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Book Review

Don Chipley

Erin Neill

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ross, G. (1993). The search for the pearl: A personal exploration of science and mysticism. Sydney, NSW: ABC. (304 pp Paper)

This book begins and ends with two mythic tales. The first is "The Hymn of the Robe of Glory" and also "The Song of the Pearl" (pp. 9); the second is "Sir Parsifal's Search for the Holy Grail" (pp. 296-297). Both tales tell of how the hero (or we humans) have two experiences of contact with a symbol of divine consciousness. The first experience we are too immature to appreciate, so we must undergo a journey of separation, suffering and struggle to regain access to what has been ours all along (the Robe of Glory/The Holy Grail Cup). Like the Prince and Parsifal, Western culture is seen to have had its first contact experience with divinity in the Renaissance. In the times that followed, however, we got caught up in the egoic success of scientific, technological and materialistic revolutions, all the while losing sight of the notion of service to others (thus rejecting the feminine principle needed to balance our lives). Thus we have greatly separated ourselves from our Cosmic Source and have suffered and have had to struggle to remember and regain the lost union with the Divine.

Ross believes we are now poised to alter our world view and participate in a wholistic revolution which will enable us to access our higher consciousness and join forces to co-create a "mystical renaissance" of "Cosmic Christ Consciousness." To do this we must tame the dragon of maleness, awaken to the importance and growth of feminine energies both individually and universally and unleash both these energies in light of a new vitalism wherein they flow in rhythmic abundance and integrative balance. We have begun a pathway to freeing the feminine energy of the heart/belly/genitals/body/instincts, but transformation depends on our learning to use feminine energy to heal the deep wounds inflicted on ourselves as an outgrowth of excessive reliance on maleness and patriarchy. We must reconnect with the Great Mother if we are to relate empathetically with the subtle interconnectedness of the diverse aspects that is the universe. Matthew Fox describes mysticism as 'the unification of heart and cosmos' (pp. 277). Creation spirituality advocates maintain that interconnectedness via a process of divine becoming of both individual and universe (Cosmic Christ Consciousness) is the path to mystical renaissance. Such a realization is forthcoming once we begin to celebrate the worship the mystery that is ourselves, tune in with the flow of the Eternal Tao and journey deeper to unveil the Divine Ground of our Being.

The above summary provides an overview of this very comprehensive and excellently written book which also contains numerous insights on the journey of SELF/Cultural transformation. The author states that the book is about Western culture's loss of the Tao and the path to its rediscovery. The book has three parts sandwiched between an "Introduction" and "Epilogue" (the segments offering the two mythic tales). Part I, "The Tao of the West," examined both traditional and modern worldviews in Chapters on Physics, Biology and Psychology related to

the disconnection/reconnecting with the deeper reality. The perspective of one pro-mystic per chapter (e.g. F. Capra--Physics, R. Sheldrake--Biology and C.G. Jung--Psychology) is discussed in more detail to clarify a specific sense of the wholistic worldview increasingly being accepted by leaders in various scientific disciplines. Part II examines certain notions of mystical consciousness and transcendent insights and techniques associated with the Eastern paths of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Part II synthesizes notions from three as yet "untrodden" pathways (Ken Wilber's States of Consciousness evolutionary framework, Jean Huston's Sacred Psychology, and Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality) which hold keys to the mystical renaissance already unfolding. Two of the pathways are directly related to transpersonal psychology (T.S.), while the third, creation spirituality, is seen as a theology of T.S. All of these perspectives are concerned with breaking through one's conditioning and connecting the intuitive self (psyche) with the energy of Divine love (Eros). The intuitive self when transformed becomes more of a 'perceptive sense' or consciousness of the Divine Beloved One (pp. 280-281).

This book has a great many strengths and relatively few weaknesses. It does a masterful job of weaving together threads from an extensive variety of sources to create a wholistic worldview of Cosmic Consciousness. The second chance to realise right connectedness through a death/rebirth process (as suggested in the tales) is an interesting notion, but a bit too simplistic for my taste. Some of us might need several more chances to get it right in connecting with the Wheel of Life.

DON CHIPLEY

Walsh, R. and Vaughan, F. (Eds). (1993). Paths beyond ego: The transpersonal vision. Los Angeles: Tarcher/Perigee. (293pp Paper)

This book is a carefully chosen collection of fifty abridged pieces of writing produced by well known authors who have contributed significantly to the field of transpersonal psychology. The editors, Walsh and Vaughan, take the newcomer on something of a showcase tour through many areas of experience relevant to the transpersonal psychologist and anyone else interested in exploring the depth and breadth of human awareness. The areas highlighted include meditation, dreams, psychedelics, science, individual growth, psychotherapy, science, philosophy, ethics and ecology.

The writing is clear and the currency of the material apparent to any socially aware, and concerned, reader. It is flagged in the warning given by John Mack in the Foreword:

We are witnessing a battle for the human soul between two opposing ontologies. (pp. xi)

He describes the powerful materialistic, mechanistic view of reality which dominates and inhibits our life in society today and compares it with the

transpersonal view "in which the physical world and its laws represent only one of an indeterminable number of possible realities...." (pp. xi). The implications of the two ontologies in terms of the pursuit of what would be considered to be worthwhile knowledge and worthwhile existence are markedly different. Obviously then the possibilities for the future for human beings and their environment would be vastly different also.

The book sets out to draw the reader's attention to significant areas for investigation of what human consciousness might mean and thus highlights the narrowness of the physicalist stand. The book is divided into three parts which further subdivide until there are eleven sections. The editors have made available some of the work (in varying lengths from brief one page pieces to longer papers of several pages), of such thinkers as Ken Wilber, The Dalai Lama, Fritjof Capra, Ram Dass, the Grofs, Sri Aurobindo, Charles Tart etc.

The tour begins at Part 1 with The varieties of transpersonal experience and progresses to Part II, The farther reaches of development, and thence to Part III, Foundations and applications.

Paths beyond ego is useful in that not only does it orient the reader by giving some idea of the breadth of the material available, it also enables him/her to identify possible areas of personal interest so that further reading can be pursued. That the book is successful in fulfilling its purpose is apparent from the commendatory nature of the comments made by tertiary students who have not been familiar with Transpersonal Psychology and who have therefore been invited to read the book as an introductory text.

ERIN NEILL