

Engaged Spirituality: Prayer within the Providence of God – Part 2

Alan Wright and Jamie Edgerton¹, March 2017

Foreword: Personal Introduction from Alan Wright

This paper is a sequel to the earlier paper: “Engaged Spirituality: Prayer within the Providence of God”² which tells the story of the formation of an intercessory prayer team (“Oldies for Intercession”, or OFI) underpinning World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action (CV&A) program. There was nothing startlingly new about OFI’s methodology. But it was highly disciplined in bible study and reaching deep shared discernment, and it followed basic principles - such as Practitioners and Intercessors reaching agreement in the spirit of Matt.18:19 prior to any significant changes in focus. Feedback on answers to specific prayers was increasingly positive, and pilot CV&A programs in World Vision were expanding exponentially³.

By the end of 2011 it was obvious that OFI was reaching the end of its first phase. Llew Evans had died and Daphne Holden of Westgate Baptist, who had replaced Llew, had sold her home and moved into a retirement village 12 kilometres away. I was approaching 90. To give an account of our stewardship, I began writing - jointly with Jamie Edgerton and Bill Walker - the ‘Engaged Spirituality (ES) Paper’. Early in 2014, our ES paper received enthusiastic endorsement from World Vision International leaders who commended it to World Vision staff for study and implementation where people felt ‘ready’ for it.

Why then this present paper as a sequel to the ES paper? I knew that something more was needed. One of the biggest issues the ES paper addresses is the ‘Sacred-Secular Divide’ that is deeply entrenched in many Evangelical/Baptist churches. This is partly because of their concerns about Christians falling into the ‘trap’ of what was called ‘The Social Gospel’.⁴ That danger is gladly acknowledged: but deeper still, we see the obligation to ‘love our neighbour as ourselves’ and ‘pray the kingdom’ - whatever that might mean. I knew that we had not adequately shared the ‘wrestling with the Scriptures’ that we had undertaken, and that without that evidence many leaders within my Baptist/Evangelical tradition would not be persuaded to make the fundamental shift in perspective that the ES paper suggests is now required of us humans. In saying this, I am honouring my Baptist brethren.

The proximate purpose of this sequel is to set out the biblical foundations and implications of the comprehensive ‘OFI Worldview’ articulated in the ES paper. The ultimate purpose of the two papers, is to challenge the churches to engage ‘The Powers’ of Ephesians 6:12 that underpin the curses of poverty, conflict and environmental destruction⁵ undermining God’s purpose of redeeming and renewing the world. This engagement can only be effective and sustainable if it is undertaken in partnership with the Spirit – with the Spirit acting as the ‘senior partner’.

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² “Engaged Spirituality: Prayer within the Providence of God”, Wright, Edgerton and Walker, 2014
<http://www.wvi.org/development/publication/engaged-spirituality-through-citizen-voice-and-action>

³ CV&A is now being implemented in 700 area programs in over 50 countries - helping to introduce reforms in over ten thousand schools, health centres, and other services, serving tens of millions of people.

⁴ Whereby Christians can become so deeply drawn into addressing social and justice issues that they leave little time for attention to God Himself in worship and devotional life.

⁵ This conviction was based on Walter Wink’s exegesis referenced in footnote 6. Too often the Churches serve as chaplains to the Powers rather than challenging them to act justly.

I. Early Beginnings, and Scriptural Underpinnings, of 'Oldies for Intercession'

Early in 2005 Llew Evans and Alan Wright were living next door to each other in separate bungalows. As former close colleagues on the staff of Carey Baptist Grammar School in Melbourne for 15 years, now widowed and retired Baptist activists, they read and reflected on Walter Wink's trilogy of books⁶ on "The Powers That Be". It was life-changing. Llew copied out the words from the final book onto a piece of white cardboard: "History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being". He placed it upon the sideboard in the room where they used to have lunch together nearly every day. There they made a solemn covenant with God together: "We will give the rest of our lives to this ministry of intercession". In time they called their partnership 'Oldies for Intercession (OFI)', somewhat whimsically to help avoid any pretentiousness.

Alan and Llew knew that such a commitment addressed their deeply felt sense of what was needed in the light of what Wink had written, based upon his rigorous biblical studies. They were acutely aware of the perilous age in which they were living, and the relative powerlessness/apparent ineffectiveness of church 'prayers for the world'. Such prayers (of course) were usually general – with concerns being mentioned in vague terms, leaving them in God's hands to 'fix' without church attendees doing anything more about them. They felt quietly restless about this pattern of praying but did not know what to do about it.

Within a month, a former student of theirs at Carey Baptist Grammar School, Jamie Edgerton, approached Alan. As a staff member of the World Bank, Jamie was co-designer of the World Bank program: "Community Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM)", which was the precursor of World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action (CV&A) program. He asked Llew and Alan to become prayer-partners with Bill Walker (World Vision staff member) and himself as they introduced the CBPM approach into World Vision Area Development Programs in Africa and Latin America. Jamie briefed Alan thoroughly on the principles on which the CBPM programs worked to 'free impoverished communities to empower each other.' Alan had been a senior research officer for the Australian Federal Commission of Enquiry into Poverty, and responsible for one its main reports to the Whitlam Government⁷: "Outcomes of Schooling: Aspects of Success and Failure"⁸. He thus had the background to see immediately that the principles upon which CBPM was working resonated strongly with the report's understandings and recommendations that suggested similar sorts of strategies: *reflecting upon experience until better ways forward are visualized, then acting upon these effectively (i.e. with 'competence' - the capacity to act upon our relevant environment in such a way that 'the self is enhanced)*. OFI responded wholeheartedly to Jamie's invitation.

They had already been reflecting deeply upon the current state of the world, and were in broad agreement about the following basic insights and principles:

⁶ Wink's acclaimed trilogy of biblical exegesis on the principalities and powers: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Powers that Determine Human Existence* (1986); and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992). Fortress Press is the publisher of all three books in the trilogy. Wink wrote a short popular digest of his work: *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (1998) that was published by Galilee.

⁷ When the Whitlam Government was dismissed in 1975 these recommendations were tragically lost before the then Minister for Education, Kym Beasley Snr. could implement them.

⁸ Wright et al, "Outcomes of Schooling: Aspects of Success and Failure", Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976

(i) After 6,000 years of wave after wave of 'domination systems'/'empire building', we are confronted by advanced technologies of destruction PLUS the exploitation of the earth's resources at an unsustainable rate. We have been ushered into a new era of history! But 'thinking humans' all over the world within different cultures and religions have been perceiving our universal human need to either "live for the good of the whole earth and its peoples" or condemn our children's children to a non-viable lifestyle on Planet Earth. Recognition of this stark dichotomy is now simply reality facing!

(ii) The doctrines of "justification by faith" and being "born again" stress regeneration which is foundational. But, if linked with the individualism of Western culture and a focus on the return of Christ, these doctrines can sometimes lead to an 'other-worldliness' and a lack of interest in serious social reform such as CV&A initiatives are undertaking. Such individualistic pietistic faith divorced from social justice has created the 'sacred/secular divide' that has nearly destroyed the Christian church's influence in public affairs - just when it is most urgently needed.

(iii) In this new era of history into which technology and empire has launched us, they had been 'awakened' to the potency of the query: "What does the Lord require of us...etc." as addressed in Micah 6:8. It is hard to over-estimate the magnitude of this awakening on a personal level. But their concerns for the survival of our planet led them to the conviction that Christians in all walks of life need to actually 'see' what is going on - not just in their own 'villages', but in the world: the destructive forces of globalisation based on a financial system which replaces colonialism with indebtedness, so that "he who pays the piper" (or lends him money) effectively "calls the tune".

(iv) Strategically positioned organizations such as World Vision can greatly assist churches to 'come to grips' with these fundamental human issues. They can help churches to learn about and effectively address these issues with well-informed 'on the ground' research and involvement — not just "the good intentions of would-be 'do-gooders'". Such genuine engagement contrasts with many of our church 'prayers for the world' which, while well intended, can be powerless because those that pray thus are not well-informed and are only rarely in a position to 'come to grips' with these issues.

(v) The complexities are huge, and the 'Powers that Be' (the "principalities & powers" of Eph. 6:12) - characterised especially by egoic behaviour - are well entrenched. Christians who are focussed primarily on individual piety and disengaged from the challenging issue of our time risk being out of step with God and relatively powerless in the face of the Powers. Jesus Himself confronted, engaged with, and unmasked the religious and political powers in first century Palestine. In calling disciples to follow Him, He calls us to do likewise in our 21st century world. We do this by becoming consciously engaged in conscious partnerships with God and each other: "God-working-with-us."

Broadly speaking, to start with in their weekly OFI meetings Alan and Llew followed the sequence of the Lord's prayer: hallowing God in their hearts then 'praying the Kingdom on earth' by consciously holding key people 'in God' while seeking to discern with them the will of God in their unfolding situations as they were up-dated with emails. They strove to get their own egos out of the way; to be sensitive to what was really happening 'on the ground'; and to respond accordingly. This was not an academic exercise, but a mutual 'walking with God' activity that included systematic meditation upon these Scriptures:

- II Cor. 3,4 & 5 in the Philips translation;
- Rom.8:26-28 in the RSV;
- John's gospel, Ch. 1 - the prologue - and chapters 3 and 4 (the woman of Samaria);

- John 14:15-17 - “another Counsellor ... the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, *for he dwells with you, and will be in you*” (RSV, *emphasis added*): note the continuity between Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us, as we shall see below.

Alan and Llew were deliberately holding Jamie and Bill Walker ‘in the Spirit’ as the joint leaders of the CBPM pilots. Later their focus broadened to Bill and his colleague Keren Winterford and their key counterparts (Betty Wamala in Uganda, and Maria Carolina in Brazil) who forged and tested the CV&A programs by expanding and enhancing the CBPM approach. Camilla Symes⁹ of World Vision UK, who later played a key role in the global unfolding of CV&A from those pilot programs, was not ‘on their radar’ at that stage.

Camilla wrote to Alan on April 8, 2014 with an email headed: “Thanks to Alan Wright and OFI for their prayers for CV&A”. He initially reacted negatively: *“I was, of course, delighted to receive this affirmation, realizing the implications of what was being conveyed. But I became increasingly restless because so much emphasis was placed upon my own role, when I was part of a very close-knit team. Jamie and Bill had ‘done the heavy lifting’ (and prior to them, Paulo Friere and many other pioneers of social accountability work).*

Camilla went on to detail her experience of being first provided with free return ticket airfares between London and Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and then feeling called, a few months later, to use them – all the while not knowing why. She was well known to WVUK, and ended up in the World Vision UK office on the day news arrived of significant funding for the very programs for which CV&A had been designed. She was invited to apply on the spot for the job of overseeing the ambitious expansion program, and was appointed a few weeks later.

It was then that Alan reacted. He said: *“No No ...I had nothing to do with that”*. He did not want to be praised for something he had no part in. And he continued to affirm this self-effacing position.

A few days later he had a profound experience in prayer: *“I was aware of the Spirit in some sense withdrawing from me, and my body became physically colder. My internal metabolism was changing in some way, until there, upon a screen inside my mind were the words: “Check your thinking ... what do you think happens when I am really invoked as a partner?”.*

He was absolutely stunned: *“My heart melted. I was sorrowful, repentant - even though it was such a gentle rebuke, or correction. But as I sat there digesting the implications of it my mood gradually changed, and the sense of “Presence” returned. I realized the huge implications of the whole communication. OFI was of course covenanted to intercede for the whole CV&A global initiative as it was unfolding outside the areas of our immediate awareness - not just the particular projects in Uganda & Brazil that we knew about. God the Spirit was “working with us”, and His ‘contacts’ were not limited to our OFI/CV&A networks !”*

Under Camilla a handpicked group of four was soon appointed to provide CV&A with the leadership it needed in the critical months/years ahead. This gave OFI a ‘picture’ of just what it means to have God working with them as the ‘Senior Partner’ in the enterprise. This was the interpretation their many hours of pondering Romans 8:28 had led them to, as detailed below.

It was in the light of that gentle rebuke and correction that Alan replied to Camilla (with copies to Kevin Jenkins - President of W.V. International - and his off-sider Mark Lorey). Alan thanked

⁹ Camilla had been working under Archbishop Tutu in South Africa as the Diocesan Development Officer for the Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist, Anglican Church of Southern Africa, before working for the Barnabas Trust in South Africa.

Camilla for her email, underlining what a close-knit 'team' OFI was part of - including, best of all, a clear ministry of the Holy Spirit whose 'contacts' were far wider than ours. Not only did the implications for the future of CV&A within World Vision look very significant, but also they themselves were now confirmed and confronted with the implications of such a partnership with the Holy Spirit.

II. Theological Reflections on Providence

Over time OFI's focus shifted increasingly to Romans 8:26-28 and the idea of Providence: 'God working with us for good'. This passage was important to them for two reasons:

(i) Llew was admitted to an aged care centre at the age of 92. He deeply identified with the words in Romans 8:26: "*The Spirit comes to us in our weakness*". These words somehow attuned his soul, especially when physically he felt he just had no energy to pray in such a deeply focussed way.

(ii) The emphasis on Providence in Romans 8:28: "*God working with us for good*" had become very significant for Alan over the preceding couple of decades, as we share below.

Initially OFI did not start with examining the Greek. But their questioning led them to do just that, and this turned out to be very illuminating and critically important to their growing understanding.

To explain these developing insights, consider Romans 8: 26 -28 in the RSV translation:

26 "*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.* 27 *And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* 28. *We know **that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.***"
(RSV, emphasis added)

Many will notice immediately how the RSV translation of verse 28 differs from the Authorized Version:

"28. *But we know that **all things work together for good to them who love God ...***"
(King James (authorised) version, emphasis added)

Other translations of the highlighted phrase in Romans 8:28 include the following:

"*every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.*"
(Petersen's "The Message"), and

"*everything that happens fits into a pattern for good*"
Phillips translation.

Alan and Llew could see where the contrast lay between what could be called the "weaker" concept of Providence in the King James, Petersen and Phillips translations, and the "stronger" concept in the RSV translation. They asked: is it "things" being worked into a pattern for good", or is it "God working with us for good"? The RSV version "*God works for good with those who love him*" invites disciples into a very serious commitment indeed: a life-changing commitment.

Alan consulted with Dr Keith Dyer, Professor of New Testament at Whitley College in Melbourne. With Keith's guidance, OFI discovered that in the Greek manuscripts, there are grounds for *both* weaker and stronger translations of Romans 8:28:

(i) Two Greek manuscripts (Codes Sinaiticus and Codex Claromontanus) have the words: *“panta sun-ergie eis agathon”*, translated in the King James Version: *“all things work together for good”*.

(ii) But three other Greek manuscripts are earlier, and probably more authoritative: (Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Papyrus 46). All three have the words: *“ho Theos sun-ergie eis agathon panta”*, which the RSV translates as: *“In everything, God works for good with those who love him.”*

The contrast is between *“God”* and *“things”* working for good, although the point is just one of emphasis - on the *‘ho Theos’*. *‘Things’* don’t *‘work’* ... only God does - within things!

This was just the insight that Alan needed. As he puts it: *“in due course I was led, step by step, to realize that God intends us humans to learn to pray, opening ourselves to Him in such a way that ‘He works with us’ as a ‘Senior Partner’ on real-life projects that we design for transforming life on earth and human beings ‘for the better’.* It took some time before I dared to express my insights in this way – my confidence arose literally out of experience”.

Prayer is not just for so-called ‘spiritual’ types. It is the major methodology for all humans to realize their latent divinity - the image/seed of Himself that God has already placed in every human being for living relationship with Him. This also needs close relationship with other human beings as we learn to focus together upon how we can become effective instruments of God in real human situations. However *we will not realize our divine potential unless we all sharpen our approach to ‘spiritual practice’*.

This is what happened for Alan and Llew as they made their covenant with God to become intercessors by forming OFI. They came to realize for themselves the point of human life on earth. Both found their individual life-purpose. And this is really all that the Pray-ers and Practitioners of Engaged Spirituality are doing.

III. Refocussing our Understanding of Human Spirituality

As Alan and Llew continued their scriptural reflections as part of their OFI ministry, they noticed that the three verses of Romans 8:26 -28 constitute a close-knit string of ideas. ‘Providence’ – the idea that *God is working with us for good* (v. 28) – is the ‘end product’ of *the Spirit making intercession for us according to the will of God* (vv. 26-27).

Before they could think constructively about this they were interrupted by a series of honest sceptical questions. They gradually came to see two things:

(i) Both Alan and Llew were raised in a pietistic evangelical tradition - but they saw just how limited that was while it remained individualistic. “Loving our neighbour means ‘acting in response to his human need’ - in some way or other, as Jesus pointed out in his parable. This was salutary!

(ii) They pondered the Spirit’s role in ‘coming to us in our weakness’; ‘interceding for us with deep groanings’; and praying ‘according to the will of God for us’. They recognised this as the same focus that Jesus had in The Lord’s Prayer: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”!

As we pondered these issues, they asked themselves a very honest critical question:

“If the Spirit has been making intercession for ‘us’, i.e. the Christian churches, for over two millennia, why has there not been more progress towards the reign or kingdom of God on earth being realised?”

This question really ‘stopped them in their tracks’! While Alan had been ‘commissioned to ‘stand in the Providence of God’’, and had lived (as a Director of the Elm Grove Trust) ‘by faith’ – affirmed in practice - in Providence to supply the needs of that unfolding venture, he still knew that this was a valid question. It troubled he and Llew for a whole fortnight. They even asked themselves honestly at some point whether perhaps this whole idea of the Spirit’s intercession for disciples might be just a “nice idea’ without foundation in reality. They did not actually believe that could be the case. But the question had to be asked - and answered - honestly.

This really drove Alan and Llew back to basics. As they searched for honest answers they found themselves articulating afresh what it means to be a human being, and to be “made in the image of God”. And so they came to spell it out afresh, as follows: we are self-conscious beings, with memory (instant replay); the capacity for reflective and critical thought; imagination, and the power therefore to perceive better ways of doing things, learning from mistakes - and inspirations! But above all we have the gift of freedom whereby we can choose to follow those better ways, or not! They saw all over again the importance making those choices: we must all learn to choose to do the better ways that we see. All those human faculties (and more, including the seed/‘word’ of God) are our latent human spirituality.

They also came to realize that:

- (i) this capacity to choose based upon our freedom is the foundation of all human morality and spirituality; and,
- (ii) we humans become what we meditate upon and actually choose.

Thus Alan and Llew were gradually provided with a whole panorama of human life on earth as “a vale of soul-making” (John Keats). With ‘the seed of God’ planted in us (John 1:4) we humans have the chance to reach our potential by exercising all our human capacities to make moral and spiritual choices attuned to ‘the light within’. Our human choices are thus absolutely fundamental. To grow morally and spiritually we must make choices, and a key domain of choice is to join ourselves in a partnership with the Holy Spirit in ‘engaging the Powers’ in human situations according to the will of God. *This is the very dynamic of the Divine acting within human affairs: human beings as co-creators with the Spirit of a ‘better future’.*

The paragraph above summarizes what took OFI a whole fortnight to wrestle into clarity. But they found this absolutely mind-boggling! No matter how much the Spirit may pray for us, only we can make those decisions. Life on earth is about our spiritual growth. Humans can only accomplish spiritual progress by acting upon what we have been shown ... that is what it is all about!

We realised that this was precisely what Walter Wink had been saying in his books about “The Powers” operating to defeat the “Reign of God on earth”. As disciples we must learn to stand up to the ‘Powers That Be’ in God’s Name ... and we must learn to pray and act that way with God as our Partner. In some way or other, OFI had discovered this for themselves by asking critical questions, and waiting upon God for the illumination.

Alan and Llew had a new ‘ball game’ - a new commission. And they went back to Romans 8:26-28 with renewed vigour.

They gradually came to a number of fresh insights:

(i) the Spirit acts as a sort of Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Godhead. Theologically He is just a continuation or extension of the life of Jesus in His earthly ministry. John's gospel (Ch.14:16-17, KJV) makes this very clear ... "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

(ii) It was *Him*, the Spirit, that disciples have to learn to work with. As the paper on Engaged Spirituality points out, this understanding of the Spirit as the COO of the Godhead is not a theological definition of God, but an understanding that arose from OFI's working experience.

(iii) If God is working with disciples, then He obviously is expecting that we will use our human spirituality (i.e. our capacities of self-consciousness, memory, reflective and critical thought, imagination, creativity - and above, all freedom) to choose the 'better ways' that show themselves, OR NOT.

(iv) As disciples we are called to 'act upon what we have been shown' (c.f. Micah 6:8). This clarified the whole idea of Providence: if we disciples dare to take the initiative, using our own discernment in our choices and reaching agreement together, *then* He "would work" with us. *This insight really opened OFI's eyes to new possibilities!* He will work with us in our creative ventures, as we for our part are deeply engaged with Him as the Senior Partner.

OFI thus saw the answer to their critical question: "Why, if the Spirit is interceding, has there not been more progress towards the reign of God in over two millennia?" The answer, in short, is because *we humans - the churches particularly - have failed to enter into real working partnerships with the Holy Spirit's intercession. His operations in this world are necessarily limited, in order to allow us our human 'freedom to choose' the better way, or not. We can invite the partnership of the Holy Spirit to 'work with' us, or not. The 'muscles of human spirituality' can be developed in no other way than by this real 'exercise'.*

IV. Our Primary Human Reality, and the Need to Wake up to ourSelves

The insights set out in the previous section resonated deeply with many of the intuitive lessons gleaned by Alan during two periods of educational research:

(i) directing Outward Bound adventure programs for youth, and de-briefing them from their log-books with deep listening to their articulated desires to make something of their lives, and,

(ii) open-ended interviews with 18 yr. olds (for the Henderson Poverty Commission for the Australian Federal Government) about their transition from school to life outside school.

One highlight from the latter research was Alan's interview with a leader of an outlaw Biekie gang, who articulated wistfulness about what he might have become. These deep, poignantly expressed longings convinced Alan of the truth articulated in John's Gospel Chapter 1, namely that the same Word (self-expression of God) that had been made flesh in Jesus is in every human being as 'the light within'. This Word is always illuminating the path before us towards 'the better way'. Of course, we all also know ourselves as 'sinners': we all tend to 'look after No.1' and fail to heed the promptings of 'the light within' towards 'the better way'. But that's not the

‘primary reality’ about us: it is only the ‘secondary reality’. What we human beings need above all is to “Wake up to ourSelves” - to Who we really are, to this source of inspiration at the core of our humanity, essentially as ‘spirit-beings’. Jesus called this whole process ‘being born again’. This distinction between the ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ realities of human nature changed ‘the centre of gravity’ of Alan’s whole theology, ‘universalizing’ it in some way.

As OFI processed these reflections and insights, they developed a new ‘inclusive’ worldview with a profound sense of the Oneness of all humankind in the Divine across all boundaries. And it was *this* that gradually became the foundation of all their intercession. In all this, they were of course feeling their way. This new understanding of the Divine ‘working with us’ was then placed alongside Alan’s earlier experience of being ‘commissioned’ to “Stand in the Providence of God, and let His light dispel the darkness”¹⁰. OFI interpreted all this as a validation and unfolding of the providence of God operating in their lives.

This enlarged worldview opened up a whole new vista for OFI: the great adventure of human spirituality. *We humans have the potential to become co-creators with God of “the reign of God on earth” that Jesus envisaged. The choices that we make determine our progress towards becoming who and what we are as potentially Divine beings. We humans simply must make these choices. God cannot make them for us - or force us in some way - or the whole process of spiritual formation would thereby be undermined.*

The first glimpse of this now firmly-grasped understanding provided valid and satisfying answers that made complete sense to OFI. Alan’s whole spiritual journey had led him, step by step, towards that vision of life on earth under the Divine. Alan and Llew both had a new perception of human spirituality and of their calling to a growing partnership with the Divine towards ‘a better life on earth’. But they had so much to learn!

In the light of this new worldview, the Romans 8:26-28 passage had ever-richer insights to suggest to them. Their attention rested upon the phrase ‘working with us’ for good. They saw that it implied a couple of things:

- (i) that God expects us to use our initiative and take action where we feel action is needed: then He will work *with us*, and
- (ii) He is showing us all the time: we are being illuminated by ‘the light within - the Word’, as well as by all our human faculties for spirituality, outlined above. This reinforced their understanding of Micah 6:8: “I have shown you, O man, what is good”.

These insights helped to universalize the importance of what they were discovering. And they linked directly with what Jesus apparently expected of his disciples as ‘the two’s and threes gathered in His Name’ and learning to reach agreement about what we should ask for ‘in His name’ (Matt.18: 19). OFI paraphrased these imperatives for Christian disciples thus:

“Don’t go off ‘half cocked’. No shallow ego-stuff: bright ideas off the top of the head. Do your homework; seek wisdom, recognizing that in God, everything is connected; learn to discern the will of God in each complex human situation, especially in cultures that are strange to you; agree together; then ask for His will to be done in Jesus’ name, invoking the Spirit as our Senior Partner.”

These insights validated the dynamics of the broader OFI prayer partnership they had formed. This is made up of Practitioners and Pray-ers/Intercessors in a covenanted relationship with

¹⁰ Details of Alan’s experience of being commissioned are documented in his book: “A Chaplain Remembers: Lifelong Reflections on the Educational and Spiritual Values Shaping the William Carey Chapel”. 2006. Westgate Publishing

God and with each other. In practice this broader partnership in Engaged Spirituality had begun to reap deep benefits, and has done so again and again.

They just knew that they were onto something of huge importance. To articulate what they were discovering required the invention of new concepts (Appendix 2). These concepts can be summarized as follows:

“Waking up to ourSelves; learning to walk humbly with God transcending the narrow egoic drives to look after No. 1 by living for the good of the whole earth and its peoples; and praying with the Spirit as our Partner and guide.”

The Word (or self-expression of God) has been operating from the beginning of creation (John 1:1) – however long ago that may have been. But only in the ‘The Word made Flesh’ (John 1:14) was the deep historic process of redemption and renewal of the earth made clear. In various ways we humans have been shown these things. But Christians in particular have been given these truths by being enacted and given expression in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Yet too often and for too long we Christians have failed to wake up to ourSelves and to realise our destiny to - in some real sense - become co-creators with the Spirit of a ‘better future’ - the reign of God upon earth.

It would be hard to over-estimate the importance of the issues OFI were wrestling with in those early formative days. Their perspective on the ministry of intercession completely changed. *Far from being ‘other-worldly’, a ministry of intercession is totally focused upon tuning in to the real world and to God, and then learning to give expression to the new vision in everyday life¹¹. There is no sacred/secular divide: the secular is simply the sphere in which the sacred is meant to find expression by us humans engaging in partnership with God!*

William Carey, called the ‘Father of modern Missions’ in Christian circles (Appendix 3) lived and served at a time when a whole new world was being ‘discovered’ by European nations - the pre-colonial world at the beginning of the 18th Century. He saw people whom God loved, and for whom Christ died, and who would need to have the Scriptures - or parts thereof - translated into their own native tongue, and he thereby glimpsed what would become his own life-purpose. But many other business entrepreneurs saw goods, markets and wealth to be made; cheap natural resources to be accessed; and, later, colonies to be manipulated by gaining control.

We find ourselves, within World Vision’s CV&A initiatives at the beginning of the 21st Century, in a comparable context: freeing marginalised people so they can empower each other to be who God wants them to be. CV&A practitioners, supported increasingly by prayer fellowships, engage with the egoic systems of Powers hell-bent on a contrary agenda that oppress and exclude marginalised people and threaten the sustainability of our whole planet. The challenge of all human spirituality in the 21st Century, which this paper has been written to outline, is to transcend the egoic motivations that all too often dominate individual and corporate behaviour to the exclusion of considering the good of the whole earth and its peoples. This is now becoming increasingly obvious and urgent.

¹¹ *This is the theme of the Old Coventry Cathedral, and also of the William Carey Chapel in Melbourne.*

Appendix 1: Students' Innate Desire to Make a Difference for Good: Implications for all Secondary Education

In the 1970s Alan designed the Chapel for the school (Carey Baptist Grammar in Melbourne) from which both authors come, and in which Alan served as Chaplain for 15 years. This Chapel is currently being surrounded by a series of buildings, one of which is the future Global Studies Centre. Alan regards the Global Studies Centre as *"a brilliant concept that potentially can lead toward the transcendence of the narrow academic focus that has come to dominate the ethos of all western-style secondary schools, with curricula geared almost solely towards competitive examinations for Tertiary Entrance."*

Alan feels passionately that: *"this 'straight-jacket of Secondary Education'¹² too often leaves a significant proportion of less-academically gifted students seriously disadvantaged, deeply discouraged, and low in their self-esteem. Sometimes, when combined with other elements of disadvantage, it leads to some forms of disaffection: they feel locked out of a constructive entry into society. Once articulated, repeated, and internalised, a label such as "No-Hoper" (which is often applied by teachers - among themselves - to a significant few within this 'educational strait-jacket') can become a self-fulfilling prophecy with dimensions of a painful reality.*

Using the significant educational resources now available on-line, and the provision of opportunities for students to explore rather than mainly to study for exam purposes, the Global Studies Centre could open up for all students a more vivid understanding of what is really going on in the world into which they will soon be moving, and where their lives may fit into both the global and local context. This is likely to be especially helpful for the less academically gifted students. The clearer their understanding, the more valuable it will be for them.

As part of his research for the Poverty Commission with ACER, Alan was responsible for interviewing a total of 150 school leavers, made up of numbers roughly proportionate to the numbers in State High schools, Technical schools, Catholic, and Independent schools. Of the 22 Independent school students interviewed, 15 were given the label "education conveyor-beltors". Student interviewees (and their parents) typically knew that going on with their education was 'the thing to do', but they had no idea where it was leading for them. There is a considerable amount of anxiety in that, and with it a dissipation of energy and motivation - very precious commodities at the beginning of their life-journeys.

But there was something else of even more fundamental importance that emerged from Alan's research. The research interview schedule broke with mainline ACER methodology at that time, namely, statements would be made; then space would be provided in which the respondent could indicate by ticking in appropriate boxes: 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Not Sure', 'Disagree', or 'Strongly Disagree'. The value of this method is its simplicity for the researchers, and the ease of simply inserting the quantitative data into the computer for graphs and correlations that look very impressive. But unfortunately it limits the possible outcomes/meanings of the research to the alternatives thought up beforehand by the person designing the interview schedule: that can make it boring and frustrating for the person being interviewed. S/he may have strong feelings/views that are given no chance of expression in their own words.

¹² Former Carey Headmaster Gerard Cramer described this phenomenon as the 'strait-jacket of Secondary Education' in his speech-night address in 1967, pondering poignantly upon the label "No-hoper".

Alan's put his job on the line by refusing to use that interview schedule. His alternative schedule (finally approved) started with fundamental, open-ended questions to all 18-year-old interviewees: *"How have things been for you since you left school? What's it been like 'getting started'?"* Often they could hardly believe it - they were being asked to tell their own story in whatever way they liked! They lost their nervousness, started wherever they wanted to, and their stories and ideas gradually poured out (and were captured on a tape-recorder).

Alan reflected: *"It was not only profoundly interesting, but underlying it all we heard something entirely unexpected - a profound, unmistakable phenomenon. There was an underlying passion to 'make something of their lives for good' ¹³. Sometimes this passion emerged even when the odds were clearly stacked against them, given their school experiences and outcomes"*.

One memorable example was a Year 11 leaver from the lowest stream of a suburban (Housing Commission area) Technical School. During the interview, he said: "We were the 'dummies' - we were not expected to learn *anything!*" (*our emphasis*). He left school mid-year to take up a job in a wholesale electrical company. After initiation into the job, he joined a team of two others to visit the retail companies on their books early in the week to take orders, parcel them up, and return later in the week to deliver. He was assistant to the man who kept the records of what was in their wholesale storage to begin with, and again after the distribution. A list was made of what was required to replenish their stocks, giving them time to do so before they returned in two week's time. What he needed to learn was crystal clear, and he really applied himself. A week or two before our interview, because of sickness, he had done the whole trip on his own without a hitch. The 'Big Boss' commended him ... and he was beaming: *a man amongst men, performing competently*. I told him, as we packed up, how important his story was for our research, with the emphasis emerging towards more *"education towards competence: the capacity to interact with one's relevant environment in such a way that the self is enhanced"*. He grasped it immediately, beaming even further - and then blurting out something like: "That's wonderful! If anything ever goes wrong, I'd be only be too pleased if I could help you in some way."

That interview helped in shaping Alan's final research report on ways to overcome many aspects of 'educational disadvantage' ¹⁴. In essence this amounted to giving 'reflection upon experience' a much more central place in Secondary Education, at the same time making special arrangements for enlarging their experience. Later, when he was leader of a 'Transition Task Force' (transition from school to work) in the Central Highlands/Wimmera Region of Education in Victoria, Alan developed an Experience Based Curriculum (EBC).

Alan had trialled a form of EBC at Carey that became the foundation for his appointment to ACER for the Poverty Commission. This was an innovative approach for year 10 level - a critical year for 'restless adolescents'. It combined elements of English and History subjects in shared studies of a chosen theme, like 'Post-war Migration in Australia'. Small groups of students (of mixed abilities) would work together to develop hypotheses about migrant life. By block timetabling, and with the approval and guidance of staff, these student groups would undertake 'investigative excursions' into the 'real world' of migrant groups¹⁵.

In such processes, students are no longer 'just school-kids' but 'young adults with L-plates on': it feels quite different! This process of 'reflection upon experience' is as natural as breathing for all

¹³ This phenomenon, reflected upon when the research was over, changed the 'centre of gravity' of Alan's own Christian theology (as enlarged upon above, p.9).

¹⁴ Outcomes of Schooling: Aspects of Success and Failure: Wright et.al. (AGPS 1976)

¹⁵ By time-tabling the two subjects together for one afternoon per week, student groups could exit school early for such investigations without disturbing other classes.

human beings, thus overcoming the 'bookish-ness' of much secondary education for lower I.Q students.

This planned enlargement of students' experience for personal and group reflection can not only provide vivid learning experiences, but can also release huge amounts of energy for developing community involvements, perhaps life-interests, as well as real grounds for future career choices. This had been demonstrated vividly by the history of Carey Abschol: a group of Senior Students (with 3 staff representatives, including Alan, serving as 'sounding boards' but having no vote, to keep it as a student initiative).

Carey Abschol formed in 1961 in response to a challenge by Asian students. It was active until 1974, when, after research, they became the Aboriginal Educational Incentive Scholarship Fund (AIESF) for all Secondary School students. They raised \$84,000 before they handed it over to the State Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a going concern ¹⁶.

It was simply tragic that the Whitlam Federal Government was dismissed before the Minister for Education (Kim Beasley Snr.) could legislate for "The Life-long Learning Model of Education" which he saw was emerging out of the educational research being conducted by Alan's team.

There are parallels between Alan's EBC approach and the remedies proposed by Sir Ken Robinson ¹⁷ to what he called the "academicism" of Western-style education. Alan is sure that the Global Studies Centre being opened at Carey Grammar School later this year (2016) will be seriously addressing some of these fundamental educational concerns. They are of crucial importance.

¹⁶ This story is partly written up in: "By Courage and By Faith: the First 50 Years of Carey History" (Stuart Sayers, 1973)

¹⁷ Sir Ken Robinson was knighted for his educational research in the U.K. A key source for further reflection is his TED Talk "Do Schools Kill Creativity?", available at https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

Appendix 2: Underlying Concepts of the OFI Worldview

Transcending Human Egoity

The whole point of the paper: “Engaged Spirituality: Prayer in the Providence of God” is to proclaim to the Churches an invitation to a commitment to embrace and model a higher level of spirituality. This is particularly critical at this time in history when crises of catastrophic proportions loom for the human race. Our advanced technology has launched the human race into a new era of human history. Egoic behaviour exhibited in collective human organisations and systems is characteristic of what we refer to as ‘the Powers that Be’. We must ‘grow up’ out of our human adolescence towards our full maturity, leaving behind the petty ego-games whereby we pursue our own selfish interests rather than the good of the whole.

This imperative represents a ‘spiritual awakening’ of the most profound nature. Though we can see it operating in others so easily, it is about the last thing we want to admit about ourselves. To recognize just how much the primitive ego is operating in us, undermining our nobler aspirations and the quality of our human relationships, would be a huge awakening indeed - for which we can only pray in ever increasing numbers. This, of course, is the fundamental point of this paper and its preceding “Engaged Spirituality” paper. We desperately need to learn to pray in such a way that God will indeed work with us, as a ‘Senior Partner’. This will only occur once we make the right sort of commitment, and consistently practise the appropriate disciplines and life-styles. No more ... and no less!

Waking up to ourSelves

The same Word (self-expression of God) that had been made flesh in Jesus (c.f. John’s Gospel Chapter 1) *is in every human being as ‘the light within’*. This Word is always illuminating the path before us towards ‘the better way’. Of course, we all also know ourselves as ‘sinners’: we all tend to ‘look after No.1’ and fail to heed the promptings of ‘the light within’ towards ‘the better way’. *But that’s not the ‘primary reality’ about us: it is only the ‘secondary reality’*. What we human beings need above all is to “Wake up to ourSelves” - to Who we really are, to this source of inspiration at the core of our humanity. As ‘spirit-beings’ we are invited to overcome (‘die to’) our egoic distortions of “looking after No 1” and to receive by grace the spiritual fullness of being in Christ. Jesus called this whole process ‘being born again’. The subsequent process of spiritual maturing can be seen as learning to ‘hallow God in our hearts’ and ‘pray the Kingdom’ in every aspect of our lives.

Caring for the Whole Earth and its Peoples - under God

In a nutshell, CV&A programs aim to ‘empower the poor’ to take the initiative in addressing their own poverty and ‘powerlessness’ in the face of adverse economic and political forces. They are designed to help people realize: “I can ... we can ... together make a difference ... for good”. This empowering shift in perspective touches the very springs of the human spirit, as we shall see. Too often it has been ‘crushed’ - or almost crushed - by adversity. Empowerment, CV&A style, potentially catalyses a spiritual awakening in the hearts of both marginalised community members and those who are dedicated to serve them. It can help build spiritual bonds that transcend all boundaries. It evokes a mindset (which we call ES) that we can consciously choose: to ask God to ‘work with us’ as we help those being crushed by adversity when it is within our power to appropriately do so. It is a whole life-style, with roots in the Divine!

By extension, we can come to glimpse the point of our human life on earth “as a vale of soul-making” (John Keats) where we humans “wake up to ourSelves”. By responding to “the light within” (John 1:4) we can progressively transcend our primitive beginnings “looking after No. 1”. Our human efforts and systems remain dysfunctional, messy, and fragmented and will not reach their potential until we die to our egoic selves and adopt a ‘dying-with-Christ’ attitude. All humans need to transcend these egoic drives: this is the root of all human spiritual/religious struggle.

The “Secret Place” from which spiritual awareness and maturity unfolds

*"He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide "under the shadow of The Almighty".
(Ps 91:1)*

The phrase “under the shadow of The Almighty” echoes the concept of The Providence of God.

But where exactly is “the *Secret Place of the Most High*”? Alan had had never really stopped to ask that question before: it was more of a theological concept than a place.

In his nursing home, Alan increasingly felt the need to sleep half the day as well as all night. To make up for so much time sleeping, he began to regularly practice an ‘emerging from sleep’ routine of “stopping at the Half-way House” between sleep and wakefulness. In time he found the God-consciousness of it became so ‘real’ that one day it suddenly dawned on him: “*This is the Secret Place of the Most High which I have long treasured*”! But now he saw that it is also the ‘Root/Essence of the Divine’ in every human - not just a concept: it is the place within in all humans from where “the light within” (of John 1:4) emanates: the same light that was ‘made flesh’ in Jesus (John 1:14). He had connected the dots in a significant way!

This is a ‘universal phenomenon’, transcending all the different interpretations given to it by different world religions. It is a universal phenomenon to be ‘explored together’ in dialogue for deeper insights that ‘saints’ in different traditions have pioneered. We are all exploring the Mystery we call ‘God’ that is the root of human existence, as well as all spirituality. This understanding is the ‘ontology’ of our human ‘One-ness’ in the Divine.¹⁸

¹⁸ *This insight led Alan to suggest: “All educational approaches to the study of religion – especially in secondary schools - should provide an introduction to human spirituality and the contributions made to it by the great world religions. Such study and exploration would be highly relevant to every human being. When taught without dogmatism, universally, it could help open up a new era of human one-ness and tolerance.”*

Appendix 3: William Carey's Biblical vs. the Mercantile Perspective

There is an interesting parallel between the OFI worldview and that of William Carey, the 'Father of modern missions'. Towards the end of the 18th century, Carey placed a map of then-known world on the wall of his cobbler's workshop. Inspired in part by the journals of Captain James Cook, he began filling in on his map the new countries that were being 'discovered', each with its native peoples and particular languages. He perceived that the Bible - or parts of it at least - would need to be translated into each of these languages so that missionaries could take the message of Christ to them. The seeds of his own 'life-purpose' were thus being sown. His own life just kept unfolding as he simply took the next steps as they presented themselves, and as he interpreted them!

Other people saw the goods these newly 'discovered' countries had to trade. They were cheap by western standards and could be traded very profitably. Trading companies were formed with huge financial resources. In due course the governments of the European countries, with superior military technologies, took control of the instruments of governance in successive 'New World' countries. Colonies were formed and declared to be possessions, with the explicit approval and encouragement of the European church leadership. Some European countries got in first and established large empires. Their colonial assets were envied and wars over colonies eventuated - as in the 1st World War - though the underlying cause (defence of the Empire) was rarely talked about. The possessive materialism that drove the behaviour of these competing 'domination systems' continues to be exhibited in modern times.

The limits to such human behaviour are beginning to become evident. We live in the post World -War era with increasingly sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, instant communications, and constant simmerings of resentment at the imposition of 'controls' over corporate behaviour, especially access to natural resources.

This is the world in which World Vision' CV&A programs have emerged, underpinned by OFI's intercessory support. On one level they represent benevolent ministries of empowering poor communities to negotiate for effective services and roles within their own countries. At a deeper level they respond to Walter Wink's powerful exegesis of our Christian commission under God to "engage the Powers" (outlined above) in God's Name.

It is important to thus clarify "the big picture" within which we channel our faith-based efforts. There are a great many such initiatives: spiritual movements of reform and transformation - both faith-based and otherwise - that are occurring across the globe, increasing all the time as people everywhere are 'waking up to themSelves' and their spiritual potential all over the world. These are the signs of real hope that we need to grasp with both hands, and consult widely together how best they can be facilitated.