

# The Sacred, Science and Sustainability

Four Lunchtime Dialogues      Pitt Street Uniting Church  
October 2012

**Outline:**            **As science is revealing a new understanding of the universe, we are challenged to look afresh at our understanding of our relationships to all of creation and deepen our sense of the sacredness and Mystery of God in creation. This may challenge old ways of imagining God but also offers new ways to see how the Spirit of God is moving in an unfolding, evolving universe. It can guide us towards creating a more sustainable future and a more contemplative way of being, one which sees connections, affirms life and can transform the way we live.**

In these introductory sessions we will use the guidance of theologians including Thomas Berry, Bruce Sanguin, and Michael & Connie Dowd who have brought together understandings from science and religion, to give a challenging vision of living in a sacred interconnected universe.

**Facilitated by:**    Janet O'Sullivan, retreat facilitator with Eremos and Australian Christian Meditation Community, and Isobel Bishop (Pitt St Uniting Church)

**Information:**      contact [janet\\_osullivan@aapt.net.au](mailto:janet_osullivan@aapt.net.au)

## Focus weeks 1-4

1. Forming our worldviews
2. Evolution - Our place in an evolving universe
3. Ecology: being part of part of interacting and interconnected eco- systems. We are all one.
4. Neuro science- our inner world- transforming consciousness/spiritual practices e.g. meditation.

---

## **Week 1      The Stories We Live By**

**Each of us has a unique story – which gives us a unique but partial lens on the world-it is said we see the world as we are rather than as it is. In sharing world views- ours can expand.**

My world view comes from having a Christian background, growing up in the country, training as an economist, from having significant contacts with Asian cultures, from discovering a contemplative Christian tradition and from being a mother concerned with life for our grandchildren and their children. I am not a scientist.

As well as our individual stories we are strongly influenced by our group stories whether they be social, political, faith based, ethnic, national. If we strongly identify with them we can easily become opposed to other world views and we see many examples of that playing out in the world today.

We are all aware of the global sized problems facing us. To solve them we need to find a way to cooperate globally - what could possibly unite us enough to achieve that?

We need both an accurate map of reality from empirical studies of science and the motivation, sense of meaning and values of a shared spirituality. We need a new story. Both science and religion are addressing the mystery of who we are and our place in the cosmos and the boundaries of the mystery are being pushed back by science, giving us a new view of our world and our place in the cosmos. Our expanding understanding of the cosmos deepens our awareness of the mystery of God in creation.

In our lifetime science has made amazing advances in understanding the story of the earth as a fragile interconnected web of life including human and non-human creation. It is a new story giving us the possibility of a new relationship with the earth as a sacred unity-our common home. Only if we regard it as our sacred home will we respect it and care for it.

---

The sustainability crisis poses challenge and opportunity. Our Western lifestyle, by many measures, is not sustainable, either environmentally or socially. We are facing a crisis of which we are being forewarned-the first generation to realise that we can make our planet unfit for human life. It is a challenging time to be alive, with opportunities to expand our thinking, and participate in co-creating a new way of being. Crises can be times of great creativity.

It is calculated, using the ecological footprint measurement, that we would need 3 planets if all lived like Australians. Humanity has been disrupting the balance of the earth's eco systems, living off its natural capital and creating ecological debt for future generations. We are facing looming shortages of food, water and resources and social inequality is increasing.

We are slowly realising our dependence on the earth, our given home. We have an economic system not related to earth's laws, and one which is upsetting the delicate balance of nature.

We see that we may have distorted our role, with a sense of "Domination" over non-human creation, with a focus too much on a God-human relationship without rightly considering the human-earth relationship. We need change in technology/ lifestyle and more importantly, consciousness- to address causes, not just symptoms such as climate change. We can't really address the outer without changing our inner worlds -our attitudes, world view/consciousness. Can we say that sustainability is essentially a spiritual issue?

As Einstein is often quoted as saying "we cannot solve problems with the consciousness with which they were created". Underlying the issue of unsustainability is the need for a new consciousness, a topic which religions and science are now both exploring and which offers hope that human behaviour can be changed, leading to a new way of seeing our place in creation / a new vision of our earth community/ new ways of being and new images of God.

In our time we have a new cosmology being revealed by science, and new capacities (e.g. Global communication networks) but are in urgent need of a new story of who we are which can be integrated into the old stories from our religious tradition. Stories which many are now finding no longer guide their lives, stories using a language hard to relate to in our times.

In this session we will be introducing 2 foundational thinkers who are integrating the new understandings from science into theology, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme.

**Thomas Berry: Catholic priest, cultural historian, eco theologian- geologist (earth scholar) who died in 2009. Berry articulated a new Earth-based spirituality that integrates the evolutionary perspectives of science with the feelings/understandings that inform religion and the arts. Thomas Berry understood that with the degradation of nature goes a diminishment of the human.**

**He emphasized the significance of story, and in particular the universe as story. 'The universe story is the quintessence of reality. We put it in our language, the birds put it in theirs, and the trees put it in theirs. The story has its imprint everywhere, and that is why it is so important to know the story. If you do not know the story, in a sense you do not know yourself.....'**

Berry: *The Great Work* - expressed the need to move from being a disrupting force on the Earth to a benign presence. He says, "This transition is the Great Work of our generation. We are between stories ...science now telling a new story with big implications for religion. We need a story which includes us in the ecology of the earth, and in the unfolding evolving universe.

**DVD Thomas Berry and The earth community. (You-Tube)**

**(Note: many talks with Thomas Berry are available on You Tube)**

**Discussion:** What do you find challenging in the views expressed? What insight did you gain?

Brian Swimme is a scientist, a mathematical cosmologist, now teaching evolutionary cosmology. He was inspired by Thomas Berry who introduced him to the earlier work of Teilhard de Chardin (who died in 1995 and who wrote *The Phenomenon of Man*, in which he explored the unfolding of the cosmos which challenged creation stories in Genesis. Like many churchmen in the past with radically new ideas, he was opposed by the Church - but now is accepted.)

Many of the eco theologians who now incorporate the latest scientific understandings into their Christian story, refer to these 3 as foundational to their new understandings

Science and religion- the two main streams of knowing: science – logical/rational/ based on observation... Spirituality/religion - scripture/intuitive/ heart knowing/ experience (sometimes spoken of as day v night language or left brain/right brain)

Can these 2 ways of knowing be integrated and can they complement each other rather than compete as ways of understanding the world? Both reflect the human yearning to understand the mystery of the universe and find meaning in the mystery.

**Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said "More than anything else, the future of civilisation depends on the way the two most powerful forces of history, science and religion, settle into relationship with each other."**

For many in our time, science has become the new God, purportedly explaining the workings of the cosmos without the need for a God.

The worship of science also led to pseudo sciences...like economics... which has become so dominant in forming our current world view. Economics is human construct, not related to the principles of the planet- e.g. aiming for continuous growth on a finite planet, and ignoring environmental and social costs.

Science provided us with unprecedented power, tools of communication and knowledge which created the industrial revolution, our high standard of material well-being, but not the larger sense of meaning or purpose or values to use it wisely- unless embedded in a cosmology of meaning (which religion provided in the past). Now we urgently need the wisdom of religion and the understanding of science. Scientific findings are a wake-up call to the challenges we face, as well as a means of restoring awe and wonder to the universe we live in and we need religion to internalise the message and take action.

Both science and religion in their partial ways have contributed to the world views which have brought us to this point of crisis. Both have done harm to the environment, in terms of us humans trying to control it and regard it as separate from ourselves. Both science and religion risk the fundamentalism of certainty – both are limited by human capacities.

John O'Donoghue, who draws from Ireland's rich spiritual Celtic heritage, said "invoking God too quickly absolves us from having to grapple with the mystery in its earthly and cosmic aspects. While science tends to exclude God, religion often brings in God prematurely."

The worldview of science have not always been as far apart as they have been in recent times

Following Copernicus and Newton, Western science broke away from religion. Now they seems a new possibility of a meeting point -new discoveries in science confirming earlier intuitions of our unity and interconnectedness, and restoring awe and wonder to the beauty, order and complexity of the world we live in, an appreciation which can restore the sense of sacredness of the world and a sense of a common ground , a common reality we all share, a common story which human and non-human creation, share.

Religions have generally clung to outdated cosmology as known at the time when their scriptures were written, often ignoring God's first revelation in nature over 13.7 billion years ago. They have also focused on the human divine relationship, at the cost of the human earth relationship which has now become of critical importance. *The science of ecology is now placing us in the ecology of the earth, not apart from it...so when we wound the earth we wound ourselves. Science, in making amazing discoveries of the wonder and creativity of evolution can help to recover the sense of sacredness of nature and the universe.*

Now a growing number of eco- theologians and evolutionary theologians are addressing the new cosmology and our relationship to the rest of creation and we will introduce some of them in these dialogues.

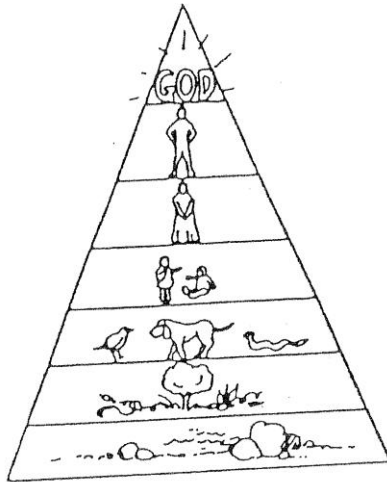
**You Tube: SWIMME: A New Story**

## **Discussion**

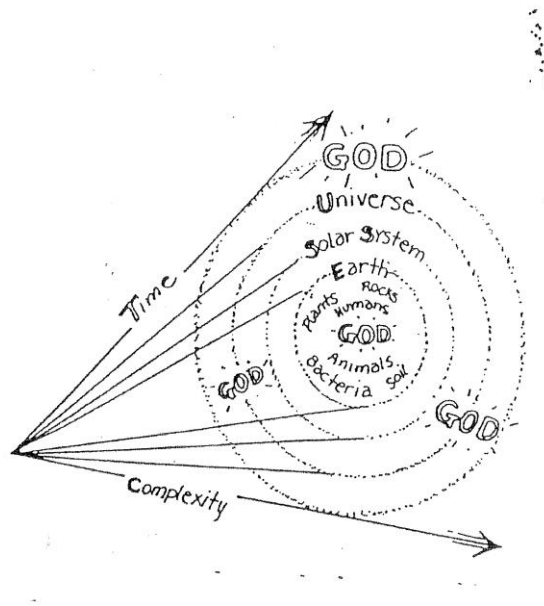
Has your world view been changed significantly by any particular encounter in your life? A new idea? A person? An experience?

## Week 2 Evolution

Old Cosmology



New Cosmology



### What is the place of God in an evolutionary world?

Major world religions were founded long before Darwin and before an understanding of how the world came into being, as now being revealed by science. Creation stories used metaphorical/mythical language. Christianity has struggled with the concepts arising from Darwin's position on evolution. Debates over the Genesis creation stories are intense, some take them literally (creationism), some see God as the designer who in one act created and set in motion all life (intelligent design). There was, and is, a reluctance to consider our common ancestry with all life, and elements of chance, struggle and randomness in the process.

Prior to Darwin, religions were hierarchical in structure, sometimes reflecting the great chain of being—mineral to plant, human, divine. (see diagrams of the old and new cosmologies) Now the world view is more horizontal with creation of the galaxies, the solar system, the earth, life—humans—a complex web of life.

The vast time scale of 13.7 billion years is now seen as preparation for our creation as beings able to reflect and be aware.

John Haught....if the earth's history is represented as 10 volumes of books on a shelf... we are the last page of Vol 10.

Evolution in most people's minds relates to Darwin's "survival of the fittest" and how this 'describes' human nature. With no need for a God in explaining the creation and with the suggestion that humans evolved through random genetic mutations, a sense of deeper meaning and purpose for our lives was removed. Much of the science establishment since Newton has not seen the need for a God in the process, and was based on the assumption of the physical world as reality, but this too is changing as what we know is dwarfed by what we don't know and much of the universe now seen as invisible reality.

It is a much bigger story. Since Darwin, the understanding of evolution has expanded and from evolutionary biology and voices such as Elisabet Sahtouris, an evolutionary biologist, we see that beyond the struggle for survival there is evidence of a more mature stage of evolution with cooperation in adapting to the environment. This cooperation is seen in the larger eco systems, such as a coral reef, a rain forest. An alternative view of evolution is as a divine unfolding with the presence of the spirit, both at the Big Bang and in the subsequent process. There is now a growing recognition of the reality of the invisible world, which has yet to be systematically explored.

The universe is now considered to be over 90% dark matter and energy; and at the other end of the scale only less than 20% of the DNA has been given a definite function, and it is said we only use about 10% of the brain!

Conclusions from quantum physics indicate that the universe and all of its physical matter actually consist of immaterial energy, and the invisible energy field appears to be the primary governing force in the material world. It is beginning to sound like a modern version of ancient spirituality: the universe made out of energy, everything is interrelated, everything is one.

From an evolutionary perspective we are related to all of creation...all life having emerged from the same cosmic source, each stage of the unfolding over 13 billion years preparing the conditions for further diversity and complexity, each stage transcending and including the previous growth. We have a unique consciousness which allows us to recognize our connectedness-we all have the capacity for transcendence, the capacity to be more: the Spirit of working within creation to bring this about. There seems to be "some mindful activity" at the heart of the cosmos drawing creation towards greater complexity and diversity in a creative process involving suffering, death and rebirth. Scientists suggest that chaos is a stimulant for activating new forms and new patterns of creativity.

A God of divine mystery seems an appropriate image!

**You Tube John Haught, God after Darwin ---beginning 8 min approx. (total length 46 min)**

(Prof. of Theology and Director of Science and Religion Studies at Georgetown University, making a bridge between the two for students for over 20 years)

**Discussion:** Seeing the universe as a divine unfolding - how does that engage your understanding of God?  
What could we be evolving towards? Kingdom of God? Unitive being?

Seeing the universe as an unfolding story what are we emerging towards? The crisis we face may be the point of transformation into beings motivated by love – an evolutionary threshold to be crossed. Thomas Berry called it a "moment of grace" when we could awaken to who we really are.

"We are moving towards a global brain, but need a global heart"

Jesus set out a vision for a more abundant life, one empowered by the Spirit and called for a transformation of our being.

At the centre of Jesus teaching he invited and challenged listeners to participate in the vision, in the here and now, that motivated all that he did. He chose to empower others towards being more. He described the vision in terms of images and parables...

- as coming as a gift from God
- engaging in co creativity/active participation
- where divine communication and human acceptance meet
- a collective reality as we participate in humanity's ongoing self- transcendence
- living it in responsible and caring relationships, relationships flowing out of love

The idea of an unfinished universe, and unfinished humans, gives significance to each moment, that newness is emerging.

BRUCE SANGUIN...an evolutionary Christian perspective

Sanguin "If Jesus is to be relevant to us today, we need to interpret his teaching through an ecological lens"

He explores ways in which Christian doctrines can be understood in a cosmological way- congruent with what we know about the universe.

Sanguin – "the Kin-dom of God", moving from an ethic of dominion to one of mutuality

"Kin- dom of God" as metaphor for 'all of us' which suggests the belonging of all our relationships...human and non-human.

### Quotes from Sanguin

**"Ecological degradation results from the same dynamic that causes injustice in the human realm...we are out of relationship with God, self and neighbour and the planet "**

**"I propose that scripture, like the story of the universe, reflects an evolutionary dynamic, the evolution over time...reflecting the stage of spiritual consciousness of both the writer and the community being addressed"**

**You Tube Bruce Sanguin Evolutionary Christianity (7 min)**

**Berry "When we pray for a better world God gives us the opportunity to create it"**

### **Discussion:**

How does this challenge you to think about our role now as co-creators?

## **Week 3 Ecology**

### **ECOLOGY- is the ecological crisis fundamentally a spiritual problem?**

Introduction: the implications of understanding who we are in relation to evolution....are unfinished beings capable of transformation?

(Note Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.)

Evolution also occurs in our thinking. Throughout history we have seen how difficult is it to change paradigms – the way we understand the world. When someone challenges the assumptions behind an existing world view and proposes a new model of reality, there is always resistance. Witness the denial we have seen throughout history (see examples of Prophets and heretics... below)

Ecology, our interconnectedness with all life on earth, challenges us to a new vision of human-earth relations in the context of the whole planet and offers new ways of understanding Scripture (e.g. “all members of one body”)

We live in a state of grace - the earth provides for us - the planetary biosphere has done the work for us. We have been invited to the banquet of life but like the men in the parable we are distracted by the affairs of our lives.

While science continues to illuminate great mysteries of the universe, our immediate experience of creation is through our home planet. We are now being called to engage not just with life on earth but with the life that is the earth, of which we are a part.

To embrace Earth Community, as part of it, not separate - we are a microcosm of a macrocosm and what we do to the earth, we do to ourselves.

We currently deny the higher order potentials of our nature that would allow us to live in peace and cooperation. Looking at ecological systems, underlying them as they mature is cooperation rather than competition ....e.g. rainforests, coral reefs.

Our deepest desires are to live in harmonious relationships, but we have become alienated from our true sense of belonging in nature as a communion of beings rather than a collection of objects.

Eco-systems are systems of mutual feeding, involving sacrifice, struggle, death, rebirth.

There are eco-systems within eco systems: our body is an eco-system, we are part of multiple eco-systems, all of which are inside of the whole eco system of the earth. At each level if the balance of giving and receiving is disrupted, the system becomes dysfunctional. Just as we health issues arise when the body is out of balance, so we see problems arise when the earth is out of balance.

We are in need of a paradigm shift - our world view is too restrictive and too materialistic...too dualistic. A look at the Greek word “Oikos” – household - is helpful. It is the root word in economy (management), ecology (laws of the household) and ecumenism (shared values) “Oikos” represents Oneness, but the economy is built on separateness - a human construct, disconnected from the physical laws of the planet. We can't have unlimited economic growth on a finite planet, or an economy which dominates.

In healthy eco-systems there is no waste. There is concern with the impacts things/actions have on others, with right relationships, with accepting limits. When is enough enough?

Voices are now increasingly challenging the goal of economic growth, raising moral and ethical issues.

### **DVD Leonardo BOFF Environmental Ecology (recent talks on “The Four Ecologies”- see his website)**

Boff - “we need a vision of not only cultural change but also spiritual transformation through a renewed and renewable relationship with the entire network of creation”.



We have mostly lost the sense of a sacred world where gratitude, reverence, and rituals maintain that awareness of sacredness.

## **DISCUSSION**

How would it make a difference if we saw the world as sacred?

Who is my brother?

---

## **A new world view will challenge our images of God**

Meister Eckhart "what we name as God is not God"

No metaphors can exhaust the reality.

Images of God do not describe God but express ways, experiences, of relating to God. We use the familiar to talk about the unfamiliar and many are no longer familiar with kingdom / shepherd images of scripture. As we continue on our faith journeys, probably our images of God have changed.

Re Dawkins....what image of God is he denying? Possibly one which many Christians may also now reject.

Michael Dowd...."evolutionary evangelist". United Church of Christ minister, (and scientist wife Connie Barlow) are pioneers in "evolutionary Christianity" (Regard Swimme and Berry as mentors.)

Relating to theology...he says "God is a sacred name, a mythic name for reality" ...how do I communicate to reality. How do I intimately relate to reality?"

Dowd gives a description of the stages of his faith journey beyond scriptural literalism

1. recognition that 'evidence is divine communication'
2. the collapse of the 2 story universe - a natural world and a supernatural (rather pre- natural....how people thought before we understood the universe as we do now)

"God is not a person but a personification of reality"

3. an expanded sense of self... - we are an expression of the universe.

What new images are arising from our expanded understanding of who we are?

Some new images include God as Ground of Being, Sacred wholeness, Divine Mystery, Three Faces of God, (Wilbur), God within, the world as body of God.

'The world as the body of God', introduced by theologian Sally MacFague, is a very useful image as we consider the issue of sustainability.

She suggests that it is an image needed for our time in relation to the issues we face and to overcome our sense of separateness from creation.

How do I communicate with reality? As a cell in communion with the very body of which it is a part. God beyond and within the process, both transcendent and immanent. God is not a distant being as in the kingly metaphor, but being itself- one in whom 'we live and move and have our being.'

'to see the world as God's body brings us close to God, brings us to an awareness that we are in God's presence....here and now...intimately part of the life shared by all. (All members one of another.) This makes the world a sacred place - to be loved, cared for, valuable in itself, for like us, it is an expression of God, as we are"

**DISCUSSION:** Do you find the World as the body of God a helpful metaphor? How have your metaphors changed?

**You Tube Joanna Macy- The Great Turning....5.30 minutes**

Some 'ecological thinking' prophets---Evolution of orthodoxy!!

Giordano Bruno (16C), Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, mathematician and astronomer. His cosmological theories went beyond the Copernican ...that the universe contained an infinite number of inhabited worlds populated by other intelligent beings.<sup>1</sup> After the Roman Inquisition found him guilty of heresy for his pantheism, he was burnt at the stake.

Galileo -father of modern physics...--- He was tried by the Inquisition, found "vehemently suspect of heresy", forced to recant, and spent the rest of his life under house arrest

Teilhard's Phenomenon of Man -finished in the 1930s, but was published only after his death in 1955. The Roman Catholic Church considered that Teilhard's writings contradicted orthodoxy and initially prohibited their publication. However, some of Teilhard's views became influential in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI praised Teilhard's idea of the universe as a "living host".<sup>[2]</sup>

Matthew Fox 1993, Fox's conflicts with Catholic authorities climaxed with his expulsion from the Dominican order for "disobedience": long conflict with the Catholic powers over creation spirituality led to becoming an Episcopalian Boff- Brazilian. Catholic priest, most known for his liberation theology in the 1980s came into conflict with the church for his supposed Marxist views, and for his criticism of the church hierarchy' In 1992 Rome, prevented him from participating in the Eco-92 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which finally led him to leave the Franciscan religious order and ministry.

While silenced for speaking, he turned towards liberation of the earth and has since written numerous books on that topic.

## Week 4 Human: Inner Worlds and Consciousness - God Within

What is the nature of reality? It seems that- the more we know the more we realise how much we don't know—a vast amount of reality appears to be invisible to our normal senses, but is being revealed as in a developing story, particularly by the technologies of science.

Yet, the mystery remains, Infinite Reality can be experienced by the finite mind only as Unfathomable Mystery.

We are conscious of being conscious, but don't really know what consciousness is. While science is revealing the wonder and intelligence in the universe, the question of 'why' we exist and the purpose of the universe remain more in the domain of religion than science.

We see the world as we are, not as it is, as thru a glass darkly. Yet we assume that we perceive the world directly, even though we know differently.

There are many aspects of reality we don't perceive, e.g. much of the electromagnetic spectrum, sound, smells outside of certain range, magnetic fields. There are many amazing aspects of invisible reality we usually don't question...e.g. connectivity via mobile phones, though we know them through their effects.

That scientific world view for the past 300 years is still largely based on the assumption that the physical world is the real world; it explains most phenomena but not the nonmaterial world of the mind.

The recent development of a worldview consistent with modern physics offers a different perspective, not based on separation but where matter and energy are intertwined. From this the question of consciousness has arisen as a legitimate scientific study.

- Is consciousness a product of the mind?
- Is it dependent on the material world of time and space and matter?

OR

- Is it a fundamental basis of reality out of which matter emerged?

If Consciousness came first... (we can call it capital C...Consciousness) can we say we live in a 'spirit' filled world? – universal Consciousness , Unitive Consciousness , objective Consciousness, transcendence, Christ Consciousness, spirit, God, Universal field of energy/intelligence

If consciousness is universal, does it imply different qualities of individual consciousness arose as the complexity of brain systems grew until we developed as beings able to be aware of our own awareness?

- ▣ O'Murchu on consciousness "the all-pervading energy of creation, underpinning the endless process of co-creation"

We are learning that, we are interconnected and still evolving with all creation, not separate from nature, but held in an encompassing and emerging consciousness - the ground of all being.

- Is God "being rediscovered" in the form of quantum consciousness?
- Is evolution an intelligent and purposeful process leading towards fulfilment?
- Can it be seen as evolution towards Godliness...goodness, beauty, love, truth, justice?

Aspects of consciousness:

Jung: collective unconscious -an amalgam of past experience- a reservoir of spiritual, psychic and mental energy (memory)

Sheldrake; A conscious universe is revealing the reality of non-local influences.... non local and nonphysical fields of memory (morphogenic fields) leading to sudden shifts in consciousness and behaviour.

(if enough people hold something to be true, not just intellectually, but with their whole being, it can suddenly be true for the whole.) This gives support to the idea of tipping points (critical mass). Could it be that non local influence also supports the power of prayer?

#### INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- ▣ Are we as drops of water in an ocean of consciousness?
- ▣ “the ground of our being.....” I AM
- ▣ Is our consciousness evolving?

The term consciousness, as applied to our individual consciousness or awareness, is used in different ways-

- We hear the expression “we are in need of a new consciousness’—one which takes in an expanded world view incorporating truths from religion, sacred traditions of all ages and modern science - that we are one world.

e.g. Peter Russell, “(neurophysiology of meditation) “It is our current mode of consciousness that is unsustainable. It leads to short-term needs that are intrinsically incompatible with the long-term needs of future generations”

Head knowledge alone is not enough; we also need the experience –knowing from the heart, (thus both science and religion).

The nature of consciousness and exploration of the inner world has become a significant topic of research in psychology and neuroscience revealing the possibility of different states of consciousness, through observing different modes of functioning in the brain. It is interesting that scientists have worked with the Dalai Lama for decades experimenting with monks who meditate and learning about the sophisticated mind science of Tibetan Buddhism.

If the inner world and outer world are not separate; If consciousness is the basis of the universe, out of which matter came ,then we have a different starting point- a spirit filled universe.

Is it a function of the brain or is the brain a transmitter/receiver from the larger Consciousness? To use the analogy of a radio receiver- are we rightly attuned to receive this energy?

As an individual experience, an increase in consciousness may be described as ‘attention and awareness beyond our usual state of separate awareness’ to an experience of communion-with others, nature, God; an experience of simply being – I AM, the earliest name for God. God as the ground of our being.

- Is our individual consciousness as a drop in an ocean of consciousness? If so, how are we connected to the greater consciousness?
- How do we become attuned? Being present, requiring silence, stillness, simplicity- letting go, openness to God in prayer.
- Some religious phrases... Mind of Christ? Channels of God’s love (love as the energy of God)? Spark of the divine?
- Focused, relaxed attention - as in meditation. In that experience of emptiness is fullness-the source from which life flows (God)

**DISCUSSION:** “The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual crisis” ...do you agree that we need a change in consciousness?

## **Contemplative Practices (prayer as experiencing divine presence)**

There is a long tradition of prayer as the practise of the presence of God, kept alive in particular in the Orthodox tradition.

Richard Rohr "It is not God who is absent, it is we who are not present to the Divine presence." We are usually living in the past or future rather than in the present.

From Christianity we believe that we can be transformed, that we are called to be transformed. From science we are learning that the brain can be changed.

Forms of individual consciousness

1. Our ordinary consciousness- sleep like- thus Jesus's call 'to wake up' – mostly undirected sense perceptions, stream of thoughts in the mind, emotions. Many relate this to identification with our ego selves rather than our true selves.
2. Self awareness- being present to oneself- an awareness of simply being- I AM- true self -God within. A move from head knowing to heart experience.
3. Objective consciousness- higher /universal-intelligence of the universe- God  
Mystics from all traditions speak of encounters with a 'unitary consciousness'... which we have called mystical experiences.

Meditation has been a practice used in most traditions to come to a deeper consciousness and the experience of the spirit within. By focus on breathing, or repeating a sacred word, moving from head to heart - bringing oneself into the present moment.

(11) Jesus said 'you must lose yourself to find yourself' –letting go of your ego identity, to open to true self. He also said to "enter ones inner room...." to pray.

Meditation.... A one-ing exercise" coming to our centre –a integration of mind, body, spirit - withdrawing attention to a state of simply being - letting go of ego attachments... open to the presence of God within. This is an experience of simply being....I AM, part of the great I AM of God... a state of communion. In that connected state may have a taste of and energy/love that relates us with something we might call 'sacred', unity consciousness. A simple practice, but not easy!

Brain science has demonstrated that changes occur in the brain during deep meditation- changed brain waves, towards deeper relaxation and an integration of left and right hemispheres of the brain.

## **You Tube 'What is Meditation' Fth Laurence Freeman (8.46 min) World Community for Christian Meditation**

L. Freeman "contemplative prayer awakens our sense of connection and responsibility for and to the wondrous creation we are part of. Because meditation heals the excessive individualism of our culture....we can truly see the relevance of a deep spirituality to the healing of our wounded environment."

What is emerging which we are called to contribute to?

- Kingdom of God?
- Universal humanity?
- An unfolding of 'the grand liturgy of the universe' (Thomas Berry)?
- Being channels of God's love? (The energy of love...a renewing energy, from God's boundless self-giving)

John Dominic Crossan "Jesus came to bring a paradigm shift -that the Kingdom of God is already here- awaiting our participation -you've been waiting for God but God is waiting for you.. God's not going to do it alone..."

James George "The immediate work at hand- both inner and outer is our responsibility. We can and must act. But then we must leave the outcome to God "

Thomas Berry "Our challenge is to create a new sense of what it means to be human"

Bruce Sanguin The Prodigal Son – (an example of scripture through an ecological lens)

The young brother demands his inheritance immediately, mirroring our adolescent stage of development as a species, goes to a foreign country and squanders it on wasteful living; and finds himself in degraded circumstances, with no one else to blame but himself. He finally comes to himself, experiences genuine remorse, and makes the long and humbling journey back to home to ask for forgiveness and is welcomed back with great compassion.

Sanguin asks: "are we willing to 'take up our cross', give up our identity, and ask to be allowed back as servants into the Kin-dom of God?"

**DISCUSSION:**      What is the newness to which we are being called?

---

## **RESOURCES USED:**

The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity-conversations at the Leading edge of Faith".

[www.evolutionarychristianity.com](http://www.evolutionarychristianity.com)

An internet based series of talks and study guides hosted by Rev .Michael Dowd who interviews 38 speakers, scientists and religious from a spectrum of denominations, who are exploring the implications of new scientific understandings for theology.

An outline of speakers and summary of content is available at this website

(Many talks by these contributors are also available on You Tube.)

[www.progressivechristianalliance.org](http://www.progressivechristianalliance.org)

Opportunity to join the dialogue around The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity

## **Some relevant books**

Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Sally MacFague, *The Body of God*

Diarmuid O'Murchu , *Evolutionary Faith, Quantum Theology*

Bruce Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos*

Laurence Freeman