

Spiritual Landscapes in a global context

Irene Alexander

“For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father”.
(Ephesians 2: 14-18)

The counselling relationship is set in a much bigger context – beliefs of both counsellor and counsellee concerning Religion, Denomination, Gender, Sexual orientation, Social justice and use of the Earth will influence understanding of the issues at hand as well as satisfactory outcomes. As humans our first reaction to difference is often fear – we draw back from others who are different from people, whose beliefs are different. We build walls to protect us from the influence they may have on us.

This keynote was a stimulus to explore our theology concerning other religions, especially the East; our Catholic roots and the Christian mystics, feminism, homophobia, wealth and poverty, care of the earth – science and cosmology. As Denis O’Hara said in his keynote Evangelicals and Pentecostals have traditionally taken a “defensive posture against the evil world and the unbiblical church.” Our theology needs to take note of the words of Jesus, “You search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they, which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5; 39) Over the centuries our theology has rigidified keeping others and us from the life that Jesus offers. A high view of scripture should be to ask of any interpretation – “Does this bring me into a closer love-relationship with God?” and “Does this interpretation help me extend grace to others so that they are drawn to God?”

Ask yourself these questions as you explore the issues....

Who is this God who comes preaching peace and to give everyone access to God?

What are the walls that divide?

[What are the walls that separate us?](#)

Are they walls concerning our theology or walls concerning Religion, Denomination, Gender, Sexual orientation and Social injustice? Are they walls that involve the use of Earth?
Or are the walls that divide fear such as fear of difference or fear of the other?

Do the walls that divide or separate involve our theology concerning The East, our Catholic roots, Feminism, Homophobia or our Wealth/poverty or care for the earth?

-Perhaps we have a defensive posture against the evil world and the unbiblical church

What is our perception of the East, our theology concerning other religions?

The influence of the East; Indonesia is a Muslim Nation of 250 million on our doorstep
Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in Australia. What is our response?

The author suggests we have two responses, one is to show hospitality to the stranger “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mathew 25 ;35)

Another way is by having openness to our own faith tradition with other traditions that are similar, she suggests looking for commonality for example in the unknown.

Having an openness to our own faith tradition – of whatever denomination, beginning with the early Christian mystics, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola. Secondly having openness to spiritual practices that bring us closer to God, for instance practicing Contemplation.

“I understand contemplation to be any way that we can unveil the illusions that masquerade as reality and reveal the reality behind the masks”.
(Parker Palmer, 1991, 17)

“He whom neither men nor angels can grasp by knowledge can be embraced by love. For the intellect of both men and angels is too small to comprehend God as he is in himself”
Love transforms one into what one loves (Catherine of Siena 1347-1380)

The Counsellor’s privilege is in hearing stories of honesty and authenticity, companionship in the journey.
Hearing what works and what doesn’t

We are nowhere commanded to be right but we are clearly called to love especially the marginalised and we are called to justice. Justice includes looking to the rights of the marginalised and oppressed.

“Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you”. (Deuteronomy 16:20)

“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne”. (Psalm 89:14)

“I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory” (Matthew 16: 18-20)

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God”. (Luke 11:42)

Two thirds of the world’s hungry are women. Two thirds of the world’s illiterate and poor are women

Our western religious tradition has taught us to think in terms of hierarchy and domination.
How are we to live justly by having a continual awareness of equity and inequity?
Are our churches still teaching that women are not equal to men?
Is something other than the cross needed to redeem this half of the human race?
Can women be ordained in the Baptist and Presbyterian and Anglican churches in your state?
Can a woman be called pastor in the Pentecostal churches – if she herself is not married to a man called pastor?
We can call God a rock, a door, a tower, a fire - can we call God Mother?

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men”. Philippians 2
He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human.
It was an incredibly humbling process.

How are we to live justly? By having a continual awareness of equity and inequity and by seeking the marginalised.

30% of the world consumes 80% of the world’s goods.

One sixth of the world's population do not have access to safe water in Africa it is 54%.

Water Facts

* 2.6 billion people in the world do not have access to adequate sanitation, this is roughly two fifths of the

world's population.

* 5000 children die every day as a result of diseases caused by unclean water and poor sanitation.

* The weight of water that women in Africa and Asia carry on their heads is commonly 20kg.

* Water Aid projects providing safe water, sanitation and hygiene education cost just \$40 per head. (Water Aid) This approach reduces the number of deaths caused by diarrhea and other diseases by an average of 65%. (WHO)

Sharing the World's Wealth

Gross domestic product per capita 2006, USA 42,000, Australia 34,740, New Zealand 26,463, Malaysia 5041, China 1,708, Indonesia 1,283, India 705, Myanmar (Burma) 219, Malawi 161

Somehow we think we have a right to spend 'our' money how we choose

Speaking of the world's wealth, God created a rich and beautiful world and asked us to care for it (Genesis 1:28). Somehow we heard that we could use it up and exploit it and then escape into heaven when "God destroys the earth".

175 countries have entered into "Ratification, acceptance, accession and approval" of the Kyoto protocol.

Australia, Kazakhstan and USA are the only 3 countries which have signed but not ratified.

We need to refresh our theology of creation. Science and theology need to be reconciled.

Science is [in fact] rediscovering spirituality.

The new physicists are telling us that the connectedness of the universe is infinitely complex.

They are telling us that there are 100 billion galaxies and that new stars are being born, and that the universe is better thought of as a living organism not dead inert gasses.

Who is this God who comes preaching peace, to give everyone access to God?

How does our theology, and our lifestyle, need to change, in response to this God?

"You search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life Jesus." (John 5:39-40)

Eternal Spirit, Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Love-maker Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven:

the hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom

Sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever. Amen

Eternal Spirit, Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Love-maker

Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

the hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings freedom

Sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory
of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen