

“Meditation and Peacebuilding.” In preparation for the seminar to be held at trinity college, Melbourne, Friday June 16 2023.

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A personal word of introduction:

In recent years I have tried to focus on what I think is most important for my grandchildren and their generation.

This has led to a focus on how meditation can help peacebuilding.

Here are some thoughts:

*The practice of meditation has made me more peaceful than would otherwise have been the case.

From Jesus, I know that peace is both a beautiful divine gift and our responsibility.

Gifted with peace, we are called to be peace-makers.

Meditation has helped me receive and dwell better in God's peace.

Meditation has helped me be more attentive to what I think about and about what I let influence my thinking. Meditation therefore gives me a greater freedom of awareness with which to choose what words and actions come from my thoughts. Meditation helps me to better build peace in daily life.

But does this mean I am serene?

Meditation, as part of my spiritual practice, also means I see and feel life's beauty and pain more intensely.

"When it comes to the suffering of innocents, this intensity is ...some days, unbearable..

*Given my vocation, I take the funerals of people who have some belief in God and therefore some heavenly expectation.

Nonetheless they mostly have quite liked it here and would have been quite happy to stay longer.

I took such a funeral last week. This dear man would have liked a few more good bottles of wine with family and old friends. Some more sensual affection. Time to finish various projects. Give the family a few more adventures. Travel places he hadn't seen. Watch a bit more footy. Stare at the stars... Hypnotise kangaroos...He liked it here.

Juxtapose my brief, folksy appreciation of this once-off adventure called life on earth with the cruel folly of suffering caused this week by violence.... Think of those with power to kill in Russia, Myanmar, many places. Think 'domestic violence'; school-age kids with large knives in nearby suburbs.

All these unnecessary and premature deaths of real people are because there is no sustained peacebuilding culture which is shaping relationships, local, national and international.

What we are starting here today is SO important!

Thinking about what is most needed by my grandchildren's generation has led me into some related illumination, particularly as regards the complex matter of 'forgiveness'.

A simple diagram from our 'Forgiveness: A Study Guide' helps enunciate the choice as regards peacebuilding.

https://cdn.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3944378/2-FINAL-Forgiveness-A-Study-Guide-E-book.pdf

After an experience of 'Hurt, Harm or Loss', in which direction do we travel?

A culture of violence persists for so long as the choice to retaliate and seek revenge persists and is normalised, legitimated by the prevailing culture.

Changing a culture is demanding. There are oppositional forces; vested interests..

That is obvious in terms of war and militarism but is true at every level of human relationships.

A friend was appointed to a position to do "Cultural Change" and "Cultural Engagement". He was invited to a dinner with the Board which had appointed him, following their Strategic Planning process.

Welcoming him the Chair of the Board said: "Of course none of us here think there is anything wrong with the culture. We like things as they are!"

Good luck!

As the saying goes: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast!"

My friend persisted in that organisation, notwithstanding this unpromising start!

He built a team that created a much healthier culture- more forgiving; more peaceful.

But it took him the best years of his vocational life. And is still a vulnerable achievement.

Creating a 'peacebuilding culture' requires so much persistence and so much imagination!

A sacred imagination, in fact, in the abiding Holy Spirit.

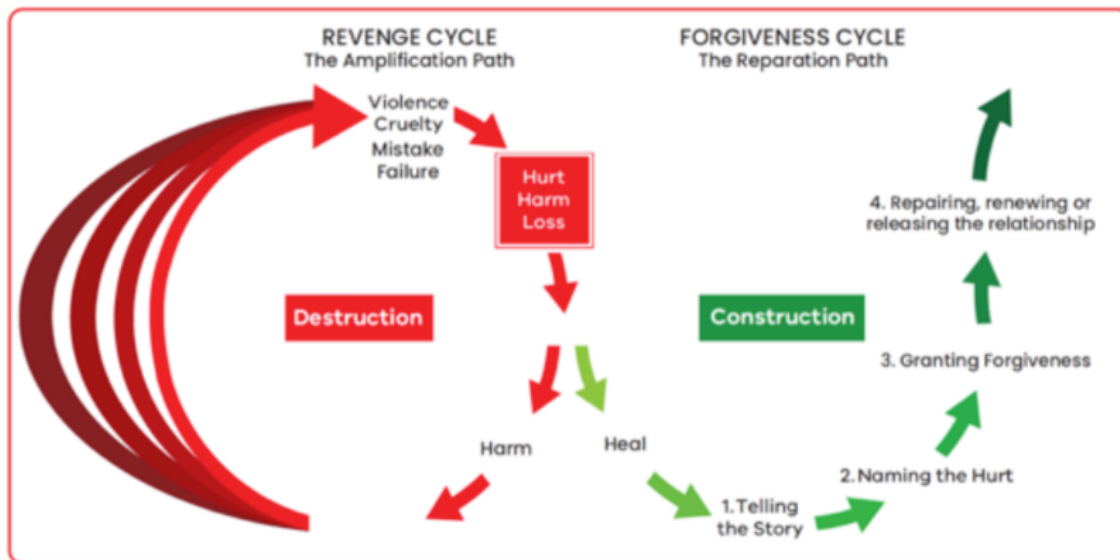
SACRED IMAGININGS:

So, in this context, some elaborations as regards "Sacred Imaginings":

There is a saying that if you can imagine something it can become real.

There are many versions. "If you can imagine it, you can create it." [William Arthur Ward].

I imagine the wisdom of our Meditative practices and our various Retreat cultures coming to shape how national and international leaders soon do their meetings!



Yes, I can imagine the basic learnings we have acquired, as a human family, being better practiced in international affairs and at our local level. In fact, becoming normative! Can we imagine this together?

What are some of these learnings which we know help with the choice to heal and to create better relationships after times of 'hurt, harm and loss'?

Here is a short list of things we know do help with the telling of stories, the healing of relationships and the planning together of a better future:

- *Gather people in a safe and a beautiful place.
- *After initial hospitality, offer times of silent meditation.
- *Conversations thereafter that help people get to know each other. Both the public self and the private self. Slowly, carefully...
- *Meals made and shared together. 'Peace Meals.'
- *Careful listening and patient dialogue, which utilises all we know about quality dialogue. For example- Don't interrupt; ask open questions if you are not sure what the other person means; keep confidences so as to build trust; be attentive to one's tone of voice so as to invite rather than close down a conversation. Be patient with each other because some things are hard to say.

*Patient, yes, right from the start. Not rushing in from other intense activities and with a predetermined departure time so that the quality of listening and dialogue are therefore impacted by these arbitrary, pre-set timelines. [Our practiced respect for what is needed for healing and for a better future together, tells the story of how much the relationships involved actually mean to us. If we don't give this proper time and attention, what does this say about our priorities? Last week we saw the two senior Generals of the U.S and of the CCP's huge military regimes exchange a hurried handshake across a table in a crowded room. It was reported as the first time these two men had ever met. They have no relationship and yet, even inadvertently, could destroy us all.. any day.]

*Make absolutely sure that time is given to manage mistakes and to clarify misunderstandings.' Let none come to you and go away sad', prayed Alcuin for those in leadership about 800 AD.

*Give time for informal conversations, 'yarning' ..making sure every voice can be heard; every contribution is received in a respectful atmosphere and that no one feels less important.

*Let there be laughter; Humour; Unexpected new friendships..

*More meditation. Meditation beginning and ending sessions.

*Ensure space is given, before the end and in this respectful, safe and gracious setting so that life-giving, peacebuilding next steps can emerge.

*Celebrate and embrace these 'next steps' as the fruit of this time of togetherness. Celebrate that when everyone leaves there IS a better future and we all feel we are part of it!

BUT

Without such a 'Peacebuilding Culture' in place we see what we see.

*The competitive, often hostile, 'us versus them' culture of nation state rivalries, is currently producing, for example, terrifying arms races, the opportunity cost of which is causing more of the poor to starve.. Starved of basic necessities. Starved of education to ensure their God given gifts can be offered in the dignity of work. Starving.. <https://www.wfp.org/news/increasing-risk-hunger-hotspot-areas-sudan-crisis-spills-over-subregion-and-el-nino-looms>

*And again, we have a plan, the Paris Agreement, to contain the risk of catastrophic climate change, but we do not yet have the quality of international cooperation needed to implement this plan. The next UNCOP in Dubai this December will be the 28th. On the best available current information it is hard to feel it will achieve what is crucial.

*And, relatedly, we have international leaders, who come out of this hostile culture of non-meeting and who are causing terrible suffering. *In our world of sacred imaginings, it is hard yet to picture Mr Putin; Mr Xi Jinping with Mr Biden and others on retreat, meditating, cooking together, conversing patiently.. finding a way forward that stops the suffering we now see!

So many have died since Russia invaded Ukraine; since the military dictatorship took power in Myanmar.

One could elaborate ..and elaborate.. and elaborate. But the point is clear.

A Peacebuilding culture must emerge from this.

And we CAN see what it looks like. It's how many of us strive to live now.

And we have all had a journey to this place of clarity about what actually works.

But we also see how demanding is the challenge.

On meditation, peace and in conclusion..

As I said at the beginning, Meditation has made me more peaceful than would otherwise have been the case.

Meditation has helped me better appreciate both that peace is a gift from God and also our task and responsibility as peacebuilders.

Meditation, following my beautiful mantra, 'Jesus have mercy', returning to it, has helped me to better receive God's peace as a gift, grace upon grace.

Meditation, by helping me be more aware of my thinking and of what influences my thinking, has helped me make better peacebuilding choices.

That is , in terms of what I think, say and do.

Meditation has aligned me with a childhood wisdom, often seen in the art of today's children, that the world would be a happier place if people stopped hurting each other, killing each other.

Meditation has made things simpler. I yearn that everyone is safe, at peace with each other and able to enjoy this short time called 'life on earth...'

Because this is not the case ,meditation and peacebuilding is an obligation I feel most intensely .

May God bless us with peace and may we shape together today, initiatives that nurture a more meditative, peacebuilding culture.

We can but offer our best. I look at my grandchildren, all under ten, and just know I must..

