

What is it to be spiritual?

Last week I had the most incredible experience. I met William Paul Young, author of the runaway best seller 'The Shack'. I listened as he spoke about the development of the book out of his own life experiences. The book started out as something he wanted to write for his children, but demand for it became so great it was published and is now a best seller in many countries around the world. It was declared book of the decade in Croatia.

Young tells the story of a father trying to deal with the grief of the violent loss of his daughter. He wonders why God would allow such a thing to happen. Although told in the form of a novel, Young brings a perspective of God and spirituality that is outside the box of traditional religious thinking. Without giving too much away, God, for example, is portrayed as a jovial black woman who loves to cook. I don't think he heard that in a sermon, or was taught it in a religious seminary!

These days there is a lot of talk and practice of spirituality outside formal reli-

gious institutions such as churches. Many claim they do not need to go to church to be spiritual. This is true. However, others find deep spiritual meaning in the context of worship with others as part of a congregation.

What is it to be spiritual? How is it that a book like the shack has struck such an emotional chord in millions around the world? Is there a deep dimension of spirituality in each of us that longs to be fulfilled? I believe the answer is yes.

Spirituality is a function of faith. It is in the realm beyond our five senses. Scriptures reflect this. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11) Jesus taught that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (John 1)

The realm of the spirit and spirituality is not irrational it is super-rational, in the same way that it is super-natural. This is illustrated in the Psalm 19, 'The heavens declare the glory of God'. We see the won-

ders of the unseen through that which is seen. Romans 1 also reflects this truth. 'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

In this context, it is easy to see spirituality expressed all around us outside the box of religion. If fact, it is often easier to see outside this box than inside it. When people look inside the box of religion they find rules and politics and ritual that often obscure what spirituality is all about.

I see spirituality in the selfless giving and love shown by people who have no religious motivation. An incredible example of this is Dr Bindeshwar Pathak. He was born into a wealthy high cast family in India. Contrary to his religious teaching, he became concerned for the millions of untouchables in India. These were outcasts of society, could not mix with others, Their only role in life was to clean the

latrines. They were the poorest of the poor. Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, spent his life and fortune developing a flush toilet that uses very little water. He was successful and began installing them in public places throughout India. This has set millions of untouchables free to do other tasks and rejoin society in a dignified way. He set up an organization called Sulabh to accomplish this. 'The Sulabh's achievements are noteworthy: it has been able to restore human rights and dignity to 1, 20,000 scavengers, set up about 11 Lakhs household toilets and 7500 community toilet blocks, constructed over 190 human-excreta-based biogas plants and made 640 towns scavenging - free. The sanitation facilities created by the Sulabh are used by over 10 million people everyday. Dr Bindeshwar Pathak has been honoured nationally and internationally for his exemplary work.' (www.sulabhinternational.org). Here is a man who is 'flying the plane of the spirit'.

There are others who are exemplifying this spirituality, including Muhammad Yunus ...the founder of microcredit— using loans

of tiny amounts to transform destitute women into entrepreneurs. Gandhi was one of the most spiritual men in modern history, teaching peace and brotherhood. His weapon was self denial, and he single handedly brought peace between two warring religious groups in India; Hindus and Muslims. . Jesus, arguably

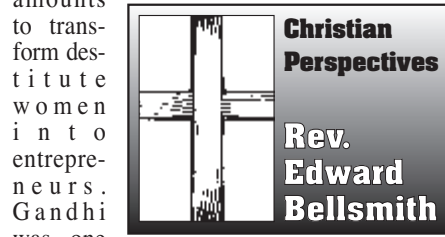
the greatest non-religious spiritual person of all time, taught that if we just give a cup of water we are being spiritual. (paraphrased).

and the need for us to care for it. Where I live there are two signs commonly posted. On is 'stop the windmills.' The other is 'think green' these are a metaphor for a spiritual battle that is being waged in our world today that is beyond the walls of religion. In these ways and others, spirituality is being practised all around us. It is characterized by the fruit of the spirit; love, joy peace, patience, gentleness goodness meekness faith (Galatians 3). It leads to two observations. The first is that people can love the box of religious structure, but not necessarily be spiritual. I think we all know that. We can love the music, the ritual, the architecture and the vestments.

We can become heady on the culture, the power and the politics, and yet not be spiritual. We can rationalize and theologize until the cows come but not be spiritual. The second is that we can live a totally secular life and not be spiritual. Many do.

Spirituality is love. It is loving God, and loving each other. It is loving God's creation. We perhaps use religion as a starting point.

However, the most important lesson is that we need to look beyond these in order to delve into the realm of the spiritual. If we do, we will see God in people practising spirituality in an explosion of activity all around us. On with the journey!



Christian Perspectives
Rev. Edward Bellsmith

the world. It makes one wonder where true spirituality lies

I see spirituality in the current green movement. In a post modern society, it seems that as a race we are beginning to wake up to the sacredness of our planet

Column on papal infallibility said fallacious

• From page A10

and all priests know quite well what is being asked of them well before the day of ordination.

We now turn our attention to historical and factual inaccuracies. Firstly, the accusation that St. Paul was a misogynist is an "ad hominem" or "against the man (person)" argument. It tries to undermine the credibility of the person by attacking their personal character. This accusation of misogyny has been laid against him in modern times but it does not hold up under close examination. It's too simplistic.

St. Paul was a man of his times. Women did not enjoy equality with men and Paul was raised in a patriarchal society, but he was also a man who had a profound conversion experience. All his writings have to be understood in that context. He saw, for example, that baptism in Christ was the great equalizer (see Galatians 3:27-8). He worked alongside, praised and supported women in teaching and preaching. Where he did not support women the cause was usually due to local problems and abuses.

Are St. Paul's writings controversial? Indeed, both in the first century and now, but the controversy does not arise from some politically correct ideological interpretation that is evident in Ms. Scrafield-Danby's article. It arises because it is a challenge to all, men and women, to go beyond the wounded relationships experienced as a result of the Fall and to see their perfection as human beings in their submission to Christ Jesus. More can be said but I am limited in space.

Perhaps my greatest contention with the article in question is the gross error evidenced in the presentation of Christian Dogma. It brings into question the author's theological competence. The author writes that "according to dogma, Jesus was sent by God to be a human amongst humans." This part is correct.

What is gravely incorrect is the second part: "His Son was, in part, God's way of coming to understand what he created, to feel our pain, know our dilemmas and understand our lusts." This is both a logical and theological fallacy.

By definition God is perfect. God understood as a communion of three Divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit) cannot be lacking in any way. For God to need some understanding regarding those he created would contradict the logical definition of God as "all knowing".

This is theologically incorrect in that Jesus did not come so that God could understand suffering but rather so that human beings could truly understand the meaning of suffering. Jesus also came to transform suffering from something tragic to something salvific. By his suffering, death

and resurrection Jesus turned the ultimate defeat into the great victory over sin.

Jesus is a Divine Person, the Son of God (Logos), that St. John so beautifully described at the beginning of his gospel. While Jesus, in his humanity, "grew in wisdom and in stature" (Lk. 2:52), in his Divinity was a perfect understanding of all creation, for he was its creator, as the Apostle's Creed states "though him (the Son) all things were made." This error in Dogma is just another example, along with the one's laid out above, of the erroneousness of this author's opinion. Yet there is even more.

If this article is any indication then this author lacks a certain depth to her reasoning. She writes that "our physical life includes sexual activity and it would be hard to understand our humanity without sexual knowledge." This comment is either woefully superficial or grossly arrogant. Physical life may include sexual activity, but it is not a necessity. Many men and women have expressed a profound understanding of our humanity while having remained virgins. Great spiritual writers and mystics such as Sts. Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Frances de Sales are but a few who express an unrivalled understanding of human life and dignity.

I would also dare anyone to show me how their lives as celibates and virgins had deprived Pope John Paul II or Mother Teresa of a profound understanding of humanity. In fact, it is often the virgin and the celibate who understands better than the rest of us what true humanity is. Finally, we get to the real point that Ms. Scrafield-Danby wants to make. Her first half of the article was, as I said, a straw-man argu-

ment that she could set up and dismantle so that she could justify what she really wanted to criticize: Pope Benedict's stance on condoms. Really, we were set up so that we'd buy her criticism of the Pope without thinking about it critically.

So, let's ask a very simple question. Is the Pope right or wrong? Is there any evidence or scholarly secular support for the Holy Father's position?

A 2002 Report by USAID entitled "What happened in Uganda" explains in detail the factors that contributed to the decrease of AIDS infection rates from a high of 15% in 1991 to 5% in 2001. The key contributing factors were the emphasis on abstinence and fidelity rather than condoms (though they were certainly available). Naturally there are many alternate suggestions to explain this decrease but the report deals with them and space prevents me from elaborating.

In Botswana the abstinence program was all but abandoned in 1993 and the focus was directed towards condoms. According to the secular AIDS charity AVERT, "Successful social marketing and subsidisation have substantially increased condom use in Botswana. Population Services International (PSI) has helped to promote the 'Lovers Plus' condom since 1993 and the 'Care' female condom since 2002. One of PSI's key strategies for marketing condoms has been peer education, which has been conducted in a variety of settings such as fairs and festivals, shopping malls, workplaces and bars."

AVERT continues: "In 2003 the Government of Botswana, with funding and technical support from ACHAP, launched an extensive condom

distribution and marketing campaign, providing for the installation of 10,500 condom dispensers in traditional and non-traditional outlets throughout the country. Millions of condoms have been procured for free distribution."

The emphasis on condoms has seen the infection rate in Botswana go from 13% in 1995 to 24% in 2008. Enough said.

Does the Pope have any support from secular experts?

Edward C. Green, director of the AIDS Prevention Research Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies seems to be one such supporter. In an interview with National Review Online on March 19, 2009, following comments made by Pope Benedict regarding the ineffectiveness of condoms, Green stated that "The pope is correct or to put it a better way, the best evidence we have supports the pope's comments." He stresses that "condoms have been proven to not be effective at the 'level of population.'"

As I said at the outset, Ms. Scrafield-Danby is certainly entitled to her opinion, but I hope it has been made evident clear that her opinion is based more on ideological bias than it is on logical and factual reasoning. Her argumentation is flawed, relying as it does on logical fallacies, her theological (dogmatic) understanding of God is erroneous, her scriptural interpretation is too simplistic and her criticism of Pope Benedict's position is refuted by statistical data and expert opinion.

Ms. Scrafield-Danby is right, it is "Time to admit fallability". Hers, Dennis Buonafede, B.A., S.T.B., B.Ed., M.Div. Brampton

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Sunday, November 1 - Laurel United
Sunday, November 8 - Mono Centre - Remembrance Day Service
Sunday, November 15 - St. Andrew's, Camilla
Sunday, November 22 - Laurel United
Sunday, November 29 - Burn's Unit - Mono Centre
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Minister: The Reverend Don Nash
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trinityunitedchurch@bellnet.ca

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Grand Valley Branch - Mill Street, Grand Valley
Pastor: Elder Del Franks
Church phone: 928-3020 Pastor's phone: 940-8660
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519-925-2796

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SENIOR KINDERGARTEN
Children who have not attended Junior Kindergarten. Five years old on or before December 31, 2010 (born in 2005)
Children must be eligible to attend
PRIMROSE, CENTENNIAL HIGHLANDS OR HYLAND HEIGHTS Elementary Schools
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To register your child you need to bring:
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