

One Meets Another in the Presence of a Third: Beyond Exclusion and Embrace

Reverend Bill Gaventa

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON MEDICAL SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY OF NEW JERSEY

The title of this conference, *Exclusion and Embrace*, is taken from Miroslav Volf's profound book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Volf 1996). Your sub-title is 'Conversations about Spirituality and Disability'. As the third conference in Australia around this theme, you, and we, are on a journey of dialogue and discovery. It is, I would propose, a movement from polarities through perils and paradoxes to a new understanding of the pathways on which the 'will to embrace' (Volf, p.29) can walk and flourish. It is also crucial to note at the very outset that Volf's book did not come from a person working in the world of 'disability', but it does explore universal human themes that illuminate our journey. The reverse is also true; that is, the themes and issues from your work, and the presentations at this conference are not just about 'disability' but speak to a much wider audience. If we did not realise the connection before, the context of this conference in the two months following September 11 heightens a universal awareness of the capacity of humankind to split itself into two or more.

This paper will first summarise some of the polarities that trap us in either/or positions, stifle our conversation, and trap any creative movement with the will to embrace. Then it will examine some of the perils and paradoxes that come when we do manage to break free of the polarities, caution signs as it were, on the road to embrace. Finally, drawing on the work of people who I consider my mentors in community building, I would like to outline some of the pathways that are emerging as 'best practices' in community building or, in other words, in putting our will to embrace to action.

BEYOND POLARITIES

The rule of polarities, the tendency to make issues and questions into us versus them, black or white, right or wrong, is an experience you and I know far too well. By and large, polarities are far too easy answers to the fundamental spiritual and philosophical questions at the heart of life: the question of identity ('Who am I?'), purpose ('Why am I?'), community ('Whose am I?'), and the meaning of what is assumed to be, or experienced as, tragedy or suffering ('Why is this happening?') (Gaventa 1997). You might have your own list of them. Here are some of mine:

Disabled or normal/typical

Making people one or the other is a denial of the ways we are all limited and vulnerable, as well as a denial of the differences that are already there between people who supposedly are one side or the other, or people whom we think are 'all alike' in terms of race, looks, faith traditions, styles of worship and so forth. You also know that while the recognition that 'we are all disabled' can be a step in awareness, it is also far too quick and easy, for it can deny the very real issues and injustices which people with significant disabilities face on a daily basis.

Spirituality/religion or disability/science

While some of the greatest advances in attitudes and services for people with disability have come from science, people with disabilities and their families have also struggled in recent decades to break free of a medical or scientific interpretation of their lives. Medicine and science helped to liberate people with disabilities from unhelpful and abusive superstitions and religious interpretations of disability and illness, but face the same challenge as 'faith' once did when they become the dominant, and controlling, world view. People with disabilities and their families now say, 'I am not just patient or client but also citizen, believer, artist, neighbour and member'. The current challenge to this polarity is whether science can be 'scientific enough' to explore the world of faith and spirituality, as it has begun to do, and whether Religion can be 'faithful enough' to see the validity of scientific perspectives. Albert Einstein's injunction that 'science without religion is crippled, and religion without science is blind' makes that point powerfully and, in the context of this conference, uses metaphors of disability in fascinating ways.

Another version of this polarity is that of 'State' or 'Church', or 'secular' versus 'religious'. It is a polarity where boundaries once built to protect and guide can become barriers to partnership, collaboration and inclusion: in other words, forces that exclude that rather than embrace.

Segregation or integration/inclusion

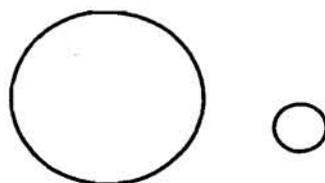
The myth of inclusion — as Miroslav Volf and Australians Jayne Clapton (Clapton 1999) and Elizabeth Hastings all say — is based on a premise that it is all right to exclude. Phillip Adams, in his tribute last night, reminded us that Elizabeth Hastings said it profoundly and simply when she said: 'I was already created *in* by God. What right have others to exclude me?' (Hastings 1995).

I once heard my friend Parker Palmer say this another way when he noted some of the axioms of community life that come out of intentional religious communities like monasteries and religious orders. These were, admittedly, his own versions: 'The first rule of community is: it is the place where the person we would rather not be around *is*'; 'The second is that just as soon as that person leaves, someone else will automatically take their place'. The point is simply that our boundary lines for community, in God's eyes, are just too small.

Victim or hero

People with disabilities and their families are far too often caught between an identity of 'victim' or an identity as 'hero'. You are the 'poor disabled person' or the 'supercrip': the one who has overcome his or her disability. Families face the same extremes, between pit or pedestal.

In a theological framework, the one who is different can become the scapegoat or the saviour. Look at this by drawing two circles: one larger; the other much smaller and on the outside.



If we think of the smaller circle as the person with disability, or the stranger, on the outside of the wider circle, or community, then far too often that stranger becomes the one who bears the iniquities of the community (as in the witches at Salem in the U.S.): the one who raises the

questions, fears, and insecurities at the heart of the wider community. At the opposite extreme, the stranger can be the saviour: the one who is seen as the rescuer of another person or a community at peril.

Perhaps you have heard the old mind twister about the power of expectations to shape human behaviour: 'I am not who I think I am. I am not who you think I am. I often am who I think you think I am'. That is about the power of others' expectations to shape us. There is a reverse power that impacts how we see because of what we project out; the way we might use the 'other' to define ourselves in a process of 'over-against'. The corollary mind twister would be 'You are not who you think you are. You are not who I think you are. You are often who I think you are in order for me to be (or not be) the person who I think I am'.

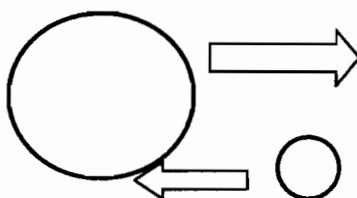
The extremes, or polarities, still beg our own answer to the question of identity: naming who we are from the inside out. It is the profound question Moses asked God who dared to call him to lead the Israelites: 'Who do you say that you are?'. To identify how we differ from one another does not have to be the same as exclusion. Finding and claiming who we are is a fundamental part of personal maturity. One of the fascinating parts of Volf's book is the way he looks at gender identity, not as an 'over-against', but an identity as male or female that must be constructed with a sense of 'not without' the other (Volf, pp.167-190). Perhaps we need to construct 'normal' and 'disabled' in the same way.

Evil or good

You know this polarity far too well. It is clearly all over the news in the wake of September 11 — right versus wrong. The only clear antidote I know for people of faith is the injunction I first learned from my Old Testament professor in seminary: 'If you read Scripture and end up feeling self-righteous, then you are reading it wrong'. Volf says it in another profound and powerful way, quoting both Nietzsche: 'The harm the good do is the most harmful harm' (Volf, p.61) and Plantinga: 'At the heart of sin lies the "persistent refusal to tolerate a sense of sin"' (Volf, p.80).

Powerful or oppressed

If the polarity of evil versus good leads to the sin of a false sense of purity, then oppressor/victim ends up with a false understanding of power. Go back to the image of the two circles. We may think we are communicating with one another, but perspectives influenced by size and position often miss each other.



One of the most stirring moments of the last conference in Adelaide was when Michael Lapsley, the keynoter from South Africa, used the quote from Nelson Mandela which says, essentially, that we are more afraid of our gifts and ability than we are of our limits and vulnerabilities.

There is real oppression in the world. That cannot be denied. But liberators too often become oppressors. Victims become abusers. An identity of victim can imprison you and me, as Volf says, within our own narratives. His book explores this dangerous interplay in profound ways.

The events of this past month have clearly reminded me of the challenge we face in this interplay, and of the way that major faith traditions, at best, break down this polarity rather than sanctify it. As I understand my Biblical tradition, we may have been oppressed, and our past and character are certainly shaped by the context of our lives and the actions of others, but we are still each responsible for our actions in the present moment. 'You kept me from doing it!' and 'You made me do it!' are both deadly denials of our power and responsibility.

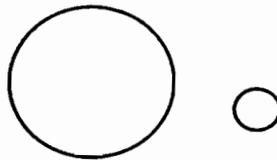
Exclusion or embrace

Again, this is the polarity that Volf explores so effectively. We all know it at the most basic level of our lives. Shutting out my brother or sister is, I know, not right. But we all resist the parental injunction, 'Now just kiss, or hug, and make up'. What is it that allows people to step out of these deadly dances, to keep their particular and unique journey, but also to see themselves from the perspective of others? Volf calls it 'the will to embrace'. I am called not to embrace my enemy and the stranger but to have the will to do so. Truth and justice are not possible without the will to embrace; but the embrace cannot happen till truth is said and justice is done (Volf, pp. 99-163).

PERILS AND PARADOXES

Assume, then, that you and I have that will, as your very presence at this conference would indicate. Assume that we are trying to build conversations, bridges, partnerships, congregations and communities that include everyone. Assume we are trying to move toward one another. One of the strengths of Volf's book is that he points out some of the dangers of a false embrace. There are challenges and issues that get in the way that we have to take seriously.

Let's explore this by a more refined version of a movement I have described in other places. Fr. John Aurelio, a fellow chaplain in New York State residential institutions in the 1970s, once said, in a talk I heard early in my journey, that in face of a person with a disability, 'we' (i.e. 'normal' people) move from fear to pity to anger to love. In the past I have done some thinking and writing about the parallel movement in congregational ministries as a movement of changing prepositions: from no ministry or concern for people with disabilities to ministries 'to' or 'for', to ministries 'with', to ministries 'by' people with disabilities (Gaventa 1986). Going back to using the circles as symbols, let's explore some of the perils of this movement toward one another.



Fear

The first peril is fear, anxiety and/or revulsion. We have to take this seriously, for the fear of the world of disability is a fear of limitation, vulnerability, and one version of the 'stranger in our midst'. Dan Gottlieb, a Ph.D. psychologist in Philadelphia and host of a popular and excellent radio show called 'Voices in the Family', also happens to be quadriplegic. Of course, you would never know that on the radio unless he talked about it. I once heard him, in person, talk about this fear: 'I represent', he said, 'everyone's living nightmare'.

Parker Palmer, in a keynote address at a conference called *Merging Two Worlds*, talked about the impact of the stranger with developmental disability in our community. He outlined how this version of 'stranger' in a so-called 'normal world' challenges and pushes our illusions (i.e. dis-illusions us): the illusion that we know others completely, that we know ourselves fully, that we will escape disability and death, and that we must earn love (Palmer 1986). David Tacey, in his book on transformation in Australia, *The Sacred Edge*, talks about another version of the fear of the 'other' in his discussion of the Australian struggle with indigenous peoples and with a fearful, untameable land (Tacey 1995).

At a practical level, when dealing with congregations, clergy and others, it means that the fear and anxiety aroused in 'typical' people by people with 'disabilities' has to be addressed. The paradox and irony is that clergy and congregations are the ones who feel limited, incapable or, dare we say, 'disabled' when presented with the opportunity of inclusive ministries with people with disabilities. They are the ones who feel like the smaller circle. That is where this peril becomes paradox. Who's disabled in this encounter?

Fix and cure

Embrace, perhaps for people with disabilities and for people without, can mean to fix, change, normalise, or cure. Those can be other versions of conquer, absorb, and/or control. Imagine the larger circle above embracing the smaller. Does it roll over the smaller one, absorb it completely, so that it disappears altogether? If we are working hard to enable people with disabilities to believe in their own capacity and giftedness, then what happens when 'they' do not want to be 'fixed'. What happens when 'they' no longer want to be in the helpee or client role? What happens at such times as when the self-advocates at a national conference in the States on self determination gathered at a plenary session — which they called a 'disability tea party' — and metaphorically threw overboard the parts of the present system that they did not like? One of the participants tossed out a poster saying 'we are not a case, and we don't want to be managed'. What happens when the concept of 'wholeness' as a pastoral and spiritual ideal and therapeutic goal becomes oppressive because by many of the 'normal' standards of the world 'wholeness' is not possible for people with disabilities?

The question is where we recognise the interplay and necessity of borders that identify and proclaim who we are, as well as mark our limits (Gaventa 1986). Those also become boundaries: some of which bind us; some of which limit us unnecessarily; some of which are utterly necessary. Love, according to the poet Rilke, is not the embrace that absorbs but, rather, 'two solitudes that border, protect and salute one another'. Gordon Hilsman, in a short article on spiritual assessments, resurrected the word 'assessment' for me when he noted that its Latin roots are words that mean 'sit' and 'next to' (Hilsman 1997). Far too often we use that word to mean 'objectify and hold at arm's length', or to assess in order to 'fix' or 'control'.

Thus, that peril leads to a second paradox. As Miroslav Volf points out, the second step in the drama of embrace, after the open arms, is not the hug but a 'waiting' or putting the arms down and stepping back: a willingness to give space to the other, and to recognise that there may be crucial issues of truth and justice that the will to embrace must first address before a genuine embrace can happen. Even more paradoxically, a true embrace only comes with the willingness to let go after a uniting and embrace has happened (Volf, pp.140-147).

Anger

In Fr. Aurelio's movements, anger is when we move beyond pity and begin to see and hear the injustice, prejudice and struggle faced by another with a disability. 'We' then get angry with and for them. One difficulty with this is that 'we' can become rescuers or self-proclaimed prophets.

Volf explores this much further when he looks at our temptation to hold onto anger and become self-proclaimed agents of God's vengeance. The paradox is to hold onto the passion that calls and commits us to action, but also to be ready at any moment to repent and/or forgive. Vengeance may be understandable, but is not defensible. Forgiveness flounders, as Volf says, 'because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners'. The challenge of the Psalms, as he notes, is that 'rage belongs before God' (Volf, p.124). Repentance and forgiveness are the spiritual dramas that allow each of us to open the boundaries that define and protect us and give space to the possibility of embrace and reconciliation.

Gift

Beyond anger is a recognition of gift: the ways that people give to us just as we seek to help and/or embrace them. We are called to recognise not just the gifts in each other but the mutuality between us, and our interdependence on each other's gifts. Part of the challenge is putting the last first; that is, recognising, affirming, and using the gifts of people who were previously defined only in terms of needs and deficits. That has been the central theme in 'person centred planning'. The paradox, of course, is that one of the best ways to help people in need, and certainly to build inclusive communities, is to work from their strengths and gifts.

A further challenge for modern professionals, both clergy and human services, is to recognise the ways that we receive from those to whom we give; that is, the mutuality of the relationship (Frank 1995). But the task does not stop there. Helping the last to be first is crucial, but the reverse is even harder; that is, learning as professionals and those with power to get out of the way and put the first last (Chambers 1998). What are we as professional care-givers called to give up? The first 'professionals' were those who professed vows of chastity and poverty for the sake of clarity about their call, motivation and trustworthiness in a religious order. Most 'professionals' these days have no desire to do that, but the challenge may be how we give up other forms of power — assessment, planning, programs and purse-strings — and follow more carefully where people want to go; not where we think they should. Hence, we have another paradox. We who have said, 'Come to us because we know how to deal with your needs', now have to learn, as we help build community, to give that knowledge away.

Finally, there may be a recognition not just of gift but of call; that is, the question is not how 'we' are called to help or embrace 'others', but how all of us, people with and without disabilities, are given gifts and called to respond to the immeasurable gift and challenge offered to us in the embrace of a forgiving and loving God.

These perils and paradoxes are powerful forces. We need to take them into account in that period between the will to embrace and the embrace itself. There is the time when we wait and the space when we step back, listen, learn, and take great care that our desire to embrace is mutual, and the act not one of oppression or submission.

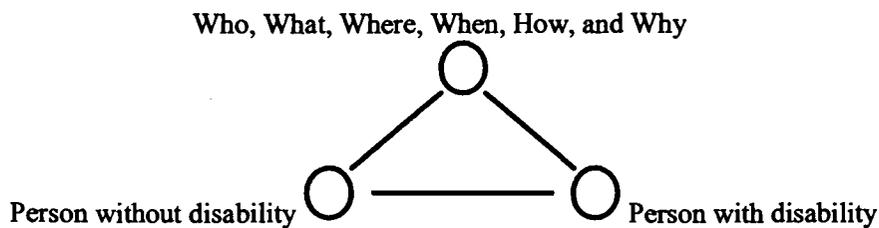
THE THIRD WAY: BEYOND EXCLUSION OR EMBRACE

Those perils are another way of saying that sometimes the best way to connect two points is not a straight line. What is the third thing that helps people step out of themselves to welcome the other? There is, in pastoral care, an old phrase that sums up the sacredness of meeting another in relationship: 'one meets another in the presence of a Third'.

My colleague who works with me as co-editor of the *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*, Dr. David Coulter, a paediatric neurologist, talks about three ways of looking at another. My first challenge, he says, is to see the other for themselves or to see them as they see themselves, through their eyes. The second is to see the other through my eyes; that is, what would I think or feel if I were in their place or position. The third is to try and look through God's eyes (Coulter 2001).

As I have worked at interpreting my experience and that of others who do what seems to me the most creative work in inclusive ministries and community building, the strategies of building these pathways (or in Aussie, 'footpaths') between two people or two worlds, on which the will to embrace needs to move organise themselves in my rather simplistic mind by a series of 'third ways'. What are they? Let me summarise them, and move from our metaphor of circles, to triangles.

The Third Ways



The Who?

The first is the key role of intermediary in bridging the gap between exclusion and embrace: the one who facilitates the connections in creative ways. David Schwartz (1996), in his book *Who Cares? Rediscovering Community*, calls such people the 'askers'. Who are the people in a congregation or community who know everyone and are willing to ask? Can we as professionals learn to be askers; acknowledging our own lack of knowledge when it comes to activating the will and capacity to embrace in any given community. John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien talk about the role of the asker when they say that the quality of anyone's life, particularly for people with disabilities, depends on the quality of their introductions and their invitations (O'Brien and O'Brien 1996). How are people introduced to one another? Where do people get invited? Miroslav Volf asks whether we are bridge-builders or bystanders. Both have an impact. The question is what kind of impact we want to have.

The What?

What is it that connects two people? It has to be something beyond their oversimplified identity, beyond the polarities of 'disabled' or 'normal', 'good' or 'bad', and 'victim' or 'hero'. What is the strength or interest that draws people together, and leads to people relating out of shared interests or concerns, mutual capacity and abundance of potential rather than out of presumed limitation or projected fear?

One example I commonly use is about an interest or strength no one would ever use to describe me. Suppose, for example, there was a person with a disability of one kind or another, but say, intellectual disability, who had few community connections and friends, but loved opera. As an 'asker', I could take the position of trying to recruit some volunteers to befriend this person, which may or may not work and sets up an imbalance of giver and receiver at the very beginning.

The biggest hurdle I may have is convincing others that they have something to offer this person with a disability. But if I decided to work from his passion and love, then I would go looking for other opera lovers, and work with an introduction or invitation that goes like this: 'I have a client (better yet, 'I know a person named John') with whom I work who loves opera and never gets to enjoy it with others or share that passion. Is there a way you could help us with that?'. The appeal is to strength and interest of one person to strength and interest, but untapped, of another.

Ric Thompson, a participant at this conference whom I just met, told me another story that is even better ... and real. He was working with a man with severe cerebral palsy who lived in a nursing home and who had no community connections. As Ric got to know him, it was clear what his interests were. His walls were covered with pictures of Harley Davidsons and naked women. Ric hinted that if they worked from his interests they might have to prioritise; but that was not particularly appealing to the man with CP. I do not know the entire story, but Ric, the asker, got him connected to a Harley Davidson biker group. After getting to know him, they changed their by-laws to make him an honorary member (you were supposed to own and drive a bike). After a number of years he died. At his funeral, a procession of bikers appeared and not only participated but led the way, took over the procession, and also carried him to his grave. That would never have happened had the initial 'what' focus been on the cerebral palsy.

'Community building', John McKnight and John Kretzmann say, 'does not happen from the outside in, but the inside out, and only from a focus on gifts and capacity, rather than limits or weaknesses' (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Any congregation, any organisation, any corporation which is successful and strong becomes so by focusing on the capacity and gifts that everyone can contribute; not on their weaknesses, sins and limitations.

The Where?

What are the third places (Schwartz 1996) where people already come together and encounter each other: that shared public space where the stranger might gradually become the fixture and then the acquaintance and then the friend? That third place, the community place, might be the neighbourhood church or synagogue or mosque, or it might be the neighbourhood pub, the sports arena, the shopping mall, the village square, the local coffee shop where all the gossip is heard, the post office, the sports field, or the local park. What and where are the third places in your lives, or in the lives of your community? Where are we, as Parker Palmer says in the title of his early book, in public places where we are in 'the company of strangers'? These are places where everyone has the right to be and places which nurture the possibility of building connections and relationships based on other things that they share.

The When?

What are the shared activities, the common services, the hobbies, the public functions, the community events, the cultural celebrations, the annual festivals, the religious and secular rituals that draw people together? When do they happen? Is it the community 'work day', the charity celebration and fundraiser in which everyone can participate? Is it just the activity of walking a dog and having it be the social magnet that introduces you to the stranger on your street (Pancsofar 1998)? Is it the community tragedy that draws people out toward one another, as we have witnessed in miraculous and awesome ways in the wake of September 11? Or is it the community passion, as I read in the newspaper ad I saw for the MCG the last time I was here, acted out in the stadium full of Melbourne Demon fans, purporting to be the place where real Sunday worship happens?

The How?

Enter the role of the community guide, the job coach, the church coach in a process of leading and accompanying others into a strange and new land, or helping others reach a desired goal or vision. Coaching others is far different than professional care, for it is learning to give our knowledge and power away, rather than asking people just to come to you. And it is learning how to get out of the way.

There are some key parts of coaching and guiding which make it very different than assessing and treating. It is finding the values, vision and symbols that capture imagination and dreams. It is telling the stories that have inspired you and may inspire others. It is helping others discover their capacity to flourish in this new land or relationship, rather than doing it your way. And it is celebrating, always celebrating, looking for and believing in the capacity of each person and team and organisation and congregation to make new connections, build new pathways, and touch each other in ways that transform both individuals and communities (Gaventa 2001).

The Why?

Assuming all of those skills are there, all the third ways, the question that remains is the 'why'. What calls people on those journeys and pathways? What creates, in Volf's term, the will to embrace? My hope is that the days of this conference will be full of discussions about that central question, but let me pose several 'whys', all of which bring us back to the central and crucial roles of spirituality and theology in conversations about exclusion, embrace and disability.

The first is our values and vision. What kind of civic society or community do we want to be? What kind of people do we want to be? ... what kind of congregation? Is it the civic dream of freedom for everyone? Is it the Australian vision of a society in which everyone has a 'fair go'? Days like September 11 push that question very hard for many of us. In religious or spiritual terms, we say, for example, that we recognise and affirm the image of God in every person. What do we see? Do we believe, as a saying from the Middle Ages states, that 'in front of every person there is a host of angels saying, "Make way for the image of God, make way for the image of God" '? And what kind of 'gathered' or 'connected' people of God do we want to be?

The second is that the will to embrace is another variation on the ancient call of many of the major faith traditions' call to hospitality, and to the importance of welcoming the stranger, not because of what the host might do for the stranger but because of the gift that the stranger brings to the host. Parker Palmer brought his work on community and hospitality to the stranger into the 'world' of disability for the first time at the Merging Two Worlds Conference in Rochester in 1986. He noted that the call to hospitality and to welcome is founded on three principles besides or beyond the call to welcome the stranger in the same way that God has done for us. They are:

- Self-preservation: if the world is not safe for strangers, it is not safe for me. I am always someone else's stranger.
- The honouring of diversity and its multiple gifts to our experience of the dimensions of being human. We welcome the stranger, in Parker's opinion, because the stranger saves us from one of the worst possibilities of modern life: the boredom of homogeneity.
- We need many eyes to see the truth; we might add, 'many senses'. There are gifts of knowing, seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, learning, moving, speaking and loving in many different ways that come from the will to embrace the stranger in the world of disability and/or difference (Palmer 1986).

The third 'why?' is the call of faith — the call of spirituality — the response in each of our religious and spiritual traditions to the experience of the sacred and holy in our lives, and the enduring tasks of finding, shaping and reinterpreting meaning in the events of our lives and journeys. The sense of vocation and calling is that which we must do because of who we have found ourselves to be. That call is a question and challenge, not for how 'we' (however you define that) embrace the 'other', but for how we and the other together respond to the call to service, discipleship, faithfulness, servant-hood, mitzvoth, mindfulness ... the call to move beyond ourselves on both an outward and inward journey. We are called to find and respond to the truths that have been given to us. My truth may not be your truth, but in the journey together we may move from polarities that exclude to truths that move toward embrace. Parker Palmer (1983), in *To Know as We Are Known: The Spirituality of Education*, notes that the root word of 'truth' is in fact the same as 'troth'. In that process of shared call, we may become connected, each sharing from gift and need, moving towards real love and relationship, or a *be-trothal* to one another.

Finally, the fourth 'why' is the recovery of wonder and mystery, and the release and redemption of our illusions of control. Huston Smith, the wise and elderly chronicler of the major faith traditions of the world, said it best last year in a keynote address at the National Conference of the Interfaith Caregivers Alliance in the US. He used the metaphor of an island: 'As the shorelines of our knowledge expand, the boundaries of our relationship with the unknown and wonder grow even longer'. It is that ongoing experience with mystery and the holy that calls us, compels us, invites us, and pushes us to the embrace of the other. I don't know who you are; you don't know who I am. And we don't know who we can be, or are called to be, together. One plus one, as we begin to connect in one or more experiences of community or congregation, often feels like three or more. 'Where two or three are gathered, there I am in the midst of them also.' (Matthew 18:20)

This 'why' is where I would agree with David Tacey in that you, Australia, have a real gift to give to the world by virtue of being the world's biggest island. You are the land with the history of enchantment and dreaming; the land where assumptions of order, control and conquer meet the boundless spirit of a mysterious space and an eternal sky. You began as a people who were excluded. You have your own experience of the polarities that exclude, the dangers of the excluded becoming the excluders, the challenge of forgiveness, and the perils and paradoxes of reconciliation and embrace. That hard work, the gift of learning from honest recognition and remembering, can be a footpath for others in our respective journeys that lead beyond the options of unjust exclusion and unloving embrace.

For that gift and the gift of this conference to that ongoing dialogue — 'good on yer!'

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