

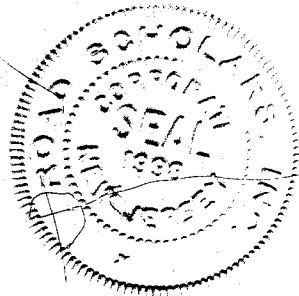
KEVIN J. SHARPE

**FROM SCIENCE
TO AN
ADEQUATE
MYTHOLOGY**



INTERFACE PRESS

III



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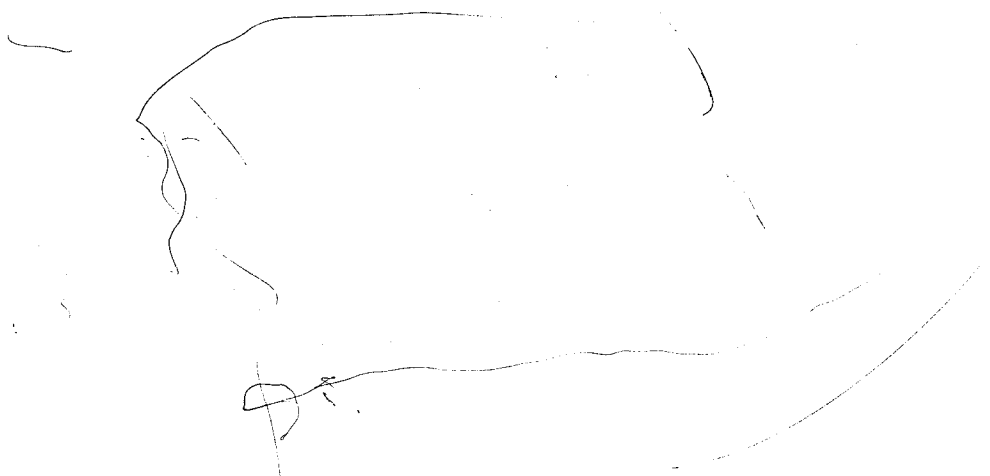
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Preface

When a Djauan tribesman in south-west Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia, said he has just seen a mimi, a being in their spiritual world — represented in rock-shelter galleries, he was reporting what was an actual experience. That I could not see the mimi in spite of his guidance, was irrelevant. I had not imbibed the belief and the traditional context, and so did not have the eyes to see. . . .

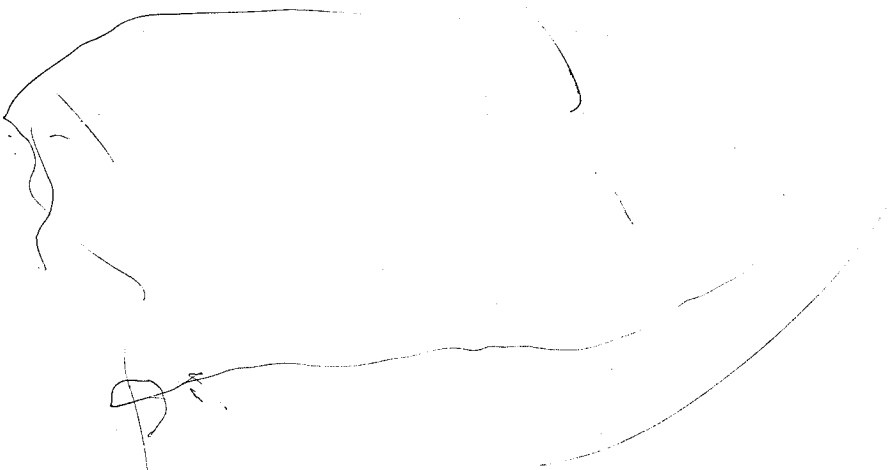
In 1924 a full-blood Aborigine from the mouth of the Murray River, South Australia, was staying in my home in the Hunter River Valley, New South Wales. Walking by a billabong in the paddock, he said that if a pelican settled on it, he would know it brought him bad news from his people, and he would have to return to them at once. He did not ask whether pelicans ever alighted on my billabong. He took for granted that his *ngaitye*, the “friend” of his clan, would appear in case of trouble. We might dismiss this expectation as baseless, but to him it was a tradition of totemic experience, of a mystic relationship between man and nature (species and phenomena), into which he was born. My Narrinyeri guest expressed his accepted belief which itself arose out of, and was nurtured by, a believed and quite credible experience of past generations.

A.P. Elkin¹

If science is not rational, what is?
(attributed to) Thomas Kuhn²

I attempt in this book to justify the need for an integration of science and Christian theology, and to propose a model for that integration. Myth is used as the central theme. For modern Western culture, the knowledge of the sciences,

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it is claimed, functions as myth; it is the core of our society's mythology. Having recognized the need for a mythology behaving adequately for our society, science and two Christian options are examined and found wanting as candidates. Their integration is suggested as the solution.

Five chapters and an addendum comprise the work.

Chapter One. Beliefs change; those of Western society have moved over the last 400 years — and are continuing to move — from being essentially Christian to being essentially secular. This process of secularization has created many of our social problems because of its lack of a clear and encompassing ethical code and moral base, having undermined that of Christianity and being unable to replace it satisfactorily. As a mythos, secularity cannot answer the ethical malaise of modern Western culture. As a repository of values, nor can it control the inventions of its prima donnas, science and technology, so that all life faces extinction gradually and cataclysmically.

Our need is for a source of adequate values.

Chapter Two. What our culture needs, in fact, is an adequate mythology. The question arises: what is myth? This is most difficult to answer because a great variety of meanings are intended by the word, and there appears to be no consensus, no one universal constituent which makes a myth a myth. However, a list can be made of the properties of myths, not all of which will probably characterize any one myth: (a) A myth is a story (b) often of extramundane beings, groups or events, (c) and usually set in another space and time than that of the myth-tellers. (d) A myth can be basic to the people's understanding of the origin and operation of this world, (e) and can be authoritative, defining what is true reality. (f) Moreover, a myth may present models for behaviour, (g) and involve people's emotions. (h) It is also sometimes associated with rituals.

Having digested all this about myth, it is worth noting the differences and relationships between myths and such things as beliefs and ideologies.

Chapter Three. The theories of science are the core myths of modern Western culture. That science is a mythology has not infrequently been noticed, but usually in a negative sense: the fanciful or bad things of science, such as a fanatical scientism, have been taken as the mythical. The modern understanding of the nature of scientific knowledge, the subjective aspects of its inspiration, basic beliefs, confirmation, and its theory changing, enable a more general acceptance and justification of the insight that science is a mythology.

When each of the categories described in Chapter Two is compared with science, it is clear that science excels at (a) to (e), and, as a mythology, is weak in the rest; while not entirely lacking, the ethical and person-involving aspects of myth feature little in science. Because myth and science are often contrasted over their respective non-critical and empirical natures, it becomes important to look more deeply at this issue; both of these factors are present in each of

science and traditional myth, even if the degree to which each obtains the factors varies.

If we are to accept that science is a mythology for modern Western society, we can also see in which ways science is inadequate to this task.

Chapter Four. But is the Christian mythology any more adequate? A form of Christianity is required if many of the institutions essential to Western culture are to be undergirded: law and science being two. The two dominant forms of Christianity as expressed in its theologies are looked at as to their mythical adequacy. Both are found inadequate.

The first, the conservative option, fails because it stands against secular society, a deep cleavage forming between them so that much of secularity is denied by Christianity; conservative Christianity cannot pervade our secular society. The second, the liberal option, appears to have lost its explanatory power by casting all its concerns and directions into the secular tide. For the first to be adequate a whole new culture would have to emerge — impossible. But the second cannot speak from the heart of the secular mythos because it fails exactly on those properties of myth at which science excels; without them there is no authority and there can be no ethics.

Chapter Five. A solution, an adequate mythology, may be found in the integration of the scientific and the Christian mythologies; in this way all the various properties of myth may be satisfied. The "ladder" model for the integration of scientific and theological knowledge is suggested as the means. In it the two disciplines develop their understandings of the one experienced reality (the ground on which the "ladder" stands), along their respective means and towards their respective ends (the two distinct "poles" of the "ladder"), but sharing and making common decisions on subjects of mutual concern (the "rungs" of the "ladder"). Such "rungs" do occur and are of fundamental importance to each.

Even now some physicists are attempting to bring their religious insights into their physics, and some theologians are attempting to do their subject by a scientific method. One can see signs and guidelines for the emergence of an appropriate theology.

Perhaps in working towards the science-Christianity mythical integration, a more just, more stable and more self-controlled society may emerge.

Addendum. Looking at philosophical problems arising in the philosophy of science from the perspective of myth just developed, leads to some interesting observations.

From Science to an Adequate Mythology comes as a climax to a number of years in the fields of science and religion. I have a developed interest in both of these areas and have been most concerned to bring them into a unity in which

each is involved in the other, reflecting what I feel should be a unity in myself. What I am presenting here is an attempt at rationally establishing the unity of science and religion.

There are many acknowledgements that need to be made to those who have assisted me in various ways. Amongst them I should mention Dr Peter Donovan, Professors William Wolf, John Skinner and Gordon Kaufman, and Dr Alexander Gallus. Sandra Myer was my typist. I should also mention the Bishop and people of the Waikato Diocese of the Anglican Church of New Zealand, and its Cathedral Parish of St Peter. Most thanks, however, go to my wife, Christine, and my family, who have not only given me physical assistance and encouragement, but have followed me around the globe and gone without much to allow me to develop these ideas.

I wish to dedicate the work to Dr Gallus, the Princeton Theological Seminary and the Episcopal Theological School (later the Episcopal Divinity School), from whom and in which many of the ideas expressed herein were born and nurtured.