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ST MICHAEL'S LECTURE 2

THE NEW FAITH A HIGHER SPIRITUAL INTELLIGNECE A TASTE OF A DIFFERENT WAY OF BEING

Dr Francis Macnab

“A newly global Christianity....is finding its soul again”.

(Harvey Cox: The Future of Faith. Harper One, 2009.)

“From 1648 – 1970, we had essentially one idea of what it means to be religious in the western world. To be religious was to be engaged with a religious institution.

Now....people are more likely to claim a spiritual practice than a religious identity.”

Patricia Killen Dean Pacific Lutheran University, U.S.A (XnC. Dec 2008)

For the whole of my professional life, I have been reflecting on the relationship between religion and psychology. This concern first began in my teenage years, and now in these later years, the questions in this relationship have taken on a new intensity.

- ◆ We have almost grown out of the hostility and resistance of psychology to religion – once most notably shown by Sigmund Freud and Albert Ellis. This was challenged by William James, Heinz Kohut and my own Scottish professor, Malcolm Millar. From different religious and philosophical perspectives, they applied themselves to the questions of human existence and the understanding of the human being and the human community.

In the intense study of the body and the mind, they continued to ask, “Is this all there is?” What of the human spirit, the role of religion and the place of faith? While religion is now back on the human agenda, in this era of so-called religious wars, many people say, “I am not religious, but I am spiritual”.

- ◆ Probably they mean they would have no part in institutional or denominational religions with their dictates of doctrine and dogma but they would hold to a spirituality that seemed to provoke them to look inwards, and to be conscious of the positive influences around them.
- ◆ Some go further to assert their search for what is sacred in life, while others turn to various expressions and practices of meditation and mysticism.

While many say, “I am not religious, but I am spiritual”, we can readily identify the converse expression, “I am not spiritual, but I am religious”. These people may be so compulsively committed to their religion that it acts in ways to conceal the extent of their spiritual impoverishment.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN RELIGION?

In July-August 2009, I travelled to Zurich and Geneva, to be part of the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin. I also wanted to re-absorb the meaning of that 17th – 18th century Reformation in which Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and Turretini played such leading parts.

I spent considerable time in the Fraumünster, The Grossmünster and St Peters Kirche in Zurich before proceeding to Geneva. I was intrigued to find that in all of the words those reformers spoke, they repeatedly referred to the need for “a new faith”. They began to study the bible critically to try and reconcile theology with reason. Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1671-1737) asserted the need to accommodate his theology to early scientific discoveries. He said he was prepared to deny the reality of the biblical miracles, and the fundamental doctrines such as the trinity, the divine nature of Christ and predestination in order that theological thinking be in keeping with reason and science. A new faith for them however, meant stripping the churches of all icons and colour. It meant bare walls, austere architecture, and pews crammed into a building that allowed little freedom of movement.

As you walk through their churches you can feel the bleakness that pervaded the Reformation times.

In recent years, the Fraumünster commissioned Marc Chagall to reposition the rich colours of exquisite stained glass in this magnificent church. (It needs to be said that those windows in the Fraumünster became the provocation and inspiration of our Bicentennial 1988 windows of “Streams of Consciousness” in St Michael’s.)

Although the reformers spoke of a new faith, it took something like 250 years before some colour was seen to be an important part of faith and its reawakening in that place.

Jesus of Nazareth used colourful and meaningful stories to provoke the need of a new faith that would enhance the human spirit and bring hope and health to human bodies and minds. So I use a story to give a descriptive quality to the New Faith we need in our time:

A 60 year old man had met with me several times in psychological therapy. One day we were unravelling a very complex concern of his, when he interrupted himself and said, "I came and sat in your congregation last Sunday morning". I was astonished. He had no involvement in anything religious over the course of his lifetime. He was a man who had been closely associated with the God of Mammon since he was twenty years of age and his god had been excessive in generosity. But he had many other life worries.

He said his visit to church that Sunday morning opened up a totally new experience. He said: "I watched what you were doing, and I became aware of how absorbed and engaged people around me were. To my surprise I found tears coming to my eyes - altogether it was like a taste of a different way of being".

He was not talking about a list of beliefs, any more than Jesus was when he said, "your faith will cure you". He was witnessing a drama that seemed to speak to where he was, and I think, to where he would like to be with a different way of being. Faith is necessarily inductive – explicitly starting with the human situation.

Karen Armstrong (1999) in her book, "A History Of God", (on the last page), wrote –

"If we are to create a vibrant new faith for the 21st century, we should, perhaps, ponder the history of god for some lessons and warnings" (p.468)

DOES IT WORK?

The question I constantly ask is “Does your religion work?” Again Karen Armstrong, “More and more people have found it no longer works for them, and when religious ideas cease to be effective they fade away”.

Many become preoccupied with the beliefs of religion and the defence of their beliefs even when those beliefs have no meaning or relevance, or have become insupportable in the light of the evolution of reason and science, and even the evolution of biblical and textual research. That is why the New Faith, of our advocacy, proposes moving beyond the argument of belief to the dynamics of faith, the great themes of faith, the essential contributions and the gifts that come with a new faith comprehensively understood and applied to life.

We constantly ask, “Does your religion work?”, “How does your religion work?” And for those who dismiss religion in favour of their spirituality, the same questions apply.

We know that if something works, it may not be necessarily right. But if it does not work, it becomes difficult to continue to claim it is right.

If your faith doesn't work, it is no good. If your faith is stuck in your head, as an intellectualisation, the rest of you is missing out. Your 'Faith' must work!

When Jesus said “Your faith has made you well”, he was talking of a faith that works!

He did not get into the head-stuff of asking them to recite a creed, or whether they will stake their lives on their beliefs in the trinity.

He spoke of a working faith.

He showed a working faith.

He lived a working faith.

A working faith–

1. Would provide an attitude and an energy to cope with a life situation;
2. It would give the person a sense of self agency and self efficacy;
3. It would restore the person to a connection with the processes of life and their community;
4. It would re-energise their beliefs in what is possible, their beliefs in the power of a significant presence, and their own beliefs in the God who seems to draw them towards health and a state of wholeness.

Jesus of Nazareth had an effective three years ministry in which he offered people something (that worked). Later the promise of something ‘working’ took on different forms.

Now we live in the age of enhancement. We know that if we feel a sense of enhancement, we will do better work, we will even enhance others.

These days enhancement comes by means of tonics, drugs and health food supplements.

There is widespread recognition of the place of physical enhancements, cognitive, mood, relationships – even moral – enhancements. The pressing question then becomes: What enhancement can religion give to individuals and society in this present era? Perhaps we should “tick the boxes” to the following questions –

Does religion help you to cope better with life’s stresses?

Does religion have a quietening, strengthening, healing effect on your mind?

Does religion provide you with a stronger sense of belonging to a tradition, a ritual, and a group of people?

Does religion open up avenues for you to support good causes and so give expression to your personality?

Does religion lead you to a fuller sense of the meaning of life, and your life in particular?

Does religion give you an energy and a passion for life?

Does religion lead you to a broader or deeper spirituality?

Does religion lift you to the awareness of a higher spiritual place that calls you to be in harmony with it?

Does religion encourage you to develop a greater maturity and a higher spiritual intelligence? (to be discussed later)

Does religion affirm you as a person, strengthen your belief in yourself, and enhance your self-worth and self esteem?

Religion has been caught in its own contradiction.

On the one hand it has promoted the idea of a bigger and better person, of striving to be “perfect”, complete, fully functional and whole.

(The Moffatt translation of Matthew 5.48 reads) –

“You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

On the other hand it stood in strong opposition to many pathways to personal enhancement, and has left people in their suffering rather than provide a mature and scientific access to enhancement and relief.

Society places high emphasis on academic and sporting achievements, opposes enhancing drugs, but has been ambivalent about the enhancing/dangerous effects of alcohol as an enhancement of well-being.

Debate will continue, but one question remains –

Will your religion and spirituality contribute to a greater enhancement?

The New Faith is attempting to articulate the goals and characteristics of religious and spiritual enhancement and the ways by which that enhancement can be more fully accessed for the benefits of individuals and society.

Religion and spirituality must speak clearly to a person’s search for a sense of vitality and worth. It must strongly endorse an experience of being connected to something

that enlarges their sense of belonging and engagement and of growth and a meaningful celebration of life.

For a large population this assertion will be perceived as ridiculous, for religion has become widely associated with the opposite of enhancement– with boredom, lethargy, irrelevance, and disillusionment.

Some will ask what does it mean to say religion ‘works’? Does it cure you? Do you cope better with life’s anxieties? Does it do anything to your relationships? Will it get you a good husband/wife? (Remember, there was a time people went to church to find a life-partner?).

Many hold onto beliefs that don’t work.

They remind me of a childhood experience in rural Australia. There was the belief that if you found a horseshoe in the dust, you should pick it up and throw it back over your left shoulder. That would bring good luck. No one really believed that, but they kept doing it just in case! There are many beliefs in religion that we don’t really believe, but we hang onto them just in case! Thus reason and science go down to the back of the bus, while the front seats are reserved for our preferred fiction.

Back in 1955, the Scottish theologian Ronald Gregor Smith came to Melbourne with his lectures on: “The New Man- Christianity and Man’s Coming of Age”. Many people rejected his proposal and in consequence never did come of age. More than 50 years later – we propose a New Faith. It has been impulsively denounced by a few with irrational uninformed expressions of alarmist condemnation.

All done as if Gregor Smith’s book had never been read, nor all the works of theological research and conversations in these intervening years. The 19th century philosopher Schopenhauer, declared -

“All truth passes through three stages – First it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident.”

Mahatma Gandhi put it into four steps –

“First they laugh at you
Then they ignore you,
Then they fight you
Then you win”.

Some asserted years ago there is a “Crisis of Organized Religion” (Becker 1973). Apart from what is happening in religion, people in the wider community are not going to church. A raft of reasons could be given for why this is so and some will counter the assertion by referring to the large numbers being attracted to the transitory and flabby appeal of a totalitarian fundamentalism.

The observable reality is that people have left (are leaving) the mainline churches. People frequently say religion does not work in the areas of acute and prolonged human need. Furthermore, the central biblical promise that Jesus would save the world has not been fulfilled, and in face of all other religions of the world, it never will be fulfilled.

If we pause to be honest about Jesus, we have to admit we know very little about him and there is a wide disputation about what he actually said. Essentially we recognize he stood for something and was pointing to something.

I see he was pointing to “the new man”, “the new woman”, the new being and a new humanity. That involved some healing of the old and a constant shaping of the new, some way to leave the past, some way to discover a different future, moving from the realities of the known to the anxieties of the unknown.

I see the parables of Jesus as a story-telling drama, demonstrating the importance of the spoken word, the authentic presence, the liberation of optimism and hope. And the energy, the psychological mobilising of faith in the self, in the other, in the therapeutic healing processes, in the future, in life and God.

Is religion any good? People have different ways of responding to such a question. Many years ago, when I was barely into my adulthood, my mother died. On the Sunday immediately after her death, I chose not to go to my own (Presbyterian) church. I knew it had nothing to say to me. Instead I went to a high-church Anglican Service.

The sermon was tolerably irrelevant. But the symbolism of the service itself led me to an unforgettable experience of something beyond words – a God beyond all the God talk I had heard.

I experienced a 'presence'. Was it a God presence, a spiritual presence, a healing (it did not heal) transcending comforting presence?

In spite of the many defects in the institutional church, here it was the significant carrier of a valued enabling experience.

Some people would quickly reject the notion of a 'Presence'. It was an inner state of acceptance and serenity. Whatever it was then, I know it touched my desolation and said it was time to embrace a new faith to give shape to the future.

That is what I experienced then, and that is what I have tried to bring to people in the years since that Sunday that I have remembered with gratitude.

At another point in my early university life, I was doing my internship at a large mental hospital. In the chaos of each morning I was there, I accompanied the superintendent psychiatrist on his rounds. His presence had a profound influence on every patient. He asked his questions, carried out the fairly superficial psychiatric examination, turned to me and described the diagnosis and the treatment he would propose. All this was done with a quiet controlling presence that affected the most withdrawn patient through to the wild and tempestuous disturbance. He did not speak of his faith. He did not need to, it was evident in his presence.

The words of Karen Armstrong (1999) are again highly liberating –

“There is not one unchanging idea contained in the word ‘God’ but the word contains a whole spectrum of meanings, some of which are contradictory or even mutually exclusive. Had the notion of god not had this flexibility, it would not have survived to become one of the great human ideas.”

If we look at our three religions, it becomes clear that there is no objective view of ‘God’: “each generation has to create the image of God *that works for them*”. (p5).

WHAT TO BELIEVE

People understandably ask me: “With this New Faith, what do you really believe?” I shall start to answer by referring to Jesus of Nazareth. The story dramatically began with his presence. John the Baptist speaking to his followers, turned around and pointing to Jesus, he said, “Here he comes!”

1. I believe in the good presence in special people, in each one, in the healing encounter, in life, as described so well by Martin Buber.
2. I believe in the energy of faith. Without it our body falters, our mind is cluttered to overload, and our spirit is impoverished and without passion.
3. I believe in the healing of wounds. I believe in a new faith that carries us from what is past to a new meaning to the future. We assert that a workable faith is found in the psychological understanding of the process of therapy as well as the dynamics of faith. Similarly therapy in the 21st century is unrealistic and superficial if it does not embrace religion and spirituality and the process whereby people develop out of primitive religion and a fragmented or superficial spirituality to a mature expansive religion as the highest possible spiritual intelligence.
4. I believe in the heritage of the generations in their search for liberation in its many forms and in their affirmation of human possibilities and each person’s dignity and potential.
5. I believe that the pursuit and manifestation of a good spirit in world affairs, in human relationships and in all personal reflections and endeavour, is vital for the survival of humanity, for peace between people, and for the health and happiness of each individual.

6. I believe the writings of the bible reflect the searchings of many for the meaning of life and have brought to the passing centuries a body of wisdom, inspiration and courage. It also contains some large sections which are intolerably cruel, genocidal in the name of their god, and injunctions and stories which, if taken at their face value, are unacceptable in law or morality in our time.
7. I believe that Jesus of Nazareth pointed to a new awareness of spiritual health and growth.
8. I believe that human beings can look beyond their particular experiences in life to a higher spirituality and that all humanity is enhanced as a strong harmony with that higher spirituality is sought and achieved.
9. I believe that people of faith and spiritual awareness can become a supportive community that focuses on the care of people, the concerns about the planet and the process that sustains health and survival as preferred to the destruction, the indifference and the despair that can dominate human thought and behaviour.
10. I believe that each person can experience their worth, their acceptance, their potential, and a capacity to become a positive part of life and the human community.
11. I believe in prayer as a way of bringing quietness to the human spirit, and a way of searching for a meaningful harmony with the best life.
12. I believe prayer can be an expression of hope that in the anguish and anxieties of human existence, there is an energy of faith that gives us the wisdom and courage to endure and transcend the anguish and anxiety.

13. I believe that through all religions and beyond them, there is a deep yearning in the human spirit to be carriers of the best courage, wisdom and inspiration for the wellbeing of humanity.
14. I believe there are people of goodwill, intelligence, and skill who will persist in finding ways to translate their best beliefs into a practical faith for the health and enhancement of individuals and the evolution and survival of humanity.

These 14 beliefs are a vital engagement with the challenge of that question –
Is your religion any good?

The New Faith is attempting to articulate the goals and characteristics of spiritual enhancement and the ways by which that enhancement can be more fully accessed for the benefits of individuals and society.

A NEW REFORMATION

We are in the mood for a new reformation – different from the first reformation –

- ◆ Beliefs have undergone a vast evolution and resolution.
- ◆ Creeds formulated to suit earlier understandings and conceptualisations are not relevant or acceptable when placed alongside 21st century knowledge and maturity.
- ◆ Churches have lost the appeal they once had and the promises that they offer to an uneducated and receptive public are no longer seen to be valid. (e.g if you believe ‘enough’ you will be cured of your chronic illness; if you avoid the ‘sins of the world’, good things will come your way; if you are good, there will be a place for you ‘in heaven’ We cannot overlook that many people who have demonstrated their corruption and deadness of spirit also believe they have a place in their fantasy of heaven).
- ◆ There has been a major shift in the dynamics of faith to a fuller exegesis of what an inductive, inclusive, inspirational religion may mean.
- ◆ Conversations with science, psychology and psychoanalysis, archaeology and biology have given a different knowledge and understanding of humanity and its place in evolution and history.

A new reformation will recognize the errors of the church and religion in the past and will formulate new ways whereby church and religion will contribute to the health and well-being of humanity in the future.

A new reformation will look for a more intelligible religion, a more intelligent spirituality that not only places the human being and the human community in the constant search for the meaning and mystery of life, but honours the sensibilities and evolving strengths of each human being.

A new reformation searches for a new moral compass and an exploration of ethics appropriate to a technological, post capitalist, multicultural, multi- faith society.

A MORAL COMPASS

In several areas of ethics and morality the churches have taken up positions of authority, imposing a moral imperative that closes all conversation.

The New Faith asserts the need for sustained conversations that acknowledge the realities of societies and people undergoing change, and that encourage and affirm each adult's right to make important decisions on their own life.

The New Faith is inductive rather than impositional.

The new faith advocates a different management of moral and ethical questions. Instead of beginning with a set position traditionally imposed on a given situation, the New Faith first examines the particular situation and then asks to be involved in conversations with all disciplines concerned.

The goal is to determine what is of the importance in this situation and what is of the longer-term and ultimate importance. No one can be sure of what will be of ultimate importance and that is why conversations with history, philosophy, theology and the relevant sciences and disciplines are necessary.

It calls for increasing levels of education, maturity and openness, since most people will go along with the "conversations" always adhering to their pre-established "position".

In this, we now realize that morality does not need religion to be its guide.

The churches have had great difficulty with the concept of love, and making it work in human relations. One of religion's strongest energies is hate.

Tallis (2008) wrote –

“What is still living about religion, alas, is the individual and collective self-hatred that seems to energise its most passionate adherents”. (p119.)

The self-hatred is seen all too clearly in the attributions of inferiority, low self-esteem and sinfulness, whereas the hatred of others is seen in the interpersonal resentment and hostility, recriminations, intolerance of rational conversation, mystification and dehumanisation.

In proclaiming that God made the human being “in his image”, the churches have settled into a complacent view of the way we all fall short, instead of advocating the pathways to our fullest humanity. We need to say ‘goodbye’ to the negative ‘God’ of the past, and say ‘hello’ to a positive New Faith for today.

The churches are considerably occupied with issues of –

- ◆ Same sex marriage
- ◆ Homosexuals’ place in the church
- ◆ Sexuality within and outside marriage
- ◆ Its historic duplicity on masturbation
- ◆ Celibate ministries
- ◆ Abortion, birth control, contraception
- ◆ Size of families in the context of financial resources, a mother’s health and mothering capacity, educational resources.

The churches have shown a confusion on issues such as stem cell research and its benefits; palliative care, pain control, and end of life issues;

The churches have been slow to identify domestic violence, discrimination and violence against women, and the abuse of children.

The New Faith emphasises an open attitude along with vital engagement with what it means to go with the flow of life, and flourish. We have been given the parable of the mustard seed as an example of this realistic possibility.

WHAT IS WRONG?

Many ask, “you assert the need for a new reformation: what is wrong with Christian religion as it is presently expressed?”

1. It is wrong in its answers to questions no one is asking; in imposing teachings and dogma that people have outgrown, or that they recognize as not in keeping with an inclusive, tolerant, generosity.
2. It is wrong in its several discriminations against people of difference, and in particular against women, and in its continuing passivity towards violence and injustice.
3. It is wrong in asserting the indissolubility of marriage relationships that are burnt-out, or are violent and destructive.
4. It is wrong in continually supporting a patriarchal, authoritarian male dominated church institution.
5. It is wrong on many aspects of its sexual morality and behaviour and its refusal to forfeit its self attributed authority in all matters sexual.
6. It is wrong in declaring support for “eternal truths”, when truth is ever-evolving, ever in a state of discovery.
7. It is wrong in its repeated repression of scientific discovery and scientific progress.
8. It is wrong in its failure to recognise the changes in the religious and spiritual landscape.

Frame (2009) wrote –

“...Australians individually and together are losing their commitment to formalised religion and (that) the kind of people Australians have been and society they have built will be remarkably different in the future” (p104)

9. It is wrong in that it has not recognised the need to restructure the sacraments of the church in ways and words that are more meaningful to people and more expressive of the dynamics and themes of the faith, instead of reciting scriptural passages that are without adequate foundation or are offensive when understood as eternal truths.

10. It is wrong in “the self-hatred that seems to energise its most passionate adherents” (Tallis, 2008) and the hatred and abuse it generates towards people of difference and those it deems inferior.

SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN GROWTH

Rabbi Michael Lerner (2000) wrote –

“Tens of millions of people are already involved in some form of spiritual practice”
(p1)

“Many people have turned to the realm of spirit to try to make sense of the pain and suffering they’ve experienced. Others have sensed there is something deeply missing in their lives....Still others turn to Spirit because they are overwhelmed by a sense of awe and wonder at the glory of the universe” (p3)

Lerner sets out 16 tenets of an emancipating (liberating) spirituality. He says it “encourages the spiritual evolution of the human race toward higher forms of knowing, loving, sharing, rejoicing” (p.173)

I suggest this evolution will require a constant affirmation of a higher intelligence. It is different from the intelligence we recognize and measure in regard to adaptability to society, the development of certain capacities for an adequate life-fit, and the measurement of those attributes needed for the skills that many tasks require.

Rego et al (2008) saw that effective leaders at work and in the community “implement practices and nurture and respect spiritual needs and when they do not, unhealthy consequences are likely to follow for individuals, organizations and society”. They suggest five dimensions of work- place spirituality –

- (a) The team’s sense of community,
- (b) Alignment with organizational values,
- (c) A sense of contribution to society,
- (d) Enjoyment at work,
- (e) Opportunities for inner life. (p172.)

Each of these requires a definitional review to ensure that some overall humanitarian values inform the expression of each item in (a-e).

There is a great deal of generalised referencing to spirituality - but what does it mean? What is spiritual growth? And what of spiritual intelligence?

There are many descriptions given of spirituality.

I propose a spirituality that moves away from the language of transcendence of our psychical state, of mysticism and the numerous esoteric individual and group sanctification experiences. Spirituality may embrace meditation and mindfulness exercises, but both of these may not include spirituality or a description of spirituality.

I particularly want to place my view of a higher spiritual intelligence in a different zone from the mystics, the fundamentalist pietists and those who see themselves engaged in an “other-worldly” experience.

The higher spiritual intelligence is seen in a vital engagement with people in the pursuit of their maturity, growth, and enhancement, and in their work to enhance community belonging and positive relationships across difference and prejudice.

This spiritual intelligence is a development of generosity and compassion, emotional well-being and constructive social functioning all diverted towards a shared and constantly enhanced quality of life.

Parents with their newborn infant might pause to wonder what kind of spirit this child brings to the world (peaceful, irritable, restless, responsive), what influences will help him/her develop a generous friendly spirit and what experiences will give cause for his/her hostility and resentment.

Often parents are so engaged with numerous demands they slide over the need of the child for appreciation – for what William James called that deepest principle of human nature.

Spiritual growth will embrace the various layers of human appreciation. Many hymns of praise use words that militate against our common experience and intelligence, and we do not recognize their theme of appreciation.

Appreciation is the response to the gifts of life and of our common belonging and awareness of the dignity and rights of all human beings, for the life of all creatures that share the planet with us.

Spiritual growth and intelligence recognizes the consequences and the ultimate futility of the negation of violence. The intelligence involves learning the laws of violence (Ellul, 1970) and teaching the intelligence of non-violence for a better survival.

We cannot pretend we are highly developed spiritual beings while we continue to despoil the planet and destroy the great architectural sites of the world as well as the homes of millions of people.

Human beings are constantly up against one of their chief enemies – anxiety and worry within, and fear and terror from without. To protect ourselves we employ powerful but vulnerable personal inner defences as well as the seductive power of external military might.

But anxiety, worry, fear and terror are often diffusely uncontrolled, misunderstood, mismanaged and extremely costly. They do not yield to the preacher's promise or to the politician's proposals. In our evolution we have not been able to control these destructive forces.

We might speak of the spirit of tolerance and peace, the spirit of a quiet mind, and yet they continue to evade us, or we cannot/do not make them workable realities for us, even though our health and well-being depend on them.

We have developed the habit of worry, the behaviour of intolerance and the hostility. We might write text books on metanoia, but we do not believe, nor do we practise, the necessity of change, the process of therapy, or the evolution of humane communities.

LIBERATION

Religion from its origins has advocated and stood for a comprehensive liberation from our primitive fears, our frightening neuroses, our threatening enemies. But one of the laws of liberation is to study what we wish to be liberated from.

Throwing words of liberation and freedom around may create some awareness, but we need to start with the inductive conversation of a workable spiritual intelligence.

We are well- experienced with the compulsive power of anxiety and fear, worry and terror. We maybe convinced that no form of spirituality is relevant to these ubiquitous experiences. What part can anything 'spiritual' play when we are faced with these tyrannies?

Since World War 2, our several generations have been absorbed in a strenuous pursuit of wealth and the manifesto of an angry and greedy capitalism. We have much good to show for it – all aspects of life have been touched by the capitalist ethic and practice. Not all of it has been angry and greedy. Much of it has been socialistically concerned in providing education, schools, transport, health services, and bigger and better homes and housing, more scope for leisure and greater freedom from the harsh demands of manual labour.

We have also seen the growth of a humanitarian and compassionate capitalism from which people world-over have benefitted. But the human spirit has remained irrelevant and unstudied. Unless we can show that a spiritual intelligence is important, then of course, we should let it disappear from our discourse.

We see clearly that despite many positive signs of collaboration and caring, most people know that people – sooner or later, perhaps ultimately – will go after their own interests and to hell with other people.

Most people know how relationships are always vulnerable to the demand of usage – “Are you of any use to me?”, “You are treating me like a bag of garbage – so I will return the favour with a bit of interest”.

Thus we find ourselves living in a world of deprivation. Not deprivation of the world's goods or even power, but deprivation of authentic "I – Thou" relationships, of basic or celebrated joy, of a sense of a higher purpose.

INTELLIGENCE

We are all born with intelligence to “grasp and shape” (Tillich,1951) our human experience. As we grow, we discover we have an attitude, a certain intelligence, to play hard manual sports, complex classical music, or to cope with conflicting social challenges.

We see people with high social intelligence, work intelligence, ageing intelligence. We adopt intelligent behaviours, and demonstrate different levels of intelligence for various mental pursuits. But what of spiritual intelligence?

HIGHER SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

We know some people have a low level of simple spiritual awareness. Can there be a higher spirituality when little or nothing is taught to children or adults?

In the first book I wrote in 1965, I attempted to layout some basic themes of existential analysis and psychotherapy. I designated five critical themes which can be transposed into a spiritual intelligence:

1. The capacity and practice of being fully present to another person in a genuine encounter.
2. The capacity for an authentic relationship and its challenges of a considered self disclosure.
3. The experience of closeness and distance, of a secure individualisation and a comfortable participating involvement with others.
4. The experience of a vital confirmation of one and the other.
5. An existential focus to enhance the meaning and motivation of a person's existence.

Everyone has a spirituality that discloses the values they hold, the way they speak of, and relate to other people, the depth of their wisdom in adapting to the tasks and frustrations of life and the ways they integrate the past and the present (history, memory and current experience) into a positive philosophy of life and way of being in the present.

This spirituality involves beliefs about the self, life's meanings and life's despairs, the Gods of others and the faith we hold in ourselves and others and in the possibilities of the future.

Spirituality like religiosity was once the subject of scoff and sneers in the therapeutic health professions, but it is now increasingly recognized as being deeply intertwined with everyday attitudes, health and well-being.

Wheeler (1999) an American psychoanalyst recalled a significant moment of his childhood when his mother drew him to her and wrapped her coat around him, thus conveying to him that he was held and accepted, and he wrote –

“The meaning of life is in that coat, it is the home to which we belonged as a child. If you’re lucky, you never lose it, it simply evolves, smoothly and continuously, into that larger, more abstract home of religion, or perhaps in a secular vein, into clan or community or ideology”. (We might add: our own spirituality) (p.247-248)

Many do not experience that belonging and enhancement.

For some, depth psychotherapy provides a way of exploring the possibilities that life continues to open to them that there are many pathways.

In a recent visit to Tokyo, I stood at my hotel window 35 storeys up, and looked down at the intricate network of roads common in Tokyo.

In some places traffic lanes ran in three or four layers, one above the other, and the roadways rise and fall, turn to left and right. They are not all going to the same place, but they open up the variety of pathways to the many desired destinations.

In psychoanalysis we speak of a transformation of negative energy into positive energy, of psychic emptiness into an enhanced life where personal enhancement spreads to an interpersonal and a contextual enhancement. This will depend on a sensibility of the human spirit and its liberation from its largely undeveloped state.

Not everybody has an interest in their spiritual development or the spiritual values of the nation. As with the Tokyo road layers, so with religion and spirituality, people will take different roadways.

In this wide human pursuit, we see that people develop differently, but their spirituality is grounded in our universal humanity, and though institutions may proscribe and impose their requirements, ultimately our spirituality is manifested in countless pathways, giving rise to a richness of all humanity.

Many do have this interest. These people do want to work towards higher human and spiritual ideals. They may be motivated by religious beliefs or by enlightened self-interest.

Our highest spiritual intelligence might be described in six ways –

1. There is an inborn spiritual quest in each person to explore their best and deepest ways to be a good human being.
2. There is a readiness to listen to the ways the sages and searchers of previous eras have tried to understand life and make the most of it while life is given to them.
3. It is the capacity to bring meaning and wisdom to life's pain and life's possibilities.
4. It dares to deinstitutionalise Jesus of Nazareth from the churches and follow his finger that pointed to the many pathways to a better humanity.
5. It encourages a constant existential readiness to counter the reoccurring encroachments of psychic deadness (Eigen, 1995) or to what I have called soul deadness (Macnab, 2000)
6. Spiritual intelligence courageously confronts the human and individual past, and practises a revitalising engagement with a new faith for the self, the other, the future.

ACTION PROCESS

We are faced with two sources of considerable resistance and demoralisation –
There is a rigidity of the institutional churches and their continuing pledge to defend the old faith, its outdated language and its ineffectiveness in our present society.

There is the lack of responsiveness of a secular society in which people have become so alienated from religion that it is difficult to see ways that will substantially change.

We could leave it there and say, “O well that’s how it is, and that’s how it will always be!”

There are however some remarkable moments of recent times –

- (i) There are increasing numbers of people who are maturing out of fundamentalism and while some leave religion altogether, others, on the basis of new learning, awareness and scholarship, are joining some progressive mainline churches.
- (ii) There is a considerable growth in the progressive Christianity movement.
- (iii) There is the continuing work of the Scholars of the Jesus Seminar who have attracted increasing numbers of theological scholars and preachers.
- (iv) We, at St Michaels have attempted to create a significant repositioning of the church, its religion and an intelligent spirituality in this city. In my presentation to the conference of the Jesus Seminar in California, and in the book “The Historical Jesus Goes To Church”, (2004). I set out some of the things we have done.

In 2008, we decided to be more outwardly oriented with the intention of making more effective contact with our secular city. The response in the media and across the internet has been astonishing and positive beyond any of our expectations.

Several ministers' groups (mostly retired servants of a church that was disillusioning to them) have shown unequivocal support and a desire to be part of future conversations.

Within St Michael's itself, we have a unique structure of a church council of nearly 50 members (larger in size than many congregations) and all showing a firm support for the movement of a resilient church and a New Faith. It is a huge privilege to be part of such a group of people.

From that church council we have over 90 committees and task forces involved in a spread of programs unequalled in any other church in Australia.

After the first New Faith lecture which brought 700 people, we held two Witness Boxes, in which people asked questions regarding The New Faith. About 200 people attended each of these two gatherings. Along with these we have held some five "Ingot" meetings, each one devoted to consideration and conversations of different aspects of the New Faith.

We have also held two major conversations on science and religion, and 50 people contributed essays to our essay competition on, "The Theology of Beauty".

I hope all this is saying something more than keeping alive a rumour that there is a vibrant good spirit in this city.

12 STEPS TO A HIGHER SPIRITUALITY

Twelve step programs have had great appeal for people seeking a different way to cope with life, a different way of being. In America more than 3.5 million people have turned to 12-step programs annually.

Tonigan et al (1999) have written about a 12 step program and how they contribute to spirituality. We can go further and develop a 12-step program for the development of a “higher” spirituality. The more spiritual values are internalized, the higher the probability that such values will find practical outward expression. Our quest is for a spirituality that deepens our inner awareness and experience, and that has practical working value (“it works”) in our outer behaviour and interactions in daily life.

12 STEPS

1. Faced with the transitions and tragedy of existence we set out to recover and sustain a new sense of balance in our inner life.
2. We set out to rediscover what I have called a listening wisdom.
3. We set out to stem the drainage of human care, of human decency and dignity, of human courtesy and commonality.
4. We set out to discover those factors that enhance happiness, well-being and a flourishing existence.
5. We set out to acknowledge the allies of the human spirit and a higher spirituality.
6. We set out to create networks of people pledged to create and sustain a world of open heartedness, genuine dialogue and the affirmations that foster a better humanity.
7. We set out to sustain a sense of planetary survival and the protection of the vital ecology of life.
8. We set out to strengthen the understanding and commonality of all religions devoted to spiritual awareness and growth.

9. We set out to recover a sense of awe and wisdom in more than one zone of human existence.
10. We set out to study the meaning of spiritual growth and liberation.
11. We set out to find meaningful ways to affirm and celebrate others' spiritual growth and liberation.
12. We set out to translate that spiritual growth into a flourishing existence: a taste of a different way of being.

I have a rational scepticism about 'Man made in the image of God'. I believe that the God that (who) has evolved over the centuries is a God made in the "image of man", I nevertheless honour the words of Rabbi Michael Lerner (2003)

"It is the God energy within us.... that is constantly pulling us towards transcendence of our own constitutional ways of being and understanding reality. We move toward our newer conceptions of God, because we are pulled that way by God".

In the context of Lerner's 'emancipating spirituality' expanded in his book "Spirit Matters" (2000) we are searching for a new richness to our inner lives- a richness that will change our management of our existence and our way of relating to others. Whether we call this the "way of God" or the energy and exuberance of life (Cupitt, 2003), it may not matter to most of us.

It will be demonstrated in a 'new human force'.

Keiko Takahashi (2001) concludes her book of that name by saying –

"The new life thus struggles with the old life until it breaks through (our) inertia, appearing as 'the new human force'." (p.122)

"We are called upon by our times and the world to change ourselves from within to truly meet this challenge of retrieving 'the human force' again" (pxv.)

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