

# ***If you have influence in your home, your neighbourhood, your community, your organisation, then you are in leadership - who leads you?***

## **Claudius van Wyk**

Sunday evening a group of us gathered on-line to reconsider leadership in relation to the Pentecost event some 2000 years ago. According to New Testament tradition that was the time, 50 days after Easter, when the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Shavuot. What they experienced together in that narrative was an ‘outpouring of the Holy Spirit’. Henceforth they would be informed by, directed by, and empowered by the so-called Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus.

We examined this story through the lens of the holistic worldview and practice. We explored together whether the Holy Spirit could be reconsidered as the ‘*Spirit of the Whole*’, namely, the totality of patterned energetic information that constitutes all of existence.

We began by looking at the creation story where ‘*the Spirit of God hovered upon the deep*’. “*And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*” Genesis 1; 5.

We noted that in Hebrew the word for light is ‘*Boker*’, at a deeper level meaning ‘cosmos’, and the word for dark is ‘*Erev*’, at the deeper level meaning ‘chaos’. So already in the creation story the evolutionary process is shown to be stochastic - there are chaotic patches that will generate new order.

## **Organising into coherence**

According to holism’s author, Jan Christian Smuts, over time the ‘whole’ reorganises the parts into greater coherence. Could it consequently be possible that our state of world affairs, especially the hearts and minds of humankind, could be ready for such a reorganisation - a metaphoric ‘outpouring’ of, and immersion in, the Spirit of the Whole?

It was the late Lawrence Bloom who suggested that we are no longer in an era of change - we are in a change of era. He mused that we are in the middle of an intelligence test for humanity. “*The prize for success is beyond our wildest dreams - But the penalty of failure is beyond our worst nightmares.*”

What form of intelligence might that be, we asked - human intellect enhanced by artificial intelligence - or something else? Was there a deeper intelligence at work in existence - or was everything a function of happenstance - a cosmic accident? If all of ‘being’ is informed and organised by that transcendent intelligence, it suggests that the very cells of our bodies are an expression of that. Then from the perspective of creative evolution, is it just a question of time and inclination that our minds and motivation could evolve to also become an expression of the deeper cosmic ‘knowing’?

To acquire some deeper insight we explored the scriptural background to Pentecost.

We noted Jan Smuts' admonition to assembled scientists in his Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1931: *"The ancient spiritual goods and heirlooms of our race need not be ruthlessly scrapped. The great values and ideals retain their unfading glory and derive new interest and force from a cosmic setting."*

Now we endeavoured to consider an exegesis of the Biblical account of Pentecost from such a cosmic setting. To evaluate whether, at this critical juncture in human evolution, we were due for such a fundamental spiritual reorganisation - and new renaissance.

In the face of widely anticipated 'systems collapse' of our global institutions, accompanied by concerning evidence of a regression in human values, would we go back to neo-Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' perspectives? Or would a 'spiritual metanoia', nature's own deep drive to wholeness, modulate that global reorganisation, dampening the elements disruptive to coherence, on the one hand, and amplifying those enhancing of coherence. Consider the New testament Parable of the separation of the wheat from the tares at harvest time? (Matthew 13; 24-43). Consider also the disruption in personal lives and practices.

*"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire ... He will purify the sons of Levi ... That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness".* Malachi 3; 2, 3:

So we explored this notion of harvest time in the relationship of Pentecost to the preceding Jewish festival of Shavuot. We noted that orthodox rabbinic traditions teach that Shavuot also marks the revelation of the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai: *"You shall observe the Festival of Weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the Festival of Ingathering at the turn of the year."* Exodus 34:22:

This notion of law and the Torah presents an interesting juxtaposition is the celebration of Shavuot, and the Pentecost celebration, namely, becoming enlivened by the holistic spirit of life itself.

## **Personality redefined**

Writing an article, '*Homo Sum*', back in 1899, Smuts drew attention to the limitations of law in creating the milieu for human advancement. He wrote: *"...No law is thinkable without Personality, law being but the very faintest recognition of the harmonious form in which Personality reveals its essence."*

In '*Holism and Evolution*' (1926) he developed this theme of the holistic personality in sync with the greater order further. *"...Moral discipline, whilst important, must not oppress personality with an overpowering sense of duty. Duty should be assimilated into the quite normal impulses of the Personality - moral discipline should become second nature."*

So what Smuts was pointing at was a transformed relationship of the Personality with the 'whole' as the natural life-enhancing milieu for human advancement. Was that the 'spirit-filled' Personality?

## **Unity in diversity**

This background context then brought us to considerations of principles of unity and diversity, the relationship of the individual to the collective - and the implications for holistic Personality. And we followed the metaphor of wheat and bread as introduced in the festival of Shavuot: *“Keep falsehood and deceitful words far from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the bread that is my portion.”* Proverbs 30; 8

Now we could ponder on the notion of ‘bread’ and ‘portion’. Observe that the writer discards both poverty and riches from that invocation, surely pointing to something beyond material possession - even sustenance.

## **Metanoia: new eyes - new heart**

According to the texts, John the Baptist, was preaching of the coming of the Messiah and inviting believers to prepare by undergoing baptism - immersion in water. His prediction was that the coming ‘holy one’ one would baptise with spirit. Baptism was symbolic of dying to the ‘old’ life and being reborn to ‘new’ life. To John’s surprise Jesus presented himself for baptism: Matthew 3;16: *“When He had been baptised, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.”*

Notice the text declares ‘...*The heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the spirit of God...*’

Those who have had the mystical experience often feel as if they are becoming one with God, or the Absolute. Mysticism also often refers to any kind of ecstasy or altered state of consciousness. It typically also refers to the attainment of insight in ultimate or hidden truths, and to human transformation, often to be supported by practices. The key words are thus ‘insight’ and ‘practice’ - new eyes, new heart.

What then are these insights and how do they inform practice?

## **Temptation and the age of materialism**

Continuing the analogy of bread and spiritual sustenance there’s an important clue in Jesus’s temptation in the desert. According to the narrative he fasted in the wilderness for forty days. In that period the tempter challenged him to use his powers to turn the ‘stones’ into bread: Matthew 4;4: *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”*

The spiritual ‘word’ in the Bible was ‘Logos’ which, in Greek philosophy, it related to a universal divine reason, or the mind of God.

So following his symbolic rebirth at baptism, with his sojourn in the desert, Jesus is shifting his focus and experience from physical to spiritual sustenance - not by bread alone. Could he now draw strength from his epiphany at baptism?

## **The Lord's Prayer**

From this perspective we can now revisit the prayer he taught his disciples - we can regard it as both a profound invocation and a deep commitment. The key invocation is; *"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

This then is surely a commitment to being an agent of the incarnation of 'Divine will' (as expressed in the creative evolutionary process of the phenomenon of holism) into everyday life: Matthew 6;11: *"Give us this day our daily bread."*

This aspect of 'daily bread', the 'portion' referred to in Proverbs, in the invocation then takes on a deeper and transformed meaning. What it might be suggesting is something like this: "...present me with the quality of experience or challenge I need, that in taking it on, in responsibility, I will serve to advance the divine cause and at the same time discover my deeper Self as an agent of divine will.

## **Unique life challenges as gifts of self-realisation?**

Jesus unpacks this principle in a powerful and profound 'Parable of the Talents'. Here the master entrusts to his servants challenges of great value (talents), both to them and to his estate. The two who engage generatively with the challenge are commended, the one who hides the talent is excoriated. Matthew 25; 14, 15: *"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability."*

Notice the words: *"... To each according to his ability."* What this suggests is that we each have a unique capacity to respond to the world generatively. And we only can discover this unique capacity in engagement with the world - in responding (not reacting) to what life presents to us. The more we exercise that capacity the more resilient and creative it can become.

If however our focus is based on narrow self-interest, we will surely naturally tend to respond to that which we deem will advance our material existence, and boost our sense of self-esteem. The materialistic perspective will have shackled our deeper potentiality. With a transformed identity, when we have apprehended the world (our fellowmen and entire living milieu) as an extension of our being, our motivation is fundamentally altered to support the invocation *"...Thy will be done on earth..."*

## **Whose will?**

In the quote by Jan Smuts above where he cherishes our spiritual heritage he talks about the narrative receiving new interest and force from a cosmic setting. And then he stresses the notion of sacred Personality. Now this Personality, is not a superficial description of different human characteristics, extrovert vs. introvert etc., this is a quality of emergent self-awareness of which human consciousness is the current most advanced expression. The universal order is becoming conscious of itself through our diverse experiences and awareness. That Self, whilst located in the individual, is a new potential manifest 'whole' as an expression of the universal order itself when in unified relationship with other such transformed selves.

St Paul, speaking to the Athenians, found the pedestal to the unknown god, and reminded them of their traditional poem to Zeus, “...in whom we move and have our being.” And so he declares: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” Acts 17;18.

Note that he emphasises a continuity of relationship “... for we are also ‘his’ offspring” Paul, as we will show, ‘got it’ that we have emerged from the enabling milieu of the ‘whole’.

## **The Eucharist - the supreme sacrament**

At the Last Supper Jesus would graphically emphasise this principle when he associates his body with this emergent divine Selfhood. He, using the bread, emphasises the cardinal principle of unity in diversity - of the part in the whole: Luke 22;19: “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

Now metaphysically we can see his ‘broken body’ as the differentiation of that divine potential Personality into our unique capacities to respond, as we have identified above - “...to each according to his means”. But in drinking from the single cup we are united in our commitment to a collaborative endeavour to manifest the divine will being ‘done’ on earth - and so the ‘spirit of the whole’ is activated.

## **Finding our way back**

A vast proportion of humanity struggle with their conditions of existence. They have little mental capacity, energy, or motivation to deal with the greater issues facing humanity and life on earth. Others, with some capacity and motivation to reflect, look to material and technological solutions to our problems of existence. Still others are waking up to the reality that it is our quality of consciousness, our world-views, our deeper human motivations, that are the real issue. And for many, in the face of apparent regression and decay, there is a growing sense of despair.

And yet there is a deeply reassuring message in Jesus’ ‘Parable of the Prodigal Son’. We know the story. He demands his birthright from his father and leaves for a faraway place where he squanders it in riotous living. Finally in enslavement he falls onto deep misery and despair: “And when he came to himself, he said ... I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him... And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

Luke 15; 17 – 20. Notice the words, “...When he came unto **himself**”. In his crisis that deeper inner potential has remembered. Now he will go back to ‘source’ in service - he will become an agent in the greater whole. And here come the reassuring part - “...when he was...a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran...!”

The ‘spirit of the whole’ (Holy Spirit) is acting in life anyway, but we are free agents. The promise of the parable is that when we adopt a transformed intention, one in service to the greater whole, to our fellow human beings, to our fellow creatures and life itself, it will bring to us, ‘each according to our means’, that which is our to do for divine will to become manifest in earth.

## **In service of the ‘whole’**

St Paul now spells this out in 2 Corinthians 12: 4 – 7: *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”* Note the key sentence: *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every **man to profit withal.**”*

Our individual service in its diversity but coordinated in shared endeavour is for the advancement of the whole. In addressing the scientists in 1932 Jan Smuts spelled this out from the scientific and philosophical perspective:

*... The concept of the organic whole must ... be extended beyond the spatial limits of the organism so as to include its interaction with its environment. The stimuli and responses, which render them mutually interdependent, constitute them one whole, which thus transcends purely spatial aspects. It is this overflow of organic wholes beyond their apparent spatial limits, which binds all nature together and prevents it from being a mere assemblage of separate interacting units.”* J. C. Smuts: Presidential Address (1931)

But he held a deeper spiritual intention - he was exploring something even deeper. He wrote: *“There is one ultimate whole with ascertainable character, and human personality is the most highly developed form and function of this whole. Our human ideals of thought, conduct and faith follow from the nature of that whole and find in terms of that nature their true expression and explanation.”* J. C. Smuts - An Inquiry into the Whole (1910)

## **The last word...**

These are grand, almost esoteric, concepts we have been exploring. Ultimately the simple message is to recognise our own unique character but to transform that character into wholesome engagement with the persons, issues and challenges presented to us in life. Whilst it is not given to everyone to have major epiphanies, it is surely sufficient to believe in the goodness of life as it evolved to its greater potentialities through our engagement with it.

*“I don't have any idea of who or what God is. But I do believe in some great spiritual power. I feel it particularly when I'm out in nature. It's just something that's bigger and stronger than what I am or what anybody is. - Jane Goodall*

Yes we face formidable challenges - but we can trust that our intention to the good is not ultimately in vain, The grand cosmic unfolding, whose depth and experience is embedded in this dynamic moment, knows our individual part - and will help us bring it to manifestation.

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