

## Address at the Launch

Speech 2: at 5.00 pm at the Launch

In 1606, the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros sailed into a harbour in the New Hebrides &ndash; and in the first flush of excitement named it Australia del Espiritu Santo. This had been a long European dream &ndash; from Terra Australis Incognita to a dream of a great South Land dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Like many before and after him, de Quiros failed in his mission &ndash; but poets (if not historians) have celebrated his vision &ndash; a land where people &ldquo;shall walk at last like spirits of fire&rdquo;, a land of the imagination, found only if you &ldquo;voyage within&rdquo;.

There was another dream in the great South Land of the Spirit &ndash; with the Rainbow Serpent emerging from her long sleep underground. Her time to give birth had come. She set free the Spirit beings and created our distinctive landscape, with its hills and valleys, its tracts of water, its trees and wild flowers and all living things. So this great land was born &ndash; together with its animals and human inhabitants &ndash; all in relationship with one another and with the land &ndash; forever celebrated through story, song and ceremony.

One of the ways we are learning to talk of the human person is that we are &ldquo;always otherwise engaged in Spirit&rdquo;. This is the One &ldquo;in whom we live and move and have our being&rdquo;, who hovers over us as the windy Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters, over the chaos. This is the One who overshadows us, as the Spirit overshadowed Mary &ndash; and the One who breathes life and peace among us &ndash; just as the Risen Christ breathed Spirit over the disciples in the upper room. This is the Spirit who wakes us up to the communion which is both our origin and our destiny, our gift and our task. This is the Spirit, who &ndash; according to the Orthodox tradition &ndash; &ldquo;creates events of communion&rdquo;. And such communion thrives on otherness and difference, and invites us to see others not as a threat but as promise. Iris Murdoch, the English novelist and philosopher said that &ldquo;love is the difficult realization that something other than oneself is real&rdquo;. This is not far from that disposition of openness &ndash; that contemplative attitude which is so crucial in our ministry &ndash; and which has been called &ldquo;a long loving look at the real&rdquo;.

Spiritual direction &ndash; in its many forms &ndash; is at least about creating a culture of conversation &ndash; a sharing in what is often called God&rsquo;s &ldquo;dialogue of salvation&rdquo; with us. Good conversation with others demands the pursuit of real and honest conversation with ourselves &ndash; a conversation that leads to a recognition and acceptance that we are deeply flawed &ndash; yet we stand on holy ground. This inner conversation is where we learn compassion towards ourselves: it is an inner conversation which is part of the great conversation of salvation. John Paul II continued this theme of his predecessor and suggested that such a dialogue was not so much an exchange of ideas or opinions (which too readily polarizes and politicizes) but is an &ldquo;exchange of gifts&rdquo; &ndash; touching on a pithy definition of spiritual direction from the 1970&rsquo;s: &ldquo;a gifted presence to help a gifted self to emerge&rdquo;.

One of the things we celebrate in this ministry of spiritual direction is presence. Spiritual Directors International&rsquo;s journal is in fact called (simply) Presence. It is with particular pleasure that we have received greetings from Mary Ann Scofield &ndash; copies of which are in your Conference kit. It is also our delight to welcome here Liz Bud Ellmann &ndash; who is the Executive Director of Spiritual Directors International. I also want to acknowledge the greetings of Anne Hadfield from the New Zealand Community of Spiritual Directors.

When someone is present to someone else, really present, something happens. Carl Rogers, in the 20th Century said that when a person is deeply heard, deeply listened to, the more there is that happens. If we can get in touch with our own experience of being looked at, seen, or being listened to, heard &ndash; we can recognize that experience, that shift within us: the more there is that happens. And when we read the Gospels we begin to see what is so attractive about the way Jesus of Nazareth is present, or available &ndash; and this capacity for such presence was surely forged in his own foundational, baptismal experience of being seen and delighted in by Abba &ndash; God.

As spiritual directors, we know and experience this fact of presence and its cost. Being present to someone else always asks something of us. When we listen to someone else &ndash; someone different &ndash; someone other &ndash; it&rsquo;s as if we let go of or hand over something of ourselves, for the sake of the other. I hand over for example, my opinions, my time, my preoccupations and concerns, for your sake. As Benedict XVI in his first Encyclical says: &ldquo;I

must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.&rdquo;

This way of being present &ndash; which we see so clearly in the paschal mystery of Jesus &ndash; is sacrificial &ndash; and in the words of Rowan Williams it is a sacrifice &ldquo;in the sense of something given up, handed over, so that a mutual relationship may be both affirmed and renewed. Being in the church is being in the middle of this sacrificial action.&rdquo; And the mutual relationship which is affirmed and renewed is nothing less than *communio* or what Thomas Merton called a &ldquo;hidden wholeness&rdquo;. This *communio* is our home and our destiny; it is a gift as well as a task &ndash; which is why it is so important to create a culture of conversation. Because what God has done for us is to be done in and through us, we discover the great privilege of learning to be present &ndash; living the paschal mystery in our own ministry of costly presence. &ldquo;So death is at work in us but life in you.&rdquo; (2 Cor 4:12 )

The Second Vatican Council declared, &ldquo;The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts&rdquo;. In this &ldquo;praxis of solidarity&rdquo; to which we are called &ndash; this &ldquo;discipleship of presence&rdquo; &ndash; there will be both acceptance and protest. This prophetic dimension to the ministry of spiritual direction will (as Walter Bruggeman puts it) see with different eyes, keep alive the ministry of the imagination, penetrate through and beneath illusion and distortion and the way we define ourselves and each other. It will bring to expression the hopes and yearnings which have been denied and suppressed. It will make a difference to the way we offer spiritual direction &ndash; and it will make a difference who we offer spiritual direction to. It will make a difference to the way we run our formation programs and it will make a difference who we encourage and admit into these programs. It will help us look into life those who are still largely invisible and listen into speech &ndash; into expression &ndash; those whose voices are too often ignored or inaudible. The prophetic dimension urges us to feel with the heart of God and offers a genuine, attractive and alternative way which brings both freedom and hope.

In the words of a contemporary American poet, &ldquo;the world offers itself to your imagination&rdquo;. Cardinal Newman saw clearly that &ldquo;the heart is reached not by reason but by the imagination &rdquo; Jesus, in his proclamation of the Kingdom or the Reign of God was offering an imaginative, attractive, vision of an alternative way of being in the world. So as spiritual directors we offer in Michael Leunig&rsquo;s words: &ldquo;another way of knowing, another way of being&rdquo; &ndash; through story, image and poetry. As we stay with people the hidden and latent power of the symbolic &ndash; whether it is the text of the Scripture or the text of one&rsquo;s life &ndash; is unleashed &ndash; opening up a genuine meeting place for revelation and encounter &ndash; a place where the Creator can deal directly with the Creature.

This ministry is a very ordinary and very human ministry within the life of the Church, and yet for those of us called into it there is no greater privilege. It is a hidden ministry &ndash; but transparent &ndash; and it is for this reason the Council has made one of its foundational documents, A Code of Ethics. It is a hidden ministry in the general life of the Church &ndash; but it is hidden too in the confidentiality which necessarily surrounds it. This hiddenness &ndash; and the deep personal and intimate engagement it requires &ndash; exposes both parties to risk. We do well to remind ourselves of these vulnerabilities, and a Code of Ethics can help us towards safer and better practice. But our concern for appropriate standards of behaviour is grounded in the nature of God in creation and incarnation. Because we bear the image of God, and because we are the beneficiaries of the sacrificial life of Jesus, &ldquo;individuals cannot be used for the pleasure, satisfaction or benefit of others&rdquo;.

It is a vocation, a calling to an other directed ministry &ndash; but its vocational strength and fruit lies in the constant openness to our own personal vocation, and the challenges and choices that brings, together with the promise of personal growth and transformation. Who we are in God matters &ndash; and our ministry is intimately tied to our own growing sense of delight in ourselves &ndash; and the freedom that comes from that. There is a very good reason why spiritual directors are in spiritual direction themselves. There is a very good reason why spiritual directors seek supervision.

It is a charism &ndash; a grace from God and without that we are nothing. But it is about skills too &ndash; and for this reason the Council has as another of its foundational documents, Standards for the Formation of Spiritual Directors.

The contemporary English poet, Anglican Priest David Scott, has written a poem about the Roman Catholic spiritual director Baron von Hugel &ndash; who, in the late 19th Century, wrote letters of direction. Of von Hugel he wrote

Walking into Kensington with the letter,

his muffler tight against the frost,

he reassures himself that directing a soul

is not only a matter of angels' talk, it is

also the knack of catching the evening post.

Charism, or angels' talk it most certainly is &ndash; but spiritual direction is also a skill &ndash; &ldquo;catching the evening post&rdquo;.

The Standards the Council offers to formation programs arises out of the recognition of the diversity of models and the strengths of many of these programs, and the celebration of the initiative of the Spirit. Incidentally, we are in communication with 17 formation programs in this country. This Standards document is arguably the most crucial of the Council's documents, and undergirding it is a vision of locally trained spiritual directors who are well formed, equipped and competent &ndash; and above all else &ndash; graced persons open to growing awareness and interior freedom.

And running through all the Interim Council's deliberations and discussions has been a golden thread: a growing sense of commitment to the practice of discernment.

When we came together in October last year to choose the Inaugural Council, the definition of discernment we accepted was as follows:

Discernment is based on an act of faith that the Holy Spirit is at work within and among those who seek to know God's wisdom. Good discernment requires good information and a willingness to attend prayerfully with freedom of heart to the movement of Spirits within oneself and within the group and within the world around us.

This work we did those two days was a focused process of prayer and dialogue. It was, we came to see, an event of the Australian Church , and one which has the potential to gift the Church.

Discernment is perhaps best understood as a verb, rather than a noun, a practice, a way of being in the world that is open to God, open to each other and profoundly fruitful. While such discernment over these two days was a task with a specific outcome in mind, we came to see it as much more: as an investment for the future practice of the Council. We came to see it not as a recipe, but an art form, not a task or an achievement but a way of life. We came to see, what I have mentioned before &ndash; that the Holy Spirit comes as the creator of events of communion.

Karl Rahner uses the image of a chess club to describe the Church. Just as the executive of a chess club won't necessarily contain the best players, but exists for the good of the club, fostering its aims, encouraging its members &ndash; and just as those who make up the real core of the Church are the ordinary Christians who pray, love, serve and speak out prophetically, so this Council will not necessarily consist of the best spiritual directors in Australia. It simply wants to pledge itself to honour the charism of spiritual direction:

to guard the flame.

to foster good practice and accountability.

to encourage individual spiritual directors as well as associations and networks.

to offer Formation Programs standards of excellence to aspire to.

and to constantly draw our attention, not merely to what we can do better, but to what God is doing among us.

This is a very special moment &ndash; a celebration of grace. May we together continue to find in surprising and beckoning ways that this can truly be a great South Land of the Holy Spirit.

The Interim Council has worked hard and well over the past 4-5 years &ndash; and this is a good opportunity to acknowledge their work.

In the preliminary stages: Michael Horsburgh, Peter Cantwell and June Flynn brought their particular experience and expertise to our foundational documents. We are grateful to Jonathan Wells QC and the Adelaide legal firm of Lynch Meyer for work on our Constitution. Michael Smith was the Interim Council&rsquo;s initial Chairman and brought much enthusiasm to the early stages of its work. It is important here to acknowledge and thank the Campion Centre for Ignatian Spirituality in Kew for its very generous hospitality towards the Council in the provision of accommodation and meals and a place to meet over the last 5 years. We particularly want to acknowledge the support and financial contribution made by the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes. Mary Cresp worked tirelessly as its secretary and liaison, and together with Kevin Canty, Joan Ryan, Deidre Scott, Jan Geason and Sue Dunbar brought experience, enthusiasm, goodwill, hard work and insight to the task in hand. To all these people we owe a deep gratitude.

Six of us from the Interim Council: Elaine Smith , Brian Gallagher, John Stewart, Robin Pryor , Jill Manton and Philip Carter have come into the new Council. I want to thank them for their work in the past and their willingness to be on the Council in the next stage of its life. Through a discernment process, these six and a further six (Frank Daniels, Lynette Dungan , Anne Lane , Ruth Morgan, Beth Robertson and Stephen Truscott) make up the Inaugural Council.

Philip Carter