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# ST MICHAEL'S LECTURE 1

## THE NEW FAITH

Dr Francis Macnab

On a recent visit to Berlin, I took time to make a visit to the Egyptian Museum. I especially wanted to see the presentation of Queen Nefertiti, regarded as the most beautiful woman of all time. Her husband was also of intense interest. Akhenaton was Pharaoh of Egypt (1367-1350 BCE) possibly a little before the birth of Moses. In his time he insisted on religious reform and became an early advocate of a new faith of Monotheism. When Moses proclaimed his ten commandments, it is interesting to speculate how much he had been influenced by Pharaoh Akhenaton.

Over the centuries, there has been an evolution of what faith means; and there have been continuing efforts to arrive at a New Faith that spoke to people out of an evolving intelligence and wisdom, and out of the dynamics of the culture of a particular people.

Australian contemporary culture is expressing a wide, albeit inarticulate, hunger for a better understanding of the human spirit. There has been a flooding of written and electronic information about the physical aspects of health and well-being. There has also been a huge acceleration in the searching of the mind and mental processes. But the human spirit remains largely unexplored. Many have been fearful of any talk of the human spirit, and others have walked away, satisfied that it is irrelevant to them and their children.

Some have called on religion to settle the searchings of the human spirit and it has gone further to search the hidden and deepest spirit at the heart

of everything. Religion identified its sacred books and developed its various theologies, some of which when disputed or challenged, led to much violence and slaughter from before the time of Moses to well after him.

In establishing systems of beliefs, many have erroneously concluded this is what Faith is about. The challenge has been “Do you believe this?” “Do you believe that?” Correspondingly there has been a strong defence of beliefs. “You must believe this.” “If you don’t...”

As I have advocated a New Faith for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, some have reacted on impulse. “You should not - must not – question or disturb the faith handed down to us by the fathers of religion.”

Some have said it is next to blasphemy, because to question the belief systems is to question God who gave the scriptures. They so easily deny what should be self-evident, that taking into account that these writings are frequently inspired and inspiring, they are written by human beings – like us. They were writing out of their time and culture, out of their intelligence and wisdom, out of their memory and understanding, and out of their tunnel vision, prejudices, and commitments.

But faith is more than a congregation of beliefs. In fact to converse on Faith as if it is only about beliefs and the doctrines and dogma arising from them, is to acknowledge only one aspect of Faith. I have called it one of the Platforms of Faith. The New Faith I have developed over 30 years, takes its shape on five platforms. For those who have adopted the generational attitude that their belief system must be defended – “Onward Christian Soldiers”, there is the tendency to see Faith only on one platform. The New Faith tries to find its reality and expression in the context of a very secular Australian society. It is a society with its religious culture markedly different from its origins in the Anglo-Saxon culture and different also from its covetings of the American religious culture.

To see the faith only in terms of beliefs, biblical texts, creeds and custom is to miss the comprehensive richness that the New Faith offers, worked out in biblical and theological research, contemporary psychoanalytic practice, and a new understanding of health and the part Faith, and the depths of the human spirit play, in sustaining health and recovering or restoring health.

The New Faith proposes **FIVE PLATFORMS** for its expression. **Each platform has seven components.** I do not envisage more than five platforms, but the seven components in each platform are fairly arbitrary. It is easy to see how much more could be added.

To challenge the New Faith on only one of its Platforms is perfectly acceptable, but to challenge it as if the one platform were the only platform is premature and prejudicial. First acknowledge the Five Platforms and then it is reasonable to evaluate the parts.

The First Platform is probably the one most contested. It is the one which because it has been sequestered from the other four, makes it far more vulnerable to attack and the churches that have succumbed to this tunnel vision defence have lost the contest. People have walked away on the basis that if the first platform is unsatisfying or flawed, then it is all over.

The First Platform is the Platform of **Basic Beliefs**. There could ensue long arguments about which are the “basic beliefs”. I will state my seven. You might delete or add – but the conversation is worth having. Which are the seven core beliefs of the Faith?

The old Faith, dogmatic and deductive, declared its seven beliefs in terms of sin and redemption as portrayed in Old and New Testament, the person of Jesus Christ as interpreted from the New Testament, the incarnation and resurrection, the place of prayer, and life after life.

The New Faith starts on a different baseline of an existential awareness; searching and inductive and evolving.

In my studies on men, I asked the same question: “Are you a religious man?” I have heard Phillip Adams on Radio National ask the question to many of the men he has interviewed: “Are you a religious man?”

His men are all from the higher levels of position and achievement. My men are from pre-middle-age through to the very elderly: From the professions of law and medicine, from business and industry, from veterans of the armed services, from hard and soft sciences.

“Are you a religious man?’ The vast majority reply “I have little or nothing to do with organised religion.” A strong proportion will add, “I believe there is more to life than getting up in the morning and going to bed at night. I don’t believe in the Churches’ God, but I believe there is more to life than our fragile bodies and limited minds.”

The second question followed: “Did you ever have any part in organized religion, and if you did, what happened?” A large number replied they had no association with organized religion at all. They attend weddings and funerals, but without interest in the religious component. Others who had some early association with religion said they left it -

- ◆ When their mother died; it had no relevance to them at a critical life event.
- ◆ Because they felt excluded – they were gay, divorced once or twice.
- ◆ Because it had no appeal to them intellectually.
- ◆ Because they were sure the whole church ‘thing’ was unbelievable, unintelligible, and of no relevance, and it was boring.
- ◆ Because churches were always trying to talk up bible texts as if they had to be defended, whereas the more open pursuit of a personal spirituality was more important.

# PLATFORM I

## SEVEN REVIEWS OF FAITH – BELIEFS .

1. **The Faith Factor.** The New Faith simply ASKS: What can be a valid faith in this 21<sup>st</sup> century? What is there in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century faith that will cause people to stop in their tracks and say, “My God! That means something to me.” Faith is not something in a jar to be studied by philosophers. Faith is a living reality.

Jesus of Nazareth did not put forward a system of faith beliefs. In effect -

He said: You need faith to live! The bigger the faith, the better you cope.

He said: Faith is necessary for you to be cured. Your faith will reconnect you with the energy of healing and hope.

He said: Your faith will open your eyes to a world you had not seen before.

The good news is this – while many lose the sense of being alive and wanting to live, now and again, someone comes alongside and says, “Let’s look at this in a different way.” In the quietness of a relationship based on a faith factor we will sit together and listen for the energy of life and its resilience and transformation. The New Faith attempts to articulate and describe the Faith Factor for Life and the fullest quality of life.

Several factors have emerged as relevant to faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- i) Religion, generally and especially in its fundamentalist expressions, has been blamed for local and global violence.
- ii) The large scale defection from the churches;
- iii) The growth of interest in Buddhism, meditation, mindfulness and Quakerism:

- iv) The wide and diverse explorations into spirituality:
- v) The recent natural and man-made disasters have shown that archaic, infantile and irrational beliefs and non-beliefs about God and religion are still widely prevalent and continue to reflect on our religious teachings and religious intelligence.
- vi) The emerging interest of psychoanalysis in religion, and the way it is part of a person's inner life and their identity; and the way it contributes a sense of vitality and well-being.
- vii) The role of feminism and feminine psychology and theology in challenging patriarchal structures, male dominance and the concept of God as highly genderised.
- viii) The multicultural movement has challenged religious certainties, religious intractability.
- ix) The greater awareness of the importance of the human spirit in the pursuit of life-goals, life-meaning and life contentment.
- x) It is notable that William James (1901) in his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh stated a widely ecumenical view relevant in present times, that the religious life carries the belief that "the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe"... that "a harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end," and thereby "a new zest adds itself like a gift to life..." (p. 464).
- xi) The interest in dreams (biblical and our own) as a way to listen to the human spirit in times of affluence and times of anxiety.
- xii) The burgeoning of science unknown in Jesus' time – physics, chemistry and medicine, DNA, stem-cells, space exploration and the internet

2. **A Positive Religion.** The new Faith searches for release from our negative constriction and destructive selves and asserts a possible, plausible, positive, practical way of being alive.

For several generations, parenting and education have strongly emphasised what “can’t be done”, and individuals being inadequate, hopeless, unlikely to be “any good”.

Jesus of Nazareth Kept pointing people to possibilities;

Kept speaking in the most positive terms;

Kept asserting the practical pragmatic side of the values of kindness, generosity, grace, celebration and good humour.

We should hold up Edward de Bono’s book on H+ Religion. Religion, he said, is about happiness. We note that the very first (Hebrew) word of Psalm 1 is “Ashrei” – which means “Happy”. (Whoever would challenge that and say, “No, it is about gloom and misery?”) H+ stands for happiness, humour, helpfulness, hope, health, holding together, the best humanity.” I frequently turn to the poets and the artists. Judith Wright knew of many of life’s negatives, yet she wrote positively -

How to live, I said, as the flame-tree lives?” or...

“I have known a wine  
a drunkenness that can’t be spoken or sung  
without betraying it...  
Maybe there was once a word for it. Call it grace,  
I have seen it, once or twice, through the human face.”

Notably theologians, preachers and church people have readily absorbed themselves in a culture of criticism and judgement and have evaded the practice of generosity and grace, the positive and possible.

3. **God and Prayer.** With the unfolding discoveries – the revelations – of Galileo, Freud, Darwin, Mead and Bowlby, we have had to face a vastly

changed view of the world. In this year – the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth – Christian Churches continue to evade the challenge of Darwin’s proposals to one of the most strongly defended myths of the Old Testament. The three-tiered view had long been taken for granted. But if God is no longer “up there” where is he? This question challenged theologians like Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoffer, and many others. It became easy to be an atheist, and so the atheistic philosophies and politics have had a field day, but now atheism, like some persisting remnants of Christianity, is on the wane. (McGrath , 2004)

A huge problem for theological circles was the concept and place of God. If he is not a “he”, not a “person”, mortal, supernatural Being “up there”, what does God become and what sensible form does prayer take? Can we continue to justify that kind of culture that says “We prayed to God in St Stephens Church and he answered our prayer,” but he refused to answer the fervent persistent prayer of the mothers of Rwanda, or Argentina or of Gaza?

Even today we hear prayers to God that he should stop the floods the fires and the earthquakes. Some continue to speak of an “intelligent design” instead of intelligent management, of a God person who if we pray enough, will restore the brain dead individual, even though he denies life outright to 25,000 children dying every day!

Eckhart Tolle (2005) wrote an insightful comment on Revelation chapter 21 – “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” He said those words are about an “awakened consciousness”.

“The realization is the awakening. Awakening as a future event has no meaning because awakening is the realization of Presence.”(p. 308)

The New Faith strives to understand God as “the Presence” in the moment of awakening.

4. **The Life of Dialogue.** The New Faith asserts the central place of what Martin Buber called “The Life of Dialogue”. It moves us away from the treatment of human beings as a means to an end; away from dehumanisation and humiliation; away from the posture of judgment. It elevates the essential aspects of relationships in which people strive to discover their common humanity and common purpose and most essentially their common commitment to the mutual enhancement of life. Buber said, we do not set-out to impose ourselves on others but we are always in a process of unfolding and searching.
- “You must descend ever anew into the transforming abyss, risk your soul ever anew, vowed to the holy insecurity.” (Daniel p.99)

The “old faith” has had a long history of a “life of monologue”. It did not need to ‘descend into the abyss’. It stood above it and gave its pronouncement on many matters upon which it claimed some ‘given right to speak’ – and particularly with regard to human relationships, sexuality, sexual behaviour, contraception and procreation. People were frequently confused not only about right-and-wrong, but about their identity, and their life direction.

The New Faith searches for the courage to be the person we were meant to be – always searching to leave our anxious protected self and find our fullest relationship with the world.

The life of dialogue is not one of chatter and inauthenticity, nor is it one of angry interchange and abuse. It may be a dialogue of meaningful silence, of searching for an alternative way, of respect for dignity and difference, but always in the awareness that we live in the context of I and Thou, of the interpersonal and the intersubjective. This stands in sharp contrast to the pursuit of individual ‘righteousness’, but sees ‘righteousness’ in its biblical sense of ‘right relationships’.

5. **What was Jesus pointing to?** Many will say, Jesus of Nazareth had no difficulty talking about God as 'heavenly', as 'father', and also as 'spirit'. "God is a Spirit", said the insightful writer of St Johns Gospel. Who was this Jesus and what was he about?

Jesus in his time was convinced of God's kingdom in contrast to the violent corrupt kingdom of his era and before. We have difficulty talking of God as "King" and God having a "Kingdom". The old faith spoke of "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords, in a culture where Kings and Lords were visibly present, but as Gary Bouma (2004) pointed out, these terms lose their value in other cultures.

"In the republican USA... no one thinks of God as the President of Presidents or the Senator of Senators". (p 109)

The New Faith articulates that Jesus was pointing to a New Faith, a New Way, a New Being, a new and better Humanity.

We assert that we need to do less of our pietising of Jesus. Robert Funk (founder of the I.S.J.S.) said; "We need to do less pointing TO Jesus and start focussing on what he was pointing to."

What was he pointing to? To a better human being and a transformed humanity – to a way of being, a new being in which tolerance and compassion would be pre-eminent. What was this extraordinary insightful person pointing to? To a new faith that would help people live with courage, to the pathways of faith that could lift people out of their alienation and illness, to a faith that would open them to the miracles of healing. Not the 'throw away your crutches and your contact lenses' miracles, but the miracle of an authentic presence. (Oddly enough it has taken psychoanalysis to bring home to the churches the detailed characteristics of the healing power of an authentic presence.)

Jesus did not prescribe conditions of belief in order to start again. He did not say, ‘You have to believe in A, B, C & D.’ – He said “It takes faith”. You need a bigger faith. A different faith. Faith as a force, a presence, an energy, that can help you be a different human being. You may not be around forever. But you will be different.

6. **The Scriptures.** The Scriptures have always been a paradox for many people. I meet some who tell me they have read the Bible from cover to cover, twice over. So what? That can be like going through our grandmother’s bathroom cupboards over and over. We have made a careful inventory of all her medicines, but we don’t know what’s for what, and she can’t remember.

The New Faith says little more than informed and liberated scholars have said for decades. But it does call for openness, honesty and less defensiveness. If your Bible gives multiple accounts of the human slaughter ordered by Moses, will we call those mass destruction, mass murder or crimes against humanity? And then what follows?

If we put the stories of Abraham together – on the one hand he is presented as a person ready to go out in faith to face the unknown and build a nation. On the other hand his treatment of women and his son Isaac left his reputation tarnished. But there is so little about him and we are left to imagination which itself is a major component of all religions.

In my book on the Psalms I asserted that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we cannot accept that the terrible violence that was advocated by God can be the guide for our life. We have read the psalms very selectively. See for example, Psalm 59 or Psalm 109. But alongside many like these, we have Psalm 94 and Psalm 105, and Psalm 121, where there is the description of God as a significant presence. Thus there is a recurring paradox, a repetitive contradiction that cannot be ignored.

When we come to the New Testament, we either accept the gospels as a supernatural revelation, or we apply critical evaluations not only to the text, but to the veracity of the accounts given. E.g. We are given a verbatim account of the Temptations of Jesus. Who was there to record that suggested conversation?

Similarly, the prayer in Gethsemane. With the disciples asleep, who heard him say, "Father if it is your will, let this cup pass from me."?

In the trial before Pilate, we are given the words that were exchanged, and many preachers through the ages have made much of them. But in reality, those words have to be regarded as fiction. That does not dismiss them. Many books of fiction contain great wisdom and are words of insight and inspiration. (Kazantzakis, Dostoevsky, Ibsen).

The New Faith, in common with all critical Biblical scholars and preachers, seeks an honest enquiry into the Scriptures, and a readiness to accept that the faith does not depend on deceptions, but is ready to find significant meanings and inspiration in a narrative that is a story and a teaching.

7. **Everyone's Worth and Acceptance.** The New Faith asserts every person's worth and potential. People across generations have reported the same heavy prediction and destiny placed upon them – "You'll never be any good!" "You are a nobody and you will always be a nobody!" Christian Faith has followed a peculiar pathway in this regard. If we follow the scriptural narration, Jesus invited specific people to join him. It would seem they had no training for the task; they did not have to subscribe to a belief-check. They became disciples on the basis of their perceived basic worth and potential. In the context of their Judaic background, it was inevitable they would be affected by the views of their religious tradition. Their view of God would also comply with that tradition – until Jesus of Nazareth introduced a different view of God.

Over the centuries, Christianity has fumbled between a view of God as unconditional love to a view of God as demanding obedience. We have been caught in the anxiety that we are tainted by our past, with a deep inadequacy and unacceptability. As a result, people generally have admitted wide confusion. Many have been deeply affected by fear and guilt and the churches have participated in this fear and guilt, largely indifferent and uncaring regarding the psychological and emotional damage that has followed. With the burgeoning of the various schools of psychology, particularly since the 1960's people have begun to see that their desire for self-worth and their pursuit of their highest potential were not sinful. Instead of feeling guilty that they felt "good" about themselves, they began to realize it was Life's gift to them. The wide human potential movement became a revolution, and even today the churches have been slow to notice how much the ground has slipped away beneath them, and their theology has not made the critical evolutionary adaptation.

The New Faith asserts the primacy of the worth of each individual and their potential, free of theological intrusion or conditions.

This is developed further by Erich Fromm, (1966) a psychoanalyst who took up a position as a radical humanist with a global philosophy "which emphasises the oneness of the human race, the capacity of man to develop his own powers and to arrive at inner harmony and the establishment of a peaceful world..." always moving to penetrate "through the fictions and illusions to a full awareness of reality" (p. 14)

## Platform II

### A THEMATIC FAITH

The Scholars of the Jesus Seminar have done a huge amount of very careful work over these last 30 years. One highly notable feature has been their commitment to an ongoing conversation. This is so very different from the single individual determined on a cause in which he/she was the sole scholar. With the Jesus Seminar, there are the regular meetings of the several scholars, the seminars of smaller groups, the testing of their work by people from different disciplines or differing areas of scholarship and practice.

Their work has been largely a study of the texts and history with the objective of determining what were the authentic words of Jesus, and what it was that this provocative larger-than-life figure was set on achieving.

Decades before I became aware of their work, I had been pursuing a different approach. First of all, I had a far-reaching involvement in the international world of psychology and psychoanalysis. Secondly, I also had a parallel commitment to the church's ministry within a city congregation. I determined to develop an intelligible conversation between the two disciplines and arrive at areas of integration by which a number of themes became evident, and highly relevant to both disciplines and equally highly meaningful to people generally.

I have put a great deal of effort into the exploration of seven themes.

1. **The enhancement of the human spirit.** This has been largely disregarded or evaded by psychology and psychoanalysis until relatively recent times. And it has been widely mismanaged by the churches and theologians. There has been an abundance of writings on the "holy" spirit,

but very little informed discussion on the “human” spirit. How is the human spirit ENHANCED in relationships, in work, in art, in music? How is the human spirit enhanced in times of stress and sadness, trauma and tragedy? And how is a Faith relevant to these human experiences and needs?

2. The New Faith asserts the importance of **the evolution of a better humanity**. St Michael’s by taking that name, asserted that it stood for the reduction of violence, destructiveness and waste, and the promotion of health, quality lifestyles and a more tolerant, compassionate humanity. The theme of the New Faith is the search for a better humanity. It was what Jesus of Nazareth was pointing to!
3. The New Faith looks for **a new consciousness of the ethics of love, work and play**. There is now an awareness that many 20th and 21st century events have outstripped ‘old’ morality, and a new moral compass must become part of the conversations in economics, politics, and science, and human behaviour in a post-secular society. The New Faith recognizes the need for a constant ethical review as each discipline raises new doubts and concerns. Don Cupitt of Cambridge wrote –

“the new ethic to which the church is committed must in time erode away and destroy her old theology”. ( p.131)

The remedy, he says, is obvious; “we need to get life’s centre of gravity back into the centre of life itself, and so reunite life with itself. We have to take life as it comes, making the most of it, from moment to moment, and from day to day”.(p. 153)

“Religion becomes less a matter of dogma, authority and obedience, and more a method of wisdom, insight, creativity and day-to-day care of things”. (p. 165)

4. **The expulsion of negative and constrictive mentalisation** is now long overdue. Our society has been heavily imbued with the regressive images of fear, pessimism, suspicion and gloom. The New Faith looks for ways to expel our well-learned negativity and nihilism and find rational ways to a positive world-view, and a more positive view of the human personality and its growth and healthy development.

It is alarming to note how widely religion has defended the negativity of “Thou shalt not”, from the mythic story where Eve is forbidden to taste the fruit of Life, to Moses and his commandments through to the rearing of children in a fear-dominated secular society.

The New Faith asserts and sustains the positives of life and religion. Don Cupitt (2003) wrote we need to “train people to enjoy life” (p.64). “It is high time we learned to be less hard on ourselves and on each other; it is high time we learned how to love this life and live it well. It’s all we’ll ever have.”(p.65)

5. The New Faith recognises how Jesus of Nazareth repeatedly **focussed on healing, health and wholeness**. (We sometimes forget that the biblical word ‘salvation’, comes from ‘salus’ to be whole). The New Faith joins the important conversations of ways to effect healing of old wounds and distressing memories, and the regulation of words and emotions vital for health and wellbeing.

Central to the New Faith is the ongoing search for the many pathways to health and wholeness in individuals and their culture.

6. The New Faith raises the well-worked questions, ‘Why go to church?’ ‘What is the church for?’ I have developed this concern further in another place. In the context of this presentation, the New Faith points to **the importance of our therapeutic communities** and to their diverse and inspirational energies to lift people out of their loneliness, give them a sense of belonging,

and provide social capital and social support. People and society search for such communities that are not only deeply humanitarian, but also reliably concerned about a transformative healing and hope in the human spirit.

7. The New Faith emphasises **the experiences of enjoyment and exuberance** for everyone across the life-span. It asserts that the pursuit of happiness is basic to existence, but exuberance is something more. Kay Redfield Jamison (2004) wrote –

“Exuberance is an abounding, ebullient, effervescent emotion...Exuberance leaps, bubbles, and overflows, propels its energy through troop and tribe.” (p. 4) “Nothing is quite so wildly contagious as exuberance” (p. 135)

She might have gone on and said, but it is sadly and so obviously absent in so many of our religious observances.

Exuberance challenges the theologians everywhere to focus their attention on what Jesus of Nazareth meant by those words –

“I am come that people may find life, and find it in its fullness.”

## Platform III

### THE ENERGY AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE NEW FAITH

Faith, as Paul Tillich wrote, is “an act of the total personality”...and it “participates in the dynamics of personal life.” (p.4) It is important to include the dynamics of social life – the interpersonal and contextual concerns that must always be part of the dynamics.

The New Faith identifies seven such dynamics –

1. It aims to be **inclusive**. God has no borders, spirit, no special favourites. The New Faith seeks a full inclusion of colour, race, gender, sexual preference, religions. We recognise that this objective is not yet reached – it continues to be part of human evolution, and is always vulnerable to regression. The ‘old faith’ has a long history of exclusion discrimination and humiliation. The New Faith gives specific focus to the need for personal and social re-education and reconstruction of the dynamics of inclusiveness.

2. It is **inductive**. The ‘Old Faith’ has been widely and strongly expressed through hierarchical overt and covert impositional structures. This was conveyed through patriarchal, authoritarian, powerful, and punitive systems.

It inevitably insisted that the ‘truth’, the ‘right way’, the only interpretation, had to be imposed, dogmatically and deductively. The inductive faith begins from a different premise. In the gospel narrative people said “Here I am”. The afflicted Gadarene went onto say, “What have you got to do with me?”

The inductive faith starts with the human situation and the human searching, and then attempts a correlation with what Jesus of Nazareth was pointing to.

Gary Bouma (2006) wrote, "Patriarchy is dead among the under forties in most organisations in Australia. However, the church, like the military continues to be a patriarchal organisation." (p.126) And even when it protests a more open style, its dogmatic impositional mode is close to the surface.

In another place, I quote George Albee, one time president of the American Psychological Association and also one time preacher in St Michael's Church –

"All psychologists should help to get rid of organised religion. It doesn't matter which religion; they are all patriarchal. And that is one of the major sources of social injustice in our society and in our world. Every major religion puts women down, grants women second class status."

3. The New Faith is **integrative**. Rather than insisting there is "only one way", it attempts to draw different ways, different disciplines into a conversation. It recognises that in a secular or post-secular society the core humanitarian values common to all religions can become the energy of the integration of communities and religions.
4. The New Faith is **interpersonal** in its ethics, its psychology and behaviour. It attempts to transcend the defensive and paranoid individual ego, and draw it into an awareness, empathy and conversation with the 'other', and the wide range of differing 'others'. It honours difference and it draws differences into a tapestry of evocative colour and vitality.

5. It is **interconnective**: connecting individuals and communities with the world, and a global consciousness. We are connected by the internet to people and cultures and to what is occurring on planet Earth. Individuals can spin-off in their pathology or their criminality or their sense of inferiority and shame. The New Faith articulates a process of reconnecting and interconnecting with relevant resources and reconstructive endeavours. We see this occurring as the individual diagnosed with a condition can connect with the vast interconnected resources of “Google” and “Yahoo” and more.
  
6. The New Faith has drawn out the place of **intelligence** in its exploration of religious intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and humanitarian intelligence. Intelligence can be applied with great competence to a tunnel-vision mentality, but it can also be part of a wider more comprehensive dynamic by which we recognise that a world that has changed requires an immediate intelligent adaptation.

Religious intelligence has rarely been understood and probably never taught or treated as an important part of religious and social experience. Perhaps that is one reason why many people dismiss religion and its doctrines as unintelligent.

In my book on *Traumas of Life and Their Treatment (volume 2)*, I attempt to designate seven areas of trauma, and seven pathways for the restoration of the damaged soul. This is only one part of the phenomenology of a religious intelligence; and it is a critically important one.

7. There is a view that going to church is boring. That religion is irrelevant, and theology has answers to questions no one is asking. And so, the vital ingredient of **inspiration** has been lost. We might pause to note that

inspiration comes from the Latin meaning “breathed upon” or “breathed into”. Clearly many do not want to get too close to that breath. Ken Wilber (1956) wrote –

“...naturally, this soul does not smile very much. This is a soul for whom all inspiration has gone sour...To whom can I sing songs of joy and exaltation?” (p. 195-6)

We might make some affirming noises to that, especially when we look twice at many of the hymns that gained entry into the approved hymn books.

The New Faith searches for ways to infuse positive energy and enthusiasm into the flatlands of our existence. It seeks ways to elevate and expand the spirit of people and places, of events and experiences.

## Platform IV

### SEVEN ESSENTIAL CONVERSATIONS

There have been many statements made about the ways science in its various expressions has made religion redundant or appear unintelligent and dangerous. There have been many attempts by people of religion to reclaim the high ground. But little has been done to evaluate how science can bring a better understanding to various areas of religion and faith. It has always astonished me that academic circles have remained largely uninterested in these areas of research. Psychology, for example, could have revoked its self-attributed superiority to, or disregard for, religion and examined how religious interest affects thinking and behaviour. Why does this one person adopt a religious view of the world while his family think he is 'off his head'?

For more than a century theologians and various people speaking from their chosen Christian podium have assumed it was their role and their right to become the adversaries of science and the defenders of religion. They have opposed scientific research even where there could be benefits to life and the relief of chronic suffering. They have opposed the Darwinian revelations to the point of one archbishop claiming he had calculated that the world was created in 4004 BC, (despite the fact that indigenous Australians have been a community for more than 40,000 years). They have opposed psychoanalysis on the ground that it was a threat to the idea of the human soul, despite the fact that Freud wrote at length about the murder of the human soul.

The recent religion despatch by Richard Dawkins has evoked a Dawkins despatch by religion. We can transcend the adversarial argument by inciting an informed conversation.

Instead of an uninformed opposition to science, the New Faith advocates a wide conversation with the hard and soft sciences, economics, and psychoanalysis.

The New Faith steps over preconceptions and presumptions of a higher moral conscience and enters a conversation.

This conversation reaches into seven areas –

1. **Science and the understanding of such basic human concerns of faith hope and love.** How does faith function in the fullest sense as an expression of the whole personality in the context of its operative environments? And love? A man may say he loves a particular woman without recognising how his love is an expression of hate towards his mother, or how that love is a cover for a range of psychological needs. I have explained some of these concerns in my book “Hungry for Love”. Similarly, a considerable amount of work has been done on hope: how hope is lost, regained, sustained. What is the difference in the hope of a man who says “we hope to raise \$20 million next year” and the same man who says “we hope our Parkinsonian mother will wake up tomorrow and be cured’?

Psychoanalyst Jeremy Safran wrote – “When life experiences have been such that one has little faith in the possibility of influencing one’s own destiny or that others will be willing or able to act on one’s behalf, the process of cultivating such hope becomes THE problem of analysis. In such cases, the severity of the patient’s bitterness, cynicism and despair makes it virtually impossible for him or her to find any kind of solace from other human beings, and leaves others thwarted in their efforts to make contact or be helpful... Often people hide the full intensity of their despair from others because of a belief that others will be alienated by it.” (p.6)

The New Faith has a readiness to embrace a science of faith, a science of hope, and a science of love. Each of these are vital to the way life is and will be lived. Every individual has their own experience to tell about faith, hope and love, but there has been a long resistance to use science to understand them. Faith, hope and love are central to social behaviour.

2. There is a conversation to be had with the **science of God**. Some believe with considerable energy, others believe intellectually, and some with a fabric of belief without the energy of belief. Some psychologists speak of psychic or soul deadness. Michael Eigen (1995) wrote of “the different sorts of psychic deadness”. (p.606) T.S. Elliot described it in his “love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. Henrik Ibsen had his Peer Gynt too busy to notice what had happened to him. And Edvard Munch showed the inner deadness in the faces of people in his painting “Evening on Karl Johan”.

The neurologists are exploring a god-spot in the human brain. The science of neuroplasticity now is moving beyond the centuries-old notion that the adult brain is a fixed entity into old age. There are expectations not only about the deterioration of the brain with ageing but also about the rearrangement of the brain.

Norman Doidge (2008), research psychiatrist at Columbia University, wrote:

“The neuroplasty revolution has implications for our understanding of how love, sex, grief, relationships, learning addictions, culture, technology and psychotherapies change our brain... Some of our most stubborn habits and disorders are products of our plasticity. Once a particular plastic change occurs in the brain and becomes well established, it can prevent other changes from occurring. It is by understanding both positive and negative effects of plasticity that we can truly understand the extent of human possibilities”. (p. xvi)

3. The conversation of ageing has brought a **new science** to the psychology **of the ageing brain**, the ageing mind and ageing communities. Our SAGE groups, now operating for twenty years, have been exploring how people can age more intelligently and with greater vitality of spirit. This requires a great deal of work on the understanding of the spirit – how it develops, how it is lost, how it can be regained and what influences and environments constrict and damage the human spirit and what enlarges, enhances, and liberates the human spirit, as we move through the life-span.

The New Faith accepts the importance of appropriate institutional care of the ageing population; but it also asserts that we need to research those times that enhance the quality of life, long before institutional care becomes a necessary measure. Old Faith has probably been too concerned with the assurances of eternal life in terms of time 'everlasting'. The New Faith interprets the biblical 'eternal life' as quality of life, soul health and enhancement, in the fullness of life lived 'now'.

4. A similar conversation is long overdue on **the science of mind, mood and emotions**. It is astounding (to use an emotional word) that people continue to speak in an 18<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century way about faith as a system of intellectual belief and argumentative creedal statements, but so little conversation has taken place over the vulnerability of the mind, the pathology of the mind, and the role of mood and emotion in religious experience. The corollary also needs to be stated that we know so little about faith and its influence and effects on mood and emotion.

William James wrote his significant Gifford Lectures in 1901 on The Varieties of Religious Experience. It was, and is, a major milestone in the evolution of our understanding, but a great deal has been done, chiefly and in the last 40 years, and we need to join that conversation.

The study of personality has shown the importance of what has been called the five factors of personality. I have called it the five plus two: optimism, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism; and I add integration (of “I” with the “We”) and compassion (an expression of altruism).

We know that some of these personality factors act in ways to close off the reception and expression of new ideas, and other factors evoke their reception and expression. We need to join this conversation.

5. The ‘Old’ Faith had a strong consumer-conquering attitude to the environment. You had your block of land – you made it produce results. You wanted to have some fun so you went and shot ducks and geese. You needed fuel, so you cut down forests. You needed to get your produce from Melbourne to Sydney, so you put fleets of trucks on the road. The New Faith is saying we are to be deeply concerned about the **Science of Planet Earth**, the only home to all humanity and all that lives. In my book of prayers “Inner searching and Inner Strength”, published in 1988 I wrote this prayer –

“Eternal Father, lift us into an awareness that we are –  
guardians of the cosmos,  
trustees of the universe,  
citizens of the world,  
members of the one family of God (Life)...” (P25)

6. The Old Faith knew the language of the quiet mind and the words of Whittier’s hymn –

“Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.”

But there was considerable evasion in putting this into practice. As a result people accepted the diagnosis of anxiety states, panic disorders, stress-related illnesses, and many died too soon.

The New Faith has sought to open up intelligent and life-saving conversations on the early training of children through to the psychology of healthy ageing, especially determined to confront the anxieties of life and the stressful nature of our existence. It joins the **vital science of the Quiet Mind**.

Dr Ainslie Meares (1976) reflected –

“Let us grow.  
A man grows in wisdom,  
A woman grows in understanding,  
A boy in strength,  
A girl grows into the future.  
How do we grow in ourselves?  
We grow in the stillness.”

7. The Old Faith has promulgated the concept of forgiveness and absolution, but people have remained unable to forgive and locked-in to a lifetime of unresolved guilt and distressing tenacious memories. Shakespeare, in “Antony and Cleopatra”, has Caesar near the end of the play say to Cleopatra – “Make not your thoughts your prisons, ... dear Queen.” But we all do just that!

Within the New Faith, we speak of finding “release” from the past wounds, distressing memories, impacted resentment and obsessional revenge. Redemption – to use old faith terminology – may be a positive objective, but we need to provide relevant ways to release people from those experiences that hold them captive affect their mood and growth, and sometimes lead

them to wish for death. The New Faith advocates an involvement in the science of release, as it continues to explore the processes of “the release mechanisms”. I have expanded on these in my books on “Traumas of Life and Their Treatment”.

The Science of Release will also include the science of emptiness, for emptiness in its wide manifestations, holds the person in a state of helplessness and despair until realistic pathways of release can be negotiated.

## PLATFORM V

### GIFTS AND GIVENES

Existential philosophy and theology have – in the past - made a substantial impact on psychotherapy. Many schools today – including my own – teach a program of existential psychotherapy.

Existentialism has been filled-out by many philosophers, theorists, authors and practitioners. At its baseline, it attempts to designate the fundamentals of human existence - what Irvin Yalom (1989) called the “givens”. He found that “four givens are particularly relevant to psychotherapy” –

- (i) the inevitability of death;
- (ii) The freedom to live as we will;
- (iii) Our ultimate aloneness; and
- (iv) The absence of any obvious meaning or sense to life.

The New Faith brings seven givens to the existential conversation:

1. **The ‘gift’ or the ‘event’ of life** – life for each person.

Life for each depends always on life with others. Our life is always lived in the context of the life of a family, a group, a relationship (actual or imagined), a community, a church, a workplace. In all of those areas, life

can run out, but so long as it sustains certain characteristics, it remains a 'gift'. Similarly, life is lived on Planet Earth. We had nothing to do with Planet Earth being here for us and others, but we do know that all life depends on the life of the Planet. If the Planet dies, life also dies. The 'old faith' concept of eternal life needs to be laid alongside the 'new faith' concept of quality of Life: a life which integrates "consciousness, culture and nature and thus finds room, for art, morals and science – for personal values, for collective wisdom, and for technical know-how". (Wilber, p336)

2. **Our life-span:** our finitude. In the last hundred years, we have added thirty years to life expectancy. At the beginning of 1900, it sat about 46. Today it is 76. The reasonable expectation is that in the next 50 years a large section of the population will live to 120, probably in much better condition than many septuagenarians today. This not only changes the ingrained biblical determination of three-score years and ten; it also changes the conception of human beings living in a highly technological society for sixty years past our present retirement, say, of 60 years. Whatever your views on this likelihood – two things remain – first how to avoid death of the body, mind and spirit, as we age, and second how to cope with our given life-span in constructive creative ways.
  
3. Human beings from their first breath – or maybe from conception – have **possibilities, potential and choices**. Some have more than others. Some destroy or negate what they have. The New Faith attempts to

acknowledge these and thereby undo or challenge those influences that restrict and restrain, that increase anxiety rather than embrace “the truth” that is supposed to set us free! Free for growth, for development, for fulfilment.

4. Every healthy child is born with a potentially creative brain. The systems of society, families, education and church will often praise and reward the creativity of scientists, artists, and musicians: but they overlook or disregard the millions whose creativity was squashed by society, families, education and church.

The New Faith has faith in the creative brain and seeks conversations on how that creativity can be continually explored. The “old faith” has been fond of drawing boundaries and defending them. But in retrospect people who have been able to sustain imagination and creativity and stretch or step over those boundaries have become what Clive Hamilton (2008) called the “avatars of virtue” attracting admiration from people around the world. He named three: Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama. We could name more, who along with those he named, overcame huge resistance and showed how imposed boundaries could be transcended.

5. Individuals and society manifest **anxiety in its various forms**. There is a desire to eradicate that anxiety, but it is a ‘given’ of human existence. The ‘old faith’ has tended to say anxiety is evidence of human sin, and the best

management of it is to 'repent', i.e., turn to God, church or religion, as the way to achieve a quietened non-anxious state. The New Faith embraces resources available to understand the differentials in anxiety – from everyday hassles and worries through to uncontrollable panic states and chronic anxiety that affect mind and body, relationships and work, memories of the past and foreboding about the future. In one era of existentialism, the proposed answer to anxiety was despair, or as with Martin Heidegger, a resolve to take the anxiety upon us. In another era, Paul Tillich said human existence also contains a basic courage to be a fully functioning person in spite of the inroads anxiety makes upon us.

In our current era, we can add to that resolve and courage the contexts of our existence, the context of conscious and unconscious influences, of our various communities of support and challenge, of fantasy and imagination, of being present to a presence, and a faith in the transformative resources that arise by planning and in spontaneity, by grit and by grace.

6. Every person has the given and developed **capacity to relate to the world** – to people, present and not present, to experiences, real and imagined. Every person has the capacity to relate to their inner self and its search for what Wilber (1998) called “the good, the true and the beautiful”, - (although in the light of the arguments that gather round what is 'true', I would prefer 'the good, the tender and the beautiful.')

It is the individual owning their psychological self and listening to the depths of the soul and simultaneously relating to the world in increasingly authentic ways.

7. Every person touches the desire **to find a way – a way to be in the midst of chaos**, in the aftermath of trauma, in the longitudinal pain of many losses.

There is the choice of anger and resentment,

the choice of cynicism and withdrawal,

the choice of sickness and suicide.

They are each a way to be, and a way to negate Being.

The New Faith recognizes we are living in a new world, very different from the world of our grandfathers, different from the world of the Luthers and the Wesleys, the Anselms and the Augustines. They sought their way according to the circumstances of their time. We do not cast any aspersions on that. We simply say that we must find our way.

Some words of the Nigerian poet Ben Okri are apposite—

“The most authentic thing about us  
is our capacity to create, to overcome,  
to endure, to transform, to love,  
and to be greater than our suffering,  
we are best defined by the mystery  
that we are still here, and can still rise  
upwards, still create better civilizations  
that we can face our raw realities,

and that we will survive  
the greater despair  
that the greater future might bring.”

And because that future will be so drastically new, we will need a New Faith  
for it.

## QUO VADIS?

The question now before us is – where does the New Faith go from here? In its five platforms, it has provided considerable scope for stimulating conversation. And the conversation will go on. In my role as the preacher I am not involved in the conversation though I have tried to ensure I have made a full contribution to “stimulating” many conversations. In my decades sitting as the psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, my role is often constrained by the important silence, but in the silence there is considerable scope for reflection and inspiration.

### I

The five platforms of the New Faith will soon distill into **five searchers’ groups called Ingots**. An “ingot” is a mass of metal ready for reshaping and refining. There is a lot of reshaping and refining to be done to help the Faith be ready for the changing circumstances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### II

We have been astonished at the extensive searching and the intensity of interaction that have burst upon us by **the Internet**. We will continue to develop this powerful conversation.

### III

We are about to launch a further aspect of the New Faith. It will focus on the important place and strength of the human spirit in our contemporary society. In workplaces, in the arts, in science, economics, history and theology, we see that we need to recover and reshape the human spirit.

This invokes the words of Hegel (1821) -

“The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only at the falling of the dusk.”

We need to spread our wings, for our time is now.

We will open a **Centre for the Development of the Human Spirit**. It will be inclusive, transcultural, transpersonal. It will draw together the research, the psychological explorations, the humanitarian reflections, the theological interpretations and the expanding international studies of spirituality. The centre for the development of the Human Spirit starts with the premise that the human spirit requires development, that it has been long neglected, it has become blocked, or has become too much dissociated from mind and body. The centre will be an attempt to explore society's preoccupation with acquisition, affluence and ego-centred defensiveness and will focus on relocating the human spirit in daily discourse and its manifestations in generosity and dignity, in personal enhancement, and the health of society.

Starting with this presentation, we will attempt to provide a series of presentations, that the bridging of the human spirit and faith might find clear expression in discussions on –

science,  
art,  
music  
contemporary psychoanalysis  
contemporary theology  
the secular and post-secular society.

We plan that presentations from people in these different fields will have status and significance and be of high interest to wide sections of society. Our intention is to be more specifically focussed than, say, the Boyer lectures, and in doing so, be of added significance. It will be our way of inviting a stimulating conversation, and in so doing assert and affirm that the exposition of the New Faith for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century does not rest with the theologians and clergy but within the fabric of a searching population and in the context of people at different turning points in their lives.

We will seek connections with the Science and Medicine Network in England, the International Scholars of the Jesus Seminar, the Jewish Tikkun Organisation of America and such other relevant bodies.

Rachel Kohn (2003) wrote –

“The free-flowing exploration of spirituality and the charting of new frontiers might not be delivering all the answers, and indeed may be taking us into some dangerous waters, but they do provide something of a laboratory of thinking and practice that old-time religion is much too cautious to engage in.” (p.195)

We invite people of courage and commitment to join us in this vital engagement.

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