



Reflection Letter 5, July 2015

CONSCIOUSNESS

OWITF Reflections

Carl Sagan said "In the last tenth of a per cent of the lifetime of our species, we reluctantly noticed that we were not the centre and purpose of the Universe, but rather lived on a tiny and fragile world lost in immensity and eternity, drifting in a great cosmic ocean dotted here and there with a hundred billion galaxies and a billion trillion stars". To take in this new information requires a shift in consciousness about who we are in the midst of this reality. Time and time again down through the ages we have had to refine and sometimes discard what gave meaning to our existence.

Consciousness or new consciousness is a term that has become very popular in the development of current spirituality. But what does it mean, and what difference does it make for our spirituality? There is so much written on the subject that all one has to do is Google the word 'consciousness', and you are flooded with information that ranges from New Age to Buddhist teaching. We recommend the article of Anne McDermott in the *Our Way into the Future* recent publication as a very good introduction to the subject.

By way of summary, Anne says that consciousness involves the principles of interiority, differentiation and communion. Interiority refers to the principle that each living system has the potential to become what it is meant to be. Just as an acorn will grow into an oak tree and nothing else, so we who are made in the image of the divine are called to grow into the unique person that we are. Each person has within him or herself the potential to become a person fully alive, fully developed physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Interiority recognizes the essence of the person, and such recognition can lead to a sense of reverence for the essence of all of creation and a new consciousness of the essence of everything.

The second principle of differentiation is about variety and difference. Most of us thoroughly enjoy experiencing the variety that nature offers in all her forms: mountains, lakes, valleys, forests, prairies, desert, trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers etc. But in many ways, history tells us about the tragic story of our inability to live with differences in others. Currently in various parts of the world, there are wars and massacres among people who cannot accept difference of religion, race or politics. Nearer to home, when we see others with talents and gifts that we do not possess, we can be inclined to compare or deride those qualities that we may not have. It seems that differences can cause distress instead of delight in the infinite variety in people and creation. Differentiation, however, welcomes the variety in each other and in all of creation and rejoices in the uniqueness of everyone and everything.

The third principle that Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry talk about is communion. As an

eleven-year-old boy, Thomas Berry, probing the red hills of his home in North Carolina, skipped across a creek and found himself in a meadow. Seeing the white lilies cresting above the dense grass, he listened to the crickets' song drift toward the distant woods and the wisps of cloud in the azure sky. This "magic moment," Berry claims, "gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember." For Berry, the universe was a communion of subjects, all interconnected and all part of the sacred plan.

And so for us Brothers, what difference will this new consciousness make? In a word, the new consciousness invites each of us to reverence each person, creature and all created matter. Such reverence leads us to contemplate the very essence of each element in creation and to develop a wonder for the God of the Universe. St. Bonaventure said, "Therefore any person who is not illumined by such great splendour in created things is blind. Anyone who is not awakened by such great outcries is deaf. Anyone who is not led by such effects to give praise to God is mute." He goes on to say, "Open your eyes; alert your spiritual ears; unlock your lips, and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love, adore, magnify, and honour your God."

As we begin to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to all that surrounds us, and to everyone with whom we come in contact, our response becomes one of love and compassion, of acceptance and forgiveness. It is as we see into the very essence of all people, creatures and all living matter that we come to understand the very preciousness of the whole of creation. Contrary to a world that seeks to dominate, exploit and abuse those who are poor and helpless, the new consciousness invites us to forgiveness and compassion where we come to a real acceptance of ourselves and others.

The message of Jesus, "I came that you may have life, and have it to the full", must surely echo this new consciousness where the fullness of life involves a deep recognition of the sacredness of the entire universe, and a desire for an intense communion that responds to the desire of Jesus "that they may be one." As Brothers we can allow a 'Jesus consciousness' to become part of us. We can reflect on Jesus' way and so learn to live inspired by his attitudes and spirit. When the early disciples were open to the Risen Jesus their fears disappeared and they were filled with peace and joy – surely a new consciousness. They saw that 'all is one' in the world and so engaged with its peoples with courage, compassion and love for all.

Teilhard de Chardin saw love as the essence of unity, something that Brotherhood surely desires!

Your brothers,

David, Declan, Donal, Francis, Ruwan and Sunil



Awareness of the divine begins with wonder.

Abraham Herschel