



REFLECTION

Inclusion, Power and Cosmology: Thoughts on Some Principles for Engaging with People on the Margins

The King will say to those on his right: 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you went to see me'.

Then the upright will ask him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?' The King will answer, "Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to one of the least, to my brothers, you did it to me." - Matthew 25 : 34-39

How do we prepare ourselves to start working in programmes that engage with people and communities experiencing extreme poverty and marginalisation?

Jesus' teaching as outlined in Matthew above appears quite straightforward and unequivocal; go out and give food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, clothing to those without, spend time with those isolated by sickness or imprisonment and give welcome to strangers. Why is this formula for action so important?

- It is Other focused – It calls us to an inclusive orientation or stance and one that is opposed to exclusion.
- It is about restoring imbalance and injustice – those who are on the edges or outside of the community are brought back in by being given their entitled share of its common good.
- It is about directly engaging with Jesus as, in this passage and in so many others throughout the gospels, He clearly identifies himself with those who are isolated, vulnerable, hungry and powerless.
- It elevates the status of the excluded Other because this is the group with whom Jesus sees himself belonging – 'you do it to me, "one of the least, to my brothers"'.

Most humans do not need to be taught by Jesus to be charitable to others in need. Our own intrinsic goodness, which is an innate part of our human nature, impels us to respond when we see or encounter others suffering. Yet simultaneously, within this same human nature is the capacity to inflict great cruelty and suffering on those who we have excluded from our common good community. Those of us who don't consciously inflict great cruelty and

suffering on others possess the capacity to ‘not see’ and ‘not engage with’ the suffering of the excluded Other.

Where Jesus’ teaching is important for us within the Christian narrative is that He provides the means whereby, through Him, we can practice the transformative discipline of adopting an inclusive orientation or stance. This practice will sharpen our response to the excluded Other and open our vision to identify and engage with exclusion wherever it exists. One other very significant piece of Jesus’ teaching about the excluded Other is that they are given full status with the community from where they are excluded or are on the margins of. Their poverty and apparent powerlessness does not diminish their humanity, nor their status within the community.

Power Relationships in Helping Others

How we engage with people experiencing extreme poverty and marginalisation is critical. Similarly, how our engagement is experienced by the Other is just as critical. Being an individual or organisation with resources to help an Other bestows power and it is a power that does not go away simply because we don’t want to claim it or recognise it. It exists and is experienced by those without it regardless of our own intentions or motives. How we engage with the Other experiencing poverty and how we share this power are inextricably bound up.

To share power with an Other requires a quality of relationship that encompasses characteristics from concepts such as, humility, respect, dignity, equality, inclusion and interdependence. When a relationship begins between a helper and someone being helped it begins with a power differential that will be experienced by the ‘helped’. This power differential will continue until the ‘helper’ applies the discipline or stance that can shape the relationship with these characteristics and power can begin to be shared. A power sharing relationship requires a structural, as well as an individual discipline or stance.

The Practice of Helping. Charity, Alms Giving

The giving of money, food or goods to the ‘needy’ reflect a generosity of spirit, a recognition that others are suffering, that acts to alleviate this suffering are required and that these are good acts for individuals or the community to be involved in. Generally these are acts that bring about some temporary relief to the suffering of the Other, but, by themselves they tend to not address any of the complex reasons why an individual or recipient group needs help or is suffering. Unfortunately when people give help to an Other without paying sufficient attention to the power relationship they are engaged in, they can, unconsciously perhaps, cause a disconnect between themselves and the one who is receiving their help. The result of this disconnect will often be an increased powerlessness and a lowering of status and esteem of those “helped”.

Power Relationships, Spirituality and Cosmology

Each of us has a sense of where our own selves are positioned in relationship with others; those intimately close to us, those within our common good community and those on the

edge or excluded from this community. This sense is informed by our own spirituality and the dominant cosmology shared by our community. Historically people have practiced charity to others out of an innate human goodness that wants to respond to others in need. Many with a religious ethic bring to their charitable practice a dynamic or purpose that may also be about participating in a Divine plan or exercising their own relationship with their God/s or religious body of beliefs and practice.

From a Christian point of view the dominant Cosmology for the last four to five centuries evolved towards an individualistic focus. Each person's relationship with God was important and societies and economies evolved to reflect democratic ways for individuals to live and work together within a mutual, or common good community. Responsibility focused on the individual. Generally a sense of justice and a concern for others less fortunate is the motivation to help the marginalised Other, but fundamentally, any individuals that fell to the margins of the common good community, or were outside of it all together, were there by their own responsibility.

This is a too simplistic statement to adequately reflect the many rationales that place responsibility more on the marginalised than the community - rationales such as Divine will, or each person's situation reflecting a falling in or out of God's grace or favour. The thrust of such a statement was that in an individualistic cosmology it is generally arbitrary whether the community picks up any responsibility for the marginalisation or exclusion of any of its individual members. If there is truth in this, then the very act of choosing to help an Other becomes a discretionary act based on having the power of choice.

Within the evolving cosmology of today there is a shift from an individualistic focus towards an awareness of all of creation being inter-connected and inter-dependent. As this awareness gains ascendancy in our community's consciousness there will be greater awareness of our whole-of-community's responsibility for those of us who are suffering and marginalised. The response to help them shifts from being an arbitrary choice towards being an imperative, as their suffering or marginalisation mirrors our own diminishment. Within an inter-dependent, inter-connected cosmology we are all 'in it together' and if some of us have our capability to thrive, to live fully, reduced, so do we all. If the capability to thrive within parts of the eco-system within which we live- our Earth, is reduced, all of us will experience the consequences eventually.

The words of Christ in Matt 25: 39, quoted above, jump out in relief when read from this evolving cosmology consciousness:

"Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to one of the least, to my brothers, you did it to me."

As Christ identifies himself with those who are isolated, vulnerable, hungry and powerless, so do all of us and the status of the excluded and suffering Other is elevated towards a Christ -like level because these are who He identifies with. This is the place of radical responsibility for the Other.

NEWS

Eco-News From Around the Edmund Rice Network

On the Road to Copenhagen

Br Moy Hitchen has written to all Congregational Leadership teams, on behalf of Edmund Rice International, urging them to lobby their national politicians to achieve a 25 – 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, and to commit to this at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The suggestion has also been put forward as a step towards Copenhagen that members of the Edmund Rice Network be encouraged to decide on a specific reduction in their carbon footprint in the coming month – shorter showers, less meat, fewer lights, more walking, are some options!

Finding Local Markets for Food

It takes some time, and even research (Google helps!), but most of us can find a market near us, selling local produce. This lets us support local growers, and saves the earth the damage done by large scale transport of food and goods. We don't burn the carbon based fuels, we don't use the high energy machines, and we get fresher food.

Climate Change Just Got Nastier

If threatened species and ecosystems disappearing are not damage enough, recent research in Geneva has highlighted the fact that many human rights are also threatened by Climate Change.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." (article 25(1))

These fundamental rights are denied to the 35 million people already displaced ('migrants') because of Climate Change.

Those of us struggling to 'Make Poverty History' or to implement the Millennium Development Goals know our job has just got harder. At least, with Climate Change, we know who's responsible, and we know what to do about it. Now, who's blocking the process? – **Br Brian Bond**

Edmund Rice International Online Course

Like to learn more about how you can take effective action for justice at a global level? Want to know more about the work of Edmund Rice International (ERI) and how you can be part of it?

Then why not sign up for the ERI online course which aims to raise awareness about more effective global action for justice at <http://erisj.org.au/course/> - no prior knowledge is assumed, and whilst it is meant to be informative and interesting it is not an academic course. Best of all it is free and you can work through the material at your own pace.

It is designed for busy people who would like a basic understanding of how organisations such as ERI can work within the UN system to bring about improved outcomes for the most vulnerable people on our planet and for our earth itself.

The course is divided into eight topics containing material for reading and reflection, some questions for discussion and an opportunity for chat with like-minded people around the world – (an optional feature), some suggestions and guidelines for engaging in a simple exercise in advocacy of your own choosing and some quizzes to test your own understanding – (there are no marks or grades associated with the course).

You are welcome to sign up and work through the course individually (each topic takes about two hours to work through) or better still to form a group and work through it together! – **Br Brian Bond**

ERC Group Presents Petition on Climate Change

Community members concerned about the impact of climate change have presented a petition to the Member for Lowe, John Murphy, calling on the Australian Government to lead a campaign of strong and effective action at the upcoming climate change negotiations in Copenhagen.

Members of a group that meets regularly at the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education at Homebush West organised the petition and collected more than 800 signatures in just over one month.

ERC worker and group coordinator Leonie Cornell said the response to the petition in such a short time from ordinary people in churches, businesses, families and neighbourhood communities shows that voters are looking for strong leadership from all sides of politics.

“As well as advocating for a collective emissions reduction target for rich countries of at least 4 percent, we believe Australia and other developed nations need to compensate developing countries for the devastating impacts of climate change,” Leonie Cornell said.

A policy report from the Global Carbon Project released this month states that Carbon emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production in 2008 were 8.7 Gt C, 41 percent higher than in 1990 (Kyoto Protocol base year). Developed countries are still leading

carbon emissions on a per capita basis, and Australia is the highest emitter on a per capita level. <http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbonbudget>

“We’ve delivered this petition to the Member for Lowe, the Hon John Murphy, but we are aware the signatures represent many more members of the Australian community across many electorates.

As Parliament resumes for its last session before Copenhagen, we hope that the wishes of this large section of the community are taken into account before compromising on any targets or carbon trading schemes.

“There should be no more waiting for others to come onboard. We call on the Australian Government to act now and take a leadership role at the negotiations on climate change in Copenhagen.”

Goulburn History Book

As noted in the last edition of *Oceania Updates*, a history of St Patrick’s College, Goulburn has won the Community and Regional History Prize at the NSW Premier’s History Awards. Former college teacher, David Bollen’s book *Up on the Hill* provides a detailed and engaging history of the college from its foundation in 1874 through to its closure in 1999, won the \$15,000 prize.

Copies of the book are available for \$59.95 plus postage (not \$49.95 as previously reported) from the Oceania Support Centre in Balmain on +61 (0)2 9810 3922 or by email: mabourke@edmundrice.org

Employee Assistance Program

Oceania Province employees in Australia and New Zealand are reminded of the free, voluntary and confidential Employee Assistance Program available.

Access Programs has been selected by the Province to assist staff when personal, family or work issues are impacting on a person’s well being or quality of life.

Access Programs are independent of the Province and do not disclose information to the Province unless requested. They can be contacted by telephone 24 hours a day and direct counselling is available in a variety of locations, inside and outside of work hours.

Some common issues people seek assistance for are: relationship and family problems; grief and loss; conflict with fellow workers; gambling; alcohol and drug use; stress and emotional distress.

Access Programs can be contacted in Australia on **1800 81 87 28** and in New Zealand on **0800 327 669**. Further information can also be found at www.accesspl.com.au

EVENTS

(Brisbane) - Summer Ecological Dialogue – December 7

The vision from Munnar calls us to open up connection with the natural world and “...explore the Mystery of God in all Creation”..... including the unique creation that we are ourselves.

What better place to do that than in the bush? "Going bush" is uniquely Australian term that might mean going to the mountains, the outback or even the beach. At its essence it strongly implies leaving the built environment and heading into Nature, to live a little more simply and reconnect with landscapes that feed our spirit.

Any call to open up connection with the natural world would also invite us to be prepared to adjust our speed to match that of Nature. This is when the healing gift of Nature starts to do its magic work. This healing is on offer to us all, on standby if you like, ready for us to connect and be absorbed in the wonder, mystery and beauty of God's Earth Creation.

If you have been feeling a bit frazzled lately, out of touch with your life's purpose, a little short of joy or in need of inspiration, you are invited to join Gerard Keating and Terry Hitzke on the latest Ecological Dialogue, to be conducted at Mount Glorious on the afternoon of Monday December 7 commencing at 3 pm and finishing with refreshments, taking in the sunset at Westridge Outlook at 7 pm.

During this time we will journey through rainforest and take the time to become still and open our five senses to the richness and diversity of Mother Nature and enter into your own personal dialogue with special places, energies and creatures that resonate a deeper and true connection to what is natural inside you. You will have time to walk, talk, sit, share wisdom and begin to build a connection with Nature that can nurture your spirit and provide a balancing still point to our often densely packed lives.

RSVP for the December 7 Summer Ecological Dialogue to gikeating@emdundrice.org by November 30 2009. There will be a cost to attend this dialogue.

(Canberra) – Ageing and Spirituality: Resistance, Resilience and Change

The fifth National Conference of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies will be held in Canberra from September 28 to October 1 2010.

Registrations are now being accepted and further information can be found at www.centreforageing.org.au

OCEANIA UPDATES

Oceania Updates is distributed by email every fortnight to Brothers, members of the wider Edmund Rice Network (ERN) and interested groups and individuals. Its purpose is

to provide regular news and information on the Oceania Province, its people, places and happenings as well as on Congregation issues.

Please send any material for *Oceania Updates* to the Province Communications Manager, Tom Cranitch at tacranitch@edmundrice.org or +61 (0)7 3261 9675.