

Invited keynote address to the Australian Anglican Schools Network Conference (AASN), Brisbane QLD Aug 14th 2010

Spirituality and Religion Today: Rekindling Faith in a Secular World 11.30am - 12.30

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1. 'Today faith requires an inner life'. – Louis Dupréⁱ
2. 'There exists some point at which I can meet God in a real and experimental contact with his infinite actuality'. – Thomas Mertonⁱⁱ
3. Karl Rahner said: 'The future Christian will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all'.ⁱⁱⁱ
4. Here Louis Dupré is illuminating:
Precisely this sense of emptiness accounts for the strange attraction mystical literature holds for our contemporaries. For most mystical writers have at one time or another expressed the emptiness that in some way corresponds to the sense of religious absence that so many feel today. The modern person is justified in turning to the masters of spiritual life by the fact that *in his emptiness he has nowhere to turn but inwardly*. The contemporary person is *forced* to start the spiritual journey from within, even though that is the place where he/she most grievously encounters a void as silent as the secular world that has ceased to speak in sacred tongues.
5. The idea that we are part of God and that God is part of us has never been looked upon favorably in the West. This idea is usually seen as blasphemy; the apartness of God must be preserved. Yet there are times when there is nothing we could be more sure of than that God exists and it is our communion with him that feeds our lives. I believe every woman and man has had communion with God whether they recognise it as such or not; whether they remember it consciously or not. But we are reluctant to refer to this experience as 'God', because we say to ourselves, 'What could a mere nobody such as myself have to say about such an important subject?' When we feel the presence of God, many of us are afraid to call it God because it does not fit into any image of the divine that has been recognised in history. – Adrian 2010
6. T. S. Eliot captured this well when he wrote: 'I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper'.^{iv}
7. This is difficult to achieve, but with the writings of Thomas Moore, John O'Donohue, David Mowaljarlai, Margaret Atwood and Mary Oliver it is a distinct possibility.
8. One of the mottos of my work is the Latin maxim: 'Called or not called, God is present'.
9. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida has said: 'Secularisation is only a manner of speaking'.^v
10. As one of my students wrote:
Underneath their hardened secular shells, people still need to believe that there is more to their existence than just one fragile life, that, in the sweep of time, is over in a blink of the eye. The majority of people still have faith, or rapidly try to recover faith in the critical and urgent moments of their lives. This is today's reality, which is confounding to me: why do we wait for adverse circumstances to occur before we reach out to touch the face of God and be embraced by the holy? – Carolyn 2004
11. Mircea Eliade gets it right when he refers to the inner man or woman as *homo religiosus*, that is, an innately religious presence which is as religious today as it ever was.
- 11 A. I have published several accounts of this disturbance and the readjustments that have taken place subsequently.^{vi}
12. The same student who denied religious faith at the start, wrote this at the end of the course:
It is hard to sway a convinced materialist like myself from his constant scepticism about religious matters, at least I thought it was before this course. But it is terribly hard to continue to oppose the idea of 'spirit' when it is presented in poetry and inspirational writings. Before the course, I

blocked out religion as irrelevant to my life, it made no sense to me at all in its conventional, archaic and drab form. But when spirituality is expressed in poetry, passion, and subjectivity, I have to take another look, as these expressions are inspirational and move me in an unexpected way. I now see that emotion and spirit can be included in my world, and I can have such elements without straying from reality. – Steven 2001

13. Bernard Lonergan puts this memorably in a simple one-line formulation:

The fruit of the truth must grow and mature on the tree of the subject, before it can be plucked and placed in the absolute realm.^{vii} (1968: 3)

14. Before I started this subject, I was confident in ‘bagging’ Christianity for the way in which it had failed me. Empty rituals, outmoded morality, and corrupt institutions, etc. Yet as the weeks have passed, I have come to realize that a more sophisticated dialogue is at my disposal. I have discovered that my childish repudiation of the Christian Church revealed a lack of knowledge into the nature, depth and multi-layered appearance of spirituality within religion. I come away with greater respect for my religion of origin, and for the presence of spirituality in what I had thought was a dead and moribund institution. – Jenny 2002

Concluding remarks: The new interest in religion and faith is personal rather than collective, existential rather than devotional, experiential rather than instructional, and passionate rather than moralistic. It is concerned with encountering God in this life, rather than preparing to meet him in the next, which is the more traditional approach.

Louis Dupré puts this well:

Essential for religious life in a secular society is that it originates *within the self*, as a personal response to an inner call, rather than being derived from inherited habits or from social pressure. That personal attention to the inner voice had been lacking became evident in the massive apostasies of the 1970s and 80s when social support for religion suddenly weakened. *Those whose faith was not rooted in firm personal convictions simply abandoned it.* Today faith requires an inner life.^{viii}

David Tacey, *ReEnchantment: the new Australian Spirituality* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2000).

David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2003).

David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Jung, Psyche, Earth* (Zurich: Daimon, 2009) – this book may be purchased at this website: www.daimon.ch

ⁱ Louis Dupré, ‘Spiritual Life and the Survival of Christianity: Reflections at the End of the Millennium’, in *Cross Currents*, New York, 48:3 (1998), p. 4. <http://www.crosscurrents.org/dupre.htm>

ⁱⁱ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961, New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 37.

ⁱⁱⁱ Karl Rahner, ‘The Spirituality of the Future’, in K. Lehmann and A. Raffelt editors, *The Practice of the Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1986),

^{iv} T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* 1(935, London: Faber, 1968), p. 76.

^v Derrida, ‘Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’ (2000), in Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart eds., *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 32.

^{vi} David Tacey, ‘Losing My Religion, Recovering the Sacred’, in *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2003; London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

^{vii} Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Subject* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), p. 3.

^{viii} *Ibid.*