

Where is the Collective Consciousness Now?

No question about it, this article may be considered a continuation of the one I had recently completed entitled **AT&T**. There I examined the younger crowd involved with selling and/or explaining electronic technology to the public. I picked out AT&T since that's my corporate carrier. It can be any one of a multitude of similar stores. The staff is quite intelligent, have a gift to gab, yet seems immune to anything that doesn't fit within their realm of expertise. That realm is essentially ethereal and because it doesn't exist in the concrete world, is demanding and all-consuming as mediated by either a computer screen or a smaller cell phone screen.

And so with the young people representative of Generation Y and I think more specifically the Alpha Generation I came up with the title in the form of a question inferring they'll be best suited to answer it. Then I thought it over a bit more. This generation isn't concerned where they are. It's like asking fish how they like the water in which they are swimming. The environment, of course, is the screen. Actually the best way to designate them is The Screen Generation. I'm surprised no one has thought of it yet.

With this in mind I applied an Icelandic expression to how these young people relate outside their screen time, if you will. A friend of mine observes this as reluctantly going outside their safety net which is not entirely inaccurate. As for the Icelandic expression which I had fleshed out more fully earlier, in essence it's applicable to a cow in the field which looks up from constantly eating and watches anything that momentarily gets its attention. The phrase is *kúa horfa* or cow watching, that is, a cow engaged in watching, not us watching the cow. It lasts only for a few second after which the cow goes back, head down feeding on the grass. While this is transpiring #2 is coming out the other end. Actually I find it symbolic of absolute bliss on the physical level.

This, I believe, is descriptive of the overall behavior of what's labeled the Alpha Generation and may similarly apply to the one before it, Generation Y. I'm not particularly interested in the labels not exactly certain I got them in order. Rather, my attention is focused upon the people to whom these labels apply. Surely they are light years away from the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boomers, the

former rapidly fading away and the latter not terribly far behind it. In fact, I venture to say never has there been such a disparate division in history. As for the two generations at hand, they represent a process of getting more ethereal as already noted. I guess you could apply the adjective virtual as well. The adjective ethereal can lean towards what is commonly held as divine. Nothing of the such is applicable here.

Their predecessors—let's say starting with the Greatest Generation—were firmly rooted in the physical or mechanical world. As for the earlier ones going further back in time, they were more agriculturally oriented but nonetheless similar. What they all had in common was their rootedness in a specific place they'd call a neighborhood. That word, it seems, has become outdated overnight. And so while the Greatest Generation and the one before it differed considerably, they pale in comparison to the current state of affairs. Thus from the Baby Boomers, children of the Greatest Generation onward, we witness a tendency to become more abstract and well, virtual. It started off slowly, mostly mechanical and industrial by nature, but rapidly shifted to the digital world. Such are the roots for the more recent talk about AI starting to dominate our lives, a force to be reckoned with in the near future and beyond. In essence, the foundational realities of space and time which had been taken almost as rooted in eternity, are being left behind.

Each jump from generation to generation has been marked by considerable fear and trembling as well as hesitation. For the first time that fear has been totally discarded, considered as irrelevant. Each phase had a different thing to worry about but all have the same common denominator where the unknown is unsettling. That too has been thrown out. After all, we can project any problem onto a computer screen and manipulate it, so says the current generation. I may be jumping the gun a bit and may echo what earlier generations had said about the next one, but this time the leap is a quantum one: from the physical to the virtual. Once on the virtual level, by way of analogy we've left the earth's atmosphere and have launched into a totally new realm. The earlier stages may contain vestiges of the physical...the analogical...but quickly they too will be shed for what the digital world view perceives in terms of ones and zeros.

All in all the fast-paced nature of inventions shows no sign of slowing down. Even that word may be a misnomer since it evokes a mechanical world view. It implies

moving from point A to point B and then on to point C, etc. Any familiar measurement just may be superseded by another form of measurement. Even that term may end up in the dust bin. This, of course, is speculation. Regardless, not one of us can come away unaffected. Personally, I'm interested in how this ties in with the Western theological-philosophical tradition which at first glance seems to be losing ground if not being left behind altogether in the proverbial dust.

While the observation about being left behind has some validity, something so rooted in the transcendent just can't get up and disappear overnight. For sure, to some degree for the world of Generation Y and the Alpha Generation, it's still flickering somewhere, albeit dimly, on their respective screens. One common denominator seems to be at work. That's an innate tendency in us, hard to put our hands upon, where we are in continuous movement in the sense that we're not at rest. However, the movement now is from 1 to 0 to 1 to 0 and so forth (if it ever could be called movement).

Such movement is so pervasive that to conceive any condition outside it is next to impossible. Even the generations which live, move and have their being on a computer screen are like this even if their movement isn't movement in the traditional sense. Sometimes we feel this movement is taunting us, egging us on to seek rest which always escapes us. This native unrest isn't always bad. On certain occasions it serves to push us out of our lethargy to accomplish things. However, it seems to have gone overboard and shows no signs of relenting.

While exploring the increasingly fast-paced nature of society may be helpful, enough is being done in this regard. Instead I prefer focusing upon what it may be missing or leaving behind. That's the first part. The second part consists in seeing if something can either follow successfully in its tracks or take its place. In the **AT&T** article I had explored how people of the two younger generations deal with religion when it's put forth passionately to them. Those subscribing to this traditional missionary activity go about their duty passing on the Christian message, the Greek verb *kerusso* being a good way to describe that. We can throw in the more common *euangelizo* or proclaiming it. By this I don't mean the common Bible thumping, damned-if-you-don't approach.

The two youngest generations have hit upon a means, perhaps unintentionally so, of handling anyone who's trying to influence them in a manner they see unfit. It's

especially true when it comes to religion. That's where *kúa horfa* comes in. They've perfected it to an art form. To be on the receiving end of this *kúa horfa* surely must be unnerving, for it's never been employed until now with such effectiveness.

So if you're a Christian evangelist and have come across this *kúa horfa*, you either succumb or use it as an occasion to do some deep thinking and reassess your approach. Unfortunately that doesn't come easy. Exposure to *kúa horfa* is unprecedented for anyone rooted in the past, and by past I mean the two thousand year history of evangelization that despite ups and downs, had been successful. By reason of its close connection with the transcendent realm, it had the power to have changed the course of world history. Indeed, this is certainly worthy of recognition, but no time to take glory in that. Things have changed that profoundly.

Perhaps instead of feeling rebuffed or spurned in the face of *kúa horfa*, those affected by it might try a different tack. Instead, pause and consider that this rejection just might be deserved, something that has been in the works for a while. It has a way of putting you in your place no matter how great the message you have or think you have. Considering this spatially helps. You've just been ignored which is worse than being rebuked. If it were the latter, you can adopt the martyr guise and glory in that. Instead, you're left as the recipient of the merest of all glances emanating from *kúa horfa*. Don't forget. While this is going on, the other end is busy with #2. The natural response is to feel left behind in the rear view mirror while the other two generations have moved on. Thus the feeling of being rebuffed leads to a sense of not so much being left behind but all alone. At this point throwing in the proverbial towel is a serious temptation.

And so a negative perception of space and more poignantly, of time comes rushing in upon you. You're not even an object of being mocked or ridiculed which could be transformed into an inverse type of consolation. The space around you contracts while the time when you're the object of *kúa horfa*, momentarily as it might be, seems to drag on forever. In fact, you'll never forget that indifferent stare as long as you live. And as bearer of the Christian kerygma you look even more out of place, let alone out of fashion.

So why not put this painful experience of a gap in terms of an interval, a time as well as place to withdraw momentarily? Gregory of Nyssa, someone who was one of the keenest observers of his day concerning what had to be done to make the Christian message relevant, used the Greek noun *diastema*. This translates as interval, distance but with emphasis upon the through-ness of the situation, hence the preposition *dia-*. Awareness of such an interval as this turns out to be a distinct advantage insofar as removing us from that which is pressing down upon us and the need not to escape it but to go *dia-* or through it. The element of both space and time thus are held in a certain abeyance because we're not dealing with anything that suggests room or the passage of time. Thus *diastema* offers an opportunity to make good use of where we're at vis-à-vis that unnerving experience of *kúa horfa*. We can start by looking back with the same *kúa horfa* which might...just might...make the person or persons doing it pause for a second to assess the situation.

In the **AT&T** article I brought up one point of commonality or what we all share. That centered upon the fact of being hijacked, an experience everyone feels yet has a tough time shaking off once it happens let alone articulating it. By hijacking I mean being overcome suddenly by an event or words from a person which had set us off on a tangent we find difficult to shake off. In other words, we're held captive against our will. Does the sense of being left behind mentioned above have something to do with this? Yes if it's allowed to take control and govern our lives. However, since the experience is relatively new, it hasn't been mapped out well enough.

Now perhaps the biggest challenge of them all with regard to this talk about *kúa horfa*. It consists in moving from the personal to impersonal. The very thought of putting this forward is loaded with the potential for considerable misunderstanding. Nevertheless, it seems to be the central issue at hand. Despite the involvement with computers, etc., Generation Y and the Alpha Generation put a premium on social interaction. Perhaps they do this because so much of their time is caught up with the screens on which they live their lives. When not involved with that part of their lives—and that contains a hell-of-a-lot of their time—they crave for something different, the human touch if you will. So if you want to relate with these folks you have to take into consideration their unique combination of being digital while at the same time looking for social-ability. As

for the latter, the best way in is through the commonality we all have of being hijacked. Just about everyone looks for the opportunity to bring it up.

Clearly this new breed, if you will, is at the forefront of a collective consciousness that has moved on, to where exactly we don't know which is why I had chosen the title for this article. It's a combination of opposites: a desire to be sociable and the impersonal nature of what consumes so much time of the younger generation. Here seems to be where the real tension lies, not quite visible yet pervasive. The moving on, if you will, consists of how to incorporate the sociable with the abstract, another way to describe the impersonal.

Actually the notion of being impersonal can be raised to a new level. At first the very idea seems repulsive since we're bombarded from the media with the need to have healthy relationships. Even more so by apocalyptic movies saying that in the not distant future we'll all be robots or subjected to them. Yet a certain ambiguity with regard to the personal has been and continues to be an element that has been present in so much spirituality as well as a bone of contention. Part of the reason is that in the West we've inherited a religious tradition that stresses the personal. From the day of its origin to the present much of our collective story has been about the struggle between that vantage point and what's emerging and mistakenly taken as a threat, the rise of the impersonal.

With regard to this age-old struggle between the personal and impersonal, by sheer chance I found a footnote in **The Holy Bible**, Ignatius Press edition (p. 1039) with regard to the Book of Ecclesiastes. This text is somewhat of an anomaly since it harps on the drudgery of existence, acknowledging God but wondering how he fits into what we see about us. Thus the book contains reflections more of a philosopher than presenting a testimony of belief: "Ecclesiastes has to insist on God's goodness and power and providence even though experience seems at times to show the contrary."¹ As for the impersonal, it doesn't mean adopting a

¹ By way of contrast, consider the following which is typical coming from the East: "If an ordinary man, when he is about to die, could only see the five elements of consciousness as void; the four physical elements as not constituting an "I;" the real Mind as formless and neither coming nor going; his nature as something neither commencing at his birth nor perishing at his death, but as whole and motionless in its very depths; his Mind and environmental objects as one-if he could really accomplish this, he would receive Enlightenment in a flash. He would no longer be entangled by the Triple Void; he would be a

stance in conflict with those sincerely committed to propagating the Christian message, that is, by assuming the role of the personal pronoun police. Yet when you think of how Christianity and science bump up against each other we get an abundance of convoluted arguments where one tries to fit one with the other. No matter how hard the effort, it just ain't going to work.

A quote like the one relative to Ecclesiastes has haunted every generation ever since that book had been written and is at the heart of where we are now. The scenery has changed dramatically but its essence has not even though the drama has shifted...has moved on...to another level. No question, it echoes Ecclesiastes famous lament "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." I'd say it's a kind of pre-*kúa horfa*. So what started out and still remains on the surface level an insurmountable chasm between older and younger generations has a certain commonality. The chasm remains, of course, and is not to be filled in any time soon. Confronting the newness of the situation is what stymies us.

Given the tried n' true Christian missionary approach as put forth in the **AT&T** document and carried over here looks...well...somewhat archaic. Should it be abandoned? That's the first thing that comes to mind. To this I give a half yes. The traditional approach in its rawest is to convert as many people as possible. Once converted, however, you wonder what happens to people when they're left on their own. The two generations labeled Y and Alpha don't give a hoot about this, hence their *kúa horfa*.

Some of the elements with regard to this shift from the personal to the impersonal may be garnered in part from a book by Frances Cornford entitled **From Religion to Philosophy**. Although it was written over a hundred years ago it reads as fresh as could be which is a sign of its enduring significance. Even the title is a giveaway. Note the "from" followed by "to" with regard to religion and philosophy, not the other way around. In sum, first comes religion which has held

World-Transcendor. He would be without even the faintest tendency towards rebirth. If he should behold the glorious sight of all the Buddhas coming to welcome him, surrounded by every kind of gorgeous manifestation, he would feel no desire to approach them. If he should behold all sorts of horrific forms surrounding him, he would experience no terror. He would just be himself oblivious of conceptual thought and one with the Absolute. He would have attained the state of unconditioned being. This, then, is the fundamental principle." **The Zen Teaching of Huang Po**, #18, pp. 45-46

sway for eons and continues to have influence albeit in much watered down manner. Then followed a gradual relinquishment marked by essentially a period of extended immaturity consisting of wars, political upheavals and the like.

Now that this initial but inevitable strife has subsided at least from the point of view regarding this article which is concerned with generational differences, it might be worth examining the path begun philosophy and continuing today. I use the present tense since it's active as in the tussle between those concerned with *kerusso* and Generation Y and the Alpha Generation. For this reason I insert a lengthy footnote from Cornford's book. Note that afterwards I've underlined key parts, abstracted them and made some observations ².

-Embedded in the very substance of all our thoughts. This suggests something-somehow-somewhere is lurking deep within us. Cornford locates it not just in the center of our thoughts or where thoughts come into existence but in

² "But, when we have eliminated all such formulas and creeds and put aside the supernatural, there remains embedded in the very substance of all our thoughts about the world and about ourselves an inalienable and ineradicable framework of conception, which is not of our own making, but given to us ready-made by society-a whole apparatus of concepts and categories, within which and by means of which all our individual thinking, however original and daring, is compelled to move. This common inherited scheme of conception, which is all around us and comes to us as naturally and unobjectionably as our native air, is none the less imposed upon us and limits our intellectual movements in countless ways-all the more surely and irresistibly because, being inherent in the very language we must use to express the simplest meaning, it is adopted and assimilated before we can so much as begin to think for ourselves at all . This mass of collective representation is, of course, constantly undergoing gradual change, largely due to the critical efforts of individual thinkers, who from time to time succeed in introducing profound modifications. It is different for every age in history, for every well- marked group in the intellectual chart of mankind, and even within such groups, in a minor degree, for every nationality. Hence the error of supposing that human nature is much the same at all times, and that, since non-human nature is much the same too, the Greek philosopher of the sixth century B.C., studying his inner and outer experience, was confronted with the same problems seen in the same light as the English philosopher of today. The difference-the immense difference-between the two lies in their several inheritances of collective representation. It is a difference that comes home to anyone who has to translate ' (as it is called) from Greek into English. He will soon discover that, when once we go beyond the names of objects like tables or trees and of simple actions such as running or eating, no Greek word has an exact equivalent in English, no important abstract conception covers the same area or carries with it the same atmosphere of association. Translation from one language to another is impossible, from an ancient to a modern language grotesquely impossible, because of these profound differences of collective representation, which no 'translation ' will ever transfer." Pp. 44-45

their very center. He's at pains to stress this. For something to be embedded means it's close to impossible to extricate and is in a position to govern us whether we consent to it or not. One way of looking at this is that this embedding (the third element below) can hijack us...even without us knowing it...until it's too late.

-Inalienable and ineradicable framework of conception. Such is what Cornford labels as being embedded as above. Note the strong words "inalienable," "ineradicable." Both are put in the service of creating a framework with regards to conception. This is not unlike a physical conception, of giving life to how we think. All the activity involved is something we can't prove outwardly. Instead, we have an inner sense of its reality and "prove" it by how we comport ourselves.

-Not of our own making, but given to us ready-made. Reference is to the "framework of conception" as above which seems to be completely autonomous or independent from ourselves. Of special note is that it's given—imparted from a source we can only guess at but label as God—whole and entire. That sets up the most basic framework where we deny the above two mentioned deep-seated realities, "substance of all our thoughts" and "framework of conception" described by two adjective suggestive of permanence. More on this after the outline.

-Common inherited scheme of conception. Words which suggest a unity among all human beings. The fact that it is inherited can apply to a transmission that happens without the intervention of thought.

-Imposed upon us and limits our intellectual movements. The word "imposed" isn't a burden but a demarcation willingly received. Its purpose is to keep us focused.

-Adopted and assimilated before we can so much begin to think for ourselves. Reference is to the "common inherited scheme of conception." This is a foundation to everything, hard to pin down in words but readily accessible if we acknowledge Jung's words "the psyche is real." More often than not people say albeit unconsciously, "the psyche is not real."

-*Constantly undergoing gradual change.* Reference again is to the “common inherited scheme of conception.” I.e., it isn’t static nor lurches ahead. Instead, emphasis is upon the word “gradual” which is equivalent to stable growth.

-*The error of supposing that human nature is much the same at all times.* This error is in light of the previous entry with emphasis upon change. I.e., we are not static.

-*The immense difference-between the two lies in their several inheritances of collective representation.* Reference is to ancient Greek philosophers and the ones of today or those of Cornford’s era.

- *No important abstract conception covers the same area or carries with it the same atmosphere of association.* An observation with regard to the never precise translation of, for example, Greek into English.

Of all the above mentioned excerpts from Cornford’s book, I single out once again the following because it strikes a chord with much of what this article is about: *not of our own making, but given to us ready-made.* It’s in reference to the “framework of conception” which is permanent in a kind of quasi-sacred manner. Each and every one of us...advocates of the Christian message and the AT&T crowd...find our roots here. I guess in German it’d be considered as an ur-source, one that’s primordial. Cornford speaks of this ur-reality, *phusis* among the ancient Greeks, which translates as nature but also includes origin, constitution and even temperament. More on this later, most like the next article.

Upon hearing this excerpt broken into two parts: “not of our own making” and “given to us ready-made” by no means are we to take them as something abstract that has dropped down from on high. Instead, they have direct impact upon someone who has won the lottery and won it big. Indeed, such overwhelmingly wonderful words are enough to wipe out any distinction between generations or better, to breeze right through them. it’s the joy that does the trick, nothing else.

At this point some observation with regard to Eastern religions may be inserted. They have developed to a high degree (present but less so in the West) that we are whole and entire from birth. In fact, I believe the Judeo-Christian tradition has an edge here as we being made in the image and likeness of God. The problem is that our appreciation of this insight has remained woefully undeveloped. So while

this most basic of all insights is found just about all over the world, it's helpful to look where it's most evident. As for the Eastern view of us being whole and entire, it's more static or belonging to the realm of being, if you will. As for the Western view, its beauty lay in a combination of being static and dynamic all at once. The two terms are bantered around a lot...an awful lot...but not plumbed as much as they could be. Taking a slightly difference stance as to why this is so, I figure a large part of misunderstanding is rooted in the negative of Jung's words, "the psyche is not real."

This doesn't infer an outright denial of the divine image and likeness. Instead, for the most part people simply don't subscribe to it even though they may be preaching or teaching it as professionals. I suppose numerous sources can be proposed as to why this is so. Should we stick with the West's religious tradition, one place to look is the Genesis account of the so-called fall, that word being so ingrained and at the same time somewhat unfortunate.

What's interesting is that that the Lord God is responsible for a set-up destined to end in disaster. He did this by forbidding the first man and first woman to eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden because it will allow them to know both good and evil. Note the location, in the very center of the garden which means no matter where you go, you're constantly aware of its presence drawing you to it like gravity. It's literally inescapable. To make matters worse, the fruit stood out as being "a delight to the eyes" [3.6]. Talk about setting a trap...

The Lord God was fond of taking an evening constitutional when it was cool, something the man and woman were did as well though off by themselves. However, he had a somewhat sinister intent in mind by waiting for an occasion when he didn't run across them as usual. One evening he called out the usual greeting of sorts, and surprised the two who hide themselves. This is precisely what the Lord God wanted. Now he could get them where they were most vulnerable, lecture them to death which comprises most of Chapter Three. After the lecture, of course, he'd expel them from the garden along with the serpent. All three deeply resented this treatment which was passed on to subsequent generations. At least they could see that the Lord was

Once outside Eden, the man and woman along with subsequent generations could reflect upon why they were treated so harshly. Although they lost immortality and

the security of the garden, at least they didn't have the Lord God breathing down their necks. Yes, they ate of the forbidden fruit but realized how they had been set up to be drawn to it like a magnet by reason of its location. This indeed was inevitable. Over a period of time it became more evident that the Lord was jealous of two human beings he was responsible for creating which he perceived as being set against himself. Although he is almighty and enjoys wielding his power, he was sorely lacking in perhaps the most important thing of them all, an immaturity he never realized until now that had been lacking in him. Coming to grips with this indeed was embarrassing.

Actually the Lord kept denying it down through the ages while looking for every opportunity to project his almighty-ness as a coverup. At last it came to a stop with the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ. Even then, the divine immaturity continues to linger and requires even another divine person to intervene, the Holy Spirit. This time the Spirit has to stay permanently with humans as a kind of antidote. Yes, it takes a lot...an awful lot of energy...to wake the Lord up the damage he had done. All the while the Lord is looking at this with a deep sense of shame.

So this different twist on the Genesis story about the fall turns out to have both a positive and a negative side to it. Positive in that they've gained something the Lord in his almighty-ness never had. Such is hidden reason, if you will, of the rants and raves the Lord does throughout Israel's history. Negative in that after leaving the Garden of Eden the first man and first woman suffer the consequences of having been lectured by the Lord God. This is what galls anyone the most and has an effect lasting longer than one would expect. To prove it all you have to do is look within your own life. Furthermore, it cuts across the generational divide which is why I had delved into it. Each and everyone one of is an inheritor of this saga. Surely it rings true with Generation Y and the Alpha Generation. Who knows. Perhaps in time they may surprise us all with some new and original insights into this conundrum.

Clearly insight into the divine image and likeness, wonderful as it is, requires an upgrade as by introducing the further insight into us being made whole and entire. Not to change it but to change our sometimes long-held beliefs about it.

The problem is that the reflections passed down through the years...decades, really...have in large part drifted away from it.

In this concluding paragraph I bring in again the opposite of Jung's statement, "The psyche is not real." To repeat (and this is important), such a statement doesn't mean people deny that we're made in the divine image and likeness. Far from it. They'll do everything in their power to preserve this basic insight. However, they don't subscribe to it. Instead, adhering to doctrines and structures which support this foundational insight is of more importance.

Such a stance means the copy is favored over the original. That's how subtle the transmission (or transgression if you want to be strong about it) of this erroneous position happens to be. Actually putting Jung's statement in the negative is stronger than we may admit. Ultimate freedom from it doesn't derive from our own efforts but from a transcendent source. I'd equate it to winning the lottery. Even that's a huge gamble. There may be a number of smaller prizes, but only one person gets the Big One.

+