

## 2009 Conference Papers

AN OTHER VOICE National Gathering of the Spiritual Direction Community of Australia Mary MacKillop Place Hospitality and Conference Centre North Sydney The following are some of the speeches and conference papers of the second gathering of the Spiritual Direction Community of Australia. The gathering offered an opportunity for spiritual directors of all traditions to come together to listen deeply to some of the contemporary voices impacting our ministry today: • Listening to the Earth • Listening to a universally shared religious Spirit • Listening to the challenge of Nonviolence To go directly to one of the speeches and conference papers below, click on the green highlighted link. The Formators & Day: Thursday evening 23 & Friday 24 April 2009 Opening Address of Welcome to Formators - Philip Carter, Chairperson AECSD

Being a Formator of Spiritual Directors - Brian Gallagher

National Gathering of spiritual directors: Friday evening 24 & Sunday 26 April 2009 Opening Address of Welcome to Second National Gathering, Philip Carter, Chairperson AECSD

God as Difference In Communion & Pat Fox, Keynote Speaker

Another Remembering: Listening to a Universally Shared Religious Spirit & John Seed

Another Way: Listening to the Challenge of Non-violence - Brendan McKeague

Opening Address of Welcome to Formators, 23 April 2009 - Philip Carter, Chairperson AECSD I want to welcome you all to this very first formal gathering together for those associated with formation and training programs in the ministry of spiritual direction in this country. At the launch of this Council & the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction & three years ago in Melbourne & I suggested, among other things & that the theme of dialogue or conversation might be helpful as we reflect on the work and ministry of spiritual direction. I suggested also that one of the Council's chief tasks is to create and foster a culture of conversation & a culture where communion takes place. It seems important to place this motif of conversation within as wide and deep a context as possible. John Paul II in his Encyclical & "That they may be one" said: The capacity for & "dialogue" is rooted in the nature of the person and human dignity... we cannot fully find ourselves except through a sincere gift of ourselves... Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways it is always an & "exchange of gifts";

His successor, Benedict XVI, alluded in his first Encyclical, to the cost of such dialogue, the totality of such presence.

& "I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self. I must be personally present in my gift." Thomas Merton was equally as clear about & "communication" or

& "conversation". True communication on the deepest level is more than a simple sharing of ideas, or conceptual knowledge, of formulated truth. The kind of conversation that is necessary on this deep level must also be & "communion" beyond the level of words, a communion in authentic experience.

And he went on to say: If I insist on giving you my truth, and never stop to become your truth in return, then there can be no truth between us.

This is the kind of communication which asks of us a costly presence, a self-emptying, a staying with & an experience even of poverty and dying, for the sake of the other. This is true of our ministry in spiritual direction: it is true in our ministry of formation: and I hope it will be true for us tonight and tomorrow, where we can be open to grace and to each other, and experience something revelatory and transforming, for ourselves and for our practice.

& "Conversation is our only hope" the post-modern theologian David Tracy says. There is always a challenge in conversation where we & "risk our present self-understanding by facing the claims to attention of the other." Theodore Zeldin & a social commentator & writes extensively around the theme of conversation. He asks: But how can conversations make so much difference? They can't if you believe that the world is ruled by empowering economic and political forces, that conflict is the essence of life, that humans are basically animals and that listening is just a long struggle for survival and domination. If that's true, you can't change much. All you can do is have conversations which distract or amuse you. But I see the world differently, as made of individuals searching for a partner, for a lover, for a guru, for God.

And he goes on: What is missing from the world is a sense of direction, because we are overwhelmed by the conflicts which surround us, as though we are marching through a jungle which never ends. I should like some of us to start conversations to dispel that darkness, using them to create equality, to give ourselves courage, to open ourselves to strangers, and most practically, to remake our working world, so that we are no longer isolated by our jargon or our professional boredom.

David Ranson says that, with the disciples on the road to Emmaus we might well claim & "happy the person who has learnt to converse, for the future will be theirs." We see the world differently: we value persons as images or viceroys of God: we believe that every encounter with each other holds out the possibility of encounter with God. The vision that I have for this Council is one that embraces us all but extends us as well. The focus on formators and formation programs is not incidental to the life and work of the Council: it is rather integral to it. You will have seen in our documents over the past year, a change in wording from Standards to Guidelines. Here we are struggling to move from the language of law and boundaries to the language of horizons and possibilities. In the same way, I could suggest that a Code of Ethics could become a Code for Ethical Practice. In some thinking on contemporary religious life it has been suggested that a better understanding of the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience might be to reframe them as vows for poverty, chastity and obedience. This seems to me an altogether more dynamic and open understanding of what we are about and may in fact help us. So tonight and tomorrow & we hope, in a little way to Dispel the darkness & so that things are a little clearer & because we are a bit closer.

Work from the vision and for the vision of the inherent dignity and freedom of the human person &ndash; of every human person.

Take heart and live hopefully and face a future which shapes us more (even) than our past. And move beyond professionalism (though it is vital) and beyond jargon (which isolates and makes us unreal) to open ourselves to what is strange or new &ndash; for the remaking &ndash; the transformation of our world.

Two of our best teachers over the past decades in this ministry tell us that &ldquo;the point of disclosing to God &ndash; and I would add to others &ndash; what is on our minds is the act of disclosing, not what we disclose&rdquo;. Disclosing whatever is on our minds [and hearts] however &ndash; whether the matter we talk about makes us happy, saddens us, or causes us to furrow our heads in puzzlement &ndash; is a way of revealing ourselves to God [and to others]. Setting out to disclose ourselves in this way, if only for a moment, promotes our relationship with God [and with each other]. Madeline Birmingham & William Connolly

This is a ground breaking moment for the ministry and charism of spiritual direction in this country. It is the first time for so many of us &ndash; called to help in the formation of spiritual directors &ndash; to be together in this way &ndash; for conversation. As we are with others in the hidden work we do, so we can be with each other today: present, available, living and acting as congruently as we can, creating space for the other &ndash; for others &ndash; and at the same time affirming and renewing the mutual relationship which is the community of God in whom we share and live and move and have our being. The Council is a growing, evolving phenomenon. Today&rsquo;s conversation is an exciting marker in that process. Marge Piercy has a wonderful poem about speaking: It is entitled Unlearning not to speak

She must learn again to  
speak  
starting with I  
starting with we  
starting as the infant does  
with her own true hunger  
and pleasure  
and rage.

May this time together be a time when we hear another&rsquo;s voice  
hear our own voice  
make things a little clearer by moving a little closer.  
have some of the darkness dispelled  
and find heart by opening ourselves to the befriending  
Spirit of God.

Being a Formator of Spiritual Directors, 24 April 2009 - Brian Gallagher To be fully-alive human beings, free, faithful, and fruitful, is the goal of any process, any model of formation. In AECSD&rsquo;s desire to support you in your ministry of formation, the Council has thought and prayed, consulted and struggled with different expectations, and written and re-written several times the document entitled Formation Guidelines: Recommendations to foster, support and recognise the formation of spiritual directors in Australia (initially called Standards for Formation&hellip;). Through it, we&rsquo;ve always believed that, first and foremost, we are called to be free, faithful, fruitful human beings. Then, maybe, we can be spiritual directors, supervisors, mentors, and formators of others. The very terminology raises questions. We&rsquo;ve all come today, obviously considering ourselves formators of spiritual directors &ndash; and yet I know some are asking &ldquo;what exactly is formation?&rdquo; AECSD uses the word &ldquo;formation&rdquo; of spiritual directors, since that has been the traditional term. We recognise that some may say &ldquo;training&rdquo; of spiritual directors, some say &ldquo;preparation&rdquo;: we&rsquo;ve continued to say &ldquo;formation&rdquo;, meaning that we are concerned with the ministry of helping to prepare others for their own ministry as spiritual directors. (You recall that we had similar questions about calling ourselves spiritual directors: some preferred terms like &ldquo;spiritual companion&rdquo;, &ldquo;soul friend&rdquo;, &ldquo;mentor&rdquo;, but the traditional term holds. No spiritual director, in fact, directs others, in the sense of imposing direction; similarly, no formator forms others, in the sense of shaping them into some pre-determined mould.) I don&rsquo;t imagine that anything I&rsquo;m about to say is terribly new. Maybe we can see this time as an opportunity to remind ourselves of the basic principles we hold as spiritual directors and formators, and to review the ways we translate these principles into our ministry. \*\*\*\*\*

I have two basic assumptions: \* formation is a personal, dynamic, developmental, wholistic reality. Its aim and its outcome are not pre-determined, not static or measurable. Certainly, there is an intellectual content to formation &ndash; as Teresa of Avila once said, make sure you talk to someone learned! I would add, someone who has integrated their learning, integrated the intellectual, spiritual and pastoral components &ndash; for formation is essentially about personal growth, conversion, transformation. Learning about spiritual direction is a mere first step in learning to be a spiritual director. \* secondly, spiritual direction is God&rsquo;s work. However we go about our work as spiritual directors or formators of spiritual directors, we cannot risk distracting from what God has done and is doing in those to whom we minister. As spiritual directors and formators, we focus on the workings of God&rsquo;s Spirit in others; we listen (with those to whom we minister) to the invitation of God&rsquo;s Spirit in their prayer, their ministry, and their life experience. \*\*\*\*\*

We probably didn&rsquo;t need the reminder, but we were given it strongly in the early writings of Gerald May. May says it&rsquo;s rare that any one of us comes to ministry utterly freely. We all come with varying degrees of unconscious self-interest and conscious or unconscious preconceptions about what we can offer and what we imagine the other person

needs. It's precisely because of the unfreedoms that all of us carry that we are invited to conversion &ndash; to be fully alive human beings, let alone open, sensitive spiritual directors and formators of spiritual directors. Because we are called to life, to freedom and to truth, our ministry of listening to and responding to God's Spirit requires constant discernment and constant reflection on our own inner movements and personal dynamics. On behalf of AECSD, I want to pick up this insight of Gerald May to see what light it can shed on our ministry of helping others to be spiritual directors. I want to address questions like when and how does formation happen &ndash; for us and for those to whom we minister? And what does it mean for me to be a formator? \*\*\*\*\*

I believe that what Gerald May says about the unfreedoms we bring to our ministerial relationships is true for all of our relationships. Few of us come to any relationship utterly freely, whether our relationship with God or our relationships with our loved ones. Invariably we come with some level of possessiveness, self-interest, selfishness in our loving, though we rarely know this in our awareness. John of the Cross would say that the normal development of any relationship is a process of purification of our desire and our love for another. It happens in all of our relationships, often quite painfully: we can experience it as a time of crisis in a friendship or marriage, a time of frustration in our spiritual direction or our therapy, a time of apparent loss in our lives, a time when God seems remote and uncaring. Moreover, we experience it as a time of helplessness to change what seems to be happening to us. As you know, John calls this experience a dark night. And though it may be dark and joyless, he says it's the way our desire is purified and freed. It doesn't feel so, but in fact, it's a time of growth, personally and relationally. It's normal; indeed, it seems it has to happen for all of us. As we are purified, we come to know the other, the one we love, more truly, in herself / himself, not judged by our likes and dislikes. And we come to know God more truly, not as we ourselves have imagined God. To say it another way: in this process of purification, we are constantly invited to move from loving, ministering, being with others because of the satisfaction it gives us, or the affirmation we receive, rather to loving and ministering to others for their sake, regardless of the cost. This point of freedom is the goal of formation. As supervisors and formators, we are especially interested in others' ministerial relationships, but more and more we find that we cannot isolate these relationships from other relationships in a person's life. When the process of purification happens for someone, it will be across the board, integrated into the person's whole life experience. And it will be ongoing: I'm tempted say, never-ending. We want our spiritual directors to be free, faithful, and fruitful in their ministry. We want it for them because we know that a spiritual director's ability to be present to another, to listen to another, and to sense the movement of the Spirit of God in another's experience, depends on the director's own inner freedom. An unfree director will hear what she wants to hear, or what suits her to hear, or only what he is able to hear. Our ministry of supervision and formation is intended to promote that growth to freedom in the spiritual directors who come to us. \*\*\*\*\*

We need to talk about how we go about this, how we can help the movement to inner freedom in another person. Because we believe that spiritual direction, supervision and formation are God's work, we've committed ourselves to a contemplative approach to our ministry. Contemplation is to see as God sees, to hear as God hears. As we help others to be spiritual directors, we'll want to work contemplatively ourselves, at the same time as we are encouraging them to a contemplative way of ministry. We know we can't teach someone to contemplate the beauty of a rose or the shimmer of the moon rising over the bay, or the uniqueness of the person sitting across the room. But we can ask what happens in your inner world as you focus on the rose or listen to the person opposite you&hellip; how are you affected by what you see and hear. As we focus on our inner life in this way, we find that most of us experience a mixed bag of movements in ourselves as we look and listen. There is much we could say about discernment, the task of sifting these mixed movements. For now, we note that, as we help others in the process of purification, a key focus for us will be identifying and naming the different spirits at work in the other, in both their prayer and their ministry. (Needless to say, we will need to name the different spirits in ourselves, too, as we listen and support others.) In simple terms, God's Spirit will promote true self and will challenge any falsity, while spirits not of-God will promote untruth and unfreedom &ndash; and will even make them seem attractive! If a person is honestly open to God's Spirit, anything not of-God will be exposed &ndash; false images, hidden agendas, inner attachments or unfreedoms, any unconscious tendencies to control or manipulate God's work. Thomas Keating calls this process of purification &ldquo;divine therapy&rdquo;, a therapy for the &ldquo;tyranny of the false self&rdquo;. Keating promotes such &ldquo;therapy&rdquo; by the practice of centering prayer, on which he has written widely. Contemplative prayer (with spiritual direction) and contemplative ministry (with supervision) serve to bring into our awareness any blocks or resistances to God's Spirit, enabling us to grow in freedom. Keating says that &ldquo;if we don't allow the Spirit of God to address the deep levels of our attachments to ourselves and to our programs for happiness, we will pour into the world the negative elements of our self-centeredness&hellip;&rdquo; In other words, when we do allow &ndash; and only when we allow &ndash; the Spirit of God to address the deep levels of our inner attachments, through contemplation, only then will we avoid pouring our self-centeredness into our world -- which includes, of course, into our ministry. Formation, in summary, is about encouraging true self, the unique free, faithful, fruitful person God has created each of us to be &ndash; we began by saying, the true person innate in each of us. And so, at the same time &ndash; and for the sake of encouraging true self &ndash; formation is also about exposing and rising above false self, as we have been describing. Then, as formation deepens and our spiritual directors grow in inner freedom, we find that their ministry thrives. In directors committed to such inner freedom, each in her/his own unique way of ministering, we find that contemplative listening, sensitive discernment and prayerful spiritual direction flow quite naturally. \*\*\*\*\*

Finally, it hardly needs saying that our ministry of formation of spiritual directors asks of us the same inner freedom, the same contemplative listening, the same ongoing growth in self-awareness that we hope for in the spiritual directors who come to us. Accepting that we are all committed to deepening human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation (for ourselves and for our spiritual directors), then there are implications : implications for each of us, personally, as

formators, and implications for any program of formation that we set up. I thought it might be helpful if I talked of some of the implications that have emerged for me over my years of involvement in the ministries of spiritual direction, supervision and formation. I cannot say, precisely, what the implications are or will be for you &ndash; though I think I can say confidently that, of its nature, this is not an easy ministry! There are no short cuts to this growth towards inner freedom. \* To begin with, growth in self-knowledge and self-awareness is not easy. The invitation to such growth is never-ending and asks a clear commitment from us. In my experience, one reason I've found it difficult is that there seems to be no let-up: it demands constant reflection on all of my life experience, and on all of my relationships, as much as on whatever is happening in my ministry. It seems that every interaction, every day, has the potential for some new awareness. Two experiences have helped me: I had some months of intense personal therapy (a number of years back). I recommend that strongly. It takes some learning that intellectual insight into my inner dynamics, of itself, doesn't bring change. Only emotional insight does that &ndash; and we need proper help to come to that level of awareness. As you know, people preparing to be psychotherapists are required to attend one or two years of personal therapy themselves, as part of their formation: I'm not sure that spiritual directors &ndash; or those helping others to become spiritual directors -- should be any different? I found it immensely helpful. And still, today, I believe that I couldn't do this ministry, without my own regular spiritual direction / supervision. The other major help I've experienced has been to work closely with others, as part of a team, mutually supporting, challenging, inter-acting with others &ndash; and having to work hard to keep the relationships open and honest. I can't imagine now working any other way. \* Secondly, fidelity to a contemplative way of life is not easy. I'm sure I'm not alone in my experience of impatient struggle with the waiting time, the temptation to fill the time with something apparently "more useful", the ever-present un-knowing, seeming to have little to show for the time given to contemplative prayer. And I'm sure I'm not alone in my experience of waiting on God in ministry, resisting the temptation to tell the other person what to do, to put the other person on the right track (what I think is the right track). Again, thanks be to God, I've experienced good helps. The first was a spiritual director who guided me in a contemplative way, learning to be still and to appreciate the place of my body and my breathing, learning to let go of my ever-active mind and all my good ideas. Later, I lived in a Zen centre for some months and practised Zen meditation for some years. All of which, I think, helped me to be more open, and vulnerable, to let go control, and to wait on God. The other help came from an experienced supervisor who, some years ago, challenged me to direct a 30-day retreat, without mentioning the words "Ignatius", "Spiritual Exercises", or "Discernment". Clearly, it was an invitation to listen contemplatively to the movement of the spirits in the retreatant's experience, without preconceived ideas on what should happen in the retreat. I think this helped me, too, to integrate my learnings about what we call the "rules for discernment of spirits". I valued that very much. \* I want to say, too, that the ministry of being a supervisor or a formator of other spiritual directors is not easy, either. Maybe what has challenged me most has been the very uniqueness of each person who comes to me. With all the demands of the ministry (that you know), the temptation often is to tell others "this is what it means to be a spiritual director" or "this is how to be a spiritual director". But, in fact, there are no moulds, are there? As a friend of mine says often, there is no other spiritual director quite like you, or me. (There is no other formator quite like you, or me, either.) We are each called personally and uniquely. Given all that I've already said, the risk of putting others into a kind-of "mould" of spiritual director is all the greater when there are not too many helps available to us in this ministry: we've all experienced how difficult it is to find a good supervisor for ourselves; and we all know how little is available in programs for formation of supervisors. Again, I'm happy to name where I've been helped. We began our formation program for spiritual directors 30 years ago with good experience of being supervised ourselves, but little experience of being supervisors. The greatest help was that we were not alone: I could not have, and would not want to have, moved into this ministry without the mutual support, challenge, and learning that came from close interaction with others on the job. I referred to that above. Moreover, we had excellent professional mentoring from an experienced therapist and supervisor. That ensured our own formation, transformation, as we worked with others in their formation. Again, my strongest encouragement to you is to seek such professional mentoring. \*\*\*\*\*

References: John of the Cross: The Ascent of Mount Carmel; The Dark Night Collected Works, many editions Thomas Keating: Intimacy with God Continuum Publ., NY, 1996 The Human Condition Paulist Press, NY, 1999 Gerald May: Care of Mind, Care of Spirit, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1982 Will and Spirit, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1982 Opening Address of Welcome to Second National Gathering, 24 April 2009, Philip Carter, Chairperson AECSD Theodore Zeldin, a social commentator, who has written a book called An Intimate History of Humanity, says that "humanity is a family which has hardly met", which highlights both the long slow evolutionary story of human becoming as well as the fundamental importance for human beings to interact or relate as social beings. But, as the English novelist Ian McEwan says: "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion and the beginning of morality." Bill Vanstone was an Anglican priest in UK &ndash; who shunned academic life in post-war England &ndash; and became a parish priest for all his working life. In his book Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense, he wrote: If God is love, and if the universe is His creation, then for the being of the universe God is totally expended in precarious endeavour, of which the issue, as triumph or tragedy, has passed from his hands... God waits upon the response of his creation. He waits as the artist or as the lover waits having given all... Always, for the richness of creation, God is made poor: and for its fullness God is made empty.

It's not difficult to see then the particular charism of what we mean by spiritual direction. The image of artist or lover &ndash; with the expenditure or cost of waiting, or being so poised "like the pointer of a balance" as Ignatius suggests &ndash; so that "the issue, as triumph or tragedy, has passed from [our] hands" &ndash; captures something of our high calling, our sacred trust &ndash; and plunges us into the very heart of who God is. Put another way, Cardinal Walter Kasper talks of "the absoluteness of the gospel [which] has to do with the

unconditional nature of love, which neither casts aside nor absorbs the other, but rather withdraws, makes room for the other and this acknowledges his/her identity and enriches him/her. So what we do — in spiritual direction — is not something merely functional. It goes to the very heart of who God is, and what it means to be human. It opens us to the very heart and mystery of existence. When we read a text — when we are present to someone else — when we are engaged in spiritual direction — when we pray or gather up our lives in the Eucharist — our being present requires or demands a “de-selfing” — a “dispossession”; something like the kenotic self-emptying St Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians, the providing of space for an other, for the Other. And this space — where we confront otherness and difference — is about a fullness, a plenitude, a generosity. Knowing the other as other dominates what we call post modern thinking. The grand or meta-narrative — including the Christian grand narrative is, if not disallowed, certainly treated with suspicion. And yet, whatever view we have about what is post-modern, Philip Sheldrake suggests that “though Christianity has a distinctive wisdom, it is not a “grand narrative” and does not contain all the answers. Christian commitment must be tentative, open-ended, ready to be transformed through ongoing encounter and experience”, and I would add, conversation. I like that — for its modesty, its humility, its vulnerability, its transparency, its openness. For this is our vocation: presence without privilege, dialogue without arrogance, ministry without domination. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was hanged only a few days before the end of World War II suggests in his book *Ethics* an attitude for our pastoral practice which he calls “the penultimate attitude”. “When I am with someone who has suffered a bereavement, I often decide to adopt a “penultimate” attitude — remaining silent as a sign that I share in the bereaved man’s helplessness... and not speaking the biblical words of comfort which are, in fact, known to me and available to me.” He goes on to ask: “Does not this mean that, over and over again, the penultimate will be what commends itself precisely for the sake of the ultimate...?” Such kenosis, such self-emptying, creates space — to share in the paschal sufferings of Jesus — and such self-emptying affirms and renews this deep truth about ourselves: that we are at one with God and with each other. “We were all once one”: this unity we seek already exists in the divine intent. Our learning to offer space for the other is the affirmation and renewal and healing of that “original unity” which is our gift and our task. The Australian theologian Terry Veling says: “Every face we encounter is a face of otherness. Every face says, ‘I am other to you.’ Every face says ‘I am not you.’ This other calls out from us a response, ‘commands my attention, refuses to be ignored, makes a claim on my existence, tells me I am responsible. And this always. I will never be freed from the other.’ This is true not just of our friends, not just of strangers, but of enemies. And not just of other people — but of the whole community of creation. Contemplative practice which requires “selfless attention, unweariness, patient, passionate commitment, honesty of purpose, hunger for truth” renders what is too often unheard, heard, too often invisible, visible. With such costly contemplation, with “a severer listening” as an American poet suggests, by “wearing our eyes out as others their knees” as R S Thomas suggests, we may begin to hear another voice, see another person or creature or thing as they are, inviting us to live into another way. John Paul II in a Christmas homily at the beginning of the new millennium spoke about Michelangelo’s ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. “Between the finger of God and the finger of man stretching out to each other and almost touching, there seems to leap an invisible spark. God communicates to [the human person] a tremor of his own life, creating him in his image and likeness. That divine breath is the origin of the unique dignity of every human being, of humanity’s boundless yearning for the infinite.” Post-modernity insists we find meaning “within the very structure of human, embodied experience”. So “Every ‘other’ is a new face of the hidden God, a new incarnation of the Christ we seek, a new manifestation of divine creativity. The stranger is a bearer of truth that might not otherwise have been received.” President John F Kennedy said that “if we cannot end our differences at least we can make the world safe for diversity.” But we are called beyond this. We are summoned — as Jonathan Sacks, the Commonwealth Chief Rabbi says — “by God to see in the human other a trace of the divine other.” He goes on to talk of the real test of faith: — words which are crucial for us in our world at present: where we are so easily tempted to create divisions or perpetuate ancient hostilities, to speak in terms of “them” and “us”; in order to shore up our identity or security, make scapegoats or invent conspiracy theories, to inculcate and increase fear, to speak of an axis of evil, and so on: Can we make space for difference? Can we hear the voice of God in a language, a sensibility, a culture not our own? Can we see the presence of God in the face of a stranger?

But if we are stardust — that part of creation come to self consciousness — what space will we allow for the whole created order? Our sacramental theology tells us to see the face of God — to hear God — in the otherness of creation; but has it made any real difference to the way we treat creation? As Thomas Berry says, “to wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice.” We are not being asked to be trapped in sameness or conformity; we are being invited into our openness, which is the midwife of faith, and away from the closed mind, the hard heart. We are being asked beyond labels and boxes — beyond the divisiveness of “them” and “us”; — we are being asked to discover liberation in difference, where we are enlarged and not diminished by such difference. This is our second National Gathering. Our theme is Communion and Difference. Pat Fox will help us reflect theologically — helping us plunge a little into the depths of God — of who God is — and into a Christian anthropology that makes sense of our experience and provide an anchored presence in our ministry of spiritual direction. Just as God embraces otherness — just as communion thrives on difference — so from John Seed we will begin to hear something of the universal religious spirit of which all of us are heirs — that before we formed a religious thought or aspiration we were “otherwise engaged in spirit”. Anne Boyd will help us listen to the voice of the earth — for too long held out there as a mere

backdrop to the "human" drama of salvation and Brendan McKeague will challenge us with the way of Jesus; the way of non-violence where we can appreciate more fully difference and otherness; and live towards the vision; that imaginative, alternative vision of reality, the Kingdom, or Reign of God and all this to ask ourselves: what are the implications of our reflections on communion and difference for our practice of spiritual direction? Without this vision; of human dignity and of a common humanity and of a realization that we are purely and simply part of nature, though the part which has the capacity to recognize God; we could not see or hear each other, or even want to. But with this vision we will be energized, even in seemingly desperate circumstances, to live and work with hope so that we come to reflect something of that unity and diversity of our God-in-community; in whose image we have been made. I said to the Formators who met yesterday and today that I have a vision of a Council where we move from the language of law and boundaries to the language of horizons and possibilities. This vision is one of generosity and inclusivity, in our practice as well as our belief. David Tracy says that "conversation is our only hope". This Council and this Gathering are about creating a culture of conversation; not mere communication; but an experience of a deeper communion. Our vision of working ecumenically must be of the highest priority. It is a vision that takes us beyond inter-Christian exchange, into a deeper ecumenism. It is not about clearing things up, but making things a little clearer; and it will always mean becoming a little closer. It remains for all of us deeply sad; and profoundly challenging; that we cannot and will not be celebrating Eucharist together. But as the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez says:

"Rediscovering the other means entering his own world. It also means a break with ours. To enter the world of the other... with the actual demands involved... is to begin... a process of conversion." Let me end this evening's proceedings with a bedtime story from Pablo Neruda, the great Chilean poet: One time, investigating in the backyard of our house in Temuco the tiny objects and miniscule beings of my world, I came upon a hole in one of the boards of the fence. I looked through the hole and saw a landscape like that behind our house, uncared for, and wild. I moved back a few steps, because I sensed vaguely that something was about to happen. All of a sudden a hand appeared; a tiny hand of a boy about my own age. By the time I came close again, the hand was gone, and in its place there was a marvellous white sheep. The sheep's wool was faded. Its wheels had escaped. All of this only made it more authentic. I had never seen such a wonderful sheep. I looked back through the hole but the boy had disappeared. I went into the house and brought out a treasure of my own: a pinecone, opened, full of odour and resin, which I adored. I set it down in the same spot and went off with the sheep. I never saw either the hand or the boy again.

And I have never again seen a sheep like that either. The toy I lost finally in a fire. But even now, in 1954, almost fifty years old, whenever I pass a toy shop, I look furtively into the window, but it's no use. They don't make sheep like that anymore. I have been a lucky man. To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvellous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses; that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things. That exchange brought home to me for the first time a precious idea: that all of humanity is somehow together. That experience came to me again much later; this time it stood out strikingly against a background of trouble and persecution. It won't surprise you then that I attempted to give something resinous, earthlike and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood. Just as I once left the pinecone by the fence, I have since left my words on the door of so many people who were unknown to me, people in prison, or hunted, or alone. That is the great lesson I learned in my childhood, in the backyard of a lonely house. Maybe it was nothing but a game two boys played who didn't know each other and wanted to pass to the other some good things of life. Yet maybe this small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside me also, deep and indestructible, giving my poetry light.

God As Difference In Communion and Pat Fox, 24 April 2009, Keynote Speaker GOD AS OTHERGOD FOR US I. Three Stories from the Hebrew Scriptures GENESIS 1:1-3 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. GENESIS 1:24-27 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have domination over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. GENESIS 18:1-8 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on; since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. EXODUS 3:1-7 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside

to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, 3:11-15 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites; out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you'; This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations. II. The Trinity : God as Three Persons, Persons in Communion "In trinitarian theology, the object upon which we reflect is another subject, or self, namely, the God who relentlessly pursues us to become partners in communion." Catherine Mowry LaCugna God for Us p.332 To communicate the full richness of the God revealed by Jesus, Christians needed to be able to formulate statements about God and God's relationship with the world that were congruent with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and with the Christian communal experience of life in the Spirit. An exploration of the origins of the concept of PERSON Until the time of the Cappadocians — Basil, his brother Gregory of Nyssa and friend, Gregory of Nazianzen — in the fourth century, there was no word that could bring out the full significance of the "other" as an individual distinct person. There was no way of pointing out the importance and dignity of the individual human, let alone to the distinctiveness of God as three. The development of the concept of person happened through the agency of the Greek Christian leaders who were thoroughly steeped in both: the world view of the Bible and in Greek philosophy. Reflecting on the scriptures and on the collective, lived experience of their lives in Christ and the Spirit, they described the reality, integrity and significance of each person of the Trinity. In so doing, they maintained each one's radical equality and unity in the communion of the one divine being. Orthodox scholars point out that the concept of person was significant not only for trinitarian theology, but also for the development of an understanding of the human person. It allowed the mystery of the "other" to be affirmed. Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas claims that: "the concept of person is humanity's most dear and precious good." "Being a person implies the openness of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the self; and thus to freedom." Zizioulas observes that: "this patristic concept [of person] is completely congruent with a contemporary understanding of person as a relational category and stands in stark contrast with the individualistic tradition which until recently has been so central to Western theology since Boethius in the 5th Century." "Being a person is basically different from being an individual or personality." There are two basic aspects of personhood: Ecstatic: A person comes to be in relation, moving out of self to form communion. Hypostatic: A person is a free, unique unrepeatable entity. Both are inter-related The call to personhood implies relationship, freedom, otherness A call from an Other requires an initiator. (cf Moses' call, Exodus 3) Otherness in this case is always a gift, it visits us and calls us to be particular and unique. The human being is constantly formed through the response to this call of the Other. As long as there is freedom there is history: the yes; and no; to the call. The person is an "I"; that can exist only as long as it relates to a "thou"; which affirms its existence and its otherness. If we isolate the "I"; from the "thou"; we lose not only its otherness but also its very being; it cannot be without the other. This is what distinguishes a person from an individual. John D. Zizioulas, Communion & Otherness Personhood is freedom Personhood is the freedom of being other — to be oneself. A person's uniqueness is absolute and this freedom is for the other. Freedom thus becomes identical with love. God is love because God is Trinity — persons in communion. We can love only if we allow the other to be truly other, and yet to be in communion with us. "Beloved since God loved us so much... if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us." 1 John 4: 11-12. "A study of the doctrine of the Trinity reveals that otherness is constitutive of unity, and not consequent upon it. God is not first one and then three, but simultaneously One and Three." "Communion does not threaten otherness, rather, it generates it." "Fear of the other is pathologically inherent in our existence [and] results in the fear not only of the other but of all otherness... We are afraid not simply of a certain other or others, but, even if we accept certain others, we accept them on condition that they are somehow like ourselves. Radical otherness is anathema. Difference itself is a threat." "The mystery of being a person lies in the fact that here otherness and communion are not in contradiction but coincide... Communion does not lead to the dissolving of the diversity of beings into one vast ocean of being, but to the affirmation of otherness in and through love." Relationship is the basis of personhood, and the Trinity is a true source for understanding all relationship and the "other" in relation. Difference is the locus of the Spirit's work and it is in a lived communion that the uniqueness and difference of each entity are found to be able to come to their full potential and creativity. Since this notion of person is to be found only in God, human personhood is never satisfied with itself until it becomes an imago Dei. Human persons are called to exist in the way God exists. Living according to the image of God as a person in communion leads to theosis (becoming God). To be a person is to be in relation. It is a way of being/relating which enables both diversity and unity. III. Some Implications of "Attending to the

Other; Receiving the Other requires the capacity of creating spaces of liberty and dialogue where we can not only welcome the differences within each other and each other's cultures and charisms but where we can also find ways to welcome the radical Otherness of God – attending to God as 'Other.' Incapacity to welcome the radical otherness of God seriously subverts the coming of God's reign. Communities of the like-minded are weak signs of the kingdom. Love of self; attending to the 'other' within 'If the self that we love is expanding into relation, expanding into maturity, recognizing its dependence and its limits, then what is in the interest of that self, is actually the same as the interest of the human community and the other. That is the extraordinary work of human liberation, or you might say, salvation.' Rowan Williams, 'The Tablet', 4 April, 2009

Love of neighbour; attending to the other; This requires of us much more than mutual tolerance; It requires of us a mutual attentiveness that draws us beyond the narrow limits of our own sympathies and language. Do I dare be touched by the imagination of the other, and enter into the land of their hopes and fears? We have to embark upon a stretching open of our hearts and minds, what Thomas Aquinas calls a *latitudo cordis*, which draws us into the capacious home that is God.' Timothy Radcliffe OP, 2005

Love of God – Attending to God as Other; to receive the God who says to Moses and to all humankind, 'I AM WHO I AM.' to relate to God as 'God Three,' and/or 'God She.' to make room for God who is personal but not imaged anthropomorphically – as either male or female. to stay with the stretching questions about God that emerge at this time of new understandings of the creation of the cosmos and in 'the face' of all creation. to search for God's presence in the face of those who are starkly different from us in sensibility, values, culture... To welcome the 'other' or the 'stranger' within our own selves

One God, Holy Trinity God, Eternal Mystery, Source of Life, Jesus, the crucified and the risen One sent into our world as absolute future and opens up for us a space of grace and love, a space wherein transformation can occur, Holy Spirit, infinite, unsurpassable future, who comes towards us, inviting our acceptance and response. Totally Other: A space of grace and love; Holy Mystery, Word and Spirit: an eternal stance of openness, of giving and receiving, spilling over into creation, inviting us into communion. Relationship, dialogue, communion.

Bibliography

Zizioulas, John D. *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985. \_\_\_\_\_ *Communion & Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London: T&T Clark, 2006.

Fox, Patricia A., *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God*. Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier The Liturgical Press, 2001.

Veling, Terry A. *Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven*. New York: Orbis Books, 2005.

Murray, Paul D. (Ed.) *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

An Other Voice Text from power-point presentation given by Patricia Fox, April 24, 2009. Another Remembering: Listening to a Universally Shared Religious Spirit, 25 April 2009 – John Seed (While John did not give his presentation from a script, his following essay covers much the same ground as his presentation.)

The Ecological Self by John Seed In the 1970s, when Jerry Brown was Governor of California, the eco-poet Gary Snyder was working in his administration. One day Gov. Brown felt exasperated. He said to Snyder: 'Gary, why is it that, whatever the issue, you are always going against the flow?' Gary replied: 'Jerry, what you call 'the flow' is just a 16,000 year eddy; I'm going with the actual flow!' The deep, long-range ecology movement is based on a feeling for nature that sees the environmental crisis as a symptom of a psychological or spiritual ailment that afflicts modern humanity in technological societies. We moderns are enveloped by an illusion of separation from nature, made more extreme by anthropocentrism or human first centredness. Supporters of the deep ecology movement critique the idea that we are the crown of creation, and the measure of all beings. We tend to think that the world is a pyramid with humanity rightly on top: that nature is merely a resource and that it has only instrumental value. To maintain such a position, we have to ignore our own deeper feelings that our poets remind us of. The great California poet Robinson Jeffers was one of the ancestors of the deep ecology movement who reminds us of our connections with the natural world. As a young man, in the 1920s, he wrote this prophetic poem for his two infant sons. Shine, Perishing Republic While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening to Empire, And protest, just a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the mass hardens, I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth. Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness and decadence; and home to the mother. You making haste, haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is good, be it stubbornly long or suddenly A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains: shine perishing republic. But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thickening center: corruption Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains. And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master. There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught – they say – God, when he walked on earth.<sup>1</sup>

A popular formulation of the sensibilities of the deep ecology movement is found in Ishmael and other books by Daniel Quinn. In a recent essay, 'The New Renaissance,'<sup>2</sup> Quinn calls on us to heed this 'concise expression of the basic message of all my books.' He says that anthropocentrism is 'the most dangerous idea in existence' because it necessitates mass extinction, including our own. He writes: And even more than being the most dangerous idea in existence, it's the most dangerous thing in existence – more dangerous than all our nuclear armaments, more dangerous than biological warfare, more dangerous than all the pollutants we pump into the air, the water, and the land. All the same, it sounds pretty harmless. You can hear it and say, 'Uh huh, yeah, so?' It's pretty simple too. Here it is: Humans belong to an order of being that is separate from the rest of the living community. There's us and then there's nature. There's humans and then there's the human environment.

The term deep ecology movement was coined in the 1972 by Arne Naess, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Oslo University. He and other theorists have traced the historical roots of anthropocentrism.<sup>3</sup> Naess and others offer a more wide ranging critique. Naess also coined the term *ecosophy* for any lifestyle and practice which focuses on ecological values and harmony with the natural world. The author Lynn White Jr. focuses particularly on the role of Judeo-

Christianity.<sup>4</sup> In this religion, according to White, we live in a world where only humans were created in the image of God, only humans have a soul and, prophetically: the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all that moveth on the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hands they are delivered.<sup>5</sup>

Given that there are such deep anthropocentric roots in our culture and psyche, it is little wonder that a change of concepts is not by itself sufficient to reorient ourselves, to align ourselves back with the flow of the natural world. As Arne Naess has pointed out, ecological ideas are not enough, we need an ecological identity an ecosophic self. Ideas only engage one part of our mind in cognition. We also need ecological feelings and actions as well as ideas to nurture a maturing ecological identity in a place. Poets have always known that in wild places too, we may expand into larger identities. Here is Jeffers again: I entered the life of the brown forest, And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone, I felt the changes in the veins In the throat of the mountain, and, I was the stream, Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking: and I was the stars, Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his own summit; and I was the darkness Outside the stars, I included them. They were part of me. I was mankind also, a moving lichen On the cheek of the round stone . . . they have not made words for it . . .<sup>6</sup> Arne Naess writes: If reality is experienced by the ecological Self, our behaviour naturally and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics. We certainly need to hear about our ethical shortcomings from time to time, but we change more easily through encouragement and a deepened perception of reality and our own self, that is, through a deepened realism. How that is to be brought about is too large a question for me to deal with here. But it will clearly be more a question of community therapy than community science: we must find and develop therapies which heal our relations with the widest community, that of all living beings.<sup>7</sup>

When I first read these words in 1986, I couldn't help but think of the work that Joanna Macy and I had initiated the year before. "The Council of All Beings" is a set of experiential deep ecology processes, ceremonies and rituals that help us to expand our identification in the way that Naess describes. "Community therapy to develop deep awareness of our ecological self" is a good way of thinking about this work. A couple of years later I was privileged to witness a ceremony held in a Hopi village high on a mesa in the southwest of the United States. It was so like the Council of All Beings. The masks were more splendid, of course, the drums more confident. And people assured me that they had continually celebrated thus for thousands of years. Since then I have searched in vain for a single example of an indigenous culture, still connected to their traditions, which didn't have such ceremonies: regular rituals to testify that the human family is one strand in the larger web of life, to acknowledge all our relations. This suggests that the tendency to disconnect from the natural world might not be just a modern phenomenon as I had assumed. The fact that indigenous people invariably practice such ceremonies, speaks of the human tendency to forget who we really are and wander off into socially constructed identities. Why else would we need to regularly and powerfully remind ourselves that we are part of the web of life? Most peoples have always had cultural processes to counteract this tendency. So many solutions have been found that allow the human community to continue to cleave to the whole Earth community. This had been lost from our culture, suppressed by inquisitions and ignorance and now it re-emerges in a thousand ways. Even more than "community therapy," I think that "cultural reclamation" encapsulates this work that reconnects. Deep ecological experiential processes for connecting with our ecological selves, that have been developed and extensively tested over the last 20 years, are described in detail elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> We work with three major processes: • Despair and Empowerment or work with feelings. We circle together with our people as of old and mourn the loss of species and landscapes, • Deep Time, Evolutionary Remembering, The Cosmic Walk. remember our billion-year journey • The Council of All Beings, and empathize with the myriad creatures. We circle together with our people as of old and mourn the loss of species and landscapes, remember our billion-year journey, and empathize with the myriad creatures. Whenever we do so, we have found that a palpable and expanded ecological identity inevitably emerges in participants along with a profound experience of community. These things are explored in community. We need to find or create a "sangha" of kindred spirits (as all spiritual traditions have recognized). We need to find opportunities to meet—on solstices, equinoxes, under the full moon, in deep ecology workshops or online—to build these vital support systems into our lives. In such ways, while swirling in the midst of the vast eddy, we may remain aligned to the flow. Naess advocates a pluralism of ecosophies. The platform of the deep, long-range ecology movement contains statements<sup>10</sup> that most people who consider themselves part of this movement can support, even though each person may have a unique and personal ecosophy. This paper is a sketch of my own ecosophy. I came to this understanding, this consciousness, initially through a profound epiphany that took place when I found myself taking part in the first direct action in defense of rainforests at Terania Creek, New South Wales, in August of 1979. As I wrote some years later in an essay titled "Beyond Anthropocentrism,"<sup>11</sup> for me this transformation of perspective came from my actions on behalf of Mother Earth. "I am protecting the rainforest" develops into "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking." What a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature. In the early 1980s, reading Devall, Sessions, and Naess, I finally found a philosophical approach through which I could make sense of this experience. For myself, the spiritual awakening that took place while participating in the defence of the rainforests has until now obviated the need for any other form to experience the divine - the Earth itself has become my sacred text. However, it is clear that many people's love of Earth is mediated thru one of the great faith traditions and that each of those traditions has within its texts and liturgies, many expressions of ecological sensibility and love of Earth. The Earth suffers under the thrall of the religion of the market place, the dominant spiritual mode of these dark times. Both nature and the faith traditions falter under the onslaught of the most pious religion the world has ever known, worshipping mammon in skyscraping temples and shopping malls not just one day a week but seven; with worshippers all the more fervent by virtue of being completely unconsciousness that their supposed

secularism is, in fact, a profound spiritual faith. The most visible spokesperson for the forces seeking complete global conversion to the Religion of the Marketplace, President Bush, has on numerous occasions made clear (whether wittingly or not) the faith dimension of this worldwide evangelical enterprise. Perhaps the most striking instance was in the course of his first televised address to the US public following the tragedy of September 11, 2001. With millions of Americans waiting to hear from their leader how they should best respond to the crisis, Bush issued a clear directive in the strongest terms possible: Go out and shop! We need to build bridges and coalitions between those who love and care for Earth and those whose love of God acknowledges the sanctity of His creation. Certainly there are initiatives in this direction from both the ecology movement and from each of the major religions, and "Ecology and Spirituality" aims to highlight these and to explain why it is of the utmost importance to nourish the growing shoots of ecological concern in the faith traditions and of spiritual understanding in the conservation movement. My recent presentations in North America were sponsored by various churches whilst last year I co-facilitated, along with Rabbi David Seidenberg, a weekend titled "Judaism and Deep Ecology" at a Jewish retreat Centre in New York. These presentations included stories about the overlap of ecology and Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Earth is where all these mighty faiths meet, each has grown from the soil of this planet and it is in the Earth that they are reconciled. Here is one of the stories which was included in "Ecology & Spirituality" via our film "Reweaving Shiva's Robes". Arunachala is one of the most sacred sites in India because, in the Hindu tradition, the story is told that their supreme deity, Shiva, manifested as a column of light stretching from infinity to infinity. He was so dazzling that the other gods in the Hindu trinity, Brahma and Vishnu, complained that they were being dazzled beyond endurance. In his compassion, Shiva took on a new form as this mountain, Arunachala and a vast temple was built at its base. Many believe that walking the 11 km around Arunachala is the fastest way to enlightenment and pilgrims by the millions have thronged there since time immemorial. In the long line of illustrious sages who have taken up abode in caves on Arunachala was Ramana Maharshi, one of the most celebrated Hindu mystics of the 20th century who died in the '50's. In 1987, the Rainforest Information Centre received a letter from one of the nuns in Ramana's ashram telling us that when Ramana had arrived at the mountain as a young man, it had been clothed in a mighty jungle and tigers could be met walking along its flanks. But now, nothing remained but thorns and goats, couldn't we please do something? We helped the nun set up an NGO and raised funding including two substantial grants from the Australian Government aid agency while volunteers from Australia spent more than seven years helping to reclothe the sacred mountain. After some years, the authorities from the main temple invited us to move our tree nursery inside the temple walls and allowed us the use of their precious waters. Consequently, we initiated the regeneration of the temple gardens, growing flowers for their ceremonies as well as hundreds of thousands of native tree seedlings each year. When I returned to Arunachala after leaving Kolkata last December, I was heartened to find that more than 10 new NGOs have sprung up around the base of the mountain. These inspired groups have constructed native tree nurseries and are engaged in tree planting, environmental education, fire prevention and fire fighting. Not only was I able to walk in the cool shade of the trees our project had planted, but I was able to witness also the regeneration of the ancient association between plants and temples, nature and spirit, God and Earth. Workshops Workshop descriptions and John Seed & Ruth Rosenhek workshop schedules and essays can be found at [www.rainforestinfo.org.au](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au) Joanna Macy's schedule and writings may be found at [www.joannamacy.net](http://www.joannamacy.net). Notes 1 Tim Hunt, editor. 1988. The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Stanford: Stanford University Press, Vol. I. 2 See [http://ishmael.org/Education/Writings/The\\_New\\_Renaissance.shtml](http://ishmael.org/Education/Writings/The_New_Renaissance.shtml) 3 See the deep ecology section at [www.rainforestinfo.org.au/](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/) 4 Lynn White Jr. 1967. The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. Science 155: 1203-1207 5 Genesis 9; 2 6 From Tim Hunt, editor. 1988. Signpost. The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Stanford: Stanford University Press, Vol. I. 7 Arne Naess 1988. Self Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World. Thinking Like a Mountain - Towards a Council of All Beings by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, and Arne Naess, New Society Publishers. 8 See the deep ecology section at [www.joannamacy.net/](http://www.joannamacy.net/) or [www.rainforestinfo.org.au](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au). 9 PhD thesis by Eshana (AKA Elizabeth Bragg). For a summary of her findings see "Towards an Ecological Self" at [www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Eshana.htm](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Eshana.htm). 10 See Arne Naess. 2005. The Basics of Deep Ecology. The Trumpeter Vol. 21, No. 1. 11 Reprinted in Bill Devall's book Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology, Peregrine Smith Books, 1988. John Seed is a long-time, deep ecology movement activist who also conducts council of all beings workshops. He has been working for the protection of rainforests for 25 years. [johnseed1@ozemail.com.au](mailto:johnseed1@ozemail.com.au) Another Way: Listening to the Challenge of Non-violence, 25 April 2009 - Brendan McKeague 1 Who's talking: a brief introduction and overview of where I come from 2 Departures and discoveries: leaving the tribe. 3 Finding New Treasures 4 Entering New Territory 5 Looking Inside 6 Naming the Holiness in Nonviolence 7 Spirituality of Nonviolence 1 Who's Talking I stand here today as a person who has been invited to speak to you about my experience of the holy through nonviolence. Let my next words seek to dispel any mistaken assumptions that I have achieved the state to which my great passion aspires. I am NOT a nonviolent person. In fact I can be quite a violent man when the notion takes me. As I journey towards becoming less violent in my life, I have come to recognise the holy in my capacities for both violence and nonviolence. In my interpretation, "the holy" transcends any attempt of mine to try to limit the location of the divine exclusively in either one of these constructs. To be holy, to be whole, necessitates the inclusion of my capacities for both violence and nonviolence. I've been looking forward to this opportunity to speak with you - thanks for the invitation. My name is Brendan McKeague, from an Irish Catholic background in Co Derry, Northern Ireland. I was born into a conventional Irish Catholic family, all of our relatives were Catholic, went to Mass every Sunday, attended Catholic primary and secondary schools (double-dosed with seven years in Catholic Boarding School), played games with other Catholics, father owned a pub, in a predominantly Protestant town, most of the patrons were Protestant. I was well and truly inducted into the characteristics of my socio-religious extended family, through an enculturation process that included songs, music, sport, schools, church, housing estates, job allocations, socialising patterns that confirmed my identity within, and loyalties to, the Irish

Catholic people and institutions. This process accentuated the difference between 'us' and 'them', the separation into tribal factions that emphasised the boundaries between who was 'in' and who was 'out'. These destructive demons of denominational divisiveness were lauded and honoured as our meaning-making mythology; we were encouraged to pray hard so that we might become martyrs for the cause of Holy Ireland &ndash; Holy Catholicism, intertwined in a mesh of nationalistic fervour, passion for the patriotic and allegiance to the God of a preferential option for the Chosen Ones. In our culture, there was no more admirable way to die than as a martyr for Holy Ireland, and especially if that death was executed by our most despised foe, the British. As one of our most famous tribal rallying songs, thinly disguised as a traditional holy hymn, illustrates; Faith of our fathers living still, we will be true to thee till death;

Our fathers chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free.

Oh how our hearts would beat for joy, if we like them could die for thee;

Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death

This pattern was layered into me at so many levels and so deeply rooted in my childhood formation that I'm still, at age 57, coming across forgotten shoots that break through to my surface in varying degrees of inconvenient interruption. This was the background to my formative years that created a comfort zone around living, working and praying within the cradle of my 'own folks', where I'd be safe within my tribal territory, ruled ultimately by the one, true God. From where I stand now, I can see how the twin primal needs for survival and belonging were unleashed when there were any signs of personal or collective breaking out from the tribal ways of doing business &ndash; 'those Prods are out to get us, don't trust them an inch'. 'We need to stand up and fight (and die) for our freedom &ndash; like Jesus did'. Or when introducing a new girlfriend, 'is she a Catholic', or praying the Rosary for all the Catholic suffering souls in the world &ndash; offering prayers that entire nations might be converted to the Holy Roman Catholic tribe; This loyalty also produced rather quirky, creative actions on behalf of the tribe. For example, Shamie O'Neil from the Falls Road in Belfast was dying at the age of 83. He called his wife Brigid and asked her if she'd bring him the local Presbyterian pastor. Brigid asked why he wanted him. Shamie replied that he had made up his mind, he was going to 'turn' (convert). Brigid was shocked: 'why would you do that Shamie &ndash; you were born Catholic, grew up Catholic, married a Catholic, sent your children to Catholic schools and now you want to abandon your faith just when you're dying?' Shamie replied: 'I've thought long and hard Brigid and I've worked it out: it's much better if one of them goes than one of us!' This was where I started life and spent the first twenty three years or so growing up. Moment of grace initiated by 'the other tribe' &ndash; I was working as a Personnel Manager in a local textile company in my town of birth, three years after completing university, and had all the trimmings of a successful, professional man at age 23. I was well paid, in a position of influence in the community and had pleased my family no end. Then one quiet, mid-week evening, while paying a visit to the outside dunny of a local pub where I was having a pint or two, three men, whom I knew to be from the 'other tribe', cornered me and their leader said in a very clear, penetrating voice: 'We hear you've been hiring too many 'fenians' (Catholics) up there. If you hire another one in that factory, we'll blow up your old man's pub!' I did hire a few more Catholics, and Protestants, but for me the writing was on the wall, and shortly afterwards, as a result of this and a combination of other circumstances, I decided to leave Ireland. 2 Departures and Discoveries - Leaving the Tribe In the ensuing years, I have been a teacher and educational consultant, first in England and then in Australia, working within the Catholic tribe until I could no longer sustain the tensions between my loyalty to the tribe and my need to break away; in an interesting intervention, my tribe forced the decision on me. Having initially worked in Darwin for first couple of years in Australia, and with particular teaching experience in the area of post-compulsory secondary curriculum and developing teaching processes for those on the margins of the school service provision, I was offered a plum job in Perth. I was thrilled at this affirmation from within my tribe &ndash; having been working in the Catholic education system in England and Australia. Then after a couple of years, due to Federal Government change of policy, I was called into the Director's office and told I was being let go, made redundant at the ripe old age of 33, with four children under the age of seven and another one a few weeks away from arriving. The sense of rejection and accompanying shock, anger and despair hit me like a rubber bullet. One minute I was a well-paid secondary education consultant in my chosen area of specialisation, the next I wasn't needed, unwanted and out the door. After recovering from these initial reactions, and with the support of a strong partner, I discovered that I could exist outside of the conventional professional career pathways that I had chosen. I learned how to access and trust my own resourcefulness; I connected with my passion for peace-making and social justice, participatory and equitable education for all children in the classroom, not just those going on to University, a fair go for the marginalised people in our society and in the wider world. I worked part-time in the areas of my passion, teaching in an Aboriginal College, working with kids in residential care, eking out enough income to pay the bills, feed our family and, more significantly, learning how to tap into the universal abundance that is always available for those who have become clear about what they need and then ask for it. We survived well for the next ten years on the basis of 'ask and you shall receive' &ndash; learning the difference between what we wanted and what we needed, getting to know ourselves well enough to identify what we needed, then intentionally asking for it &ndash; and letting go of the need to control where, when and how it would show up! An extension of this learning was to be able to recognise, and honour, what we needed when it did show up! The stimulation from these engagements, created a desire to expand my learning and discover more about myself. During the decade of my forties, my explorations took me to the Centre For Action and Contemplation (CAC), and Pace E Bene (PeB) in the USA &ndash; and subsequent encounters with the Enneagram, contemplative prayer and the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence, all of which contributed significantly to my spiritual growth. Moment of grace initiated by 'an ignorant enemy';

Being made redundant, a decision initiated by someone who obviously had no idea what he was doing and didn't recognise the talent he was dismissing, threw me totally out of my planned, controlled life pattern. I came to realise later in life just how important it was for me to have been 'discombobulated' and shaken off the pathway of conventional, comfortable and successful achievement. In considering just how significant this unwanted inconvenience has been for the rest of my life, I have come to understand that not everyone who, by accident or by design, has caused me pain has warranted the title of 'enemy' and not everyone who makes me feel good about myself has likewise warranted the title of 'friend'.

3 Finding New Treasures I continued to work in adult education, facilitation, social justice activism and peacemaking...and by making opportunities to travel and engage with CAC and PeB, expanded my knowledge, skills and wisdom around the integration of action and contemplation, violence and nonviolence, the influence and power of the 'dominant culture' and the 'myth of redemptive violence'. This timeless, universal myth, languaged by Rene Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), describes how the process of forming a tribal group, bonding together to defend against common threats of other tribes, seeking to convert the others to become like us, and ultimately legitimising the destruction of those others who resist, is the 'glue that holds society together'. And of course, there is no better disguise for this myth than to wrap it up in legitimate 'sacred work' which often thinly disguise more sinister and subtle agendas such as maintaining power and control, acquiring wealth, seeking revenge and punishment, or the self-indulgent projection of one's own anger onto enemies. A statement of worldview, that encompasses some of the above validations of violence, was provided by an American Major during the Vietnam War who, after witnessing the destruction of the village of Ben Tre, said: 'It became necessary to destroy the village in order to save it' And if we don't have a common external enemy that we can all project our hatred, mistrust, suspicions and fears onto, then we will create an internal one — the notion of scapegoating so creatively crafted in the ritual of the Jewish tradition. According the book of Leviticus (16:20-22), the priest would bring a goat to the centre of the village, lay his hands on it, transfer the sins of the community onto the goat and then beat it out of the village into the wilderness, thus banishing evil from the village. The escaping goat carried away the sins of all. It was later recaptured and offered as blood sacrifice in atonement. These concepts, originating in the ancient rituals of offering sacrifices to appease, or to create favour with, angry Gods, have operated universally throughout history and are still alive and well today. It was so easy for me to recognise how this worked so effectively in my own culture where tribal loyalties and obedience, was the glue to hold us together and share in our common victim-hood, always needing someone else to blame for our woes and disasters. How deep is this patterned behaviour within me — if someone walks in a room and speaks with an Irish accent, my deeply embedded instinct for survival immediately kicks in with the question: 'one of us or one of them?' Even after all these years it still takes me a few seconds to manage this reaction when meeting someone from the North for the first time. These constructs gave me a lens with which to see my own participation in the cycles of violence deeply embedded in the dominant 'enemy' culture — and a language to describe it.

4 Entering New Territory As I began to understand how this is played out in the cultural patterns surrounding us, and exploited skilfully by those who have vested interested in maintaining division, holding on to power and control over socio-cultural constructs, those who benefit from the militarisation of the world and perpetuate the need for wars and weapons, I recognise how the need for an external enemy sustains the legitimation of powerful forces in our world — the 'Powers that Be' as theologian Walter Wink calls them. Those who create and maintain the shape of the 'dominant culture'. The need for enemies is a strong stimulus for bonding the tribe and manipulating energies to support and validate fear of 'the other'. Around this time also, I started working with a small group of others (Prison Outreach) visiting people in prison with a view to supporting their transition back into society. I had been encouraged, invited and cajoled into trying this work by a long-term friend who, fed up with my continual procrastinating, finally told me straight (quoting some other wise sage): 'Brendan, you will never think your way into a new way of living, you will only live your way into a new way of thinking!'

This prison work really took me into places I'd never have chosen to go. I received a few tough lessons about how the process of scapegoating works in all levels of our society — the sex-offender tribe had its own hierarchy of 'virtually acceptable' to 'totally despicable' that enabled all, save the seemingly unredeemable, to have someone else to castigate and project their demons onto. Moments of grace initiated by 'the despised'

I will never forget the first day I walked in Casuarina maximum security prison in Western Australia to begin my work with Prison Outreach. My fear and anxieties were palpable, the long corridors of concrete, the razor wire stringing fences, the heavily muscled uniforms, the tattooed torsos, the smell of control...and I was choosing to enter this domain — why? I don't think I really knew why at the time — all I knew was that I couldn't not go, having been invited persistently by my long-term friend and nonviolent activist, challenging me to take this nonviolence edict about loving my enemies seriously...as a father of six children, I would have counted child-abusers as being among the most despicable enemies I could think of.

During thirteen years of regular engagement with these men, I came to realise that what I had despised most about them and their offending behaviours also existed deep within the darker recesses of my own inner prison cells — and, if I could help it, would never be allowed out in public!

And as these men opened up their stories to me, and I listened with attentive intention, I understood more about how the patterns of dysfunctional relationships and the so-called 'stinkin thinkin' surrounding their family narratives, could have such an impact on behaviours. A revelation from the enemy — and one which I will honour for the rest of my life. If these men, in their commitment to breaking the cycles of abuse in their lives, could go so deeply into their

own pain, often the product of fractured childhoods, abusive parents or family members, social rejection and emotional malfunctioning, then surely I too could gain the strength and courage to do likewise — without the need to be forced by civil authorities. Surely this is what Jesus meant by inviting me to discover the gifts delivered by my enemies. If I could take time to really listen to the story of another with whom I disagreed, and listen to understand rather than to convert, then perhaps I could hear the Spirit moving in the lives of both of us.

Through a process of engaging with these men over many years, I discovered how the ‘myth of redemptive violence’ and ‘scapegoating’ had been working within me. I recognised that I had the capacity within myself to be an abuser, to groom potential victims, to rationalise my violation of others — maybe not expressed in the societal sins of sex offending — but a disturbing discovery within my own hitherto impregnable fortress of self-righteous commitment to social justice and nonviolence. Love Your Enemies This led me to reinterpret what Jesus meant when he said ‘you must love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you’ (Mt 5:43-48). Rather than loving my enemies to convert or redeem ‘them’, Jesus was telling me that this was how I could redeem myself. By engaging with and befriending my external enemy, I could come to embrace more fully the enemies operating at different levels within me — this was indeed a clever and creative way to transfer the focus to an inside job! As I explored further the spirituality of nonviolence, as distinct from my initial experimentations with using nonviolent tactics and strategies as tools for engaging in the transformation of others, I recognised the parallel journey of entering into the Paschal Cycle. To willingly enter the cycle of death and resurrection, witnessed by Jesus, even as a scapegoat or victim, prepared to absorb the pain and suffering caused by self or others, was about surrendering to the paradox that enables such a crucifixion to transform me, out of which there will be a resurrection into a new life, a new way of seeing and being in the world. Thus, having discovered that loving my enemy is all about my redemption, not theirs, I began to reconstruct my own story in a new light. I began to see socio-cultural activism and transformation in a new way. I also began to see the need for some deeper soul-searching within — and of course, fear of what I might find there, was a constant distraction from getting ‘down and dirty’ — Reminding me of the story about two men from indeterminate ethnic origins coming out of a pub one night — Paddy bends down by the street light and starts searching for something on the ground. Mick says to Paddy: ‘What are you doing down there?’

Paddy replies: ‘I’m looking for my keys, I’ve lost them’

Mick says: ‘Well if you tell me where you’ve lost them, I’ll help you look for them’.

Paddy, pointing to a spot a few metres away, says: ‘I lost them over there’.

‘Then’ says Mick, ‘why are you looking over here?’

Paddy replies: ‘There’s more light over here!’

And similarly, it is often much more difficult and scarier to look in the darker recesses of our own inner landscape — requiring considerable more courage and commitment. 5 Looking Inside I was jarred by a couple of ‘sit-up-and-pay-attention’ characters in my dreams, and a couple of ‘accidental interventions’ in my life that forced me to admit that, alongside my outer passion and activism to change the world, I needed to make a journey inwards that eventually dragged me kicking and screaming into a therapeutic journey of spiritual companionship — a true gateway to the ‘holy’: ‘In order to keep our balance, we need to hold the interior and the exterior, visible and invisible, known and unknown, temporal and eternal, ancient and new together. No-one else can undertake this task for you. You are the one and only threshold of an inner world. This wholesomeness is holiness. To be holy is to be natural; to befriend the worlds that come to balance in you.’

John O’Donohue, Anam Cara, p14 I got to know my in-house tribe — a rag-tag mob of violent and nonviolent folks who each clamoured for my attention and from time to time, sought to dominate my outer behaviours. I was helped to understand my own inner light-shadow relationship and identify those parts of me that I had banished to the nether regions and shady recesses of my inner world. In digging into this deep tapestry, this messy mixture of good and bad, of violence and nonviolence, of love and lust, of pain and joy, of sacred and profane, I began to understand the meaning of the divine presence, or ‘Kingdom of God’, that dwells within. I, like most of the rest of the human race, was made up of a curious cacophony of voices, an ensemble of occasionally melodious instruments, often playing out-of-tune, with some playing an entirely different score, and invariably with one or two energetic soloists seeking to lead or conduct the whole orchestra. I am a rather complex community indeed! I also began to apply the skills I’d been using in my outer world to facilitating nonviolent peacemaking processes in my inner world — active imagination, Open Space Technology, restorative justice, deep truth-speaking and listening, negotiating emergent outcomes — and understanding the outer-inner links around the work that I was doing in my day-job. There are some deep spiritually-grounded principles in an OST meeting that helped me on this new journey inwards — whoever comes are the right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could, whenever it starts is the right time, when its over its over and the Law of Mobility/Two Feet — Through the process of meeting and engaging with many members of my inner tribe, and I know that there are some I have yet to meet, I came to realise just how difficult it can be to hold some of the paradoxical tensions together while still operating in an apparently functional way to the outside world. Using this experience of gaining more insight and understanding of the inner tribe, led me to see just how easily I could demonise or dehumanise people in my outer tribe. Just as there are times when I want to throttle one or more of my inner family, I can easily feel the same way about those who I meet in my outer world, especially my enemies! 6 Naming the Holiness in Nonviolence So what have I learned about seeing and naming the holiness in nonviolence? Nonviolence is a spiritual process that necessitates a deeply convicted acceptance of who or what ‘is’ — and the ‘courage of self-encounter’. This creates a capacity to transcend the self or self-interest, in situations of conflict-generated tensions. There is a capacity to willingly participate in the myth of ‘redemptive suffering’ and embrace the paschal cycle in everyday living, moving intentionally and inevitably

towards potential crucifixion &ndash; and to see this as a sacred journey. In situations of high risk or conflict, which is where our most truthful tensions appear, this necessitates seeing the Divine in self, in the &lsquo;enemy&rsquo; and in the event&hellip;.here&rsquo;s a moment of noticing such a &lsquo;theology of nonviolence&rsquo; in action&hellip;. About ten years ago I first read the story of Angie O&rsquo;Gorman in a book she had edited: *The Universe Bends Towards Justice* (1990). Angie told her story about being confronted in her bedroom, alone and in the middle of the night, by an intruder who had broken in to her house. She awoke, startled, frightened and disoriented, with a very short time to gather her senses and respond to what had invaded her familiar, safe environment. As Angie tells the story, in a split second she realised that, in her words: &lsquo;either he and I made it through the situation safely - together - or we would both be damaged. Our safety was connected. If he raped me, I would be hurt both physically and emotionally. If he raped me he would be hurt as well. If he went to prison the damage would be greater. That thought disarmed me. I found myself acting out of concern for both our safety&rsquo;. (p242)

In that moment, she summed up for me what a nonviolent response to a violent action might feel like in a spiritual sense. By refusing to dehumanise or demonise this intruder and potential abuser, Angie centred herself in her belief that God was present in both her and her unwelcome visitor in that moment and she reacted out of that belief. She felt the presence of the divine spirit within herself and somehow managed to acknowledge that it was present in the &lsquo;other&rsquo; also. Because of this &lsquo;centering belief&rsquo;, Angie was then able to use the skills of disarmament that she had learned in her life journey up to that point. She took the man by surprise by asking him what time it was! He replied that it was 2:30am. She noticed that the clock by her bed said 2:45AM and hoped that his watch wasn&rsquo;t broken. She then asked him how he had got into her house, He replied that he had broken a kitchen window and soon the &lsquo;energy of escalating violation&rsquo; was replaced by a social conversation&hellip; I have drawn on the courage of this wonderful practitioner of nonviolence many times in situations where I have felt myself falling into inculturated patterns of fight or flight. Angie put into words and images what an authentic &lsquo;spirituality of nonviolence&rsquo; looks like, where she, like Jesus, trusted and surrendered to the presence of the Divine in the moment. I also learned something about the skills of practicing nonviolence from Angie. For many years I waited for an intruder to break into my bedroom so that I could ask him or her what time it was &ndash; hasn&rsquo;t happened &ndash; yet! I also found it comforting and relieving to know that the nonviolent practitioner doesn&rsquo;t actually know how the script will go &ndash; and doesn&rsquo;t really need to! I can expand my capacity for nonviolence by learning and developing skills, but in the moment of trial, I need to feel and trust the presence of the holy in me and in the situation confronting me. Either God is in it &ndash; or God is not at all! (There is an oft-quoted Richard Rohr line that goes something like: either we accept that God is in all things, or we have no basis for believing in God&rsquo;s existence at all.) One such incident happened in my life a few years after encountering Angie&rsquo;s story that did confirm these insights. I was sitting outside a caf  in an outer-Perth suburb waiting for one of my ex-offender friends to arrive for a meeting &ndash; he was late and I was enjoying the warmth, the coffee and the newspaper &ndash; actually beginning to hope that he didn&rsquo;t show up at all! Then he did &ndash;with a roar and a screeching of tyres, his car wheels bounced off the kerbside and he jumped out of his car, cursing and swearing and bowling over tables and chairs as he moved menacingly towards the caf  and other customers. I was disturbed and knew that I needed to act quickly - and that didn&rsquo;t include the option of running away! Angie&rsquo;s story flew fleetingly past and I stood up, felt my feet firm on the ground, acknowledged the presence of the divine in me and in my friend, and began to move directly towards him, cutting off his path to others who were by this time beginning to prepare for engagement. I placed myself between him and the others in the caf , including the owner who had come out to see what all the racket was about, so that my friend couldn&rsquo;t get past me, nor could they, without pushing me aside &ndash; and I wasn&rsquo;t easily pushed. I held my arms outstretched to make it harder for him to get round me, and with strong intent, continued to move moved closer to him, forcing him to move backwards, away from the gathered crowd. By this time, the caf  owner had recognised both of us as we had been there a couple of times before and he calmed the customers down while I continued to force the direction of travel &ndash; away from the incident. I calmly and firmly said: (What time is it?) &ldquo;Wow &ndash; you&rsquo;ve really lost your cool. I&rsquo;ve never seen you this angry before. What&rsquo;s happened?&rdquo; A few more torrents of abuse and deletable expletives later, he finally managed to tell me about how he had just been refused his CentreLink payment by a very young-looking officer because he had filled out the form incorrectly. So we walked and talked for about an hour, him going deeper into his story about childhood abuse, bullying stepfather, alcoholic mother, absentee siblings - and his only learned strategy for dealing with anger was to hit and be hit, inflicting and feeling the force of physical pain was his connection to normality&hellip;and I breathed long and gratefully for the privilege of being alongside a man who was delving deeply into his soul&hellip;an immersion in the holy. &bull; (By the way, Angie O&rsquo;Gorman will be in Australia: Brisbane, Ballina, Adelaide, Melbourne, in July-August this year as a guest of Pace e Bene &ndash; to continue to inspire us on our journeys towards nonviolence. See our website for details.)

7 Spirituality of Nonviolence A spirituality of nonviolence, as distinct from the use of nonviolent strategies or skills for pragmatic purposes, includes and embraces the capacity for violence in us. This oft-feared dimension of well-raised good Christian folks, for whom violation of self or another is a cultural taboo, is either actualised on the outside or the inside. If I develop a pattern of suppressing my urges to strike out at my enemies on the outside world, due to fear of social, religious or physical repercussions, then unless I have a way of acknowledging and channelling the energies into some other outlet, I can risk violating myself, or as is often the case, taking it out on some poor unsuspecting, innocent victim &ndash; often someone in my own family. I have experienced the holiness in my own life when I have courageously confronted my own desire to lash out and dehumanise, diminish or destroy part of myself or another &ndash; and struggled &ndash; often with accompanying physical and emotional tensions &ndash; to divert from the deeply embedded patterns of fight or flight within me. And might I add that violence comes in many forms &ndash; not just the

physical violence that is easy to see! There are other more subtle and insidious forms at work on a daily basis &ndash; verbal, psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual violations take place in everyday relationships &ndash; and some of these are much harder to recover from than physical violence. I have been fortunate to be able to review my life from a healing and reframing perspective that has enabled me to recognise that what I might have considered to be violations of me have in fact been blessings. Being forced to think seriously about leaving Ireland helped me in my individuation process, being forced out a career-path job helped me to rely on my own resources and spend time with my young family, being enticed into relationship with sex-offenders helped me to begin my own journey inwards&hellip;.all blessings in my life. As Richard Rohr says, &lsquo;God shows up disguised as your life!&rsquo; In another time or culture, I might have described these moments of grace as visitations by &lsquo;angels of the Lord&rsquo;! As the late John O&rsquo;Donohue wrote in *Anam Cara*, &lsquo;often the deeper meaning of a fact emerges when it is read in a spiritual way&rsquo;. (p113). This wisdom of hindsight, otherwise known as &lsquo;retrospective retrojection&rsquo; (Borg and Crossan), is a great gift indeed. Holiness is about a journey towards wholeness. Jesus pointed me in this direction when he tagged on the key words to the end of a significant piece of scripture for me. In Matthew 5:48, he calls his friends to be &ldquo;perfect &ndash; just as God is perfect&rsquo; &ndash; and it is only in my latter years that the true meaning of the original Greek word, teleos, was revealed to me &ndash; the notion of being complete or whole just as God is whole. My journey to wholeness is about aligning my life to my purpose for being on the planet at this time in history. That wholeness will include all of me, including my imperfections, including my tendencies towards violence. The Navajo people who make the most beautiful blankets, each one containing a miniscule deliberate fault, have this wonderful, embodied way of reminding themselves that: perfection is the inclusion of imperfection, not its exclusion. I&rsquo;d like to add a couple more stories of how I&rsquo;ve connected with the holy through nonviolence &ndash; these are about how the stories of others have become part of my story by the way they have impacted on my life, my beliefs and my behaviours&hellip;the stories of people known to me who continue to inspire and energise my commitments&hellip; Just about this time last year I was working in the Solomon Islands providing training programs in the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence, and I discovered in that experience a little more about the universal presence of the myth of redemptive violence, scapegoating, tribal belonging. In the midst of this new cultural context, I felt connected to ancient themes &ndash; the perpetrators of violence, projecting their hurt and pain out onto someone, anyone, else. Alongside the bystanders and observers, there emerged the courageous and bold who not only believe another way is possible, they seek to make it happen. A mid-life priest in his early forties, let me refer to him as Matthew, told the group his story during one of our sessions, He had been sent out to an outlying parish in the highlands, and was intent on being a peacemaker, encouraging people to stop fighting, lay down their weapons and talk to each other. Some of the local warlords and tribal elders saw him as a disturber of their peace &ndash; interfering with their power and vested interests. He continued to talk and walk the way of Jesus, about blessed are the peacemakers and love of enemy. Late one evening on a trip out of the village to a distant village about 6 hours drive away, he was stopped at a roadblock and a group of armed, masked men forced him out of his vehicle. One of them held a gun to his head and said he was going to kill him, this meddling priest who was becoming a real nuisance, limiting recruitment to their gangs and interfering with the local ways of doing business. Matthew felt his own physiological fear, his body was trembling - and he could also smell the fear in the man holding the gun, whom he fleetingly thought he recognised. Then he was suddenly overwhelmed with a sense of God&rsquo;s presence within him, gathered his courage and said to the man: &rsquo;I can see you are very troubled by what you are going to do. So, if you are going to shoot me, then do it quickly now for both our sakes&rsquo;. The man began to tremble uncontrollably, dropped the gun and ran off into the bush&hellip; Matthew started talking with the other men and gradually disarmed them with his calm, strong assurance. They asked him for a lift into the village &ndash; and he agreed. Some weeks later, the man who held the gun to his head came to confession and sought his forgiveness. It was not just Matthew&rsquo;s story that moved me in a moment of holiness; it was his way of telling it and the way in which it deeply touched the others in the group, some of whom were in tears as he brought the tensions of those moments of near-death into the room. Not only were we hearing about his sacred story, we were feeling the presence of the holy all around us in his telling of it. This led to other stories coming out of the group &ndash; many for the first time, as this community engaged in the process of healing and recovery from years of vicious violence directed at each other. Alongside these stories of personal nonviolent responses to violence, there are many more I would love to tell here today &ndash; give an Irishman an audience, a microphone and a pint of Guinness (oops) and its hard to stop him &ndash; stories about whole communities and tribes collectively reflecting the presence of the holy in their collaborative actions&hellip;.stories like the students in Tiananmen Square, the Tibetan Buddhist monks, the peasant forest-dwelling people of Novozybkov in the shadow of Chernobyl, the people of Serbia and their nonviolence movement to overthrow Slobodan Milosevic, Vincent Lingjari and the Gurindji community at Wave Hill, the Pine Gap Four or the Samuel Hill five protesting against the presence of US war games and satellite installations in Australia&hellip;countless stories of the holy at work in the spirituality of nonviolence that refuses to destroy, diminish or dehumanise self or others&hellip;while courageously standing up for their truth. Such stories many of you know and can access them easily on your websites&hellip; Finally though, one last story that I need to tell and honour here today ... the story that has continued to inspire, challenge and confront me with my own limitations to this nonviolence &lsquo;stuff&rsquo;&hellip; his name was Michael &ndash; a student with me at my Irish Catholic boarding school &ndash; an ordinary young boy, bright, wide smile, sparkling eyes, game for a laugh, quiet and unassuming, active in sports, a background social-dweller, with occasional front-of-house appearances. I never saw him after leaving school, he was a couple of years younger than me, and we went to different universities. I heard about his death though. He was standing at a bus-stop in Belfast going up to Uni to sit an exam when he was picked up and bundled into a car by three men, taken to a hide-away in the mountains outside the city, tortured horrifically for three days and when he wouldn&rsquo;t give any information &ndash; because he didn&rsquo;t know anything, it was a case of mistaken identity

&ndash; the men told him they couldn&rsquo;t let him live and were going to kill him. We heard all these details years later when one of the men confessed to his murder. Michael managed to ask if he could have some time to say his prayers to which they replied it wouldn&rsquo;t do any good as they were going to kill him for sure &ndash; but go ahead, pray away for yourself if you like. Michael replied: &lsquo;No, you don&rsquo;t understand, I don&rsquo;t want to pray for me, I want to pray for you&rsquo;! My work to grow and expand the spirituality of active nonviolence into mainstream culture is dedicated to the memory of Michael, a young man who reflects to me the presence of the &lsquo;holy of holies&rsquo; in his nonviolence. &ldquo;For all of us, the only beliefs to which our deepest heart and soul can consent are those which our personal experience endorses. Sacred spaces are opportunities to meet that experience and allow it to take us beyond itself&rdquo;

Margaret Silf, Sacred Spaces, p14 References: Angie O&rsquo;Gorman The Universe Bends Towards Justice, 1990 John O&rsquo;Donohue, Anam Cara, 1997 Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, the Last Week &ndash; A Day-By-Day Account of Jesus&rsquo; Final Week in Jerusalem, 2006 Margaret Self, Sacred Spaces: Stations on a Celtic Way, 2001 Rene Girard Violence and the Sacred, 2005 Walter Wink the Powers That Be, 1998