

Spiritual Life on the Anglican Verandah

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"Without learning wisdom, the *koinonia* between us drops to the level of 'getting on together as best we can', far from enough to allow the people of God to be moved forward by the life and purposes of God" (Daniel Hardy, *Finding the Church*)

'The times they area a changing'

The third millennium is not an easy time in which to live. Finding the way ahead into an unknown future is even more problematic. For much of the previous century Western society and culture has undergone a progressive melt down through the trauma of world wars, unprecedented violence, massive disparity between rich and poor and the emergence of religious fundamentalism.¹ The traditional structures of our social, political and religious life have been under pressure for a number of years and serious cracks have begun to develop. Increasing fragmentation of community life is now a feature of the world we inhabit, not to mention violence, war and loss of public confidence in leadership in society and church. There has been a major shift in values and expectations from the mid-twentieth century to the twenty-first century. As a society we are no longer sure what common values can hold us together. In the absence of any overarching narrative for social life and cohesion and with the increasing marginalisation and distrust of those institutions that used to offer a sense of meaning and purpose, such as the churches, we find ourselves at the mercy of a vast array of competing options for life in the global village. The smorgasbord culture might at first sight appear tantalising and the aromas enticing but it does present some major obstacles, not least being how to chose from among the variety.

But is it a case of unqualified gloom? The destabilising of established institutions and the questioning of once hallowed ideas and values can have a liberating influence on people's lives and social interactions. New found freedoms present new opportunities to discover more of the wonderful mysteries and joys of life. A critically reflective society will generally be a far healthier one than one which squashes dissent and free thought. Opportunities for fresh and vital wisdom are constantly emerging. The postmodern 'decentred world' may be the environment for new possibilities for human interaction and well being.²

So it seems we are between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand we are all too aware of the destructive tendencies of our times, the dissolution of the social fabric of our life and our loss of practical wisdom.³ On the other hand we recognise new opportunities for the adventure of life unearthed in the crumbling of the past. How are we to live between yesterday and its fast disappearing foundations and tomorrow, which hovers on the brink of chaos and new life yet to be revealed? There are any number of options open to us these days and perhaps none more so than in the ecclesiastical market. It is hard to know the sure path forward both personally and in our community. What can we hope for in rapidly changing times?

¹ For an introduction to fundamentalism see Ernst Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Routledge, London 1992.

² For an exploration of the implications of the advent of the so-called postmodern see Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age*, Fortress press, Minneapolis, 1997.

³ Practical wisdom is precisely what we lack and is most in need of in society. The category of wisdom is fundamental to the Christian story. The Cambridge Anglican theologian David Ford states that "Wisdom is about the good shaping of the understanding and of life in the midst of [the] multiple overwhelms.... Wisdom is not just concerned about more information and knowledge... Wisdom deals with dimensions of life that much academic learning tends to bracket out, such as suffering, joy, or the purpose of existence". See *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP, 1999, p.165.

Whose Verandah? Which Anglicans?

Christian discipleship has to be forged within the context all too briefly sketched above. The impact of this wider context has been felt in various ways throughout the Christian church. In the West the church has been increasingly marginalised as a credible and influential voice in society. Though in Australia it could be argued that the church has never played a major role in our social, political and cultural life save for its role as a sort of moral policeman.⁴

Anglican Christians in Australia are not immune from the challenging and confusing times in which we live. Today the Anglican Church in Australia finds itself increasingly under pressure both from without and within.⁵ Social forces of radical conservatism and liberalism in all their guises and extremes find expression within the life of the Anglican church in this country. The voice of the broader middle way is often muted. Given the anxieties of our times perhaps these developments are not surprising but it should call us to stop and question what is going on. It is simply too easy to mimic the surrounding culture's anarchic or authoritarian tendencies.⁶ When our church does this we show our lack of wisdom and maturity: we lose the capacity to make a difference to be the 'leaven in the lump'.

I have often thought of the church as a kind of verandah: on the one hand open and welcoming to the world and on the other attending to the deep needs of people in the inner life of individuals and communities. On the verandah both outer and inner world meet and the church of the gospel has the responsibility to occupy that in-between place critical for its own sense of purpose as witness to the coming Kingdom.⁷ Clearly from what I have described above life on the Anglican verandah is not at all a settled matter. The issues we face as a church to do with sexuality, gender, poverty and wealth, mission and worship, power, authority and church order are contested. Furthermore, they generate high levels of conflict, impairment of our common life (koinonia) and capacity for intelligent and compassionate witness and service in the world.⁸ Reclining in our well-worn chairs is not really an option.

In these challenging and confusing times a number of questions arise: What sort of Anglican verandah will be necessary to resource spiritual life for the future; what resources in the Anglican tradition are available to meet the demands of our present times?

⁴ Its roots are generally located in the early history of colonisation and the relationship between church, state and general convict population. The assessment of Thompson is not uncommon: "...Christianity was largely rejected by convicts and by other working class Australians, except among the Irish minority. There was a growing alliance, if at times tenuous, between the Church of England and the state to impose moral order upon a licentious settle community", *Religion in Australia: A History*, OUP, 1994, p.10.

⁵ Statistics from the recent National Church Life Survey provide a snapshot of the present situation and raise some critical questions about the future character of the denomination in relation to the younger generations and in the rural regions of Australia. See NCLS: Initial Impressions 2001, NCLS

⁶ In times of social confusion and fragmentation, often driven by the rhetoric of freedom and self-expression, a counter movement of a distinctly authoritarian link often emerges offering certainty and safety in exchange for new obedience. These features of the wider cultural landscape have religious forms, which are both appealing and dangerous because of the divine imprimatur they give to.

⁷ See "The View from the Verandah: Gospel and Spirituality in an Australian Setting", *St Mark's Review*, Winter 1998, pp.4-10.

⁸ The Anglican Communion is at present experiencing significant internal stress due to major differences over issues to do with sexuality and gender in the West. Other stresses to do with inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power that involve the third world for the most part remain invisible but not for that reason any less crucial to the quality and sustainability of our common life in a worldwide communion.

This matter is quite urgent. Australia is a culturally and religiously rich and diverse nation. Anglicanism basically belongs to one cultural strand; albeit historically the dominant one from Anglo-Saxon stock. Increasingly this cultural strand represents a diminishing element in the Australian cultural/ethnic garden. How will a narrow verandah Anglicanism offer the kind of space necessary to accommodate the rich cultural mix of Australia? My own view is that the only way forward is for the recovery of a truly broad church Anglicanism which can generate nourishing forms of spiritual life. There are good grounds for this belief. The actual history of the Anglican church testifies to the remarkable capacity of the Anglican church to interact creatively with local contexts and cultures.⁹ The world wide Anglican communion as represented at the Lambeth gatherings witnesses to the diversity within the Anglican communion and gives hope for the possibility of a broad based church with rich currents of spiritual life.¹⁰

What does the Anglican verandah look like and who is on it? This issue pressed home to me during the first National Anglican Conference in Canberra in 1997. In an address by Dr Graham Cole, the then Principal of Ridley College Melbourne, he discussed the issue of Anglican diversity and the need for moving beyond tolerance to see the varieties of Anglicanism as all having something to offer.¹¹ What constituted that variety? Apparently this could be reduced to two groups; Evangelical and Anglo Catholic. Cole encouraged these two groups to work more closely rather than maintain the more usual separation. He likened the two groups to two different sides in a war zone with defections occurring from time to time. I was startled by the metaphor. Was this all there was? The Anglican Verandah did not look too inviting.

The irony was that the address was delivered as an irenic piece, an overture from evangelicals for a more cooperative joint venture. Yet something was missing; something vital to Anglican consciousness. However, it seems that Cole was simply echoing a popular view that Anglicanism in this country could be simply and accurately divided into two essentially opposite groups, the Anglo-Catholic and the Evangelical.¹²

⁹ I have just returned from the Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal commission attended by representatives from all over the Anglican Communion. What was remarkable to me was the immense variety and vitality of the participants and the stories they told of the way the gospel was being lived in their local cultural contexts. We can easily forget how innovative and resourceful the Anglican tradition has been and continues to be in the enculturation of the gospel. For a discussion of the challenges ahead in this regard see Ian Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan eds., *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, Church Publishing Incorporated, New York, 2001.

¹⁰ The list of attendees at the 1998 Lambeth Conference indicate the richness and diversity of the Anglican Communion. The centre of growth and influence is rapidly shifting to the Anglican church of Africa.

¹¹ See *National Anglican Conference Journal*, 1997, Graham Cole, "The Boundaries of Diversity", pp.53-57.

¹² See the discussion in Tricia Blombery, *The Anglicans in Australia*, Australian Gov. printing Service, Canberra, 1996, pp.21ff. Having described the two strands Blombery notes that "In reality within the Australian communion the majority of Anglicans have been in the middle church tradition, or have followed moderate forms of the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic traditions", p.24. The problem with this depiction of Anglicanism is that the majority 'middle church' apparently does not constitute a strand in itself and is not discussed as such. This of course makes no sense in relation to the actual history of the Anglican church and fuels the popular notion that there is no positive rationale for the traditional Broad church tradition. Blombery is in large part echoing the view of Bruce Kaye, *A Church without Walls: Being Anglican in Australia*, Dove, 1995, pp.111-113. Though Kaye does refer to the 'middle church' as a discernible tradition and clearly in his own account the origins of this strand can be located in the architect of sixteenth century Anglicanism, the great ecclesiologist Richard Hooker.

What is particularly worrying about the above depiction of Anglicanism is the loss of the sense of 'broad church' as a discernible and positive tradition.¹³ The Anglican verandah is beginning to look a very narrow one indeed. The variety of spiritual life possible is similarly significantly thinned down. This was not always the case and in what follows I would like to make some proposals about the kind of verandah Anglicans occupy and the forms of spiritual life a broad verandah makes possible in our Australian context. This first requires a brief exploration of that much overused word 'spirituality'.

The Notion of 'Spiritual Life'

The term spirituality seems to be an umbrella term under which many and varied 'religious' people sit. The term in fact is quite slippery and this is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it provides a convenient concept to gather the variety of approaches, Christian and otherwise, that exist in Australia. It provides a starting point for churches to have dialogue with many other people and groups beyond the traditional boundaries of church. So a broad based approach to spirituality can break down the ecclesiastical walls provide a more inviting environment in which religious impulses can be discerned. In an age weary and suspicious of formal religion and its institutional embodiment the appeal to spirituality has a natural attraction.

On the other hand the term is capable of such wide interpretation that it becomes meaningless beyond a certain point. As one theologian has stated "Spirituality as a technical term is a notorious fugitive from definition".¹⁴ He goes on to state: "but at least one could say it involves a form of practice, a pattern of life in search of ultimate meaning. For Christians this practice most usually involves the belief that communion with Jesus Christ is the way of encountering ultimate meaning". This notion of spirituality as a 'form of life' is echoed in Bruce Kaye's depiction of spirituality as 'the cultivated sense of the presence of God'.¹⁵ This is helpful. Working backwards we note first that it is about God. So secular forms of thought that appeal to a nature spirituality do not really come with the orbit of spirituality. This is not to deny the importance of a quasi-religious secular naturalism that is so pervasive today, though the above depiction is quite clear: the Christian tradition refers to a Divine being to be distinguished from creation as such.

One God or many? This is another level of debate. Some religious traditions speak of the Divine being but do not differentiate the reality of Divine being from nature or so identify the two that the world is divine without qualification. This too has a strong influence today and contains many insights regarding respect for the sacredness of life and environment. However, the Christian tradition has a very particular way of speaking of the Divine being and in relation to the world. This manner of speaking has been seasoned by almost two millennia of discussion and emerges out of an even longer period within the Jewish tradition. The Christian spiritual tradition is informed and enriched by the God of Jesus Christ. "The story of Jesus becomes in various ways the story within which Christians seek to live their lives, discovering in this particular unsubstitutable path the transforming companionship of God".¹⁶

¹³ This matter still remains on the agenda notwithstanding the recent groundbreaking publication, *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, Bruce Kaye Gen ed., Melbourne Uni. Press, 2002. In this publication Kaye refers to 'those of different schools' within Anglicanism (p.172) and Bill Lawton's chapter on 'Australian Anglican Theology' provides a fascinating overview of the diversity of the Anglican traditions. However in doing so he remains essentially within the two strand theory even as he discusses Archbishop Moyes as an example of that 'broad spectrum of opinion, distrustful of both conservative Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic parties', p.185. What we lack is a rigorous and positive theological account of the *via media* of the Anglican church that does justice to our heritage and contemporary challenges in Australia. For an example of what this might entail in the wider Anglican scene see the recent book by the Anglican theologian, Daniel Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism*, SCM, 2001.

¹⁴ Mark McIntosh, *Christology From Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2000, p1X.

¹⁵ Kaye, *Church Without Walls*, p.208.

¹⁶ McIntosh, *Christology From Within*, p.1X.

But the above depiction refers to a 'cultivated sense'. Minimally, this points to some form of intentional fostering or nurturing of spiritual life. It does not just happen nor is it a given as such. Rather, such a life has to be deliberately sought, developed and honed down over a long period. The discipleship tradition of the Christian Church in its many and varied forms has this process in mind. This is the context for the variety of spiritual disciplines and 'practices of piety' that belong to our Christian heritage.¹⁷

However, a critical issue for Australian Anglicans concerns the struggle to develop forms of spiritual life that express an enculturated and lively faith in this land. We have not been particularly good at picking up the cues from our own context and weaving them into an authentic homegrown Anglican spiritual life. Can we talk about an Anglican spirituality that has been enriched and 'cultivated' by the experience of life in this country? Perhaps there are things that have helped to shape the direction and form of spiritual life in the Australian context. Are there particular experiences as a people from many parts of the world that have generated a subliminal set of values, aspirations and basic approaches to life that inevitably inform the 'cultivated sense' of the presence of God in this country. Discipleship and spirituality might have a particular Australian twist. But how to tap into it without becoming trite and overly self-conscious is the real challenge.

Perhaps this is where the notion of 'presence' comes in. What does this mean for Australians? Much of our early experience is not of the Divine presence but of absence. A convict people abandoned by society, removed to the farthest point of the earth; to live in a society described as the 'most Godless place under heaven'.¹⁸ The subsequent history of European and indigenous people is testimony to the continuance of suffering and violence. When this is coupled with an imported and prevailing deism in English religion - in which God is more usually invoked as a somewhat benevolent yet distant overlord - the seeds are sown for a loss of the sense of the presence of God. In this regard Manning Clarke's famous phrase 'the Kingdom of Nothingness' comes to mind.¹⁹ In this cultural context Divine absence is no longer felt as absence; is more akin to a loss of the consciousness of absence, a great void. Robert Hughes', *The Fatal Shore* leaves the reader in no doubt about this feature of our history and culture.²⁰

Certainly the so-called postmodern, in its multitude of forms and guises, makes much of the absence of God as a fundamental condition of human experience. It is easy to dismiss this and equally easy to capitulate to a notion of absence that is uncompromising and far too simple. The Christian tradition has a very subtle and long tradition of discussion of the presence and absence of God that provides a rich resource for our contemporary situation. Our Australian experience of absence of God and abandonment sharpens and informs this ancient tradition. Maybe we are in a unique position to articulate something fresh and life giving for spiritual life precisely in our experience of the loss of God. The Christian mystical tradition may resonate with us for it too knows of the experience of absence as well as presence.²¹ As Christians we witness to the God who is present with us closer than breathing. But even in this intimacy God remains far above and beyond our highest thought. God's immanence reveals the God who invites awe and wonder.

¹⁷ For two recent contributions to this on-going concern in Anglicanism see, L William Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination: An Anglican Spiritual Tradition*, Orbis Books, 1999; Timothy Sedgwick, *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety*, Eerdmans, 1999.

¹⁸ See Ian Breward, *Australia: The Most Godless Place Under Heaven*, Beacon Hill Books, 1988. Breward notes that the phrase has been attributed to a "Scottish Presbyterian theologian's view of the difficulties many migrants had in recognising true religion in their adopted land."

¹⁹ Quoted by John Thornhill, *Making Australia: exploring our national conversation*, Millenium Books, 1992, p.169.

²⁰ *The Fatal Shore*, Collins Books, 1987.

²¹ See my article, "Finding the Way in an Age of Religious Pluralism: The Relevance of William law and the Christian Mystical Tradition", *Pacifica*, 9, June 1996, pp.145-163, esp. 162f.

Different Emphases in Spirituality

Broadly speaking I would suggest that 'spiritual life' has to do with how we are orientated in the world with God and how we live with God and others in the world. The 'spiritual life' encompasses this territory. And here the question can be sharply put: Who and where is the God with whom we travel in the world? Our spiritual life will take its cue from the answer to this question. Two well known options emerge at this point: a strong creation/incarnation based spirituality or a spirituality more anthropocentric and focused on redemption. These are not mutually exclusive, indeed they ought never to be. However, it is possible to give emphasis in one direction or another. How do the strands of Anglicanism bear up in this regard? Evangelicalism has traditionally stressed the redemptive approach; so too has a traditional High Church and Anglo-Catholic approach. Both strands can be developed in a personal/individualist manner though perhaps more so in the former.

A broader based creation spirituality approach is quite fashionable in our times though it is often unfocused and lacking in theological depth. The creation-based approach has historically been focused in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation – literally God assuming flesh. John's gospel is the key here: 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (chap.1: 14). This approach gives value to the material world and expects to find God alive and active in the created order. This has historically been given greater emphasis in the more Catholic wing of our Church.

The Anglican tradition is heir to both a strong incarnational and redemption spirituality. They need each other and it is only when they become separated that problems arise.

However, in recent years two other emphases from the Christian tradition have come to the fore. The first of these involves a strong sense of expectation in the gospels of the God who is coming to fulfil every human longing and bring healing to the earth. This generates a spirituality funded from an eschatological (ie from the perspective of the future – eschatos: last things) perspective regarding the new community of God. This is an anticipatory spirituality founded on hope. This spirituality of promise resonates with much of current thinking in theology; though here again it is easy to fall into idealist patterns of thinking and fail to connect with lived experience. Such a hopeful spirituality will have to be properly grounded.

But what does a fully realistic spirituality look like? At this point we note a second recent development which focuses on the kind of community necessary for hope to flourish. The word used in a great deal of thinking about the church in Anglicanism and other churches is *koinonia*, meaning fellowship or communion – not in narrow sense of what happens on Sunday but in the wider sense of the connectedness of Christians with God and the world. This *koinonia* is concentrated in the Church's eucharistic celebration and flows out into all areas of life. *Koinonia* is a critical idea for it raises very sharply the issue raised at the beginning of this paper concerning the breakdown of society and loss of confidence that institutional life can actually create healthy life-giving communities whereby people can be nurtured and grow and give themselves to others. *Koinonia* is precisely that capacity whereby people are held together in a way that is generative of strong community that is patterned after the life of Christ. A *koinonia* spirituality places great emphasis on the vitality of life that comes from community with God and others in the world; not just as an afterthought when we have sorted out our relationship to God but rather finding God in and with our relationships with each other.

The above two developments -a spirituality of promise and *koinonia* - enrich the incarnational and redemption based traditions. Together they provide an exciting vision of a spiritual life, which can grow hopeful and steadfast communities of faith. The foregoing themes all have roots in the Scriptures and our Anglican tradition. We now turn to that tradition to observe briefly what resources it might have to offer us in our quest for a viable spiritual life for today.

A Glance at our Traditions

When the 16th century Anglican theologian of the church, Richard Hooker, considered the nature of the Church he distinguished between the visible church as either sound or corrupt.²² The church of Rome remained a visible though corrupt church. He likened the variety of ecclesial bodies throughout the world to a sea that encircles the globe but is different, as the oceans of the world were different.²³ Hooker embodied a broad conception of the church and he was unwilling, for good theological reasons, to un-church any ecclesial body. He did not employ the notion of a 'true' church as became popular in Protestantism. However, he did develop criteria for judgments concerning the soundness or corruption of the church. Hooker's basic conception is as good a place to start as any for Anglicans. What flows out of his broad-based understanding of the church is an equally broad-based conception of the spiritual life. Here the key theme is one of participation with Christ and others in church and society.²⁴ This was focused in the sacraments and through this the Christian was energised and directed into the world for witness and service. This life of participation in the world was the occasion for thanksgiving and a vocation to be both a distributor of the benefits of Christ - as we have freely received so we freely give - and an agent for drawing others into new life in the gospel.

It sounds simple enough in many ways it is. Moreover the Anglican church has a rich and varied history giving expression to a variety of forms of spiritual life. However, it is as well to note that conflict has never been far off as the various strands within the Anglican weave have pulled in different directions or asserted their dominance. In Hooker's day the emerging Puritan element in Anglicanism came into conflict with Hooker's broader vision.²⁵ In the nineteenth century the Tractarians, through the genius of Newman, Keble, Pusey and others reinvigorated the more Catholic wing of the Church. During roughly the same period - perhaps a little before - the evangelicals through Henry Venn, William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon and others recovered a strong focus on conversion and promoted a strong social and missionary Anglicanism that had a direct impact upon the practice of Christian life for many years since. Fredrick Maurice mapped out a broad-church conception, which envisaged a strong connection between God and society.²⁶

These different emphases and vision of the Christian life have added to the richness of Anglicanism. These same strands of church and theology have also generated a significant body of spiritual writings over the centuries.²⁷ Many of these works have exerted a significant impact upon the way that Christians have lived out the gospel as Anglicans. In the early to mid seventeenth century a remarkable flowering of spiritual writing occurred. We have the work of Donne, Herbert, Andrews, Taylor, Baxter, and many others. In the eighteenth century the hymns of John and Charles Wesley and the former's treatise on *Christian Perfection* (1766) have had a lasting impact. There have been few more important works from the early eighteenth century than William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728). But Law's later mysticism has seemed to many as an aberration within Anglicanism.²⁸ This view accords with the general suspicion by the churches of Christendom of the mystical way. Underlying this is a question of power and the danger such a spiritual life presents to the established traditions.²⁹

²² Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book Three, part 1, para. 9, London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1954 (Everyman ed.), p.289.

²³ *Ibid*, para.14, p.296.

²⁴ The theme of participation is developed by Hooker, *Ibid*, book five, chaps. 56 & 57. This includes his discussion of 'The necessity of sacraments unto the participation of Christ'.

²⁵ An excellent book on the intricacies of the period and the theological and ecclesial tensions is Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War*, CUP, 1992.

²⁶ For an overview of the period see Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989; Stephen Sykes and John Booty, *The Study of Anglicanism*, SPCK, chap.2.

²⁷ For a general introduction to the spiritual traditions and persons identified here see John Moorman, *The Anglican Spiritual Tradition*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983.

²⁸ The English spiritual writer and commentator Martin Thornton considered Law's later mysticism as unbalanced and a sign of the disintegration of the via media of the Anglican way. See *English Spirituality*, London: SPCK, 1963, p.282.

²⁹ See for example Grace Jantzen, *Power Gender and Christian Mysticism*, CUP, 1995.

Dean Inge and Evelyn Underhill in the twentieth century and Coleridge in the nineteenth century saw the matter quite differently. As mentioned earlier the Christian mystical tradition of Law may strike a cord with contemporary Australian life and its search for the sacred.³⁰ In the nineteenth century Keble's devotions provide an insight into the renewal of the common life of the people of God from the Catholic wing. Newman's writings and Simeon's sermons gave voice to renewal in the spiritual life of people.

What are we to make of this mix of spiritual traditions within the one church? Can they be accommodated on the same verandah?³¹ And perhaps equally importantly what resources can they offer a future Anglican church in Australia?

Contextual Spirituality for the In-Between Places

Certainly the above strands in our church point to the fact that historically Anglicanism has shown a remarkable capacity for what I would call a contextual spirituality. Such a spirituality is well grounded both theologically and liturgically. It takes with utmost seriousness the challenge of enculturation of the gospel wherever it has to be witnessed to and lived. This approach to the Christian life is rooted in the incarnation of the Word become flesh dwelling amongst us in solidarity. It underpins the life of communities of faith and hope in local contexts where faith and discipleship have to be lived afresh in each generation. This kind of spirituality represents something of an inner ideal of Anglicanism. It only takes root with struggle for, as history shows only too well, a danger for Anglicanism is that it has often become welded to particular social and cultural forms of the day and lost its cutting edge. To the extent that this has been a problem for the Anglican church down under it has compromised the prophetic dimension of the gospel.

Theologically the theme that has proved helpful in my own thinking concerns Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday has not occupied a prominent place in the Anglican tradition from any of its strands. Part of the reason is simple: not much happens on Holy Saturday and there doesn't seem much to say. The day symbolises Christ's sojourn in the tomb. It is the 'dead space' between the dying of Good Friday and the rising of Easter Sunday. The famous twentieth century Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner noted that Holy Saturday was the quietest day in the church's year. It is an in-between day when not much happens or can happen. It is manifestly not a day for celebration, not a day for the expression of God's power; the social activist can't get much joy out of this Christian symbol, nor can the liturgically or evangelically minded. Holy Saturday looks more like a vacuum, crevasse or empty void. Best left alone.

What then is in it for us? Ought Anglicans make something of Holy Saturday as part of its spiritual tradition? Can this tradition provide the Anglican church with some raw materials for its own mission and identity in our context? I think there are fruitful possibilities here, especially in so far as Holy Saturday is a symbol of a spirituality for the in-between spaces of our existence.³² Spiritual life associated with this in-between place is very different from forms of spiritual life that are either aligned so closely with the mainstream culture and its values that they lose their Christian distinctiveness or that self-proclaimed counter cultural stance which often assumes a judgmental attitude towards society and fosters a spirituality of exclusion. Such a spirituality will have to be able to sustain life in community from within the complexities of our situation. It will have to include the more traditional 'spirituality of dwelling' with an emerging 'seeker-orientated spirituality'; the safety of home with the adventure of the pilgrimage.³³ How might the Holy Saturday tradition provide the basis for a full Christian realism that contains within it intimations of hope and celebration amidst the brokenness and evil of this world? Any notion of 'spiritual life' will have to take account of this.

³⁰ David Tacey's, *Edge of the Sacred*, Harper Collins, 1995, provides many insights on this theme.

³¹ It is an important matter in the wake of a history that includes some notable and lamentable failures in this regard. I would particularly single out the break with Wesley and the formation of the Methodist Church.

³² See my reflections from a liturgical point of view; "He descended to the Dead: Has Holy Saturday a Future in the Church's liturgical Calendar?", *Church Scene*, Easter 1996.

³³ See the discussion in Hardy, *Finding the Church*, p.105 with reference also to Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950's*, Berkeley, California Uni. Press, 1998.

The Holy Saturday tradition, with its emphasis on the in-between existence - between Good Friday and Easter Sunday - is directly related to that unusual article in the Apostles Creed: 'He descended to the dead'. The descent to the dead was a descent to an in-between place from which new life was generated. Reflection on the 'Descent to the Dead' has a long history in Christianity and has been the subject of some remarkable insights in recent decades in a post Holocaust world.³⁴

The Cambridge philosopher George Steiner, offers a compelling insight into the significance of the descent to the dead and the Holy Saturday tradition in his remarkable book, *Real Presences* (1989).³⁵ In this sustained dissection, analysis and response to the 'postmodern' Nietzschean world Steiner meditates on the 'forgetfulness of God' that lies close at hand and informs much of our culture and everyday life. Steiner explores the implications of this forgetfulness from the perspective of literature and philosophy.

Steiner's writing points to the fact that the forms of spiritual life necessary in such a setting will have to be carefully, artfully and courageously crafted. In this context simplicities are appealing but dangerous and distortive of the situation. This is what is worrying about many approaches to spiritual life today: they are overly simple responses to the needs of the day. They purport to know too much and proclaim their certainties with unwarranted force. To this extent they fund spiritualities of retreat rather than engagement; they represent spiritualities of closure rather than openness and they represent spiritualities which are sharp and uncompromising rather than flexible and capable of adapting to new conditions.

Steiner's approach commends itself powerfully in our circumstances. He refers to the 'transitional circumstances' of our times. We are a culture and a people who are in-between the old and the new, we are waiting in between. It is a place that is full of pain and the occasional glimmer of hope. Such a context requires, above all, patience and perseverance and a wariness of quick-fix solutions. At the end of his work Steiner searches for a symbol to situate our times and the form of life it requires. He finishes his book thus:

"There is one particular day in Western history about which neither historical record nor myth nor Scripture make report. It is a Saturday. And it has become the longest of days. We know of that Good Friday which Christianity holds to have been that of the Cross. But the non-Christian, the atheist, knows of it as well. This is to say that he knows of the injustice, of the interminable suffering, of the waste, of the brute enigma of ending, which so largely make up not only the historical dimension of the human condition, but the very fabric of our personal lives. We know, ineluctably, of the pain, of the failure of love, of the solitude which are our history and private fate. We know also about Sunday. To the Christian, that day signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension, of resurrection, of a justice and a love that have conquered death. If we are non-Christians or non-believers, we know of that Sunday in precisely analogous terms. We conceive of it as the day of liberation from inhumanity and servitude. We look to resolutions, be they therapeutic or political, be they social or messianic. The lineaments of that Sunday carry the name of hope (there is no word less deconstructible).

But ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other. In the face of the torture of a child, of the death of love which is Friday, even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless. In the Utopia of the Sunday, the aesthetic will, presumably, no longer have logic or necessity. The apprehensions and figurations in the play of metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and hope, of the flesh which is said to taste of ash and of the spirit which is said to have the savour of fire, are always Sabbatarian. They have arisen out of the immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?"³⁶

³⁴ Perhaps the most profound reflection is that of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1990, chap.4.

³⁵ Steiner, *Real Presences*, University of Chicago Press, 1989.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 231f.

The waiting that Steiner speaks of is not passive. It is a cultivated waiting that brims full of vigour, life and resilience. It is a waiting that does not glory too quickly in triumphalist claims nor ultimately does one get the sense of an infinity of emptiness and uselessness. He recommends a hopeful waiting that breeds holy patience as the new life emerges from the old. But it is not an easy, comfortable waiting. How can it be amidst the endless round of pain and violence in this world? Thus he concludes: " But ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday". Perhaps here is a clue for the character of the spiritual life needed at this time in our church. It may provide the framework and orientation for the traditional markers for Anglican spirituality - incarnation and redemption – as well as more recent developments ie promise and koinonia. An Anglican Church that provides resources for the long days journey of the Saturday will be a church that fosters a particular fruit of the Holy Spirit; the spiritual discipline of patience (Galatians 5:22).

Living patiently with a bit of mess

Learning to be patient in difficult times when there are many things that generate significant disagreements is a real challenge. One of the most important issues for Anglicans is how they will go about the business of handling conflict in a Christian manner and do so with patience. Most of us prefer simple and quick solutions to our problems. But as we know from personal life and general experience in the world of work resolution of some issues - if it actually occurs! - takes time and effort. Patience and longsuffering become a valued gift of the Spirit. Likewise, in the life of the Anglican Church easy and quick solutions to our tensions and problems cannot be achieved overnight. One way in which the church tries to resolve matters quickly and often prematurely is through appeal to law. The legislative impulse is powerful in our church culture. It appears to offer clear and final solutions to intractable problems and saves us the time of having to deal with people we find it hard to get on with. But the move to law might not really work for a body such as a voluntary institution like the church, which is healthiest, when it encourages high quality face to face interactions and relationships. This is what grows the koinonia of the people of God. And koinonia for the sake of the gospel is what the church ought to be about: May they be one that the world may believe

Learning to live patiently with one another, listening attentively, remaining in conversation rather than cutting one another off or agreeing to go our own separate ways; these things belong to the life of the Christian disciple.³⁷ But it does not come easy and today in our church there is a tendency to close down conversation and distance oneself from those who see things differently to us.³⁸ The spirit of compromise and tolerance is often dismissed as a position that has little integrity. But nothing could be further from the truth. In our church we are more familiar with the either/or which leaves little room for positions that occupy what may be termed the excluded middle ground. This in-between place can appear unattractive to many. Voices from this place are significantly silent in many of the debates of the church today. They are often portrayed as being unsure which way to go. The high priority they place on maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is more usually overlooked by those voices that proclaim the truth according to their interpretation.

³⁷ Perhaps as a church we need to rediscover the art of holy listening as a means to find our true spiritual direction. This is usually developed in individualist categories eg Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1992. What might this look like if it was developed as a discipline for a church's spiritual life?

³⁸ Distancing from one another is hardly a mature Christian approach to tension and does little to enhance the life of brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. However the 2001 General Synod seemed to be moving in this direction. It is reflected somewhat in the image of the different diocese of the Anglican church in Australia being more like 'cousins' rather than brothers and sisters in Christ.

These are the simplifiers, the rigorists on both sides of the divide who share a common aversion to the middle ground. Their systems and ideologies are tight, consistent and uncompromising. The virtue of their position is internal coherence and consistency but the price is high. The system is notoriously incomplete.³⁹ Advocates for such extreme positions - and they are certainly alive and well in our church - find it difficult to admit the possibility of other alternative authentic *Christian* approaches to the issues and challenges of our day.

As Steiner reminds us 'ours is the long days journey of the Saturday'. This may not be welcomed but it may accurately depict our contemporary context and predicament. What is quite remarkable is that it is precisely out of such places and conditions that the power of the gospel erupts and brings new life. The in-between places of our life, those difficult, often painful and perplexing dimensions of our personal and communal lives are the places where God's Spirit can work and the Kingdom of God can break out and in! But this needs time and patience for it is the long days journey of the Saturday; the day of hesitation, waiting, patient listening. This is surely the burden of the Archbishop-elect of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams' profound reflections on his experience in New York on September 11 last year.⁴⁰ The title of William's meditations, *Writing in the Dust*, deliberately picks up the allusion to Jesus writing in the dust in chapter eight of John's Gospel. In this strange and enigmatic gesture Williams finds hope:

"He [Jesus] hesitates. He does not draw a line, fix an interpretation, tell the woman who she is and what her fate should be. He allows a moment, a longish moment, in which people are given time to see themselves differently precisely because he refuses to make the sense they want. When he lifts his head, there is both judgment and release. So this is writing in the dust because it tries to hold that moment for a little longer, long enough for some of our demons to walk away."⁴¹

In the mystery of iniquity there is an even greater and more enduring mystery of God's incarnate love which engenders hope but never in a glib or cheap manner. It takes a 'longish moment', it involves judgment and release. It may be precisely what gives new life and hope to spiritual life on the Anglican verandah in Australia for the twenty-first century.

³⁹ If a system is internally consistent it will not be complete: if it aspires to completeness it will invariably contain inconsistencies. This, in essence, is Thomas Torrence's interpretation of Godel's theorem in *Theological Science*, London: OUP, 1969, p.255. For the most part today consistency is privileged over the quest for completeness.

⁴⁰ *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on the 11 September and its Aftermath*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.81.