SHARING ECOLOGICAL WISDOM THROUGH DIALOGUE ACROSS WORLDVIEW BOUNDARIES

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This paper aims to build a bridge between worldviews, a bridge capable of connecting what are often incomensurable perceptions of environmental issues. A model for communication which goes beyond argumentation and dialectics is derived and outlined from the various works of Raimon Panikkar. Panikkar's diatopical model offers symbolic discourse as a means to link theological, philosophical, and ecological aspects of environmental issues. The example of Fijian rainforest conservation is used to show how ecological wisdom may be exchanged across worldview boundaries.

It has been all too hastily supposed that 'other' cultures should come to our table, where we eat with the knife of dollars and the English fork, on the tablecloth of democracy, on plates served up by the state, drinking the wine of progress and using spoons of technological development, while at the same time seated at the chairs of history (Panikkar, 1995:102).

INTRODUCTION

It has become fashionable these days to discuss, debate and express concern for the so-called environmental 'crisis'. This is particularly conspicuous in the 'developed' world where the objective methods of rational science are increasingly focused on solutions to what appears to be escalating ecological degradation of our Earth. However, science, with its handmaidens technology and economics, appears to be failing in its attempt to provide durable solutions. Part of the reason for this failure is the fact that science, economics and technology are the very tools that instigated the problem in the first instance. For three hundred years the refinement of these tools have bought humankind many benefits, but they have also created much suffering, not only for the peoples who were trampled beneath the megamachine (Mumford, 1970), but also for many of the myriad creatures with which we share our home (*oikos*). The current struggle to come to terms with the effects of human actions on the environment has, thus far, generally been focused on the rational i.e. the intelligible expression arising from *logos*. Furthermore, this particular *logos* originating from the Western tradition emphasises the dualistic separation of the subject from the object, the inner from the outer, the sacred from the secular, I from Thou and people from nature. If the natural world, of which we are all part, is seen as a wholly externalised reality, then it is unlikely that a people wedded to such a worldview[1] can solve many of the ecological problems we are faced with today. Other ways of

knowing may be required to complement the singular focus of rational exegesis.

This raises the question of how 'other ways of knowing' may be expressed and accepted by those who are immersed in a worldview which is not only universalistic, but also embraces apologetics[2] as a means to exclude the wisdom and traditional knowledge of others. Can each expression of reality be communicated intelligibly without mutual exclusion? Can a *shaman* and a scientific ecologist work together? Certainly not, if the communication is based solely on argumentation, dialectics and the presentation of evidence[3] or, as Panikkar's metaphor suggests, by always forcing others to come to the Western table. The difficulty is compounded by Western claims that truth must always be non-contradictory. This principle of non-contradiction effectively excludes expressions of *logos* which may be incommensurable to Western truth claims. One thing may be stated with certainty: no one culture or worldview can know all aspects of reality. Different worldviews and cultures know different parts of reality, and in a dialogue on environmental issues, the value of all worldviews needs to be acknowledged So, how can people who see the world differently communicate with each other in a meaningful manner across worldview boundaries?

The task then is to facilitate a sharing of wisdom across worldview boundaries which allows for the validation of differing, and often incommensurable, ways of knowing and experiencing the Earth. This is particularly important in the modern era as it is now widely accepted that human expressions of reality are manifold, and it is becoming increasingly obvious that these may not, and often cannot, be drawn into a single worldview. The rise of pluralism has encouraged the recognition of other traditions as viable worldviews and has gone some distance in halting prejudice against peoples who hold to their traditional knowledge and refuse to convert to Western modes of

thinking. The problem which remains unsolved is the way in which other ways of knowing may be validated, not only as an intelligent expression of reality, but as equally intelligent expressions.

To discover how each worldview is an equal expression of reality we must inquire into the basis of worldview construction. This begins with an inquiry into how a worldview's *logos* is centred on a particular *mythos*[4], and how *mythos* arises from mystery to act as a horizon of intelligibility which allows people to communicate. For communication to occur it is necessary to find common symbols which could help to bridge the barriers which exist between seemingly incommensurable expressions of reality. We must approach the basic parameters of human communication and attempt to discover how a horizon of intelligibility arises in the first instance.

MYTHOS, LOGOS AND SYMBOLS

The greatest ontological question of all time is "why is there some-thing rather than no-thing?" This fundamental question has always haunted the human mind. There is of course no final answer, which could satisfy any deep inquiry into such matters. And yet we must start somewhere; we need a horizon to show where the 'real' stands out against the 'given'. A starting point must be discerned before any intelligible expression can arise, otherwise we would all be caught in an infinite regression as each inquiry moved forever backwards in search of some supposed fundamental founding truth. This horizon or starting point is the realm of myth, as Raimon Panikkar (1979:279) states:

> Myth, like experience, enables us to stop somewhere, to rest in our quest for the foundation of everything. You cannot go beyond myth just as you cannot go beyond experience. If you could you would lose both the myth and the experience. Neither allows for further explanation. The moment you explain a myth, it ceases to be myth; just as explaining an experience is no longer the experience. They are ultimate.

We cannot exist as human beings without mythical horizons, and yet surprisingly, these horizons are not universal to all peoples. Each cultural group has discovered different means of expressing the mysterious qualities of reality. If, for example, we consider the scientific worldview we are told that the universe originated from a 'big bang', an event in the distant past which supposedly formed the basis of material reality. The existence of matter led to the formation of planets and eventually the evolution of life which includes humans as intelligent beings capable of perceiving the universal order. On the other hand, the Judaeo-Christian version describes an all-powerful creator God who linearly created the universe and all its myriad expressions of life. In the ancient Chinese conception, *T'ai Chi*, the Great Ultimate gave rise to movement which created the heavenly way (*yang*) and the earthly way (*yin*). From *yin* and *yang* came the various elements which created the myriad things. In New Zealand Maori creation, *Te Po*, the great darkness, gave rise to the sky above (*Rangi*) and the earth below (*Papa*). Between earth and sky, the children of *Rangi* and *Papa* emerged to manifest as the myriad things (Yoon, 1994:306). These creation stories form a horizon for being in a world, and while the details of each creation myth may vary widely, the central idea of a mystery is common to all. The events and evidence arising from each myth is wholly relevant to each cultural group to whom such myths represent the basis of reality. In this sense the 'big bang' is a myth even though the myth-denying, non-sacred scientific worldview is convinced that its view of reality is the only correct one.

Panikkar (1979:98-99) explains myth as follows:

> Myth then recounts in its own way the ultimate ground of a particular belief; either of others' belief (myth seen from the outside) or of our own beliefs (myth lived from the inside). In the latter case, we believe the myth without believing in the myth, since it is transparent for us, self evident, integrated into that ensemble of facts in which we believe and which constitutes the real.

The unsayable, inexpressible mystery which underpins reality cannot be made intelligible to the reasoning intellect without myth. The *mythos* of a worldview is the foundational collection of myths which make up the central parameters upon which a way of perceiving the world is based. If for instance, we reject objectivity, we are immediately situating ourselves outside the scientific worldview boundary; likewise, in the Christian tradition one must accept the centrality of the historical Jesus to remain within the Christian worldview boundary. In this sense, the scientific worldview is functionally similar to religion in that there are a set of hidden presuppositions and assumptions which underpin scientific rationality.

We cannot live without mythic structures, and as our horizons of inquiry shift, so our myths change, yet we can never create intelligible expression without myths. *Logos* is, then, dependent upon *mythos* to make the underlying mystery of life communicable. Furthermore, the transfer of meaning between *mythos*

and *logos* is carried through symbols. Symbols do not represent things: they present them. They are realities in themselves. The symbol and its reality are in a *sui generis* relationship with each other. In this sense, symbols are the bridge between object and subject. They are also a means of presenting *mythos* to the intellect in a way which provides meaning that does not need to reveal the hidden aspect of the myth. Humans symbolise that which they cannot easily describe intellectually. One of the most powerful symbols of the modern era is money. Paper money is in particular a key symbol which supports the mythic coherence of the global economic system. If the pure light of logical exegesis was applied to analysing paper money, in the same way it has been applied in the past to the symbols of other cultures, paper money becomes merely coloured paper with various sets of images and numbers printed on it. To a culture without a money myth, these inscribed papers would have no special significance apart from the attractiveness of the print, as an art form, a curiosity, or some kind of fetish. Yet in the modern period, money is a quasi-religious symbol of singular importance to social cohesion. The symbol is the vehicle whereby the myth manifests itself in reality. Without the myth there can be no symbol; without the symbol the myth is not manifest. Myth and symbol are intrinsically related to the intelligibility of reality. While the myth remains 'unseen' the symbol is highly 'visible' and can be interpreted in a seemingly infinite variety of ways.

It is the symbol which is of importance to dialogue between worldviews. Symbolic discourse is a search for symbols which can stand in the place (*topoi*) between worldview boundaries, beyond argumentation and dialectics. Here Panikkar (1990:13) notes:

> ... it [the symbol] implies the relativity between a subject and an object. The symbol does not pretend to be universal nor objective. It seeks rather to be concrete and immediate and to speak without intermediary between subject and object. The symbol is at one and the same time objective/subjective; it is constitutively a relationship.

This is the realm of true understanding where validation and convincement can occur[5]. Each worldview has revealed its own symbols to mediate between *mythos* and *logos* and these symbols denote a richer and more multi-faceted reality than the analytical intellect is able to grasp. Symbols are not restricted to the realm of religion; all worldviews, whether sacred or secular, symbolically present their myths to intelligible expression. The key to meaningful dialogue on environmental issues which can bridge worldview boundaries depends upon finding common symbols, or at the very least, symbolic correlations.

One of the main conflicts which occurs in such communication is between sacred and secular conceptions of reality. We can say that the secular scientific method is the experiment. This is a comparative method where verification is achieved by replicating the results, one experiment by another. Such experimentation is a matter of 'going over' the data in a double sense: 'checking' it by repeating it in a quantifiable manner and taking an 'objective' stance, understanding it from 'outside' the object of study. This means 'going above' the subject matter which rules out all 'subjective' concerns which are placed out of bounds at the outset. The traditional or sacred method of experience means 'going through' an experience, understanding from within. This method of undergoing an experience is not repeatable and therefore not verifiable from outside the personal and cultural horizon which makes it possible. For this reason experience is always seen as unscientific in that the 'subjectivity' of the experiencing subject, the belief of the believer, is inextricably part of the subject matter. Experience is thereby ruled out of the experiment and repeatability or verification is ruled out of the experience.

Today, the dialogue between worldviews using conventional methods usually fails, because while we may all be talking about the same 'thing', we are not saying the same things about 'it' because our mythic horizons may be radically different. For example, to a geologist a given mountain may be an andesitic volcano which can be analysed and described in great detail according to scientific theory. On the other hand, and from another viewpoint, that same mountain may be a sacred entity which also has a detailed history and a perfectly intelligible foundation for its sacredness. The same mountain is being described according to different mythical expressions which give rise to incommensurable expressions of *logos*. If a 'compare and contrast' methodology is used here, one is a scientist; if one demands initiation into the mysteries in order to 'experience' the experience, one is a traditionalist. So neither a purely objective nor a purely subjective approach will suffice to draw any commonality which may lead to the sharing of ecological wisdom. A further step is required. This is what the diatopical dialogue seeks to achieve.

THE DIATOPICAL MODEL

Raimon Panikkar, in his life-long attempt to outline a method for inter- and intra-religious dialogue evolved

what he termed the diatopical model[6]. Panikkar's three-step interpretive method is designed to overcome the limitations of argumentation and dialectics in order to allow participants in dialogue to move into the realm of symbolic discourse where commonality may be discovered.

The first of the three levels of discourse is that which takes place within the culture, tradition and religion which make up a worldview. It involves the explanation of components of that worldview and its traditions as experienced by an interpreter within its own boundaries. It is an expression of how a particular worldview 'looks', how it feels to live within that particular view. This step consists in elucidating a faithful and critical understanding of one's own tradition so that explanation of the set of taken-for-granted truths about the reality which constitutes our 'world' can be elucidated. This is a matter of verification; 'how' we do things, 'what' we do, and 'why' it is important that we do them. This is also the beginning of a discourse of enclosure in that it sets the limits of our understanding of a particular issue. Dialectics and argumentation are not necessarily a hindrance to this level of the dialogue because we are expressing reality as we see it in everyday terms. This kind of interpretation is morphological, i.e. it gives us the form of a worldview and mediates communication within the boundaries of a particular worldview horizon.

The second interpretative step is the process of defining the boundaries of a worldview. These boundaries are defined by the relationship between the core aspects of a worldview which are embedded in its founding texts and events. Panikkar called this step a diachronical interpretation in reference to the changing contours of the context over time. Panikkar (1990:9) maintains that this is of singular importance because: "The temporal gap between the understander and that which is be understood has obscured or even changed the meaning of the original datum".

This means that we need to understand what was meant by those who presented the founding texts and stories in the context that they themselves experienced at that time. To understand the essential nature of another's worldview, one must know where the 'other' is coming from, i.e. the 'how' and 'why' of their founding texts. The knowledge of these founding texts also allows each worldview representative to enclose their worldview within a definable boundary. For meaningful dialogue to achieve its stated aim, each party needs to know where a worldview begins and ends, what its mythic expression is and how far intelligible cognition extends. This interpretation brings a

particular way of 'seeing' and 'knowing' the world to life by revealing its beauty, wisdom and intrinsic coherence to those of differing worldviews. Here spokespeople are encouraged to recount their creation stories and express myths which tell their people how reality unfolds for them. A worldview, in this sense, is like all living things: it has an origin, and emerges in the same manner as a tree from a seed to expand to the limits of its teleological necessity. This second level of discourse establishes the boundaries of a worldview by setting the criteria for meaning and validity in that worldview. Diachronical interpretation leads to a discourse of disclosure which is the third level of dialogue.

This is the diatopical hermeneutic which is the search for and interpretation of symbols which may be common and intelligible to divergent worldviews. Because symbols present the myth, a symbolic interpretation does not pierce the *mythos* and so avoids the *demythicisation* associated with dialectics and argumentation involved in the first two levels. It is these authentic symbols which grant our beliefs their unity, continuity and power to legitimise and sustain a 'world' of meaning and values (Krieger, 1991:64). The task is to carefully interpret the symbols which are capable of carrying meaning across worldview boundaries. Clearly comparison will not suffice because there is no superior standpoint from which to make such comparisons which, by their very nature, deny the belief of the believer and turn symbols into signs[7]. Rather we must learn to think in and with the symbols of another tradition, as with our own. This leads to the difficult question of how different symbols can be 'thought' together. Panikkar (1978:14) suggests an example of what is needed:

> We may use the notion of homology, which does not connote a mere comparison from one tradition with those of another. I want to suggest that this notion is the correlation between points of two different systems so that a point in one system corresponds to another. This method does not imply that one system is better (logically, morally or whatever) than the other, nor that the two points are interchangeable: You cannot, as it were, transplant a point from one system to another. The method only discovers homologous correlations.

The third level of discourse operates within the space of encounter between different worldview boundaries. Situated beyond argumentation and dialectics it is a discussion of how truth, values, beliefs and faith are presented in symbolic form. The task of the dialogue, in terms of sharing of ecological wisdom, is to allow

each partner to understand and become convinced of the validity of the other's symbolic perception of particular aspects of the natural world. A secondary, but equally important outcome, is the potential to 'free up' the secular scientific worldview from its own dogmatic and self-enclosing universalism, so that the accumulated ecological wisdom presented by other ways of knowing can enter and enrich the scientific tradition. What we are seeking is a commonality between ecological wisdom (whether sacred or scientific), and values (whether philosophical, ethical or spiritual). We are looking for the common ground between ecology (in its widest sense), environmental ethics, and nature-centred religion: the *oikos*, the *ethos* and the *theos*. Ecological wisdom is not just a matter for scientific or philosophic inquiry. For many the earth is sacred because it is the house of all being. To approach ecology and ecological issues within such a unified framework, a concerted effort is required. Such effort must be combined with a genuine desire to understand other people's perceptions, no matter how different from our own. Each participant needs to approach the dialogue with an attitude of genuine inquiry and an existential openness; there can be no coercion. Furthermore, the aim of the dialogue is mutual enrichment, and not a 'jumping across' to become enclosed within someone else's pre-suppositions and assumptions. Rather, each person involved needs to have a firm grounding in their own tradition so that they can offer an open and honest rendition of the form and origin of their worldview without retreating into orthodoxy, universalistic stances or setting exclusivistic barriers. It is a matter of realising that another's truth is as equally valid as one's own. Participants cannot be asked to sacrifice their own worldview for another, but rather expect theirs to be enriched by additional revelations of truth.

FIJI: FORESTS IN TRANSITION

To show how such dialogue can be successful we will now briefly consider a South Pacific example[8]. On the island of Viti Levu in the Fiji group, serious ecological degradation is occurring as a result of the unsustainable commercial logging of native rainforests. In scientific terms, the solution would seem obvious: the instigation of a series of carefully considered ecological reserves protected as national parks, scenic reserves, etc. However, planners and ecologists who attempt to introduce protection policies are likely to meet with resistance, even by those Fijians who wish to preserve their forests.   The reason for this is not easily discernible to Western style rationality.

Fiji, like many other places in the South Pacific, has a history of colonisation. Not only was political auto-nomy removed, but traders and missionaries dispossessed people of their land and religion introduced the idea of 'ownership' and the Christian notion of a distant and transcendent God. The cumulative effect of this was detrimental, not only to the Colo peoples[9], but also to their once sacred forests which were stripped of valuable timbers and converted to pasture and cropping land wherever possible[10]. By the end of the nineteenth century the Fijian worldview had been radically altered. Land alienation and a new and essentially alien spiritual tradition had demoralised the people, and introduced diseases had decimated the population, causing the British administration to seek ways to save the 'native' people from extinction. The result was a complicated land tenure system which meant that Fijians held on to most of their traditional lands (France, 1969).   For some years this was moderately successful until the rise in demand for tropical timbers which brought a new influx of resource strippers. The traditional chiefly land tenure system which had protected the forests for millennia was no longer active, having been dismantled by the British administration, and the way was open for another round of exploitation. The result has been catastrophic. Twenty years of logging using modern technology in a region with high rainfall and deep basaltic soils has resulted in severe erosion, pollution of rivers and siltation of fringing coral reefs.

A morphological and diachronical interpretation reveals that to many descendants of the original forest-dwelling tribes of Viti Levu forests are not simply 'standing stocks' of timber, ecosystems containing exceptional biodiversity or places with aesthetic value. They are the crucible which contains the primal *mythos* of the hill tribe people. The forests are living symbols of *Vanua*[11], the overarching and guiding principle of Fijian life. In traditional times, the forests were the living 'skin' of the land, protecting the soils, and the rivers and estuaries from flooding. The spiritual relationship between the people and the *Vanua* was also a 'skin' which both empowered the people and protected the life-giving land. This relationship between spirit, people and land was symbolised in many diverse ways. One central symbol was the preparation of bark cloth or *tapa*. Women who manufactured the *tapa* were called *kunga ni Vanua* - the flesh of the land. This title is derived from the most important food plant, the *taro*, whose leaves and stalks are edible directly, but the much prized root is enclosed within a skin. This skin is the contact with the soil of

the *Vanua* as the placenta is the contact between mother and foetus, and so the *tapa* presents the contact between the spirit world and the human world. This is why traditionally *tapa* is draped in the temple where it serves as a path for the Gods to enter the priests (Sahlins, 1985).

The spiritual aspects of forests are also celebrated in *kava* or *yaqona* (*Piper methysticum*) ceremonies where the dried root infusion is made into 'the water of the land' and ritually consumed at many important social and spiritual occasions. The symbols of wild *taro*, *tapa* and *kava* are central to Fijian ceremonies and collectively present the vital connection between the people, their land and the spirit of all being. Furthermore these symbols all originate from the forest which, as the living 'skin' of the land, held the highest place in the forest dwellers' cosmology. Forests were not just a collection of trees somehow separate from human concerns; they were the actual life of the people.

As with many indigenous peoples worldwide, a renaissance of traditional culture is emerging in Fiji. It is currently at an embryonic stage, but those who recognise and encourage the trend are aware that saving the remaining unlogged forests is of paramount importance to the possible revitalisation of Fijian social and spiritual traditions. Western conservation methods are clearly inadequate to the task of preserving these sacred forests. In the modern era, sacrality is not judged to be part of Western conservation traditions. Forests are usually valued for their utilitarian qualities, or as ecological 'museums' where biodiversity can be stored or contained. Intrinsic value remains a much debated concept, and while aesthetic values for forests are currently in vogue, there is little to suggest that any sacred conceptions or values arise from modern considerations of forests.

And yet a diachronical interpretation suggests that forests were once very important to European spiritual traditions. In Genesis, for example, we find the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil from which Eve sampled a forbidden fruit. In the Greek tradition temple precincts were invariably sacred groves. Artemis and Dionysus, Goddess and God of the woodland groves were once worshipped with often riotous abandon (see Burkert, 1985:85-95). Rome itself has a forest origin where the King of the Oak ruled under the laws[12] of *res publica* in the moist and forested land of the Latins in Alba Longa (see Frazer, 1996). The abundant forest myths of northern European peoples are widely documented in story,

legend and ritual. One of the most detailed forest cosmologies arose from the Nordic tradition where the great world tree *Yggdrasil* is the centre of the shamanic journey of Odin who crosses the rainbow bridge (*Bifröst*) to bring knowledge from the realm of the Gods (see *The Elder Edda*, 1969). Sacred Oaks, Hawthorns, Ashes and Yews continued to inspire Irish and English Celts well into the Christian era (see Schama, 1995 for a detailed history of European attitudes to forests). While the gradual waning of the European forest *mythos* resulted in the waxing of civic life, the forest symbols endured. The significance of the Oak and Acorn, the Maypole, the Green Man, the wreath of holly and a host of tree symbols became entrenched in European languages (see Low, 1996). The family tree and the evolutionary tree are common word symbols which have been transferred into modern parlance, as is the idea of youth 'flowering', of evil having a 'root', and even knowledge and wisdom is said to grow from a 'seed'. The love of parks, gardens and green vistas remains a common element in the European sense of place.

Tree and forest symbolism remains essentially latent in the Western worldview, but a deep love and respect for trees, forests and gardens remains an important aspect of modern life. What has obscured the old European forest *mythos* is the modern myth of property[14] and the associated idea that material accumulation is a meaningful activity. This has resulted in the separation of the ancient connection between people and forests as sources of spiritual meaning. In terms of a diatopical interpretation, the point of connection between the secular West and the forest dwelling peoples such as the hill tribes of Fiji, can be found in the realisation that *Vanua* is the embodiment of a relationship which Europeans once shared but have now mostly relinquished. Yet a deep symbolic connection remains. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber attempted to provide an alternative to the externalising force of objectivism/ dualism when he suggested that we could enter an I-Thou relationship with a tree. Buber writes:

> I contemplate a tree ... I can feel its movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air ... I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life. I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognise it only as an expression of the law ... I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers and externalise it. But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I

contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an 'it' (Buber, 1970: 57-58).

Buber's contention that trees are responsive agents reflects not only the forest dwellers' claims but also suggests how our ancestors viewed trees as the focus for mysterious elements of life.

Here we can see a kind of symbolic correlation between traditional European attitudes to forests and the still active *Vanua mythos*. This is the point where the real dialogue can begin. When each worldview can see the basic intelligibility of the other, genuine exchange can occur through mutual validation. If scientific ecologists reject the notion of *Vanua*, not only do they denigrate a cohesive worldview, but they also lose the chance to enrich their understanding of their own forest symbols and historical traditions. In the case of deforestation on Viti Levu, local people need the intellectual and pragmatic tools derived from scientific knowledge which can provide many benefits to help protect their forests as sacred places. Once each worldview is validated, the approach to the issues can move to a new level of understanding where some scientific conservation methods can be applied to the preservation of sacred places. *Vanua* is profoundly spiritual, but also contains utilitarian aspects. People were not excluded from their sacred forests, their actions were regulated by a traditional system of resource conservation guided by priests, *shamans* and chiefs. The wealth of knowledge arising from long periods of intense association with forests allowed local people to learn a special kind of ecological wisdom. This kind of wisdom has generally been overlooked by modern ecologists and planners because it belongs to a different order of knowing, arising from a *mythos* which is radically different to secular and objective concepts. This knowledge remains inaccessible to science if the dialogue is based solely on argumentation, dialectics and the presentation of evidence. However, through the three-step interpretation, described here, a new level of understanding may be reached and provide a basis for a genuine exchange.

CONCLUSION

If Western people can revisit the spiritual aspects of their own latent forest symbols then the *Vanua* concept immediately becomes recognisable, and a bridge to further exchange is constructed. The diatopical model is well suited to many situations where communication between differing worldviews has been effectively blocked by mutual or partial rejection of each others'

mythoi as horizons of intelligibility. *It is particularly useful where sacred and secular conceptions of nature conflict because it allows the sacred aspect of the secular worldview to be revealed and at the same time shows the necessity of pragmatic solutions to many pressing ecological problems to sacred worldviews.* This particular dialogical method also acts as a means to validate the 'other' view, and such validation is essential to a meaningful communication which can lead to the sharing of ecological wisdom. If the environmental movement is to become a serious force for the conservation, protection and guardianship of the Earth's remaining natural places, it must develop a deeper understanding of ecological issues by accepting and actively seeking to combine theological aspects with the ethical and physical concerns. Such a 'spiritual' attitude remains latent in the Western tradition and its renewal can be facilitated through dialogue with those worldviews where sacred myths remain a part of everyday life. The 'science' of ecology would do well to embrace these wider conceptions, especially where conservation projects occur in regions where people still inhabit their sacred places.

Science and the objective method is one and only one way of discerning reality. As the twentieth century draws to a close it is increasingly obvious that no single approach to large scale ecological problems can be successful. Those who are concerned with the growing environmental crisis need to communicate with each other to search for comprehensive solutions which not only respect different approaches, but which can validate each other as equal expressions of ecological wisdom. Only then will it be possible for the *shaman* and the ecologist to speak with each other in a manner which can result in meaningful exchange of wisdom.

NOTES

[1]   Worldview is used here in the sense of a 'picture' of the way things in sheer actuality are, the concept of nature, of self and society. A worldview contains the most comprehensive ideas of order. It is the lens and focus by which reality is perceived.

[2]   The apologetic method has three steps; first a common ground, within which two opposing groups may meet, is projected, secondly the weaknesses of the opponent are discovered and thirdly, the apologists' must show that the solution to their opponents' problem lies within the apologists' view. This allows the apologists to expropriate and incorporate those parts of the opponents' views which they wish to use within their own worldview while at the same time denigrating what they do not need.

3   The process of building up arguments to support one's view is effected by methodological reasoning. This is the traditional hallmark of the Western justice system. Dialectics require a logical disputation which is usually used in terms of an inquiry into metaphysical contradictions and their solutions. Evidence presentation is the manner of backing up one's statements with 'proof'. This is usually presented in terms of non-contradictory criteria.

4   *Mythos* is never the object of thought, nor is it objectifiable. It is rather that which allows thought to conceptualise itself. It is the basis for intelligibility, but it itself remains opaque to the intellect. Once it is pierced by *logos* it ceases to be *mythos* but is reduced to mere ideology. *Mythos* is the prime expression of the real, not in reference to what is thought (which is *logos*), but to that which we believe in without believing that we believe it (See Panikkar, 1979: 98-99; 100; 399).

5   Convincement means more than conversion. If I am convinced of what you are saying then your truth becomes part of my truth. Convincement does not mean inclusivism or the subjective state of being convinced but, rather a broadening of my own understanding and revelation of my own myth.

6   Panikkar's diatopical hermeneutical model (*dia* - across, *topoi* - place between) was developed from his own life experiences. Born of a Spanish Catholic mother and South Indian Hindu father, Panikkar found himself between two linguistic, religious, and cultural worlds. He completed three doctoral theses, the first in chemistry, the second in philosophy and the third, a Th.D. in Catholic theology. Combined with academic ability, Panikkar is multi-lingual, fluent in twelve languages and writing in six. He also has a working knowledge of Sanskrit, ancient Greek and Latin. Panikkar is a fully consecrated Catholic priest who spent more than 25 years living and teaching in India and the US alternately. The author of more than 30 books and 300 published articles, Professor Panikkar's work on inter-cultural and inter-religious issues is a significant contribution to the rise of pluralism and cross-cultural understanding in the modern era.

7   A sign according to Panikkar is an epistemic reality: "It points towards the thing (other than itself) for which it acts as a sign. It belong to the epistemically real. It signals, it points toward the other 'thing' like a signpost or a flag. It can be self-explanatory or it may require some explanation ... But in order to understand it you do not need to transcend thinking".

8   The original study of possible dialogue on conservation issues in Fiji runs to a hundred pages. Here we can only briefly outline the issues.

9   The hill tribe people inhabited, and continue to inhabit, often densely forested and rugged hills of the interior of Viti Levu. In Fijian, interior is Colo, hence Colo peoples are those whose autochthonous ancestors sprang from the land itself. Colo people belong to the rugged hills and dense forests of the interior, and are tied to them through an ancient relationship with the land creating Gods. Local spokesperson Kalaveti Batibasaga describes this relationship as: "Each tribe has its own totems and Gods to call on for all their needs. This was not God in Christian terms. A ritualistic relationship with the whole of the land included the forests as special places of worship where first fruits were offered. The forests were their 'cathedrals'; their places of worship in nature," Batibasaga, June 1997, pers. comm.

10   Sandalwood was highly prized by many early European traders because it could easily be exchanged with Chinese merchants (today sandalwood is an endangered species on Fiji's main islands). The British, New Zealand and Australian planters colonised Fiji for the purpose of cropping sugar, coconuts and other tropical products.

11   *Vanua* is usually translated as meaning land. This however is a simplistic notion of what is, in actuality, not just physical, but also a cultural, social and spiritual entity. Land, in Fijian terms, is not something which can be traded or sold; land, people and Gods are an inseparable unit. There is also a social unit of agnatically related kinsman which is also called *vanua*. Here the capitalised *Vanua* refers to the larger concept.

12   Even the word 'law' has forest origins. Vico explains: "First it must have meant a collection of acorns. Thence we believe is derived *ilex*, as it were *illex*, the oak; for the oak produces the acorns by which swine are drawn together. *Lex* was next, a collection of vegetables, from which the latter were called *legumina*. Later on, at a time when letters had not been invented for writing down laws, *lex* by necessity meant a collection of citizens or the public parliament, so the presence of the people was the *lex* or 'law'".

13   Much of the modern concept of property and property rights are attributable to the political and moral philosophy of 17th Century philosopher John Locke.

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