

## Listen, can you hear their spiritual cry?

We live in times where many young people are increasingly pursuing their own spiritual search and yet at the same time distinguishing between spirituality and religion. David Tacey's book, *Enchantment, The New Australian Spirituality* presents the following insights into the spirituality of Australian young people. From these insights I believe it is possible to discern the spiritual cries of young people today. Their cries have many implications for our work with them and if we listen carefully we may also learn things important for our own spirituality.

'For young adults today, spirituality is no longer a matter of private or personal concern. Many of my students talk to me about spirituality in worldly and public terms – as the basis for a new sense of human community, as a cure for racism, as an essential ingredient for the new ecological awareness, as an antidote to domestic violence and civil unrest. Spirituality for youth today has acquired a public conscience, with very little of the antisocial, pleasure-seeking flavour that it had for the university students of my own generation, in the 1960s and 1970s. Spirituality is still a deeply internal experience, but it is an internal experience that profoundly affects how we view nature and the world, how we see ourselves and each other' (Tacey 2000 p187).

- How do our schools ensure that all learning is interconnected and open to religious and spiritual questions?
- How do we convey to students that Christianity is a faith and a way of living in the world and not just a personal belief system?

'Churched and unchurched youth share the same passion: that if spirituality means anything at all in today's world, it has to mean social justice and political equity. The old idea of a quiet, personal devotion to God and allowing Caesar to get on with ruling the world has given way to a new holistic ethic in which spirituality is personal and social simultaneously' (Tacey 2000 p189).

- How does Christian Studies inform students about social justice?
- How are the students given opportunities to support the LCA's organisations, Australian Lutheran World Service and Lutheran Community Care, that work for peace and justice in the local and global community?

'It is not just a matter of 'modernising' church practices in order to regain contact with society: deleting Latin, bringing in guitars and rock music, reducing rituals, even introducing language that is inclusive of women will not ensure that contemporary culture is drawn in and that the church can find renewal and resume its leadership role. On the contrary, it is angels, rituals and mysteries that many people want to 'discover', and that many sorely miss when the modernised church takes them away' (Tacey 2000 p197).

- What opportunities exist for teaching about and involving students in worship and prayer practices that engage students in ritual and the mystery of God?
- Where and how do our schools provide sacred spaces and times for silence, reflection and solitude?

'Youth spiritual experience challenges society to recover its spiritual life and its religious imagination. Youth spiritual experience also represents a serious challenge to Western religious tradition. Firstly, it teaches that the spirit has got out of the bottle, and that organised religion no longer holds a monopoly on spirituality, a word now used freely and often without any reference to the churches. Secondly, it shows that spirituality is an existential and practical issue, involving not merely knowledge of theology or familiarity with Scripture, but knowledge of the self, of the psyche and of life itself. Spirituality is less concerned these days with an abstract faith in the afterlife than with practical concerns with this life. Young people are looking to spirituality to teach

them how to live, how to be in the world, and how to know themselves in relationship to others' (Tacey 2000 p210).

- How is Christian Studies grounded in and connected to what young people consider spirituality to be about?
- How does Christian Studies assist students to critique a range of religious and spiritual options and provide them with skills to make 'wise choices'?

'Western religion in the past has relied on a high degree of conformity and routine religious practice, often set in place by fear rather than arrived at by conviction. The way ahead will have to emphasise grace and love, and this will necessarily involve a religious style that encourages rather than represses, personal variations on the religious theme and unique expressions of the religious calling' (Tacey 2000 p205).

- How do our schools assist students to distinguish between the rules and expectations that provide order in a school from the message of Christianity, which is grace and love?
- How is the gospel communicated to students in their every day experience of the school?
- How do our schools facilitate students' own expressions of their spiritual search and calling?

Our young people are desperately crying for spiritual meaning. They are seeking an experience of a gracious God who loves them and connects with them. They search for resources to develop their identity and purpose for living. They seek a spirituality that finds expression in relationships with others both locally and globally and recognises a responsibility to the earth. I believe that the Christian tradition provides an array of resources that can help young people on their spiritual journey. The role of the teacher, then, as Rossiter (2001, p37) suggests, is to be 'wise spiritual interpreters guiding young people's efforts to become themselves critical interpreters of culture in their personal quest for meaning, and for values to which they can commit themselves'. In Christian Studies there is a need for a 'focus and language which show that they [teachers] are in tune with the way young people ask questions about meaning, purpose and identity.'. Are teachers in Lutheran schools prepared to listen to the spiritual cry of their students? Are we prepared to hear their searching questions and to enter into dialogue with them? Are we willing to reflect on what young people believe about spirituality and consider how it could enhance our own spiritual journey?

**Anne Dohnt**  
**National Christian Studies Coordinator**  
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