

The Plight of the Marginalized Requires an Integral Vision

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Abstract The Oceans surrounding our island continent, when regarded as a symbol, can enable us to understand the state of our mind, and most pertinently what is shaping the attitude of our nation toward the boat people seeking refuge in Australia. To some the ocean appears to be a mote, to others a bridge. These alternative views describe the range of opinions in the Australian population that speak of a divided nation. How has this division emerged to the point of people being most reluctant to aid others seeking asylum? Jean Gebser presents an explanation from his Integral perspective describing the vision necessary for a more humane solution.

The Marginalized

The Christian disciple is typically one who is drawn to respond to the marginalised of society, for our heart is stirred by life's injustice and suffering and greater meaning is discovered in working to correct this anomaly in God's beautiful creation. In Australia one present day experience has captured the heart and mind of our nation, the refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Sadly it is not with a united heart but it stands as an issue which divides the population in its attitude.

I find myself asking how is it that our politicians have been able to manipulate public thought so easily? How is it that our nation which is generally regarded as easy going and friendly become so inclined to turn from its humane response and in a majority of cases chosen to become hard lined and critical.

The resulting debate readily degenerates when addressed politically. I want to examine a different approach believing we need a new vision that will enable us to

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transcend the divisive state in which we are caught. Surely there is a path that will enable Australians to recapture a deeper level of the humane?

Sea as Symbol

I want to develop my reflection around sea as 'symbol'. The current Australian debate has strangely focused upon the 'boat people'. Despite this being the most insignificant means by which refugees appeal to Australia it is virtually the only one that causes local citizens distress. I suggest it is the sea that symbolises the debate. For some the sea is seen as a bridge, for others it is a moat, a stretch of water designed to keep others out. Symbols become a focus for our understanding. They arouse human response in a variety of possible ways depending upon what we see as meaningful for us. Symbols do not carry definitive definitions for we engage with them as if in relationship with them. They tell us as much about ourselves as they do about the symbol. Hence I want to present the sea surrounding our continental island as a symbol which mirrors what is going on within us.

To do so I want to look at the Australian Western shaped mind alongside that of the people who live more closely to the sea, the people of the islands of the Pacific in the Oceania region. For the Australian the ocean is perceived as moat, for the latter it is a bridge and source of life. With apologies to the people of the Oceania islands I am merely using the information from the book 'Waves of God's embrace – Sacred Perspectives From the Ocean', by Winston Halapua, to capture a contrasting picture to the Australian mind for it is an understanding of the Australian mind I am seeking to understand.

An Integral Vision

I find hope in reflecting upon the work of those who regard themselves as seeking an integral vision for humanity. I am viewing both Islander and Australian through the perspective of the Integral perspective, so firstly a word on this evolutionary developmental paradigm of life.

The perspective of such scholars speaks of our present era of history as ‘the second axial era’ of history. Scholars such as Ewert Cousin’s, Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber and Raimon Panikkar speak of our historical time undergoing a mutational change, which echos the first Axial period. The first has been spoken of as shaping the millenia prior to the life of Christ. This first era could be said to be characterised by a change from the tribal to the individual, while this second era is bringing about the transition from the dominance of individual consciousness to the newly emerging global consciousness, from the dominant rational to the all inclusive integral, from the dualistic to the non-dual consciousness.

The Integral theorists present a story that will enlighten us. I specifically note the work of Jean Gebser, who builds his understanding of human consciousness upon the evolving nature of the mind. In turn such evolutionary movement of the mind is reflected in the progressive development of individual experience. This is well described in the work of numerous western developmental psychologists, such as Ken Wilber and eastern spiritual guides. For our purposes today I simply want to note the way Gebser and Wilber map the successive eras of history which speak of the mind transcending the previously commonly experienced one. Their map speaks of the successive eras of the archaic, the magical, the mythical, the mental-rational, and now the burgeoning integral era. Each era in turn sees the mind displaying characteristics that best speak of the most helpful way the mind can function in the known world of the time. The cyclical pattern suggests that the challenges of each era finally become too great for the way the mind is functioning. It is as if the previously known capacities reach their limit even for that era. A time of crisis ensues as the mind seeks its new perspective and dynamics of evolution open new capacities of the mind with new stratus of resource emerging. A new era of consciousness awakens. The cycle keeps repeating itself, evolutionary growth, a point of limited capacity for progress, a time of crisis, then the emergence of greater capacity of a new era of development.

While many will be aware of Karen Armstrong’s book ‘Transformation’,² as making popular the notion of the first axial period of history in the centuries prior to Jesus, Ewert Cousins directs us to the work of Carl Jaspers to speak of the transformation

² Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation, the World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremah* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

taking place in human consciousness at this same time of the Buddha, Confucius, Socrates and the Jewish prophets, such as Jeremiah. For the Integral mind it was the time humanity moved from the mythically dominated mind to a new era to gradually be dominated by the mental-rational function. Cousins builds upon the work of Jasper to argue that humanity is now experiencing the second axial period of history.³

Pacific Island Mentality

While Modern western mind might readily look down upon the approach to life of the mythically shaped era it would be wrong to overlook its great blessings. It was a time of significant unity within its own communities and a time it showed great affinity with the creation it lived within. It revealed an element of spirituality that even today stands as so admirable. Many have been inspired by signs of this mentality in indigenous groupings that they have sought a deeper understanding.

Winston Halapua

In the light of my questioning of the sea as symbol surrounding Australia I want to firstly turn to the writing of Winston Halapua, in his book 'Waves of God's Embrace' (Sacred Perspectives From the Ocean). In his reflection from the life in the waters of Oceania he reveals the beauty of the harmony with land and water that could be said to reflect the richness of the mythical era. In the forward to this book Allan Davidson writes,

With beguiling simplicity he develops the metaphor of the sea and the great oceans and draws from them images that reflect on personal identity, relationships, sharing and hospitality between people, deep encounters through story telling, poetry reflecting understandings of God and the place of human beings as part of creation.⁴

The story begins with recollections of the earliest boat people who millennia before had ventured forward across the same seas as our present day 'boat people' by

³ Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1992).

⁴ Winston Halapua, *Waves of God's Embrace. Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2008). Forward by Allan K. Davidson vii

moving from land to sea to land to sea to land to sea. Their earliest story was one of bridge. Such travels shaped their courageous minds to see land and sea as one. Both were found to be the source of life, rich in its fruit. The concept of ‘moana’ speaks of land and sea as the one home.⁵ The unity was easily understood with the mythically dominant mind, and dependence on both land and sea consolidated an affinity with creation, an affinity that the most modern mind has seemingly lost.

Halapua writes,

I write using metaphors arising from the different aspects and waves of the ocean. I write with a deep oceanic sense of interconnectedness with creation, with others and with the mystery of the God who calls into being all things.⁶

Then again he elaborates, ‘I am aware of being embraced by the mystery and energy of a cosmic rhythm.’⁷ And so Halapua proceeds to develop his theology through the images and experience of life in this environment. For this he refers to ‘theomoana’ and he quotes,

In bringing together God and Oceania [I] offer ‘theomoana’ – ‘God the Ocean’ – as a metaphor to open up new ways of seeing and understanding the challenges that come from creation, the environment, the church and the ways we relate to one another.⁸

Creation does not always behave as idyllically as we would like. It presents times of extraordinary challenge. This has never deterred the spirit and vision of the islanders but it has strengthened their resolve to live with creation with greater respect and consequently with greater harmony. Halapua describes,

Seas can be powerful and destructive forces; but the Pacific Ocean that has given birth to ... ‘theomoana’ takes its name from ‘Pacific’ meaning ‘the peaceful sea.’⁹

⁵ Ibid.3

⁶ Ibid.5

⁷ Ibid.6

⁸ Ibid.viii

⁹ Ibid.viii

Even today as they face perhaps their greatest challenge, their vision of sea as bridge, speaks prophetically. It reminds all that there is another way, that their life, bears testimony to the reality that land and sea, humanity and God are one. In Panikkar's vision he describes this unity with his self created word 'cosmotheandric'¹⁰.

Halapua's prophetic words reflect to unity,

We live in a world where there is an overwhelming need to learn to relate to each other and the world around us. Our failure in relationships contributes to poverty in many forms, but there are more than enough resources in this world to go round and be shared. The violence in our world both to people and to the environment, causing climate change, calls urgently for a prophetic pathway out of the doom of our own creation.....Groaning and glaring poverty is not so much the result of lack of resources as of our isolation from one another - our failure to realize the depth of our connection.¹¹

I have highlighted this picture to help better magnify our understanding of the common Australian mind by way of contrasting the two pictures. We need a clear picture of the western mind of our own day to understand why we struggle to see the sea as a symbol of unity as the Pacific islanders, a bridge and not as we presently do as a moat.

Jean Gebser

I now turn to the second picture I want to present. It is a generalised description of the modern western mind as described by integral visionary, Jean Gebser.¹² I argue that his perception illuminates what one is likely to find dominating the mentality of Australian people. Australian behaviour is consistent with the frame of mind Gebser

¹⁰ The word cosmotheandric is one personally formed by Raimon Panikkar to capture the inter-independent nature of all reality. It consists of the three primary domains of reality, creation as the cosmic, humanity as andros and the divine as theos.

¹¹ Ibid.7

¹² Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, trans., Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).

describes as having reached the pinnacle of mental functioning when it reached its zenith through the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In examining the development of the rational mind as the dominant form of human functioning he recalls its initial transition from the mythological era at approximately 500 B.C.E. to the then emergent mental-rational era. The rational capacities kept developing until reaching a high level with the coming of the Renaissance period. His thesis is explained by an ‘irruption of space’¹³ awareness. Here he identifies the extraordinary work of Leonardo da Vinci who captured the essence of perspective in a way no one had previously so comprehensively done. The importance for consciousness of da Vinci’s work was that perspective heightened a new awareness of space. Art is a good example. Paintings prior to this time were commonly without background, or when present, were minimal at best. Figures were mostly generalised presentations rather than portraits of specific people. Gebser referred to the earlier period prior to the Renaissance as an unperspectival time. The era beginning with the Renaissance is presented by Gebser as a perspectival era. It was the first time the human mind showed understanding of the significance of a perspective in drawing. Why Gebser argues that this was significant was that people became aware of the particular space being addressed. In painting, the object of the painting was a particular person in a particular place. It was space specific, and with it was also a sense of awareness of the space between the artist and object. In general terms it hastened the ability to be precise and analytical about the particular in question. However, this introduced the capacity to divide and separate. We could understand something was ‘this object’ but not ‘that object’. It was this in particular that enabled the mind to cope with the new highs of mathematics and science. In summary, space became the dominant feature that shaped Gebser’s perspectival era. With it came the common capacity to particularise, separate and ultimately segregate. It encouraged the mind to understand a fragmented and mechanistic world. It is what created the dominant rational mind and the reduction in appreciation for the mythic. It led to an era where the rational mind dominated the search for truth..¹⁴. Concepts were

¹³ This is the spelling of ‘irruption’ that Gebser uses.

¹⁴ I am reminded of Gary Bouma, in *Australian Soul* describing the changing means of determining truth. In the pre-renaissance time he speaks of it as the authoritative leader, during the enlightenment times, it was reason and now in current time it is personal experience. Gary D. Bouma, *Australian Soul Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

precisely discussed, accepted or rejected. The dialectic nature of discussion regularly differentiated. People saw every part of creation as an independent reality. It witnessed the split of science from religion hence the death of God phenomenon. It enabled the splitting of the atom not just in a physical way but from moral responsibility. The list abounds. With it came the loss of the rich spirituality of unity and harmony that was evident in the mythologically dominated era.

The modern western mind is so shaped by this mentality that it functions in what Ken Wilber describes as simply the conventional state of consciousness.¹⁵ It still dominates the common Australian mentality. Despite two centuries of gradual development all around us, the large majority of people still display traits of Gebser's perspectival mind. Dare we seek to follow a new light forward, our politicians through the media easily appeal to this deeply entrenched mentality to divide, fragment and particularise. We easily stumble when seeking to travel on the path to reconciliation, we shy away from grounding our feet in environmental issues, we recoil from those who are different. We are predominately perspectival people.

The Ocean that surrounds us is our moat.

The mental-rational has not so significantly effected the Pacific island people to the degree that it has in the western world and so its concept of moana continues to offer a contrasting picture.

The Challenge

But with the extraordinary contribution this new awareness of space had made to humanity, like all other eras before, its life still had its limit and something new is necessary to move humanity even further forward.

Gebser, Wilber, Cousins and Panikkar are scholars who have made a significant contribution to understanding the newly emergent world consciousness

¹⁵ K Wilber, *A Theory of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000).20

The challenge is to discover a process for responding. The sense of crisis experienced by many, some of whom cling desperately to the past and its conventional way of life while others explore alternatives and argue for new ways for living, leaves an unsettled society wondering. Gebser recognises this turmoil but responds with a message of hope.

On the basis of the initial manifestations of the new consciousness ... we can undoubtedly take for granted that many today are in a position to achieve this mutation, particularly since there have been individuals in earlier times who have achieved this integral mutation.¹⁶

Hope does require a means to fulfil the goal, which becomes our challenge. Gebser asks this very question himself:

Yet one question remains: what can man do to bring about this mutation? To this we have already hazarded an answer: we must know where we are to effect events, or to let them take their course; where we are merely to “be aware” of truth, and where we may “impart the truth.”¹⁷

The attitude he calls for must reflect the new integral vision of global consciousness with appropriate values.

The new consciousness structure has nothing to do with might, rule, and overpowering ... What is needed is care; a great deal of patience; and the laying aside of many preconceived opinions, wishful dreams, and the blind sway of demands, there is a need for a certain detachment toward oneself and the world, a gradually maturing equilibrium of all the inherent components and consciousness structures predisposed in ourselves, in order that we may prepare the basis for the leap into the new mutation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Gebser.298

¹⁷ Ibid.273

¹⁸ Ibid.300

An Irruption of Time

Gebser proceeds to speak of this time of transition through the new evolutionary mutation taking place. Signs of its emergence appeared through the closing times of the mental-rational era even through the nineteenth and twentieth century's.

Even now the existing time of transition is a gradual phenomenon according to Gebser. 'Our present consciousness is one of transition, a consciousness in the process of mutation which is beginning to unfold new forms of realisation'¹⁹. The most iconic example of this new era, but not necessarily the first sign, would be according to Gebser, 'Einstein's formulation of the four dimensional space-time continuum. Consciously or unconsciously the time question has played a principle role in the natural sciences ever since.'²⁰

He speaks of the mutation as being shaped by an 'irruption of time'. 'At the moment when consciousness became able to account for the essence of "time," time irrupted... The term "irruption" signifies both the intrusion as well as the collapse of time for our consciousness.'²¹. 'For perspectival-thinking man, time lacked all quality'²². All things had previously been understood as if bound within the concept of chronological time, but now a sense of time-freedom is conceivable.

To the perception of the aperspectival world, time appears to be the very fundamental function, and to be of a most complex nature. It manifests itself in accordance with a given consciousness structure and the appropriate possibility of manifestations in its various aspects as clock time, natural time, cosmic and sidereal time; as dynamics, psychic energy (and thus in a certain sense in the form we call "soul" and the "unconscious") and as mental dividing. It manifests itself as the unity of past, present and future; as the creative principle, the power of imagination, as work and even as "motoricity"... And along with the vital, psychic, biological, cosmic, rational, creative, sociological and technical aspects of time, we must include – last but

¹⁹ Ibid.284

²⁰ Ibid.286

²¹ Ibid.284

²² Ibid.284

not least – physical-geometrical time which is designated as the “fourth dimension.”²³

For Gebser, ‘This seemingly random enumeration of temporal aspects may be disconcerting to someone unable to disengage himself from his three-dimensional conception of the world. To a systematician these aspects will seem to be incongruent quantities. But they are not quantities: they are elements and functions which cannot be conceived of or arrayed in spatial terms.’²⁴ ‘We shall have to become accustomed to recognising acategorical elements and the pre-eminent acategorical magnitude, “time” as an intensity.’²⁵

The implication of the new era is seen by contrasting the perspectival with the aperspectival, the latter opening humanity to time-freedom with its integral consciousness.

The coming to awareness of “time” in its full complexity is a precondition for the awakening consciousness of time-freedom. The freedom from time in turn is the precondition for the realisation of the integral consciousness structure that enables us to perceive the aperspectival world. The whole can be perceived only aperspectively; when we view things in a perspectival way we see only segments. In conceptual terms, however, we can only approach the whole by way of “integrals” or “totalities”²⁶ .

Gebser makes a detailed study of the way this irruption of time began appearing in numerous domains of life. He is able to illustrate how time-freedom has created this new awareness of consciousness in all domains of life: poetry and literature, mathematics and physics, biology, psychology and philosophy, the social sciences of jurisprudence, sociology and economics, dual sciences such as quantum biology, psychosomatic medicine and parapsychology, music, architecture and painting, all domains of life he is able to illustrate how time-freedom has created this new awareness of consciousness.

²³ Ibid.289

²⁴ Ibid.285

²⁵ Ibid.286

²⁶ Ibid.289

Conclusion

I began by asking us to think of the sea surrounding our nation as symbol. My concern was that it tells us as much about ourselves as it does of the sea.

I have suggested that Australians have seen it as a moat, rather than as a bridge such as the islanders of Oceania. My thesis is that Australians are too easily prone to continue living in the mentality of the mental-rational perspectival era beyond which the evolutionary movement of history has begun to move. Global consciousness is the internal reflection of the global village concept.

The islanders of Oceania have not lost the wonder of unity and harmony with their environment, which was once common to all humans, when perception was grounded in a mythic mindedness. Less dominated by reason it has much to teach the people of the rationally minded western world. They remind us of another way. Their life style carries a prophetic message.

A unity and harmony of all that is, once again awaits us. Gebser, Wilber, Cousins, and Panikkar all stand at the forefront of those who are attempting to map this integral vision.

The integral opens our mind to the totality of all past developments of consciousness.

‘We must, ... achieve the new integral structure without forfeiting the efficient forms of the previous structures.’ ... A truly integral perception cannot dispense with the foundation of the mental structure any more than the mental structure can dispense with the mythical, and the mythical with the magic, that is, if we are to be “whole” or integral human beings.²⁷

²⁷ Ibid.299

- Armstrong, Karen. *The Great Transformation, the World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah*. London: Atlantic Books, 2006.
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