



Mark Argent

Abstract

This paper draws on the experience of visits to Bali and using that experience of a culture very different to my own, to inform my own understanding of Christian spirituality. It draws on the fact that I realised that there would be enough references to Bali in the volume I am writing on psychodynamics and Ignatian spirituality to mean that that will need to have a separate chapter on Balinese Hinduism not because I claim to be an expert in this, but because of what can be learned about my own heritage from looking in the mirror of something very different. Teasing out the significance of different aspects of Christianity and Christian spirituality in the UK is a complex task because things inter-relate in ways that are at times bewildering. Looking at the Hinduism in Bali offers some rich insights because of the similarities which seem to be there -- speaking of unrecognised aspects of one's Western Christian heritage being reflected in the mirror of another faith, rather than necessarily being a fair reflection of what is in Bali. This paper draws on two ways of thinking, which I see as complementary. One is Lacan's idea of the "instance of the gaze" when you look and think you understand; realising that it is more complicated than that, and then entering into a deeper confusion which then leads to a frustration from which more learning can come. The other is the language of 'countertransference', that is, of owning what is happening in one's response to a situation, which includes owning the fact that it is incomplete. The end result is that looking at something very different (such as, Balinese Hinduism) provides insight into aspects of one's European Christian heritage that are not so easy to spot directly because they are so familiar. Examples of the insights on offer include, for example, the Balinese Barong dance which weaves together a complex set of myths around what in the West could seem to be good and evil and various gender roles. But that description is too simplistic: things weave together in complex ways which asked to be heard in terms of finding balance between good and evil and between differently-gendered ways of being. The simplistic language is too simple: Jung's work provides a rich critique in terms of unconscious complements, and reflection on the Barong dance actually invites exploration of how these balances are negotiated in the west -- and suggests that the simple language often used is so simple as to feel like a defence against something far more complex.

Bio

Mark read Natural Sciences and then Theology at Cambridge. He divides his time between creative industries and work at the interface between psychoanalysis and spirituality. His first book was on the composer R.J.S. Stevens and he is currently writing one on psychodynamics and Ignatian spirituality. He has recently given papers in this area at conferences of the International Society for Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations and of

the Organisation for Promoting Understanding of Society. Other interests include both writing and playing music, and painting. His career has included extensive retreat-giving experience and time in South East Asia which has had a profound impact on how he views his own Christian heritage. He was also very involved in establishing the East of England Faiths Council and served as its Secretary 2001-2006.