Religious Education Conference

Nurturing a Relevant and Empowering Spirituality
Overview:

- Reflections on ‘Christian spirituality’
- What is Ignatian Spirituality?
“The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words. It is beyond speech. It is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity, but we discover an old unity. My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be, is what we are.” — The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton
Who is this guy?
It was an animation of Belgian priest and physicist Fr Georges Lemaître, who was the first person to propose the Big Bang theory. It would have been the priest's 124th birthday.

"Most people have heard of the Big Bang theory, but fewer recognise the name Georges Lemaître, the man who came up with the hypothesis that transformed our understanding of astrophysics. Born on this day in 1894, Lemaître was a Belgian Catholic priest who proposed that the universe began as a single primordial atom, which he referred to as the 'Cosmic Egg.' Although his thesis was based on calculations derived from Einstein’s theory of general relativity, Einstein initially dismissed Lemaître’s work, remarking, ‘Your calculations are correct, but your physics is atrocious.’ Two years later Einstein changed his mind.”
Introducing ‘Christian Spirituality’
“SPIRITUALITY HAS BECOME AN INDUSTRY ... Many of the people who read spirituality books or listen to bestselling CDs of plainchant are also suspicious of religious institutions and dogma. Coherent belief systems and commitment to faith communities are no longer assumed to be necessary for a spiritual quest. The new spirituality is often labelled New Age. It tends to be eclectic and to concentrate on interiority and self-improvement. There is something of a supermarket atmosphere coupled with a certain antiintellectualism. Many commentators interpret this contemporary search for 'spirituality' as a replacement for traditional 'religion' and understand it to be a reflection of the wider western cultural fragmentation popularly known as postmodernity.”

Philip Sheldrake (The Way39/2, April 1999, p.162)
Spirituality vs Religion

Many contemporary approaches to ‘spirituality’ seek to detach it from ‘religion’. This bypasses both specific belief systems and any organic connection with the classic spiritual traditions of the past. Yet, the Christian spiritual tradition in its plurality has depths of wisdom to offer. The question, of course, is how traditions and classic texts are to be interpreted and continually re-appropriated in ever-changing social, cultural, and religious contexts.

The danger of dualistic thinking: Spirituality vs Religion

The danger is that ‘optional’ spiritualties offer personal practices to assuage spiritual hunger, yet can all too easily turn into another form of individualistic consumerism.

An adequate spirituality also needs a language to identify some object of desire worthy of our human possibilities and that draws us beyond the superficial, the immediate and the self-absorbed’

Historical Perspective/Hermeneutics

“There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on thinking and reflecting at all”

Physiological
Food Water Shelter Warmth

Safety
Security Stability Freedom from Fear

Belonging - Love
Friends Family Spouse Lover

Self-Esteem
Achievement Mastery Recognition Respect

Self-Actualization
Pursue Inner Talent Creativity Fulfillment

WiFi
Facebook

I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles.

Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I have done the night before, what I will do later and with whom.

I give them pictures of my family, my dog and of me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, driving around town, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every day.

I also listen to their conversations, give them the “thumbs up” and tell them I like them.

And it works just like Facebook! I already have four people following me: two police officers, a private investigator and a psychiatrist.
The Context

“The earth, entire peoples and individual persons are being brutally punished. And behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea called “the dung of the devil”. An unfettered pursuit of money rules. The service of the common good is left behind. Once capital becomes an idol and guides people’s decisions, once greed for money presides over the entire socioeconomic system, it ruins society, it condemns and enslaves men and women, it destroys human fraternity, it sets people against one another and, as we clearly see, it even puts at risk our common home.” Pope Francis

Meeting with Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, July 10, 2015
The Australian economy is very healthy and the earth is very unwell...

Well I'm sure glad we live in the lucky country and not on the earth...
What violence do you want - Sporting, military or random - psychotic?
GIVE ME A CHILD UNTIL HE IS SEVEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE MAN...
SON... YOU'RE A LIAR, YOU'RE A BULLY, YOU'RE GREEDY, YOU'RE MANIPULATIVE, YOU'RE SELF SERVING...
YOU'LL GO FAR...
I've been such
a terrible mother...
he's all dreamy and
sensitive and
loving...

Don't be so
hard on yourself.
It could be a
birth defect.
The Violence of compulsive work

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form of its innate violence. To allow myself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns. To surrender to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything . . . is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of the activist . . . destroys the fruitfulness of one's own work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

(Thomas Merton)
Richard Rohr

“We live not just in an age of anxiety, but also in an age of shame. I find very few people who do not feel inadequate, stupid, dirty, or unworthy. Guilt is about things we have done or not done, but our shame is about the primal emptiness of our very being, an ontological question. It is not resolved by changing behaviour as much as by changing our very self-image, our alignment in the universe.”
"We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds... Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough for us to find our way back?"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
“The things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice.”

Mahatma Ghandi

“The things that will destroy us are: terrorism, greenies and higher interest rates.”

John Howard
This May all be True But ...

What we seek is a sense of wholeness: feeling a deep sense of being worthy, accepted and loved; feeling at one with oneself, and inner harmony devoid of inner conflicts and divisions; feeling like one who is fully functioning or being in rare form; feeling at one with God and the universe as well as a deep solidarity with people throughout the world.” (Wilkie Au, Urgings, P.10)
It wasn’t meant to be easy …

“God is not glorified by half-persons” Ruth Burrows

Spiritual and psychological growth go hand in hand.

Becoming aware – sounds so easy, but in practice is so difficult. It requires a profound transformation in the very core of our being.

Learning to deal creatively with conflict (particularly inner conflict)

God wants us to be whole (or as whole as we can be!):

Ephesians 3: 16-19
Christian Spirituality is …

In specifically Christian terms, the notion of ‘spirituality’ refers to the way our fundamental values, lifestyles, and spiritual practices reflect understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation.

Christian Spirituality is ...

- Spirituality is what we do with your spirits, our souls ... it has to give us energy, fire... the opposite of a spiritual person is one who has no energy, who has lost all zest for living; to have lost our identity, to not know who I am any more... a healthy soul keeps us both energised and glued together. (Rolheiser)

- To talk about “the spirit” is to discuss what gives life and animation to someone. Christian spirituality is reflection on the whole Christian enterprise of achieving and sustaining a relationship with God, which includes both public worship and private devotion, and the results of these in actual Christian life.”
Christian Spirituality is concerned with the interior experience of believers ... but the term is resistant to precise definition.

For Christians it is the living out of the encounter with Jesus Christ... so it is to be understood as a way for individuals and groups to deepen their experience of God or “to practise the presence of God”.

An authentic and real personal relationship with God.

The relational, spiritual, or experiential aspects of faith, as opposed to the more cognitive or intellectual aspects which defines traditional theology.

It is a way of life ... our beliefs and values are expressed and embodied in a definite and intentional way of living.

It is about the transformation of our consciousness and our lives.
Spirituality

“The most traditional understanding of spirituality is that of a way or path that leads to self-transcendence” (Au, Urgings, p.10)

Self-transcendence ... A person who is open to self-transcendence is one who respects the mystery of his or her personhood ... they believe that grace abounds everywhere and that a dramatic inbreaking of God can occur at any moment, even as one paradoxically affirms that God is already present at every moment... (Urgings, P.9)
The Great Divide (A binary perspective)

Between:

- Spirit and flesh
- Soul and body
- Heaven and Earth
- Male and Female
- Spirituality and Religion
The danger of dualistic thinking:

Sacred vs Secular

• Sacred: associated with special places and activities
• Secular: that which lay ‘outside of the temple precinct’

Anything outside the temple precinct is the ‘mundane or everyday’ and is therefore not ‘sacred’ and therefore it is ‘profane’
The Eucharist has been preempted and redefined in dualistic thinking that leaves the status quo of the world untouched, so congregations can take the meal without raising questions of violence; the outcome is a "colonized imagination" that is drained of dangerous hope.

— Walter Brueggemann —
A life-denying, pleasure-denying history

Too narrow, too pessimistic, too ‘other-worldly’, too unsubtle and too repressed. It refuses to accept the blood-and-guts reality of what we are, the bodily, sexual, earthy amalgam that makes us who we are. We want to be human, fully human. If God doesn’t want our humanity the way it is, the way he made it, then he doesn’t want us at all. … (Hederman, p.15)

An unresolved tension between flesh and spirit, between life and anti-life, between joyous and sorrowful religion… (Hederman, p.16)
Christian Spirituality is ... marked by 8 characteristics

1. Intimately related to a specific understanding of God and his relationship to the world and humanity.

2. This world and all that is in it is a gift from God to all creatures.

3. God’s engagement with humanity is particularly reflected in the Incarnation: the embodied, historic existence in the person of Jesus Christ.

4. Has a positive view of the world and of the human body.

5. Recognises that sin and disorder do exist in the world.

6. Christian discipleship is essentially communal.

7. Spiritual transformation takes place through God’s abiding presence both within the individual and within the community;

8. Is ‘here and now’ while at the same time being drawn towards the *eschaton*.

Prayer

“I pray Thee, O God, that I may be beautiful within.” (Socrates)

“What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.” (Von Balthasar)
What is Ignatian Spirituality?
“I feel Jesuit in my spirituality, in the spirituality of the Exercises, the spirituality, that which I have in my heart. I haven’t changed my spirituality, no. Francis, Franciscan, no. I feel Jesuit and I think like a Jesuit. Not hypocritically, but I think like a Jesuit.”

Pope Francis
The Spiritual Exercises

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the conviction that God is active, personal, and—above all—present to us.
What is Ignatian Spirituality?

• The Ignatian Way (God is good, gives gifts)
• Disordered affections vs deepest desires
• Ignatian framework for decision making
• Discernment of Spirits
• Process of discernment and how it changes us
• Finding God in all things
What is Ignatian Spirituality?

- Contemplatives in Action
- Regular practice of Prayer
- Ignatian prayer – Examen
- Magis

Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of the heart, what we desire, caught up in God’s grand design, gratitude, responding to God and falling in love.
The Jesuit Meaning of "Magis"

Magis (pronounced "màh-gis") is a Latin word that means "more" or "better." Magis refers to the philosophy of doing more, for Christ, and therefore doing more for others.

It is related to Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, a Latin phrase meaning "for the greater glory of God" and is a key notion of Ignatian spirituality.
Two main themes:

1) finding God in all things
2) discernment of spirits
Finding God in all things

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the conviction that God is active, personal, and—above all—present to us.

The God of Ignatian spirituality is a giver of gifts. “God’s love is poured forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters into an unending stream,” St. Ignatius wrote. God’s blessings are a loving gift that invites us to love in return.
Discernment of Spirits

“… if we do things which keep us energised and integrated, on fire and yet glued together, we have a healthy spirituality … conversely, if our yearning drives us into actions which harden our insides … then we have an unhealthy spirituality”. (Rohr)
Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius of Loyola began to learn about the discernment of spirits while convalescing from serious battle injuries. He noticed different interior movements as he imagined his future.

Ignatius believed that these interior movements were caused by “good spirits” and “evil spirits.” We want to follow the action of a good spirit and reject the action of an evil spirit. Discernment of spirits is a way to understand God’s will or desire for us in our life.
Ø Disscretio … is about light … the light of understanding … With an open eye you will recognise the way to follow Jesus’ way.
Ø It is a synthesis of what is going on inside the heart … ‘motions’…

Ø To discern: to distinguish and action from another, pointing the differences between them”.
Ø ridding of all disordered attachments
Ø No. 313 … through perception … rules for perceiving … Sentir (to feel) … emotions are related to feelings … motions are mostly feelings … rules help us to put a name to our feelings …
Ø If I talk to the feelings, I am begin to get them under control … to be aware that the feeling is inside me.
Ø analysis of different motions …
Ø to recognise the will of God and (No. 326) …
Ø “The SpEx having as their purpose the overcoming of self and ordering of one’s life on the basis of a decision …”
Consolation and Desolation

The feelings stirred up by good and evil spirits are called “consolation” and “desolation” in the language of Ignatian spirituality.

- **Spiritual consolation** - is an experience of being so on fire with God’s love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can.

- **Spiritual desolation** - in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil.
Examen (The Most Amazing Prayer you’ve never heard of!)

1) Pray for light: become aware of God’s presence – and I relish;

2) Review the day with gratitude … I ask God for help;

3) I review – paying attention to my emotions. Review the feelings that surface when I review the day;

4) Pray spontaneously; ponder the difficult moments;

5) Look toward tomorrow with hope, joy and renewed commitment.
No one can be grateful and unhappy.
Certainty is the sin of bigots, terrorists, and Pharisees.

Compassion makes us think we may be wrong.
I am no great improvement on the men who killed Jesus.
The final power is to be at home with powerlessness.
He found God.

God spoke to him.
God said, "Help me, I'm wounded."

God lay bleeding on the ground.

"You're not God," said the man, "God is ALL-Powerful."

"I am all-vulnerable," said God, "I am in pain. I am at your mercy."

These words were so unbearable to the man; so infuriating, that he finished God off right there and then.
"...do not depend on the hope of results. ...you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself."

Thomas Merton
I am fortunate indeed!
I have been granted
the wealth
of another day of life –
Jesuit College of Spirituality
Simone Weil, *Reflections on the right use of school studies with a view to the love of God.*

Last line:
“Academic work is one of those fields which contain a pearl so precious that it is worth while to sell all our possessions, keeping nothing for ourselves, in order to be able to acquire it.”
Our Pathways and Courses

• JCS is Australia’s only University College which specialises in the study of Spirituality.

• A student at JCS may choose a course of study from four available pathways:
  ➢ Spirituality
  ➢ Spiritual Direction
  ➢ Supervision
  ➢ Leadership
Courses of Study at JCS

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- Graduate Diploma in Supervision
- Graduate Diploma in Theology
- Master of Spiritual Direction
- Master of Spirituality
- Master of Philosophy
- Doctor of Philosophy
- The Arrupe Program
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✓ Many of our courses can now be completed online
✓ Many of our courses also in the evening
✓ Suitable for teachers & leaders in schools

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