

REVIEWS

In the spring of 2005, at the Victoria School of Writing, I met a shy, intelligent and thoughtful man, Tom Martin, and I got a chance to read the manuscript that would eventually become *The Bluff Detector*. It is a strangely powerful manuscript that wrestles with universals by approaching them through the visceral, hard-fought human transformations borne out of Tom's specific, particular journey as a man in the late twentieth century. I was instantly impressed by the depth and range of Tom Martin's reading in mythology and philosophy, but eventually more impressed by his ability to transform that depth and range into a particular voice that not only includes those other voices, but moves beyond them into individual thought. You can't say that about a lot of books. It doesn't often happen, and for that reason, Tom's way of thinking about things always stayed with me.

I suspect that we are in a transitional time in our history, and our potential as humans is undergoing transformations that will yield new, hybrid ways of being human and living in the world. This is the precise territory of Tom Martin's book, and he maps it carefully and with incredibly subtle precision.

—John Lent, author of *Cantilevered Songs* and *So It Won't Go Away*

At the meeting point of many rivers – to name only a few, inclusiveness, partnership, liberation, nonviolence, and biophilia – the author W. Thomson Martin invites you to a picnic. This picnic is not to be held high up on a bluff above it all but right down where these waters meet. Already present are Paulo Freire, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Jung and Joyce, Arnold and Amy Mindell, Muhammed Yunus and Jesus, Gutierrez and Romeo Dallaire, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

and the missing women of the Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Alice Walker and Meister Eckhart, Riane Eisler, James Lovelock – and not to forget Gaia. From such auspicious company the author learns to fine-tune the art of *bluff detection* – a skill, he shows us, necessary to our survival but only if it can be practiced with *empathy and compassion*. Martin applies this discernment to institutions that nominally come under different banners, be that religious, political or social. Indeed, as he observes, bluff detecting – the ability to discern when we are being *taken for a ride* – is essential for healthy living in *every* field of life.

The author narrates from personal experience how he began in quite a different calling... a crucial way station came with his realization that proselytizing, the path into which he was born, was “a deceptive activity”:

The proselytizer either pretends to be inclusive, or acts under the illusion that he or she is being inclusive. The proselytizer invites you to become part of their faith community.

On receiving such an offer, however, the Bluff Detective learns to look inside the invitation and discern who has *not* been invited:

We deny that we are biased against people we see as being different from us. For centuries, many people have been having a party at the expense of other people who have not been invited... Yet, at the same time, most of us like to tell ourselves that we are among those not invited.

Inside *The Bluff Detector* you will taste choice dishes from all parts of the world, from many fields, and many times, prepared by different hands. Bring something of your own and share in the feast – but be warned: it's not always a picnic...

—Iain Marrs, editor and homeopath

THE BLUFF DETECTOR

STORIES, DREAMS AND RIVERS OF CHANGE



W. Thomson Martin



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The Bluff Detector

ISBN 978-1-897435-26-7 (trade paperback)

Cataloguing information available from
Library and Archives Canada

Printed on acid-free paper.

Agio Publishing House is a socially responsible company,
measuring success on a triple-bottom-line basis.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedicated to my wife Ana
for her support, encouragement,
inspiration and hugs.



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PREFACE

This book is one of the consequences of an experience I had in 1988. In a poem I wrote after the event, I described what happened to me as an “inflamed brain.” Ever since, my neuropeptide receptors have been re-networking. The experience resulted in a change of my worldview. I now see things I did not see before.

I started to write the book several years ago initially deciding that the only reader would be myself. I saw the process of writing as a way to clarify where my own journey had taken me. However, as the book began to take shape, I realized it was no longer just my story. As I wrote, I began to weave in stories of other people whose lives and experiences, often through their writings, had a significant influence on me, and as the book progressed I began to feel, like James Joyce, “an ambition to squint at my [musings] in print.”

This book is about looking down a microscope and seeing through a telescope at one and the same time. It is about seeing and learning to know the inside and the outside of our human experience in synchronicity with the universe.

I write about the importance of stories for our lives—in particular, the importance of our own stories. I write about the urgency of discerning a creative story from a destructive story. I write about the art of bluff detection as being increasingly necessary for our survival as individuals and as a species.

In the initial chapters I explore the role of context and experience in the shaping of who we are. Then I attempt to expand the view.

When we begin to see ourselves as part of something greater than a religion, a culture or a nation, we just begin to see, as Meister Eckhart said, “as God sees.”

Gradually, the book developed as my synopsis of the writings of authors, primarily from the 20th century, who I believe have made significant contributions to the creation of new worldviews. These authors through their lives and writings have tapped some wellsprings and begun streams of change which, for the health of all created beings, will need to become rivers in the millennium ahead. Their names may be found in the bibliography. These authors include Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Riane Eisler, Alice Walker, James Joyce, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Brian Swimme, Ken Wilber, Arnold Mindell, Michael Milburn, Joanna Macy and Richard Tarnas. Some of the rivers they helped to source are those of inclusiveness, partnership, liberation, nonviolence, biophilia, and health.

As I wrote, I realized I was sorting baggage I had been carrying with me for many years. I was discerning which pieces I still found valuable and which to leave behind so that I might continue to grow as a person, to travel light, and to enjoy life. It is difficult to go through such a sorting process without falling into the trap of being judgmental and blaming others, or myself. The art of bluff detection is necessary for survival, but I am still learning to practice this art with empathy and compassion.

This is the story of my journey towards open space.

T.M.

Victoria, BC, Canada (2010)



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book describes new trails that are quite different from those familiar to my parents' generation. Yet I am forever grateful to my parents for the maps and directions they provided for me. Although it may appear on the surface that I am critical of the paths my parents followed, I ask the reader to read between the lines and to acknowledge that the scenery along the way I have traveled is markedly changed from the views and visions they perceived. Yes, I parted from their trail but they guided me well to the start of that new path.

In my book I acknowledge several mistakes, or at least ill-informed decisions that I made along the way. Looking back it seems the bigger the mistake, the greater my learning experience. So in a perverse kind of way I am grateful for these "mistakes."

I admit to being skeptical about the legal category called "intellectual property." I have a strong sense that each of us is so indebted to the universe as a whole and to each other that any attempt to set such boundaries is at least, somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, I have attempted to acknowledge those to whom I am particularly aware of my indebtedness. Their names are listed in the Bibliography section. Primary indebtedness is acknowledged through quotes from the writings of key authors who have influenced my thinking.

The list of others I am indebted to covers 75 years. How can I possibly list all their names! However, I must mention my patient,

sensitive and knowledgeable editor, Michael Kenyon. Thank you, Michael, for understanding my quirks and for challenging me to clarify my thoughts, particularly in Chapter Two. Special thanks are also due to John Lent whose gentle encouragement is so much appreciated. On his advice, I included personal vignettes at the beginning of many of the chapters. I am deeply grateful to my friend Iain Marrs for reading the manuscript and for providing a unique synopsis of my book.

A moment of synchronicity brought me together with Agio Publishing House and with Bruce and Marsha Batchelor. Thank you, Bruce, for guiding me through the publishing process and for the additional editorial work you did. Your emphasis and experience with sustainable print-on-demand (POD) publishing is much appreciated. Thank you, Marsha, for the graphic design of the book. The attractive presentation of your design is evident throughout the book.

Special thanks to Lorraine Thomson for her magical, dreamy and colorful art piece which adorns the front cover. I love it!

I am very grateful for in-depth conversations with many people who have stimulated, what Hercule Poirot might describe as, “my little gray cells.” Among those who have played this role in recent years have been Marianne Flory, Dumitru and Minh Lucaciu, and Stan Tomandl.

Special thanks are due to Seymour Berg for his careful proofreading of the manuscript.

Finally, this book would not have been finished and certainly not published without the advice, support, encouragement and transformative spirit of Ana Simeon. Thank you, Ana.

PART I



STORIES, MYTHS AND DREAMS

CHAPTER 1



TO GRANDPA WITH LOVE

I was accused of irreverence at the age of six. The setting for this experience was a gray stone rural church in Northern Ireland where my grandfather was “The Reverend.”

My grandfather, standing in the pulpit high above me, prayed with closed eyes. I sat in the front pew, the manse pew. The length of his prayer must have tested the patience of God to the limit. But then, perhaps, God had a mute-button available for such occasions. My grandfather’s prayer went on and on. My patience failed the test. I made the discovery that by sliding along the polished wood pew on the seat of my pants I could relieve my boredom and experience the joy of horizontal propulsion, while viewing from different angles the bowed heads of choir members in front of me. There was plenty of space along the pew for sliding that Sunday. My father was in the city. My mother stayed home to care for the recently arrived twins, my sisters. Only my grandmother and brother were in the pew with me. My grandfather pronounced the “Amen,” his prayer finally coming to an end. He opened his eyes, instantaneously fixing them on me. Unfortunately, my timing was off. I was now located at the extreme distant end of the pew. Glued to the spot momentarily, I got the message intrinsic in my grandfather’s stare from above and in haste, retreated to where I had started my slide to irreverence.

Back at the manse after the Sunday morning service, we had

early afternoon dinner in the dining room, as was the family custom. This room was used only on Sundays, or when guests were present. It had dark wood-paneled walls and a large central table with straight-backed chairs. A wood-and-mirrored sideboard held the “good” dishes and cutlery. My grandfather stood at the head of the table, carving knife in one hand and two-pronged fork in the other. Before I received my portion of the Sunday roast, he again fixed his eyes on me. So began, in the presence of my family, the reprimand I received from my grandfather, “When I am praying to God, I expect you to sit still and listen until I am finished.” He continued: “The whole congregation was surprised to find you at the end of the pew.”

I had clearly embarrassed my grandfather. I had failed miserably to live up to his expectations for a son, a grandson and a great-grandson of the manse. My grandfather had chosen the setting and timing of his accusation for maximum shaming effect on me. My mother was silent. I was silent. I lost my appetite for the roast beef.

More than 60 years later, I can recall feeling angry and hurt at my grandfather’s rebuke. But now I can also be grateful for that negative experience. Today, I see the story differently. I am at a point in my life where I can imagine God and me sliding up and down that church pew together, many years ago, laughing at each other. We both got so carried away just having fun, that God, not keeping track of that human invention called time, failed to release the mute-button to warn me. I, for my part, forgot to anticipate the amen.

This story has become a significant part of my personal myth. Its waves

continued to influence me throughout my life. The event, from my early childhood, has stayed in my memory. Why?

For me, the story has several layers. What I learned from this experience remained unassimilated in my sub-conscious for years. Like some dreams, the details kept returning to my conscious memory. It was as if the story was saying to me, “Hey! You need to process me.” Certain life experiences remain in our memory because they represent important milestones in our journey to the present. This was a formative experience for me: an early step in my individuation process.

I now see within this story the seeds of certain characteristics that were to show up later in my life. I began to play the role that had been assigned to me in the shaming. I began to rebel against other people’s expectations of me. More than once in my later years, I have rebelled against the power of the Church, or its representatives, and its attempt to control the lives of its members. I have maintained an eagerness to explore, even if only to the end of the pew. A certain irreverent playfulness continues to reside somewhere inside me.

But most importantly, this story started a process within me that was active only at an unconscious level for many years. This process was developing a new understanding of God. There are many ways to define the concept of God. Yet, when we allow the way we see our relationship with God to evolve, it changes the way we see the universe, the world, and every living being. Everything changes.

Besides being a record of these changes and stressing the importance of stories—our own stories—this book is also about how I became smarter at the process of discernment, or what I will call *bluff detection*, within our religious, political and social institutions.

In the second part of the book, I make a shift and look at some

of the cultural and social streams of change that started, or gained momentum, in the last century. When we, the people, become more aware of our inherent human—or, in more traditional language, God-given—power to change ourselves and our world in creative and positive ways, then these streams may become rivers of change. But first, we must choose to use our power for creativity and bluff detection.

In the third part of the book, I look more specifically at the role of the *bluff detector*.



WANTED: LIFE-GIVING STORIES

Thought, story, mythology, religion: all are mysteries of the mind. Our life is a gift. Likewise, our own life stories are a special gift. The stories of saint and hero may inspire us, yet if we pay attention to our own stories, we may learn experientially through our own lives. We may use our personal stories as key resources for self-learning, self-direction and self-development.

The stories of a particular hero may sometimes be linked together to form a life-long mythology. Such mythologies may, over time, become institutionalized into a religion through the work of people I will refer to as the professional religious. Paradoxically, religion may inspire some to heights of creativity, while for others religion may stifle or repress their own individual and collective story.

An example, from just a few decades ago, of the suppression of peoples' collective stories comes from the Church-run residential schools in Canada. In many of these schools, First Nations students, separated from their families, were forbidden to speak their own language within the school environment. Traditional Native stories and customs were made the subject of derision in the classroom.

Professional religious leaders, imams, rabbis, priests, pastors, ministers—the terminology is multifarious—commonly receive training in the telling and interpretation of core stories from their own religions. Traditionally, however, little or no emphasis has been placed on

encouraging the followers of a religion to recall, tell, reflect-upon and learn from their own life stories. If such reflection does occur, it tends to focus on a once-in-a-lifetime, altered-state, conversion experience.

Monotheistic religions in particular, with their emphasis on a God external to the self, further exacerbate this tendency to draw the believer's attention away from his or her own life experiences. Rather, emphasis is placed on the story of a historical person: Muhammad or Jesus, for example. I would further submit that many Christian religious leaders have over time intentionally drawn the attention of believers away from recorded sayings of Jesus that lay emphasis on the importance of inner self-reflection. Later in the book, I will quote a number of sayings attributed to Jesus that suggest he was acutely aware of aspects of God within himself. There is no suggestion, by Jesus, that he regarded such awareness as something necessarily unique to himself.

The "pew story" I related from my own childhood occurred when the family, with the exception of my father, became evacuees from Belfast, Northern Ireland when the city was subjected to bombing during World War II. I am now convinced that this story, positioned as it was during family and social upheaval, contained formative elements for the rest of my life. On the other hand, this is simply one of my stories. The Peruvian Christian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, writing about the stories and experiences of his people, puts it this way: "We drink from our own wells."¹

¹ Gutiérrez. *We drink from our own wells*. (Adapted from St. Bernard of Clairvaux.)

TERMS AND MEANINGS

The edition of the *Random House Dictionary* I have on my shelf defines a story as: “A narrative, either true or fictitious, in prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the hearer or reader.” The word *myth* (from the Greek *mythos*) originally also meant “story or saying.” Later, *mythos* and *myth* took on the meaning of “fictitious story.” The result is frequent confusion about the contextual use of *myth*. I will use the word *myth* to mean “a metaphoric story.”

Myths are metaphors that reveal insightful truths to the human mind and psyche. Myths are “the tools of poets and artists.” Myths are “the language of the soul.”²

Mythology is the study of myths, a collection or anthology of myths. As I write at the beginning of a new millennium, I no longer see any justifiable reason to use different terms for the metaphoric stories or “sacred writings” of different religions or cultures. Thus, for me, the word *mythology* is appropriate to use for the canon of the *Bible*, the writings that form the *Qur’an*, the *Bhagavadgita*, and for the indigenous stories of the North American Native traditions. To do otherwise is to continue to provide support for the religious and cultural biases of past years and to suggest a hierarchy of religions.

The zoologist Richard Dawkins used the term *meme* to describe an idea or story that spreads rapidly from human brain to human brain.³ Like genes, memes replicate and are subject to a process of selection. Howard Bloom described a *meme* as “a self-replicating cluster of ideas.”⁴

² Walter. Foreword to: *World Mythology*. Willis, ed. p. 9.

³ Dawkins. *The Selfish Gene*. pp. 192; 323.

⁴ Bloom. *The Lucifer Principle*. p. 10.

A meme is sometimes in the form of a short phrase so that it may be memorized more easily. But more about memes later. In the meantime I will elaborate on my use of the word *myth*.

A MYTH'S JOURNEY

Imagine a myth derived from a dream. The dream is experienced in three-dimensions and involves multiple sensory channels—visual, sound, touch, movement and perhaps even taste and smell. Only the dreamer experiences the original pure form of this myth or metaphoric story. Once the dreamer attempts to translate the story of the dream for a listener, or to write the dream down in a diary, the pure form of the myth is inevitably lost to some degree. Some of the experience of the dream is lost in translation.

A myth in its pure form represents a revelation from the personal and collective unconscious of the dreamer. I will explore Jung's theory of psychic activity a little later, but for now let's imagine that part of the dream's insight comes from the fuzzy area of the psyche of the dreamer between the personal and collective unconscious. However, once the dream is translated or transcribed, it is no longer in its pure form. It is inevitably subject to the screening processes of the dreamer, who may recall some parts of the dream clearly while other details of the dream will remain more distant. Nevertheless, at this point in time, if the dreamer analyses the dream it may often contain an important metaphoric insight for the dreamer.

Let us now imagine the dreamer sharing a synopsis of his or her dream with friends, perhaps at a village or town gathering. Suppose further that one of those hearing the dream is a writer or poet who recognizes the wisdom and value of the insight of this dream and asks

permission to write the story down. The writer may attempt to interpret the dream for a wider audience and move the original pure myth further away from its original form yet maintain the core of its revealed wisdom. I will call such a story a *creative myth* or a *creative meme* that is now passed on from person to person by word of mouth or in written form.

But something quite different may also happen: Let us imagine that this story comes to the attention of an ambitious local religious leader. The religious leader is concerned about increasing the size of his faith community and rewrites the myth inserting some of his own words of encouragement to achieve his aim. He then uses this modified myth in his homily or sermon on the next holy day. Later a power-hungry local politician, a friend of the religious leader, on hearing this modified myth, repeats it to his speech writer and tells him to insert a mixed metaphor or even a contradictory message into the myth's original meaning that is more consistent with his own political ideology. I call this modified and manipulated story a *destructive myth* or a *destructive meme*. Such a destructive meme may now be used as a propaganda weapon, often with the addition of some fear-mongering by the politician.

Unfortunately, destructive myths subtly woven into complex mythologies may persist in societies for generations, resulting in immeasurable damage to human communities. Just as some unhealthy genes may be passed on from generation to generation, some destructive memes may circulate for centuries within cultures.

I use the term *creative meme* to refer to a phrase, a story, or an idea that is wise, beautiful, life-loving, life-respecting, truth-seeking, inclusive and healthy. A *creative meme* has the potential to provide

support to individuals and societies with these same characteristics. In contrast, I use the term *destructive meme* to refer to a phrase, a story, or idea that contrives to destroy life, to exclude certain people, to inhibit human development, and to feed the greed of some while ignoring the rights of all beings.

The ability to discern whether a meme is creative or destructive for human well-being requires knowledge about the origin of the meme or myth together with awareness of its effect on human communities throughout history. In short, such discernment requires the art of the bluff detector—which we shall discuss later.

THE ORIGINS OF MYTHOLOGIES

The mythologist Joseph Campbell regarded mythologies and their corresponding religious deities as creations of the human mind and psyche.⁵ What is the connection between the psyche and mythology?

In this context I find it helpful to remind myself of Carl Jung's three levels of psychic activity: We are most aware of our individual *consciousness*—my awareness of myself and my experience of the “fields” around me. Every so often we may become aware of our *personal unconscious* level consisting of low-intensity, undiscerned, forgotten, or sometimes repressed experiences. Then there is the third, or deepest level, the *collective unconscious*, which for me is the most mysterious. To describe this level I take a more evolutionary slant than Jung. Essentially similar for all human beings, the collective unconscious consists of inherited instincts and archetypal or primordial images from the beginnings of living experience. We share this level not

⁵ Campbell. *Myths to Live By*. p. 253.

just with our human ancestors, but with single-celled life forms, with blue-green algae and with the trees.⁶

Jung saw mythologies arising primarily from the collective unconscious level of the psyche. Yet, surely, complex mythologies also contain stories from both the conscious and unconscious levels of the individual storyteller or storywriter. Presumably, religious leaders, with a variety of motives, would select what they considered appropriate stories for preservation on stone, papyrus, paper, or simply by word of mouth. Stories within complex mythologies may have been retold, rewritten, translated and edited with various emphases and interpretations that, in some cases, may bear little resemblance to the story in its original form. But for each epoch of human history, metaphoric stories as contained in the various world religions sought for the most part to express diverse personal and cultural experiences which spoke to some part of the collective spiritual or psychic experience of their time. Undoubtedly, sometimes stories which appeared to contradict or question viewpoints of the leaders would be ordered burned or otherwise censored. At other times, destructive memes may have been selected intentionally for preservation and communication because they fed the need of leaders for power over their followers.

Many theologies today are written to reflect societal changes that have already begun to take shape locally or globally. Is it not likely, therefore, that ancient myths had a similar origin? For example, in a society which had swung towards male domination, as in the late

⁶ Jung. *The Structure of the Psyche*. In: *The Portable Jung*. Campbell, ed. pp. 38; 56; 60.

Minoan period, would it be surprising to find modified-myths that down-played the role of women in society?

As human experience and knowledge enlarge and change individuals, societies slowly select stories and myths, both old and new, that are most meaningful to them and their time. As Campbell suggests, each and all of us must take responsibility to ensure that our myths, our memes, are “at one with all,” and that our horizons are limitless.⁷

Sadly, as Robert Walter wrote in a foreword to the book *World Mythology*:

For many, their own myths are literal facts, while everybody else's are imaginative constructs. Lest you think this distinction is merely academic, simply switch on the evening news or scan the headlines in any daily newspaper. We think ourselves an intelligent species, and yet ... we are still ravaged by ancient tribal enmities, most of which are fueled by reductive interpretations of exemplary tales and heroic sagas, of myths that have been handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, as Campbell has noted again and again, such mayhem is, and always has been, the inevitable tragic consequence of literal readings of mythological images, of metaphors....⁸

THE ROLE OF MYTHOLOGY

Campbell saw mythology as serving certain functions for individuals and societies.⁹ I see an urgent imperative today for individuals and

⁷ Campbell. *Myths to Live By*. p. 266.

⁸ Walter. Foreword to: *World Mythology*. Willis, ed. p. 9.

⁹ Campbell. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. pp. 608-624.

societies to rethink the role of mythology. The stories that we live by are important for healthy living and healthy societies. How then do we keep the creative memes and discard the destructive memes from our ancient mythologies? How do we seek out and create new life-giving and life-loving memes? Creative memes may take many forms. For example, one of Constantin Brancusi's sculpture series may help the human spirit soar like a *Bird in Space*.

To take an example from the Christian tradition, the importance of the myth about Jesus rising from the dead is frequently misunderstood. This is not a myth about someone two thousand years ago defying the laws of physics. Rather the role of this myth is to encourage each of us individually and collectively to ask the spiritual question of ourselves: "Are we rising from the dead today?"

Here I will attempt to update, and largely rewrite, Campbell's four functions of mythology. These functions may serve as a broad screen for the would-be bluff detector, but more importantly I present them as aids to the opening of ourselves to creative memes.

Creative memes:

1. Awaken a sense of awe and respect for the mystery of the universe, for the mystery that is me, and for my place as part of the universe;
2. Convey an image of the universe and cosmos that includes a scientific understanding of how the universe works, but at the same time acknowledge the mystery beyond the science;
3. Serve a sociological function in supporting a constantly developing and changing social order by recognizing our interconnections and interdependence with every human being and with the natural world; and
4. Provide a psychological and spiritual support to help the in-

dividual person center, harmonize and balance his or her life locally and globally.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

To deal with this topic is like walking through a minefield. Perhaps a *mind-field* is a more appropriate word.

Religion has been accused of everything from being “the opiate of the people” to essentially being a business operation. Yet, somehow, religions stay around. So why is religion important to people?

One clue is provided by the writings of Brother Leonard of the ecumenical community of Taizé in France. Brother Leonard writes about our human need to belong. He writes about his own “never-ending search for belonging.”¹⁰ The role of religion in meeting the human need to belong to a larger identifiable group or community may well supersede the role of religion in perpetuating a particular mythology or wisdom tradition. People have a need to feel accepted. Pointing to a church with a spire or a mosque with a minaret and saying, “I belong there,” is a way of saying, “I am part of something larger than myself.” “Look, I am accepted by that group.” When a new member joins, or is born into a religious community, a special ceremony of acceptance is enacted to mark the event. The member hears the words or experiences the ritual which says in one way or another: “You are accepted. You belong here.”

Religions, like our dreams, are filled with symbols. Here is another reason for the human fascination with religion. There is always something unknown, unconscious and hidden in a symbol. Symbols,

¹⁰ Brother Leonard. *Belonging*. p. 2.

and religions which use symbols—and all do—draw us out beyond the point of human understanding. Symbols speak to us about aspects of being that cannot be measured by a scientific method. Anyone who expects to find an alternative to religion will need to understand the power of symbols for the lives of people.

Celebration and ceremony play important roles in religion. Celebrations, especially if they involve a feast, help to build a sense of belonging, a sense of community. Ceremonies are steeped in symbol. As Leslie Silko observes, there is nothing like “a good ceremony.”¹¹

Religion binds people together. Unfortunately, an excess of binding elements may lead to constipation. Constipation inhibits flow, movement and change. I expect a suitable laxative contains spirit—the kind of spirit that has long been associated with breath, air, movement and freedom.

COUNTERFEIT MYTHS

One of the recurring themes of this book is to emphasize the importance of developing bluff detection skills. The skill to be able to discern when we are being “taken for a ride” is an essential skill for healthy living. Such skills are important to develop for many arenas of life, including the economic and the political. They are equally important in the religious arena.

Many mythologies contain destructive memes that have been used by a person or group to maintain power over another person or group. Such destructive memes must be relegated to the historical categories of human cultures if we humans are to grow and evolve. Campbell

¹¹ Silko. *Ceremony*. pp. 2-3.

claimed that some stories were “consciously contrived, counterfeit mythologies.” One example of such a story, recorded in *Genesis*, Campbell suggests was contrived by “a lot of old men (attempting to) simplify life by keeping women in the kitchen.”¹² One version tells the story as follows:

*To the woman he [the Lord God] said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you will bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”*¹³

If any of us doubted the continuing destructive influence of the above story, we were reminded at the turn of this century by an American woman, a member of a Catholic order. The woman was angered by her Church’s continuing refusal to ordain women to the priesthood. Pope John Paul II had the habit of kissing the ground when he first got off a plane after landing in a new country. Following her encounter with the Pope during his tour of the United States, the nun pointed out the Pope’s confusing message: “He kisses the ground and walks on women.”¹⁴

Another example of destructive memes that may have been inserted into an ancient myth appears within the story of Cain and Abel. As recorded in *Genesis* this is the story of a mythological killing.¹⁵ In this creation story Cain and Abel are the sons of Adam and Eve. The

¹² Campbell. *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. p. 323.

¹³ *Genesis* 3:16. *The Bible* (RSV).

¹⁴ Quoted by Vidal D. *A Secular Society: Believers and Unbelievers*. Forster H. trans. In: *Le Monde Diplomatique*. November 2001. p. 15.

¹⁵ *Genesis* 4. *The Bible* (RSV).

brothers grow up and Cain brings fruit as an offering to God while Abel brings the newborn of his flock. God apparently accepts Abel's offering but rejects Cain's offering. This rejection makes Cain angry and he kills his brother. This is a story of sex, birth and the life of a herder and a planter. Then the herder is killed by the planter—a surprising twist. Is this the first mystery story? Perhaps it is just a way of saying vegans also kill.

Why are we told that God received Abel's offering but rejected that given by Cain? Is this an attempt to justify a ranking-order of roles within a society? Often men were the herders while women were the planters in traditional societies.

The myth goes on to raise the issue of revenge. In the story, God says: *If anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.*¹⁶ This represents a lot of vengeance! It suggests that God approves of vengeance as punishment for wrong-doing. I think this myth as it appears in the first book of *The Bible* has given both individuals and governments false justification for numerous terrible acts of vengeance. Many, including myself, would agree that some form of punishment is necessary for murder and other atrocities. However, the focus of any justice system, in my view, needs to be the correcting of behavior and prevention of future wrong-doing, not revenge.

As an example of the continuing damaging effects of this ancient myth today, I refer the reader to the report of the Goldstone Commission on the Gaza conflict of 2008–2009 prepared for the United Nations Human Rights Council.¹⁷ The Commission's findings

¹⁶ Genesis 4: 15. *The Bible* (RSV).

¹⁷ The lengthy report is reviewed by Stephen Lendman. (<http://www.countercurrents.org/lendman260510.htm>).

are blunt, stating that *Israel willfully and maliciously violated international law by attacking 1.5 million people, mostly civilians, indiscriminately and disproportionately*. The Goldstone report also concludes that Hamas must be investigated for war crimes. The Israeli Government's response has included attempts to vilify Justice Goldstone and the entire Human Rights Council.

MYTHOLOGIES AND NATURE

As Campbell points out in *The Power of Myth*, traditional mythologies tend to fall into one of two major categories. In the first category, the mythology connects humans to themselves, to each other and to nature. In these mythologies, humans are seen as an integral part of nature. The North American Native mythologies fall into this first category. In the second category, exemplified by the Judeo-Christian mythologies, humans are separated from nature, but linked to a particular *chosen* sociological group. The second category of mythologies view the natural world as existing to serve humans; the emphasis is on the domination of nature by the human species.¹⁸

I suggest a growing number of people today are beginning to see that certain creative memes from mythologies that emphasize our human linkages to nature provide the basis for a more sustainable and resilient lifestyle over the long-term. In contrast, some memes from mythologies that view humans separate from and dominating the natural world are moving us towards increasingly self-destructive behaviors.

¹⁸ Campbell with Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. pp. 22-24.

TOWARDS NEW CREATIVE MEMES

In one of his conversations with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell predicted that any new mythology was unlikely to take shape any time in the near future. Campbell thought the world was changing too fast for a new mythology to develop soon.¹⁹

Campbell was not asked, however, if he thought the people of the world need a single, all-encompassing, global mythology. Is such an idea not just a way to fall back into the old way of thinking and acting: the concept of One-True-God, One-True-Religion, One-True-Church, One-Power-Control-System? Would such a mythology not continue to attempt to destroy diversity and to limit human creativity? Surely, for a healthy world, it will be essential to have varied creative memes in distinctive languages that reflect a diversity of personal and cultural experience. It is imperative, I believe, that new creative memes begin to mirror more adequately today's realities and our wider relationships with people and nature, pointing us toward a more universal pluralism.

Where will life-respecting creative memes come from? Clearly many already exist as part of the older world mythologies. Others will be found in the literature and art of the world. It may be that writers and artists who have themselves experienced the rapid social and cultural changes of recent times will be in a unique position to create such memes.

Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson suggest we are living in *between time*. They explain that: "The Between is the time Between

¹⁹ Campbell. *Ibid.* p. 31.

worldviews, values, and ways of life; a time between stories.”²⁰ In their book, *The Cultural Creatives*, they document, with data from one of the world’s larger countries, signs that new stories are beginning to reflect the new reality taking shape in our midst.

One of my favorite new myths was written by Brian Swimme. Swimme believes “our primary teacher is the universe.” In his book, *The Universe is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story*, Swimme writes:

... All our difficulty as a species on this planet stems from our false relationships with winds, seas, life, sunlight and land. It’s not that we’re bad; we’ve simply been trying to live outside our true relationships with these primordial cosmic presences.

But as you move into the full universe, you will discover something stupendous. All these powers are yours! They cost nothing! They do not depend on the color of your skin, the name of your religion, or your place of birth. The further development of the Earth community depends upon our ripening as a species, but nothing is more natural for the human person to accomplish.

We sometimes fall into the delusion that power is elsewhere, that it belongs to a different group, that we are unable to find access to it. Nothing could be further from the truth. The universe oozes with power, waiting for anyone who wishes to embrace it...²¹

²⁰ Ray and Anderson. *The Cultural Creatives*. p. 235.

²¹ Swimme. *The Universe is a Green Dragon*. pp. 150-151; 167.

Jean Houston takes the approach of looking again at some of the stories from the past and provides fresh insight as to how these old creative memes continue to speak to us today. In *Godseed: The Journey of Christ*, Houston looks at the story of Jesus from the viewpoint of human experience.²²

Both Swimme and Houston take a global, cosmic perspective in their writings. Swimme's creation story tends to fall within functions 1 and 2 as previously listed for mythologies. Houston's focus is on functions 3 and 4. Neither author limits him- or herself to any single role for mythology.

Finally, each of us has the potential to speak of, or write out, his or her own creative memes. The discoveries made by Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, and many others about their lives and their relationship to the origins of all life are also available as self-discoveries to each individual person today.

Each of our stories is unique and has special significance. It is not essential that we tell, or write, our stories in flowing, flowery language. What is important is that we tell or write our own stories in our own way, in our own style, and in our own language. We may also choose to paint, sculpt or dance our story. If, through the sharing of our stories in our spirit communities, in our writing, through the arts and media, or on the Internet, others are encouraged to grow in spirit, so much the better.

Telling our own stories will require some risk-taking on the part of

²² Houston. *Godseed*.

each of us. Are we ready to launch out “beyond the edge of the world,” into the unknown?²³

²³ Momaday, N Scott. *In The Bear's House*. New York, NY: St. Martin Griffin, 1999. Reprinted in: *Yes, A Journal of Positive Futures*. Bainbridge Island, WA: Winter, 2002. p. 37.



REDEFINING OUR IDENTITY: THE SEARCH WITHIN

The nineteenth century Vedantic mystic and teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, told a traditional story of a young Indian student who had just been listening to his guru's teaching about transcendence and the multiple nature of the power that supports the universe. Joseph Campbell, speaking to a North American audience in New York in 1969, adapted the story as follows:

The youth, profoundly moved, exalted in the notion of himself as at one with the Lord and Being of the Universe, walked away in a state of profound absorption; and when he had passed in that state through the village and out onto the road beyond it, he beheld, coming in his direction, a great elephant bearing a howdah on its back and with the mahout, the driver, riding—as they do—high on its neck, above its head. And the young candidate for sainthood, meditating on the proposition “I am God; all things are God,” on perceiving that mighty elephant coming toward him, added the obvious corollary, “The elephant also is God.” The animal with its bells jingling to the majestic rhythm of its stately approach, was steadily coming on. And the mahout above its head began shouting, “Clear the way! Clear the way, you idiot! Clear the way!”

The youth in his rapture, was thinking still, “I am

God; that elephant is God.” And, hearing the shouts of the mahout, he added, “Should God be afraid of God? Should God get out of the way of God?” The phenomenon came steadily on with the driver at its head still shouting at him, and the youth, in undistracted meditation, held both to his place on the road and to his transcendental insight, until the moment of truth arrived and the elephant, simply wrapping its great trunk around the lunatic, tossed him aside, off the road.

Physically shocked, spiritually stunned, the youth landed all in a heap, not greatly bruised but altogether undone; and rising, not even adjusting his clothes, he returned, disordered, to his guru, to require an explanation. “You told me,” he said, when he had explained himself, “you told me that I was God.”

“Yes,” said the guru, “you are God.”

“You told me that all things are God.”

“Yes,” said the guru again, “all things are God.”

“That elephant, then, was God?”

“So it was. That elephant was God. But why didn’t you listen to the voice of God, shouting from the elephant’s head, to get out of the way?”¹

This myth, I suggest, is a wise creative meme. Several of the functions of mythology, as outlined in the previous chapter, are incorporated in this single story. The process of finding out who we are may not be without hazard and humor! Listening to God means having

¹ Campbell. *Myths to Live By*. pp. 146-147.

our antennae tuned to all directions, not just horizontally in front of us!

Teachers and mystics from many religious traditions, at various points in their spiritual journey, have experienced a sense of oneness with God. Some have also been tortured and killed by the political and religious establishment of their time. Some two thousand years ago, Jesus, a Jew from Nazareth in Palestine, was tortured and then crucified at Golgotha. Christian tradition tells us Jesus was killed because of his claim of being at one with God. It is more likely he was killed because he was seen as a threat to public order.²

In the Sufi tradition, the mystic Hallaj was tortured and crucified in Persia during the tenth century. Hallaj had compared his love for Allah with that of the moth for the flame. Finally, one is consumed by the other.³

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Christian theologian, wrote a poem in his prison cell. Words from the last verse read:

*Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!*⁴

Bonhoeffer was executed, by the S.S. Black Guard, in a concentration camp at Flossenburg, Germany on April 9, 1945. In a brief biography, Leibholz emphasizes how clearly Bonhoeffer, before his death, recognized that “Hitler and his gang” were traitors to their own country.⁵ More recently (2001 – 2009), another gang, this time

² Funk and The Jesus Seminar. *The Acts of Jesus*. p. 133.

³ Quoted by Campbell. *Myths to Live By*. p. 149.

⁴ Bonhoeffer (quoted by Leibholz). *The Cost of Discipleship*. p. 16.

⁵ Leibholz, G. *Memoir*. In: Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. pp. 9-28.

in Washington, DC led by George W. Bush, displayed an alarming number of the same fanatical ideas about nationalism and imperialism. Trust by many individuals and nations in the nominal democracy of the United States was severely strained during this time. Can trust be regained by a new administration in Washington?

For now, I wish to focus on the experiences and expressions of oneness with God of people like Jesus, Hallaj and Bonhoeffer. Are such experiences restricted to particularly sensitive and courageous people with special knowledge and awareness? How do such individuals attain the self-awareness and inner strength to face the fears of others? What is it in such people that make others, in positions of power, so fearful of them? May any of us gain such self-awareness and inner strength by tapping the riches of the inner-self, the inner garden? I salute Jesus, Hallaj and Bonhoeffer. They were very special people. The key question for me is: What may I learn from them?

THE SCIENTIFIC GOSPELS

In *Genesis 2-3*, God's command not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden is strange. It is rather like God saying to us, "I gave you a magnificent organ called the brain, just be sure not to use it." In the end, however, the wise serpent and the pragmatic woman saw through the illusion, the bluff of this story. This, of course, was not the only time in history that attempts were made to control the flow of knowledge and information. The suppression of the texts of the *Gnostic Gospels* was another example from a later period.

The Latin word for knowledge is *scientia*, the origin of the English word *science*. The Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis*, the origin of

the word *gnostic*. The concern of the scientist and the Gnostic is to search for knowledge. Some people attempt to distinguish between knowledge obtained by a scientific method and intuitively- or experientially-acquired knowledge. However, although the methods for measurement and the criteria of the research process to obtain knowledge may differ, the objective of the researcher is the same, namely, to learn more about a bug, a star, a car, or oneself from the process of the research.

The focus of the Gnostics' search for knowledge was primarily the self and humankind. Their science was what today might be called spiritual psychology. Some "basic" scientists dispute the linking of science and psychology. But science is science. To describe only part of it as "basic" is a reductive approach to the search for knowledge.

Attempts to control the flow of knowledge appear to have played a role in the early years of the Christian religion. There is now evidence that some of the teachings of Jesus were suppressed for political reasons within the early Church. Here, I provide a brief story about the discovery of some Gnostic texts.

BURIED TREASURES

In 1945, while digging for fertilizer, two Egyptian farmers found a large, sealed, red-earthenware jar. The jar was discovered at the cliff-base of a mountain with caves near Nag Hammadi on the banks of the Nile River. In the jar were 13 leather-bound papyrus books.⁶ As Pagels relates, some parts of these texts may have been burnt, as their value and importance was not recognized at the time of first discovery. Further,

⁶ Pagels. *The Gnostic Gospels*. pp. xiii-xxxvi; and Meyer. *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*. pp. xv.

due to some dramatic events that Pagels describes in her book, it took many years before these texts became available for study. The texts, dating from about 350 CE, are Coptic translations of earlier texts mostly written in Greek. Bound within 13 books were 52 different texts.

Much earlier, another Gnostic manuscript had emerged, also in Egypt. This manuscript, found in 1769, was not published for more than a century. Towards the end of the 19th century, part of a Greek text of the *Gospel of Thomas* was found.

The teachings of the Gnostics were regarded as heresies by the dominant part of the Christian Church, or the Church that pulled the strings of power. I describe a heresy as anything you believe and I don't, and that poses a threat to my control over you. Vigorous attempts were made to suppress the Gnostic texts by the Church fathers, including Irenaeus and Tertullian. By the fourth century it was a crime simply to possess a Gnostic text. All copies known to Church authorities were burned. The suppression was very successful. For most of two millennia the content of these texts has been hidden.⁷

The content of the texts found at Nag Hammadi is varied.⁸ For my purpose here, I draw the reader's attention to only a few, highly-selected sayings from these writings, which focus primarily on self-knowledge and self-identity. From the *Gospel of Thomas*:

Jesus said, "...The kingdom is inside you and outside you.

⁷ Pagels. *The Gnostic Gospels*. pp. xiii-xxxvi; Eisler. *The Chalice and the Blade*. pp. 124-128.

⁸ Robinson, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library*.

...If you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty and embody poverty.”

Jesus said to them, “...When you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, ...then you will enter the kingdom.”

Jesus said, “Know what is within your sight, and what is hidden from you will become clear to you.”

Jesus said, “Whoever knows everything but lacks within, lacks everything.”

Jesus said, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you.”

Jesus said, “When you see a likeness of yourself, you are happy. But when you see your images that came into being before you, and that neither die nor become visible, how much you will be able to tolerate.”

Jesus says, “Whoever finds self is worth more than the world.”

Jesus said, “You see the speck that is in your companion’s eye, but you do not see the beam that is in your own eye....”

He said, “A person is like a wise fisher who cast a net into the sea, and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisher discovered a fine big fish. So the fisher threw all the little fish back into the sea, and with no

hesitation kept the big fish. Whoever has ears to hear ought to listen."⁹

Some of these sayings of Jesus, as recorded by Thomas, suggest where Jesus found the source of his own strength. Furthermore, some of these sayings suggest this same source of strength is indeed available to each of us—if we make the commitment and take courage to look within ourselves. These sayings are about personal discernment.

Hippolytus, writing about what he regarded as heresies, quotes the Gnostic teacher Monoimus as saying that each of us may find God by starting with ourselves.¹⁰

RECREATING OUR IMAGE

The writer Neale Donald Walsch, who together with his wife formed *The ReCreation Foundation* based in Oregon, has written extensively about the human concept of God. Walsch suggests that many people brought-up under the influence of Christian tradition have been taught to consider it somewhat blasphemous to seek to be like God. Paradoxically, it is not considered blasphemy when people seek to be like the Devil.¹¹ According to the doctrine of original sin, Christians are taught that they are born in sin. Why this fascination with sin and evil?

⁹ Composed from parts of sayings from the Nag Hammadi Codex II: 32-33; 45-46; 47-48; 51; 37-38; 33-34. In Meyer. *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*: 19 (Saying 3); 31-32 (Saying 67); 32 (Saying 70); 34 (Saying 82); 38 (Saying 110); 24 (Saying 26); 20 (Saying 8).

¹⁰ Hippolytus. *Refutations Omnium Haeresium* 8, 15; 1-2. See Pagels. *op.cit.* xix-xx.

¹¹ Walsch. *Conversations with God*. Book 1: 85-86.

In a later book Walsch, like the Gnostics, claims that the Creator may indeed be found both within each of us and all around us.¹²

Matthew Fox connects the myth about not eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden with our creative abilities.¹³ The original sin, Fox suggests, may have to do with a tendency to repress our own creativity. Do we fear our God-like qualities? Could it be that many of us don't want to acknowledge our God-given gifts of creativity? I expect that Walt Whitman would not have counted himself among such.

SONG OF MYSELF

*... Be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about
God and about death).
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God
not in the least.
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than
myself.
Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and
each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own
face in the glass...¹⁴*

¹² Walsch. *Communion with God*. p. 15.

¹³ Fox. *Creativity*. p. 91.

¹⁴ Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*. p. 71. (*Song of Myself*. From Stanza 48).

**GOD: A SYMBOL OF THE UNIVERSE,
THE COSMOS, EVERYTHING**

A definition of God, derived from the twelfth-century *Book of the Twenty-four Philosophers*, is quoted by Joseph Campbell as follows: “God is an intelligible sphere, whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.”¹⁵

Shug, in Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*, expresses a similar sentiment when she says: “I believe God is everything that is, ever was or ever will be.” As Walker points out, this understanding of God is not new. Similar words were attributed to the Goddess Isis some five millennia earlier.¹⁶

With such an understanding we may begin to see the universe not only as something physical, but rather as the complete complexity of the cosmos, incorporating every aspect of being—body, mind, emotion, spirit—together with the environment and the space beyond.

Such an understanding of the cosmos sees the concept of a strictly personal God as reductionist. A concept of God as “Everything” does not exclude belief in a personal God. It does, however, recognize that the magnificence and mystery of God is greatly limited by seeing God as only having a human face. Is it any wonder that such a limiting concept of a strictly personal God has led to reductionist thinking in many other aspects of “Western” thought? Our science becomes reductionist; our connection to nature is denied; and our relationship to people of other cultures is filled with fear.

The belief in a strictly personal God, common in many parts of the

¹⁵ *Liber XXIV Philosophorum*. Proposition II. Clemens Baumker. Quoted by Campbell in *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. p. 31.

¹⁶ Walker. *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*. pp. 3-4.

Christian tradition, I suggest, actually provides support to the concept of God as a construct of the human mind. The motivation for humans to create a concept of God, Goddess, or Allah in their own image may be very strong. It is undoubtedly easier to claim a God, Goddess, or Allah with human-like characteristics, than it is a God that is an uncontrollable and unimaginable Everything! The bluff, found in the Judeo-Christian traditions, is that God created man in his own image.¹⁷ The opposite is much more likely.

When we redefine our understanding of God, we redefine at the same time, our understanding of who we are. By enlarging our concept of God, we clarify our relationship to the rest of humanity, to nature as a whole, and to that part of ourselves that Paul Tillich called “the ground of all being.”¹⁸ To use psychological terms instead of theological terms: we begin to understand our conscious personality more clearly, while continuing to be mystified by our personal and collective unconscious being—the complex that together constitutes the *Self* that *cannot be fully known*.¹⁹

When we understand ourselves to be an integral part of the universe—however miniscule that part may be—then our whole attitude changes. Now, caring for each other and the planet becomes a part of caring for ourselves. Thomas quotes Jesus as saying, “The kingdom is inside you and outside you.”²⁰ So we had better take care of both the

¹⁷ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁸ Tillich. *The Shaking of the Foundations*. p. 60.

¹⁹ Jung. *Phenomenology of the Self*. In: *The Portable Jung*. Campbell, ed. p. 142.

²⁰ Meyer. *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*. 19. From Saying 3.

inside and the outside of our lives, both individual and collective, both local and global, right now.

OUR HERO IS WITHIN

There appears to be, within each of us, a need for a relationship with a greater power, an authority, a hero. We need to understand the link between our origins and the origin of everything. We need a way to see ourselves as part of the universe, as part of the cosmos; or, if the reader prefers, we need a way to understand our relationship to God. This need is a part of our human psyche, a part of the mystery that connects us to the cosmos, a part of the mystery that is each one of us.

Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen write that our human task is to discover God within.²¹ I much prefer this description of our task as human beings to Walsch's suggestion that we are seeking to be like God. To seek to be like God is not only impossible, but might quickly lead to a dangerously inflated ego.

James Joyce expresses the core thought of this chapter as only he could: Joyce has Elijah (at his second coming) say:

*You have that something within, the higher self. You can rub shoulders with a Jesus, a Gautama.... Are you all in this vibration? I say you are.*²²

In this chapter, I have borrowed stories and sayings from various cultures, ancient and modern. Some of the quotes are from a long-suppressed part of the early Christian tradition. In their own way these visionaries and heroes express their understanding of who they really

²¹ Wong and McKeen. *The New Manual for Life*. p. 290.

²² Joyce. *Ulysses*. p. 414.

are. With them, each of us may say: “Our hero is within us.” What is the garden of my psyche but my primordial, present, and future connection with Everything? In more ancient language: What is my soul but God within me?