

‘Spirituality’ Stream: Further Insights from A1 (Dr Peter Mudge) Reflection and Dialogue from today’s breakout sessions (12/9/19)

Proposal: A 10 STEP MANIFESTO to promote the Theory and Praxis of Spiritual Formation (SF)

1. Understandings of spiritual formation need to expand continually (challenge yourself)

e.g. the YOUCAT Prayer Book contains many sources inside and outside Catholic Christianity; Rowan Williams (2017): God as the ‘First Theologian’ and first Contemplative (95). ‘contemplation is not a private specialism; if it is to do with our re-creation in the likeness of Jesus.’ Cf. article on ‘stretching’ SF by Mudge (2019). Also, watch or re-watch Robert Barron’s (2011) *Catholicism DVD* (10 sessions), and his YouTubes as ‘theology refreshers’.

2. Spirituality needs to be reunited with theology, biblical studies, missiology, history, etc

Evagrius Ponticus (d.399): ‘If you are a theologian you will pray truly, and if you pray truly you will be a theologian’; Barron (in Greeley, 2003, vii): ‘The Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar said that the greatest tragedy in the history of Christianity was neither the Crusades nor the Reformation nor the Inquisition, but rather the split that opened up between theology and spirituality at the end of the Middle Ages...If you had asked Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome, or even Thomas Aquinas to distinguish between his theology and his spirituality, he wouldn’t have understood the question’. Teaching endeavours should be “trans-disciplinary”.

3. Scripture study and interpretation need to incorporate and teach prayer and liturgy, in each of home, school and tertiary contexts

Scripture and prayer are explained in unison in the *Catechism* (Part 4, Section 1); St Ambrose: ‘We have been given Sacred Scripture so that God and [humanity] may talk together; for we speak to [God] when we pray; we hear [God] when we read the divine saying [Scriptures]’; Scripture and prayer go hand in hand – e.g. Our Father, Psalms, liturgical texts such as Phil 2; *Lectio Divina* and other methods imply the same dynamic. See also Hall (1998, 35): ‘As these...church fathers – lived and thought out the implications of the Bible, the latent wisdom of Scriptures bubbled to the surface in their sermons, commentaries, treatises and prayers’; see also Treier (2008, 71); Bowe (2017, 82-87, 117-121), for whom the Psalms are a ‘school of prayer’ showing one ‘how to pray’ (Ibid, 118).

4. Divisions between Eastern & Western Christianity and between Abrahamic faiths in particular require historical understanding, dialogue and healing

God is the ‘love that lurks...behind all things [including traditions], pushing, pulling, and cajoling them’ (Barron in Greeley, 2003, ix). The *Philokalia* (5 volumes; Palmer et al, 1983) is an excellent one-stop source for a wealth of insights into Eastern Christian SF. Also available is a one volume summary on *Prayer of the Heart* by Kadloubovsky & Palmer (1992).

5. The best way to cultivate traditions, narratives, disciplines and virtues is to simply practise them as part of a long-term commitment

Thomas Merton on prayer: ‘Take the time’ is his most urgent advice.

6. Narrativity and ‘story telling’ are essential for the survival and thriving of SF

‘A story can sing the truth, not just tell it’ (Barron in Greeley, 2003, viii).

7. To say ‘spirituality or SF is embodied practice’ is a tautology; both are inextricably linked

SF is ‘embodied’ as Examen, labyrinth, bowing, walking, breathing, chanting, signs of cross, tears, blessing of body postures and the senses (e.g. Pagitt, Prill & Olsen, 2005).

8. Authentic and integrated SF needs to incorporate a full portrait of Jesus who was a disturbing figure, preached some difficult sayings, and made many uncomfortable

Barron (2011): 'Christianity...is a relationship to the unsettling person of Jesus Christ (10). To follow Jesus is to be 'amazed' and 'afraid' (Mk 10:32) (14-15). Jesus included everyone at his table (open commensality) in a space marked by compassion and forgiveness (16).

9. Mature spirituality includes selected elements of the Ascetical, the Active-Practical, the Mystical and the Prophetic-critical models. In our contemporary world, the last two types require more earnest and systematic development

These four models are identified within Christianity and other traditions in Sheldrake (2012).

10. The PD model that ideally suits promotion of SF is a combination of diocesan 'train the trainer' and in-school SF teaching, cultivating dialogue between staff, students and specialists (cf. Quality Teaching framework)

Among many articles see, for example, Adams (2014) which counsels against use of the 'top down', external, or 'institutional' model of PD, and argues for an in-school, dialogical model which takes account of teachers' PD needs, includes 'follow up', is not isolated from classroom practice, saves on expensive external inservicing, and enables them to become 'better and more professional teachers'.

Recommended Sources

Adams, L. T. (2014). Teacher and policy alignment: A phenomenological study highlighting title I high school teachers' professional development experiences. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 22(2), 117-138.

Barron, R. J. (2011). *Catholicism*, DVD. New York: Image; and the book (2014). New York: Three Rivers Press.

Barron, R. (2010ff). YouTubes. Suggested titles: The Lord's Prayer; What faith is and isn't; Hans Urs von Balthasar (2 parts); Parable of the Wedding Banquet; Five Ways to pray better today; On "Prayer"; Sainthood, sanctity & what makes us holy?

Bowe, B. E. (2017). *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame*, 2nd edition (with L. Brink & J.R. Barker). Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield.

Greeley, A. M. (2003). *The Great Mysteries: Experiencing Catholic Faith from the Inside Out*. Lanham, ML: Sheed & Ward.

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Kadloubovsky, E. & Palmer, G. E. H. (transl.). (1992/1951). *Writings from the Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart*. London & Boston: Faber & Faber.

Mudge, P. (2019). 'All things are too small to hold me, I am so vast' – Towards a more expansive cultivation of spiritual formation among the Gen Alpha cohort in an Australian context. Paper presented at BBI-TAITE, Pennant Hills on Wed 11/9/19. To be published 2020.

Pagitt, D., Prill, K. & C. S. Olsen (2005). *BodyPrayer: The Posture of Intimacy with God*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press).

Palmer, G. E. H., Sherrard, P. & Ware, K. (transl. & ed.). (1983). *The Philokalia: The Complete Text – Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain & St Makarios of Corinth*. Volume One. London & Boston: Faber & Faber. Also, by the same authors and publishers: Volume Two (1981), Volume Three (1984), Volume Four (1995), and Volume Five (2018).

Sheldrake, P. (2012). *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press.

Treier, D. J. (2008). *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian practice*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos.

Williams, R. (2017). *Holy Living: The Christian Tradition for Today*. London: Bloomsbury.