

**"The Psychologist in the Community"**

**By**

**(Prof.) Gayle Gilchrist James, MSW, RSW (AB)**  
**Faculty of Social Welfare**  
**Vice-President, Alberta**  
**Association of Social Workers**

Luncheon Speech  
Psychology Association of Alberta  
Palliser Hotel  
Calgary, AB

Sat., Oct. 30, 1976

## "The Psychologist in the Community"

Bill Thompson states:

"All the computers in the world won't help you if your unexamined and unconscious assumptions on the nature of reality are simply wrong in their basic conception. All the computers can do is help you to be stupid in an expensive fashion".

At the Edge of History, pp. 165

Ivan Illich describes that moment of understanding when we abandon our "solutions", as we let go of the illusions that made them necessary. (Ibid, pp. 168)

The more time you spend in your profession, and I in mine, the more we find ourselves abandoning solutions, giving up illusions, and discovering unconscious assumptions.

You are psychologists; you are familiar with the concepts of figure-and-ground. Thus far in this Conference and Annual Meeting, we have been looking at "the psychologist" as the predominant figure in the gestalt, and at "the community" as the background. When figure and ground are reversed, all the old facts fall into "new and often alien forms of consciousness... in the old modern era, science was 'objective' and art was 'subjective' ; but now the attraction of opposites has brought them together and neither science nor art is 'where it used to be" (Passages About Earth, pp. 5). So we can adjust our angle of vision to attempt to meet the theme of this Conference, and we can focus for awhile on "the community". But, in this Age of Aquarius, it is not at all clear with whom we share "joint ownership... identity of character; (and) fellowship..." (Oxford Dictionary), for that is what the word "community" symbolizes in our culture.

Until 1972, most of us who comprised the university - educated (one form of the ruling elite), worshipped the rational mind, dismissing religion as a "prerequisite for cultural advance" (Dust of Death, pp. 3). We were the sum of the advances of the tribal community of the agricultural society (where we moved from individuals to institutions... of the industrial civilization (Where we evolved from institutions to corporate systems)... and of the scientific planetary civilization, or post-industrial state (when individuals themselves became institutions - (Ralph Nader is an example of this phenomenon).

We had surrounded ourselves with machines, which the intellectuals among us claimed were dehumanizing, and, out of love for our "afflictions, (we sought) to make psychotherapy into a way of life..." (Passages About Earth, pp. 7). Until the '70's, our "community" was, for most of us, those who shared joint ownership of the products of an urban technological culture (which includes our degrees from big educational businesses like universities)... our identity came from looking into the eyes of our colleagues for reaffirmation of our existence... and our communion was achieved, at least temporarily, through alcohol or hallucinogens... and in our unconscious awareness of our lack of real communion, we made communication itself a subject of study. To understand our culture, you must focus not only on what it recognizes, but on what it ignores or fails to recognize: its linked opposites. Our technology has been our unique excellence... but alas, most of us are not Greek tragedians, and we failed to see that the "linked opposite" of our unique excellence has been a tragic flaw: the denial of our cosmic consciousness.

But God... or the One... or Buddha... or Limitless Love and Truth... or the Essence... whoever/whatever is out there and in us has a sense of humor. So, in 1972, Apollo 17 shot into the sky from the technological foundation of Earth, shattering the web around this planet, setting "all the hot air out and the heavenly vibrations in". (Passages About Earth, p. 3). Little wonder, really, that many of the astronauts found

their journey into space a conversion experience. We entered a New Age, and in the "new stage in human culture we have reached a planetary society containing more bits of information than the mind can stand, but holding enough space for the spirit too soar". (Passages About Earth, pp. 3)

If Apollo 17 was a consummation, then its opposite movement was about to begin. This has led to doom-and-gloom reports from some quarters:

"Nature has let us down. God seems to have left the receiver off the hook, and time is running out".

Arthur Koestler, quoted by Guinness; in The Dust of Death.

"Western culture is marked at the present moment by a distinct slowing of momentum, or perhaps, more accurately, by a decline in purposefulness and an increase in cultural introspection. This temporary lull, this vacuum in thought and effective action, has been created by the convergence of three cultural trends, each emphasizing a loss of direction. The first is the erosion of the Christian basis of Western culture... the second is the failure of optimistic humanism to provide an effective alternative... and the third is the failure of our generation's counter culture to demonstrate a credible alternative to Western Christianity and humanism".

Guinness, The Dust of Death.

The question is: are we experiencing the death or the rebirth of mankind? Teilhard de Chardin recognized that these phenomena are "perhaps outwardly akin to death; but in reality a simple metamorphosis and arrival at supreme synthesis". (Passage About Earth, p. 144). Thompson comments (Ibid, pp. 145) that "some death or rebirth of man is not as far off as Teilhard imagined. Because human culture is coming to a point, the distance between the edges of good and evil seems to be narrowing. The multinational corporations are devoted to profits and the exploitation of resources; nevertheless, they are creating structures for planetization. They are also accelerating the ecological death of the planet, and this in turn is accelerating the mystical transformation of mankind... under the threat of species annihilation, Homo Sapiens is trying to accomplish its transformation into a new species".

Prior to Apollo 17, Thompson forecast this moment when the meaning of "nature, self, and civilization" (At the Edge of History, pp. 230) would be revised:

"Birth is a cry of joy and a scream of pain: the environment that has sustained us for a time is now crushing down and pushing us out. But death, too, is a scream of pain and a cry of joy and so we cannot be certain that we are headed for one and not the other...at the edge of history, history itself can no longer help us, and only myth remains equal to reality...the future is beyond knowing, but the present is beyond belief. We make so much noise with technology that we cannot discover that the stargate is in our foreheads. But the time has come; the revelation has already occurred, and the guardian seers have seen the lightning strike the darkness we call reality. And now we sleep in the brief interval between the lightning and the thunder."

We are moving into the New Age, and many have their own vision of what that is and will be:

- Paolo Soleri in his Consanti Foundation in Arizona is a modern day Moses in the desert, building his arcology, and dwellings-unit, city-size, a union of archiculture and ecology... but not successful in escaping the tyranny of form;
- Richard "Baba Ram Dass" Alpert at the Lama Foundation in New Mexico;
- public housing in British New Towns;
- the historian Wagar's "World Order Models Project" patterned after H. G. Wells;
- the Club of Rome's (Pierre Trudeau: member) "Project on the Predicament of Mankind", etc. etc.

But, as Thompson has indicated, "only myth remains equal to reality", and only our religious myths have been and are of a scale large enough to deal with what is happening in the New Age. Ironically, we as social scientists have clung to that which physics has long since abandoned: the assertion that "culture operates only through social interactions, (for us) space separates, and what does not touch physically or symbolically can have no effect... (but) even in non relativistic frames of reference, physicists assert that all is energy and vibration and that the polar wind reaches to the limits of the solar system". (Passages About Earth, pp. 125).

Each of us and all of us here have to work out our own essential vision of mankind on this planet Earth, to live in and with the gestalt, whether it be myth/reality, or form/essence or subject/object, or any other apparent dichotomy of linked opposites.

In closing, I want to come full circle, and to share one man's view of that Essential Vision. The man is David Spangler, an American who, while living in the "planetary village" of Findhorn at Forres, Scotland, from 1970-1973, summarized where some of us are in our journey in the New Age:

"...the infinity (within man) is still there and it seeks its release, and throughout history, man had always sought this release... not every man, necessarily, but those individuals who embody, for the race, the growing tip. They may not be the elite of the race... they're just another part of it. Those that are not the pioneers, and who are content with maintaining old forms, and the things that are treasured from the past, have as important a part to play as the tissues that maintain the body of a plant, so that growth has something to rest upon. But, nevertheless, within humanity, there is this growing tip of people, hundreds of thousands of them, in every culture... and out of the efforts of these people, and those who support them, humanity has grown... and in recent years, it has grown very swiftly.

"In every level of life, man is learning how to go beyond form... to find meaning, what is its inner essence? What's behind it? What is it trying to communicate into life? Because there, we find our communion, our oneness: on a form level, we only find our differences. To penetrate to this essential vision, while living in form, becomes man's challenge, then...

"...after centuries of working...man stands at the threshold of having developed enough awareness that there is an abstract world that, perhaps, he can learn how to build a society, and live a life, attuned to the Essence... if a man could do that, he would initiate an entire new world, a new heaven and a new earth. And to me, that is the essence of the New Age, that for the first time in planetary history, enough people, enough places of the world, possessed with enough influence... to communicate beyond form, and not to get hung-up by the particular means that our dream may use to express itself, and to recognize that within me, and within you... the dream is essentially the same: that a world

is created where that which is potential within us each, the finite seed that has taken root in that soil of our infiniteness, can have the opportunity, and the freedom, and the nourishment to unfold. And anyone who tries to create such a world is, to me, a New Age person. And for many people throughout the world, this kind of awareness that the awful separation between earth and heaven, form and spirit, matter and energy... can come to an end, and we can begin to perceive unity, oneness, and the ever-present determination of the essence of our being, and the beingness of all life, to emerge through whatever channels are provided for it."

The essential vision behind form is "...the dream of the humanity that will reach the stars, not in space-ships, but in life, and in consciousness, because the stars are our brothers...

"...these people form a community upon the earth even though they are not physically together. A family that is widespread through its love is still a community if they have shared communion. And though, today, we may split and go our separate ways... if we have shared something... we shall never be as separate as we were when we came in and sat down. And it's not the condition of being together physically that counts, it is the condition of being together in essence, recognizing the togetherness, the oneness, that we always have.

"In the New Age... it's not for some to create and others to watch - everyone must participate. There are no such things as spectators in a nuclear war. And there's no such thing as a spectator upon the planet now...

"Communication, communion, community: three ways in which the essential vision of humanity is emerging and will create a New Age for all of us."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Thompson, Wm Irwin (1974). At the Edge of History: Speculations on the Transformation of Culture. Harper Colophon Books.
2. Ibid (1973-1974). Passages About Earth: An Exploration of the New Planetary Culture. Harper & Raw.
3. Guinness, OS (1973). The Dust of Death, a Critique of the Counter Culture. InterVarsity Press, 1973.
4. Spangler, David (1973). "The Essential Vision", from lectures (taped) to the Findhorn Community.
5. Ibid (1971). Revelation: The Birth of a New Age. The Findhorn Foundation.
6. Pirsig, Robert M (1974). Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values. Bantam Books.