

Myth speaks in the language of the story-teller, but it speaks of the mystery of human existence, of our origin and of our ultimate destiny. It tells a story which takes place somewhere and sometime, but it points to a mystery which is beyond space and time. Myth seems to speak of the finite, but it really speaks of the infinite. Myth succeeds because finite things are never merely finite; the humblest of them points beyond itself, to a place above all places and a time beyond all times. What follows here is a modern myth, and it tries to do for a contemporary theory of knowledge what Plato's myth of the cave did for his theory. It uses the image of a voyage to an (apparently) other world to illuminate the mystery of human knowledge.

Slowly consciousness returned, and I awoke with the awareness that I had left my own world, and would live forever on an alien world which orbited an unknown star, over the edge of time from the universe of my birth. But this new world did not confront me, for it was still in darkness. It had been drawn into orbit around a darkened star, the incredibly dense and burned-out remnant of a cosmic drama which had unfolded eons before. Strangely I became aware of this new world, not because it shone of itself or was illumined by some independent source of light; in itself it remained in the dark. But a strange force went forth from me, which was at once light and warmth, and infinitely more, creating an omnipresent brilliance in which the new world became visible - a pervading warmth in which the planet began to spring to life, and a pregnant, expectant silence which was soon filled with wonderful harmonies. I had the overpowering feeling that I was not simply taking note of a world which already existed, but was rather present at the creation of a world. But I was not simply a spectator at this creation; in fact, I could not think of myself as looking *at* this world at all, for it was coming to be *with* me and *through* me. This world would give body and substance to my dreams, and in those dreams the voiceless strivings of this world would come to fulfillment.

My awakening was the awakening of a world. In my

presence, each part of this world, each thing within it, came into the light, emerging from the formless shadows. I woke to a harmony of joyous sound, but it was not as though I heard objects or things; it was rather that *in me* they ceased to be mute. My power of vision was not passive, for I did not see things which were already there; rather, through my power of vision they emerged from the darkness of eternal night to become clothed with color and form. I did not face or confront them as actors on a stage, but rather took part with them in the drama of coming-to-be. I did not hear *their* voices, but rather my voice was theirs and it spoke the words they longed to say. Through me this new world was coming to be. And, as it came to be in my presence, I felt that I was freed from the limits of my own body and was alive in all the corners of this new world to which I offered light and voice.

As this whole world came to be in my presence, I greeted each new thing and each living being and asked it from where it had come. And they answered in chorus, «We were not yet fully real; we dwelt in a world of shadow and silent longing, without form or substance. Through you we have come into being, and in you we have found our past and our future.» I knew then that they would always be a part of my life and that we would forever be one.

But now, without losing my conviction that I dwelt on a new world, a strange revelation came to me: I knew that I had never left my own world. And at this very moment, the whole new world which had come into being through me spoke with one voice and said, «You dreamed a dream which is unlike all others, for it is a dream of your own world as it really is, and as you never knew it. Once you transfixed this world with your gaze; you tried to make a copy of it in your mind, so that you might use it and control it. The things of your world longed for life and voice, but you kept them silent and inert, for you feared to be touched by them. But now you have discovered the mystery of knowledge: you and your world are one. Together you are the response to a word which was spoken above the

formless wastes of non-being before time began. That word was a beacon of light which penetrated the black and shapeless emptiness. And the light shone with such brilliance that it could not be quenched, but caused a glow within the blackness. In the black and empty wastes there began to stir a response to that word which was light, and a wondrous movement began: a world began to move toward reality, and it would one day fashion eye and ear, mind and voice, so that it might speak the word of joyous thanksgiving to the One who had spoken the primeval word in the darkness. That faint stirring which had begun eons ago has led to you; you are its eyes and ears, its mind and its voice. You resonate with the vibrations which rise from the simplest atom and which reach you from the farthest star. From the beginning this world has longed to exist in fullness, in consciousness and freedom, and in you it has come to the full possession of being. Be present to your world in awe and wonder and joy, for in you, each limited thing becomes a cry of wonder that its destiny is to *be*. In you the limitless longing of a world has found voice, and turns to the one who spoke the world in the primeval darkness.»

The approach to knowledge which this myth tries to express is very close to that used by Gustaf Britsch, in his *Theorie der bildenden Kunst* (Theory of Visual Art). This book should be available in translation, with a commentary by myself and Raymond Berta, F.S.C., a couple of years down the line. I believe that it also expresses the same theory of knowledge which is found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, Part 1, Question 84, Article 7, and to which Karl Rahner gave brilliant expression in his book, *Geist in Welt* (translated as *Spirit in the World*).