

## **SPIRITUALITY IN ABUNDANCE: Diversity and integrity in Australian pilgrimages, a Christian response**

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I am telling an old myth in a new way. Each society takes that myth and retells it in a different way, which relates to the particular environment they live in. The motif is the same. It's just that it gets localised. As it turns out, I'm localising it for the planet. I guess I'm localising it for the end of the millenium more than I am for any particular place<sup>1</sup>. (George Lucas)

We are about to experience what could be called a 'second enlightenment', a postsecular enlightenment, where religion and spirituality will return to centre stage and where secular materialism will appear out of date and anachronistic. However, with this new religious enlightenment, the sacred will be experienced in radically different ways from the past. The new awareness will not champion premodern religious categories but, rather, will introduce new and altered concepts of the sacred<sup>2</sup>. (David Tacey)

The new consciousness which was anticipated and first took shape in the creation of artists, thinkers, and scientists, will not be fully valid so long as it is not lived in daily life. What form can it take? It will take its own necessary course. Yet the confusion of the present situation requires a certain readiness, open-mindedness, and co-operation of each individual. It will happen of its own accord since the structure of the new mode of realization has begun to manifest itself with an undeniable intensity in the most diverse areas of our lives<sup>3</sup>. (Jean Gebser)

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<sup>1</sup> Lucas, G., and Moyers, B., (1999), 'Of Myth and Men: a conversation between broadcaster Bill Moyers and director George Lucas on the spiritual meaning of the Force and the true theology of Star Wars'. *Time*, 3 May, 1999. pp. 71-74.

<sup>2</sup>Tacey, D., (2000), *ReEnchantment: the new Australian Spirituality*, Harper Collins, Sydney, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Gebser, J., [1949] (1985), *The Ever Present Origin: Part One: Foundations of the aperspectival world, a contribution to the history of the awakening of consciousness. Part Two: Manifestations of the aperspectival world, an attempt at the concretion of the spiritual*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, p.530.

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper charts the emergence of varied movements of spiritual exploration in Australia. Specifically this paper outlines the significance of the work of cultural philosopher Jean Gebser for the Church in addressing the emergent murmurings of the Sacred, and the shift in consciousness that is required for its concretisation and exploration, particularly for Australian society.

### **Australia – a place of burgeoning spirituality**

Spiritual life in Australia seems to be going through something of a period of revitalisation. The forms of spirituality that are manifest may not be ones that the Christian Church has traditionally recognised but they are a reflection of the human desire for the Numinous<sup>4</sup> and its presence in our lives. It would appear from popular writings such as those produced by John Shelby Spong, or books like *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran and *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield; the growth of various forms of New Age movements; the attraction to mythical narratives such as those created in *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*; interest in Eastern spirituality and philosophy; the popularity of the work of Michael Leunig; the desire for alternative forms of therapy and healing; and Mind-Body-Spirit festivals that spirituality is not out of fashion in Australian culture.<sup>5</sup> Although these are diverse forms of spiritual expression

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<sup>4</sup> The words Numinous, Sacred and Spirit are used interchangeably in this paper to represent the reality of God. However, it should be noted that language such as Spirit refers to an abstraction that arises in Gebserian terms from the Mental – Rational consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller list of manifestations and expressions of spiritual renewal in a variety of forms, groups, movements, artists and writers see Tacey, (2000), pp.3-4.

they have a common element in that they are predominantly experiential. While it can certainly be argued that there is intellectual credibility in these movements, the experience of the Sacred is the preeminent concern.

Australia is a culturally diverse country and our culture is providing us with an eclectic variety of responses to the Sacred. Many factors have contributed to this eclectic mix; not least the people coming from many countries that make up Australia's population, the variety of reasons that people have immigrated. These factors sit alongside wider society's increasing awareness of the significance of the spirituality of Australia's indigenous peoples, appreciation of the need for reconciliation, the movement(s) described as post-modernism and a disenchantment with the 'good-life'. It is also arguable that our landscape and history have shaped our spirituality<sup>6</sup>. From my experience and research, I would argue that spirituality in Australia has an anti-authoritarian streak, tolerates little pious rhetoric and is earthy. Put in recognisable Christian terms it is radically incarnational and highly contextual. Tacey highlights this yearning and this uncomfortable place that we find ourselves in:

How we conceptualise spirit in Australia is still beyond our imagining. And this spirit appears to be "waiting" for something to happen, waiting for some transformation or transfiguration. But of what? And of whom? It may be that Australian spirit is presently beyond our imagining because it is non-dualistic, non-otherworldly, and deeply linked to physical reality. As such, it could be "unrecognizable" (Eliade) from the point of view of the old Judeo-Christian dispensation, with its transcendentalist and dualistic character. This is perhaps why the churches have not been able to identify the spiritual renaissance in Australia, nor offer leadership in this spiritual discovery.<sup>7</sup>

Tacey is a committed Christian and is concerned to show that there is a strong movement of the Spirit in this land at present. Significantly for those in the Church there seems an incapacity to respond in a creative way. In our society the diverse of forms of spirituality

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<sup>6</sup> In particular see, Veronica Brady's "Called by the Land to enter the Land" in Hammond, C., (1991) (Ed.), *Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime*, Sydney, Millenium Books.

that one may participate in at present suggests that our response to the Spirit is in a state of flux. There is no cohesive or unifying narrative that is the all-encompassing expression of our response to the Sacred. Perhaps, for the moment, we might suspend judgment on the depth and substance of our current spiritual landscape. It may very well be argued that in some ways this might be a delight to the Church, even though the Spirit might not be 'blowing' in ways that we feel it should, or is moving in ways that are perplexing to those of us who remain in the traditional forms of the Christian community.

Clearly, within the Church there is much disquiet and concern about the "watering down" of the Gospel in such a cultural milieu. Spirituality in such a context arises because of the cry of the human heart for roots that go down deep and provide the grace to let us know who we truly are, both as individuals and as a community. Liberals and conservatives<sup>8</sup> are often fighting with one another about what is central to the content of Christian faith. These debates seem superfluous to many outside of the Church in Australia, not least because these arguments seem predominantly concerned with ideas that are divorced from the reality of everyday experience. Therefore, these concerns further remove the

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<sup>7</sup> Tacey (2000), p.98

<sup>8</sup> I certainly do not use either of these words pejoratively, but rather inclusively to describe the groups of responses to the Christian tradition. It might be argued that both of these responses, when taken to an extreme position, become divorced from our individual and communal experience, the treasures of our tradition, and most significantly stifle the possibility of transformation by the Sacred as these responses are couched in fear of real engagement with the Sacred. For those manifesting extreme forms of liberalism there appears to be the consistent deferment of engagement with the Divine through an unwillingness to state anything specific about the nature of this reality, possibly arising out of fear of intimate connection with the Sacred. For those bearing an extreme conservatism there appears to be a desire to overly control the understanding of the nature of the Divine through legalistic and dogmatic formulation that is prescriptive. In other words there is a predetermined understanding and interpretation about the Divine and how the Divine engages with humanity. Such ossified interpretation is protected by such believers through particular understandings of revelation that are self-enclosed and self-referring in the construction of understanding the relationship between God and the world. Perhaps such fear and rigidity arises from a fear of entering the unfolding narrative of existence.

significance of the Christian narrative of existence from the lives of many people as the Church does not seem to offer an experiential narrative that is vibrant for their lives. I do not believe that these are necessarily uniquely Australian problems, but possibly concerns of the overly rationalised world.

### **What does the Christian narrative offer our society?**

To summarise what the Christian narrative has to offer our society is to be in danger of trivialising the tradition. Nevertheless such articulation is required if the Church is to engage with society effectively. The Christian tradition has a narrative of “reality” that tells us we are not alone, that we are upheld by an infinitely creative God, who is profoundly and radically intimate with the creation, is redemptive and loving, relates to us individually and communally, seeks justice, compassion and mercy and knows the cost of existence in the person of Jesus. These are some of the fundamentals that come to us through the Christian tradition.

### **Possible problems with a Christian response to Australian Spirituality**

...in a period of religious crisis one cannot anticipate the creative, and, as such, probably unrecognizable, answers given to such a crisis<sup>9</sup>

It is arguable that a Christian response to the Australian spiritual milieu, which is couched in predominantly theological assumptions, operates out of a particular mindset, which is a cause of difficulty for much of the Church in communicating and engaging with our culture. In other words the presumptions and *modus operandi* that we use to

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<sup>9</sup> Eliade, M., [1969] (1975)*The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, The University of Chicago, Chicago, p.4.

address and present theological issues may not be necessarily working as efficiently and effectively as it might. Perhaps there are new ways of experiencing and articulating the reality of existence that might require us to let go of previously held ways of knowing. Such a radically different way of experiencing and articulating reality might involve a shift in consciousness, an eruption of new methods of 'knowing'. Such a process need not be reductionist, syncretistic or non-realist.

The question arises for those grounded in the Christian tradition; "how might we maintain the integrity that we ascribe to our personal and communal narrative while remaining in open and honest engagement with others in our society? How might we maintain integrity within our tradition and at the same time be called to experience "reality" in new ways?" One way of addressing these problems is to look at the very framework that we bring to our experience, our questions, and resultant answers about the nature and description of 'reality'. This may be necessary for the Church to make a significant contribution in this polylogue, but may also be of great benefit to the society of which we are a part as the spiritual wisdom of this tradition can provide depth and balance to new insights. As Tacey suggests:

The religious spark has been rekindled in Australians, but how are we to tell the genuine spark from all the new age fires currently burning in our towns and cities? The truth is, we are completely unprepared for the spiritual renaissance which is currently upon us<sup>10</sup>.

A thinker that might help provide a framework to appreciate this process a little better is Jean Gebser (1905-1973), a Prussian born cultural philosopher.

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<sup>10</sup> Tacey, D., (1997), *Australia in Search of a Soul*, Eremos Magazine Essay Supplement No. 22, March 1997, Eremos Institute, Sydney.

## **Jean Gebser: Structures of Consciousness and Contemporary Spirituality**

Jean Gebser looked at the unfolding of consciousness in the human condition. He did not believe that there was a predetermined pattern to this unfolding but rather there was a requirement of the human being and his or her culture to respond to the latent structures of consciousness within the awakening human condition. Gebser argues that humanity is utterly dependent on the Sacred<sup>11</sup> but there is also the capacity within humans to respond to the Sacred in different ways<sup>12</sup>. Different ways of responding arise because of differing structures of consciousness. Those bearing a different consciousness experience reality in a radically different way to those bearing different structures.

At the heart of Gebser's work is the belief that humanity stands on the threshold of the emergence of a new structure of consciousness<sup>13</sup>. Gebser highlighted differing structures through the history of humanity and suggests that much of the turmoil that humanity has encountered in the last couple of hundred years is the result of the deficient manifestation and consequent breakdown of the mental structure of consciousness which he technically calls the 'rational' consciousness.

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<sup>11</sup> Gebser, (1985), p.530.

<sup>12</sup> These different ways of responding arise from different structures of consciousness. Gebser provides an overview of the evidence for these differing mutations, their manifestation and the way that the bearer appreciates the world through each structure on pp.36-115 (1985).

<sup>13</sup> Gebser (1985), p.xxvii-xxviii.

Gebser's dense theory of consciousness is explicated in his *magnum opus*; *The Ever Present Origin*. In brief, he highlights five distinct and yet overlapping structures of consciousness: archaic, magic, mythic, mental and integral. These structures can be latent, that is, dormant, or manifest, that is active. Through the intensification of consciousness, the experience of reality - that is, the spiritual - becomes transparent. Put another way, through the manifestation of the integral consciousness the individual and the community experience the diaphanous nature of reality.

Each structure of consciousness can be manifest efficiently or deficiently, including the integral. That is, the efficient experience gives the bearer and society the full benefit of that particular appreciation of reality. When working deficiently, the structure dominates the consciousness to the extent that it does not allow the bearer to appreciate the insights and experiences of other structures<sup>14</sup>. For Gebser there is no sense of superiority of one structure of consciousness over another. Indeed, each structure is born by the individual and the society, whether or not they are manifest. The hierarchical interpretations or valuation of one structure over another is an interpretation arising out of our dominant structure with linearity, objectivity and hierarchy as defining characteristics. Each structure, "must be lived commensurate with their constitutive values if we are to live a whole or integral life"<sup>15</sup>. I will briefly describe the characteristics that Gebser attributes to differing structures of consciousness.

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<sup>14</sup> Gebser (1985), p.3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Gebser (1985), p.155.

### **Archaic Consciousness**

The archaic structure is a pre-human consciousness. It is dream-like. It is pre-egoic. It is the structure of consciousness most distinctly removed from our own. For the bearer there is a sense of undifferentiated unity of all things. We may glimpse the sense of archaic consciousness when we feel the overwhelming sense of absorption when stand on the edge of the sea or look into the depths of the night sky.

### **Magical consciousness**

The magical structure reflects the beginning of the awakening of consciousness. There is no sense of self as we understand it, but there is the awareness of being fused with nature and a sense of the world being filled with Sacred power. There is a vital connection between all things and humanity stands up and starts to 'control' these connections and this Sacred power through ritual, although this is not necessarily done consciously. It can be argued that such a consciousness is at the heart of an appreciation of the Eucharist. The sense of self is in the context of a tribe. We can see the deficiency of this context today through the over attachment to various clubs, corporations or gangs, or in extreme cases the roost of conflict in the Balkans and the collective identity in Nazi Germany.

### **Mythic Consciousness**

Gebser describes the mythic structure as the 'next' to become manifest in the unfolding of consciousness. Those bearing this structure still experience life as enmeshed in nature

but they also experience the further development of communal identity and communal response to the nature of reality. Imagination becomes active and the community 'understands' that it is part of a larger canvas of existence. This structure sees the emergence of the soul or psyche in response to the numinous. The Sacred begins to be envisaged in anthropomorphic ways. Obviously the sense of communal identity and imagery of the Sacred finds its place in various mythic narratives in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Ultimately, the plurality of myths and the plethora of differing communities living their myths result in a further intensification of consciousness. This is a consciousness that enables abstraction and a capacity to systematise differing world-views so as the human consciousness is not overwhelmed by a cacophony of mythic imagery. The communal imagination, that is of the mythic consciousness, necessitates the emergence of a 'new' consciousness is also the basis for the birth of much of modern civilisation because of the capacity to see and experience new possibilities. The 'new' way of experiencing reality is called the 'mental' consciousness.

### **Mental Consciousness**

As humanity wrestled with the vast array of mythic imagery that dominated the collective soul, the process of abstraction gave humanity a sense of distance and objectivity from an ultimately stultifying enmeshment that we experience with the clan and the myth when the myth is lived deficiently. According to Gebser the emergence of this structure can be

located in the middle of the last millenium BCE<sup>16</sup>. This process of abstraction was clearly evident during the thinking of the Renaissance and Reformation, when this structure of consciousness was again manifest after a period of latency. There is the development of logic and linear patterns of thinking. The mental consciousness is at the heart of our Western legal system, modern medicine, engineering and many other disciplines that require the capacity to stand back, observe, analyse and devise solutions.

Humans bearing this consciousness are able to objectify items as being distinct from the self. Abstraction enables the development of dualistic and linear thought. It enables the systematisation of thought. Monotheistic and subsequent doctrinal constructions arise because of this capacity for linear abstract thought. Another characteristic of this consciousness is the development of the individual identity, the egoic self. Ultimately these factors lead to an anthropocentric world-view.

### **Rational Consciousness**

The deficient manifestation of this consciousness is the 'rational'. The process of objectivisation leads to fragmentation of thought, atomistic interpretation of reality and competing truth claims that have radically different epistemologies, and "hypertrophied abstraction devoid of any connection with the world"<sup>17</sup>. The flowering of the ego leads to egocentrism, isolationism and a blind belief in progress at all costs.

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<sup>16</sup> Gebser, (2000), *The Invisible Origin: Evolution as a Supplementary Execution*, <http://www.ctl.unca.edu/combs/IntegralAge/InvisibleOrigin.htm>, p.7 Accessed 25/07/2000.

<sup>17</sup> Gebser, (1985), 95.

In much of academic life this consciousness is seen in the obsessive desire for outcomes, for that which is empirically provable or is economically valuable. Logic and clarity is valued over intuition. In the Church, there is a desire to speak about the liberating power of the gospel. However, the Church is constrained, by its doctrinal edifice, that is, in part, a result of mental articulation of experiences that have spoken to those bearing magical and mythic consciousness. The Church is constrained because it has over-systematised its beliefs, the interpretations have become factionalised, fragmented and removed from human experience. It is arguable that the rational consciousness now dominates so many our ways of experiencing 'reality' that many of us are unable to even see its inefficiencies in celebrating the Sacred in our midst.

The Church has in large part failed to address the structures of consciousness that its individuals and communities bring to its discussions. For example, there is a perpetual fear of unorthodoxy. Why? Perhaps this is because of over-dependence on a hypertrophied rational consciousness. Perhaps this fear arises because of predominantly unquestioned desire for myopic and monological truth. Gebser suggests that there is an emergent consciousness that might provide not simply a framework for understanding where we are at but also enables a radically new way of experiencing reality.

### **Integral Consciousness**

The integral consciousness is not about an expansion of consciousness as some in the Church might fear, but rather an intensification of response to that which is already present. Gebser argues that this consciousness is becoming manifest in a wide variety of

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areas in our culture. The integral consciousness enables the bearer to experience and hold a variety of differing perspectives at one time. This does not mean conflating these perspectives but seeing their interdependence and limitation. Where the mental consciousness has linearity, integrality has multiplicity. Where the mythical consciousness might be represented as circular because of the predominant experience of enmeshment and community and the mental expressed in terms of a line to express progression and the objectivity between two points; the integral might be represented by a sphere, to reflect the experience of multiple experiences of reality at the one time. For the person bearing the integral consciousness these are not necessarily conflicting but complementary experiences of reality that has interlocking and interpenetrating layers.

Where the person bearing the magical consciousness experiences the Sacred predominantly through ritual, the bearer of mythic experiences the importance of communal narrative. For the bearer of the mental structure there is an awareness of the importance of systemised patterns of thought. For the bearer of the integral there is an awareness of the concretion of the luminescence of the Sacred in and through the creation. Gebser describes this as the concretion of the spiritual. The spiritual is concretely perceived. There is also an awareness of the importance of each of the structures and that they are not superseded but rather intensified in the experience they provide of reality. The integral experience is not regressive or uncritical but post-rational.

These are necessarily caricatures of Gebser's understanding of the structures. While they are to a certain extent distinct, they also overlap and there can be a good deal of

discomfort for humanity in the process of the emergence or eruption of a further intensification of a particular structure.

### **Gebser's Thought: a brief note**

Gebser's work is not idealistic but begins with the evidence before him of "present-day weapons of destruction"<sup>18</sup>. The breakdown and destructive influence of the rational consciousness<sup>19</sup> and emergence of a 'new' consciousness is understandably one that provides a time of crisis for humanity, not least in our relationship with the Sacred. Some images will live on, others will be transformed and experienced in new ways and other imagery will not depart from our consciousness other than by a process of a painful death for the individual and communal consciousness.

If we take Gebser's theory and our contemporary experience of Australian spiritual life seriously, we might imagine two roads, one that is life-giving and full of uncertainty but leads to an intensification of the Sacred, and a road that enhances the process of ossification of the Spirit in our lives because of the reified and de-contextualised rational interpretations of the Sacred's relationship with humanity. It should be noted here that Gebser's theory of consciousness is not gnostic because it is not concerned with hidden

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<sup>18</sup> Gebser, (1985), p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Such manifestations can be seen in the overly rationalised and fragmented approaches to academic disciplines, economics, health sciences, international relations, isolated individualism, egocentrism and dualism.

knowledge but rather the latent and manifest structures of experiencing reality that unfold through the experience of existence:

...Gebser does not subscribe to the belief that individual intention and effort alone can bring about the new reality. The spiritual is “larger” than the personal and follows its own incomprehensible laws.<sup>20</sup>

Gebser’s theory is useful for those in the Church because it helps to understand the different modes of constructing and reflecting on the reality of the Sacred in the context of culture. His theory is not idealistic or lacking evidence. It is an invitation to become aware of the manifestation of the spiritual and the cost of responding to it:

The Grand and painful path of consciousness emergence, or, more appropriately, the unfolding and intensification of consciousness, manifests itself as an increasingly intense luminescence of the spiritual in man.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the difficulty the Church has in communicating the wealth of spiritual wisdom that it bears is not so much about the content of its message or perhaps even presentation but about the assumptions that we place on the stories and consequently on the Sacred. Perhaps as a society and as Christians we might be called to experience the luminescence of the Sacred in our lives in an intensified way. This is potentially dangerous ground. Gebser’s theory provides one way of giving us direction and raising difficult questions about the nature of the spiritual life of Australia at this time. Gebser’s work gives a unique way of looking behind the questions and concerns that face many people in contemporary Australian life, not least in terms of our spirituality. I believe this process enables us to look with our own eyes, to see life through the eyes of others and to begin

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<sup>20</sup> Feuerstein, G., (1987), *Structures of Consciousness: the genius of Jean Gebser*, California, Integral Publishing, p.166.

<sup>21</sup> Gebser, (1985), p.542.

to understand the multiplicity of spiritual paths in Australia and the movement of the Sacred in such voluptuous and evocative ways in our time.

### **Integral Implications for the Church's engagement with Society**

Gebser's theory of consciousness might generate some of the following implications for the Church and its tradition of faith as it engages with Australian society. The bearers of integral consciousness may have a plurality of perspectives in relation to our tradition and society. They may at one and the same time be able to sit within a particular tradition and yet explore the deep well of ecumenical wisdom and spirituality about life in the Sacred.

Those who bear an integral consciousness will not be relativistic or reductionist in their approach to the Christian tradition, but they will be aware of the vibrancy and limitation of this tradition<sup>22</sup>. Neither will they try to create a false homogeneity that conflates and over-simplifies differences and experience - so that the Christian tradition can be easily interpreted in a rationalised and contained manner.

The bearers of the integral consciousness may have a critical appreciation of the potential and concrete reality of the unfolding of the Sacred which their tradition conveys. For

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<sup>22</sup> Relativism is related to reductionism in the sense that a relativistic perspective does not value the depths of the tradition but rather reduces it to a lowest common denominator. Such a process arises out of the 'logic' of the mental rational consciousness and the bearers' determination to make sense of the world in a clear and logical interpretation. Consequently, a false homogeneity is created. Likewise, for those bearing the mental rational consciousness who are convinced of the superiority of their perspective there may be an inability to listen to other patterns of experience because their view of reality places predetermined and unconsciously assumed logical constraints on their interpretation of their community's narrative. Therefore both reductionist and relativistic responses to reality find their basis in the mental rational consciousness' 'need' for clarity, logic, linearity rather than the interdependent complexity and transparent simplicity that is reflective of the integral consciousness.

example, parts of our tradition such as the exodus and the resurrection become manifest time and again, concretely showing the experience of and response to the Spirit in human consciousness. These narratives draw the bearers into a relational and non-dualistic appreciation of reality. Furthermore, such experience appreciates the significance of these narratives in a way that is not constrained by time, space or ego, but erupts and effects individuals and communities in many and varied time and spaces.

The bearers will respect and experience the importance of the tradition in which they are grounded. They will be critically appreciative of their own tradition and of others and yet allow humanity's traditions and narratives to 'speak to' and 'read us' in a conversational manner, aware of the differing traditions' wisdom with respect to the unfolding of the Sacred. The bearers of this consciousness may experience the uniqueness of a given tradition in an intensified way because of the traditions place in the plurality of perspectives. In this intensified relational milieu the tradition can be brought into relation with other narratives without a sectarian or tribal defensiveness or bias. There will be a genuine exploration of diversity and unity.

The bearers of integral consciousness may be expansive in their exploration and interaction with other disciplines and with what these disciplines say to people about the Sacred and the sacred nature of reality. This is possible because the fragmentary ways of perception are known to be limited. The bearers of integral consciousness have an awareness of the self's dependence on, grounding in and diaphanous experience of the Sacred which permeates and is explored in all dimensions of existence.

The bearers may realise that the Sacred is profoundly and concretely experienced but can also be illuminated beyond our grasp. Our tradition points to, remind us and takes us further into the experience of the Sacred, sometimes confronting us through its eruption, surprising us by a 'new' awareness and also making humans aware of its presence in the concrete reality of existence as explicated by our tradition. In this consciousness appreciation there is no domestication or trivialisation of the Sacred as the bearer does not rationalise the Sacred; rather existence is re-sacralised. The diaphanous reality of the Spirit means that the Sacred is transparently manifest and concretely experienced. Those bearing this consciousness may be aware that myth is a vehicle, or a tool, just as the mental construction of doctrine is, but that it is not a container of the Sacred, so much as a mediator.

The diaphaneity<sup>23</sup> of the Sacred, as experienced in the integral consciousness, brings about a radicalisation or intensification of commitment to the world. In such a consciousness context the Christian experiences the Sacred drawing humanity into a deeper commitment to compassion and justice through being in interdependent relationship with the rest of creation. This experience gives the bearer a concomitant commitment to the transformation of the self and the world, which promotes the desire for mutuality, wellbeing, and benefit of the other, which is also of and manifests the Sacred.

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<sup>23</sup> In this context this seems to be one of the few words that is applicable. It refers to the experience and reality of the shining forth of the Sacred through all and in all. It also applies to the awakening of our consciousness to this reality in which “we live and move and have our being”. For Gebser this is the

Furthermore, in the mutually interdependent play and dynamism between the bearers of integral consciousness and the Sacred there may be an ever more intensifying manifestation and interaction, by which the Sacred and the bearers of integrality become more manifest to each other. Potentially this intensification of consciousness begets more intensification and commitment to the world and so the world and its inter-relations are experienced most profoundly as the place of interaction with the Sacred.

The resistance and fear exhibited toward such a shift in our consciousness by those bearing the overly rationalised perspective may start to highlight some of the difficulty that the Church has in presenting the Gospel as a way of providing life-giving, world-transforming life-maps, in the big and small places of life for individuals and communities. Those who have an integral appreciation of reality may need to face the ego-based defences, within themselves and others, against the Sacred and each other that have been set up by rational constraints, not least a dominating sense of control and logic. Such people may also need to face the intellectual empires that have been built upon discrete, non-communicative and sometimes combative disciplines and ways of interpreting reality.

Nevertheless, such exploration is inspired by an awareness of the emergence of integral consciousness and the bearers are able to address and discuss the concerns that are of vital importance to the open and inquiring mental consciousness. Understanding the

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awakening of our consciousness to the luminescence of the Ever Present Origin who is our beginning and end, Gebser (1985), p.542.

limits of our previous ways of 'knowing' and articulating 'reality' may help the Church to encounter our culture, concretely experiencing the intensification of the Sacred, and enabling the Church to provide society with the opportunity of entering into the mystery of Grace as presented in the Gospel.

### **Some Questions for the Church when engaging the Spirituality of Australian Society**

To address the eruption of desire for the Sacred in Australian society we may have to ask some deep questions. Questions such as: how do we as Christians respond to the possibility that our Mental Rational conceptions of the Sacred may be anachronistic? How does the Church respond to the possibility that there might be a shift in consciousness that causes people to be less concerned about particular mental constructions of the Sacred that they are required to believe in? Particularly when these constructions are predominantly representations of the Sacred from a structure of consciousness that is no longer efficient? Indeed at their worst these constructions might be seen as a significant inhibitor to the experience of the Sacred. How do we respond to those who believe and experience the Church as a place that stifles the desire for the Sacred because it refuses to allow this reality to be made manifest other than in systematic and pre-determined patterns? How do we encourage community in such an environment? What is the basis for the community's faith in such an environment? What does an integral consciousness mean for the Church's "mission"? Can we assume that we are the only ones with a mission? What might be the culture's mission be to the Church?

These are preliminary questions and, of course, there are many others that could come before these questions. There would definitely need to be more questions to follow if the Church is to begin to engage in the spiritual exploration that is occurring at present in our society.

As a Christian priest, I believe the Church has much to contribute to this sacred journey. This paper has reflected the idea that the Church may need to look at the assumptions it holds about the nature of the Sacred and the shape and colour of its own glasses, through which it approaches its questions and answers in relation to this reality, if it is to effectively engage with society. This may raise the eyebrows of some and the ire of others but it may very well be a way of participating in what appears to be a shift in our consciousness and an intensification of the experience of the Sacred in our society.