relation to God and others do not. What you call ambiguity is partly his way of covering both kinds of experience.

R: I don't see why he can't simply witness to the positive possibilities and explain that people can hide from the light because their deeds are evil.

J: He does see that, but he also sees the genuine confusion that Christians have in the face of the scientific world view.

S: Yes, I find him helpful in providing general language which clarifies how the spiritual dimensions of experience show up in the modern world.

B: I find it hard to see how anyone who is so dismissive of occult experience could deal satisfactorily with the spiritual dimension.

J: Tillich is oriented towards the transcendent creator, not to the temporary exaltations of creatures such as ourselves.

B: That interests me. All encounters with spirit are transcendent for me, so how do you distinguish an encounter with created spirit from an encounter with uncreated spirit?

R: That's important to me, too. I want to know when it is God with whom I am dealing and not some silly created spirit who is probably no better than I am.

J: Tillich talks in terms of universal depth in referring to God the creator. Occult experiences which do not connect us to God are simply another kind of finitude. The inner voices that speak through the mouths of troubled people in Fiore's office are clearly something created, even if they are spiritual in origin.

R: Possession by the spirits of the dead seems pretty clear to me in her stories.

J: Not necessarily. Vivid experience induced under hypnosis can be therapeutic. The main trick is to come up with something that the afflicted person accepts as real. The experience of a dialogue with something inside themselves which is not themselves - and the departure of this persona - is obviously effective therapy, leaving the person free from the unhelpful influence.

B: I have been thinking that you people are so near and yet so far in your understanding of spirit. I start from my own experience of spirit, which is of an energy that links me with the world in clearly discernible ways. Most people perceive this energy through feeling their participation in it. A few people can actually see it, as auras or vague swirls around people and things. We are immersed in this flow and all our activities, including our thoughts, are a part of it. This is why we need both the fully objective and the fully subjective ways of thinking about spirit, because it is both.

J: Do you think that everything is ultimately spirit, or energy?

B: I don't pretend to know what ultimately is, but physics does teach us that matter is a form of energy. I certainly don't accept the kind of split between spirit and matter that most non-reductionist western thinking has assumed.

J: Well, how do you account for 'out-of-the-body' experiences? How do mental images relate to matter and spirit?

B: This is all a bit speculative, but I think of matter as solidified consciousness. Our bodies provide many pathways for enhancing our awareness. We participate in the energy flows that enliven our world. Shamans have learned to inhabit mental images as most of us inhabit our bodies. Just as physical contact gives us both sensory awareness of the other and the point of action to influence the other, so does the appropriate mental imagery in the energy world. My image of you is not only my way of knowing things about you, which is what common sense teaches. It is also a point of spiritual contact between us through which either of us can take action to influence the other.

R: That sounds like magic to me.

B: Yes, this is part of traditional magic. There are also common sense versions of this influence, such as when I am trying to work out what you might like as a gift. I find it helpful to picture you and to associate various possible gifts with your image.

S: Do you think that most of us westerners have been socialized out of whatever psychic sensitivity we might have had as children?

B: Yes, I do. I know many people who remember seeing auras and imaginary friends as a child, but who learned not to see such things when they found out that other people couldn't see them.

R: I am not sure about auras, but imaginary friends frequently show up as demonic in deliverance ministry. They attract children into an inner world in which other people seem unimportant. These children sometimes treat other people immorally and losing their sense of being a member of the human community. This is particularly common for children who suffer physical abuse.²¹⁴

B: I don't know about this link with physical abuse, though it sounds plausible enough. I would support your concern about spirits that coddle and infantilize us. There are such spirits and we need to overcome them if we are to mature.

²¹⁴ "Demonic imaginary friends (sometimes mistaken for 'angels') are also a very common manifestation of the presence of demons with the physically abused. They become a listening ear which always understands." Horrobin, *Op.Cit.* 2, p.160.

S: Beth, if I hear you rightly, you think that spirit is to be identified with the energy flows that arise between living beings as well as within them?

B: Yes, of course, though this is not an exclusive definition, as there may also be forms of spirit which are beyond our level. Spirit does not relate only to human beings. We are part of the wider web of life spiritually as well as physically. The strange spiritual experiences that we have with the land relates to energy flows between living beings.

J: What you are saying reminds me of the Australian Aboriginal emphasis upon spirit in the land.

S: Perhaps we need to take a closer look at this.

Australian Aborigines and Shamanism

As an Australian of European descent, I have come into contact with shamanism through New Age, Euro-American sources. I have taken my initial orientation from European and American scholarship, with the additional challenges of a few Asian and Latin American contacts. All that has so far been discussed in this book leads to re-working of Christian traditions for myself and my people in the light of these challenges. Our conclusions thus far are probably of direct interest and relevance to western culture and religion as such. Yet the real focus and challenge of shamanism for white Australians does not emerge until we face the question of our own relation to the land of Australia and to the people of the land, Aboriginal Australians. I believe that the general knowledge of shamanism presented here does provide a frame of understanding which can allow us white Australians to appreciate and see value for ourselves in the ancient beliefs, practices and traditions of Aboriginal communities. We should not expect to become Aboriginal in any direct way. We should expect to recognize Aboriginal culture as a resource which all who live in Australia need if we are to become people of the land in a full sense. It is grounds for hope in the future of Australia that many Aboriginal people and communities are actively seeking to share their knowledge of the land with those white Australians who will listen.²¹⁵

There are important difficulties for white Australians such as myself who may wish to address this topic of shamanism among the Aboriginal tribes of Australia. As with shamanism anywhere, the main sources of knowledge are the individuals who are recognized by their people as shamans, together with the knowledge that their people have of them. In traditional Aboriginal society, there seem always to have been ‘clever’ men and women who can properly be called shamans in a general religious sense. These elders possess cultural and esoteric knowledge which is essential for the direction and maintenance of the traditional way of life of the tribe. It seems that tribal ceremonies traditionally have included elements in which the whole tribe participates, frequently accompanied by separate ceremonies for men and for women. These latter are often governed by strict rules of secrecy, in which individuals are progressively initiated into succeeding degrees of

²¹⁵ “I want you to walk with me through the valley of Omona in southeastern New South Wales. I will show you some sacred places. Only then will you begin to see the significance of Aboriginal culture, or the culture of the Koories (as Aborigines often call themselves in eastern Australia). As I walk through the bush I get a strong feeling when I’m coming to sacred space. I know I have an advantage even over archaeologists and anthropologists. I know inside that it is the Aboriginal who is the real expert on these matters because I’m a ‘bloke’ who feels it in his bones when approaching any sacred site. So why not come with me to share the wonderful blessings from such places?” “The Land is Sacred: Renewing the Dreaming in Modern Australia”, in Trompf, GT (Ed.), The Gospel Is Not Western, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1987, p.90. I understand that the Aboriginal elder who issued this gracious invitation has recently died, so that it is respectful not to give his name here.

adult knowledge. The 'clever' men or women are those who have been initiated into a high degree of knowledge and power. Their initiation is typically at the hands of the spirits and of the existing shamans, leading to an acceptance of their status by the tribe. There are close links between this kind of knowledge, personal status and personal power. There are therefore difficulties about the access of non-tribal people to tribal secrets, as there are obligations and status attaching to the granting of this knowledge. This is even more true for knowledge of secrets which would not be known by the majority of tribal adults. We should also remember and mourn the tragic destruction of so many Aboriginal tribes under the impact of British settlement, tribes whose secrets have almost completely died with them.

Because the British settled on Aboriginal land without recognizing Aboriginal title to their traditional lands, it has been rare for European Australians to be given access to Aboriginal knowledge, particularly the more secret matters. It should also be said that many of the white Australians who were granted a degree of access to Aboriginal traditions have not respected the conditions which, for the Aborigines, attached to the granting of this privilege. Some actions by white Australians, such as the removal of the bones of Aboriginal ancestors and other sacred objects to museums and the thoughtless or malicious vandalism of sacred sites, have been obviously offensive. Yet we should also note that the act of publishing information which traditionally was not for all (perhaps for initiated men or for women only) was also destructive of tradition and was deeply resented. Such experiences have led most Aboriginal groups to maintain their traditional secrecy with renewed vigour. White Australians need to recognize the partial and distorted nature of the knowledge that we do have. As a result, all that I am saying here needs to be viewed as a shimmering mirage reflecting something distant in an imprecise manner rather than as authoritative teaching.

As a white Australian, I am deeply aware that all too many of the Aboriginal tribes of Australia are no more. Hundreds of languages are now extinct and the knowledge that we can now recognize that these people possessed is almost completely lost. Even those Aboriginal tribes that retain some contact with their traditional way of life have been deeply affected by their contact with white society. It is possible that a few desert-dwelling groups have managed to avoid the direct effects of contact, but it is most unlikely that such groups would be ignorant of the impact of white society upon Aborigines elsewhere. These facts should dispose us to be sensitive to the need to see Aboriginal religion not only in terms of its traditional, pre-contact forms, but also in terms of its present reality after the heavy impact of two centuries of British colonization and in terms of its future prospects as a continuing tradition.

European evaluations of Aboriginal culture have historically been very negative, relegating Australian Aborigines to the lowest known category of human culture. This attitude was felt by the majority of white settlers to legitimate their disregard for Aboriginal land rights, a disregard which is still powerful today. Even the more humanitarian minority, who at least accepted that Aborigines were fellow human beings, were largely unable to understand Aboriginal culture.

The serious and systematic study of Australian Aboriginal religion is a relatively recent development of the last thirty years [i.e. since the middle 1950's]. As with many other aspects of Australian Aboriginal culture, the attitude of the early anthropologists and other observers to the religion of the original Australians was a melancholy mixture of neglect, condescension and misunderstanding. That attitude was influenced by nineteenth-century neopositivism, which saw religion in general as an illusion and as a relic of a pre-scientific and pre-logical stage of human development. It was also powerfully influenced by the dominant evolutionary model which led anthropologists to see Australian Aboriginal religion as the simplest, least developed, most infantile, form of human consciousness.²¹⁶

It is now becoming clear to all that Aboriginal culture is deeply spiritual in orientation and that the negative view of Aboriginal culture held by white settler society is quite unjustified. The land itself is shaped and sustained by the activities of the powerful ancestral spirits of the Dreaming. All aspects of mundane life, particularly sickness, death and the acquisition of food and water, are affected by the activities of spirits. Religious ceremonies are the opportunity for the people to cooperate with (or should we speak in terms of re-identifying with?) the spirits to achieve benign outcomes.

One great and fundamental feature of all Aboriginal religion is the concept of 'the Dreaming', expressed by various Aboriginal terms, *altjiranga*, *wongar*, *bugari*, etc. Although the terms 'Dreaming', 'the Dreaming', 'Dreamtime', have now been appropriated by Aborigines themselves, there is no specific concept in the various Aboriginal cultures which is translated by these English terms.

'The Dreaming' is then a plurivocal term with a number of distinct though connected meanings. First, it is a narrative mythical account of the foundation and shaping of the entire world by the ancestor heroes who are uncreated and eternal. Second, 'the Dreaming' refers to the embodiment of the spiritual power of the ancestor heroes in the land, in certain sites, and in species of fauna and flora, so that this power is available to people today. Indeed, one might say that for the Aboriginal his (sic) land is a kind of religious icon, since it both *represents* the power of the Dreamtime beings and also effects and transmits that power. Third, 'the Dreaming' denotes the general way of life or 'Law' - moral and social precepts, ritual and ceremonial practices, etc. - based upon these mythical foundations. Fourth, 'the Dreaming' may refer to the personal 'way' or vocation that an individual Aboriginal might

²¹⁶ Charlesworth, M, et al. (Ed.), Religion in Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld., 1984, p.1.

have by virtue of his membership of a clan, or by virtue of his spirit-conception relating him to particular sites.²¹⁷

Aboriginal Dreaming therefore refers both to that past time in which the ancestral beings moved about and altered the face of the earth in ways still recognizable today and to the ever-present, unseen ground of present reality. These Dreamtime presences can pre-eminently be encountered through ritual activities.

...it is through ritual that individuals can enter the spirit world and not only contact the Dreamtime presences but, more, become identified with them. During a ceremony an Aboriginal participant not only re-enacts the doings of an ancestor hero; he (sic) *becomes* that hero.

The connection of land and sites and objects and activities with the Dreaming, so that they are seen as the incarnation or embodiment of the spiritual power of the Dreaming, bestows a 'sacred' character on them; that is to say they are viewed as 'set apart' and also as potentially dangerous to those who have no rights of access to them. Many of these sacred phenomena are also 'secret'; that is, knowledge of them is restricted to certain groups.²¹⁸

Traditionally, many different groups would travel from their customary territory to join together in great gatherings which celebrated the doings of the Dreamtime beings. At these gatherings, there would be exchange of ideas, goods and services according to need and relationship status. Such gatherings aside, traditional Aboriginal society seems to have been organized into groups with distinct ownership and membership rights, where each group (and sometimes each individual) would have responsibility for specific land because they came from and belonged to that land. Their responsibility for what happened to their land arose from filial piety. Each person would also have the right to participate in the life of other groups, and therefore a carefully defined right to enter their territory through a system of family and traditional links. Writing of the Warnindilyaugwa of Groote Eylandt (in the Gulf of Carpentaria), with which he has been accorded membership as a man, the anthropologist David Turner points out how effective the traditional system has been in containing and preventing inter-group conflict.

It has long puzzled anthropologists just how the Australians could have inhabited an entire continent for 30,000 years or more yet find no evidence of organized warfare for territorial acquisition or of extermination of the other. This is particularly perplexing if we consider that the arts of war were known even to the Warnindilyaugwa through contacts with the Macassans, Indonesian traders who reached their northern shores in search of beche-de-mer, pearl shell and timber. It is not so puzzling once we have discovered the real nature of the Australian's system of social organization.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp.9-10.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

Indeed, so sophisticated are the Australians in handling conflict that they have actually devised a means whereby social and cultural change can proceed from the force of contradiction without impinging on interdependence and social order.²¹⁹

Through adherence to traditional law, based in the doings of the Dreamtime beings, traditional Aboriginal groups have maintained a mutual commitment to meet each other's needs for the necessities of life, particularly access to the food and water resources of the land and to inter-group marriages. The traditional law also provides for the care of the land and its fertility through increase ceremonies and taboos. Traditional responsibility included ensuring that the young of your own group understood and maintained the law, which could mean severe punishments for infringements. It does not take much imagination to appreciate the havoc played with this delicate system of inter-relationships by the arrival of white settler society.

The depth of the Aboriginal connection with their own land is therefore based in religious and spiritual reality, from which both identity and way of life have traditionally been derived. It is this unity of belief and culture which has been challenged, and in all too many cases, shattered, by the impact of white settlement and the Christian faith embedded in European culture. While the material impacts of dispossession, murder, disease and the kidnapping of women and children were decisive in many areas of Australia, we should also note how Christian exclusivism and the general Enlightenment disdain for spirits contributed to this European assault upon Aboriginal culture and identity. These latter attitudes persist strongly today in many influential sectors of white society despite official attempts to rectify the more material assaults upon Aboriginal people.

The Dreaming is then the most real and concrete and fundamental aspect of Aboriginal life and it has nothing to do with the Western concept of dreaming as an imaginary, fantastic and illusory state of consciousness. Once again, it needs to be emphasized how necessary it is for us to purge our minds of Western European preconceptions if we are to understand the Aboriginal religious world.²²⁰

Another dimension of the inadequacy of past attempts to understand traditional Aboriginal religion can be seen in the way in which generations of male anthropologists were happy to interpret their data to show that Aboriginal women had a peripheral role in religious matters. They were largely unaware of the existence of serious women's ceremonies and areas taboo for men. This awareness awaited the arrival of female anthropologists, particularly mature, unmarried women who could be

²¹⁹ Turner, David H, *Life Before Genesis*, Peter Lang, New York, 1985, pp.63-4.

²²⁰ Charlesworth, M, *Op. Cit.*, p.11.

granted a status allowing disclosure of serious women's business, who would treat Aboriginal women as their principal informants.

The very existence of women's ceremonies poses a problem to those who write of religion as a male preserve and privilege. Further, the nature of women's ceremonial activity varies from the Tiwi, where men and women are initiated at the same ceremony, to the desert regions, where women's ceremonies are closed, secret and dangerous to men.²²¹

The focus of women's ceremonies on the needs and responsibilities of women helps us to see how the men's ceremonies deal with the needs and responsibilities of the men as men. This personal and gender focus also serves the tribe as a whole, through the identification with the common Dreamtime beings and the land in which they now rest, as well as through the complementarity in which all individuals are affirmed either as women or as men.

Aboriginal woman like Aboriginal man is both sacred and profane. By virtue of her procreative, sexual, economic and social functions, she claims certain privileges and fulfils certain duties in the community. She has value as a social personality, and takes her place in the profane activities of the tribe. But she has also her spiritual affiliations. The system of totemism and spirit-children beliefs link her with the Time Long Past and the totemic ancestors. The increase ceremonies and mourning ritual create confidence and security in the struggle for existence. Finally, as a spiritual individual, she is also able to participate in those secret and sacred ceremonies which have been evolved to meet the particular problems and difficulties of women as a sex.²²²

In studying shamanism in Aboriginal Australia, then, we should take particular note of the gender of shaman and informant. Elkin's classic work, Aboriginal Men of High Degree, is indeed largely devoted to the male experience as reported by male anthropologists, though he does draw on the work of Phyllis Kaberry and other female authors. This male orientation is explicit in his work.

Everywhere in Aboriginal Australia the young male, on approaching or reaching puberty, leaves behind him the interests of childhood. Henceforth, he speaks and thinks more and more as a man. In an unforgettable ceremonial manner, he is taken from the camp and scenes of his irresponsible early years. He becomes the subject of a series of rites, extending with intervals over several years. The trials which he undergoes and the operations performed on him vary in different parts of the continent. But the general pattern and purpose of the ritual are the same. He 'dies' to the former life of childhood and of ignorance of esoteric knowledge, and 'rises' or is 'reborn' to a new life. The latter is not merely adult life, for which he has meanwhile been disciplined and instructed. It is much more: it is a life of knowledge and power.²²³

²²¹ Bell, D, in Ibid., p. 296.

²²² Kaberry, P, in Ibid., p.313.

²²³ Elkin, AP, Aboriginal Men of High Degree, 2nd Ed., University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld., 1976, p.3.

Initiation provides access to the secret/sacred rituals and stories which establish the being of the tribe and provide an authoritative guide to appropriate behaviour in most situations. Elkin's interest, however, is in the further initiations, beyond those undergone by all Aboriginal adolescents, which make a man or a woman into a shaman, medicine person, 'clever' person or person of high degree. Because my interest is in the existence and nature of shamanic traditions and practitioners, I am referring to these people of high degree as 'Aboriginal shamans'²²⁴, though I hasten to acknowledge that this is not an Aboriginal idea. Elkin identifies the specific focus of the powers of such people as the problems, desires and setbacks of daily life, as distinct from the ritual identification with the everpresent ancestral beings which forms the unchanging basis of traditional Aboriginal life and ceremony.

Initiation into the secret and sacred ritual and mythology of the tribe provides an authoritative background, a solid footing, and a sure hope for life. It gives general support and guidance to man (sic) in most moral and social situations. But it does not help him to cope specifically with the *problems, desires and setbacks* of daily life: For example:

1. Misfortune, bad luck, lack of success in love, in hunting or in fighting, illness or death.
2. Lack of knowledge of what is occurring out of sight and at a distance, and which may affect us, unless we are forewarned and can take precautions.
3. Ignorance of what the spirits of the dead, or mischievous or evil spirits are likely to work on us.
4. The desire to obtain this or that object or goal, the realization of which is fraught with various uncertainties and contingencies.

In Aboriginal life these problems, setbacks and desires are met in two ways. The first is the way of magic, with its rites, spells, paraphernalia and concentration of thought. If it is designed to cause injury to an individual or social group, it is called black magic or sorcery; but white if it is used to prevent evil or to produce good or wellbeing.

The second way of meeting life's problems leads to the realm of psychic powers (and presumed psychic powers): hypnotism, clairvoyance, mediumship, telepathy, telaesthesia(1), and the conquest of space and time.²²⁵

Elkin's schema of magic and psychic powers is also foreign to Aboriginal understanding. This distinction between magic and psychic powers is hard to sustain, as both require some kind of paranormal agency which is somehow at the disposal of the practitioner. Further, both magic and psychic power suggest, but do not prove, the existence of a world of spirits distinct from our own human consciousness whose power and aid can be tapped. The important point here is that Elkin pictures these elders as leaders of their communities in meeting the requirements of tribal life and as

²²⁴ I am using the Australian presumption that the word 'Aboriginal' refers to Australian Aborigines, though of course there are communities elsewhere which are properly called Aboriginal.

²²⁵ Elkin, *Op.Cit.*, pp.5-6.

specialists in dealing with the mysterious forces of reality that are recognized in Aboriginal stories and beliefs.

The point to be stressed is that while the medicine-man is considered to possess great power and faculties especially developed, none of his power is regarded as *extraordinary*, or abnormal. It is possessed and exercised against an accepted background of belief, and in some degree, though usually in a very slight degree, it is possessed by all.²²⁶

What we are dealing with here, then, can be viewed as a specific cultural development of potentialities which are part of our common human heritage rather than as something completely unique to Aboriginal shamans. Elkin's own account of the powers of Aboriginal shamans offers us a translation out of the Aboriginal frame of reference into a western framework. Elkin presents us with an account involving psychic powers, the persuasive deployment of ordinary Aboriginal knowledge and the force exercised by the aura of the shamanic role upon Aboriginal informants rather than the present activities of the ancestral beings, the traditional implements and symbolically potent objects of Aboriginal culture and the special powers of people of high degree.

Medicine-men's powers enable them to do many super-normal things, but they are all psychical in character. Healing or killing (by sorcery), 'divining' a murderer, practising hypnotism, telepathy, telaesthesia²²⁷ and clairvoyance, holding seances or visiting the sky - all these depend on the psychic training and faculties of the medicine-man and the induction of the right state of receptivity ... in the minds of the patient, victim, mourners, dreamers, or audience at a ceremony.²²⁸

Elkin is trying to make it intelligible to us westerners what it is that Aborigines believe about the powers of the shamans. He thinks that the categories of psychic power are the most plausible that we have to conceptualize some of these beliefs.

In many tribes, especially in south-east Australia, medicine-men 'can fly' through space and see what is occurring elsewhere. They might produce magical cord or familiars and travel on or in them, or they might pass through the air without such accessories. Normally, however, their bodies do not take part in these journeys; only their spirits. Indeed, their bodies are sometimes asleep.

A Nyul-Nyul informant told me how he doubted the claim of a medicine-man to gain such information, so to test him, asked him to ascertain when his (the questioner's) white employer was returning. He said that neither he nor the medicine-man knew this. The latter went off a short distance and sat under a tree with the moonlight playing through the leaves, and

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²²⁷ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (p.2142) refers telaesthesia to psychics and defines this power as "perception at a distance; direct sensation or perception of objects or conditions independently of the recognized channels of sense".

²²⁸ Elkin, *Op.Cit.*, p.37.

produced his 'spirit-dogs', which he, the questioner, actually saw. The medicine-man sent these familiars on their errand, and some little time later told him that as dawn came next morning he would hear the sound of his employer's horse approaching. Sure enough, this came to pass, confounding the unbelief of my informant.²²⁹

It is interesting to note this scepticism in the Aboriginal informant in a situation of longstanding European settlement. We can wonder whether such scepticism would arise in the same way in a more traditional setting. The description in terms of the production of the 'spirit-dogs' relates to the idea that shamans kept all manner of things in their bodies, a natural idea in the context of a nomadic life-style with few possessions to carry. Elkin adopts the somewhat rationalistic interpretation that the spirit familiars are an externalization of the spirit of the shaman²³⁰, though the account is also open to interpretation in terms of independently conscious spiritual beings. At the least, the fact that the Aboriginal informant saw the dogs does suggest that they are part of a shared reality, whether this is produced completely by the activity of the shaman or not. In this story, we see Aboriginal belief in a power consciously exercised by individuals.

This power, called *miwi* by the Yaralde of the Lower Murray, is said to be present in all persons, but to be especially developed by a few. All manifestations of psychic power are dependent on it - including white and black magic. Old people can use it so as to know who is coming and what is going to happen, whereas the especially gifted person, after much practice, can perform the quite remarkable acts already described. This *miwi* is said to be located in the pit of the stomach. And even as I wrote this, at Walgett, in August 1944, amongst the Weilwan tribal remnants there, I was told how they seem to know events of importance to them, before it seems feasible that they should do so. And several of them have told me that the 'clever man' (*wiringin*) sent something out of his body (pointing to the stomach) to see things. Moreover, this something might even be a materialization of himself, which could be seen by at least some persons kilometres away where it had been 'sent'; such persons being sensitives.²³¹

We have here a series of claims which move into realms of possibility not recognized by western common sense, though documented in the traditions of Asian religions. Paramahansa Yogananda tells of an encounter with his guru, Lahiri Mahasaya, in which the guru projected his double to meet with another man and summon him to the guru's house in order to meet Yogananda²³². This occurred while Yogananda was present in the house with the guru throughout, which understandably impressed Yogananda.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.47.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.48.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.57.

²³² Cf. Yogananda, P, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, Ca., 1977, esp. pp. 26-33.

That Aborigines have more sharply developed senses of sight, smell and hearing than Europeans is quite a testable matter which we can readily accept. It is a small but significant step to claim that some Aboriginal people exercise *telaesthesia*, the ability to perceive beyond the ordinary limits of sense perception. While this can in theory be tested, the person exercising the ability must consent to be tested - and the test conditions must not close down whatever it is that makes *telaesthesia* possible. The manifestation of 'spirit dogs' or a 'double' of the person sending requires a special sensitivity in the observer, so that it is not clear that this can easily be tested by people without this ability. Provided that there is a high level of agreement between those who do claim to see such things, it must remain a tantalizing enigma for those unable to make such a claim. Then we have the further claim that sensitive people can see the 'double' of the shaman at the spot where he or she is doing their 'far-seeing'. This is a good example of agreement between observers which is capable of generating impressive testimony for the existence of powers not apparent to all. The final step in this series is the claim that shamans are able not only to project their 'spirit-self' to a distant location but also to bring their physical body to this new location rather than bring the 'spirit-self' back to the original place. This last possibility would be one way of accounting for the many stories in which shamans appear in new places surprisingly quickly. An Aboriginal explanation recorded by Elkin is a little different from this.

Medicine-men are believed to be able to travel at a very fast pace. This is obvious enough if the claim is to fly in sleep or in a vision to distant places, or to send their familiars on such journeys. But they can also run at a surprising pace for any distance, faster than anyone can run, and without getting tired or out of breath. They apparently run less than a metre above the ground. Indeed, it has been said that the air has been made soft and solid, and that it moves along, carrying them with it. The explanation given by other Aborigines is that 'these clever men can make their spirits take them along very quickly'. Information regarding this form of progression comes from south-east Australia, especially western New South Wales, and eastern South Australia.²³³

The substance of this report is hard to reconcile with western common sense, as it lies quite beyond our ordinary experience, though there is an interesting parallel between this speed and the rapidity of movement of the double of the guru Lahiri Mahayasa in Yogananda's account already cited. Elkin himself points out the existence of Asian traditions of higher powers exercised by adepts, focusing on accounts from Tibet²³⁴. In terms of our western experience of reality, these accounts do connect with dream experiences in which, instead of walking with great effort as if through treacle, we seem able to move with great freedom and speed. Dreams involve visualization, which would

²³³ Elkin, *Op.Cit.*, p.55.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.57-66.

seem to be an important ingredient in an intentional induction of such experiences. Western common sense allows that visualization can create such a lively fantasy experience that our bodies respond physiologically as if it were real. Western common sense draws the line at the suggestion that visualization can produce further physical effects such as the softening and solidifying of the air beneath our feet. We are left with the question of whether this line represents a genuine impossibility or a decision against opening ourselves to certain kinds of experience.

An important faculty which the 'clever-men' possess, and which is assiduously trained, is 'the strong eye'. This means not so much the power of looking into another person's mind, as the power of looking into and through a sick person's body to see whether the soul is present or not, and also of being able to see the spirit of a 'murderer' and even the spirits of the dead. In short, to possess the 'strong eye' is to have the faculty of seeing spirits, of the living and of the dead.²³⁵

Again, there are people who regularly see 'auras' around other people and a wide range of living and non-living things. These auras may correspond to energy realities of a subtle or spiritual nature, as widely asserted by esoteric traditions. Western common sense systematically discounts such perceptions as no more than 'tricks of the diffraction of light', but the possibility that such perceptions do reveal subtle or spiritual realities is hard to disprove. The existence of traditions based upon perceptions such as these, of which Aboriginal Australia provides abundant examples, is prima facie evidence that significant connections, concerning life, health and death, have been established to the satisfaction of the groups maintaining the traditions.

One of the dominant claims for Aboriginal shamans is that they can induce sickness and kill by psychic or magical means. In a shamanic world, the knowledge of how to do such things is valuable for the benevolent purposes of healing and warding off the attack of malevolent shamans as well as for the more obvious purposes of punishment and the enforcement of dominance. Behind many of the traditional stories and claims, we can discern the uncomfortable split between the benign image of the protector and healer of the group and the malign image of the anti-social sorcerer. For Aboriginal people without the appropriate knowledge and power, it must be impossible to live without fear of the sorcerer. Even benevolent shamans must often be suspected of sending sickness and death, simply because it is believed that they can. When we remember the importance of punishing offences against the law by members of one's own group, it would seem inevitable that the powers of the shamans would be feared.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.49.

Our western common sense attitude to medical emergencies could be generally characterized as automatic benevolence. We look askance at motorists who pass the scene of an unattended accident at which there are obvious casualties. Avoidance of such scenes is typically governed by fears about lost time or later legal action in case of supposed mistakes in trying to help, where more malign antagonisms are not involved. In traditional Aboriginal understanding, the causes of illness are spiritual, so that medical assistance involves the risk of incurring the displeasure of the spirits or the sorcerer responsible. It is therefore a matter for close family members, who are involved anyway, or else for careful choice about involvement. Shamans require courage as well as knowledge in confronting the spirits or the power of a rival shaman.

The powers of Aboriginal shamans come to them through their 'making'. This 'making' refers to the special initiation which they receive from the spirits and from the ritual activities of existing shamans. Elkin's account emphasizes the ritual aspect, though he is clear about the importance of the role of spiritual beings. He acknowledges that the descriptions by Aboriginal shamans of how they came to acquire their powers are literally fantastic and impossible for western common sense. He suggests that the similarity of such accounts across Australia should lead us to recognize that we are dealing with something which lies outside the range of experience from which western common sense has been formed²³⁶. The essential features of the 'making' are a mystical encounter with powerful spiritual beings, who somehow overcome the person being made and who insert all kinds of powerful objects into the body of the shaman. The shaman thereafter is able to exercise the new powers.

To sum up the available evidence for South Australia, the neighbouring area of Western Australia, the Northern Territory, far-west Queensland, and the Kimberleys [the 'circumcision' areas], the making of a medicine man is a transition rite which conforms to a traditional and significant pattern:

1. The postulant, who, of course, has been approved and accepted as a candidate, is 'killed', usually by being 'pointed' with a magical 'death-bone'
2. Operations are performed on the ritual 'corpse'. Magical additions are made to the 'insides', head, thigh-bones and ankles and other joints.
3. Finally, the 'dead' person is restored to life - a man of power.
4. During the 'making' and afterwards, the postulant is brought into contact with spirits and heroes of totemic significance, the spirits of the dead.²³⁷

Elkin notes only one significant difference from this pattern in the acquisition of shamanic powers by people in the rest of Australia where circumcision is not part of the initiation of men, which is

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.17.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.24-5.

that the experience is described as occurring in trance, not as a death²³⁸. South-eastern Australia is also distinguished by the belief in 'Baiaime', who has his camp in the sky and who is powerful and mostly benevolent.

South of the Murray River, they were made by a supernatural spirit, or by the spirits of the dead, in the bush or in the sky. The normal procedure was for the spirit to open the postulant's side and to insert in it such magical substances as quartz crystals with which his powers were henceforth connected. The incision was healed without leaving a mark. Usually, too, the postulant was taken up to the sky-world. Indeed, the operation might be performed on him while there. In any case, he could henceforth visit the sky and converse with the ghosts and spirits who dwell there.²³⁹

The Aboriginal emphasis would seem to be upon the action of the spirits, whether mediated by ritual actions of the existing shamans or not. Elkin, as an anthropologist, prefers to think in terms of the ritual actions of human beings, relying on social conditioning and suggestion to explain the more spontaneous inner experiences. Howitt has recorded an initiation account from a shaman of the Kurnai which focuses on dreaming experience.

When I was a big boy about getting whiskers I was at Alberton camped with my people. [Name] was there and other old men. I had some dreams about my father, and I dreamed three times about the same thing. The first and the second time, he came with his brother and a lot of other old men, and dressed me up with lyre-bird's feathers round my head. The second time they were all rubbed over with Naial [red ochre] and had Bridda-briddas on. The third time they tied a cord made of whale's sinews round my neck and waist, and swung me by it and carried me through the air over the sea at Corner Inlet, and set me down at Yiruk [Wilson's Promontory]. It was at the front of a big rock like the front of a house. I noticed that there was something like an opening to the rock. My father tied something over my eyes and led me inside. I knew this because I heard the rocks make a sound as of knocking behind me. Then he uncovered my eyes, and I found that I was in a place as bright as day, and all the old men were round about. My father showed me a lot of shining bright things, like glass, on the walls, and told me to take some. I took one and held it tight in my hand. When we went out again my father taught me how to make these things go into my legs, and how I could pull them out again. He also taught me how to throw them at people. After that, he and the other old men carried me back to the camp and put me on the top of a big tree. He said, 'Shout out loud and tell them that you are come back'. I did this and I heard the people in the camp waking up, and the women beginning to beat their rugs for me to come down, because now I was a Mulla-mullung. Then I woke up and found that I was lying along the limb of a tree.²⁴⁰

Such accounts are tantalising in the questions that they naturally raise which we are not really able to answer. The account goes on to tell how the shaman came down from the tree with the crystal

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.73-4.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

²⁴⁰ Howitt, AW, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, pp.408-10.

given him by his father in his hand and that he was recognized as a shaman by the old men of his group. Using this crystal, he could 'pull things out of people' [i.e. heal] and catch people by throwing the crystal at them. He also tells how he later took to drink and lost his powers.

What seems clear in general terms is that we are here dealing with recognizably spiritual experiences, which in Asian religious and mystical teachings are traditionally associated with the development of special powers. Elkin's focus upon psychic powers and magic, while understandable, is unnecessarily narrow as a frame for our understanding of Aboriginal spirituality. What stands out in the stories of the initiation of Aboriginal shamans are the themes of surrender to the higher powers 'though they kill us', the dying to a previous self, the reception of a new self with new powers as a gift and an opening of access to sacred space and its powers.

Many Aboriginal people and communities have become Christian. To white Australians, this looks like a decision to turn away from the customs and beliefs of their ancestors in favour of a white religion. Yet this is seldom the full story. For Aboriginal people, Christianity mostly provides a form in which the essential aspects of their traditional culture are now carried forward. This does not negate the depth and seriousness of their Christian commitment. As they see it, they come to Christ as Aboriginal people and Christ helps them to maintain and refresh all that is good in their traditional culture. A careful reading of actual mission histories will confirm this general point. Wali Fejo, a Larrakia man and former Principal of Nungalinga College,²⁴¹ tells a story which points to the continuing presence of the Spirit of God for Aboriginal people.

The old man Mowinjin was a kidney fat man, a killer, a tribal warrior who was feared. One day he was out hunting with three other men. The others went on ahead and he stayed sitting by a tree. As he sat there he received a vision. (This was before the missionaries came). He saw a man of God and he was given a song. He did not know what the words meant. A great peace came over him. When he 'woke up' he took his fighting spear and broke it in half. He began to play the music. The others heard it in the distance and as they returned and drew closer to Mowinjin, they were amazed at the change in him. He seemed to be different, although he was still Mowinjin. He had become a man of peace; he told them – and later all the people – about his vision. He never killed again. He was no longer an angry man, feared by the people; he became a man of peace. When the missionaries came, he said: 'I have already seen Jesus, the one you are telling us about'. When Mowinjin was very old, before he died he asked to become a Christian and was baptized.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Nungalinga College is a Theological College in Darwin for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are studying for Christian ministry in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches.

²⁴² Fejo, W, "An Australian Aboriginal Perspective", in Duraisingh, C (Ed.), *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1998, pp.121-22.

Traditional Aboriginal culture knows much about special religio-spiritual experience. In this area, it is closer to the world of the Bible than modern Western culture. Even more important than this focus upon special religio-spiritual experiences, however, is the spiritual relationship that exists for Aboriginal people between themselves and the land. It is the land which makes them who they are. This relationship seems at once spiritual and physical, leading to a deep care for the life-sustaining qualities at work in the physical environment. Westerners like myself hear the dreaming stories of particular Aboriginal groups and wonder about the specific spiritual experiences that lie behind them. Shamanism as a religious tradition stems from hunter-gatherer societies which live in immediate dependency upon nature for food and all other necessities. It would seem impossible to enter fully into this tradition without living in this direct dependence upon nature. It would also seem impossible to divorce shamanistic notions of spirit from the physical constraints of life in specific landscapes and from the bodily health of the tribe and the individual persons within it.

Interlude: Spirits in the Landscape²⁴³

R: The Christian Aborigines that I know are very spiritual people, but they talk about their old-time practices as demon-worship and they are very wary about the use of black magic against their people.

J: They have been influenced far too much by conservative missionaries. Not all the Aborigines who are Christians talk like the ones you quote, Rachel. Many have maintained the old practices as part of their ongoing care for their land.

R: They tell quite convincing stories about the murderous activities of sorcerers.

B: We white folk don't know much about Aboriginal people and their beliefs and practices. What impresses me is the notion of sacred places which can only be approached with great caution and careful communication with the guardian spirits. Australian Aboriginal people seem to have found a way of entering the spirit world simply by walking into these special places.

²⁴³ The information in this section comes largely from private communications with many people, particularly my brother, Ian Yule, my sister-in-law Ro Yule and my friends John and Jeannie Adams, who have lived and worked in traditional Aboriginal communities (particularly Elcho Island and Aurukun). I am also very grateful for the conversations that I was able to have with staff and students at Nungalinga College in 1996.

R: The Bible teaches that there are specific spiritual rulers over nations and over tracts of land²⁴⁴. These rulers are either angelic or demonic, depending on whether they serve God or not. The totems and dreaming ancestors of the Aboriginal people are probably these spiritual rulers over their land, which they worship in the traditional ceremonies.

B: There are spiritual aspects to land and these can sometimes be encountered spiritually. Some of these spirits are to be resisted because they prompt evil or unworthy actions. Rachel, we have been over this matter of demon-worship before; I thought we had agreed that we needed to discern what the spirits want before concluding that they are demonic.

R: I want to see them acknowledging the Lordship of Christ before I have anything to do with them.

B: Perhaps you need to relate to them before you can see how they relate to Christ.

S: The life energies of the land are created realities with a spiritual dimension. These life energies are not perfectly balanced. We live in a broken world. The stronger aspects of any environment tend to push out the weaker. It is cause for rejoicing when a life-enhancing balance is achieved, however fragmentarily. We see the demonic quality in these life energies when the strong push out the weak.

R: You sound as though you are agreeing with me for a change.

S: Only partly. Among humans, we experience grace when the strong can learn to care for the weak. This is not really possible while the strong feel under life-threatening attack.

J: You suggest an attractive and redemptive scenario, Sandy, though I think you are forgetting the existence of wilful cruelty among people, to say nothing of your anthropomorphic analogy between people and landscapes.

S: Traditional Aboriginal people seem very aware of antagonistic forces in particular landscapes. Some areas are pretty much off limits because the spirit of the place is too dangerous to provoke.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Horrobin, *Op.Cit.*, 1, pp.46-48.

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Other areas are off limits because the spirits of the dead congregate there. The recently dead are not welcome around the living, due to their propensity to interfere.

R: This reminds me of that 'New Age' stuff from the Californian therapist, Edith Fiore. Christianity teaches that we should have nothing to do with the souls of the dead, beyond commending them to the care and protection of God.

S: That is pretty much what Fiore teaches, too, though she is willing to get involved to help to separate people from those who have somehow attached themselves.

J: I am reminded of the beliefs and practices of Shrine Shinto in Japan²⁴⁵, which centres on reverence for the *kami*.²⁴⁶ These *kami* are discernible spiritual entities. Many kinds of things are enshrined as *kami*, particularly impressive parts of nature, such as a mountain or a tree or a waterfall, and powerful ancestors who have died, such as former rulers, soldiers and other leaders. *Kami* is a title of honour, so that while everything has a spiritual side and so is potentially a *kami*, only those which somehow stand out are honoured and enshrined.²⁴⁷

B: The spiritual structure may be similar, but the tone of Aboriginal ceremonies is surely less formal and reverential than Japanese ceremonies.

J: I wouldn't underestimate the formality and the impressiveness of Aboriginal ceremonies, Beth, though of course the two cultures are very different.

R: I am confused. How can you identify the souls of dead people and aspects of non-human nature as the same kind of thing?

²⁴⁵ This discussion of Shinto reworks material from my second dialogue "Shamanism and Christianity", published in *Kyoto Journal*, No. 30, Harada Shokei, 35 Minami Goshomachhi, Okazaki, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, pp.53-55.

²⁴⁶ "The word '*kami*' refers, in the most general sense, to all divine beings of heaven and earth that appear in the classics. More particularly, the '*kami*' are the spirits that abide in and are worshiped at the shrines. In principle human beings, birds, animals, trees, plants, mountains, oceans - all may be '*kami*'. According to ancient usage, whatever seemed strikingly impressive, possessed the quality of excellence, or inspired a feeling of awe was called '*kami*'." Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), quoted in *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*, Ichiro, H, et al., (Ed.), Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1972, pp.37-8.

²⁴⁷ For an authoritative account of the nature of the *kami*, cf. Sokyō Ono, *Shinto: The Kami Way*, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo, 1962, pp.6-9.

B: This is your western individualism and humanism speaking, Rachel. You think of yourself and other humans as something other than a part of nature.

R: Perhaps so. I can see that Shinto treats us humans as a part of nature. In my view, humans have a heavenly destiny which is beyond that of the rest of nature.

J: That is the kind of thinking that has helped to put us into our present ecological difficulties. Belief in the *kami* is ecologically useful.

S: To show that a belief is useful does not mean that it is true. Christians worry about enshrining *kami* because it means an idolatrous worshipping of a creature when we should really worship only the Creator. In State Shinto²⁴⁸, worship of the Japanese emperor as a *kami* (a finite power however we look at him), was promoted as if there were no other gods of any value. However, if the *kami* are simply points of encounter with the one spiritual reality through features of this world, we may be dealing with spiritual encounters rather than worship. The *kami* are subordinate powers, 'spirits' or 'angels', not the transcendent Creator of Judaeo-Christian faith.

B: You Christians need to develop rituals of friendship with nature, just as we have rituals of friendship within human society. The same applies to the spirits of the dead, as far as I am concerned. I don't see rituals of friendship as worship. Rituals of friendship would allow you Christians to include the powers of nature and the spirits of the dead in your circle of worshippers of God.

R: I suppose we could think about non-human nature in terms of friendship. I find that sentences of Scripture come to me both when I am talking with others about our problems and when I am out walking in order to sort something out for myself. We tend to think ourselves clever for remembering an appropriate verse of Scripture, but we should probably be thanking the angelic spirits that whispered it in our ear.

B: Angels and other spiritual beings are very real, as you say, Rachel, though they don't always quote Scripture. I remember one time when I was sitting at the top of a waterfall near Melbourne and thinking with shame about our human destruction of the forests around that place. I must have been quite concentrated, for I became aware of a spiritual presence over to my right, to which I

²⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid.

could address these thoughts. This presence was slow, dignified and gracious. It accepted my contrition over destructive human activities and made me understand that my concern for the trees was appreciated. I felt immense relief at this graciousness. I felt that a bond of friendship had been established. I then became aware that the focus of this spiritual presence seemed to be located in a large, old tree which stood at the head of the whole valley in which I sat. I have regarded that tree as a friend ever since.²⁴⁹

J: *Kami*, like angels and also demons, are recognized primarily through the feelings of appropriately sensitive people. What matters is how they impress us humans, not what they might be in themselves.

S: The *kami* are expected to provide various life-sustaining exercises of power. This is one of the better reasons why they need the support of human energies. I was once in Japan, walking through a Shinto shrine at night with a sore head, feeling quite tired. The thought occurred to me that I could ask the power at this shrine for spiritual help and healing. I started to act prayerfully on this thought when I was stopped by the response that seemed to come from the place, which was that I should not bring any impurity into the shrine. If I was sore, that was my problem. I became aware of the difference between this power and the God of Judaeo-Christian tradition who encourages us to 'cast our burdens on the Lord' (Psalm 55:22) or the Bodhisattva tradition of beings whose compassion for suffering humanity leads them to offer help. It seemed to me that the *kami* preferred to be treated as a human emperor might, wanting only the strength and service of other people in support of its difficult life-maintaining work.

J: If the *kami* are spiritual beings that are encountered through our inner experience of features of nature or the presence of the spirits of the dead, are they objectively real beyond these natural features, including the earthly lives of ancestors, or are they simply our projected mental constructions onto these natural realities?

B: When people spontaneously have very comparable spiritual experiences, I think that we are dealing with something as objectively real as anything can be. Some ascetics have developed the power to see the *kami* residing in certain trees and rocks²⁵⁰. These are then identified and sometimes enshrined.

²⁴⁹ This story reflects an experience of my own, as does the one that follows.

²⁵⁰ Blacker, C, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, Mandala, Unwin, London, 1975, p.237.

J: We are back to this ability to see energy patterns or auras. I find it frustrating that I can't see these things, though I accept that some people can. What seems mysterious to me is whether the patterns that are seen really show the spiritual and emotional state of the person around whom these energies swirl.

S: I imagine that we would need to see these things before we can know how such sights relate to the rest of our perceptions of reality.

B: I see auras occasionally. I treat them as additional information, similar to dreams and visionary experiences. It is up to me to find coherence in my experience of the world. There are energies in nature as well as in ourselves with which we must deal. Imbalance in our relationship with such energies makes us sick.

S: In support of what you say, Beth, I am impressed by the physical nature of spiritual healing, which also seems to be a feature of traditional Aboriginal healing²⁵¹. Mick Fazeldean speaks about concentrating and using his hands to feel what is inside the sick person so that he can take away whatever is causing the sickness. He is quite clear about working on the body and finding things which don't belong there.

B: As far as I can make out, traditional Aboriginal people are in substantial agreement with other shamanic peoples in their understanding of the causes of illness. It is the spirits which make us sick through spirit intrusions, unless we are dealing with the soul-stealing of a malevolent shaman.

J: We think in abstractions, such as 'land' or 'landscape', 'physical' and 'spiritual'. This is usually a mark of our lack of direct experience. Aboriginal people are much more likely to talk about a powerful ancestor, the particular symptoms of their illness and the kangaroo man, all of whom they somehow experience directly.

R: I know very little about all this. I can see that it is important, in the same way that western science and medicine are important. I believe that there are indeed spiritual entities out there which do interact with us. Christian prayer offers a wonderful confidence that we can find the right way

²⁵¹ Cf. "Aboriginal and Christian Healing: An Interview With Mick Fazeldean, Western Australia", in Trompf, GT, *Op.Cit.*, p.98.

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forward and not be ensnared by evil spirits. I feel very diffident about trying to navigate these treacherous waters through my own unaided discernment as you seem to do, Beth.

B: You haven't asked me what spiritual help I have in this work, Rachel. It is different from your Christian prayer, but I know that I can't survive in the spirit world without help from powerful allies. From my point of view, you refer everything to the Creator and don't worry about the messengers. I deal with the messengers, though I acknowledge the Creator.

J: You both puzzle me completely with your belief in spirits, which I take to be reifications of your own feelings and sensitivities. My agnosticism extends to the Creator as well as to the messengers.

S: I hope we have all learned something about the limitations of our knowledge and experience as well as pushing these limits back a little. I treat it as an important conclusion that landscape is spiritually alive for many and that our health can depend upon a proper sensitivity to these intangible dimensions.

J: I have no difficulty in accepting your cautious conclusion, Sandy. Why do I still feel that all the important questions remain quite unresolved?

Enlightenment Revisited

The spiritual dimension of experience is marginalized by western common sense because of the decisive way in which the European Enlightenment thinkers embraced an outward and public orientation towards knowledge, banishing spiritual experience to the inner world of the private imagination. Despite the imaginative work of generations of creative people in western culture, personal experience as a base for significant knowledge has been accorded the lowly status of the anecdotal. Knowledge is pictured as the objectively tested and approved body of received truth about the world. Yet it is also the by-product of the activities of experiencing persons who constantly go beyond the existing horizon of the known.

Western views of knowledge are frequently based in the experience of observing an object, where we attribute the knowledge of the object to ourselves as subject. The Latin derivations of the words 'object' and 'subject' (from '*iacere*', 'to throw or lay', '*ob*', 'in front of' and '*sub*', 'underneath'²⁵²) suggest that knowing is constructed by a human activity, where what is known is laid out in front of us, while the knower is 'laid underneath', sustaining the process of knowing. Knowing is therefore more than the passive reception of information. This gives rise to pictures of knowledge in terms of a polarity requiring both an active subject and an object. Paradoxes arise when we apply this picture of knowledge to self-knowledge. Should we think that knowledge of the self is inevitably imperfect because there must always be a part of us that provides the subjectivity, which it cannot do if it is made a part of the object that is itself passively known? Or can we appeal to a primitive state, akin to our direct field of experience, in which subject and object are one, directly known by intuition, raising the possibility of also knowing our world 'from within'? Even more problematic is the issue of how we think of the knowing self. I conclude that we face the paradox that it is precisely in our own most immediate knowledge of ourselves and our world that we find that our own being is essentially mysterious to us.

Doubt has been made the foundation of critical thinking since Descartes²⁵³, who used it to look for secure foundations upon which to validate the reality of a world external to our own thought processes. It is important to note that Descartes and his successors failed in this attempt, as the only thing that was found to resist this corrosive doubt was our present act of thinking, enshrined in the

²⁵² *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary*, Op.Cit., pp. 281, 401 and 574-5.

²⁵³ For what follows, cf. Descartes, R, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, Trans. Sutcliffe, FE, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968.

famous argument, *cogito ergo sum*, “I think, therefore I am”. For Descartes, the idea of a deceitful demon whose possible activities rendered common-sense interpretations of our experience doubtful, could only be overcome by appealing to the superior power of a good God who reassures us of the objective existence of the material world. Western thinking has tended to conclude from this that critical questioning should be restricted as much as possible to questions that can be answered, a conclusion evident in the practice of science. The method of doubt and critical questioning is still dominant within western intellectual culture, though it has been refined to the point where practitioners realize that it is fruitless to try to doubt everything at once.

Descartes’ question concerned the reality of things. Western Christian doubts relate to the spiritual reliability of things; in terms of this doubt, our present act of thinking is real enough but of uncertain reliability. Western Christians are still up against the deceitful demon. Christian mistrust of the self can become pathological, as radical self-doubt can generate logically insoluble dilemmas. When we look for a basis on which to distinguish the ‘good’, reliable self from the ‘bad’, unreliable self, our own mental activity is a part of the field that we are surveying. If any part of the self may be fundamentally flawed and an avenue for satanic delusions, what is there to validate rationality or intuition or anything else? In human terms, nothing will suffice. Christian answers in terms of the illumination of the Holy Spirit suggest a possible answer, yet any experience which begins to look like such an illumination is still vulnerable to the doubt that Satan might just possibly be appearing to us in the form of an angel of light. There is no logical escape from this doubt once it is thoroughly established in our thinking. Self-knowledge as well as self-acceptance and self-love are therefore all capable of becoming quite problematic for Christians because proper vindication comes only from the transcendent source, which is God.

Christian tradition has many resources with which to address this problem of how we relate to ourselves, from practices of prayer and meditation to spiritual conversations. Such practices usually take a critical stance to the natural self, which is regularly offered up as the sacrifice that God requires of us, in the pattern of repentance, forgiveness and amendment of life. An encounter with shamanism is likely to prompt Christians to renewed attention to these resources because shamanism claims that what we meet in significant inner encounters is the powerful world of spirit. Spiritual encounters in shamanic initiation typically lead to the death of previous selves and the provision of a new self with spiritually enhanced powers. These changes are not produced by self-doubt but by the gift or the unfolding of the more powerful self through the spiritual encounter. If elements of self-doubt enter the story, it is as part of the initiatory sickness, where it is a symptom

of the dying of the self which is part of the call of spirit. All this should come as no surprise to Christians, who are called to die to self, take up their cross and follow Christ.

To appreciate the special quality of certain experiences, we need a reliable knowledge of our ordinary mental functioning. Serious doubts about our own reliability or about the spiritual significance of our own mental functioning will obscure our discernment of what it is that we are encountering. One likely casualty of such doubts is our ability to remember the details of specific inner experiences such as dreams. John Lilly, a significant scientific investigator of experiences in consciousness, formulated an appropriate separation of doubt from commitment to the unfolding inner experience.²⁵⁴ He advises us to avoid critical questions while we are having an experience, as we need all our attention to deal properly with significant inner encounters. Once the experience is over, we should first write down a full account of the experience while it is fresh in our minds. Only then should we ask whatever critical questions seem important. Lilly's way of combining commitment to the reality of the experience with scepticism about its wider meaning provides a good balance between the needs of critical reflection and the need for undivided personal presence within the actual experiences.

Many Christians who face dilemmas are inclined to think of a direct message from God as the epitome of a clear answer which removes the need for further checking. This is not my view. Even if I accept a particular inner voice as a valid manifestation of God, I am not able to treat it as a completely unquestionable theophany. Its status is more like that of a fresh and strong voice in an ongoing conversation, even if it announces itself as the voice of God. It seems to me that the inner experience of certainty and authority still needs common-sense checking. Those who claim a special status for visionary and revelatory experiences tend to regard such experiences as self-authenticating, partly because it is genuinely puzzling as to how they can be authenticated from other sources. The crucial question is whether visionary experiences are a direct participation in the life and the knowing of 'God' or whether they are something less than this. Gnostics (from the Greek word 'gnosis', 'knowledge') stress the overwhelming sense of certainty and reality that attends upon authentically visionary experiences. Pistics (from the Greek word 'pistis', 'faith') such as myself stress the need for checking even the most compelling and complete revelations.

In the early gnostic controversies, orthodox Christianity adopted a pistic stance, stressing the need to check visionary experiences against received beliefs. Ancient gnosticism, while quite diverse,

²⁵⁴ Cf. Lilly, JC, The Center of the Cyclone, Julian Press, New York, 1972.

often taught an opposition between spirit and matter which is not persuasive in our materialistic western culture. The orthodox Christian affirmation of our embodied, physical experience as the reality that was dignified by God through becoming flesh in Jesus has shaped most modern western world views. People like Carl Jung who look back to the gnostics as spiritual ancestors seem most interested in the self-authenticating nature of compelling inner experiences and the freedom of this personal knowing from the collective, dogmatic teachings of churches. Post-Enlightenment gnostic sympathizers like Jung do also believe in careful checking, though they tend to check with the internal coherence of their own significant experiences rather than with an external tradition.

I vividly remember learning something of traditional Christian attitudes to this issue through participating in a five-day workshop in 1981. This workshop was organized by the Uniting Church and led by a Jesuit, Father Frank Wallace, using the first five of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. In the middle of this illuminating and image-based work, I had a spontaneous visionary experience which came during a time of individual meditation. I saw myself as a dead planet hanging sombrely and alone in the vastness of space. I then became aware of the approach of a bright fire-star. As it came near, I could feel the heat of it and I shrank away in fear because it rapidly became too hot and painful. Just as the pain reached an unbearable intensity, so that I felt trapped and desperate to escape, something changed so that I became able to receive this overwhelmingly powerful energy. I realized that this now felt good and was in fact what I had previously been lacking. The bright fire-star then proceeded on its way through space, leaving me alive with a flaming energy and feeling joyous as I travelled on my own way, giving out this fiery energy.

I couldn't wait to tell Father Wallace of my experience, though I was quite unsure what to make of it. Father Wallace listened to my story and to what I was making of it. Instead of the powerful interpretation and affirmation that I think I expected from him, his response was to tell me that I seemed to be checking on the experience adequately. What I took from this was that he encouraged me to take the experience seriously, but on no account to use it as a guide to future actions and self-understanding without very careful checking in terms of common sense and the Christian tradition. I would now want to interpret the experience both as a direct spiritual encounter and as an example of the kinds of experience that lie behind Jung's concept of the archetypal. The question remains as to whether such experiences are potential new revelations of God or something of lesser, more personal status.

Orthodox Christianity has tended to require of new revelations that they conform to the general pattern of the old. It is perhaps obvious that I do not accept a more dogmatic pistic approach to gnosticism in which pistics denigrate and dismiss all visionary experiences other than those that they have already enshrined in their own belief system. I would want to compare new with previous experiences and relate both to Christian beliefs. In an age in which religious teachings are being put to the test of conformity with experience, Christianity has had the difficulty that its crucial experiences happened a long time ago and that it is unclear what modern experiences, if any, should count as adequate tests of the faith. One source of the modern interest in gnosticism seems to me to arise from its claims to teach what can in fact be experienced. This challenge of experiencability does seem a legitimate and important challenge to Christianity. How can Christian teachings be validated in terms of potential human experiences? It seems to me that Christian experience is defined in terms of relationship with God, so that no self-enclosed experience can be a full validation.

Shamans claim to experience non-ordinary aspects of reality which they perceive directly in an altered state of consciousness. We can begin to investigate this general claim by comparing shamanic experiences with reports from practitioners of non-shamanic spiritual traditions. As an example, we can refer to the notion of *quamaneq*, the shaman light of brain and body, which occurs in the previously quoted account of the Eskimo shaman Aua, and compare this personal account from the yogi Paramahansa Yogananda.

The saint and I were standing on the sidewalk in front of the university building. He gently slapped my chest over the heart.

A transforming silence ensued. Just as the modern 'talkies' become inaudible motion pictures when the sound apparatus goes out of order, so the Divine Hand, by some strange miracle, stifled the earthly bustle. Pedestrians as well as the passing trolley cars, automobiles, bullock carts, and iron-wheeled hackney carriages were all in noiseless transit. As though possessing an omnipresent eye, I beheld the scenes that were behind me, and to each side, as easily as those in front. The whole spectacle of activity in that small section of Calcutta passed before me without a sound. Like a glow of fire dimly seen beneath a thin coat of ashes, a mellow luminescence permeated the panoramic view.

My own body seemed nothing more than one of the many shadows; though it was motionless while the others flitted mutely to and fro. Several boys, friends of mine, approached and passed on; though they had looked directly at me, it was without recognition.

The unique pantomime brought me an inexpressible ecstasy. I drank deep from some blissful fount. Suddenly my chest received another soft blow from Master Mahasaya. The pandemonium of the world burst upon my unwilling ears. I staggered, as though harshly awakened from a gossamer dream. The transcendental wine was removed beyond my reach.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Yogananda, P, *Op.Cit.*, pp.94-5.

Yogananda recounts this as one of the early experiences which revealed to him that reality was not limited to what we can know in ordinary waking consciousness. Non-ordinary aspects of reality are, for those who experience them, similar to ordinary aspects in providing information about reality and opportunities for action. This is an enigma for those of us whose personal experience does not seem to include such exotic items. I conclude that we need to cultivate our ability to listen to the experiences of others which diverge in content from our own and to maintain a world-view which does not require us to reject the reality of the experiences of other people. We need not accept all reality claims based on these experiences. We should distinguish between experiences and interpretations, however much these interpenetrate in practice.

The critical philosophy of the European Enlightenment was classically formulated by Immanuel Kant who sought to establish the general possibilities of human knowledge. Briefly and crudely, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason²⁵⁶ limits our genuine knowledge to the structure of our own concepts (which in itself tells us nothing about the reality of a wider world) and to the world as revealed by our senses (which is merely the world as it appears to us). Genuine human knowledge of reality as it is in itself is therefore impossible. As we cannot and should not seek to live within such a sceptical view, Kant restores to us the possibility of organizing our lives on the basis of our justified beliefs about the nature of wider realities through his Critique of Practical Reason²⁵⁷ and Critique of Judgement²⁵⁸. These works legitimate the use of such unprovable organizing concepts as God, freedom, immortality and purpose. These concepts are justified as being required to validate the experience of being a moral agent who recognizes and seeks to practice the moral law. One of the central casualties of Kant's approach is the possibility of attaining knowledge by means of direct experience of the spirit world, whether in the form of angelic and demonic visitations or in the form of shamanic visionary encounters. What people might choose to believe is another matter, though Kant also looks at this critically in his work Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone²⁵⁹.

²⁵⁶ Kant, I, Critique of Pure Reason, Trans. & Ed. Guyer, P & Wood, AW, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

²⁵⁷ Kant, I, Critique of Practical Reason, Trans. & Ed. Gregor, M, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

²⁵⁸ Kant, I, Critique of Judgement, Trans. Bernard, JH, Hafner Pub. Co., New York, 1972.

²⁵⁹ Kant, I, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Trans. Greene, TM & Hudson, HH, Harper & Row, New York, 1960.

Kant's critical philosophy and the European Enlightenment assumptions in general are powerfully supported by the overwhelming success of the scientific approach to the acquisition of knowledge. For knowledge of the various kinds of objects of the everyday world of our experience, science dominates the scene. It is interesting to note that reality seems to have a capacity to resist final explanation despite the vast expansion of human knowledge. The relevant image is not that of a limited field increasingly fully explored but that of a balloon that, in expanding as new knowledge is added, shows an increasing area of interface with what is not yet known. Each fresh discovery permits further questions of detail or of wider relationships to be asked. The search by physicists for fundamental particles and by astronomers for a complete picture of the universe would seem to be examples of this pattern. To note the continuing presence of mystery in the context of our best scientific answers to the large questions is not to denigrate science but to recognize the structural limitations to human knowledge that Kant delineates.

Kant's own relationship to experiences of the spirit world was complex. In a letter to Charlotte von Knoblauch of 10 August 1763, we read of his general rational approach to stories of contact with the spirit world and of the strong impression made upon him in this connection by Emmanuel Swedenborg.

I don't know whether anyone has ever discovered in me the slightest trace of mysticism or miracle-seeking or a weakness making me accept things with credulity at their face value. So much is quite certain, that regardless of all tales about apparitions and visions concerning the world of spirits, the majority of which are probably known to me, I have always tended to make these conform to the rules of sound reason, and I have always been inclined to regard such tales quite sceptically. Not that such things are impossible, for how little we know about the nature of spirits? Yet, these instances have not been proved sufficiently. Furthermore, when we talk about their incomprehensible character, and their uselessness, we must take into account the many difficulties which arise due to the ease with which one can be deceived; I have, therefore, found it unnecessary in the past to worry much about such things or to allow myself to shiver and be scared by the dead in the darkness of a cemetery. Such was the position which I had adopted for a very long time until I came to know about Mr. Swedenborg.²⁶⁰

Kant goes on to tell of his investigation through informants of specific stories about Swedenborg which were particularly impressive and well attested. While Kant was never able to explain the correlations between Swedenborg's visions and empirical events, his response was to seek a general basis for understanding visions in terms of the pejorative category of hallucinations. This response can be found in the Essay on the Diseases of the Mind, published in 1764. It is perhaps

²⁶⁰ Kant, I, Dreams of a Spirit Seer, pp.149-50. For my account of Kant's relationship to Swedenborg, cf. Ibid., Introduction.

unsurprising that Swedenborg was not prepared to address such a negative and derogatory schema. Kant's uncharacteristically scathing attack on Swedenborg in Dreams of a Spirit Seer (published in 1766, fifteen years before the Critique of Pure Reason) may have been prompted by disappointment at Swedenborg's lack of response to the earlier work. The attack is very strange, combining, in Part I, Kant's rationalized version of recognizably Swedenborgian ideas with, Part II, some exposition of Swedenborg's ideas and experiences together with sweeping and contemptuous dismissal of them. He also attacks Wolff and Crusius, authors of speculative and rationalist metaphysical systems, as the dreamers of reason who are portrayed as no better than Swedenborg. In a letter from Kant to Moses Mendelssohn of 8 April 1766 (two months after Kant sent him a copy of Dreams of a Spirit Seer), Kant shows continuing ambivalence about his judgement of Swedenborg, but not about his attacks upon Wolff and Crusius.

...I can't help suspecting that there was some truth in the stories mentioned (about Swedenborg), and the same applies to the principles of reason concerning them, regardless of the absurdity of the former and the incomprehensible character of the concepts, and all the concoctions surrounding them, which render them valueless.

As regards my opinion of metaphysics generally, as expressed in this treatise, it is quite possible that I did not choose my expressions carefully enough and that I failed to exercise restraint, but I cannot deny that I view the exaggerated claims which we can find in numerous publications on the market by which full insights into this type of subject are pretentiously displayed, with utmost repugnance, even with some hatred.²⁶¹

Kant's criticisms of rationalist metaphysics carry conviction because he is dealing with the actual bases upon which such systems are erected, even though something of the architectonic and the substance of these systems continued to inform Kant's own work. By contrast, his study of Swedenborg's writings understandably fails to find a base from which to launch appropriate rational criticisms. Swedenborg's account of the world may appear as knowledge to the author, but it is very hard for anyone lacking Swedenborg's particular experiences to accept it as knowledge. Engagement with such materials can lead to wisdom in recognizing the limitations upon our own knowledge, as well as stimulating our own imaginations in thinking about the areas marked by mystery. Intuition provides ideas and theories that can be refined and tested. It is plausible to think that this was the effect on Kant of his study of Swedenborg, despite his sweeping rejection of Swedenborg's writings in Dreams of a Spirit Seer.

Indeed, Swedenborg's influence on Kant cannot be discounted. It is not that Kant took over any specific Swedenborgian doctrines (with the exception of Part I of the *Spirit Seer*) but they provided him with fundamental metaphysical starting points for his later views on the soul, on

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp.155-56.

the dualism of mind and matter, on his conceptions of noumena and phenomena, on inner sense and its connection with the unity of apperception. He also shared with Swedenborg the belief in the existence of other rational beings on other planets as well as his nebular hypothesis.²⁶²

Kant's treatment of Swedenborg bears witness to the difficulties that we experience in coming to terms intellectually with someone else's direct experience and with manifestations of a mysterious nature. Kant's pursuit of an understanding of visions in terms of hallucinations remains typical of modern western thinking, which marginalizes all encounters with the spirit world to the status of individual psychopathology. Equally typical is the inconclusiveness of Kant's discussion, which leaves the general issues of the status of encounters with the spirit world and knowledge gained from these encounters without resolution. Despite a century of psychical research using the methods of scientific investigation, the existence of psychic or spiritual powers in humans has not been accepted as proven by mainstream science.

Yet stories of paranormal experiences continue to occur. An interesting sociological perspective on this area is that of James McClenon, who argues that wondrous events are believed to be true by those who experience them and so have real social consequences which can be studied sociologically. His approach could be characterized as based in third person knowledge but with respect for first and second person knowledge.

This book develops a set of arguments, based on observation, which assert that:

1. Wondrous events are sociologically real. Some types have universal features that shape folk belief.
2. Wondrous events provide a foundation for belief in spirits, souls, life after death, and anomalous powers. They also have qualities that stimulate skepticism.
3. Those with the greatest capacity for experiencing wondrous events often engage in ceremonial performances. They produce wondrous events for audiences, often triggering belief and psychosomatic healing.
4. Many of the processes surrounding wondrous performances can be explained within sociological paradigms.

These arguments are associated with three types of wondrous events, categorized according to their settings. *Primary* wondrous events are spontaneous anomalous experiences. Examples include involuntary extrasensory perceptions, out-of-body experiences, precognitive dreams, and apparitions. *Secondary* wondrous events are performed. Examples include mediumship, firewalking, shamanic sleight-of-hand exhibitions, and staged demonstrations of extrasensory perception. *Tertiary* wondrous events are perceived after an individual witnesses a wondrous

²⁶² *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp.17-18.

performance or believes in a particular ideology. Miraculous healings and culturally specific religious experiences, such as seeing the Virgin Mary, exemplify this type of phenomenon.²⁶³

McClenon's approach is admirably open-minded and respectful of the reports that people make of their direct experience. He is able to remain neutral on the issue of the ontological reality of what people experience through his focus on the 'third person' reality of their beliefs which clearly have real social consequences. He does share a number of his own stories of investigations of wondrous events reported by others which combine scepticism with scrupulous observations. Of particular interest for our purposes is his picture of the 'boundary-keeping function' of orthodox scientific treatment of parapsychologists.

Although parapsychologists feel they conduct valid research, they tend to be rejected as deviant. Their social treatment reflects the boundaries of a latent scientific ideology demarcating science from non-science. The 'gatekeepers' of science, who edit journals and allocate funds, serve the scientific community by validating such borders. They treat highly peculiar claims with extreme skepticism. This process allows a more efficient allocation of scientific resources, which is a part of scientific rationality. Scientific institutions do not have sufficient time and money to investigate extremely far-fetched theories. The scientific rejection of parapsychological claims therefore creates an ideological demarcation for the scientific endeavour.²⁶⁴

It is possible to view the epistemological constriction on human knowledge stemming from the Enlightenment as onesided by recognizing that there are ways of knowing other than ratiocination upon what the senses provide us. Jung, for example, presents intuition and feeling as ways of knowing additional to thinking and sensing, arguing that people typically use two of these ways in constructing their knowledge of the world while rejecting and/or ignoring the other two. For Jung, the Enlightenment epistemology is an example of this pattern, favouring thinking and the senses while rejecting intuition and feeling as valid ways of knowing. Thinking and sensing are highly valuable within the general project of science and the determination of fact. Yet science also requires new ideas to test, which requires intuition. It is also important to ask how scientific knowledge will be used, involving values and therefore bringing in the knowledge of feelings. Visionaries can be equally onesided in using intuition and feeling alone, thereby suffering from the absence of critical thinking and sensory realism. Dissatisfaction with dogmatic scientism should not obscure the importance of critical thinking and careful observation, particularly when dealing with unusual experiences.

²⁶³ McClenon, J, Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1994, pp.6-7.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p.3.

There is knowledge in direct experience which is not to be reduced to a knowledge of objects through sense data. Whether or not we are loved by specific others is of vital importance to us as human beings. An epistemology based exclusively upon thinking and sensation would seem to render knowledge of this impossible, unless we accept an account of love as identical with 'loving behaviour consistently displayed'. Without discounting the value and importance of loving behaviour consistently displayed, it seems bizarre to ignore what comes into our awareness as intuitional knowledge and as feeling-based information. Our own bodies will tell us whether or not we feel loved, if we learn how to listen to such messages.

Theological knowledge would seem to raise a very similar set of general issues, as we can see in what Karl Barth says about our knowledge of revelation. It is a special kind of knowledge which is only possible through the internal activity of the Holy Spirit. Christians are already caught up into the life of God in properly hearing the Word of God. The initiative at every stage of the knowing remains with God and is not at the disposal of us humans.

If knowledge of the Word of God becomes possible for men (sic), that must mean that an experience of the Word of God becomes possible for them. We defined knowledge as that confirmation of human acquaintance with an object whereby its trueness becomes a determining factor in the existence of the man who knows. It is precisely this factor determining the existence of the man who knows that we call experience.²⁶⁵

Barth does not have much time for experiences as special ways of spiritual knowing. He warns us not to rely upon experiences unless they are confirmed by the Word of God. He also warns us against using general ideas in understanding Christian teachings because general ideas give us the illusion of control. We should not assume that our speculative thinking or special experiences can express Christian teaching.

Visionary and other image-based experiences which have traditionally been taken to be encounters with spirits occur within, or should I say, on the edge of, human consciousness. While they can have visual and/or auditory aspects, it seems most plausible to locate such experiences as coming to us through intuition, assisted by feeling. One such experience that I still find puzzling occurred for me one night in 1979. I was concerned for a friend who had cancer and that evening I had been with a group of friends to pray for her. I was lying in bed on my own when I felt the arrival of a presence, manifested as a kind of direct awareness heightening my attention and accompanied by

²⁶⁵ Barth, K, Church Dogmatics 1:1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, p.226.

sensations in the spine as of coming to attention. Then the words “Gwen will live” formed themselves in my mind, associated with a calm and certain feeling, replacing my general anxiety. I noted all this and then felt the presence fade and disappear. Gwen did in fact die a year and a half later, though I don’t think of this as invalidating the message. I remain uncertain whether to think of this as a visitation by an angel or as a message from my unconscious mind or as something else.

Interlude: Recognizing Spirit

B: I like the angel theory, myself. Also, I am glad that you recognize how embodied our knowledge can be. I suppose intuition is also a good word for the direct knowledge we have of our own bodily states.

J: Intuition (popularly called a hunch and equated with a guess) has come to have a bad name with epistemologists. This is largely because people are tempted to rely upon the feeling of certainty with which some intuitions arrive, while common experience shows this reliance to be inappropriate. The gambler with an overwhelming certainty that a particular horse will win cannot logically be sure of the truth of this intuition until the race finishes.

S: The feeling of certainty that sometimes accompanies intuitions is difficult and puzzling to interpret. This superhuman clarity seems typical of encounters with spirits. Yet is impossible for us, as post-Enlightenment people, not to ask ourselves if the subjective sense of certainty which may surround a particular intuition is justified.

B: You are too sceptical, as always. Subjective certainty is reliable, provided you make sure of the precise quality and reference of the experience.

R: Why do I agree with you so often, Beth, when we are representing mutually opposed religious traditions? I would probably identify this intuitive certainty with what I experience as answers to prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

B: I am not surprised to find similarities in our experience of the spirit world. We generally agree when we attend to our actual experiences, but not when we listen to narrow traditions and theories.

J: In our search for a balance between the contributions of first, second and third person knowledge, we may have stumbled on a criterion for the demonic in our experience. Where we are led into increasingly one-sided perceptions and actions through the intensity of our intuition or the overwhelming charisma of a leader or through seemingly objective, rational analysis, we should suspect the presence in us of demonic spirit.

R: I can't think of anyone more one-sided than a prophet who proclaims the radical injustice of a particular social order. Surely you don't think that prophets are all demon-possessed?

J: The fact that prophets are sometimes heavily and appropriately one-sided should merely alert us to the dangers of automatically rejecting the demonic – or should I say the spiritual, whether good or evil? Prophets have a vivid awareness of the sins of the people which they condemn and articulate in words from God. Demonic - and angelic - energies are indeed present in the word of God spoken by the prophets.

S: Yes, that makes sense to me. I like the idea that angelic action leads to the arrival of peace in ourselves, peace with other beings and the joy of community.

J: One of the problems in writing anything coherent about the world of spirit is that all kinds of questions interconnect in logically tangled ways. We are involved in this world of spirit, but not in a way which affords us secure, objective perspectives. Systematic exposition, even of theories, is constantly obliged to back-track because unproven assumptions have to be acknowledged and the challenge of other perspectives noted.

B: Sandy, if subjective certainty is a mark of the presence of spirit, why do you insist on the need to check theophanies?

S: I suppose I want to affirm the value of our ordinary, partial knowledge of what we experience because that is mostly what we have to go on. We relate to God and to the world of spirit through special experiences, but the further dimensions and connections of these experiences are never fully revealed. We are likely to go astray if we think that we understand the experience itself and its wider implications. We walk by faith, as the Bible says.

B: Let me get this straight. You are saying that we do have knowledge of spirits and of God through our encounters, but not a full or clear knowledge?

S: Yes. We see clearly enough at times to take the next step, but we should expect the future to show us where we have misunderstood the situation. The partial knowledge that we do have, exciting as this can be at times, is not knowledge of God, except in an indirect sense. We actually come to know God as we step out in faith and find expanding vistas in life; but it is life and the created order that we know, including aspects of created spirits, ideas of God and special theophanic moments. The mysterious depths of reality, in which God the creator dwells, continually recede before us with each new encounter.

R: That may be so, but don't we Christians have access to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ?

S: Yes, but it is the status of that self-revelation that I am trying to establish.

R: Surely God's self-revelation is final, once-for-all.

S: I believe that. I believe that it is so from God's side. From our side, this is a matter of faith, not sight. If we think we know the fullness of God's being and will, we are then tempted to trust our own judgement as if it were God's. What I want to say is not so much a theory as an attempt to deal with the Christian shadow, which can include triumphalism, self-righteousness and moralistic judgements of others.

B: If this is what you are trying to do, why don't you practice what you preach and let your writing be guided by the spirits?

S: Would you say that this writing has been without spiritual guidance? Reclaiming our shadow projections is not to be done without spiritual help.

R: Yes, our talk has been realistic, not forced. That doesn't happen without the Holy Spirit.

J: Well! And here I thought we were all just being sensible and thoughtful for a change.

B: We still lack agreement about the most basic things, though it has been useful to talk.

S: Yes, I still want to know about the reality of the spirit world. Perhaps you people can tell me where our conversation has left you.

Afterword

Beth

I can't improve much on traditional shamanic teaching.

'There is a doorway within our minds that usually remains hidden and secret until the time of death. The Huichol word for it is *nierika*. *Nierika* is a cosmic portway or interface between so-called ordinary and non-ordinary realities. It is a passageway and at the same time a barrier between worlds.' *Nierika*, a decorated ceremonial disk, is also said to mean mirror as well as face of the deity.²⁶⁶

I have learned some interesting things about Christian tradition from our conversations. I like the idea of guardian angels, who are an unseen but intimate presence capable of whispering encouragements and suggestions. I also recognize devils who tell us to kill ourselves. These beings connect with us spiritually through our thoughts and feelings. Shamans can enter non-ordinary reality in order to encounter such beings and to obtain knowledge and power which are effective in the everyday world. Life is a constant series of portals through which we can pass in our various practical quests. We progressively discover and establish our own identity through these encounters at all levels. This is utterly self-evident from the perspective of lived experience. It is only from an abstract perspective that the notion of spiritual entities and agencies becomes questionable.

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John

Knowing spirits strikes me as an intimate activity. I can remember the prurient excitement that I felt as a teenager to discover that when the King James translation of the Bible said that a man knew a woman, it meant that they had sexual intercourse. It was probably about the same time that I learned that the phrase "to be intimate with" could mean the same thing. Intimacy seemed a most enticing but distant adult state. Now that many of the mystifications have departed (though not the sense of mystery), intimacy still seems integral to being a person.

Each of us, assuming that your experience is structured similarly to mine, is directly aware of a field including and surrounding our bodies which changes in all sorts of interesting ways as we move and interact with what we meet. Our primitive knowing arises largely from these interactions, predominantly processed through our senses, but with meanings that relate to our needs and purposes. This kind of knowing implies an immediacy of contact; we are intimate with this world

²⁶⁶ Halifax, J, *Shamanic Voices*, Op.Cit., p.1, quoting Prem Das [Paul Adams], "Huichol Nierikaya: Journey to the Realm of the Gods", Unpublished, 1977.

of direct experience. Intimacy between us as persons occurs when we share aspects of our individual worlds, including what can be communicated through touch. Any kind of commerce with the world of spirit is by definition intimate, in that such contact somehow occurs through our own being. I am still coming to terms with some of the ideas and challenges from our conversations, though I draw the line at using mirrors for teleportation and believing in the real existence of disembodied spirits.

Scientific knowledge is a valuable abstraction from this world of immediate knowledge. It is a collective product to which many people contribute, though only on the basis of “what any observer would note”. Powerful though it is, this ‘third person’ knowledge cannot replace our direct knowledge because it has had to discard our personal ways of relating to our worlds. We make all kinds of uses of this ‘third person’ knowledge in living, but as an extension of our ‘first person’ knowing. There is also the somewhat mysterious contribution of ‘second person’ knowledge, in which significant others, such as our parents, shape our development. ‘First and second person’ knowledge involves intimacy in ways that are systematically excluded from ‘third person’ knowledge. It is therefore of central importance to note that shamanistic knowledge, like spiritual knowledge in general, is based in ‘first and second person’ knowledge rather than ‘third person’ knowledge. Our conversations have strengthened my belief in the value of first and second person knowledge, particularly in the area of establishing genuine dialogue. I might think that your ideas are whacky, but I shall continue to reflect on many of them because they are your ideas - and I have learned to respect your voices.

.....

Rachel

Like Beth, I can't tell you anything new. Indeed, I can't tell you anything that you don't know already. The Bible is the prime source of authority for Christians. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are sacred because they bring us the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus is God incarnate. This leads to a trinitarian concept of God. The Holy Spirit is constantly active in unseen ways, sustaining and renewing the created order. The whole world of created spirits is subordinated to the authority of Christ, though not without ongoing rebellion and conflict. Any created spirit can become a channel for doing God's will. The written text of Scripture and the spoken text of preaching bring about the presence of the living Word for Christians.

I like what I hear from Karl Barth. He is a bit reticent in talking about angels and demons, but at least he seems to believe in them. I know there are angels and demons because I encounter both in deliverance ministry. I can see them at work in troubled people. I know you think that it is only their own thoughts torturing or comforting them, John, but I speak with the person and the spirits are separate from them.

I have been impressed with what I have heard about the positive side of shamanism. If it is really as benign as you people make out, we need not fear it. Shamanism is not for me because I don't feel any need for it. Maybe I already live in what you call non-ordinary reality through prayer. Anyway, you have given me a lot to think about.

.....

B: That sounds very friendly to me.

J: You have helped us to rethink the basis for our judgements on shamanism, Sandy, which I have found refreshing. I am ready to look again at mystical experiences. I used to think that everything subjective could only amount to poetic ways of looking at the world which could have no objective reality. I now think that I need to consider the possibility that subjective experiences provide a window on a world of spirit which is as objective as the material world.

B: Well, I have been surprised by the strange agreements that I have found with some of your Christian teachings. I am also grateful for the open dialogue that we have had. I want to think a bit more about the spiritual role of love, as a divine energy. I am also very pleased to have survived this encounter with no threats of being burnt as a witch.

R: No, I have come to think of you as a friend, Beth, even if you haven't yet encountered the Risen Christ. Maybe that will come in the future.

B: Who knows? But the way I am now following seems right for me.

J: That's good. I would feel a bit threatened if you suddenly went Christian on me, Beth.

R: You have certainly shown me that there is a more positive side to shamanism than I had thought possible. The way you present things reminds me of the more crazy of the charismatic Christians, who seem ready to chase off after every puff of wind from the Spirit. I still think you need some anchorage in moral standards of behaviour.

B: So we are not all driven by the devil, as you were first inclined to believe?

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R: No. The fact that some Christians are demon-possessed doesn't mean that we all are. I now think that God is somehow involved with each religious tradition, but that each tradition can all too easily get corrupted. I still think that Christ is Lord of the spiritual powers and that this gives us all freedom from domination by them.

B: I can see why you Christians think that theology has a contribution to make. You have some good first principles to help you spot pitfalls and wrong turnings on your road. It all seems very public and out in the open.

J: Some of it is not very open at all, Beth. Don't be fooled by these two. The witch hunting spirit is not dead.

B: Well, I rely on you people to deal with it.

S: I hope we have done something about that with these conversations.

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