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HERITAGE, HEART and HORIZONS
NURTURING the SPIRIT

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

SPIRITUALITY
and
RELATIONSHIPS
of
VALUE

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INTRODUCTION

The most important issue for all of us at this Conference concerns the possibility of describing and embracing a **spirituality** which does **justice** to the **richness** of our **Anglican Christian heritage** – a **spirituality** which is **relevant** in our **contemporary context** with the **power** to **enliven** and **transform** our **school communities**. That sounds a tall order – and it is! However, it is not impossible. My hope is that this address will helpfully **contribute to our thinking** about these issues and **provide** ongoing **stimulus to further debate and action**. Throughout the address I intend to make connections with other keynote addresses with a view to achieving some degree of integration, whilst helping to identify issues requiring further exploration and debate. Time will be allowed at the end of each major section for quiet reflection.

We need to begin with a working definition, or perhaps better, a **working description of ‘spirituality’**. I am, for the purposes of this address, dealing with a spirituality which finds **its source and inspiration in our Christian faith** and more particularly in the **Anglican experience of that faith**. In doing so I am aware that there is a **significant issue** which I can only allude to in passing as it seems relevant to the main focus of the address. That issue **concerns the relationship between Christian spirituality** and those experiences of **Australian ‘spirituality’** for which we seek to nurture “**a shy hope in the heart.**” It seems that for a significant number of people spirituality can be separated, if not from a relationship with God, then certainly from organized religion. There is to some degree within the community a crisis of confidence in religion. This is a **major challenge** for **the church** and, indeed, for **our schools**. I am aware also that the term ‘spirituality’ is difficult to define with precision and thus I am settling for a **working description of an Anglican Christian spirituality** which will allow some breadth and flexibility in the discussion.

When some of the descriptions (definitions) of Christian spirituality are examined ¹ the following elements seem to be significant:

- the **deepening of our experience of God**;
- the **living of our lives** on the basis of the fundamental **beliefs** and **values** of the **Christian faith**;
- the element of **discipline**, especially in **prayer and action**;
- the **development** of personal wholeness (**maturity**);
- the **self-transcending** character of **spirituality**.

It is clear that an **authentic Christian spirituality** is concerned with the **whole of life** and that there is **no sharp separation** of the **sacred** from the **secular**. This comprehensiveness is, of course, a particular characteristic of Anglicanism. **Gordon Mursell** in his article “The Anglican Spirit” concludes:

“The Anglican spirit was still, as it has always been, one which refused to separate the sacred from the secular, the head from the heart, the individual from the community, the Protestant from the Catholic, the word from the sacrament”²

My contention in this address is that a **spirituality** which is **faithful to our Anglican Christian heritage**, **relevant** for our **contemporary context** and has the **power to renew our school communities** will be,

THOUGHTFUL,

RELATIONAL and

PRACTICAL.

A THOUGHTFUL SPIRITUALITY

The first, perhaps unexpected, starting point in exploring the notion of thoughtfulness is to **acknowledge the requirement to be childlike**. Mursell, in referring to the spirituality of an early English poet, **Thomas Traherne** (1637-74) states:

“ ...most attractive of all is his reverence for the childlike as perhaps the single most vital attribute for any authentic Christian spirituality”...³

He quotes from Traherne’s poem,

The Return

*To infancy, O Lord, again I com,
That I my manhood may improve:
My early tutor is the womb;
I still my Cradle lov;
Tis strange that I should wisest be,
When least I can an error see.*

To be childlike is to be teachable, to know that we have few answers to the important questions of life, to eschew pride and arrogance and to remain humble. Such an attitude runs counter to the usual way in which we acquire knowledge. We are used to approaching what can be known with the intention of remaining objective. We stand at a distance from what we view as an object and examine it. We take it apart and put it back together again. We assess its capacity to be of value to us and we manipulate it for our own purposes. The benefits of such an approach are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand we enjoy better health and an enhanced quality of life because of the dedicated work of researchers. On the other hand our world experiences untold pain because we have exploited the environment and unleashed weapons of mass destruction on innocent civilians as well as military personnel. The recent commemoration of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are stark reminders of that.

In this conference **Dr Trevor Cooling**, our second keynote speaker, has reminded us of the dangers of pursuing an academic curriculum

without proper attention to the so called “soft” questions of values that relate to meaning and significance. There remains the constant possibility that we encourage the development of “clever devils”.

A thoughtful spirituality requires us to approach the subjects/objects of our knowing with reverence and humility. We must always entertain the possibility that the process of knowing may require change in ourselves as well as us bringing about change in the object of our knowing. Indeed to use the phrase “objects of our knowing” may, in itself, be misleading. It may well be more creative and life-giving for us to think in terms of subject/objects of our knowing, for there is always the possibility that we could be **changed by the encounter**

Such a childlike approach to knowing does not relieve us of the responsibility to be discerning. It may seem paradoxical but we also need to reach out for maturity, that is, to be adult in our thinking. We seek a **mature thoughtfulness** – a thoughtfulness that searches for an understanding which is **deep and broad**, which **makes connections** with **other relevant areas of knowledge** and **explores the ethical dimensions** of our decision-making. The author of the letter to the **Hebrews** reminds us that:

“....solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”⁴

A thoughtful spirituality will require us to have a deep and honest understanding of Christian beliefs and values and to bring them into dialogue with our contemporary culture. American Catholic Christian/Religious educator **Thomas H. Groome** has advocated a five movement process of Christian learning, a process which he calls **“Shared Christian Praxis”**.⁵ These five movements are designed to help the learners critically explore their present context with the issues which are of concern to them and to bring those concerns into dialectical relationship with the Christian faith. The desired outcome is a **more faithful lived response**.

My **fundamental contention** is that **no contemporary spirituality** will be **adequate** unless it is built on a **foundation of discerning and humble thoughtfulness**.

For our schools this will mean that priority will be given to the development of a culture of **thoughtful spirituality**. There will be **at least two significant implications**.

These are:

1 There will be an impact on the whole way in which we approach our search for knowledge....

In **all parts of the curriculum** we will need **to foster a reverence and humility in our learning** and a discerning exploration of the ethical dimensions of the subject under study. We will not be satisfied with a superficial knowledge of content but will diligently search for an understanding which is deep and broad. Dr Cooling has provided us with some insights into how this can be achieved in subjects such as Mathematics and Languages.

2 We will

take very seriously the **study of our Christian faith and its implications for our daily living and decision-making**. Christian Studies ⁶ will have its proper time and resource allocation and those who teach the subject will have appropriate qualifications and experience.

In what ways in our schools

can we build a culture

of thoughtful spirituality?

A RELATIONAL SPIRITUALITY

In an important piece of research relating to children's spirituality ⁷ **David Hay** and **Rebecca Nye** came to the conclusion that:

“...the category which drew together all the different kinds of seemingly relevant data was a compound property which I called ‘relational consciousness’.”

This property reflected two patterns:

- an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by the child
- conversation expressed in a context of how a child related to **things, other people, him/herself, and God.** ⁸

I make the assumption that each of these categories of relationship has spiritual significance for all ages and therefore I will briefly explore each of them in turn.

Relationship with God

Apart from the Bible the most significant foundation document for Anglican Christians is **The Book of Common Prayer**. In 1549 the original author, **Thomas Cranmer**, then Archbishop of Canterbury, was determined to restore the kind of daily prayer that was the practice of the early Christians. He was able to take the sevenfold monastic rhythm of prayer and reduce it to just two daily disciplines.

“The Curate that ministereth in every parish church or chapel, being at home, and not otherwise hindered, shall say Morning and Evening Prayerand shall cause a bell to be tolled thereunto a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God’s Word, and to pray with him.” ⁹

Here was established a **spirituality for the common people** which was built into their everyday lives. Now they were able to **hear** and **meditate** on **God’s Word** and to join together in **common prayer**. True, we live in an age which is very different from that of Cranmer’s

time. Society then was largely rural and agrarian...today it is highly urbanized and technological. No longer do we hear the bell tolling, calling us to prayer. In the noisy, busy world in which we live we make little or no time for silence or meditation. However, in my view, it is crucial that we find ways in which we can establish the importance of a **relationship with God** which is **unhurried, reflective, prayerful** and **communal**. The Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961 to 1974, **Arthur Michael Ramsey**, commented:

*“Silence enables us to be aware of God, to let mind and imagination dwell upon his truth, to let prayer be listening before it is talking, and to discover our own selves in a way that is not always possible when we are making or listening to noise. There comes sometimes an inner silence in which the soul discovers itself in a new dimension of energy and peace, a dimension which the restless life can miss...”*¹⁰

In our schools
we must build into the curriculum
regular opportunities
for quiet reflection and for common prayer.

Relationship with Self

There is a significant number of young people in our schools who, for various reasons, suffer with **low self esteem**. Another of our keynote speakers, **Allison Bassano**, has reminded us of the **pressures experienced by young people today** and of the urgent need for them to find an inner peace – to **find their true selves**. We were challenged to reflect on the degree to which our students learn to be gentle, to accept peace, to defeat anxiety, to think positively, to rejoice and to rest. Also in our school communities there are often those whose self esteem seems to know no bounds! What is **required** is a **balanced and sane estimate of ourselves** – awareness of our strengths and our weaknesses...or, as **St Paul** expresses it, “..think **of yourself with sober judgment**.” (Romans 12:3) In an important book by **James Fowler**¹¹ a distinction is made between ‘**fallenness**’ and ‘**befallenness**’.

*“We are seeing a lot of **befallenness** in our time. Little children have parents who are too distracted or too unloved themselves to love as they ought to love, and the child experiences **befallenness**, a lack of trust, a heightened anxiety. A child is born to substance addicted parents and suffers physical, emotional and spiritual distortions resulting from abuse, neglect, and genetic damage. This is **befallenness**.”¹²*

It is too easy for us adults to be aware of the ‘faults’, as we perceive them, in young people and to give the impression that the ‘bad’ outweighs the ‘good’. We need to **recognize ‘befallenness’** and **respond with love** which is **affirming** and **positive**. This is not to say that we overlook or underestimate the **significance of the ‘fallenness’** of our human experience but that we pay proper regard to what is ‘good’ and life giving.

In a remarkable poem **Brian Wren** celebrates the goodness of human life.

Good is the Flesh

*Good is the flesh that the Word has become,
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,
good is the feeding, caressing, and rest,
good is the body for knowing the world,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the body for knowing the world,
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,
feeling, perceiving, within and around,
good is the body from cradle to grave,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the body from cradle to grave,
growing and aging, arousing, impaired,
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh
longing in all, as in Jesus, to dwell,
glad of embracing and tasting and smell,
good is the body for good and for God,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.”¹³*

Certainly we all experience ‘fallenness’, but we are all **deeply loved by God** and the **recreative work of God’s Spirit** in our lives can open a whole world of new possibilities. May we, and our students, capture the significance of the line,

“good is the body for good and for God”

**A spirituality which is life giving for our contemporary world,
while recognizing the reality of human fallenness,
will pay proper regard to all that is good and life affirming.**

Relationship with Others

When Jesus summarized the commandments he reminded us that the obligation we have to each other is to: **“Love your neighbour as yourself.”**¹⁴ It is salutary to be reminded as well, that Jesus interpreted ‘neighbour’ as having a **wide application**, wide enough to include our enemies! As members of the human family we do not live as isolated units. **John Donne** who became Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral in London in **1621** tells us in a well known passage from his **“Devotions upon Emergent Occasions”**...

*“The church is Catholic, universal, so are all her actions;
all that she does belongs to all.*

*When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me;
for that child is thereby connected to the head which is my head too,
and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member.*

And when she buries a man, that action concerns me:

all mankind is of one author, and is of one volume;

when one man dies, one chapter is torn out of the book,

but translated into a better language:

and every chapter must be so translated;

God employs several translators;

some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness,

some by war, some by justice;

but God’s hand is in every transition,

and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again,

for that library when every book shall lie open to one another.

No man is an island, entire of itself;

every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,

as well as if a promontory were,

as well as death if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were;

any man’s death diminishes me,

because I am involved in mankind, and therefore

never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee”¹⁵

I have quoted this beautifully evocative passage at some length because it helps us to see the need to **redress an imbalance in our contemporary culture which is very individualistic and self-centred**. In our schools we can over-emphasize the importance of individual excellence and in so doing undermine our inter-relatedness and inter-dependence. **All members of the school community must be highly valued**, and perhaps especially the low achievers, the apparent misfits, the disadvantaged and those with behavioural difficulties. **A fundamental issue** which must be addressed **concerns the ways** in which we give **expression to our inter-dependence**.

Without a strong sense of community

we cannot

'love our neighbours as ourselves'.

Relationship with the Natural Environment

The deterioration of the natural environment must be a major concern for us all. It has been estimated that some 60% of the world's ecosystems are now seriously degraded. We desperately need to **embrace a relationship with the natural environment which is respectful and responsible.**

One of the major concerns has to do with the effects of **global warming**. Recently I was shown over the main Australian Antarctic Division facility, at Kingston in southern Tasmania. It was impossible not to become very aware of major problems emerging in the Antarctic continent. For example, in five of the Adelie penguin colonies near Palmer Station, numbers of breeding pairs have dropped from 15,200 to 9,200 in 25 years. Some smaller colonies have disappeared altogether. The Emperor penguins face a similar future. It would appear that **warmer air and sea surface temperatures in the Antarctic** have resulted in less ice forming in the seas. This sea ice provides the necessary conditions for the algae that in turn provide food for huge swarms of krill. It is on krill that whales and penguins depend for food.

We know that **gas emissions**, particularly from the burning of coal and other fossil fuels, are a highly significant contributor to the **increase of global temperatures**. We also know that **Australia is a major culprit** for we are **profligate in our use of energy**. We still act as if the earth's resources are inexhaustible and are available primarily to satisfy our ever expanding wants and ever higher "standard of living". In the end it will probably be self preservation which will force us to act with greater determination...but by then it may be too late!

Of course we need to **pressure governments** to work with business and industries to **reduce gas emissions** and to **promote forms of renewable energy**... but also there are other things that we can do, albeit in a small way.

In our schools could we replace commonly used globes with energy efficient bulbs? Could we turn off lights and appliances at the wall when not in use? Could we install solar hot water systems? Could we only heat or cool the spaces being used? In our boarding schools can we insist that showers are kept short and efficient? Can we introduce practical programs in which students can contribute to the renewal of the local environment? And so on.

Today we need **a spirituality which reflects reverence for the whole of the created order** and a sober **recognition of the interdependence** of all that has life. **Charles Cummings** in his book on **Eco-Spirituality** says:

*“**Reverence for all things** is the essential attitude of a caretaker who wisely and gently enhances the quality of life wherever possible. The role of **humankind** in God’s creation is to be the **faithful, prudent caretaker** who walks the path of universal reverence. Each created entity has its own ordered structure, its own purpose and mysterious destiny. To live reverently in the new creation is to respect and celebrate the integrity of all that is.”¹⁶*

We need a **relationship** with the **natural environment** which is **respectful** and **caring**.

**In what ways in our schools
can we build a culture
of **relational** spirituality?**

A PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

Earlier in this address I referred to that characteristic of **Anglicanism** which “...refuses to separate the **Protestant from the Catholic**, the **word from the sacrament**...”

It is not insignificant that in the 18th and 19th centuries there was deep concern for social justice both among the Evangelicals and those of the Oxford Movement. **Sarah Trimmer** (1741 – 1810) was actively engaged in **social reform**. She said:

*“It really is a scandal to the nation, to see such numbers of the common people in extreme indigence, while the plenty and riches of the land, enable the higher ranks to indulge in all the conveniences and luxuries of life. **Every parish is a large family**... it behoves the heads of it to see that each individual in it has raiment and food, or the means of procuring them at least; and that provision is made for their instruction in such things as concern their temporal and spiritual interests.”¹⁷*

John Newton the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace”, when parish priest of an inner city London church was a notable advocate of the abolition of the slave trade, as was, of course **William Wilberforce**, another noted Evangelical. The leaders of the Oxford Movement, especially **John Newman**, **Edward Pusey** and **John Keble** generated a new concern for social justice at a time when the industrial revolution was taking hold.

A concern for the practical outworking of Christian faith has deep roots in Anglicanism as of course it does in other churches. The words of Jesus himself are a salutary reminder of the necessity for **a spirituality which is obedient to the will of God.**

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven.”¹⁸

It would not be too extreme to assert it is **obscene** to **claim** that we are **spiritually-minded** if we **do nothing** to **relieve** those in **need**.

Today we are faced with the challenge to **‘make poverty history.’** In a recent edition of **Oxfam News** we were reminded that:

*“**Every day** across the world, **30,000 children die** because they are too poor to survive.....According to the United Nations, nearly **800 million people** around the world are suffering from **chronic hunger**...more than **one billion people** do **not** have **access to clean drinking water**; and **1.2 billion people** survive on **less than \$1 a day**...”¹⁹*

The **‘Make Poverty History’** campaign is supported by a number of Christian organizations including **TEAR Australia**, which has issued the **‘Micah challenge’**. This is a challenge to take seriously the words of Micah

*“He has showed you, O people what is good..
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”²⁰*

This **challenge** is supported with a range of resources which would assist Christians in taking positive steps to contribute to the ending of world poverty by the **end of this year**.

Of course **world poverty is not the only pressing issue of social justice**. What do we think about our own government's policy of **detention for asylum seekers**? Writing in the 2005 Winter edition of **Zadok Perspectives** about the Woomera Detention Centre, **Sally Clarke** comments:

*"The grave-like grimness and finality of the detention centre itself wasn't the only tomb in the landscape. You could see the others when you closed your eyes: ghostly memorials to a history of abuse of the land and its people, many of them carried out in the name of 'national security': **Aboriginal dispossession, uranium mining, atom bomb testing, rocket launching** and most recently **mandatory detention of children and adults without charge and without limit.....The desert is a carpet under which Australia sweeps its shame.**"*²¹

We do note with a degree of relief that there has been a recent softening of that mandatory detention policy so that children and families can live in the community while their refugee applications are being considered.

There are of course many other issues and situations of significant need to which we could respond. Many of our schools raise funds for very worthwhile causes and that is highly commendable. I think, however, that as well we need to look at other practical ways in which we can respond to human need in our own communities and in the wider world.

The **important question** for us remains.

In what ways in our schools

can we build a culture

of practical spirituality?

CONCLUSION

In this address I have maintained that we need a **spirituality** which will **inspire** and **sustain** us in our **contemporary world** and that such a spirituality, in drawing upon our Anglican Christian heritage, will be deeply **thoughtful**, **relational** and **practical**.

A **THOUGHTFUL SPIRITUALITY** will be characterized by **humility** and **discernment**.

A **RELATIONAL SPIRITUALITY** will find expression in:

- a relationship **with God** which is **prayerful**, **reflective** and **communal**,
- a relationship **with Self** which **recognizes** its **fallenness**, yet is essentially **affirming** and **positive**,
- a relationship **with Others** which is **loving** and **affirms** our **inter-relatedness** and **inter-dependence**,
- a relationship **with the Natural Environment** which is **respectful** and **caring**.

A **PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY** will be characterized by a...

commitment to justice and...

action on behalf of the needy.

I conclude with another of **Brian Wren's** poems :

Great Lover, Calling Us to Share

*Great lover, calling us to share
Your joy in all created things,
From atom-dance to eagle's wings
We come and go to praise and care.*

*Though sure of resurrection-grace,
We ache for all of earth's troubled lands
And hold the planet in our hands,
A fragile, unprotected place.*

*Your questing spirit longs to gain
No simple fishing ground for souls,
But as life's story onward rolls,
A world more joyful and humane.*

*As midwives who assist at birth,
We give our uttermost, yet **grieve**
Lest **folly, greed, or hate** should leave
A spoiled, aborted, barren earth.*

*Self-giving Lover, since you dare
to join us in our history,
embracing all our destiny,
we'll come and go with praise and care.²²*

IN ALL OUR SCHOOLS MAY WE LEARN TO

“...COME AND GO WITH PRAISE AND CARE.”

ENDNOTES

¹ See chapter 1 of Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, Blackwell Publishing, 1991

² Mursell Gordon, “The Anglican Spirit” in Mursell Gordon (Ed), *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, Fortress Press, 2001

³ *Ibid.*, p.257

⁴ Hebrews 5:14

⁵ See chapter 4 of Thomas H Groome., *Sharing Faith*, Harper Collins, New York, USA, 1991.

⁶ There are a variety of titles for this subject in the curriculum. In some schools it will be called “Religious and Values Education”, “Faith and Life”, “Divinity” and so on.

⁷ Hay, David, and Nye, Rebecca, “The Spirit of the Child”, Harper Collins, London, 1998. See especially chapter 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.113

⁹ The Preface to the **Book of Common Prayer**, “Concerning the Services of the Church”

McGrath, 1991, p.107

¹¹ Fowler, James W., “**Weaving the New Creation**”, Harper, San Francisco, 1991

¹² *Ibid.*, p.134

¹³ Quoted by Fowler in “**Weaving the New Creation**”, page 135

¹⁴ See Matthew 22:39

¹⁵ McGrath, 1991, p.255

¹⁶ Cummings, Charles, **Eco-Spirituality, Toward a Reverent Life**, Paulist Press, New York, 1991, p.98

¹⁷ Mursell, 2001, p.266

¹⁸ See Matthew 7:21

¹⁹ **Oxfam News**, Winter 2005, p.5

²⁰ See Micah 6:8

²¹ **Zadok Perspectives**, No.87, Winter 2005, p.5

²² Quoted in Fowler, p. 141