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a forum for people grappling with faith and church issues

**values being real
supports faith stage transition
respects and validates the journeys of others
allows questions and doubts
lets God defend God**

The Three Legged Stool

Seeking meaning in a world of quantum leaps and fundamentalists.

By the beginning of the 20th century it was thought that there was little left to be discovered about the natural world. As Bryson so aptly puts it, "If a thing could be oscillated, accelerated, perturbed, distilled, combined, weighed or made gaseous they [science] had done it, and in the process produced a body of universal laws so weighty and majestic that we still tend to write them out in capitals". However, like some cosmic joke, the 21st century was to herald a period of bizarre scientific discoveries. Turning from big physical phenomena determined by universal laws, science discovered that "things on a small scale behave nothing like things on a large scale" (Feynman 1998). Nice neat formula science was about to be run over by the fuzzy science of quantum mechanics where very small things could be in two places at the same time!

Though often seen as competing deities science and religion shared a common obsession with authority. With an overrated confidence in its monopoly on truth, religion

developed a zealous evangelism and science a series of fixed Newtonian laws. Both functioned deterministically, holding the promise of something truly objective to measure facts, truth, beauty and goodness against. Quantum physics became a way science explained phenomena that clearly sat outside accepted natural laws. Science had to make sense of atomic structures that behaved entirely outside accepted theories. How do you explain clouds of electrons in an atom changing orbit without ever moving the distance between the old and new orbit (this is where we get the term "quantum leap" from)? Or how atomic structures separated by seven miles instantaneously mimic each others



independent activities as physicists at the University of Geneva observed in 1997. If quantum mechanics is an invitation to Newtonian science to wake up and smell the coffee, what might be religion's "quantum leap", a serious challenge to its love affair with deterministic absolutes?

Religion's quantum may have already arrived in the form of alternative voices from the margins

of the third-world. Over 1500 years Western Christianity developed a religious system or framework of meaning that answered all the big questions about life, death and the cosmos. It got away with this because it also wielded ultimate political power. This way of meaning-making found its way to the New World wrapped up in the context of European Colonialism, albeit maybe subconsciously. During the latter part of the twentieth century Marxist critique of systems of European political power gave birth not only to new social constructions of meaning but also to new theological reflection. Drawing directly from the experiences of Christians in oppressive political regimes, theologians (particularly of Catholic tradition) began to question the West's fundamental religious systems of meaning.

Western Christianity failed to adequately provide a practical response that dealt specifically with social and political issues for the poor, women and the environment. The experience of political oppression, rape and plunder became the starting point of theological reflection. This was to mark the beginning of a theological quantum leap. In the face of oppression, Western forms of Christianity were useless. Marginalised people could not find a voice, a place for themselves in the two great Christian pillars of Scripture and tradition. Simply beating louder on the authority drum became increasingly hollow and abusive.

With a growing understanding of the role culture plays in sustaining ultimate meaning, a body of theological reflection developed that sourced its authority not from some external law (the Bible says!) or culturally bound faith practices (church traditions) but directly from the *context* of such reflection. Religion needed to make sense of the experience of marginalised, vulnerable, powerless and voiceless people. The old well-worn ways just didn't cut it. Thus, out of

critical reflection on the very real experiences of the poor, came the substances from which liberation, feminist, black and eco theologies developed. Later these would find a common thread as branches of an emerging quantum theology, a way of making sense of experiences that sit outside older deterministic forms of Christian faith.

As an example of quantum theology, feminist theology seeks as its starting point the experience of women. Rosemary Ruether, a feminist theologian suggests that "the uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience [as a starting point of theological reflection] but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past". Eco-feminism seeks to reinterpret creation narratives, formulations about Jesus, and ways of being the church from the daily experience of women. Some of these reflections are robust and challenging and have enormous potential to reform the Christian church away from its flirtation with patriarchal, hieratical and imperial structures. Eco-feminist theology assaults the predominant linear, in-or-out, right-or-wrong, expressions of God, sin, the church and ecology in much the same way as quantum mechanics assaults the neatness of Newtonian physics. It seeks to develop a theology that is earthy, or "from below"; it seeks to voice meaning using everyday, inclusive language that invites reflection upon female incarnations of God. These forms are rich in images of equality and ecological partnership with the nurturing elements of the earth.

Religion's quantum leap is to regard local experience as a valued partner in faith and not subject to the hierarchy of Scripture or tradition. It is context with a capital "C", or perhaps more accurately Scripture with a small "s". Quantum theology seeks to re-position authority as a collaboration of context, tradition and scripture. Each informs the others, rather than one dominating, - a three-

legged stool. Our situation is the place we begin, a companion that introduces us to the Christian Scriptures and traditions. Quantum theology invites Western forms of evangelical and Roman Catholic faith to put away their infatuation with the authority of scripture or tradition (or both) and invites a conversation of equals rather than a monologue of edicts. Quantum theology has implications for the way we do church. It has implications for ethical and moral responses. It places emphasis on:

- Finding a place to stand and a personal voice within the story and significance of Scripture, rather than mining it for principles to obey.
- Finding points of connection with other Christian faith traditions, rather than theological positions to defend.
- Finding a mature inner authority, rather than being dependent on an external authority.
- Owning choices of meaning, exploring and discerning meaning from the substance of tradition and Scripture
- Celebrating other forms of spirituality such as mystical, Celtic and indigenous.
- Accepting voices from the margins including older heresies that often carry an uncannily accurate critique of popular culture.
- Seeking new forms of church with circular governance, attractiveness by virtue of relationship rather than by orthodoxy (right belief) or orthopraxis (right behaviour).



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- Exploring concepts of family and relationship that include valuing both singleness and monogamous life-partnerships.
- Exposing social and political oppression of people, places and philosophies. This is an integral part of the prophetic mission of the church.

Just in case there are accusations of faddishness and novelty, the way quantum theology sources its starting point of theological reflection from the local may also be found in a series of mysterious episodes in the emerging holy nation of Israel. Take, for example, Elisha's bizarre acceptance of Naaman's (a Gentile) innocent faith in which he worships Israel's god in a pagan temple (2 Kings 5). This episode seems to sit way outside conventional evangelical in-or-out frameworks of faith and concepts of church as missional communities. Its "locale" also seems to sit uncomfortably in the middle of a detailed account of a period of God's activity in forming a special and role-model type nation. Of further note, is that this seemingly isolated episode is one of the few Old Testament stories that Jesus specifically is recorded as mentioning.©

Craig Braun 2006.



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Twelve symptoms of a counterfeit church.

1. Authoritarian, oppressive leadership; no room for other ideas and independent action.
2. Lack of accountability at the top; leaders don't need or want to answer for their actions.
3. Pyramid of power; the further from the top, the less power and influence the members have.
4. Belief that members and their families are inferior to the leader and his circle.
5. Belief that the leader is closer to God and can hear him better than the lay people.
6. Strong pressure to conform to the manner, dress, speech etc of those in power.
7. Financial needs of the church (or its leaders) placed above those of members' families.
8. Pressure to give undue amounts of time to the church, to neglect other responsibilities.
9. An 'us versus them' mentality; distrust of all other churches / groups / persuasions.
10. Narrow doctrines and teachings so unique that only this group has the 'right path'.
11. Discouragement of frank and open discussion about the group, its doctrine, or its leaders
12. Ostracism of former members; prejudice against those no longer 'choosing to belong'.

I guess I'm out in the cold now
A "fringe-dweller"
Left alone in ecclesiastical wilderness
There's a few of us out here now
Soon a new culture will emerge
Perhaps I jumped ship just in time

Andrew Wheatley

Some threads of Celtic Christianity.

1. A deep "sense of connectedness" - to God, to the sacred earth, and to one another.
2. All creation is a sacred mystery, revealing God's presence.
3. Every aspect of life is permeated by Christ's forgiving love, healing power and divine light.
4. The natural order reveals God's glory.
5. Christ's light overcomes the darkness.
6. The Christian faith is always a community faith, and work and worship are one.
7. Prayer and praise arise out of the experiences of daily living and belong to the people.
8. Christ is revealed in the ordinary events of life.
9. The church is always a "missional church".
10. Sharing the good news of the gospel demands listening, prayer, penitence, obedience, discipline and risk taking.
11. It is often on the margins, amidst struggle and uncertainty that Christ is powerfully present through the Holy Spirit.
12. Life is provisional and our only true security is in God.
13. Poetry and creativity, symbol and ritual are "ways into God".
14. Church is inclusive and non-hierarchical, both women and men are equally affirmed.
15. A love of the Psalms.
16. Life is both "an inner and outer pilgrimage" - a daily journey into the heart of God.
17. In our daily living we are always accompanied by the saints and angels.
18. A healing ministry is central in the life of the church.
19. Without communal and personal penitence and lament, our journey in Christ is incomplete.
20. We cannot live without a sense of wonder, mystery and awe.
21. This day is God's day - not tomorrow.
22. Life and death are a continuum enfolded in Christ's love.

Open dialogue – a space for reader response

this is an opportunity for open conversation from readers about previous articles. You may offer your own story; a broadening or different view of the subject; or point to other resources. We ask you to respect the same guidelines that are followed in Spirited Exchanges groups:

- We're not trying to produce one answer. There is freedom for differing views and opinions.
- Anyone is free to share his/her own view even if it's different or 'heretical' from some people's perspective.
- We ask for respect for each person's opinions
- We let God defend God

relating to the last newsletter – Prayer:....

One day Saint Therese of Jesus
in a moment of closeness to Jesus
introduced herself by saying:
"I am Therese of Jesus,"
and Jesus came back with these words,
"I am Jesus of Therese."

Salt Figurine

*The salt figurine wandered over the earth
until it came to the seam where it remained
lost in contemplation of that huge mass
of swirling water that it had never seen.
"Who are you?" it finally asked the sea.
"Come on in and see," said the sea with a
smile.
Without further ado; it entered the sea,
and the deeper it went, the more it dissolved
until only a tiny amount of its body was left.
Just before being completely dissolved,
the figurine exclaimed,
"Now I know who you are!"*

Disclosure

Prayer is like watching for the
Kingfisher. All we can do is
Be where he is likely to appear and
Wait.
Often, nothing much happens;
There is space, silence and
Expectancy.
No visible sign, only the
Knowledge that he's been there,
And may come again.
Seeing or not seeing cease to matter,
You have been prepared,
But sometimes when you've almost
Stopped expecting it
A flash of brightness
Gives encouragement.

From Candles and Kingfishers Ann Lewin

*God's first language is silence. Silence is magic.
Beautiful things happen in the quiet. Flowers bloom,
stars twinkle, grass grows, snow falls...
Billie Trinidad, in The Philippine Star, Manila*

Supreme God, your light is brighter than the sun,
your purity whiter than mountain snow, you are
present wherever I go. All people of wisdom praise
you

So I too put faith in all your words, knowing that
everything you teach is true. Neither the angels in
heaven nor the demons in hell, can know the
perfection of your wisdom, for it is beyond all
understanding. Only your Spirit knows you; only you
can know your true self.

You are the source of all being, the power of all
power, the ruler of all creatures. So you alone
understand what you are. In your mercy reveal to me
all that I need to know, in order to find peace and
joy.

Tell me the truths that are necessary for the world
in which I live. Show me how I can meditate upon
you, learning from you the wisdom that I need. I am
never tired of hearing you, because your words bring
life. A Hindu prayer

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.*

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.*

*Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.*

James Montgomery, 1818 – first 3 verses

Spirited Exchanges Facilitator Training Weekend June 23 - 25

Are you looking to start a Spirited Exchanges group in your area or want to know more about what these groups provide? The Facilitator Training weekend will help you understand the ethos and develop the skills required to run such a group. The course and materials will be free of charge and some accommodation is available. You will be expected to get yourselves to Wellington and to pay for some meals.

By the end of this weekend we hope you will understand:

- what the ethos and aims of Spirited Exchanges are
- more about faith development and journey - yours and others
- why people leave churches and the resultant issues
- the skills needed to facilitate a group
- your own readiness to lead such a group

If you would like further information or to register for this weekend please email:
jenny@central.org.nz

spirited exchanges groups for 2006

Wellington:

- Student spirited exchanges group meets fortnightly on Thursday evening (during term time) around a meal beginning at 630pm at 10 Glasgow St, Kelburn.
For further details please contact Peter McKenzie-Bridle peter@spiritedexchanges.org.nz.
- Young adult (roughly early 20s through mid-thirties) meets fortnightly on Monday evenings at 730pm.
Next meeting May 8th at 183 Brooklyn Rd, Brooklyn.
For further details please contact Donia Macartney donia@central.org.nz
- Spirited exchanges (all ages) meets fortnightly on Monday evenings at Wellington Central Baptist Church at 630pm. For further details please contact Craig Braun cjbraun@xtra.co.nz or Sarah Hill sarah_hill007@hotmail.com

Auckland:

- Will be on the first Friday of each month. Meeting at 14 Erson Ave (Disability Resource Centre rooms) at 730pm. For further details please contact Jocelyn Grantham JG@dilworth.school.nz

Christchurch:

- A new group began in Christchurch on Friday April 28th. For further details please contact Elizabeth Taylor candet@paradise.net.nz

Palmerston North:

- If you live in / near Palmerston North and are keen to gather with others in a similar space, from time to time, please contact Jenny: jenny@central.org.nz. There are one or two interested in doing this. Perhaps the beginnings of a Spirited Exchanges group in PN?



THANKS to everyone who has responded to our request for a \$10 donation towards the newsletter. If you would prefer to make a donation via bank transfer our account number is: 03-0502-0169965-00 PLEASE reference to spirited exchanges



If you would like to contribute an article, suggest a topic for discussion, comment about the newsletter or come off the mailing list please write to the Editor: Jenny McIntosh at P.O. Box 11551, Wellington or email: spiritex@central.org.nz or jenny@central.org.nz or Donia Macartney donia@central.org.nz. For Alan Jamieson: alan@central.org.nz or aj@paradise.net.nz
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