

Cosmic Consciousness
we are all one
St Mary's Matters

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Catholic Community
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Cosmic Consciousness

However we interpret this topic, one thing is clear. We need to take responsibility for the bit of the cosmos that lies at our door.

We take care of each other, we rail against the injustices we see being perpetrated in our name, and we have respect for the planet on which we live.

As a community and as individuals we can move towards a sense of interdependence and connection with all about us.

We are lucky to have such a long standing relationship with Micah. This helps us to pursue our goals of justice and peace. And the work we share with this body of people reminds us to keep living by the words of its eponymous prophet:

Live justly

Love tenderly

Walk justly.

Clearly this topic resonated with the creative minds in the community as a number of excellent poems were submitted. These included one titled 'Creative Presence', the author of which I cannot remember. If s/he lets me know I will acknowledge it in the next edition.

Our opening story is an extract from a Christian Brothers' publication and sets the tone exactly for this topic.

If you enjoy the content of this issue or if you disagree with what you read, do please write to the editor. We are happy to publish your letter in the next edition.

The Editor

The Ferment of Becoming

Look around and see what is happening to our world. Ferment is everywhere. The human is in trouble, the animals are in trouble, the earth is in trouble. The rhetorical question is always 'What is going on'. There is no single answer to this question. It depends on what your world view, your cosmology is.

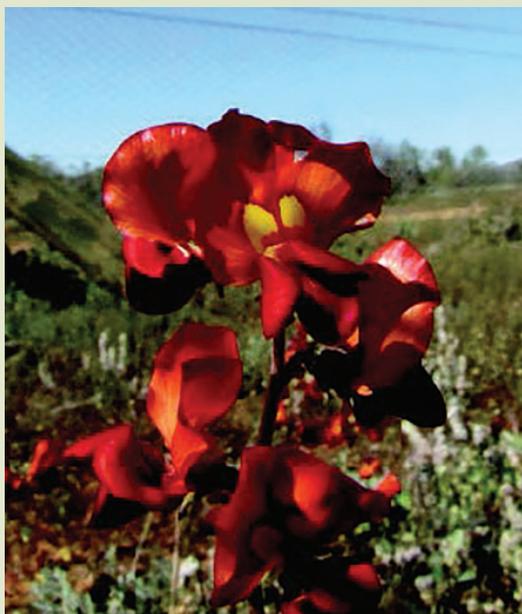
Why do humans have restless hearts? To borrow the language of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin we could say that it was a sign of the universe in a 'ferment of becoming.' It seems that the Universe has been 'becoming' for the past 13.7 billion years, and has now reached the 'restless heart' stage. Everything serves a purpose in an intimately connected universe. Everything has a role in the continuously self-organising epic in which we participate. If we want to know our role in this epic, I think we have to ask our hearts this question but not expect an answer in grammatical English.

The scripting of the Universe Story is not set in concrete, except for the guarantee that what we have done in the past and what we do in the present constrains what we may do in the future. The hidden and mysterious agency that fuels our universe and that none of us knows precisely, manifests as an innate creativity and spontaneity present in our planet, that has brought us through several extinction processes to where we are on our beautiful blue-green paradise, and that has gifted us from the time when we were all stardust, engaged then in its own 'ferment of becoming.' There are two quotes that might be apposite here. One is from Teilhard de Chardin: '...everything is the sum of the past' and '...nothing is comprehensible except through its history.' and the one is

In one sense our bodies/minds carry the traces and results of the moment of the great flaring forth, the formation of stars and galaxies from the primordial interstellar dust, the cosmogenesis of elements in the heart of supernovas, the formation of Earth and the evolution of life. We are carrying the whole history of the past right here in the present. We are dazzled by its beauty and integrity. After millenia of meditation on our world, science, culture, philosophy and religion have brought this story ever so more

present to us in almost every aspect of its beauty and poignancy. The ferment of becoming continues as an epic story still striving for fulfilment.

The other quote is from process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead: 'You can only interpret the past in terms of the present. The present is all that you have.' (Body and Spirit - Lecture 3) This is taken to mean, as Whitehead explains, that as you are faced with interpreting the past it can only be dealt with satisfactorily if you bring to it your own contemporary metaphysical viewpoint.



If you bring to it the same mindset in which it was established, then do not expect progress. Do not expect transformation. Einstein and Thomas Berry remind us that the problems of the present cannot be solved by the same mindset that created them.

The American Indian tradition gives us an insight into the emergence of the human in the story of cosmogenesis.

This tradition is extremely cosmological. Their clothes, tents and ceremonies expressed an attachment to the world that is rarely matched. Their place in the scheme of things is expressed very poignantly in song: *We make a road for the Spirit to pass over.* (Passamaquaddy traditional song) The insight here is to give us a lead as to the role of the human in the progressive manifestation of Spirit, what Teilhard de Chardin named as

'divinization.'

Brian Swimme, speaking about Teilhard de Chardin, in an interview entitled *The Divinization of the Cosmos* explains: God is present from the very beginning, but in an implicit form, and the universe is accomplishing this great work of making divinity explicit.

The Passamaquaddy people see themselves as participating in this work in a unique way. I think this is also 'The Great Work' of Thomas Berry. In this book Thomas is offering us a cosmology to help us define ourselves in this 21st Century.

Back in 1926 Teilhard de Chardin in the final paragraphs of his celebrated *The Divine Milieu* wrote about this creative ferment:

Jerusalem, lift up your head. Look at the immense crowds of those who build and those who seek. All over the world, men are toiling- in laboratories, in studios, in deserts, in factories, in the vast social crucible. The ferment that is taking place by their instrumentality in art and science and thought is happening for your sake. Open, then, your arms and your heart, like Christ your Lord, and welcome the waters, the flood and the sap of humanity.

This last page is well worth a read for those unfamiliar with his work. He wrote this at a time when the notion of the earth community was not yet well accepted in the West, and his work comes across as being somewhat human-centred.

Thomas Berry's contribution to the thinking of Teilhard with which he was very familiar, is to offer us a deeper connection to the more than human world and link it more closely to our consciousness of the sacred.

Trevor Parton (@RubidaTrevor)

Photo: Hop Pea (Flinders Ranges from the Newsletter of the Centre for Ecology and Spirituality)

Myth of Separateness: and how it keeps us blind to the oneness of life

In June 2015 a group of concerned people gathered in the foyer of Parliament House. Using the name 'Love makes a Way', they began to sing a song 'Where were You?' It was a peaceful protest in response to the treatment of asylum seekers in the country. You could not get a more obvious example of how separateness is used to justify the treatment of these people.

Our government actively and deliberately dehumanises them. They restrict information. They want us to see them as the enemy – as separate from us. From separateness comes fear and from fear we manifest bigotry, racism, hatred and violence. We become blind to the oneness of life.

The word 'God' has been tainted since mankind began to create the current main stream image of the divine. When I use the word 'God' in this article, I do not mean a bearded man sitting on a cloud issuing judgments and interfering with the world. When I use the word 'God' I mean the unknowable essence of our lives. Spong described it as the 'Ground of our Being'. 'God' is for me the indescribable force of love, of oneness with all life both past and present.

I sat with my wife Trish in November 2012 when the doctor told her breast cancer had spread to her liver and it was now inoperable. Chemo was her only option now, no cure is expected but there was hope for keeping this disease at bay for a considerable period of time. That was three years ago and she is still going strong in spite of enduring almost five years of toxic chemo drugs.

The only time I saw her show any emotion was when we walked out of the hospital. She said through the tears, 'I am going to fight this thing'.

The next day we met with our spiritual mentor Dr Phil Harker a Psychologist and good friend since the late 80's.

Phil kept saying a few things back to Trish:

'You are not a body.'

'Christ is all and in all.'

'The Christ is in you. You cannot die.'

'You cannot fight what is not real.'

'There is nothing to fear.'

'Your body is simply an illusion.'

To this day it was probably the most happy, peaceful and calming ninety minutes I have experienced in my life and I saw something in Trish fundamentally change that day. As you all know, her happy disposition and attitude are quite remarkable and remain ever since.

It wasn't about fighting cancer. It was accepting it as it is, walking with it and knowing that her real self cannot die.

From this encounter the real message of the resurrection became clear. Whilst the fundamentalist mantra is almost entirely focused on Jesus (the man), the real message and deeper understanding of the resurrection was 'The Christos, The Christ (The Spirit)'.

Jesus was the man. The Jesus of the Gospel clearly understood that he was not 'a body' and that his life was not who he was. He was the Christ. In Ephesians 4;6, the scripture says 'God is all and in all'.

Dr Phil saw the 'Christos' in Trish. He saw that she didn't need to 'fight anything'. Nothing was attacking her, the real self. Her body is irrelevant. The Christ is in her and in all.

Journey forward almost three years since Trish's diagnosis. She continues along the same path with a sense of calm and resolve. She is not fighting cancer. She is accepting of it, and continues to journey along with it.

I am not sure I can say the same about myself. Much angst comes from attachment. My own struggle with letting go of the things that do not matter has been difficult. I find myself often seeking attachment to the separate self, the separate Trish and the separate things like our home and possessions. I must say that this community and my involvement



David with his wife Trish and daughter Sophia at Richmond, Tasmania. One of David's favourite places.

in the music liturgy here has been a vital part in lifting me up when I felt overwhelmed. Many in this community have been incredibly supportive of us over the past few years. But the ego is powerful and will always try and keep us in a state of separateness.

When we see God as a separate entity we have already lost the battle over the ego and the illusion of separateness. When we petition God for 'things' as we have been brought up to do, then it is doomed to failure.

Separateness is evident when religion tells us we are broken and need to be fixed.

Separateness is evident when religion tells us we are lost and need to be found.

Separateness is evident when religion tells us we are unworthy and need to be saved.

Separateness is evident when religion tells us we are righteousness and it is all others that need our brand of faith.

Prayer has often become a dumbed down process of grovelling before an angry and vengeful God figure, seeking the removal or fixing of the very things this phony concept gave us in the first place. This is not prayer. This is religious nonsense.

The Catholic Church is clearly struggling to return to its gnostic roots. The current Pope is meeting strong resistance on all fronts by fearful men deluded by

separateness. I doubt he will succeed in bringing about any true reforms and the church may ultimately decline. The empty promises of separateness are now being laid bare to all. I believe that nothing the church can do will save its fate. Ironically I believe the only way to save the church is to let it die. No longer bound by dogma and fear, the church in a different form may manifest.

So what is Prayer, as I believe there is an alternative?

Prayer is a call to mindfulness.

Prayer is opening your mind to stillness.

Prayer is seeing the Christ in all.

Prayer is not seeking answers but is just being content to stay with the question.

Prayer allows one to see the illusion of separateness empowering action of kindness, compassion and empathy.

Prayer opens the door to oneness.

When one does not see separateness then one cannot possibly treat a refugee, a prisoner, a drug addict without compassion. One cannot see a person without seeing oneself.

We wonder why the world is such a violent brutal place, seemingly devoid of love and compassion. Mankind, it appears, has not learned much over the past 2 millennia. The world is broken. The myth of Separateness keeps us blind to the oneness of life. The terrorists who carried out the Paris attacks bear witness to the futility of separateness. Seeing themselves as messengers of a clearly impotent god, they sought to create as much horror and fear as possible.



Baby with a peace symbol is held by a Muslim mother.

A young South African tourist caught up in the midst of the Paris attacks wrote of her ordeal. At first she described the terror. Yet as she wrote her graphic account it became clear that this was a story of hope. In the midst of her despair and sheer terror she felt a sense of gratitude and peace with recalling the memories of those whom she loved. Those who helped her. Those who she saw die.

I can't help but align this revelation with the mystical message of the resurrection. Love can conquer fear. Love can conquer hate. Love can conquer separateness. Jesus is a symbol of the separate body, broken and vulnerable. Yet the true essence of the Christian story is not about a dead body rising but about the revelation of the real self. If we are truly walking in this path with authenticity we surely cannot join the chorus of those seeking retribution. Justice yes. But retribution will simply lead to reciprocity of violence.

Separateness, which pits human against human, each seeing each other as the problem, separate from one's self is a powerful force which it appears mankind cannot escape.

I recall the powerful gospel message of Jesus' last words on the cross, 'Forgive them Father; they know not what they do'. How relevant this still is today. The Jesus figure, brutally bashed, tortured and mocked refused to give in to anger and violence spawned by separateness.

He saw his attackers not as separate, but as part of the one human consciousness.

Imagine what goes through the minds of Muslims across the world, especially those living in Western countries, every time these attacks are perpetrated in their name. We do not seek to blame all Christians for actions of those that bomb abortion clinics, yet everyday Muslims appear to have to justify and re-justify their innocence.

Religions have survived this long by embracing and institutionalising separateness. Only through

fundamental change in dogma could some semblance of peace emerge.

Perhaps the best response I can find came from none other than the Dalai Lama.

'We cannot solve this problem only through prayer. I am a Buddhist and I believe in praying. But humans have created this problem, and now we want our God to solve it. It is illogical. God would say, solve it yourself because you created it in the first place.'

So how do we all move forward in a world that is clearly broken?

We need to understand that hysterical fundamentalism is not the way into the future; it is the last gasp of the past. We must be vocal in actively opposing all forms of bigotry and hatred. This community in particular has been consistently at the forefront of standing with the marginalised. There is even more need for this community to continue to be a light and a beacon of hope.

We recognise that we are all one humanity and that the illusion of separateness is keeping us blind, fearful and violent. We can immerse ourselves in prayer. Not the prayer of piety. Not the prayer of exclusion. But a prayerfulness that brings us closer to ourselves, opens our minds and guides us to gentle action.

Today let us ask ourselves how we can make a difference and how we can foster peace.

Bishop Jack Spong said: 'The spiritual task today is to seek oneness with God, not magical intervention by God.'

David Cantwell

*Live for today.
Always see the
blessings*

Ted and Louise

Cosmic Unconsciousness: a Grandfather's Musings

When a little baby smiles at you it is because it can see the fairies, according to Celtic folklore, whereas our earthbound eyes are blind to reality. There may be something in this, I truly suspect, after many wonderful hours over the past weeks spent with our latest grandchildren, Oliver and Evelyn. We all come from stardust, the wisest scientists say. We were ritually reminded every Ash Wednesday that we were dust and would one day return to dust. Perhaps they meant stardust but were too frightened of the Inquisition and all that. The innocent minds of babies have not yet been diluted by 'reality', so called, and seem to have gifts we have lost, and not just the ability to see fairies.

Wordsworth in his Ode to Intimations of Mortality suggests that, 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting'.

Then later adds, 'but trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home'.

These little ones, just wakened from their cosmic sleep, encourage reflections about the eternal questions of life and death. They can also teach us so much about

trust and innocence, the evangelical requirements to enter the kingdom of heaven. They have a beautiful poverty of spirit which allows them to admit their need of a cuddle or a pat or simply a gentle voice to help them find restful sleep, 'perchance to dream'. We, on the other hand, can be too proud to admit our need for others. Why? Because we do not believe in our hearts that the poor and helpless and marginalised and persecuted could be truly blessed in ways beyond our materialistic dreams. Do you really wish you had won seventy million dollars last week?

These little ones who absolutely rely on us are not perfect and have not yet been affected by an unreal demand for perfection that becomes an unbearable burden for too many in later years.

My mother believed, tongue in cheek, that Masefield's description of, 'a wet sheet and a flowing sea and a wind that follows fast', could just as easily refer to child minding problems as nautical yearnings. But I digress.

A poem I heard in days gone by asked the question:



'Where did you come from, baby dear?'
The reply mirrored Wordsworth ...
'Out of the everywhere into here.
And where did you get those eyes of blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.'

We are necessarily part of the cosmos, and nature and nurture shapes our destiny way beyond our control. Reach for the stars. Maybe, like ET you simply want to go home.

This short reflection was triggered by the two babies only a few weeks old. Some of our other grandchildren are experiencing the very important nursery rhyme/fairy tale part of their cosmic education where they will learn the ethics of elfland, as G.K.Chesterton so aptly describes it. But that is another story.

Tony Carroll

Life is amazing. And then it's awful.
And then it's amazing again.
And in between the amazing and the awful it's
ordinary and mundane and routine.
Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the
awful, and relax during the ordinary.
That's just living,
Heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful,
ordinary life.
And it's breathtakingly beautiful.

L.R.Knost

The Necessary Miracle of Touch

Walk as if you are kissing the earth. Thich Nhat Hanh

I would like to write about the necessary miracle of touch and keep in mind an image of Jesus immersed in a crowd. He is surrounded by those who came not only to hear him speak but also just to be in his presence. They clamoured to be healed and cleansed and felt compelled not only to hear his words but also, often, to reach out and touch him. Again and again, he reaches out to touch them, allowing them also to touch him. This is an image of Jesus the healer, his heart and hands open to us and the world.

For humans, sight is the dominant sense, taking up a larger part of the brain than the sense of hearing, taste or smell. We are so dependent on it to constitute the way we 'see' ourselves and the world that our metaphorical language is predominantly visual, so that we even describe our other senses in terms of sight and space. We talk of feeling up, down or flat, we talk of temperature and music going up and down, of being close to or distant from someone, of getting to the top and being blinded by passion.... It is so embedded in our language and the very way we represent and believe in reality, that we don't even notice it. Significantly, visual metaphors are inextricable from how we represent truth: we have insight, see the light, become enlightened and awakened, live in blindness and darkness. Seeing is believing.

However, seeing requires a certain distance; get too close to something or someone and our eyes can't focus. Furthermore, we can only see something if our eyes separate it from something else and so also in our language we can only communicate if we can separate



linguistic units: this and this. So there is a strong, unconscious connection between language, sight and truth and contemporary science is starting to grapple with the limits of this. What if we could reconfigure our experience of being here a lot more in terms of touch?

Because, while truth is a matter of seeing, when we speak of the heart and connection, of real intimacy, we generally refer to touch: I feel out of touch, we have lost touch, we must keep in touch and it really touched me. A work of art, music, nature, a loving act. When we refer to touch, it has an evocation of wordlessness, as if touch needs nothing else to be said, is an end in itself. To be deeply touched is to be, often, beyond words.

We can exist as intelligent, functioning people without a sense of sight or hearing or taste or smell but can we even conceive of being without the sense of contact with others and the world? If we see a baby alone and crying, our first instinct is to pick her up and give her the physical contact we feel she needs. Babies given insufficient, nurturing touch not only suffer psychological damage but cognitive impairment; in other words without proper touch, babies' brains don't develop properly. As human beings, without being in touch, we cannot live as well as we should. The images of orphans alone in cots in poor and crowded orphanages touch us to our core. It seems humanly unbearable.

I was in hospital once in pain and feeling alone at the time. The nurses were very busy but one young nurse came in to see how I was and I told her. She asked if I would like her to rub my back and gently did so. I still remember the absurd amount of relief and comfort it gave me. After a while she stopped, she said she should go, and I asked if she could just touch me for a little longer. And she did. I have never forgotten her intuitive kindness. When we are really vulnerable and the protective shells of ego, identity and security fall away, we return to our essential human need: the need to be in touch somehow and to be touched. This is where Christ, the miraculous healer, finds us.



Twenty five percent of Australians today live on their own and this number will probably keep increasing. It is the same elsewhere in the developed world. Smaller families, affluence, a high value placed on materialism, individualism and freedom. The fastest growing group of people living alone are women over fifty. I am one of those women. For some, solitude is preferred and embraced, and for others it is sometimes appreciated, but increasing loneliness is also one of the major social problems we now face. Many people are quietly, privately dealing with their loneliness with much daily courage, stoicism and fear. Are we becoming a people less physically proximate to one another and what might be the long term consequences of this as a culture?

Najibeh, from Afghanistan, in my current English class, lives alone, her family members in different countries, in a room shared with four other migrant women, in a boarding house with shared kitchen and bathroom. The components of her aloneness are multiple and acute and she doesn't even have the privacy to express her feelings to herself. She sometimes cooks lovely food for me and we like to hug. The concrete reality of the loneliness and untouchedness of many refugees here, displaced from family and from a culture where extended family living is a norm, is very, very tough.

Loneliness is partly so feared, I think, because at the level of our existential humanness we know that it is only a hair's breadth away from all of us, at any time: a tiny twist of fate and circumstance. Perhaps the potency and complexity of the image of Christ on the cross is in part due to his physical separation from those who loved him. He is placed out of their

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Cosmic Consciousness



NOTHING need have existed and that, even if there were some things in existence, the list need not have included the human race, let alone me.

The next question is whether the cosmos had a creator, or whether it created itself. I believe there was and is a creator,

but am not foolish enough to consider I can prove this. But neither can anyone prove to my satisfaction that there is no creator.

Next we can think about the fact that there are humans. Scientists tell us that if a number of the physical measurements e.g. the strength of an electron's electric

charge, varied by even a small percentage, humans would not exist on the earth. As the late Stephen Jay Gould (read *Wonderful Life* for a start) wrote, human life is an accident and, if the whole history of the world were played again, there is no certainty that humans would exist.

Next I compare the small time that I will live with the vast amounts of time before the universe runs down into a cold, stable state. And, as Louis Armstrong used to sing 'I think to myself / What a wonderful world', I realise that I need to consider what a great gift I have and feel grateful for it.

I believe that the most important thing for me to consider is the fact of my existence and the opportunity I have to enrich my life and the lives of those around me.

David Pincus

I take this term to mean the individual human's consciousness of the cosmos. I consider that having some realisation of the properties of the universe enriches my life and allows me to take a wider view of the fact of my existence.

I start with Descartes' assertion that 'I think, therefore I am'. This sounds self-evident but it at least reminds us that

The Necessary Miracle of Touch

Continued from page 7

reach and capacity to comfort him, with the added mockery of the vinegar-soaked cloth extended to him on a stick, and in his existential, human aloneness, he cries out: 'God, why have you forsaken me?' But this is bookended with the equally potent image of the Pieta: his mother finally holding him in her arms. How very differently these two images of death are! Imagine if Jesus had not been put on the cross but rather lay dying, mortally wounded, in his mother's embrace, surrounded by those who loved him. Could we then have had him say, 'God, why have you forsaken me?' with the same significance?

I am an Alexander Technique teacher, a form of holistic body work which involves me putting my hands on a person throughout the session. The only way my hands will be able to teach another person anything, to facilitate their well-being, is if I understand, using Alexander Technique methods, how to be more knowingly in touch with myself and, in Alexander Technique terminology, to leave myself alone. Only then can my hands listen to the other.

It is only when we are wisely in touch with ourselves that we are able to be in touch

with others and our world. Imagine if this fundamental wisdom was the ground of our children's education. Imagine if being in touch, capacity for intimacy and even skilful, physical touch were highly valued. Imagine if a capacity for relationship was a wisdom to be cultivated and respected. There is an intrinsic femininity to this and how feminine is the beloved image of Jesus with his long, flowing locks, soft, flowing robes, gentle face and open hands.

Whether we are in close, human company or not, we are always, for we cannot be otherwise, completely in touch. It is just that we have distracted ourselves, with our mind and other senses, from experiencing it. It is not a matter of seeing or seeking, because when we are deeply in touch questions don't need to arise and the distance between ourselves and the world disappears. (Visual metaphor again.) As an Alexander technique teacher, when I am doing a very, very good job, the separation between your body and theirs becomes somewhat immaterial and blurred. (Another visual metaphor!)

When Jesus places his hands upon the blind, leprous and dead, he offers them a way to start a new life, being as he is and inseparable from him. The woman with



Stained glass window depicting Jesus touching a lame man.

issue of blood says within herself, if I can only touch the hem of his garment, I will be made whole. We cannot will into being in perfect relationships, but we always have the opportunity to return to the healing that comes with being in touch with what is.

Imagine we said not that I saw my mother but that I touched her, not that I went surfing but that the ocean touched me, not that I took a walk but that I kissed the earth. Would our world become a little gentler, kinder and quieter?

Ann Ooms



From the Stillness

Such stillness in the branches

Silhouetted against western
horizon

Cloud clad

Orange seeping through

Ocean heaving

Sighing

Moving

Terns chatter

Norfolks still

Ancient

Reaching to the clouds

As does my spirit

Grounded and ephemeral

Light and pulsing

From the stillness

In the planet

Michael Tansky



A Reflection on Cosmic Consciousness

As Love Manifesting

Love's consciousness is creative
Extending and manifesting
Its infinite potential
Its inclusive boundless goodness
Displaying the essence of itself

Nothing is denied its creation
Every aspect contains the whole
The Source where it abides
The One Life that never dies
Regardless of its changing form

Sure there seems a dark world
The product of misperceptions
Perfect Love sees experiences
Not judged as good or bad
Respecting the gift to manifest

Love knows nothing can destroy
The essence of itself
It knows it is the remedy.
Where suffering cries are heard
Compassionate hearts create

Love's powerful gentle Light
Resurrects and creates new wonders
Opens awareness of its splendour
Its amazing network of One Being
The magnificence of what is

Love is all powerful
Love is all embracing
It is home to peace and Joy.
In its perfect fullness
In and beyond visible manifestation
Where Love is all there is
Words fall into Silence.

*Barbara Fingleton
Influenced by 'A Course in Miracles'*

Peeling Onions

Or The Problems Progressives Have with Prayer

St Mary's in Exile has given us the freedom to exercise intellectual integrity. To bring under the microscope all that we have been taught about God, life and death. Without the fear of mortal sin or charge of blasphemy, we can happily question and discard the illogical, historically and scientifically false, and the obviously nonsensical components of orthodox Christianity.

In doing so we have peeled the onion of doctrine and theology, discarding the personal and interventionist God, the historical Jesus, the authority of a literal Bible, and the many rules and rituals imposed by the Church.

This approach was to lead us to a new paradigm, we thought! But has it? Peeling away this onion eventually may lead to nothing in which to believe: only time in which to ponder the meaning of life, without the guidance of a Biblical or doctrinal compass.

For the purpose of this article, I will use prayer as an example of the Progressives' predicament. It will not answer the tough questions about prayer, but simply ask what is it, and why do we do it.

For if there is no interventionist God, why do we pray? Where do we gain our spiritual guidance in moral or ethical dilemmas? Or resilience in times of grief and crisis? What shall we do when our hopes seem dashed? Where do we turn when all human avenues for help for someone we love are exhausted?

If we dismiss prayer as a futile endeavour, with what shall we replace it? Peeling the onion can leave us in tears.

However, being progressive also gives us licence to seek new perspectives.

I want to share with you the perspectives of some Progressive Christian writers on prayer, to enable us to move from peeling the onion to planting a new garden in which to grow new understandings.

The first writer is Nicholas Wade and his book, *The Faith Instinct*. Wade demonstrates that across all cultures and religions there is evidence from at least 50,000 years ago of the



Ancients at prayer

human instinct to seek out supernatural help through prayer.

Even here, in the Prayers Of The Faithful, we see the tension between the rational thinking that rejects the notion of an interventionist god, and the instinct to seek help from a higher power, when human intervention is unable to do more.

This instinct to prayer demands that we adopt a belief system that includes prayer to seek answers from a supernatural source, or find an alternative. Common alternatives are Humanism, Secularism, Rationalism, and Free Thought. These options fail to consider prayer as efficacious. The options also reject the spiritual realm.

To put aside prayer from our life has its consequences.

The value of prayer is in the spiritual attributes it instils. Prayer can be shown to be an avenue to express what we love and care about, gives a platform to express our loves and hates, our desires and fears, our striving for values necessary for society to be safe. Prayer is our expression of hope, our inner desire for peace and goodwill, our plea channel for justice, a heartfelt demonstration of love, and much, much, more.

It is not to be confused with the creation of a silence within, or the emptying of the mind through meditation.

In summary, prayer is the means of our engagement with the spiritual. Or in terms of our liturgy, to engage with the Creative Spirit.

The concept of the Creative Spirit rings true for me, as it re-images God as Spirit

rather than a male or female being.

This leads us to deal with prayer from a new paradigm as Progressive Christians. David Tomlinson, another modern Progressive and an Anglican Vicar, in his book, *Re-enchanting Christianity*, looks at his faith from a new perspective, recognising that our faith is not some stagnant, unchanging belief system.

To quote him, 'The priority of the gospel lies not with textual debates and arguments ... but with the liberation of human beings to be the whole persons that they might be: spiritually, physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially.'

Progressives like Spong, Tomlinson, and others, do not peel away orthodox Christianity, but re-examine, re-interpret and revitalise our spiritual life to enable us to meet life with a renewed faith and hope.

The Progressive writer that opened for me the new way of understanding prayer was Harry Emerson Fosdick in his book, *The Meaning of Prayer*. Let me give you a taste of his view.

'We must think of prayer as separable from religion; we must ask not only what our desires are when we pray, but what are dominant in daily business; what we really are after in our innermost ambitions; what is our demand on life. Prayer, in this more inclusive sense, is the settled craving of a man's heart, good or bad, his inward love and determining desire.'

This paradigm of prayer recognises that we all have a spiritual component to our life. The spiritual soul of our identity, and the spiritual culture we share as a community, play a large role in determining our identity.

Prayer pervades our meditation, contemplation, our passion for love and justice, our hopes for the future, our tears for the suffering, our joy for the blessings that we and those we love, enjoy.

The principle of reinterpretation applied to understanding prayer, can be applied to all components of our Christian belief.

At SMX we describe ourselves as ‘leaving the hut’ of security to explore new ways of understanding the meaning and purpose of life. The example of the hut is that of people on a journey who have spent time in the safety of a hut along the track of life. The safety and security is embedded in orthodox teachings.

Some choose to stay in the hut, but the progressives leave in the knowledge they are venturing into the unknown. If we extend this, we may say they are searching for a ‘light on the hill’ that will throw new light on the mystery of the creative spirit. We are following our

spiritual instinct in faith and hope.

Prayer and many other religious practices, cannot be dismissed. It is against our natural instinct. We need a new enlightened way of living out the spiritual.

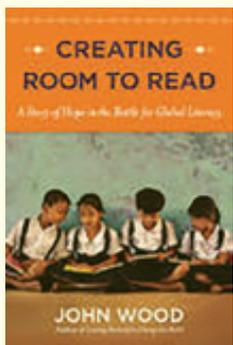
Let me finish with the progressive Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard who asked the question, ‘What does it mean to be a Christian?’ This challenged the underlying Danish Christian culture, which was similar to questioning motherhood and apple pie and went up like a lead balloon. His challenge was to question not only our belief, but how we live. His challenge

was not only progressive by questioning the unquestionable in order to appreciate more the Creative Spirit. Kierkegaard’s was also of the school of Absurdity. This school recognised that there is a limit to our knowledge of the creative spirit.

We then can take the leap of faith, or in his words, embrace the absurd, not rejecting what we don’t understand, such as the mystery of life after death, or anything outside of human power we instinctively hope for in prayer. They are new spiritual frontiers to discover.

Bob Aldred

Creating Room to Read: A Story of Hope in the Battle for Global Literacy



Have you ever wondered whether your hard-earned dollar achieves its real purpose when you donate to a charity?

This book, *Creating Room to Read: A Story of Hope in the Battle for*

Global Literacy gives a behind-the-scenes view of how John Wood and his team have created a transparent, financially accountable organization, *Room to Read*.

Their motto, World Change Starts with Educated Children underpins an ardent belief in the value of education. Educated people make more money and are more likely to escape poverty. Educated parents

raise healthier children. When a woman has finished school, she is treated better by the community and is more likely to vote.

John Wood loves playing with numbers. USA spent \$9 hundred billion on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over ten years.... If just 10% of this money was put towards education, with \$9 billion, fast-moving groups like *Room to Read* could work with local communities to construct 272,000 schools, resulting in more than a million new classrooms. At 25 children per classroom, we’ve just impacted 25 million students.

This book builds on John Wood’s original account *How I Left Microsoft to Change the World*, but it’s easy to pick up the story. Whilst trekking in Nepal, he encountered a school that had no books.

He collected thousands of books and delivered them to Nepalese schools. He gained so much satisfaction from seeing the value of educating kids that he left Microsoft and started *Room to Read*. In December 2015, they celebrated the incredible milestone of impacting 10 million children across Africa and Asia through education.

With John Wood’s Microsoft background, *Room to Read* is a lean, nimble organization, run like a business. They set bold goals, track

performance closely, and keep their running costs low in innovative ways. They use frequent flying points for travel, have a ‘No Land Rovers’ policy, and use donated office space and land transport. For nine consecutive years, *Room to Read* has received the USA Charity Navigator’s highest rating of four stars for financial accountability and transparency.

Some of their fundamental policies include the importance of educating girls, and an insistence on local community participation and co-investment in their projects.

Creating *Room to Read* is a real insight into the issues behind an NGO.

If you would like to borrow a copy of this book there is one in the SMX library

Kathy Hedemann



Community involvement in school building in Nepal.



Girls’ education is crucial. When you educate a girl, everything changes.

Cosmic Consciousness:

What is our relationship with each other, our community, our planet?

Evolutionary thinkers, futurists and scientists, the likes of Teilhard de Chardin, Einstein, Buckminster Fuller, Sri Aurobindo and so forth have all spoken of the reality of our interconnectedness. Everything in the entire cosmos is connected. In other words everything exists only in relationship.

Quantum physics has proven this to be true at an energetic level. For example when there is a major catastrophe anywhere on the planet, we feel a sense of sadness. Consider the analogy of a net. When we tweak one end of it every part gets affected.

'Ubuntu' is a South African word which means 'I am because you are', implying that I exist because you exist. We are therefore hardwired to connect with each other.

Martin Luther King said, *'We must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe has been made. This is the way it has been structured.'*

And so in a nutshell if everything is interconnected then it would follow that everything is interdependent, all beings - humans, non-humans and the whole of nature in its entirety.

When we say we are all one does that ask us to have some responsibility in each of these realms? (Each other, Community, Planet)

Albert Einstein wrote, *'A human being is part of the whole, called by us, universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening*

our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.'

That new manner of thinking is the thinking that we are all one - not separate from each other. The illusion is that we are separate from each other- in this three dimensional realm. And when we come to really understand and integrate our oneness into the very fabric of our everyday thinking and acting, we would be so different with each other, we would effortlessly transform our world. We would experience heaven on Earth. To quote *A Course in Miracles*. 'Heaven is the perception of our oneness.'

To answer the question above, If we really felt our oneness with each other, we would spontaneously be responsible for each other. The question would not even arise. In the Bible it says, Adam fell asleep but nowhere does it say he awoke. Human consciousness is asleep at the moment. We have forgotten our oneness. Our interconnectedness. That is the reason for so much pain and suffering in the world.

What practical actions can we take to remember our oneness in this three-dimensional realm of consciousness where everything appears to be separate, to the physical eye at least. That is the illusion.

Living a life of service, I believe, is our natural state in this three- dimensional world. If we felt totally connected to ourselves, the divine within ourselves, we would feel totally connected to a starving child at the other end of the planet and we could not but live a life of service to alleviate the suffering of those kids simply because we would feel our oneness with that child. We would feel their pain, like a mother and a child.

I see building 'True community' as a pathway to achieving this wondrous possibility. The possibility of realising and experiencing our oneness. 'True community' is when all members of a



community can be completely open, honest, authentic and vulnerable towards each other. When we can be transparent with each other, there is no judgement of another, even at the level of mind.

When we are able to be fully present with each other without any filters of previous experiences of each other, when we can listen deeply to each other, when we can see each other 'new' in every moment, listen with empathy and compassion, we will not only feel the other person's pain but we might even recognise the same in ourselves. We will realise our sameness, our oneness!

Often when one person shares from a place of vulnerability, others resonate with that person on some level, for we are all human. We all have the same issues, just around a different set of circumstances and when we have the courage to share from a place of vulnerability and feel heard, we will achieve what is termed as true community. 'True community' is a state of being with each other. It is what I dream of and strive my damndest to achieve: to shed the Egoistic crust that stops me from being vulnerable and thereby experiencing myself and others as love.

I believe it is our natural state to take care of each other when we feel our oneness, our connectedness. The key word is 'feel'. Our egoic minds have concocted umpteen ways to avoid feeling our emotions. To feel deeply is to be alive, to be human, to be fully experiencing this three dimensional realm that we have been thrust into via these embodied forms we call our bodies.

How much of what we assume to be true may turn out to be an illusion? And does it matter?

Continued on page 14

A Cosmic Experiment

'The old will have to crumble before the new life can burst forth.'

Somewhere I read this sentence which made me put pen to paper -

As a mother who gave birth to a number of children I must take issue with the wording of this sentence. Rather than 'crumbling' I found that becoming a mother opened me to a whole new way of thinking. I want my children and grandchildren and all future generations to be able to enjoy the things that we have been fortunate to experience.

I have a very intimate awareness now of the necessity (the urgency) to open the minds and hearts of those who follow me. If we, as members of the human race, do not open ourselves to the beauty and wonder of the universe and the awe inspiring experiment of evolution in which we are intimately involved we will be responsible for the death of not just a civilisation but perhaps the death of a cosmic experiment that has taken millions of years to develop to this stage where humankind are invited to collaborate.

This is not about the future of religion but about the future of our planet - the future not just of the human race but of LIFE on this planet. I am certain that evolution itself will continue but the earth could no longer be a major player and it would take millions of years before there is once again the confluence of all the elements that have enabled us to enjoy our privileged place in this beautiful and inspiring universe.

We have before us two choices. We can choose to recognise our responsibility to accept our role and accept too that we have to be humble enough to listen to that voice of God (of BEING) within each of us. The second choice is whether we continue to imagine that we are here as lords of the universe and did it all by our own efforts. If we do this we will condemn the world not perhaps to extinction but to becoming



'...the necessity of opening the hearts and minds of those who follow me.' are the words of Shar as she contemplates her responsibility to her eleven children.

a rocky planet which once saw the dawn of a new era and the prospect of 'Heaven on earth' and instead made the selfish decision to claim dominion over life itself.

Shar Ryan

Cosmic Consciousness

Continued from page 13

Absolutely everything we can see with our naked eyes and touch and feel and think in this three dimensional realm of consciousness is said to be illusion by physicists, scientists, evolutionary thinkers and spiritual mystics. In fact, it is said that we are all experiencing one massive hallucination.

The only time when we are not experiencing or hallucinating is when we experience ourselves and others as 'Love'. Because 'Love' is what we truly are. It is the core of what we are. Everything else is illusion.

Does it matter? Absolutely yes. This is the human journey, to experience ourselves and everyone else as Love. This helps me cope in my own life. Whenever I feel anger, sadness, frustration and so on, I immediately recognise that I am caught in the illusion. In fact that is the sign for me. I stop, acknowledge the feeling of anger, sadness, frustration and so forth, I acknowledge being in this three dimensional realm and only after I have really experienced those feelings do I

drop them because if I don't acknowledge them then they just get repressed and pop up somewhere else at a later stage.

Acknowledging and experiencing our emotions fully is acknowledging our humanness in this realm and I believe it is the gateway to experiencing our true nature. Love. Our Godness, here on earth. This is the journey. This is why we are here, I believe. Heaven is the perception of our oneness. (*A Course in Miracles*)

Jesus was one such being to have truly lived in the three dimensional realm of illusion but knew he was not of it. He said, 'Be in this world but not of it'. He was thus able to see everyone through eyes of love. He demonstrated the possibility of human consciousness to experience ourselves and each other as love (GOD) in this world of illusion. He demonstrated it was possible.

It is my personal mission to work towards that, that possibility of experiencing myself and others as love and I believe that when everyone can do that we will

have heaven on earth. Some call it the second coming of Christ Consciousness.

To feel is therefore at the crux of our human experience. How do we feel deeply?

This has been the biggest, most delicious learning of my own life. To endeavour to feel all my emotions and to cherish them. I have never felt more alive. And knowing that they are all an aspect of the illusion helps me drop them... but only after feeling them, experiencing my humanness. Oh to feel! Oh what a feeling!

Every cell in my body is alive. And I am loving Living!

'I want to be fully used up when I die. Life is no brief candle to me, it is a sort of splendid torch that I have gotten hold of and I want to make it shine as brightly as possible before passing it on to future generations.' George Bernard Shaw.

Carolyn Vincent

Creator of the Cosmos

Creator of the Cosmos
You are the one
You light the night skies
With cascades of silver stars
Your golden sun orb
Radiates perpetual light and warmth
Your breath can change the forces
Of nature from fury to calm
You paint your flowers and butterflies
With a rhapsody of colour
Your will can open the earth's crust
To release massive destructive forces
You give the earth's tidal flow synchronicity
As the stark moon waxes and wanes
Your design of our green planet
Is a miracle in itself
Your execution of earth's life forms
Is brilliant in its complexity
In humans you have given
Your pinnacle life form choice
And the gift of reason and responsibility
Perhaps this was your one error
Or is it your divine challenge?
And always your pledge to the world is love
For as long as time continues
You are the one.

Anne Maguire

Re-Imagining Luke

In traditional liturgical communities across the city and around the world people observe the eighteenth of October as the feast of St Luke. That is not a custom that has survived in our exile from the church up the road, but I invite you to join with me in giving attention to this special day.

On this day one can expect to hear sermons about the legacy of Luke. We owe to his literary imagination the cycle of the Church Year.

Some preachers and pew sheet editors will venture to tell people that Luke was a gentile medical doctor from Antioch in Syria and a companion of Saint Paul.

Others will extol his value as the primary historian of early Christianity, while others may talk about his excellent Greek language skills. He had the best Greek of any of the people who contributed to the New Testament.

In some places the preacher will focus on theological themes in the double volume of Luke and Acts which we attribute to this otherwise unknown author. Worshipers will hear about Luke's interest in the Spirit, his respect for women, his concern for the poor, his preservation of major parables, and his interest in the wealthy.

Others will reflect on the significance of Luke's Gospel being followed by a second volume, known to us as the Acts of the Apostles.

Again, for some people, the big news is that Luke was (supposedly) a companion of Paul and in some ways his biographer. We are not going to do any of those things.

We know nothing about the person who composed the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, except for what we can glean by close attention to these two books.

Together they comprise almost 25% of the New Testament. With another 25% of the NT coming from the Pauline letters, and since 'Luke' (as we call this anonymous author) was a serious fan of



Luke imagined by Andrea Mantegna.

Paul, we can see that the Pauline faction in early Christianity dominates the New Testament.

Paul's legacy was not always so esteemed in earliest Christianity, and his heavy imprint on the New Testament may be largely due to the work of people such as Luke.

For most of the last 2000 years Luke has been seen as a companion of Paul, but that is no longer a viable option. More likely, Luke comes from the generation after Paul; or even the generation after that.

The opening paragraph of Luke's Gospel (1:1–4) is one of the few places where Luke speaks in his own voice. He tells us that he has a purpose in writing. He has a method. And he has sources, because he can access the earlier written works created by those who went before him.

That pushes Luke forward to a period after 100 CE, and perhaps as late as the middle decades of the second century.

This is not the time or place for a lecture on the dating of Luke's two great literary works, but I invite you to think about the significance of Luke writing to meet the needs of the church in his own time about one hundred years after Easter.

The diverse and still marginal Christian communities at that time faced two major challenges.

The external challenge was the power of the Roman empire and especially the ongoing tensions between Rome and the Jews, with rebellions and uprising in the late 60s, the 80s, 115–117 and 132–135 CE. The Christians were caught between a desire to operate under the legal protection of being a Jewish sect, and the need to demonstrate to Rome that they were not a strange bunch of Jewish rebels. Having a leader who had been executed as a rebel was not really a good marketing strategy for that time and place.

The internal challenge was a rising tide of Christian anti-Semitism, especially associated with a church leader called Marcion. Marcion proposed that Christians jettison all vestiges of their Jewish legacy. He rejected the violent and tribal God of the Old Testament, and he proposed a new Bible that comprised simply The Gospel (traditions about Jesus) and The Apostle (the letters of Paul).

Marcion's ugly ideas found a ready hearing in a context where it was good politics to demonstrate loyalty to the Empire by denouncing Jews. Had his ideas won the day, Christianity would have been even more anti-Semitic than it would soon become, as it often has been, and in some expressions remains to this day.

Luke and Marcion were both fans of Paul. They probably both misunderstood and misrepresented Paul. But Luke rescued Paul from Marcion and promoted a vision of Christianity that valued its Jewish past while claiming a place in the social order of the Roman empire. Luke valued the past, understood the present, and forged a path into the future. His legacy has shaped Christianity for much of the last 2000 years.

I want to suggest that Luke offers an attractive template for us, a community in transition.

To unpack that idea I need to divert to Matthew ever so briefly. Bear with me.

In Matthew 13:52 we find this short but powerful parable: '... every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven

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Awareness

It has been said 'we are spiritual beings on a human journey.'

Or to have Pierre de Chardin's words backed up by quotes which are attributed to Jesus, 'God is within you and around you' or 'greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world'; and another, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die'. That is a really big deal!

It does seem that it is difficult for us to grasp the significance of these words. When we do grasp them, they completely transform our lives. 'We are Spiritual beings on a human journey.' Why is it so difficult? Perhaps it is because in our formative years we were offered very little knowledge on what these sayings were about. These sayings support the Spiritual tradition in Christianity. A modern day form of expression is to say: 'We are awareness having a human experience'. Awareness, otherwise known in the Christian tradition as consciousness or spirit, is at the core of all the world's major Spiritual traditions.

Here are some Jesus quotes, from Rex Weyler's book *The Jesus Sayings*. These sayings support the importance of awareness.

- *There is a light within: look and you will find it.*
- *When you find the light within share it with the world.*
- *The divine kingdom is within you and around you.*
- *It is like leaven in bread, a tiny force that affects everything; observe the world before you here and now.*
- *Otherwise avoid rules and follow the truth you discover yourself, act from awareness, not from habit or convention.*

So, 'Awareness'. What is it? Why is it considered spiritual?

Awareness is our capacity for experience. It is not just seeing the green tree; it is knowing that I am seeing the green tree.

The mouse sees the green tree, but to what extent does the mouse know that it is seeing the green tree? It is the part of you that knows you are sitting on the chair.

Awareness is our essential nature. The experiencer of experiences has qualities generally associated with the Divine. When the mind is silent and no longer troubled with concerns for the past or future, we connect with our sense of true self: the Divine within. In this experience of pure Being we find a steady unshakeable peace that is not dependent on what we do in life, who we are, or how the world is treating us; we find the fulfilment we have always been seeking - the peace of God that lies beyond all understanding.

This peacefulness is apparent in modern day Spiritual teachers, It can be seen in Thich Nhat Hahn, Laurence Freeman, Leonard Jacobson, The Dalai Lama, Shri Ramans Maharishi and, perhaps to some extent, even Pope Francis. These people exhibit a smooth flowing energy in the body when walking or sitting, gentle breathing, even a gentle smoothness in their speech patterns. Their faces are evenly balanced with an openness of Presence, their listening is attentive, and their eyes are soft and bright with a balanced ratio of macular to peripheral vision.

When the mind is silent, and the thoughts, feelings perceptions and memories, with which we habitually identify, have fallen away, then what remains is the essence of self, the pure subject without an object. What we then find is not a sense of 'I am this, I am that', but just 'I am - awareness'.

Way back in 1975 as a young psychologist in training, while attending one of my group training sessions, I had an experience of self- knowing: it just happened, It was like a pleasant energetic arousal of openness throughout my body, with my mind in pleasant open silence. The senior training psychologist told me that was 'awareness'. Certainly my thoughts became very clear, my feelings were very strong; my not so vivid images improved and my various body sensations came alive. In short my internal universe



An artists impression of the C14th Anchorite known as Julian of Norwich. She is thought to have had powerful 'awareness' experiences.

had become consciously available to me.

Meditation in the Buddhist tradition and the Christian Spiritual tradition comment on Awareness, but not on our subjective internal experiences'.

Around five years ago one Saturday morning, lying in bed half awake, half asleep, just lying there, a strange inner voice came to my mind. 'They are separate' it said,. I was experiencing a powerful sense of awareness at the time; 'what'? I heard myself think. 'They are separate' said the voice, 'they are separate, they are not connected'! Epiphany! My internal sense of information and my awareness are separate; They are separate! I can just be Awareness.

History has demonstrated to us that some individuals have had powerful awareness experiences. Such individuals arise across all the major spiritual traditions. The Christian tradition includes St Paul, Master Eckhart, St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich. In our modern secular times there are Eckhart Tolle and the Australian Leonard Jacobson. Such people reach a level of Awareness way beyond my energetic, pleasant level of arousal. They reach a level of awareness that is union with the Divine.

A wonderful explanation of these higher states of awareness (consciousness) is provided by the Christian mystic Brother Wayne Teasdale in his book, *The Mystic Heart*. I shall say just a little about what Teasdale calls 'partial Presence' as this is closest to my own level of spiritual development.

In partial Presence there is an expansion of awareness, love and compassion towards the suffering of many others, even globally. As well there is some sense of enhanced wisdom and knowledge of the spiritual in the universe, including experiences of a temporary, complete emptiness. However on many occasions the sense of desire remains intact. One is flicked back to the modern material world of goods and chattels and competition. It is said then that the sense of desire has not yet been transcended.

If I had reached a higher level of awareness, these are some of the characteristics I would share with others who have also reached this level:

- The overwhelming conviction that what I thought was Brian O’Hanlon - me, is completely superficial. Really, I am an expression of an eternal ‘I AM’, a spiritual being on a human journey.
- There is no longer any separate me. There is just this great happening going on. This happening is God or the Will of God, or the doing of God. The Taoist would call it the Tao; the Buddhists, Maya; the Hindus Brahman. Many experienced Spiritual Teachers report having



Thich Nhat Hahn is a modern day spiritual leader who exhibits the characteristics of peacefulness and compassion.

experienced this oneness.

- There is an extremely warm feeling of inspiration - we see the Divine in everybody else’s eyes. The Beloved is in all. Everybody is playing out an essential part in this colossal drama. We can even feel it in our enemies. We feel that we love everyone; we gain wisdom and mystical knowledge.
- There is great wisdom and knowledge particularly in relation to what happens after death (the soul and spirit move to another realm). There is knowledge in the Jesus injunction

‘you shall have life everlasting’. Again the great spiritual masters express much about such knowledge.

Modern spiritual teachers insist that what is important for the spiritual journey is to have a quiet mind. So I will finish with a simple lesson that you can practise, that brings you into awareness, into the quiet mind. This lesson is based on the work of Peter Russell.

- Sit comfortably on a chair, with your spine erect (or use the support of the chair).
- Just attend to your breathing body- the flow of the in breath and the out breath.
- Just sit being with your body and your breathing - just being with your body.
- Soften your eyes, (open or closed).
- Notice the comfortable energy and silent mind - Samadhi.

In the Christian tradition, the silent mind is: ‘Be still and know that I am God’ or to summarise the message of Jesus, ‘all that I am, you are’.

Brian O’Hanlon

Re-Imagining Luke

Continued from page 16

is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ (NRSV)

While Luke did not know, or at least did not preserve, this parable of the scholar prepared for God’s kingdom, he certainly seems to fit the description very well.

Luke was a scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven.

Luke delved into his sources to find just what was needed for his own time.

Luke valued the past but critiqued the traditions. He thought he could present a more accurate account than any of those who had gone before him; including, I suggest, Matthew, Mark and John.

Luke was not afraid of creating new

traditions, and refashioning older traditions, to serve his purposes and to meet the needs of the church in his time.

Luke invites us to assess the traditions we have inherited and start all over afresh.

Luke does not ask us to discard everything from the past, but he does invite us to catch a fresh glimpse of the God who feeds the hungry and overthrows the powerful.

Luke was convinced that God is at work in the world for good, and he invites us to see where God is at work now and join that project ourselves.

For all these reasons we can celebrate Luke today. Amen.

Greg Jenks



Luke does not ask us to discard everything from the past, but he does invite us to catch a fresh glimpse of the God who feeds the hungry and overthrows the powerful.

Sonnet

*All fear, they say, is about the future,
And all fear's origins are in the past;
Yet fear, like love, is felt in the present.
Whereas love ministers and gives succour,
Fear turns love's banquet into an orgy
Of despair.*

*As a flower welcomes spring
You open up before me - daring me
To meet in present time; yet, dare I?
Dare I dive into the heart, mind, and soul
Of you? I know that you are bottomless
And I am afraid of death. I'm autumn
And not spring; nature's winds are all askew:
You breathe out and I in. Yet, all that breathes
Dies, and all that dies exhales breath anew.*

Robert Perrier



Learning from a Place of Conflict

I've been part of a research team working, off and on, in Ghana and Liberia over the past couple of years. The research has been about exploring local sources of security, peace and justice in people's lives and who local people go to for security and justice. Recently I was in Liberia for a few weeks. I found the experience of spending this short time in Liberia powerful and moving. On reflecting and writing about these experiences I am hoping to show how what I learnt demonstrates our fundamental interconnectedness with all dimensions of life, and about letting that understanding ground and shape the ways we be and act in the world. There are some particular ways that recognising interconnectedness might orient us.

I want to draw out the real difficulty of making sense of what is going on in areas of life that are of key importance to us – other people's lives, other places and cultures, but also aspects of our lives, our place in this living web of being and the ways we, collectively and personally, make the worlds we inhabit. So what I want to say about this brief time in Liberia moves between those two themes.

- Liberians have lived through an awful lot – a long and vicious civil war played out in a series of instalments that emerged out of generations of entrenched injustice and the impoverishment and marginalisation of the majority of the population; a war that was marked by severe atrocity and has left clear trauma. But when the civil war ended – or perhaps simply stalled – the leaders of the warring factions mostly got positions in government. Meanwhile most of the underlying causes of the war have not been addressed in any meaningful way, and twelve years after the end there aren't yet clear signs that they will be. There's a strong sense of injustice – coming out of the war, but also out of the unmet drivers of the war. There are also deep divisions and lack of basic trust, coming out of the war again, but also out of the conditions that led to the war.

- While you can give accounts that put the violence of the war into context, it's nevertheless hard to grasp the brutality of it – of what human beings can do to each other. And while Liberians – some

of them anyway – were responsible for their own war, there are multiple circles of responsibility that ripple outwards – many factors supporting that brutality. There were individuals of outstanding sadism. And there were many desperate people trying to change things in the ways they thought were available. But at the same time, one of the reasons that child soldiers have become so prevalent, as they were in Liberia, is that modern weapons are now so light and so easy to come by, with so many produced and in circulation. This is a production line for weapons producers, which are all over the world – Britain, France, the US, China, Russia. I'm not saying that to produce indignation but to observe the factors that go into violence. We condemn one thing – the sadism – but still tend to let the other go.

- And for Liberia then there was Ebola.

Having said all that, so many people survived – the war, the atrocities, the Ebola, the generations of extreme injustice; so many people were and are still working to maintain not only their own but others' lives, were and are working to create spaces of peace and order, to keep producing food, to heal each other from the effects of what they have suffered. One of the reasons that's given for why Ebola was brought under control in Liberia much faster than it was in Sierra Leone was because the government, but perhaps particularly the people leading the international efforts, worked more closely with traditional healers in Liberia, not in terms of using their methods, but in terms of building sufficient trust with them to be allowed into their networks, so that the traditional healers, in time, introduced health workers into their communities and lent them some legitimacy. Just as women's groups, bringing in both Christians and Muslims, came together to push to end the war - and played a real part in that. There is tremendous strength and capacity in the everyday lives that many people are already living. And dry humour. People are often very impressive, in a kind of edgy, tough way. As Mary



Women demonstrate for peace.

Oliver, in *Wild Geese*, says: 'Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination.'

How do we respond to these situations? We can go as aid workers - and there can be a lot of good in that. But we can also recognise that we too have something to learn about being human. It's very hard for us (and my apologies for this collective term here) to see ourselves as other than the bearer of healing, of righteousness, of capacity, of what is comparatively right and good, of the right gender policy, the right transitional justice approaches and so on. Of course, we do have a lot more money, and that can be important. And in different ways we do carry within and amongst ourselves things of value to offer others – as they do for us. Medical assistance, educational assistance and so on, but more generally, we have important experience to share, and so do they. 'Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on.'

So what is it to be grounded, a bit at least, in our interbeing? Part of it might be that we go as human beings, 'frail and imperfect', to be with other human beings. We bring our bits of knowledge, but there is so much, it seems to me at any rate, that is really hard to understand. Some of this is because of different cultures, the sometimes sharply, unexpectedly different but overlapping ways that we understand and shape our experience. Liberia is a place, like many others, where many people live with a very lively sense of their interdependence, not only with other people, but also with the natural world, and the world of the unseen, of spirits. Most Liberians experience deeply their interdependence with nature and with

the world of the unseen. There is much to be learnt here too, but this sense of connection with nature is not always the interbeing that Thich Nat Hanh speaks of – some of it at least seems too infused with fear. There is great scope for sorcery and, not surprisingly given the history of the last few centuries or so, and the current conditions, some of that is very violent. Even when it's not violent it's simply very 'different' and that can be challenging. But this bears on the nature of some of the forms of healing and of social order and security that people offer each other, and so it raises questions of how best to engage with it. However we might engage, it needs to be taken seriously, and engaging might involve a kind of conversation that has to be open to our own values and the expression of our values, but that isn't judgmental. There's a place for judgment – in this country where there's a yearning for justice and to move past violence – but judgment doesn't occupy all the space.

But there are other things that are hard to understand: the scale of harm that people have done and do to each other, and how Liberia and Liberians are going to move out of the legacy of suffering and damage



Dealing with the Ebola epidemic.

that the country bears. I'm thinking of Liberia now, and the particularity and difference of that place, where these questions must have a particular register, but these questions are also ones that we're all cycling through – what are we doing to each other; how do we work with the legacy of what has been done; what do we offer each other. We learn something from talking or being with each other. Part of the power of talking with people in Liberia is how it confronts you with people who talk directly to you out of a place of pain, despair but also toughness and aliveness. We are part of that conversation, but we don't often get to see that so straightforwardly. It's a rare gift when we do.

It's important to keep working on how to respond to these questions in particular

situations, on understanding what we don't understand, but it might also be worth recognizing that there's probably going to be a lot we don't understand and that we get wrong – and that's okay – but that we are still engaged in relationship and exchange, still inevitably part of the family of things. When reading the Gospel I can see connections between compassion, recognizing that we are part of each other, and seeing judgment in that light, but also recognition of not knowing – that there are things we don't know and probably never will. Christ with the woman taken in adultery draws in those who would accuse her, but he also sits writing in the dust. What on earth is that about – writing or drawing is a highly significant activity, perhaps particularly in an illiterate society, but it's a mystery.

It's often important to work on getting a better understanding, but there's also something about realizing that in our different ways we are also part of ignorance. The wild geese announcing our part in the family of things are speaking in a language we might realize, but can't control.

Anne Brown

At the Beautiful Brookfield Spirituality Centre



David and Sophia make great music.



Lovely ambience in the Brookfield Chapel.



Our hosts, Heather and David, relax in Brookfield's garden.



And perfect for meditation.



Brian says a few words on mindfulness.

SMX - Worth Pursuing the Dream?

Chairperson's Report 2015

At times when I look around at our ageing and dwindling community I sometimes wonder should we call it a day. I can ask myself, is it all worth it? But there are many moments such as the one I am about to share with you that spur me on and encourage me.

An encouraging memory which stays with me this year was when representatives from the Board and the Community Faith Council were sitting around the table at the Queensland Theatre Company and we were deliberating about giving permission to David Burton to write a play about our story. Wesley Enoch the company's Artistic Theatrical Director came in and spoke passionately from the heart. He said that what we did as a community was inspirational. We took on the big guys when we took on the Roman Catholic Church. We refused to continue to live under the oppression of the Big Corporation. Our story is universal. Our story represents the millions of people who live under the oppression of undemocratic systems where people feel misrepresented and ignored. Our story deserves to be told, Wesley continued, because the St Mary's In Exile story is the little and small taking on the big and powerful. It's about standing firm in what we believed and it's about standing up for justice. It's about refusing to live in a system that compromises central core values and beliefs. As Wesley spoke it was a moment, for me at least, of feeling proud of what we did as a community. And not be like the Exiled Israelites from the Old Testament story of when they were exiled in the desert after fleeing the oppression of the Egyptians looking back and thinking that the days of oppression didn't seem too bad from the vantage point of the searing heat of the desert. In those days of doubt we must remember the days of compromise and the oppressive patriarchal belief systems that keep women marginalised and oppressed, people of homosexual orientation marginalised and the majority of the people voiceless and unrepresented. Wesley Enoch reminded me of that and I am grateful to him for that passionate encouragement to forge ahead in Exile despite the occasional doubts. Thank you to all those who came forward and spoke with David. We look forward to seeing the

play in September.

This year marks the 20th year of Micah Projects. I still remember the early years sitting around the meeting room in St Mary's House debating what was the best way to set up such an organisation. I remember the debates about the use of St Mary's house, and how they were centred on how best to utilise this limited resource. We wanted to make an improved response to the way people who were homeless were treated, especially those who found themselves in trouble with the law and regularly found themselves in the watch-house because of being intoxicated. We wanted families to have supported and stable accommodation where children could feel they belonged and were at home and loved.

We wanted young women who found themselves pregnant and parenting and lacking family support to be supported and cared for and appreciated.

We wanted people who had been abused in State or Church institutions to be supported and have someone who could assist them to find their voice.

We wanted people with severe disabilities to have a home and to be cared for, away from the larger sterile institutions which once they endured.

We wanted all this and more because we had heard the words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel 'whatever you do to these the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.' We believed in the innate divinity and dignity of each person and valuing and appreciating this in any way we were able. The words of the prophet Micah became our mantra 'to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.' This became our mission statement, it's what we strove to achieve and it became our name, MICAH. Micah Projects believes these three principles are in common with all people striving for a world that supports the dignity of each human being and a just society. Micah's vision is to create justice and respond to injustice at the personal, social and structural levels in church, government, business and society. At the heart of what Micah believes is that every child and



adult has the right to a home, an income, healthcare, education, safety, dignity, and connection with their community of choice.

At the very heart of Micah has been a woman with remarkable abilities and talents. A woman who has displayed again and again courage and resilience when times have been hard and the road ahead rough. Karyn Walsh has been the rock in the storm carrying the light of hope amidst despair and despondency. She has carried the vision and believed in what Micah was capable of achieving. Peter Kennedy once described Karyn as the most insightful person he has known. This year Karyn steps down as a Board member of St Mary's In Exile. She has been an invaluable member of the Board and for this we are forever grateful, but the work load of Micah has put increasing pressures on her time and energies. She hopes to continue to contribute to our deliberations as a Board and is happy to join us whenever her expertise is required.

Micah is forever appreciative of the ongoing support from the St Mary's Community. The Queensland Government has been a huge sponsor of Micah. Without the support of the Queensland Government, Micah's donors and supports, Micah could not provide the vital Community services that it does.

Our community is worth maintaining and growing. The Board in consultation with the Faith Council and the SMX community has spent much time and energy in the last year in developing a strategic plan to guide the next five year period.



Members of the board: Neil Wilson, Doc Ortiz, Annie Collette, Terry Fitzpatrick, Kate Flamsteed, Michael Kelly, Margaret Wheat. (Missing Jenny Ryan, Paul Roberts)

The Board and Faith Council subsequently prioritized items from the Forum and have since developed business and operational plans to support implementation.

Currently the Board is working with Inkahootz - designers of Micah's publications & website - to formulate a visual identity for St Mary's Community prior to launch of a formal document (scheduled for early 2016).

We have been fortunate for the last six years to have had a good friend in the Union Movement who continues to offer us hospitality in the TLC Building. Ron Monahan president of the Queensland Council of Unions has been our patron throughout this time.

Those times when we have not been able to use the TLC Building for our liturgies this year we have been able to go to the beautiful Brookfield Spirituality Centre. And those times we needed to use a liturgical space the Merthyr Road and West End Uniting Churches have been there to provide support.

This year we have enjoyed our increasing links with the Queensland Community Alliance and the many value-based organisations that form this Alliance. Many of us have known one another a long time and those not so long, but for all we have shared the good and not so good times together. There are many moments we share together that we could take for granted.

Through the Connections group we have striven to maintain better relationships with members of our own community. At our Sunday liturgies there is often insufficient time to speak with people for any length of time and get to know one another. Through a variety of activities sponsored by connections we are able to build better relationships.

The Cluster groups over many years have provided a place of connection and belonging. These gatherings have formed the backbone of what makes our community tick.

Speaking of our liturgies, they continue to be the focal point from which everything occurs. They are the place where we gather and connect, inspire and invite, pray and contemplate. So many do so much to make our community what it is.

I would like to finish with that what has become for us a well-known parable, *The Hut* - but this time I would like to change the ending.

'It was a time for the travellers to move out from the safety of the hut. The hut they were in was familiar and well-lit, but they knew that it could no longer serve them. It was time to venture out into dark and unfamiliar terrain, to seek out a new place of life. As they moved away from the hut, the light its windows cast on the world outside grew dim, until there was very little to guide them. They had to move along tentatively. The directions they decided on were often mistaken and they had to rely on each other for any progress they made.'

Not all shared the same feelings

about what they were undertaking. Where one grew frustrated, another continued to trust. Where one took heart from the adventure, another started to turn back to the light of the hut. It was a strange and unprecedented situation for them all. The only ones who knew where they were going were the ones who turned back, for they were turning to light and familiarity.'

But anyone embracing the future did not have ready-made answers to questions from another age. Those who embraced the future were grounded in that ever loving presence that is not easily named and defined, boxed and packaged. These embracers of the future had experienced and known, felt and trusted this presence over many years. In this presence there is no us and them, no convenient separation. It was the dream of Jesus, the reign of God he spoke much about, ever present and close at hand. It infused everything, and it was something to sell everything for. Resting in this presence they moved forward with a quiet confidence that Julian of Norwich the 14th Century English Christian mystic expressed many years ago, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.'

Terry Fitzpatrick



Faith Council members: Marg Ortiz, Maureen Hennigan, Pam Kreuger, Brian O'Hanlon, Terry Fitzpatrick. (Missing Andrew Kennelly, Margaret Lawson, Margaret Clifford.)

Within Me, In This Moment

In my body
I lie, captured
In my mind
I feel anxiety...
oh, but
In my spirit
I dance free...
and
In my soul
I am whole.

Shiloh Moore



Shiloh Moore shown here with the beautiful calendar she created.

St Mary's at Christmas



The Christmas Party at Merthyr Rd Uniting Church

Last Chance.

Which path?
Which path will humankind take?

The well-worn path of
I am the centre
I am not you
my rights, my God
our borders, our species
a spirit of scarcity
a stance of certainty
fear disguised as control
endless power-seeking
striving, strutting forward
unconscious and disconnected?

It's a well-used
narrow path
that has a certain ending.

Or will we take the path
rarely used of late?

To navigate this track
we need
new vision
a total reprogramming of our world view
a huge heart
a humility
to listen deeply to all other beings
to learn
and embrace all of the cosmos
and know at our deepest level
we are all connected
all part of the I am
all responsible for each other
all co-creating
as we go hurtling forward
trustfully
bound together
in an ever-evolving
ever-expanding universe.

Margaret Clifford

St Mary's at Christmas

The Children's Pageant



Sean and Sinead ready to perform in the pageant.



The little ones performing a Christmas story. Thanks to Annette and Rebecca's great work.



Annette makes fine adjustment to the star.



The young people add a special something to our choir at Christmas.



Hailey and Rebecca introduce the pageant



Hudson and Tanasha get ready to go on.



Barbara with Annette and family. Granddaughter Hayley (see photo above) was called on to read part of the pageant.



After the AGM at Common Ground. Chris plays piano as Peter and Annie trip a light step or two.

At the Christmas Dinner.

And at other times ...

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Articles, poems, letters, photos are always welcome. Send to ortizmargaret506@gmail.com
You are invited to contribute financially to the work of St Mary's Community in Exile by donating to: St Mary's Community Ltd, BSB 064- 131 Account 10339414, Commonwealth Bank, West End.

Creative Presence

I find myself standing on
a platform made of stars
shiny silver six-pointed stars

it has no edge, no wall, no barrier
it is no bigger than
my own two feet

yet when I stand on it
I feel completely safe

from this lookout high above the Milky Way
I can see from the stars themselves
In the deep night sky
right down to the sticky brown resin
on the bud of a chestnut tree
beside an old abbey wall

as the colours form on an iris
at the base of the trunk
I am the yellow splash
and the orange thumbprint
I am the silky softness of the purple petal

just as I am the crust that forms as
the resin cracks on contact
with the cool morning air

I am also on a platform of silver stars
watching
while creation pulses
matter emerges
and intention crystallises into Beauty