

Thomas Berry Manchester

Spring 2024

by Kelvin Ravenscroft © 2024

The Fertile Void



Photograph by Oleksandr Canary Islands

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PROLOGUE:

Welcome to the Spring 2024 Thomas Berry Manchester (TBM) newsletter which presents a series of nine *Reflections* exploring a range of concepts, themes, and ideas from, for example, ecology, education, art, music, and spirituality.

The title of this newsletter is taken from the Psychologist Fritz Perl's concept of 'The Fertile Void'. In *Reflection9* I present some thoughts about how this concept can relate to the series of *Reflections* presented in this newsletter.

To Everything There Is A Season:

I recall as a child listening on the radio to the song 'Turn, Turn, Turn' by the American folk-rock group The Byrds. I appreciated the jingle-jangle sound of Roger McGuinn's Rickenbacker guitar and, as I listened to the lyrics of the song, I recognised that they were quite unlike the themes which were presented in much of the popular music of the time. It was only sometime later that I discovered that the words of the song are based on verses from the Bible's book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes is a deeply fascinating text which ponders and reflects upon the human condition. It can be described as being philosophical in tone, exploring questions of meaning, purpose, and value.

Indeed, Ecclesiastes is an example of those texts in the Hebrew Bible, what Christians term the Old Testament, of what is known as Wisdom literature. Ecclesiastes asks many questions, and it can be thought of as anticipating the very questions that 20th century Existentialist Philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus considered in their works.

As I write, a year has passed since I wrote the Thomas Berry Manchester (TBM) 2023 Spring newsletter. During this period of a year, the seasons have changed, and a series of ecologically related events have been marked and celebrated in the calendar. For example, In the northern hemisphere, 1st September 2023 marked the beginning of meteorological Autumn and the 23rd September 2023 marked the Autumn Equinox. The passing of the seasons, and the end of one season giving way to another, can be regarded as marking periods or points of transition, change, and new developments both in the natural world and in our lives.

I find that my two favourite seasons are Spring and Autumn because they can be thought of as being the opposite of each other, the two sides of a coin. In the northern hemisphere Meteorological Spring began on 1st March 2024, and it brought new life when the trees and plants blossomed and flourished with all their accompanying bursts of colour and Autumn brought a gradual 'letting go' in which the leaves of trees, for example, turned a range of

browns, reds, and copper, before, ultimately, falling to the ground and returning to the Earth.

However, although Autumn was accompanied by what appeared to be a cycle of decay and decomposition, below ground the lives of trees, bushes, and plants were submerged in an almost imperceptible preparation for the eventual and gradual emergence of Spring several months later. In effect, what appeared on the surface to be the manifestation of nature's dying, was a hibernation, a preparation for the future, a slumber preparing for the awakening, the emergence, of new life.

The passing of the seasons not only mark the passage of time and the, often dramatic, changes in the phenomena of the natural world, they also can be regarded as providing us with transition points to which I give the term 'The Space Between'. The Autumn season can often find us turning inwards, reflecting upon our experiences of the Spring and Summer, and we can find ourselves quite naturally pondering upon some of those existential questions that the book of Ecclesiastes presents us with.

1st September 2023 marked a new season in the Christian calendar. It was the beginning of the Season of Creation (also known as Creation Time) which lasted for one month and concluded on the 4th October, the Feast of Saint Francis. The Season of Creation is an international and ecumenical initiative which invites us to prayerfully reflect upon, and consider what practical action can be taken,

and to identify the ways in which we can demonstrate care for our home, planet Earth, and its beautiful and glorious diverse ecologies all forming an interconnected web of life.

In a 2006 symposium considering the River Amazon, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (often termed 'the Green Patriarch') declared:

“Perhaps no other place in the world reflects so apparently or records so articulately both the sacred beauty of creation and the consequences of human choices. A spiritual worldview should inform our concept of creation and define our conduct within this world. This worldview is neither a political plan nor an economic strategy. It is essentially a way of reflecting on what it means to perceive the world through the lens of the soul.”

As we journey through the season of Spring, Earth Day was celebrated on 22nd April 2024. This gave us an opportunity to pause, to take time, as we mindfully experienced, appreciated, and gave thanks for the fragile beauty of the world and we may have located, nurtured, and sustained those places and spaces, those oases of retreat and sustenance, which are a balm for the soul which encourage and inspire us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, the very miracle of being.

6th June 2024 marks World Environment Day and this too can act as a catalyst for reflecting deeply upon the challenges and opportunities humankind faces as we look towards the future and act upon the radical ecological, economic, and political choices

which will have to be made in order to respond to the climate crisis.



Japanese Anemones, Whalley Range Photograph by Kelvin Ravenscroft

The nine *Reflections* in this newsletter are as follows:

One: *Perfect Days*

Two: *Yayoi Kosama: You, Me, and the Balloons*

Three: *A Year in a Field*

Four: *Janusz Korczak and His Meaning for Education for a Civic and Civil Society*

Five: *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*

Six: *Julian of Norwich for Today: All Shall Be Well*

Seven: *The Windhover Contemplation Center*

Eight: *Placid Landscapes*

Nine: *The Fertile Void*

REFLECTION 1: Perfect Days

Ever since my teenage years I have been an enthusiast of cinema. I continue to attend film screenings regularly and, over the past fifty or so years, it is likely that I have viewed hundreds of films of many different genres. It can be suggested that in the age in which we live, a world of rapid growth in digital information and communications technologies, including the phenomenon of the internet and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), we are increasingly living in a time in which visual images are increasingly dominating public discourse. Indeed, by its very nature, cinema is a significant example of a visual medium which, alongside, for example, the dialogue, the music, and, increasingly, computer generated imagery, work together to tell stories, stories which can inspire, excite, challenge and, at times, even disturb us. To borrow a phrase from the theologian Paul Tillich, they can lead to a “shaking of the foundations”, in which we are challenged to see the world, and our lives within the world, in radical new ways. In effect, some films can be regarded as being modern day parables in which the director and the script writer work together to share with us their visions of the world which, at times, gives us much food for thought; they tell stories which invite us to consider and reflect upon our ways of seeing and being in the world and to look at things in new ways.



'Perfect Days' Directed by Wim Wenders
Film Trailer

From the perspective of Christian faith, throughout His ministry, Jesus was a teller of stories. His parables took imagery from everyday experience and environments and located these in the experience of people and places in which the narrative of the parables unfold with a view to challenging the deeply held beliefs, practices, rituals, and ethics of the listener. In effect, Jesus invited those who listened to Him to undergo a conversion, *metanoia*, a turning around of the very foundations of their lives. Jesus, therefore, in His teaching regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God, was opening the eyes of His disciples and all those He encountered,

to live differently, to live in the world embodying the values of the Kingdom.

I have recently viewed a film which can be regarded as being a secular, a non-religious, parable. It is entitled "Perfect Days" and is directed by the acclaimed auteur Wim Wenders. It is set in modern-day Tokyo, Japan and it tells the story of Hirayama, a late middle-aged man whose job is to clean the public toilets of the city. The film shows us the structure, the routines, and the rhythms of Hirayama's daily life. Each morning, he awakes, puts on his overalls, attentively waters his plants, and he buys a can of coffee from the vending machine outside his apartment before he sets off in his van to travel to work. The film depicts him cleaning the toilets with care and commitment and during his lunch break, he sits in a park and eats his sandwiches. Alongside his quiet enjoyment of his lunch, he looks upwards to view the light gently glowing through the trees and he takes photographs of this phenomenon. Indeed, his apartment stores a collection of boxes which form an archive of the photographs he has taken over many years.



Photograph by Ryslan Бойко

www.pexels.com

In Japanese, there is the word *Komorebi* which can be translated as “the play of sunlight breaking through trees”. It denotes the beauty and wonder of this phenomenon. In effect, viewing Hirayama's experience of *Komorebi* is an invitation to pay attention, to take notice, and to marvel at, to be amazed, at this simple and gently beautiful wonder of nature. It is as if Hirayama's life is lived in the light of this experience. In reality, his structured days, his quasi-monastic, Zen-like way of living, and his joy in recognising the simple beauty of the world wherever and whenever it can be found, provides him with meaning and purpose.



Photograph by Katrin Bolovtsova

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In her review of the “Perfect Days” film in ‘The Guardian’ newspaper, Wendy Ide affirms that “Perfection, the film argues, is found in a pared-down approach to the world and a rejection of the thirst for new sensations and novelty that drives so much of society. It’s no accident that Hirayama favours analogue technology over digital – the cassette tapes, the film camera. The digital onslaught, with its noise and distractions, is in direct opposition to the spiritual peace and purity that he works towards each day. Perhaps, in its polite and unassuming way, the film advocates not just a new way of looking, but also a new way of living.”

If one looks at the ‘Perfect Days’ film through the lens of the ways of seeing and being of the Cultural Historian Thomas Berry (1914-2009) it is possible to

suggest that Wenders' film is 'Ecozoic' in its ways of seeing and being in the world. In the eleventh annual EF Schumacher lecture in 1991, Berry defined the word Ecozoic age as being the "... term that can be used to indicate the integral functioning of life systems in their mutually enhancing relations."

In the 'Perfect Days' film, Hirayama's routines, rhythms, and structures of each day can be regarded as being periods of time in which he encounters others, together with responding to the natural world, in a mode of being which can be characterised as affirming 'mutually enhancing relations.' Even when he encounters, and engages with, those who appear to bring uncertainty and unpredictability into his life, in the fullness of time it appears that he is able to stoically bring about some degree of peace and order in which relationships are, indeed, mutually enhancing.

I have reflected above upon the Japanese concept of *Komorebi* denotes "the play of sunlight breaking through trees". This concept, I suggest, connects profoundly with Thomas Berry's articulation of the significance of sunlight. I have referred earlier in this reflection to his understanding of the term "Ecozoic" in his 1991 Schumacher Lecture. In this lecture he also considered the nature of sunlight. He declared: "Every reality in the natural world is multivalent. Nothing is univalent. Everything has a multitude of aspects and meanings the way sunlight carries

within itself warmth and light and energy. Sunlight is not a single thing. It awakens the multitude of living forms in the springtime; It awakens poetry in the soul and evokes a sense of the divine. It is mercy and healing, affliction and death. Sunlight is irreducible to any scientific equation or literal description,”

This consideration by Berry on the nature of sunlight is clearly multifaceted and multidimensional and it illustrates, I suggest why it is that for Hirayama, his life is immersed in, and suffused by, the experience of, quite literally, living in the light. His daily experience of the natural world is transformative and luminous. He is able to perceive the extraordinary in the ordinary, the transcendent in the immanent.



‘Running to the Light’

by Runrig

As we continue to journey through Spring and experience and appreciate the longer days of sunlight and the warmth of the sun, may we experience and discern in our daily lives the potential for, and possibility of, those moments of grace, what the broadcaster and writer Clive James termed “revelations of elegance”, in which we see the world anew and, in the midst of the many and varied manifestations of suffering and dis-ease, we are able to affirm with the Medieval Mystic Julian of Norwich that “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”



‘On the Nature of Daylight’ by Max Richter
From the album ‘The Blue Notebooks’

REFLECTION 2: Yayoi Kosama: *You, Me, and the Balloons*



“You, Me and the Balloons” Exhibition Tour

by Kwong Lee

Throughout her long and celebrated artistic career, the work of Yayoi Kusama has been characterised by a theme which permeates her work which is her engagement with, and response to, nature and its place within the larger cosmos.

In her autobiography ‘Infinity Net’, Kusama declares that:

“In October 1959 I achieved my dream of a solo exhibition in New York. The show was titled *Obsessional Monochrome* ...the show consisted of several white-on-black infinity net paintings that ignored composition and had no centres. The monotony produced by their repetitive patterns

bewildered, the viewer while their hypnotic serenity drew the spirit into a vertigo of nothingness....

My desire was to predict and measure the infinity of the unbounded universe, from my own position in it, with dots – an accumulation of particles forming the negative spaces in the net. How deep was the mystery? Did infinite infinities exist beyond our universe?"



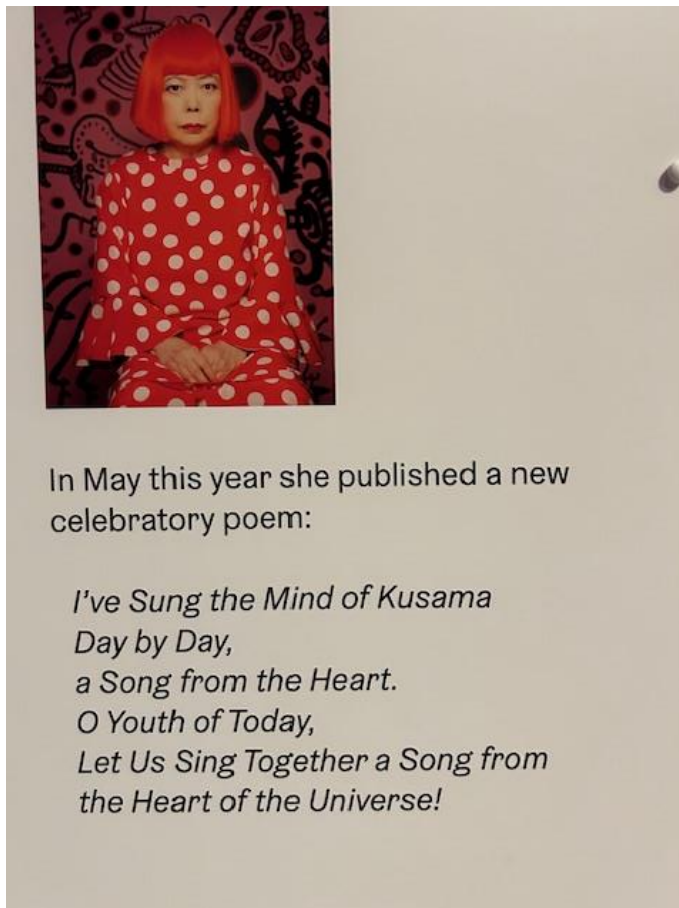
In her 9th April 2021 New York Post review of the major exhibition "Kusama-Cosmic Nature" at the New York Botanical Gardens, Rachel Laneri comments that:

"{Kusama's} world is full of talking flowers, dancing pumpkins, and exploding cosmos — and it's glorious. As she wrote on March 6, in a statement shared with the botanical garden, "Dancing through our universe are noble souls whose magnificent forms are saturated with mystery. I invite you to explore the endlessly expanding ode to the beauty of love that is my art."

Thomas Berry declared that:

“All life is a form of cosmic celebration. What moves the stars through the heavens, the Earth through its seasons, and human beings through stages of growth and learning -- all is celebration. Look at the birds flying here and there, the flowers blooming, and the trees changing colors in the fall. It's all celebratory. We have only to express and become, ourselves, celebration.”

It can be suggested that there is a deep congruence between Kusama's creative expressions of the mysteries of the cosmos and Berry's affirmation that “All life is a cosmic celebration.”



From the exhibition “Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons”



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita

*What does this artwork
suggest to you?*

What is your response to this artwork?



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita

*What feelings and emotions
do Kosama's artworks evoke?*



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita

*What ways of seeing the world,
what perspectives on life do Kosama's
artworks suggest?*

Is there any sense in which Kosama's artworks can be described as being 'Ecozoic'?



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita



From the exhibition "Yoyoi Kosama-You, Me and the Balloons"

Photograph by Malgorzata Kmita

*Can Kosama's artworks be described
as 'spiritual'?*

*What does the word 'spiritual' mean
to you?*

REFLECTION 3: *A Year in a Field*

Autumn 2023 saw the release of BAFTA award winning filmmaker Christopher Morris' documentary 'A Year in a Field'. The focus of the film is a field in West Cornwall in which a 4000-year-old standing stone, the Longstone, is located, sentinel like, appearing to gaze over all that takes place in this small corner of the Southwest of England.

The film covers the period from the Winter Solstice 2020 to the Winter Solstice 2021 and it presents an exploration of the field as time passes and the seasons change. It pays attention to, for example, the detail of the life forms found in the field such as the crops, plants, and insects and the luminous cinematography brings to life what Morris observes.



The film can be regarded as an example of an emerging genre which can be termed 'Slow', 'Contemplative' or 'Meditative' cinema. Morris' film invites us to gently immerse ourselves into the changing landscape and to

pay attention to the field as things, at times almost imperceptibly, change. The film, therefore, inspires us to slow down, to be still, to focus, to be aware of the changing details of the scene before us.

The film, however, does not simply capture the passing of time over a period of a year; it places the field in a larger context, a context of the ecological challenges and opportunities which face the world today. The Longstone has been rooted in the field for four millennia and it has stood firm as history has unfolded. As Morris filmed the field, he reflected upon the ever-urgent warnings which are being made by climate scientists regarding the threats that climate change pose to the Earth and to its life forms. He commented: “I struggle to comprehend what I am being told.” He is, therefore, clearly aware of the reality and seriousness of the situation. Indeed, during the recent Climate Ambition Summit, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, warned that “humanity has opened the gates of hell” and that we are heading toward a “dangerous and unstable world”.



Morris has also commented that: "As I got closer and closer to the field, my view grew bigger and wider, until finally, looking at the same small field, I began to see the universe." The process and experience of observing and filming the field, therefore, inspired him to become aware of a perspective, a vision, a view, a way of seeing and being, which transcended the confines, the historical particularity, of what he was recording. He began to become aware that the field was an integral part of a much larger story, a story of what the Cultural Historian Thomas Berry and the Cosmologist Brian Swimme have termed the Universe Story. They have declared that: "To tell the full story of a single particle we must tell the story of the universe, for each particle is in some way intimately present to every other particle in the universe."

In 'New Seeds of Contemplation', Thomas Merton wrote:

"Contemplation is life itself, fully awake, fully active, and fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source."

It can be suggested that Morris' film "A Year in a Field" encourages and inspires us to be "fully awake" and to be "fully aware" of the spiritual wonder that permeates the very fabric of all that exists.

As we continue to journey through the season of Spring, and await the arrival of the Summer, may we continue to be thankful, grateful, and appreciative of the fragile beauty of the Earth and may we reflect, individually, and as members of diverse activist communities, upon the steps

we can take to celebrate and affirm the very miracle of being.



'The Miracle of Being' by Capercaillie

"... we will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of the numinous presence whence all things came into being, Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us."

Thomas Berry in 'The Great Work'

REFLECTION 4: Janusz Korczak and His Meaning for Education for a Civic and Humane Society

REFLECTION 4 presents a revised and expanded text of an article which explores the life, legacy and inspiration of the Polish-Jewish doctor, writer, broadcaster, and pedagogue Janusz Korczak (1878-1942).

This reflection connects with *REFLECTION 5: the Unheard Cry for Meaning* which explores further perspectives on the life, work, and legacy of Janusz Korczak and how they are complemented by exploration of aspects of the pedagogical philosophy of the Ukrainian educator Vasily Sukhomlinsky.



Photograph by Johannes Plenio www.pexels.com

“I go to the mountains as some go to the desert: to gather my strengths on solitary walks, on the plateau of the Rax Mountain. Every important decision I have made, almost without exception, I have made in the mountains.”



Photograph by Christian Marohn

www.pexels.com

This reflection by the Austrian Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) upon his experience of mountain climbing and the way in which it impacted upon his life has as a central theme the concepts of encounter and dialogue. Frankl regarded mountain climbing as an activity in which he engaged in an interior dialogue, a dialogue with himself; he was in an environment in which he could contemplate, reflect and meditate upon his experience and be inspired

and empowered to make meaningful life choices. The mountain sojourns also were opportunities for Frankl to be refreshed and strengthened. The solitary nature of these experiences meant that Frankl was able to know himself more deeply and, in view of the nature of his work as a psychiatrist, it is likely that this self-knowledge impacted positively upon his knowledge of his clients and the ways in which he engaged in meaningful dialogue and encounter with them.

In addition to self-dialogue and the way in which this related to his dialogue with his clients, it can also be recognised that Frankl entered into a profound dialogue, encounter, and engagement with the natural world. The world of the mountains is the physical, material world, the world of the challenges and opportunities presented by the experience of nature.

The Polish composer Wojciech Kilar (1932-2013) in his symphonic poem 'Koscielic 1909' recalls the death of Mieczyslaw Karlowicz as a result of an avalanche in Maly Koscielic, one of the summits of the Tatra mountains in February 1909. Karlowicz declared:

"When I stand on the top of a steep mountain, having only the blue hemisphere of the sky above and the sea of the plateau with waves of other summits beneath, I feel as if I were blending with the surrounding space, I cease to see myself as a unique entity, instead, I sense the eternal and mighty breath of the universe."

For Karlowicz, his experience of the mountain was one in which he became aware of a dimension to life, a reality, a presence, which affirmed his connectedness with all things. His personal identity became part of, and immersed in, a greater transcendent reality. Tragically, this celebration of

the joys of the mountains is now considered in the knowledge that he lost his very life to the mountain's "surrounding space".



"Koscielic 1909' by Wojciech Kilar

Karłowicz's experience, therefore, introduces the concepts of pain, suffering, and loss. There is, in effect, an ironic sense of sorrow in the knowledge that he lost his life as a result of that which inspired him and that which he loved and celebrated. If sorrow is defined as: "the feeling of sadness, grief or regret associated with loss, bereavement or sympathy for another's suffering", it is perhaps understandable why in his 2003 works 'September Symphony' and 'Lament', Kilar has explored the experience of living in a post 9/11 world. Kilar has commented: "What matters are the emotions and associations of the listener whom I call - after Lutoslawski - the co-author. Without the listener there is no music". Kilar, therefore, is affirming that in the creative process there is a

dialogue, a dialectic, between the composer, the music, and the listener.



Symphony No.3, September Symphony'

By Wojciech Kilar

The listener encounters the music and in her response to it she is able to engage in an encounter with the 'emotions and associations' initiated by the composer in his creative work. The dialogue and encounter are related to the presence of both the composer and the listener. The composer dedicates himself to the creative task, making himself fully present to it, and the listener devotes herself to to the task of actively and mindfully listening to and engaging with the 'emotions and associations' suggested by the music. This encounter, dialogue, encounter, and presence can be regarded as a part of a process of change and development in which the potential for transformation is an ever-present possibility. This change and transformation can facilitate positive health and wellbeing in its widest sense including, for example, the

mental, physical, emotional, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the self.

This *REFLECTION 4* explores the concepts of encounter, dialogue, presence, transformation and wellbeing through an analysis of the role that study of the life, work and legacy of the Polish Doctor and Pedagogue Janusz Korczak (1878 or 1879-1942) can play in the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of students, together with consideration of the nature of education in the 21st century in terms of the contribution it can make to the creation of a civic and humane society.

Our study of Janusz Korczak has led us to affirm several key ideas that have shaped our understanding of the child and the nature of the process of teaching and learning of which we regard the concepts of encounter and presence as being at the very heart of a developing pedagogical and therapeutic philosophy. We bring to this exploration our experience of two distinct, yet related, dimensions of working with children, young people, and adults. One of these dimensions is that of teaching, in a range of educational settings, with a particular specialism in Religious Studies and Philosophy and developing strategies for facilitating the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development of learners. The second dimension is that of the development of creative and practical approaches to the fostering of mental health and wellbeing in a range of social work and therapeutic environments and contexts. This active engagement with a range of children, young people and adults has been complemented and enhanced by extensive mental health activism in, for example, campaigning, non-governmental, and charitable organisations, and networks.

We noted above that Kilar affirmed the primacy of the dialogue between the music he has created and the listener. For us, a particular inspiration in our journey of understanding of the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak has been our response to the acclaimed Polish auteur Andrej Wajda's (1926-2016) 1990 film *Korczak* which presented a profoundly poignant, powerful, and compelling portrayal of the dedication, altruism, and sacrifice of Janusz Korczak.

Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmidt) was a Polish-Jewish writer, doctor, teacher and pedagogist who from 1911 to 1942 ran a children's home and orphanage in Warsaw. He developed a radical and innovative approach to childcare and teaching and learning which he articulated in his classic work *How to Love a Child*. In August 1942 Korczak was informed that all the children in the Warsaw Ghetto orphanage were to prepare for deportation. Although it appears that Korczak may have been offered the opportunity of being released, he declined this option and chose to perish with his orphans at the Nazi's Treblinka extermination camp.



Wajda's film is a powerful resource for exploring the life of Janusz Korczak and for introducing the philosophy of dialogue, encounter, presence, transformation, and wellbeing to people of the twenty-first century. It presents a compelling portrayal of Korczak's struggle to transcend the horrors of with which he and his children were faced. The interplay of Wajda's direction. Agnieszka Holland's screenplay and performance of Wojtek Pszoniak as Korczak combine to produce a moving and powerful presentation of courage in the face of the Nazi's inhumanity. This *Reflection* aims to develop the concepts, themes and ideas presented in Korczak's life and work by relating these to the current debate about the nature of education for a civic and humane society.

Education for a Civic and Humane Society

The world of the twenty-first century can be regarded as a world in which the only constant is change. Nothing stays the same. All things are in a constant state of flux. Philosophers talk of a 'post-modern' world in which there are no fixed, unchanging, objective, absolute, and eternal truths, but, rather, there is a world of a multiplicity of perspectives, ideas, beliefs, practices, lifestyles, and world views. There are those who regard this relativist approach to life as being a liberation from the dominant political, religious, moral, and economic systems of the past. They see the high-technology digital and virtual world of the internet, including developing advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) as presenting creative opportunities for human beings to become the persons they truly wish to be unfettered by geographical and national boundaries. This can be seen as opening up a new world of freedom and creativity in which each individual has available to them economic, educational, and technological resources

which promote a higher standard of living and quality of life. However, there is a contrary view which suggests that in a world of widening inequalities between, for example, the developed world and the developing world, a world in which environmental degradation is rampant and where violence, conflict, and war affect millions of people, the post-modern vision can be regarded with some suspicion. Even in affluent societies, addiction in all of its many and varied manifestations is widespread and many people experience high levels of stress, insecurity, precarity, and depression, which all too often results in self-harm and suicide. In such a world how is it possible to formulate, develop and maintain, for example, any degree of political, economic, or religious consensus? Is it actually possible to envision a society to which most people would voluntarily subscribe? Or are we actually heading inevitably and irreversibly, in a world of climate change, global heating, species extinction, desertification and biodiversity loss, to a world of nihilism, breakdown, ecological and economic collapse, and anarchy?



Photograph by Julia Volk www.pexels.com

The Cultural Historian Thomas Berry (1914-2009) has commented "Since the appearance of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962, we have been reflecting on the tragic consequences of the plundering industrial society that we have brought into existence during these past few centuries. That we should have caused such damage to the entire functioning of the planet in all its major biosystems is obviously the consequence of a deep cultural pathology."

For Berry, the development of a rapacious highly industrialised society which destroys nature's life maintaining systems, is an expression, a symptom, of a pathological vision which regards economic growth, often at all costs, to be the primary goal of society. Berry's observation can be regarded as being echoed in the Psychologist Gabor Mate's declaration that: "Capitalism's influence today runs so deep and wide that its values, assumptions, and expectations potently infuse not only culture, politics, and law but also such subsystems as academia, science, news, sports, medicine, child-rearing, and popular entertainment. The hegemony of materialist culture is now total, its discontents universal". In Mate's view, therefore. The capitalist economic system has, in effect, permeated virtually all dimensions of life, and, in his pioneering work with those who experience trauma, he recognises and affirms that trauma is an outcome of the ways in which society works. The stress, anxiety, and sense of alienation and dislocation which millions of people experience is, in Mate's view, closely intertwined, indeed, inextricably linked, with the political and economic *modus operandi* of a globalised system which, as Berry indicates, "is the consequence of a deep cultural pathology."



Photograph by Frans van Heerden

www.pexels.com

The experience of Janusz Korczak and his orphans in the Warsaw Ghetto of Nazi-occupied Poland presented an apocalyptic vision of a world which appeared to have gone mad. The old order had been subverted and a chilling ideology was systematically and clinically defining millions of people as undesirable, as being less than human, for whom the only fate was certain death.

Although since the end of the Second World war in 1945 Europe enjoyed many years of peace, the conflict in former-Yugoslavia in the early 1990's. and the ethnic cleansing associated with it, brought back the harrowing images of former times. As I write the wars in Israel and Gaza, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and ongoing conflicts in, for example, Yemen, Syria, and South Sudan,

raise profound questions about the nature and direction of the contemporary world.

In such a world, educational institutions go about their daily business of teaching and learning, and therapeutic organisations work to restore people to physical and mental health and wellbeing. However, it can be suggested that modern educational, health, and therapeutic practitioners are increasingly asking significant pedagogical, philosophical, and moral questions about the nature and purpose of their work and are developing and promoting strategies and approaches which echo the philosophy of encounter, dialogue, presence, transformation, and wellbeing articulated in the life and work of Janusz Korczak. There are, therefore, signs that in the midst of the rapid pace of change, there are individuals, groups, and networks and organisations, who are actively and creatively reflecting carefully, and acting upon, the nature of the educational and therapeutic work they do and, as part of this process, are encountering the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak and related inspirational figures.

ENCOUNTER

Korczak wrote: "What a powerful effect on the sad life of a child, would be the memory of that person – perhaps the only one – who showed kindness, understanding and respect in a world where cruelty had become the norm. The child's future life and a sense of himself could take a different course, knowing there was one person who would not fail him."

He is recognising that parents, relatives, family, friends, teachers, carers, and therapists, for example, all have the capacity and opportunity to engage with children in a way which affirms their value, worth, and uniqueness. In

terms of schools, therefore, the teacher is not primarily a teacher of mathematics, technology, science, history, or art, for example, but a teacher of children. However, the teacher is also a learner from children. At the heart of the process of teaching and learning is the nature of the positive relationship between the teacher and her children. For many children, particularly for those who experience emotionally and materially disadvantaged backgrounds, their only positive interaction with adults is that which they experience with their teachers at school. Central to the role of the teacher, therefore, is the pastoral encounters in which she is engaged on a daily basis. Everything a teacher does or says is a learning opportunity for the child and presents them with an example, either positive or negative, of what it can mean to grow and mature. The most significant resource in programmes of Citizenship Education and Personal, Health and Social education can be regarded as being the teacher and the ways in which they relate to, and interact with, the children in their care. Indeed, Korczak declared: "Be yourself and seek your own path. Know yourself before you attempt to get to know children. Become aware of what you yourself are capable of before you attempt to outline the rights and responsibilities of children. First and foremost you must realise that you too are a child, whom you must first get to know, to bring up and educate".

DIALOGUE

Korczak declared: "When I approach a child, I have two feelings; affection for what he is today and respect for what he can become." He recognises the creative dialectic between the present and the future, between potential and actuality, and the interplay of the positive attitudes and emotions of affection and respect. For

Korczak, the starting point for both education and therapy is the experience of the child in the present moment. This present, however, is rooted in an existential context. Each child has a personal history, a life narrative, and this impacts upon their development and the unfolding of their emerging future. For the pedagogist, therefore, to facilitate meaningful teaching and learning requires that in addition to being self-aware, the teaching and therapeutic enterprise requires knowledge of the child. There are, however, no short cuts to this knowledge. The role of the teacher requires that she pays attention to, for example, what each child says, how each child acts, what each child writes and how each child expresses themselves in, creative activities such as art and music. This task requires time, effort, and energy and is an ongoing process in which new and, at times, new and unexpected insights into the child and their way of seeing and being in the world are articulated. The teacher and the therapist, therefore, share the experience of entering into a dialogue with each child.



Photograph by Tim Douglas

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The dialogue between teacher and child can significantly complement the positive nurturing provided by the child's family. However, there will inevitably be case where the teacher and the therapist are the primary source of an affirming dialogical encounter. It can be suggested, therefore, that the foundation for the development of a civic and humane society is the establishment of networks of relationships characterised by openness, spontaneity, warmth, genuineness, and compassion. Indeed, what can be termed Moral Personalism can be viewed as being an ethic of positive and affirming human relationships which should underpin the entire ethos of schools and their curricula.

In his *Ghetto Diary*, Korczak declared: "Thank you Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle. Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glow worms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle".



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Korczak is offering a prayer of thanksgiving for the beauties of the Earth. His cosmic gratitude is rooted in an appreciation of the natural world which. Despite, the sufferings of life, can present to humankind a vision of beauty and joy. Korczak's contemplation, reflection and meditation was undertaken in the midst of the hectic and challenging life of the orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto at a time when the lives of he and his children hung in the balance. The future was most uncertain. Despite this, Korczak took the time to mindfully and attentively focus not solely on the challenges, stresses, and strains of running the orphanage but, instead, he took the time to grateful for each positive aspect of his and his children's existence. He said a glorious **Yes!** to life when it would have been understandable for him to have been ground down by the daily challenges he and his children faced.



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It can be suggested that a lesson which can be learned from this aspect of Korczak's approach to his vocation, therefore, is that he recognised and affirmed the importance of periods of quiet reflection in which one could spend time focussing on that which has value. Edmund O'Sullivan has commented in his exploration of the nature of transformative learning that: "As much as humans need to be in relation, there is also a very deep need for silence. We all find it necessary to be alone and in silence. We need sanctuaries where we can find silence Silence does in some essential way enhance the quality of our lives Silence enables us to sanctify our lives. We are enabled in silence to come to a sense of the sacredness of our existence."



Photograph by Markus Spiske

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Educational and therapeutic institutions, therefore, can aim to incorporate into their work opportunities for silence, contemplation, reflection, meditation, and prayer so that each person can have the opportunity experience periods of retreat from the all-pervasive and debilitating noise, sensory and information overload, tensions, and stresses of organisational and institutional life. Educational and therapeutic environments can, therefore, aim to incorporate into their activities spaces and places which facilitate and encourage periods of rest and recovery, oases of calm, often, yet not exclusively, immersed in the natural world. This is a dimension of educational and therapeutic life for which there is much significant potential for positive creative developments. *REFLECTION 7* of this Thomas Berry Manchester Spring 2024 newsletter explores the Windhover Contemplative Center as an illustration of the ways in which a place of quiet, a space of stillness and contemplation, can be a sanctuary of peace in the midst of a University environment.



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PRESENCE

In the orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto as the children slept Korczak would spend time alone recording his observations about the children's development and progress. He maintained a diary and in those moments of solitude, he contemplated, reflected, and meditated upon his life and work and he speculated about what the future might hold. However, even in these nighttime episodes of solitude he was aware of the children. He paid attention to what was happening with the children as they tried to sleep. In a very real sense, Korczak was present with the children even when he was alone.

In his *Ghetto Diary* Korczak wrote about a Nazi soldier whom he observed through the window of the orphanage: "I'm watering the flowers. My bald head in the window What a splendid target. He has a rifle. Why is he standing and looking on calmly? He has no orders to shoot. And perhaps he was a village teacher in a civilian life, or a notary, a street sweeper in Leipzig, a waiter in Cologne? What would he do if I nodded to him? Waved my hand in a friendly gesture? Perhaps he doesn't even know what things are - as they are? He may have arrived only yesterday, from far away"

Even in August 1942, when this diary entry was recorded, which was shortly before the exit of Korczak and his children from the Ghetto, he is ruminating on the identity of the guard. It is as if he is profoundly mindful of the guard's unique individuality. He recognises the man as a person with a history. Korczak does not define the man in terms of his work as a soldier or label him with words such as 'Nazi' or 'enemy', but, instead, his whole approach to the guard is that of being aware of, and present to, his individuality

and personhood. Even though there is no direct communication between Korczak and the guard, wither verbal or non-verbal, Korczak's observation of, and reflection upon, him can be regarded as a profound example of what the Existentialist Philosopher Gabriel Marcel understood by 'presence'. In an educational or therapeutic setting, presence refers to the teacher or therapist's openness or transparency in relating genuinely and openly to children in their real needs. The concept of presence suggest that changes occur in both the adult and the child as a result of their encounter.

Presence in a teaching and learning context, therefore, can be regarded as an intersubjective encounter between a teacher and a child in which the teacher relates to the child in terms of their unique identity, their unique situation in life, and chooses to be present, fully available, on his behalf. This means, therefore, that when a teacher is exploring a concept, theme, or idea with pupils it can never be the case that the material is presented and explored in exactly the same way as it has been in other teaching and learning contexts. Each class, and each child within a class, is unique. Therefore, in an age of global capitalism with mass markets in which the individual is all too often perceived as being a consumer, the challenge for education is the question of how it can work towards making teaching and learning truly personal, authentically child-centred? If education is not personal, how can it aim to educate, to transform, persons?



Photograph by Zetong Li

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It is possible to expand an understanding of 'presence' in pedagogical contexts through making connections with the ways of seeing of the Cultural Historian and Geologist Thomas Berry in his consideration of presence as our connection with both the larger Earth community and the place of this Earth community within the story of the Universe. He has commented that:

“Our intimacy with the universe demands an alternative presence to the smallest particles, as well as to the vast range of stars splashed across the skies in every direction. More immediately present to our consciousness on here on Earth are the landscape; the sky above, the Earth below; the grasses, the flowers, the forests, and the fauna that present themselves to our opening senses. Each in its own distinctive perfection fills our mind, our imagination, our emotional attraction.”.

For Berry, therefore, 'presence' engages our mind, our imagination, and our emotions in locating ourselves within wide-ranging contexts, namely: the Earth, our connections and relationships with other than human life, and our place in the vast expanses of the Cosmos. At the heart of the educational process, therefore, is the exploration of an evolving, creative unfolding of the story of the Universe in which each and every human being has the privilege, the gift, indeed, the miracle of being born. Our personal and collective histories, therefore, are not purely defined by the genealogical facts of our personal family histories in terms of timelines mapping out our life story in relation to our ancestors and descendants, but each one of us is rooted and immersed in the story of the Universe from the Big Bang to the ongoing and unfolding journey of the Cosmos.

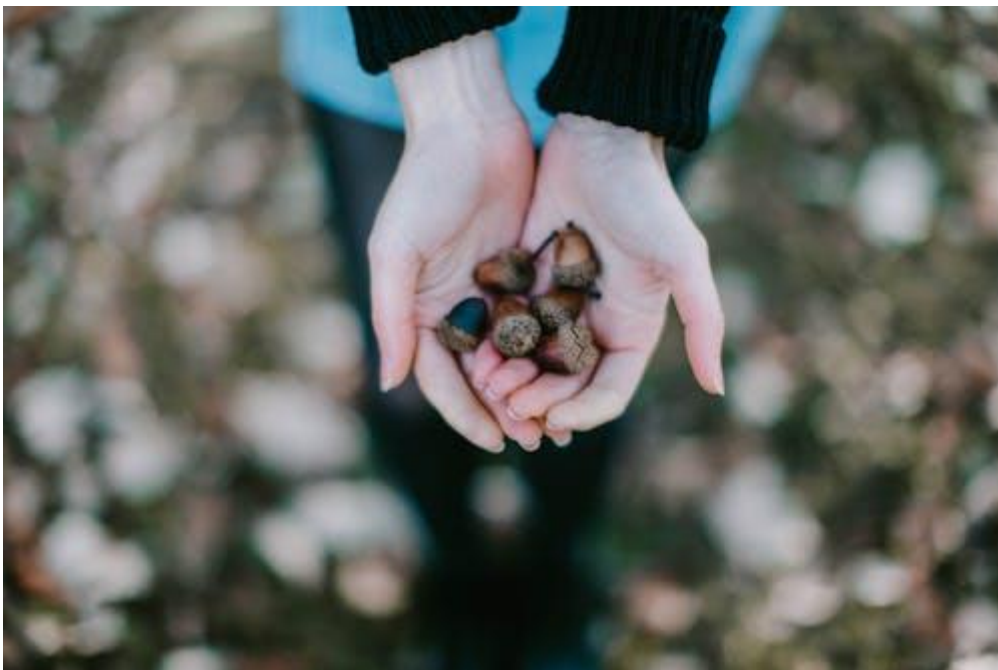
TRANSFORMATION

Korczak commented that: "There are one hundred days more left till spring. There is, as yet, not a blade of grass, not one single bud is showing. But inside the soil, among the roots, the dictate of spring is already there, secretly persisting, throbbing, lurking, waiting, and gathering strength - under the snow, inside the bare branches, in the icy gale -to suddenly burst into blossom."



Photograph by Artem Melotov www.pexels.com

He is affirming that even when things look bleak, when's life challenges appear to overwhelm us, and when we find it difficult to discern any possibility of hope or optimism, there is, at the heart of things, the potential for positive change, transformation, and development. This can also be regarded as a metaphor for understanding the child. Instead of adults focussing on the negative in a child's behaviour, actions, and attitudes, they should, instead, aim to affirm the positive and from these small acorns mighty oaks might grow.



Photograph by Leah Newhouse

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The entire pastoral system in schools, for example, should be geared towards transforming negativity in all its forms through the transformational power of positive life affirmation. Educational and therapeutic environments, therefore, should have at the heart of their aims, objectives, philosophies, and missions statements the central question of "In what ways do we promote the positive in, and for, our children?" Addressing this question

honestly and realistically, but with a sense of an achievable positive vision, can encourage and empower schools and related educational and therapeutic enterprises to create an ethos which celebrates positive transformation in all of its many and varied forms. Such an ethos, however, has to address questions of meaning, purpose, value, and significance.



Photograph by Sindre Fs

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“Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts... There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.” – Rachel Carson in ‘A Sense of Wonder’.



Photograph by Marcel Loffler

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The Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) affirms the primacy of meaning in his declaration that: "Man's struggle for his self and his identity is doomed to failure unless it is enacted as dedication and devotion to something beyond his self, to something above his self".

As a result of his personal experiences in the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps, Frankl developed an approach to psychiatry which recognises the primacy of humankind's search for meaning. He affirmed that existential frustration and spiritual problems can lead to the development of a form of neurotic illness which he termed 'noogenic neurosis' in which the individual struggles to come to terms with the value and meaning of his life. Frankl articulated a psychotherapeutic approach called Logotherapy which explores questions of meaning and encourages the individual to, in conjunction with the therapist, discern meaning in their life.

If one explores the eight attitude-virtues of humility, self-acceptance, responsibility, self-commitment, friendliness, concern, contemplation and trust outlined by the Philosopher Donald Evans as a vision of the moral life, there is the potential to explore Korczak's life and work, meaning and significance, from the perspective of his moral integrity and authority which can be regarded as being the outcome of his deep humanistic spirituality and his way of seeing and being in the world. It can be suggested that exploration of Korczak's life and legacy has the potential to facilitate the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of children because it explores the ways of seeing the world which reflect what the National Forum for Values in education and the Community identified as an approach to relationships in which: "We value others for themselves, not for what they have or for what they can do

for us, and we value these relationships as fundamental to our development and the good of the community". The vision of Janusz Korczak, therefore, can contribute to the development of a civil and humane society because it has at the centre of it what David Pascall has identified as "... The development of the inner self, with self-knowledge, relationships, questioning our place in the universe, the purpose of our lives, and our ultimate destiny."

This reflects Frankl's affirmation of the primacy of meaning. Students can be encouraged to reflect upon Janusz Korczak's life and work in order that they may develop perspectives about meaning and significance for themselves and the contemporary world. Such perspectives, however, are not restricted to ways of seeing Korczak's life and legacy solely in terms of knowledge and understanding of historical events. Korczak's vision can also aim to engage students with the affective dimension of their experience, connecting with their feelings and emotions.

A focus of education for a civic and humane society is the creative expression of the child as she articulates her journey of existential understanding. In such a perspective living is a creative act. Each individual is an artist who, out of the raw materials of their existence, strives to fashion something which has meaning. Life presents opportunities for the affirmation of the self and others as a result of which each individual has the potential to become what Ted Landsman has described as a Beautiful and Noble Person.



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In Landsman's perspective there are three aspects to the development of the Beautiful and Noble Person. The first aspect is termed the Passionate self which is characterised by self-respect and self-acceptance. Such an individual perceives themselves as being a worthwhile person. This acceptance of self facilitates development of the second aspect of the growth of nobility and beauty which is termed the Environment Loving Person for whom there is a passionate concern for the physical environment and the natural world. The world is perceived and experienced from a perspective of joy and celebration.

This encounter, this dialogue, between the person and the world facilitates the development of the third, social, dimension of the Beautiful and Noble Person which is described as the Compassionate Self. This person deeply cares about, and for, others and loves others including those in need. This empathy is translated into action on behalf of those who suffer.



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WELLBEING

Through a transformational approach to teaching and learning students can be introduced to a process which can be called Biographical Philosophy. This approach suggests that through a sensitive and empathic exploration of an individual's life it is possible to discern the perspective, way of seeing, *weltanschauung*, philosophy of life, indeed, the spirituality, they articulate. This can be explored in terms of its relationship to, and meaning for, the world today. The approach of Biographical Philosophy would acknowledge that in exploring the life, legacy, and vision of Janusz Korczak there are three interrelated dimensions which can be investigated in order to appreciate the depth and breadth of his significance for the world of the twenty first century and its relationship to education for a civic and humane society.

The first dimension would aim to explore what can be called the Historical Korczak. This would involve a detailed study of Korczak's life and work which would aim to facilitate an accurate reconstruction of the events of his life in the context of the world in which he lived. Students would explore Korczak's life and work through a cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approach utilising insights and perspectives from, for example, history, geography, politics, culture, religion, and the arts to gain a clear knowledge, understanding and appreciation of his life and work and the world in which he lived.

The second dimension to be explored in the classroom can be termed the Post-Historical Korczak. In this dimension students would be encouraged to explore responses to Korczak's life as expressed, for example, by artists, musicians, filmmakers, and poets. Contemporary

responses to Korczak's life and work include, for example, Wajda's film *Korczak* discussed earlier in this reflection, Nick Stimpson and Chris Williams' musical *Korczak* together with the Korczak sculptures of Xawery Dunikowski.

These artistic, musical, and cinematic responses to Korczak can be called post-historical because they release Korczak from his specific historical, social, political and context and facilitate the rediscovery and reinterpretation of his life and work by contemporary and future generations. Through the response of artistic and literary creativity the story of Korczak is told anew, and he therefore transcends historical particularity.

Exploration of the Post-Historical Korczak can enable students to begin to articulate a third dimension which can be called the Expressionist Korczak. In this dimension students can begin to explore what meaning and significance the life and legacy of Korczak may have for their lives in the world today. The Expressionist approach can be regarded as incorporating into approaches to teaching and learning and therapeutic strategies and interventions insight into the concepts of what is known as the Narrative Self. In this approach the teachers and pupils work together to explore their self-understanding both as individuals and as a learning community. They recognise that the self and the group are in a process of change and development. A self is not fixed and static but is dynamic, creative, open to experience and able to change and grow. Just as Korczak commented in his *Ghetto Diary* that: "I have watered the flowers, the poor orphanage plants, the plants of the Jewish orphanage. The parched soil breathed with relief."



Photograph by Torsten Dettlaff

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It can be suggested that children have to be given opportunities to be nourished not only physically but spiritually, emotionally, morally, aesthetically, intellectually, and psychically. Like the plants Korczak watered, children need opportunities to be nurtured utilising a range of inspirational teaching, learning and therapeutic strategies. Music, singing, drama, poetry, and film, for example, can be utilised to facilitate pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to encourage the growth of attitudes, skills and qualities, indeed, the virtues, which enable and empower children to find their way in an ever-changing, and increasingly complex, world and to contribute to the development of a civic and humane society.

The Expressionist approach can affirm that education is concerned with the students' dialogue with the subject matter. It aims to develop the affective dimension of experience in which students respond to the concepts, themes and ideas explored in the classroom from a perspective characterised by empathy which facilitates exploration of the material being studied for the individual's inner life, their personal subjectivity. In this creative dialectical approach, Korczak's life and work is not objectified and studied solely in terms of historical narrative but is responded to with the both the head and the heart and explored with regard to its contemporary existential significance.

Exploration of the Expressionist Korczak, therefore, aims to enable students to recognise that, echoing Martin Buber they are the 'I' who encounters the 'Thou', the spirituality and vision of Janusz Korczak. In this relational approach, characterised by dialogue and encounter, the life of Korczak is responded to in a spirit of enquiry characterised

by autonomy, rationality, altruism, and responsibility which William Kay has defined as the attributes of a Morally Educated Person.

Exploration of the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak can, therefore, contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students and can facilitate the process of education for a civil and humane society because it can facilitate exploration of the links between existential questions and people, the world and the cosmos and reflection upon the meaning and significance of Korczak's vision can provide students with the opportunity to share their own experiences of their search for meaning and identity.

Central to this approach to teaching and learning is the recognition that education includes education for the emotions. It can be suggested that neglected aspect of work with children is that of the idea of education as being, in some sense, a therapeutic process. Although it can be acknowledged that education and therapy are not synonymous, it can be affirmed, echoing Korczak's holistic approach, that all students are entitled to an education transcends the didactic.

It can be suggested that there is a real potential for the development in schools of a programme in which teachers and students journey together in their exploration of the spirituality of Janusz Korczak in terms of the framework for human flourishing presented in Landsman's concept of the Beautiful and Noble Person. He was a person who valued himself, others, and the world in which he lived. He was a Passionate Self; a person who said a resounding **Yes!** to life.

Marek Jaworski has commented that: "The bodies of Janusz Korczak and his children were burnt. What is left of

them are a handful of ashes buried somewhere which the wind has scattered to the four corners of the world. Together with this smoke, Korczak's ideas circulate around the world – ideas which nothing can destroy or consign to oblivion now”.

It can be suggested that, echoing Jaworski, exploration of Korczak's life and work can facilitate the development of an approach to education for a civic and humane society which can affirm, with O'Sullivan, that: “We live in an incredible time in earth history, and we must capture the sense of our purpose through celebrating the fullness of our existence in both time and space. Celebration is both part of the ritual of existence. For creatures of the millennium, we must remind ourselves that we are about a great work. It is a joy to be part of this grandeur.”

Such a perspective is congruent with the cosmological, spiritual, and ecological vision of Thomas Berry who has affirmed that “We might sometimes reflect and recall that the purpose of all our science, technology, industry, manufacturing, commerce, and finance is celebration, planetary celebration. That is what moves the stars through the heavens and the earth through its seasons. The final norm of judgement concerning the success or failure of our technologies is the extent to which they enable us to participate more fully in this grand festival.”

REFLECTION 5: *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*

"It has not yet crystallised within me, nor has it been confirmed by reasoning, that the child's primary and irrefutable right is the right to voice his thoughts, to active participation in our considerations and verdicts concerning him. When we will have gained his respect and trust, once he confides in us of his own free will and tells us what he has the right to do there will be less puzzling moments, less mistakes."

This declaration by Janusz Korczak in his work *How To Love A Child* affirms the importance of the child's right to be heard, to be an active participant in a process of creative dialogue in which she can find her authentic voice. For Korczak trust is at the heart of the pedagogical enterprise. The essence of trust is located in providing the child with the opportunity, and environment, a safe space, in which her views can be articulated. The child should be able to share her perceptions, thoughts, concerns, anxieties, hopes, aspirations, and dreams in an atmosphere where she will be truly heard by the adults who listen to her. The relationship between educator and child is that of a dialogue in which the child learns to trust the adult as a result of genuinely being given a voice. As a result of being heard the adult gains respect. Respect, therefore, is mutual and grows from trust.

Mary Rose O'Reilly has explored the concept of what she terms Radical Presence, and she draws upon Parker Palmer's idea that "To teach is to create space..." It can be suggested that the space, the encounter, which is actualised in the dialogue between teacher and pupil, connotes an understanding of the art and science of

teaching and learning, pedagogy, in which the classroom is regarded as a laboratory of meanings.

The existential therapy of the Austrian Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, complementing Korczak's pedagogical philosophy, affirms the primacy of the search for meaning. This presentation aims to explore Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular reference to the relationship between the perspectives of Korczak and Frankl and their significance for the nurturing of the authentic voice of the child at the heart of which is a profoundly spiritual way of seeing, and engaging with, the world.

Frankl has commented that:

Man's struggle for his self and his identity is doomed to failure unless it is enacted as dedication and devotion to something beyond his self, to something above his self.

As a result of his own personal experiences in the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps he developed an approach to psychiatry which recognises the primacy of humankind's search for meaning. He believed that existential frustration and spiritual problems can lead to the development of a form of neurotic illness which he has identified as noogenic neurosis in which the individual struggles to come to terms with the value and meaning of his life. Frankl developed a psychotherapeutic approach called Logotherapy which explores questions of meaning, value, and purpose. Frankl noted that:

A literal translation of the term 'logotherapy' is 'therapy through meaning' ... it could also be translated as 'healing through meaning'...

Frankl is affirming that questions of meaning, value and purpose are at the heart of being human and it can be suggested that Janusz Korczak's pedagogical philosophy

consistently and profoundly engages with the nature and meaning of existence and the questions which arise from it.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account. Point 1 of the article states that:

... parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express these views freely...

The reference “to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views” suggests that at the heart of this Article is the recognition and affirmation of the developing autonomy and capacity for self-expression of the child. The pedagogical enterprise can be regarded as having at its heart the aim of facilitating, developing and nurturing the capacity for children to grow in their ability to discover and articulate their own unique voice and to express their ways of seeing and being in the world cogently and confidently. Indeed, programmes of, for example, Citizenship Education, Personal, Health and Social Education and Critical Thinking can all be regarded as playing an important role in encouraging and empowering children to develop a growing sense of independence in a framework for the management of schools and creation of a teaching and learning ethos in which active pupil participation in decision making is affirmed.

However, although it can be recognised that there are many creative, innovative and inspiring contemporary examples of curriculum programmes and initiatives which aim to reflect and actualise the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Article 12, it can be suggested that there is a much more fundamental question which needs to be addressed and

explored in relation to the development of the capacity for children to express their views freely, namely the question of what philosophies or pedagogies of education can be considered as authentically creating an environment and an ethos in which the nurturing and development of the child's capacity for autonomous self-expression is found to permeate every aspect of the curriculum? Ultimately, the child's capacity for self-expression, to share their personal voice, does not develop in a vacuum, it is nurtured in an affirming context in which personal growth and development, in all its many and varied forms, is encouraged.

Janusz Korczak's approach to the child is encapsulated in his affirmation that:

An educator who does not enforce but sets free, does not drag but uplifts, does not crush but shapes, does not dictate but instructs, does not demand but requests, will experience inspired moments with the child.

Such an approach can be regarded as one in which the child is, indeed, empowered, encouraged and enabled to articulate their voice, their unheard cry for meaning, and enables them to be heard and listened to. I wish to suggest that in order to actively nurture and develop children's capacity for self-expression, to embark upon a journey of creating mechanisms through which their voice can be heard, it is possible to propose a creative synthesis of Korczak's pedagogical approach and Frankl's affirmation of the vital importance of creating and/or discovering meaning in life which can be closely related to six dimensions of a curriculum for the world of the 21st century which I wish to identify and outline. These dimensions are: encounter with nature, aesthetic and creative sensibility, contemplation, the power of story, service and ecological

and sustainable science and technology. I illustrate these dimensions with reference to the respected Ukrainian educator Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918-1970) who, in his celebrated work *To Children I Give My Heart*, declares:

In one of his letters, outstanding Polish educator Janusz Korczak ... reminds us of the necessity of gaining entrance to the spiritual world of the child, without condescending to it. This is a very subtle idea, the point of which we educators must understand thoroughly. The genuine educator must assimilate the child's perceptions of the world, its emotional and moral reactions to the surrounding reality with all their distinctive clarity, sensitivity, and immediacy ...

Sukhomlinsky follows this statement by affirming that:

I firmly believe that there are qualities without which a person cannot become a genuine educator, and foremost among them is the ability to penetrate into the spiritual world of the child.

These perspectives can be considered in relation to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child because they powerfully suggest that a significant vehicle for the development of the child's capacity for articulating their voice, for affirming their right to be heard, is the teacher's capacity to relate to, and engage with, the child's ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Ultimately, therefore, it can be suggested that, echoing Frankl's affirmation of the primacy of meaning, the child's right to be heard is grounded in a dialogic encounter between the child's view of the world and the educator's engagement with this.

Sukhomlinsky articulates an approach to education in which the child's encounter with nature is affirmed:

We went to the meadow in the quiet of early evening. A pensive pussy-willow with tender foliage stood before us, and in the pond was the reflection of the endless firmament. A flock of swans flew across the clear azure sky. We listened attentively to the music of the beautiful evening. We heard a surprising sound from somewhere in the pond, as if someone were softly striking the keys of a clavicord. It seemed that the pond itself, the bank and the firmament were all ringing with the sound.

Sukhomlinsky encouraged the children to engage with the sights and sounds of the natural world and to relate in depth to what they experienced. His declaration that “we listened attentively” illustrates that he was affirming a response to the beauties and joys of nature which required focus, concentration and an attitude of being fully present to, and with, the phenomena he and his children encountered. Such an approach echoes Korczak's declaration in his *Ghetto Diary*:

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle. Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glow worms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle.

He is offering a prayer of thanksgiving for the beauties of the earth. His cosmic gratitude is rooted in an appreciation of the natural world which, despite the challenges he and his children faced, presented to him a vision of beauty and joy. Korczak's pedagogical approach sensitised his children to the positive and the good, which was present even in the midst of what often appeared to be the chaos which surrounded them in the wider world.

A curriculum which engages children with the natural world also encourages the development of the aesthetic,

creative and contemplative dimensions. Sukhomlinsky illustrates the importance of the aesthetic dimension in his declaration that:

The chief aim for me was to teach (the children) the ability to relate emotionally to the beautiful and to give them a need for impressions of an aesthetic nature. Beauty must become an integral part of people's lives, and this task is accomplished by education.

Indeed, he celebrates the transformative power of beauty in his affirmation that:

Working to create beauty enobles the young heart and prevents indifference. In creating beauty on the earth, the children become better, purer, and more beautiful.

Sukhomlinsky recognises, therefore, that beauty is not only to be perceived and discerned, it has also to be actively created. For example, he reflects upon the creation by the children of what he terms a Nook of Beauty:

Between the school plot and a thicket of bushes, the children found a clearing covered with thick grass by the slope of the ravine. There was a lot of moisture during showers. We weeded the clearing and began to transform it into a green lawn. 'Our nook will be a Kingdom of green', I told the children ... This dream inspired the children.

Sukhomlinsky, therefore, taught the children to identify places and spaces in nature which they could work with and adapt in order to transform into an environment which could facilitate transformative learning. Through engagement with such a project the children were able to actualize, to make real, to put into practice, their hopes, dreams, and visions. This pedagogical process, therefore, inspired and empowered the children to create a meaningful learning environment, an ecology of transformation.



Photograph by Mariam Antadze

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Through this creative activity the children are being socialized into the dimension of service as a significant feature of life. Through articulating their creative voice they are being inspired, encouraged, and motivated to act not only with regard to self-interest but they are also being nurtured into an altruistic understanding of the world. Indeed, Frankl affirms that:

... being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.

Korczak and Sukhomlinsky both recognized and affirmed in their work with children that meaning, value, significance and purpose is located in encounter with, and service to and for, others. Their pedagogies, therefore, are infused with a profound moral dimension. This moral dimension and the capacity for the child to be heard and express their voice are also located in the storytelling dimension. Janusz Korczak consistently celebrated the importance of storytelling. In his books *King Matty the First* and *King Matty and the Desert Island*, together with his radio broadcasts from Warsaw as the Old Doctor, he has inspired many to recognise the capacity for tales, myths, legends fable and narratives to engage us at a deep level.

Sukhomlinsky echoes Korczak in his affirmation of the power of story. He wrote:

Why do children listen to stories so eagerly? Why do they love the twilight when the very atmosphere supports flights of the imagination so? Why do stories develop the speech and strengthen the thought processes of the child? Because the images of stories are clearly emotionally coloured. The words of a story live in the child's

imagination. The child's heart stops when it hears or pronounces the words painted by fantasy.

His recognition that stories 'develop the speech and strengthen the thought processes of the child' can be regarded as presenting a pedagogical foundation for the development of the child's voice, their capacity for authentic self-expression, affirming their right to be heard. For the child to present their voice can involve them sharing their story, their experience, aspects of their personal narrative, their own perspectives or ways of seeing things. Through listening to stories, enacting them and through writing their own stories children are encouraged and empowered to find their personal voice through which they are given the confidence to assert who they are and to share their memories, dreams and reflections, their concerns, hopes and aspirations.

The interplay of the aesthetic, service and storytelling dimensions of the curriculum is consolidated by what can be termed the contemplative dimension, which is characterised by, for example, attention, focus, mindfulness, reflection, meditation, and prayer. A contemplative curriculum recognises that both teachers and pupils require opportunities for silence and stillness so that they are liberated from the all too pervasive barrage of concepts, themes and ideas which the curriculum can overwhelm and overload us with.

Stuart Lord, President of Naropa University, has recently commented:

When I look back on the seeds of my life, they were planted during times when I was able to reflect on the deeper questions of life. These many encounters created space in my life, allowing me to gain awareness of myself, the world and my personal path of informed and compassionate service.

In Harmony with Lord's observation, In *The Boarding School* Korczak utilises metaphors from nature in his declaration:

Is it not enough that I experience a feeling of joyful gratitude as I see them grow and toughen? Is this in itself not a sufficient reward for the work done? Haven't I the right to be a disinterested worshipper of nature, to watch the shrub become green?

He is affirming that in order for the 'shrub to become green', for the child to develop and mature, there has to be an encounter with the teacher characterised by "a feeling of joyful gratitude." For Korczak, "to be a disinterested worshipper of nature" is to approach the life of the child with respect and reverence, to be fully present to the unique individuals before us. Such an approach lays the foundations, prepares the ground, sows the seed for the growth and development of the child's right to be heard.

The sixth dimension of a 21st curriculum was not able to be experienced by Korczak and Sukhomlinsky. This is the dimension of modern teaching and learning which utilises the rapidly and constantly developing world of global information and communications technology which present to both teachers and pupils unprecedented opportunities for personal and social communication and development. However, although such technologies were not present in the 20th century Poland and Ukraine of Korczak and Sukhomlinsky it can be suggested that the communications resources available to us today can, ultimately, only be of any lasting value if they relate closely to Frankl's affirmation of the primacy of meaning. The encounter with nature, the creative response to the aesthetic, the development of a dialogue between contemplation and service and their location in a context of storytelling and personal and social narratives can be

regarded as the framework in which exploration of ecologically sustainable science and technology in the modern curriculum can be fully meaningful. Indeed, I conclude with a rhetorical question: 'In what ways can contemporary communications technologies enable the authentic voice of the child to be truly heard?'

In what ways can a world of 24/7 news, ever present social media platforms, the rise of Artificial Intelligence, and the increasing advances in teaching and learning strategies utilising a range of computer-based materials and resources make real pedagogical philosophies, echo, and build upon, Korczak's and Sukhomlinsky's creative and celebratory understandings of the ways in which children develop and learn?



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REFLECTION 6: Julian of Norwich for Today: All Shall Be Well

2023 was the 650th anniversary of the “Revelations of Divine Love” of the Medieval mystic Julian of Norwich. Throughout the United Kingdom events took place celebrating this which included a morning of talks and music at Manchester Cathedral on 9th June.

This event included a series of talks including from David Walker, the Bishop of Manchester, the Venerable Karen Lund, Archdeacon of Manchester, Malgorzata Kmita and Kelvin Ravenscroft. The talks explored a range of perspectives on Julian’s revelations. The text of Kelvin’s talk is presented below. It includes reference to an ecological dimension of Julian’s ways of seeing.



‘Julian of Norwich’ Short film by Brittany Robinson

Manchester Cathedral Friday 9 June 2023

Julian for Today: All Shall Be Well

by Kelvin Ravenscroft

"Yesterday all day a small gardenia was a great consolation ... I stayed long looking at a goldfinch and walked slowly up through the woods, gazing at the tall straight oaks that are before you reach the turnstile. Everything is beautiful and I am grateful for all of it ... Sweet afternoon! Cool breezes and a clear sky. This day will not come again. The bulls lie under the tree in the corner of their field. Quiet afternoon! The blue hills, the daylilies in the wind. This day will not come again."

In the words above, written on 16th June 1961, Thomas Merton, the Christian Monk, and Contemplative Activist, reflects upon his experience of one specific moment in time, a moment in which he pays attention to, and is grateful for, the transient beauties of the natural world. He carefully observes a goldfinch, oak trees, a cool breeze, and the clear sky. Twice he affirms that *"This day will not come again."* Merton, therefore, is gently reminding us of the transient nature of all phenomena. All things that exist come into being, they grow, develop, mature, and, in the fulness of time, they cease to be. This applies to all that exists, from the smallest phenomena at the microscopic level, to the stars, planets, and galaxies at the macroscopic level.



Photograph by Felix Mittermeier

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Photograph by Mohan Nannapaneni

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It can be suggested that, from the perspective of his Christian faith, Merton is celebrating, at a cosmic level, the Divine creative dance which permeates the whole of creation. Last Sunday our worship celebrated Trinity Sunday and the week before that was Pentecost Sunday. Trinity Sunday can be viewed as celebrating the phenomenon known as 'Perichoresis', which is the intimate relationship of love between the Three Persons of the Trinity. Perichoresis, therefore, is the eternal dance of love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is characterised by mutual respect, joy, honour and unconditional self-giving and self-emptying.

As we gather today to celebrate the life and legacy of Julian of Norwich, it is clearly not possible to present a comprehensive exploration of the riches of her theological and existential wisdom and insight. The themes and ideas presented in her 'Revelations of Divine Love', what she termed 'Showings', are wide-ranging in scope. These include, for example, her meditations on the suffering of Christ, her understanding of 'sin' as not being what she calls a 'substance', her affirmation of Christ as our Mother, her multi-faceted exploration of the very nature of the Trinity, and her marvelling at the gift of creation. Each one of us will have our own understandings of, and responses to, Julian's ways of seeing and being in the world; in effect, each one of us can form our own 'impression' of how Julian impacts upon our life. This morning, my 'impression' of, and my response to, Julian will focus upon two specific elements of her Revelations. Firstly, I offer some brief reflections upon her understanding and experience of the very nature of the Trinity and, secondly, I consider the existential significance of her response to the holding of a hazelnut in the palm of her hand.

In her Revelations, Julian reflects upon the very nature of God, particularly through her consideration of the Trinity. She writes:

“For all our life is in three: in the first we have our Being, in the second we have our Increasing, and in the third we have our Fulfilling: the first is Nature, the second is Mercy, and the third is Grace.

For the first, I understood that the high Might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our mother, and the great Love of the Trinity is our Lord: and all this have we in Nature and in the making of our Substance.”

In her declaration that *“For all our life is in three...”*, Julian is affirming that the very nature of what it is to be a human being is grounded, is rooted in, the very nature of God. Just as the Divine is understood and experienced by Julian as a Triune reality, she also indicates that human personhood, human identity, being made in what the Book of Genesis terms as ‘the image of God’, is expressed in three distinct, yet related ways: through Being, through Increasing, and through Fulfilling.

Julian goes on to say that:

“Thus in our Father, God Almighty, we have our being; and in our Mother of Mercy we have our reforming and restoring: in whom our Parts are oned and all made perfect Man; and by [reward]-yielding and giving in Grace of the Holy Ghost, we are fulfilled.”

In Julian’s Trinitarian understanding, the very nature of God, the mutual interrelationship between Father, Son, indeed, God our Mother, and Holy Spirit, corresponds to a unity in diversity, a harmonious manifestation of the interplay

between Being, Reforming and Restoring, making perfect, giving Grace, and being fulfilled. From Julian's understanding and experience of the Trinity, therefore, there flows a spirituality, a theology, and an ethics of an integrated self. For Julian, this integrated self, flows from the integration within diversity of the Trinity.



Photograph by Tanya Satina www.pexels.com

The theologian Catherine LaCugna affirms that in the Trinity, the divine dancers:

“experience one fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating, enveloping, outstretching. There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again, and receiving again... The divine dance is fully personal and interpersonal, expressing the essence and unity of God.”

LaCugna's understanding of the 'essence and unity of God', I suggest, can connect with Julian's idea of unity with God which she terms 'Oneing'. In Chapter 53 of her Revelations, she declares:

“This beloved soul was preciousy knitted to God in its making, by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is oned in God. In this oneing, it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, God wants us to know that all the souls which will be saved in heaven without end are knit in this knot, and oned in this oneing, and made holy in this holiness.”

We can see that, although the details of Julian's experience and understanding of the Trinity can, at times, appear to be somewhat complex and challenging, they are, in essence, affirming that who we are, individually and collectively, our sense of personal and social identity, flows from the relationship of loving intimacy between the Father, the Son (who for Julian is our Mother) and the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost Sunday celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus following His Ascension. It is traditionally thought of as marking the birth of the Christian Church. Acts 2:1-13 presents this experience. In the wide-ranging variety of languages that Jesus' disciples began to

speaking, there can be seen a unity in diversity, a coalition of voices which are, in effect, in harmony, because they are all inspired by the one Spirit.

It is possible to discern in both Pentecost Sunday and Trinity Sunday ideas which model, which point to the very nature of, what Christian worshipping communities can be like. They can be embodiments and exemplars of the Divine dance, the music of the Spirit, in their mission and ministries. Indeed, I suggest that there is real potential for the creation and development of a Julian curriculum, a spirituality of teaching and learning, which relates Julian's ways of seeing and being in the world to, for example, the development of Mission Communities and their dialogue and encounter with the Five Marks of Mission. In this year of the 650th anniversary celebrations of Julian's Revelations, her life and legacy can be affirmed and honoured by, for example, cultivating a Julian ecological programme in which in the Church and beyond a radical, life-affirming, celebratory exploration of Julian's wisdom is at the very heart of what it means to preach the Gospel. I am currently in the process of developing such a project with particular reference to how Julian's vision connects with and complements the transformative spirituality of Francis of Assisi and the ecological spirituality of the Cultural Historian Thomas Berry (1914-2009)

In her book 'Who Do We Choose to Be?', Margaret J. Wheatley speaks of what she terms 'Islands of Sanity' which are places and spaces, both literal and metaphorical, where "it is possible for leaders to use their power and influence, their insight and compassion, to lead people back to an understanding of who we are as human beings, to create the conditions for our basic human qualities of

generosity, contribution, community and love to be evoked no matter what”.

In his sojourn in the garden, Thomas Merton, I suggest, encountered an ‘Island of Sanity’, a place and a space, in which he was able to prayerfully glimpse and experience the eternal in the transient, the extraordinary in the ordinary, to see, feel and immerse himself in the Divine dance, the symphony of the Spirit. In her cell in the Church in Norwich, Julian, I suggest, was creating and inhabiting an ‘Island of Sanity’. She was not withdrawing or retreating from the world, but through prayer and offering counsel to those who needed it, she immersed herself in, and engaged deeply with, the realities of the world. A world of the plague and religious and political turmoil.

In his poem *Auguries of Innocence*, William Blake declared:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour*



Photograph by Karolina Grabowska www.pexels.com

In her Revelations Julian writes of her experience of “(Holding) Infinity in the palm of (her) hand as she contemplated a hazelnut:

“He showed me a little thing the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and I thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came, 'It is all that is made'.”



Photograph by Jonas Svidras

www.pexels.com

At the heart of Julian's way of seeing the world is her acknowledgment of God as Creator. She recognises that the hazelnut has three characteristics the first of which is “that God made it”. Julian is affirming that all phenomena that come into being have as their cause the creativity of God. The recognition of God as the cause, the primary creative principle, which brings the hazelnut into being, can also be regarded as a vehicle through which she is also aware that her very being, her life, her existence, is

rooted in the belief in, and experience of, God as Creator of all.

It is as if Julian is not simply and only contemplating the hazelnut; through this contemplation she is, in effect, also reflecting upon her own identity, her personal sense of self. Through gazing upon a small phenomenon of nature, Julian is able to perceive that she also is, indeed, an expression of the creative activity of God. Such an insight for Julian echoes the affirmation of the Psalmist (139:14 NIV): "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well."

To "know that full well" is to integrate it into the very fibre of our being; to 'know', for Julian, is to be deeply aware that the sheer fact of our existence has not come about because of anything that we have done. Rather, our origin is located in a much larger context, what can be called a cosmic context. The God who gives rise to the sun, moon, and the stars, is the God who breathes life into us. From the perspective of contemporary cosmology, we can affirm that we are, indeed, "star stuff".

Following her recognition and affirmation of God as Creator, Julian's second dimension of awareness in relation to the hazelnut "is that God loves it." Julian, therefore, is recognising that God's creative activity is an expression of love. However, such love does not end when the hazelnut comes into being, rather, this love continues throughout its existence. God's creative activity, therefore, can be regarded as being the manifestation of relationship, an interaction, a coming together, a communion.

To be loved, therefore, means to be in relationship and to be in relationship involves a sense of movement. Love,

therefore, involves both giving and receiving in which there can be discerned what I call a 'sense of spontaneous flow'.

Following on from Julian's recognition and appreciation of the hazelnut being made and loved by God, she then proceeds to affirm "that God keeps it". To "keep it" can be regarded as testifying to the belief that in His creative loving activity God sustains and nurtures that which He has made. Such a view connotes a sense of God being compassionately involved with His creation; His creativity and loving are ongoing; they are, in effect, in process.

If we are loved by God, then the consequence is that we should also love, both God and His creation. Indeed, one way of understanding the view that humankind is made in the image of God is to see this concept as testifying to the idea that, in the same way that God loves His creation, human beings should also love God in return and this loving response to God can be affirmed in our love for others and for the Earth and all of its glorious myriad of forms of life. Such a view affirms the experience of relationship and interaction. We live in the gaze of God, we gaze upon Him, each other and upon all that He has made.

As she gazes upon the hazelnut, Julian comments: "I marvelled at how it could continue." She ponders upon how it could continue to be because "it could have suddenly sunk into nothingness because of its littleness."

To 'marvel' can be defined as "to be filled with wonder or astonishment". Julian's example, therefore, can, I suggest, encourage, inspire, and nurture us to gaze upon the world with curiosity, love, kindness, empathy, care, and compassion. Julian's response to the hazelnut can be regarded as embodying a positive and holistic way of seeing and being in the world.

Where do we find wonder? What and who do we marvel at? When and where do we find ourselves being amazed and astonished? When do we find ourselves, to echo C S Lewis, being surprised by joy? Monday 5th June was World Environment Day. May we, as we experience the cycle of the seasons, gaze upon the world with love, care and compassion and may our worship, mission and ministry point us to that creative, dynamic love which permeates the very cosmos. In his letter to the Colossian Church, (1: 15-17) St Paul declares: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

It is in such a view that Julian's challenging, yet deeply inspiring spiritual vision is rooted. It is a way of experiencing and understanding life which leads her to affirm with confidence that, indeed, "All shall be well, and All manner of thing shall be well.'

REFLECTION 7: Windhover Contemplation Center



The Windhover Contemplation Center
A Space to Experience Art and Spiritual Renewal
At Stanford University

Film by BIM Concept

(Please note that this YouTube film incorporates advertisements.

Please skip as necessary)

“As much as humans need to be in relation, there is also a very deep need for silence. We all find it necessary to be alone and in silence. We need sanctuaries where we can find silence Silence does in some essential way enhance the quality of our lives Silence enables us to sanctify our lives. We are enabled in silence to come to a sense of the sacredness of our existence.”

- Edmund O'Sullivan

The quotation above, from Edmund O'Sullivan, has been incorporated into *REFLECTION 4: Janusz Korczak and His Meaning for a Civic and Humane Society*. It affirms the importance of the practice and the experience of silence as a discipline in which, for example, meditation, contemplation, reflection, and prayer can be incorporated into the structures, the rhythms and routines of teaching and learning environments.

Amidst the hustle and bustle, the dialogue, and encounters of the classroom, the in person social interactions and the 24/7 ubiquitous availability of social media feeds, can result, for many students and staff alike, a situation in which there is all too often little time for a breathing space in which one can take time out to recharge one's batteries physically, mentally, and emotionally.

In view of this, a range of institutions, including educational institutions, are incorporating into their campuses places and spaces which provide the opportunity to experience silence, stillness, and, if necessary, solitude. This *REFLECTION 7* explores the Windhover Contemplation Center as a contemporary example of such a place and space and it makes connections with other examples of modern contemplative spaces.

The Windhover Contemplation Center is located on the campus of Stanford University. The website of the Office for Religious and Spiritual Life of the University states that the Center "... is a spiritual refuge meant to both inspire and promote personal renewal" and it "... embodies the message that, in the 21st century, the quality of intellectual endeavor is directly linked to the fulfilment of emotional and spiritual needs. The hope is that the environment will be appreciated not just for what one sees, but how one

feels and how that experience contributes to overall well-being.”

There is, therefore, at the very heart of the philosophy permeating the Windhover Contemplation Center is the experience of being inspired, nurtured, and sustained by the environs and the aesthetics of the physical space in which is located the artist Nathan Oliveira’s (1928-2010) series of five Windhover paintings, named after Gerald Manley Hopkins’ 1877 poem ‘The Windhover’. Oliveira’s paintings were inspired by kestrels flying over the Stanford foothills.



(Please note that this video incorporates advertisements.

Please skip as necessary)

The Windhover Contemplation Center is complemented by a Labyrinth which is explored in the above film.

The incorporation of Nathan Oliveira’s ‘Windhover’ paintings into the Contemplation Center illustrates what can be regarded as the coming together of aesthetic

works with the space, simplicity, and light of a contemplative environment. I find that as I consider the Windhover Contemplation Center, I am reminded of another contemplative space which has at its heart the works of an artist, namely, the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. Mark Rothko's Abstract Expressionist paintings are at the centre of a space and place which is conducive to meditation, contemplation, reflection, and prayer.

At the Tate Modern gallery in London, the Rothko Room, which hosts nine paintings, I find to be a contemplative space, which is rooted in the interface of art and spirituality. Indeed, it is interesting to observe how art galleries are increasingly becoming more than places to view art. They are, for example, becoming spaces and places which encourage deep, mindful viewing of artworks and are also environments in which embodied activities such as yoga are practiced. Some art galleries also open up their grounds and gardens to encourage the public to volunteer in the creation and upkeep of beautiful natural spaces.

For example, The Whitworth, the art gallery of the University of Manchester has a programme entitled 'The Natural Cultural Health Service' which incorporates outdoor activities that promote positive mental and physical wellbeing. Activities include meditating in nature, gardening, pilates, and being immersed in silent spaces.

*"A lot of things in daily life boil down to **wonder**. It is one of the purest forms of joy that I can imagine. I enjoy the felling. I often wonder. I do it almost everywhere: when travelling, when reading, meeting people, when I sit down to write or whenever I feel my heartbeat or see the sunrise. Wonder is one of the most powerful forces with which we are born."*

-Erling Kagge in 'Silence: in the age of Noise



Photograph by Markus Spiske

www.pexels.com

The video below presents a TED talk by the Canadian architect Siamak Harari in which he explores the principles, the values and the inspiration which led to the design and creation of a Bahai Temple which overlooks Santiago, Chile, in South America.

Harari's talk raises the question of how, in a secular age, is it possible to design, create and build a sacred space and what does it mean to describe something as being sacred?

As you watch the film, write down those concepts, themes and ideas which are particularly meaningful for you.

What do you understand by the term 'sacred'?

What is your response to the completed Temple?



“The transformative power, the ek-stasis of the design, occurs within the interior. Stepping inside for my first time, I became instantly convinced that the Chilean Temple will stand in the world as a place of deep spiritual experience. The temple contains a rare spatial force, its exhilarating and monumental single room defined by nine seemingly spinning veils. Looking up to the apex of the dome with its countless faceted panels, it appears that the veils are actually feathers and they are knotted – in marble- at the top. The whole is suffused with a mediated light, in tones that range from silver to grey to cream, and that shift to gold and ochre as the sun prepares to set in the evening.”

- Movement. Light. Ecstasy. By Lisa Rochon



Photograph by Thais Cordeiro

www.pexels.com



Photograph by Thais Cordeiro

www.pexels.com



The Chapel/Meditation Room

At Lowell General Hospital, Massachusetts

The above short film explores an example of a contemplative space in a hospital. The Chapel/Meditation Room at Lowell General Hospital provides a tranquil environment which incorporates a range of inspiring spiritual and cultural resources.

In addition, the space hosts a poignant memorial to those who perished in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The chapel is a testament to the capacity of art and creativity to explore and respond to trauma and loss and to celebrate the life of the Japanese girl Sodako Sosaki (1943-1955) who, through her creating of peace cranes, affirmed the primacy of peace making and working towards hope for a better future.

The artist Rebecca Crowell has created a series of paintings entitled 'Contemplative Spaces' which are inspired by the beauty of northern New Mexico in which she combines the colours of the natural world with an abstract form of expression. The short film presented below features the opening night of Rebecca's 'Contemplative Spaces' works at Winterowd Fine Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico,

In effect, there are two contemplative dimensions to her series of paintings. Firstly, the creation of the artworks represents Rebecca's contemplative response to what she has observed and experienced in the natural world. Secondly, the exhibition, which gathers together Rebecca's 'Contemplative Spaces' portfolio, can in itself be regarded as being a place and space in which those attending can, individually and together, observe, reflect upon, and respond to the artworks.



"Contemplative Spaces" Exhibition Opening Night

Rebecca Crowell's art and exhibition, therefore, illustrates how a gallery, a space for showing artworks, can be perceived as being a contemplative space in which those observing the artworks mindfully, slowly, and thoughtfully reflect upon the images, the colours, and the textures of the paintings.

As they gaze upon the paintings, the viewer, can be, in effect, drawn into, and immerse themselves, in the artworks in which their mental, emotional, aesthetic, and physical responses interact.

In the observations presented above regarding Siamak Harari's reflections upon designing and creating the South American Bahai Temple, we can recognise that there is a deep relationship between beauty and the sacred. To create a work of beauty, particularly when inspired by concepts, themes, and ideas from nature, can elicit awe and wonder. The immersion of oneself in such a place and space can be regarded as being a transformative experience which can be a catalyst for the formation of new and creative ways of seeing and being in the world.

In such a perspective, contemplative spaces can be oases of calm and serenity in a world which is all too often noisy, chaotic, and ridden with conflict and violence. *REFLECTION 8* of this Thomas Berry Manchester (TBM) Spring 2024 newsletter is entitled *Placid Landscapes* and is inspired by a poem by the Croation Artist Ivan Lackovic Croata. Perhaps what this *REFLECTION 7, The Windhover Contemplative Center* is illustrating is the significant and profound transformative potency for contemplative spaces and places to be at the very heart of our communities, to indeed, be exemplars of 'Placid Landscapes'.

REFLECTION 8: Placid Landscapes



Photograph by Philip Ackermann www.pexels.com

*“Where are the placid landscapes of my childhood?
Where are the forests full of birds?
Where is the silence of my homeland?”*

*Are we the last romantics who yearn for the beauty
Of the changing seasons?*

*Where are the flowers we gathered near stream
waters when
We were children?*

*Where is the whiteness of the snow?
Does it only live in on in paintings?*



Photograph by James Wheeler www.pexels.com

Remember!

The face of the earth is similar to that of a human being.

Don't forget that you are but a traveller

On this planet and nothing belongs to you."

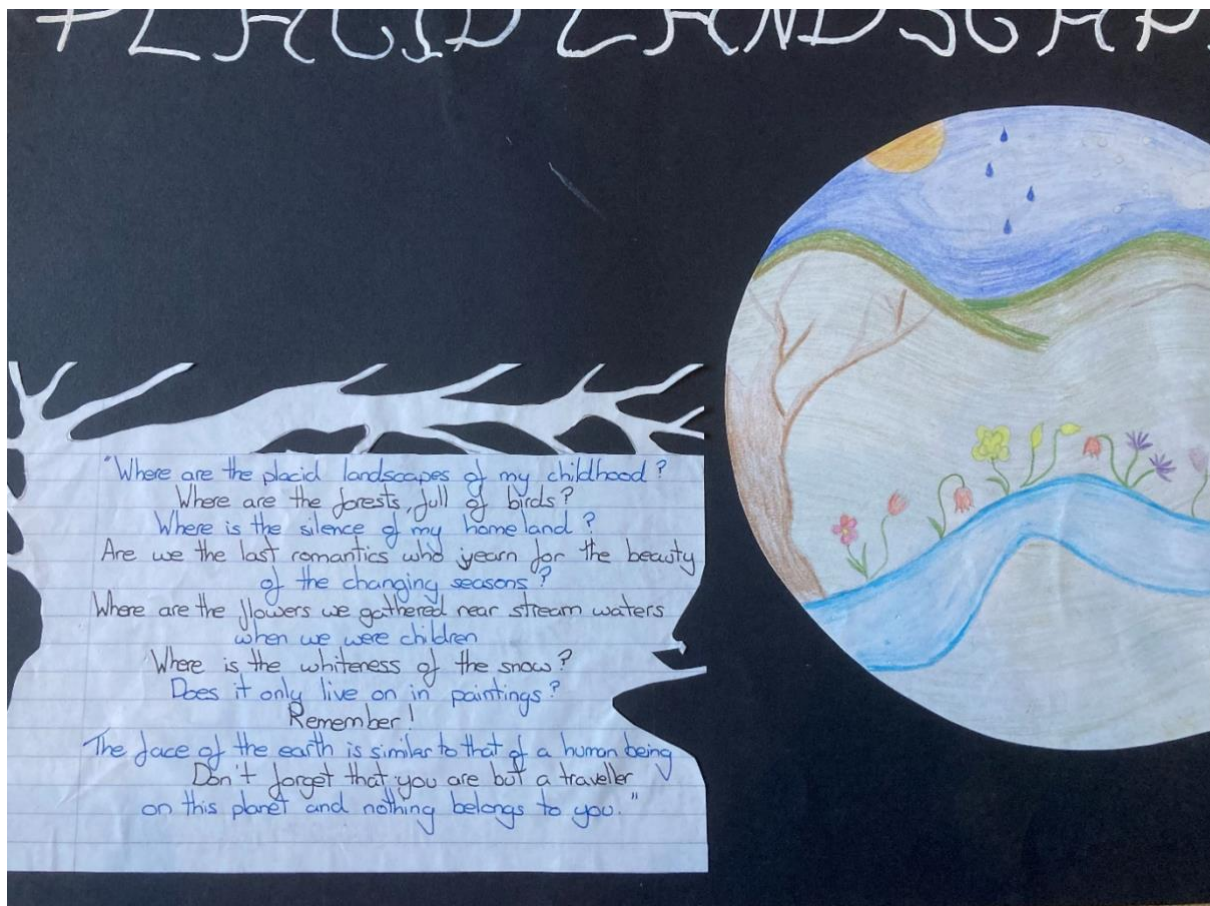


Photograph by Pixabay

www.pexels.com

“Where are the placid landscapes of my childhood? Where are the forests, full of birds? Where is the silence of my homeland? Are we the last romantics who yearn for the beauty of the changing seasons? Where are the flowers we gathered near stream waters when we were children? Where is the whiteness of the snow? Does it only live on in paintings? Remember! The face of the earth is similar to that of a human being. Don't forget that you are but a traveller on this planet and nothing belongs to you.” (1)

This reflection by the artist Ivan Lacovic Croata upon his childhood in former-Yugoslavia presents the theme of the loss of innocence of former times. He recognises that there is a contrast between what he perceived as being the almost idyllic world of nature he encountered as a boy and the suffering of his country as an adult as a result of civil war, ethnic cleansing, and partition. For Ivan there is a profound connection between place, landscapes, the natural environment in which one is rooted and memory. Implicit in his declaration is the recognition that with the passing of time there is an awareness of something being lost to the extent that it may, ultimately, disappear, become extinct, and memories of its existence therefore being recorded through the medium of art.



Although Ivan's reflections have been made in the context of the conflict in the Balkans it can be suggested he is drawing the attention of the reader to a wider perspective, a panorama which takes in the experience of the ecological challenges which are presently are facing the world. By commenting that "the face of the earth is similar to that of a human being" he is reminding us we should recognise that planet earth has an identity, an awareness, which exists independently of humankind. Indeed, Ivan presents clearly a reminder that human beings are, in reality, passing through this world; they do not own it and have no claim upon it. James Lovelock (2), in his Gaia hypothesis, has articulated the view that planet earth is a self-regulating system which has a propensity to homeostasis in which the life forms of the earth in their diversity and complexity co-evolve and contribute interactively to produce and sustain the optimal conditions

for the growth, flourishing and prosperity not only of themselves, but of the larger whole system, Gaia. In such a perspective the earth is perceived as being which has the capacity to, for example, compensate for the damage done to the fragile ecosystems by humankind.



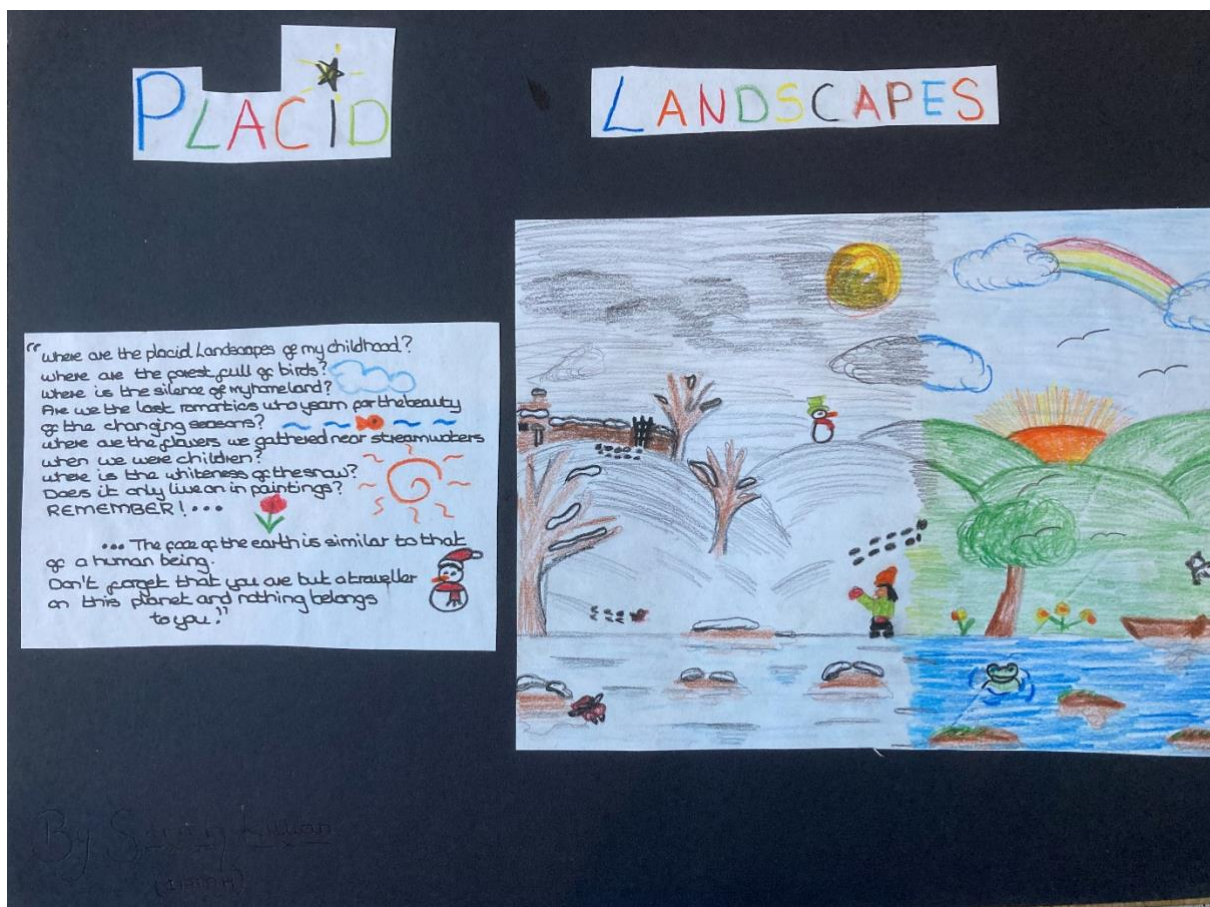
The Gaia perspective, therefore, is not anthropocentric; it does not place human beings at the centre of planet earth. Indeed, in such an approach human evolution, development, experience, and culture is a part of a much larger set of interrelated processes and interactions; they are but one aspect of what the physicist Fritjof Capra (3), Director of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California, has termed the Web of Life. He has outlined a vision synthesising recent scientific discoveries including the theory of complexity, Gaia theory and Chaos theory and has developed what he has termed "systems thinking" which recognises that the basic tension in contemporary culture is between a reductionistic, mechanistic and atomistic perspective which emphasises the constituent

parts of a system and an integrated, organismic and ecological framework which recognises the primacy of a holistic paradigm. Capra articulates this reverential awe when he talks of:

"... the core spirituality that comes from deep ecology. When I see people cutting down forests I feel real pain. I have a real emotional connection to the earth.

The other side is that I feel very much at peace by the sea or by mountains.

Those are moments when I feel most alive - this rush of feeling alive - most spiritual in the sense of the "spirit" as the breath of life..." (4)



Capra's perspective can be regarded as complementing the cosmic vision articulated in the Universe Story delineated by the Eco-philosopher Thomas Berry (5) who has illustrated how an understanding of the origins, evolution and development of the universe can facilitate the experience of awe and wonder as human beings reverentially contemplate their place in the cosmos. Each person can begin to develop a sense that their existence is part of a much bigger picture, they are not separate from nature, they are part of the universe. Ultimately, therefore, each person belongs; they are at home in the cosmos.

The Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess (6) has affirmed such a way of seeing humankind's relationship to the earth. He has articulated an approach termed Deep Ecology which is characterised by its affirmation of the intrinsic value and worth of all living creatures irrespective of their relationship to human needs. In such a perspective the earth and its resources and the myriad of life forms which coexist are not perceived in terms of their utilitarian function, their instrumental value for human beings. Deep Ecology argues that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex, dynamic inter-relationships which are in a constant state of flux in which the existence of organisms are dependent on the existence of others within ecosystems. Human activities which plunder and deplete the earth's resources which lead to devastation of the natural world present a threat not only to humankind but to all life forms which make up the natural order. Indeed, Naess has declared that "The challenge of today is to save the planet from further devastation which violates both the enlightened self-interest of humans and non-humans, and decreases the potential of joyful existence for all." (7)

At the centre of the philosophy of Deep Ecology is the belief that the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain legal rights to live and flourish. It is described as “Deep” because it is a philosophy which presents a way of seeing and being in the world which explores the realities of humankind’s relationship and interactions with the natural world. It can be suggested that the philosophy of Deep Ecology articulates an ontology, a philosophy of Being, an understanding of what it means to exist in the world from which flows a psychology, a way of perceiving one’s relationship to the self, others and the environment. For Naess, at the heart of being in the world is the experience of Self-realisation. He affirmed that “The joy and meaning of life is enhanced through increased self-realisation, through the fulfilment of each being’s potential. Whatever the differences between beings, increased self-realisation implies broadening and deepening of the self.” (8) It can be suggested that Naess’ philosophy of Deep Ecology and its understanding of Self-realisation is profoundly existential in the sense that its approach affirms both the possibility and necessity for transformation of the self and its understanding of, and interaction with, others and the environment. Indeed, Naess declared that “Self-realization, in my terminology, means realizing the possibilities; not to coerce, not to diminish the realization potentials of other beings. So the basic term is really: Self-realization potential.” (9) It has, therefore, personal, social and environmental dimensions. Such an approach complements the perspectives of Existential Psychology whose philosophical framework derives from the ontological perspectives of, for example, Soren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger and has been

adapted by psychologists such as Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, Viktor Frankl and Rollo May in order to explore and understand human personality. According to Binswanger (10) Being-in-the-World has three existential dimensions: Umwelt (“world around”) which is the relationship of the person to the biological, natural, physical world; Mitwelt (“with-world”) the social, interactive, interpersonal dimensions of existence and Eigenwelt (“own world”) the subjective, phenomenological world of the self. From a Binswangerian perspective, therefore, Naess’ approach to the Umwelt, the “world around” is characterised by a view of human potential which is closely related to realising the potential of all living creatures:

“All living creatures try to fulfil themselves..... our self-fulfilment depends on theirs, because we have the capacity of seeing all living creatures as a part of the world we share. We depend on one another.....” (11)

Rothenburg (12) indicates that

“... for Naess’ Self-realisation....One approaches fulfilment through empathy with the world beyond the ego. This expansion of concern does not diminish humanity, but enriches us by pushing the meaning of humanity further and further away from any one person’s interest. As Spinoza says, we approach perfection the more connections we apprehend of the innumerable links and branches that hold the world together as one.”

Self-realisation, therefore, involves an enlargement of the understanding of the self. This enlargement, however, does not mean an inflation of the ego characterised by a

narcissistic self-centredness and self-absorption. Rather, for Naess, self-understanding and self-awareness are developed through letting go of seeing oneself as being at the centre of the universe and, instead, becoming open to the bountiful diversity and multiplicity of life forms. It would appear, therefore, that Bingswanger's existential perspective and Naess' concept of Self-realisation share an approach to understanding human existence and personality which affirms the interaction between the self, others and the world. Such perspectives affirm that self-awareness, self-understanding, self-actualisation and self-transcendence are rooted in interaction with others and one's environment. Indeed, Naess has declared that:

“Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations. These relations are not only relations we have with humans and the human community, but with the larger community of all living beings.” (13)

Such an existential framework echoes Buber (14) in its affirmation of the primacy of relationship and encounter. In his seminal work *I and Thou* Buber outlined the two significant perspectives from which humankind can relate to the world. These perspectives, or ways of relating, are described as I-Thou and I-It. Clements (15) summarises the nature of, and relationship between, the I-Thou and I-It perspectives in his observation that:

“In I-Thou, man addresses his world and neighbour as Thou, and allows himself to be addressed as Thou in turn. This is the relation of mutual personal encounter, dialogue, communion.

In I-It, he regards his world as an It - the attitude of observation, description, usage, seen at its most detached in scientific analysis.

Both attitudes are necessary, but it is in I-Thou that man is genuinely human. "All real living is meeting."

In a Buberian perspective, therefore, a sense of self, identity, awareness and understanding of who one truly is, arises from one's encounter with others characterised by mutuality and reciprocity. Indeed, Naess suggests that:

"The joy and meaning of life is enhanced through increased self-realisation, through the fulfilment of each being's potential. Whatever the differences between beings, increased self-realisation implies broadening and deepening of the self." (16)

An existentialist exploration, therefore, of Naess' understanding of self-realisation can be regarded as presenting a personalist perspective which has at its heart a profound moral dimension. Indeed, Naess considers Kant's distinction between the concept of the moral act and the beautiful act. Moral acts derive from a desire to follow what is believed to be the right thing to do incorporating a sense of duty. However, Naess recognises that "Moral acts are acts motivated by the intention to follow moral laws, at whatever cost, that is, to do our moral duty solely out of respect for that duty." (17) Naess recognises that it is possible to be "moral" through engaging respectfully and dutifully with standards, norms of behaviour, ideals and codes of conduct which are external to the self and to which, at the core of one's being there might, in reality, be ambiguity or indifference and, in some cases, resistance and hostility. In contrast, however, a beautiful act is that which arises from positive intrinsic motivation. Naess is aware that moral acts are motivated

by duty and obligation whereas beautiful acts are autonomous, spontaneous expressions of joyful positive motivation and inclination. Each individual is an artist who out of the raw materials of their existence strives to fashion something which has meaning. Life presents opportunities for the affirmation of self and others as a result of which each individual has the potential to become what the Humanistic Psychologist Ted Landsman (18) has, echoing Binswanger's understanding of the relationship between the Umwelt, Mitwelt and Eigenwelt, described as the Beautiful and Noble Person. In Landsman's perspective there are three stages in the development of the Beautiful and Noble Person. The first stage is described as the Passionate Self which is characterised by self-respect and self-acceptance. Such an individual perceives themselves as being a worthwhile person. This acceptance of self facilitates development of the second stage in the growth of nobility and beauty which is characterised by the Environment Loving Person. In this stage there is a passionate concern for the physical environment. The world is perceived and experienced from a perspective of joy and celebration. This encounter between the person and the world promotes the development of the third, social, dimension of the Beautiful and Noble Person which is described as the Compassionate Self. This person deeply cares about and loves others, including those who are in need. This empathy, however, is translated into action on behalf of those who suffer. This tri-partite understanding of the self and its resultant theory of Ennoblement can be regarded as connecting with Naess' concept of Self-realisation in its affirmation of the positive relationship between the self and the wider world.

In addition to Landsman's model of the Beautiful and Noble Person it can be suggested that there are other significant perspectives which can be incorporated into a

framework for understanding Self-realisation. For example, in his acclaimed work *To Have Or To Be?* the Humanistic psychologist Erich Fromm presents an analysis of human values in terms of the distinction between the modes of Having and Being. He suggests that:

“In the having mode of existence my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property.” (19)

In the Being mode of existence, however, “...we must identify two forms of being. One is in contrast to having, ... and means aliveness and authentic relatedness to the world.” (20)

Fromm's affirmation of “aliveness” and Naess' consideration of “joy” can be synthesised in order to promote an ethic of celebration. Indeed, Naess declared that “... we need the immense variety of the sources of joy opened through increased sensitivity toward the richness and diversity of life, through the profound cherishing of free natural landscapes.” (21)

For Fromm, “The other form of being is in contrast to appearing and refers to the true nature, the true reality of a person or thing in contrast to deceptive appearances...”(19) He outlined a blue print for a New Society based on the Being mode. He suggested that:

“If the City of God and the Earthly City were thesis and antithesis, a new synthesis is the only alternative to chaos: the synthesis between the spiritual core of the Late Medieval world and the development of rational thought and science since the Renaissance. This synthesis is The City of Being.” (22)

It can be suggested that a synthesis of Fromm's concept of Being and Buber's I-Thou relationship can be creatively incorporated into an exploration of models of Self-realisation including that which is elucidated as a significant dimension of Naess' Deep Ecology. Indeed, what Fromm and Buber appear to articulate is what can be termed a philosophy of Moral Personalism in which the primacy of authentic modes or ways of relating is affirmed and Naess' perspective affirms the development of what he terms the Ecological Self, characterised by empathy, which calls for a radical reappraisal of ways of seeing, and being, in the world. Naess, in his ecological philosophy, calls us to a new way of relating to, and experiencing, the natural world. His Deep Ecology can be viewed as a philosophy which calls for a re-enchantment of the world which involves significant existential and psychological dimensions.

It would appear, therefore, that Bingswanger's existential psychology and Landsman's model of the Beautiful and Noble Person outlined above share an approach to understanding human existence and personality which affirms the interaction between the self, others and the world. It can be suggested, therefore, that the contribution existentialist thought can make to understanding the self and its relationship to the environment is to be primarily found in its recognition that self-awareness, self-understanding, self-actualisation and self-transcendence is rooted in interaction with others and one's environment. The existential framework echoes Buber in its affirmation of the primacy of relationship and encounter. The existentialist enterprise, therefore, can be regarded as offering a personalist perspective which cogently complements, and elucidates, Naess' ecological philosophy.

It is likely that, at some time, each one of us has experienced the sense of awe and wonder that is evoked by the beauty of the natural world. A wonderful sunrise or sunset, a starry night, a rainbow, or the radiance of a field of sunflowers, for example, can move, inspire, and even overwhelm us. Such experiences capture our attention and elicit positive feelings and emotions. They can be described as 'wonderful' because they are beautiful, amazing, and even breathtaking. Poets, painters, musicians, filmmakers, and scientists, amongst others, have expressed powerfully and evocatively their experiences of awe and wonder in relation to the natural world.

For example, the Polish composer Mieczyslaw Karłowicz expressed his feelings about the Tatra mountains when he commented:

“When I stand on the top of a steep mountain, having only the blue hemisphere of the sky above and the sea of the plateau with waves of other summits beneath, I feel as if I were blending with the surrounding space.

I cease to perceive myself as a unique entity; instead, I sense the eternal and mighty breath of the universe. Hours spent in such a mood of semi-consciousness are felt as a temporary return to the state of non-existence. This experience rewards me with peaceful thoughts on life and death; it tells me about an eternal joy of melting in the universe.” (23)

The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl also affirms the Transcendent nature of the mountain experience. He declares in his autobiography:

“I go to the mountains as some go the desert: to gather my strength on solitary walks, as on the

plateau of the Rax mountain. Every important decision I have made, almost without exception, I have made in the mountains." (24)

For Naess the mountain experience can be regarded as being at the heart of his philosophy of Deep Ecology and the concept of Self-realisation. Throughout his writings he reflects upon his many years of experiencing his hut named Tvergastein, located in the mountains of southern Norway. He notes that "it was here that I learned to appreciate anything that had to do with living beings and minerals and stones." (25)

Naess' philosophy of Deep Ecology, therefore, can be regarded as presenting a way of seeing and being in the world which affirms the connectedness, relatedness, and dependence of humankind to the wider web of life in which Self-realisation, developing one's identity in relationship with other living beings, facilitates the development of the Ecological Self which experiences life joyfully, characterised by compassionate empathy. However, in responding to his way of seeing the world critics of Naess might suggest that his vision lacks empirical foundation and that, ultimately, his ecological philosophy is a form of modern-day poetic and pastoral Romanticism which has limited pragmatic or utilitarian value. What does Deep Ecology offer to exploration of issues such as, for example, sustainable development, extinction of species, nuclear power and alternative forms of energy and genetically modified agriculture?

It can be suggested that the meaningfulness and relevance of Naess' understanding of Self-realisation can be located in his consideration of the relationship between Deep Ecology and Education. In a dialogue exploring the

relationship between Deep Ecology and education he commented:

“In Japan a friend of mine helped me to gather about 100 people. We went into the forest at daybreak, and we said: ‘Now let us say nothing to each other. We will just listen to what the trees are saying.’ We had an hour of complete silence. We were active. We had a high level of activeness, but showed no observable activity.” (26)



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It can be suggested that at the heart of the educational enterprise, the process of teaching and learning, is the capacity for students and teachers to be inspired. Inspiration can be defined as “being stimulated to creative thought or action”. To be inspired means to be motivated, energised, and animated to engage positively and creatively with something which has meaning and significance. We are inspired by that which has the

capacity to connect with us deeply. We can be inspired by, for example, a work of art, a piece of music, a film, by the beauty and wonder of the natural world, by someone or something we love or by the example of great effort, achievement and acts of compassion. In his declaration that “We had a high level of activeness, but showed no observable activity”, it can be suggested that Naess is facilitating an approach to the environment which is characterised by the experience of what can be termed “presence”. Mary Rose O’Reilly (27) has explored the concept of what she terms Radical Presence, and she draws upon Parker Palmer’s idea that “To teach is to create space...” In *To Know As We Are Known* Parker (28) identifies three key features of a learning space: openness, boundaries and an atmosphere of hospitality. For Parker, hospitality denotes “...receiving each other, our struggles, our newborn ideas, with openness and care.” It can be suggested that the “space” to which Palmer refers includes both the physical space, the material environment, which is the location for teaching and learning, and also the nature and quality of the relationships and interactions within the classroom. “Space”, therefore, can be regarded as having both inner and outer, subjective and objective, dimensions in which the existential encounter, the learning dialectical space, between teacher and students is located in a physical space, the classroom environment. Indeed, recent years have seen the emergence of an interest in educational circles in the relationship between physical spaces and children’s well-being with particular reference to the ways in which experience of the natural world promotes flourishing of both children and teachers. Point (e) of Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “Parties agree that the

education of the child shall be directed to ...the development of respect for the natural environment.” (29) It can be suggested that ‘respect for the natural environment’ underpins all aspects of Article 29 because, ultimately, the ‘environment’ is not restricted to the physical, material, natural world but also refers to the dynamic network of relationships and interactions, the ‘web of life’ which characterises the whole of creation.

Ravenscroft (30) has outlined an approach to a philosophy, a pedagogy of Contemplative Education, in which education, the art of teaching and learning is ultimately about relationship, encounter and engagement with others and the world in which we live which is characterised by presence, mindfulness and reverence. Contemplative Education echoes the approach of the Ukrainian pedagogue Vassily Sukhomlinsky in which the child’s encounter with nature is affirmed:

“We went to the meadow in the quiet of early evening. A pensive pussy-willow with tender foliage stood before us, and in the pond was the reflection of the endless firmament. A flock of swans flew across the clear azure sky. We listened attentively to the music of the beautiful evening. We heard a surprising sound from somewhere in the pond, as if someone were softly striking the keys of a clavicord. It seemed that the pond itself, the bank and the firmament were all ringing with the sound.” (31)

Sukhomlinsky encouraged the children to engage with the sights and sounds of the natural world and to relate in depth to what they experienced. His declaration that “we listened attentively” illustrates that he was affirming a response to the beauties and joys of nature which required focus, concentration and an attitude of being fully present

to, and with, the phenomena he and his children encountered.

A curriculum which engages children with the natural world also encourages the development of the aesthetic, creative, and contemplative dimensions. Sukhomlinsky illustrates the importance of the aesthetic dimension in his declaration that:

“The chief aim for me was to teach (the children) the ability to relate emotionally to the beautiful and to give them a need for impressions of an aesthetic nature. Beauty must become an integral part of people’s lives, and this task is accomplished by education.” (32)

Indeed, he celebrates the transformative power of beauty in his affirmation that: “Working to create beauty ennobles the young heart and prevents indifference. In creating beauty on the earth, the children become better, purer, and more beautiful.”

Sukhomlinsky recognises, therefore, that beauty is not only to be perceived and discerned, it has also to be actively created. For example, he reflects upon the creation by the children of what he terms a Nook of Beauty:

“Between the school plot and a thicket of bushes, the children found a clearing covered with thick grass by the slope of the ravine. There was a lot of moisture during showers. We weeded the clearing and began to transform it into a green lawn. ‘Our nook will be a Kingdom of green’, I told the children ... This dream inspired the children.” (33)

Through this creative activity the children are being socialized into the dimension of service as a significant feature of life. Through articulating their creative voice they are being inspired, encouraged and motivated to act not

only with regard to self-interest but they are also being nurtured into an altruistic understanding of the world. Indeed, Frankl affirms that:

“... being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.” (34)

The National Curriculum Council (35) has identified beliefs; a sense of awe, wonder and mystery; experiencing feelings of transcendence; search for meaning and purpose; self-knowledge; relationships; creativity and feelings and emotions as some of the many aspects of spiritual development and the Forum for Values' Environment dimension testifies to the “... value (of) the natural world as a source of wonder and inspiration, and accept(s) our duty to maintain a sustainable environment for the future (36)

It can be suggested that exploration of the Deep Ecology and Self-realisation of Arne Naess can be a vehicle for exploration of perspectives on existence which recognise and affirm the primacy of this spiritual dimension. What can be regarded as permeating all aspects of spiritual development is the quality of empathy. The capacity to understand and imaginatively enter into another person's experience can be encouraged through exploration of Naess' way of seeing the world. Indeed, he comments that:

“Part of the joy stems from the consciousness of our intimate relation to something bigger than our own ego, something which has endured for millions of years and is worth continued life for millions of years.

The requisite care flows naturally if the self is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is felt and conceived as protection of our very selves." (37)

The importance of education for the emotions has been cogently presented by Goleman (38) who suggests that our understanding of human intelligence is far too restrictive. He believes that emotions have a significant role in thought, decision making, and individual achievement and he articulates a theory of Emotional Intelligence and emotional literacy. His thesis advocates the further development of a Self-Science curriculum the main components of which include teaching and learning strategies which facilitate development of self-awareness, personal decision-making, managing feelings, handling stress, empathy, authentic communications, self-disclosure, insight, self-acceptance, personal responsibility, assertiveness, group dynamics and conflict resolution. Naess's philosophy of Deep Ecology and its affirmation of Self-Realisation can be regarded as being a pedagogic vehicle through which teaching and learning for the emotions, at the heart of which the of cultivation of empathy, can be nurtured and affirmed. There is potential, therefore, for the development of a holistic interdisciplinary curriculum which places ecological awareness and sensitivity, empathy and compassion, contemplation, presence and mindfulness at the heart of the process of teaching and learning. From the perspective of academic Philosophy, the development of such a curriculum could involve a creative synthesis of Environmental Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, Existential Philosophy and Humanistic Psychology complemented by insights from the arts together with the natural and social sciences.

In a world in which joy and pain, disappointment and hope, co-exist in what can seem, at times, to be a powerful yet paradoxical, irrational and meaningless combination, it is understandable why people ask what can possibly be an authentic response to the political economic, ecological and spiritual challenges which face the human race and the planet on which we are, ultimately, travellers, journeying into what, at times, can be regarded as being an increasingly uncertain, fragile and anxiety-provoking future.

Through development of a transformed awareness, appreciation and compassionate response to the world, in solidarity with the philosophy of Deep Ecology and the concept of Self-realisation of Arne Naess, it is possible to affirm the perspective of the Eco-philosopher Skolimowski that:

“.... ecological values are universe-centred, and life-centred. They reconnect us with all forms of life in the universe. They empower us and entrust us with responsibility for all. For we are a part of this grand sacred tapestry called cosmos. We are minute particles of this tapestry, yet terribly important as conscious weavers of this tapestry. Such is the message of ecological values.” (39)

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REFLECTION 9: *The Fertile Void*



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'The Fertile Void' is a concept developed by the Psychotherapists Fritz and Laura Perls, pioneers of Gestalt Therapy. It denotes a state of not knowing, which can be a prelude to the possibility of new and creative responses to challenging existential situations. 'The Fertile Void' can also be a state of being simultaneously empty and full. In the existential place and space, there can be a sense of things falling apart, which can give rise to a sense of aimlessness and lack of meaning in life, yet, paradoxically, this fragmented sense of self can become the seedbed in which possibilities and potential for the future is immersed.

It can be regarded as being a point or phase in life when it is difficult to make sense, to discern meaning, in what is happening. It can result in being unsure about one's

identity in which the question 'Who am I?' is difficult to articulate. It is hard to discern one's sense of self and the direction one is heading in life. There can appear to be no clear-cut answers in respect of the future direction of one's life as a result of which life can feel deeply empty. However, at the heart of such an experience, there is a paradox: deep within the experience, the space, of emptiness, there is also the potential for new and creative ways of seeing and being.

Thomas Berry, in his book 'The Sacred Universe' explores the concept and experience of alienation. It can be suggested that at the very heart of the contemporary ecological crisis is humankind's alienation from themselves, from others and from the natural world. There is, therefore, in many and varied ways, a profound sense of disconnection which permeates deeply into all dimensions of life: politics, economics, business, science and technology, ecology, the arts and spirituality. Although there are, indeed, significant positive developments, ideas, and innovations to be found in all of these areas of human activity it can be suggested that the truly creative, inspiring and empowering initiatives are, in a sense, ultimately responses to the experience of 'dislocation' or 'alienation'.

Berry has commented:

"Alienation is, in some sense, the oldest and most universal human experience. It is our human condition: the difficulty of discovering our personal identity and our proper place in the universe. Particularly in Western civilisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, humans have experienced the challenge of authentic existence while moving through a series of rapid historical transformations.... In the opening years of the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a new alienation in our inability to relate effectively to the integral functioning of

the Earth. This alienation, which results from an extreme anthropocentrism and dedication to consumerism, is causing the exploitation and degradation of the planet. Until recently, few people have realised the extent to which human fulfilment depends on the integral functioning of the Earth in all the grandeur of its natural landscapes – the forests, mountains, woodlands. Rivers and lakes – and in the wonder of its wildlife: animals, insects, fish and songbirds.”

I suggest that at the heart of what Berry is saying is that humankind is losing (or has already lost) a sense of the *grandeur* and *wonder* of the Earth. We have related to the Earth in a utilitarian, instrumental way so that everything, and anyone, is viewed as being a resource to utilise as we please, to satisfy our own ends. This is what Martin Buber terms an ‘I-It’ way of relating to the world around us.

In effect, therefore, I believe that what Berry is calling humankind to is the project of a rediscovery of a deep sense of the sacred; he is encouraging us to see the world anew and to be transformed. He invites us to develop new ways of seeing and being and to live in right relationship with our self, each other and with the Earth. Berry affirms the importance of what he terms ‘The Great Work, which he defines as being:

“... the task of moving modern industrial society from its present devastating influence on the Earth to a more benign mode of presence Our own special role, which we will hand to our children, is that of managing the arduous transition from the terminal Cenozoic to the emerging Ecozoic era, the period when humans will be present to the planet as participating members of the comprehensive Earth community.”

Berry, therefore, holds the view that in these early years of the 21st century, humankind is faced with significant choices about the future direction of the entire Earth community. He calls us to a radical reconsideration of the ways in which we relate to the web of life and his philosophy invites us to be agents of change in bringing about a renewed and transformed world. However, poetic and philosophical such a call to radical change may sound, he is, in fact, calling humankind to a radical new vision of what is possible.

I suggest that without acknowledgement of the existential fact of alienation, which Berry has clearly and unambiguously drawn our attention to, it will not be possible to transcend our myopic ways of doing things. 'Business as usual' is not an option. A new vision, a new worldview, a cosmic perspective is required. I suggest that Thomas Berry's 'Universe Story' and his concept of the Great Work, complemented by ways of seeing and being such as those of writers, educators, artists, poets, ecologists, scientists, and architects, amongst others, can be transformative sources of inspiration inviting us to respond to, and engage with, the challenges and opportunities which face us in the early years of the 21st century.

In Fritz and Lous Perls' concept of 'The Fertile Void', there is an acknowledgement that one can experience a sense of not being able to articulate the sense of one's identity; there is, in effect, a 'not knowing' in relation to oneself understanding. It can be as if each dimension of the self is separate from each other. The self is not whole; it is not unified. I suggest that there can be close connections between Perls' concept of the Fertile Void and the understanding of Positive Disintegration articulated by the Psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski who comments that:

“Disintegration of the primitive structures destroys the psychic unity of the individual. As he loses the cohesion which is necessary for feeling a sense of meaning and purpose in life, he is motivated to develop himself. The developmental instinct, then, following disintegration of the existing structure of the personality, contributes to a reconstruction at a higher level.”

For Dabrowski, therefore, it is necessary for what he terms the ‘primitive structures’ or the ‘primitive integration’ of the self, which is characterised by an existence in which the person is “... not capable of having internal conflicts, although they often have conflicts with their external environment. They are unaware of any qualities of life beyond those necessary for immediate gratification of their primitive impulses, and they act solely on behalf of their impulses.”

In Dabrowski's perspective, therefore, the self characterised by primitive integration has to, ultimately, disintegrate, to break down, to fall apart, in order for the self to be reconstituted, to be reformed, to undergo the experience of what he terms ‘positive disintegration’ which he understands to be a “... process, through loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal environment and with the external environment, is the ground for the birth and development of a higher psychic structure. Disintegration is the basis for developmental thrusts upward, the creation of new evolutionary dynamics, and the movement of the personality to a higher level, all of which are manifestations of secondary integration.”

I suggest that Perls' concept of the Fertile Void and Dabrowski's philosophy of Positive Disintegration express not only the experience of individual alienation from

oneself and others, but that they also can connote a society in which the population are driven by primitive instincts, by the desire for immediate gratification. I have quoted earlier in this The Fertile Void reflection Thomas Berry's observation that "... we are experiencing a new alienation in our inability to relate effectively to the integral functioning of the Earth. This alienation, which results from an extreme anthropocentrism and dedication to consumerism, is causing the exploitation and degradation of the planet."

As you explore and reflect upon the nine reflections presented in this Thomas Berry Manchester (TBM) Spring 2024 Newsletter, you may wish to consider in what ways each of the reflections, exploring the experience of Hirayama in Wim Wenders' film 'Perfect Days', Yayoi Kosama's artworks, Janusz Korczak's and Vasilly Sukhomonlinsky's pedagogical philosophies, Ivan Lackovic Croata's recollection of Placid Landscapes, Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love and the Windhover Contemplation Center, each, in their own ways, either illustrate insights into alienation, the Fertile Void or Positive Disintegration or point to ideas of growth, rebirth, and renewal?

As we approach the Summer Solstice, the mid-point, the turning point, of the year, may we experience in our individual and collective lives the reality of new life, new insights, new perspectives, and new joys.

Enjoy!

EPILOGUE: Letting Go

In 2015 the broadcaster and writer Clive James, reflecting upon his experience of observing a tree, commented: “Each glimpse of the tree reminds me of a beautiful Italian word my future wife taught me 50 years ago in Florence. The word was *scorcio* It means a glimpse. From one of our coffee bars we could look down a narrow street and see the spire of the abbey-church of the Badia outlined against the sky. The spire was a revelation of elegance, as my tree is now. Looking back, you realise that glimpses are all you ever get. There is so little time.” James makes a connection between observing, and paying attention to a tree, and his memory of recalling a specific moment in time which was significant for him, a moment in which a Church spire was “outlined against the sky”. He describes this experience as being “a revelation of elegance”. In effect, James, echoing a phrase from CS Lewis, can be regarded as being surprised by joy. Observing the Church spire with the sky as its backdrop was a momentary, fleeting, passing phenomenon, yet he vividly and affectionately recalls it fifty years later.

It is likely that each one of us has experienced the sense of awe and wonder that is evoked by the beauty of the natural world. A wonderful sunrise or sunset, a starry night, a rainbow, or the radiance of

a field of sunflowers, for example, can move, inspire, and even overwhelm us. Such experiences capture our attention and elicit positive feelings and emotions. They can be described as 'wonderful' because they are beautiful, amazing, and even breathtaking.



Thomas Merton Finding the Ground of Being in Nature
by Matthew Fox

On 16th June 1961, Thomas Merton, the Christian Monk, and Contemplative Activist, reflected upon his experience of one specific moment in time, a moment in which he paid attention to, and was grateful for, the transient beauties of the natural world. He wrote: "Yesterday all day a small gardenia was a great consolation ... I stayed long looking at a goldfinch and walked slowly up through the

woods, gazing at the tall straight oaks that are before you reach the turnstile. Everything is beautiful and I am grateful for all of it ... Sweet afternoon! Cool breezes and a clear sky. This day will not come again. The bulls lie under the tree in the corner of their field. Quiet afternoon! The blue hills, the daylilies in the wind. This day will not come again."

In these words, Merton, recalls the experience of carefully observing a goldfinch, oak trees, a cool breeze, and the clear sky. Twice he affirms that "*This day will not come again.*" Merton, therefore, is gently reminding us of the transient nature of all phenomena. All things that exist come into being, they grow, develop, mature, and, in the fulness of time, they cease to be. This applies to all that exists, from the smallest phenomena at the microscopic level, to the stars, planets, and galaxies at the macroscopic, cosmic, level. Like Clive James' experience of the tree and Church spire, Merton acknowledges and affirms that his experience is, ultimately, a passing moment in time, an encounter with the coming into being and the eventual fading away of all phenomena.



'The Canticle of Creation'

by the Poor Clares of Arundel

In his celebrated Canticle of the Sun, his song of praise to God as Creator, Saint Francis of Assisi appears to be overwhelmed by the vibrancy, energy, and dynamism of the whole of nature: the sun, moon, stars, wind, air, water, and fire. He responds to the whole of creation with spontaneity, joy, and celebration. Francis perceives the whole of life as being a medium through which the Divine is revealed. For Francis, the creation, the web of life, forms an interactive, relational cosmic dance, it is iconic. Creation is revelatory; it is a vehicle of Transcendence. In his Canticle Francis approaches the Divine with reverence, respect, devotion, submission, and humility, as being the source, the

ground of being, of all life. Francis praises God for "... sister moon and every star that You have formed to shine ..." and he acknowledges that wind, air, breezes, and clouds "... To everyone that breathes You give a share." Francis felt inspired to create a musical melody to complement the words of his Canticle which Franciscan Friars would sing as they ventured into the towns and villages like travelling minstrels, troubadours, teaching, and preaching. After singing the Canticle one of the Brothers would declare to the people: "We are the wandering minstrels of God, and the only reward we ask is that you live a life of true penitence!"

During the cold and frosty Winter, it is still possible to experience beautiful sunny days and glorious sunrises and sunsets when the world is illuminated in all of its fragile beauty and all things are bathed in, and suffused with, light. For example, I looked out of the kitchen window and observed a large tree in a neighbour's garden. During the Autumn weeks, most of its leaves had fallen to the ground, yet the leaves that remained were bathed in a golden light. It was as if the increasingly bare branches of the tree created by the falling of the leaves provided a space, a channel, in which the sunlight could illuminate the remaining leaves and the overall effect was that the tree was transformed; it was bathed in a beautiful golden light, and, like Clive

James, I was able to regard it as a “revelation of elegance.” It was a transformative moment in time, in which I was able to soak in the joy of creation and give thanks for the beauty of the world which is all around us, even in those spaces and places where we might not expect to discern it.

As I reflected upon my viewing of the tree, I found myself thinking about how, during the late Autumn, it was in the very act of the tree shedding its leaves, letting go of its greenery, that it was able in its emptiness to be illuminated, transfigured, by the rays of the sun. The space created by the falling leaves made it possible for the radiant beauty of the tree to be visible. At the very heart of this experience is the paradox that in letting go, emptying itself of its foliage, the fragile beauty of the branches of the tree were beautifully illuminated. The beauty of the tree in Autumn can be regarded as a preview, a prefiguring, of the abundance of life that returns to the tree in the Spring. As we journey through Spring, anticipating the coming of Summer, having passed through the seasons of Autumn and Winter with their longer hours of darkness, we can find ourselves reflecting upon times past, recalling and reliving those experiences of what Clive James called “revelations of elegance” which inspire and nurture us (although, at times, these can also be bittersweet)

FINIS:



Abba Poemen said about Abba Pior that every single day he made a fresh beginning.

The meaning of this quotation is that whatever you have done in your life so far, you can forget about and start again. You can put all the bad things you've done behind you and start afresh, like having a clean, blank piece of paper. You can always change your life, it's never too late.

meditation - the continuous application of the mind to the viewing of some religious truth, mystery or object of reverence, as a devotional exercise. To plan by revolving in the mind, to design mentally.

contemplation - the action of beholding, of mentally viewing; attentive consideration. Taking into account, regarding, viewing.

reflection - the action of turning or fixing the thoughts on some subject; deep or serious consideration. A thought or idea occurring to, or occupying the mind.

“Abba Poemen said about Abba Pior that every single day he made a fresh beginning.”

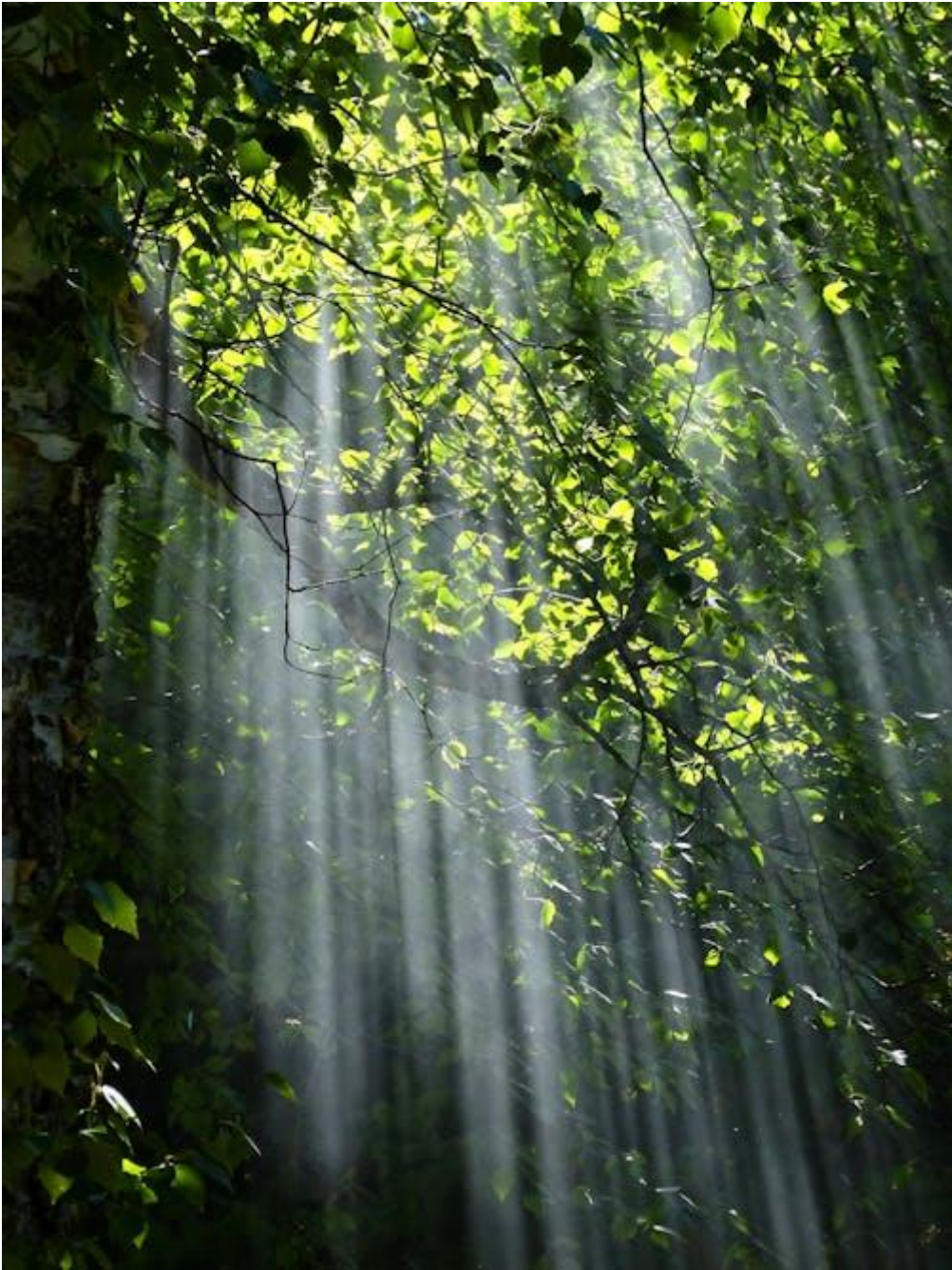
In the artwork above, Victoria, aged 13, is responding to the quotation above.

She interprets the quotation to mean:

“... that whatever you have done in your life so far you can forget about {them} and start again.

You can put all the bad things you’ve done behind you and start again like having a blank piece of paper.

You can always change your life, it’s never too late.”



Photograph by Pixabay

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