



**INTERNATIONAL GRAIL
SPIRITUALITY FORUM REPORT
and
WORK PLANS FOR COUNTRIES TO IMPLEMENT**



PALMELA, PORTUGAL

AUGUST 1- 7, 2007

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One of a number of drawings sent by the Grail from Mexico

This report has been put together by *Ruth Crowe, Mary Gene Devlin* and *Ticha Vasconcelos*, with help from *Hermien van Sloten*. Some material has been used from the Summaries of each day of the Forum that appeared on the website and additions have been made from the texts of the presenters.

Thanks to all the note-takers during the Forum and to those who made summaries for each day: *Deidre Cornell, Christa Anbeek, Mary Gene Devlin, Bonnie Hendricks, Marita Estor, Christa Werner, Lucy Kimaro* and *Mary Gindhart*.



THANKS

*** We all owe a huge debt of thanks to the Planning Team for the Forum**
Spirituality and Theology Network Coordinators: *Ticha Vasconcelos* (Portugal),
Cay Charles (USA), *Teopista Nakibuule* (Uganda), together with *Kerstin Jacobssen* (Sweden),
Maria Carlos Ramos (Portugal) and *Anita Siasi* (Italy). **Thank you, each of you.**

*** OBRIGADA TO THE GRAIL IN PORTUGAL**

For the wonderful hospitality and the warmth of your welcome. For finding such a great venue for the Forum, and for all the work done behind the scenes – the compiling of lists, advocating for visas, the preparation of the beautiful motif, the bags, the t-shirts and much much more... And during the Forum for all the work of the backstage team from Portugal and elsewhere - the extraordinary work of the translators, the wonderful organisation of the transport, the espressos and refreshing morning and tea breaks, the endless typing... Thanks to Mariana Malta for creating the Spirituality Forum website (www.spiritualityforum.org), for the daily newsletters and for the ongoing work...

*** Thank you all dear sisters** and may the indomitable and creative spirit of the Portuguese Grail women continue to flourish.

*** Thanks to all the presenters** for your rich insights and inspiration, day after day! As one participant has commented, ‘the Forum was an extraordinary experience; a gift, a bouquet and a banquet!’ (*Carol Siemering*, USA). Thank you for all the time you put into preparing your presentations and for your professionalism.

*** Thanks to Carol Webb** for the wonderful job she did as facilitator.

*** Thanks to Mieneke Hage**, our International Finance Officer, for all the time and expertise required to transfer finance and give advice to get everyone to the Forum!

From all your Grail sisters around the world.

SETTING THE SCENE

The Spirituality Forum held at Palmela in August 2007 was the fruit of six years of reflection, exchange and interaction between us all since the writing of a paper by Cay Charles, Lorna Bowman and Deidre Cornell in 1997 entitled, *Theological Context for Spirituality into the 21st Century*, and then the IGA in 2001, held at the Tiltenberg in the Netherlands. Over the years since, the Spirituality and Theology Network Coordinators – *Cay Charles, Ticha Vasconcelos, Teopista Nakibuule* and *Lorna Bowman* for some of that time, have engaged the international Grail community in a number of dialogues to help us bring forth elements of our shared spirituality, our common ground, as well as the opportunity to begin to explore the basis of our spiritual diversity as we enter the 21st century. *Ticha Vasconcelos* presented the details for us at the beginning of the Forum.

International Questionnaires and Reports (2002 & 2004), the International Grail Network Forum (2004), Faith and Culture Workshops in East Africa (2002 & 2005), International Council Meetings (2003 & 2005), the Spirituality papers and feedback in preparation for the IGA 2006, the Mission Goals around Spirituality and the recommendation from the 2006 IGA that a Spirituality Forum be held, all moved us towards this point and the themes on which we focussed during that week in August, 2007.

An additional element, as *Cay Charles* reminded us at the 2006 IGA is, that ‘We have for many years had as our base the Faith Message of 1988, rooting us in Christian faith and affirming different paths. This is still our base. But it is in the interpretations and the living out of this Faith Message that there have come about more differences, and lack of communication about why different Grail countries act as they do with regard to membership and spirituality’.

At the opening of the Forum *Anita Saisi* observed, ‘the work we did in these years has brought us to focus on three areas of research:

1. **Rediscover our Christian origins** with the means the new exegetical and historical studies give us, having the possibility to get a glimpse of what the first Christian communities understood and lived, according to the message of the Gospel and the witness of the writings they left. We know that those communities were formed by people coming from different cultures and backgrounds; just think of the difficulty Peter and Paul went through to find a common view for Christians coming from Judaism and those coming from Greek and Roman cultures. Those communities were pluralistic by necessity and they can be an example for us to be open to diversity and to find in it our richness and inspiration.

2. **We live in a time of infinite possibilities** – as Father Van Ginneken would say in his prophetic attitude. This means that today, the future is in the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, we discover more and more the values contained in all religions and we need to open our mind and our heart to their message and engage ourselves to understand all that unites. If we explore every religion and its original message, we find that faith, hope and love belong to each one of them: these three so-called theological virtues are universal and they are at the same time inscribed in the heart of any human being.

3. In recent years new understanding of the spiritual need that men and women discover in the depth of their being, in spite of the materialistic society we live in, has opened new paths to get in contact with the Mystery we call God: this gives us a task that is beautiful and difficult at the same time. **We will follow this new way of being a spiritual movement**, and we will find the correct integration of these three aspects in the years to the next IGA and beyond...

The present situation in our understanding of spirituality can be dealt with through an attitude of sincere listening and openness to dialogue. Sometimes...our desire to make ourselves understood is greater than the desire to listen to what the other wants to communicate to us.

Our movement has always been in search of the Mystery we call God and what s/he is and at the same time what humanity is. Therefore, I am sure that the search will go on as long as the Grail exists because for us to be a mystic and prophetic movement (as well as women of radical action) is not a question of choice but it is a question of life and death, as none of us can imagine a Grail that is only 'divine' or only 'human'. It is the expression of both these dimensions that will keep us alive.

This attitude of openness and dialogue is essential during these days, but somehow we may feel overwhelmed by our questions and problems. What can we do ? As a prophet of our time (Helder Camara) would say when he was asked how he would cope with all the problems of the people: 'I don't keep all these problems and the people in my mind, I keep them in my heart'.

Let us keep all that will happen in our heart, the pure heart of the Beatitudes, and let us meditate on them, as Mary did. We read in the Gospel that she did not stress herself with a lot of worries about her difficult experience, but she observed and kept all things nurturing them in her heart: for this she is called 'blessed among women'.

The Spirituality Forum

The International Grail Spirituality Forum in Palmela was then a next step in the process of dialogue around Spirituality in the Grail and moving us towards a renewal of our Vision Statment for the international Grail in the 21st century.

The purpose of the Forum as articulated at the IGA 2006 was to create an open environment to explore and deepen our Grail understanding of spirituality today, to enter more deeply into our Christian roots, and to communicate insights to Grail women in all countries.

Our hopes were to:

- listen deeply to each other as we share what is holy and sacred in our lives
- dialogue about the spiritual richness we share, the questions we have, the spiritual challenges we face in our lives on an individual, national, and international level in the Grail
- go more deeply into our Christian roots and to deepen our understanding of what it means to be an ecumenical movement
- widen our understanding of inter-religious dialogue
- enlarge our understanding of the diverse spiritual paths we have personally and in our own cultures
- face the spiritual challenges from our cultures
- include as wide a representation as possible (perhaps 50 to 60)

Themes of the Forum

- Day 1 – Cultural Changes and Spiritual Challenges
- Day 2 - Youth Voice in the Grail and what their search is about, and Intergenerational Dialogue
- Day 3 - Exploring Mysticism and Prophecy in the past and in our times
- Day 4 - Elaboration of Suffering/Human Wholeness/Justice/Solidarity and Healing
- Day 5 - Reflections of the Eucharist and including understanding of Holy Communion in the Swedish Lutheran tradition
- Day 6 - Eco-Spirituality
- Day 7 – summing up and reflection of types of dialogue for the future and approaches to inter-religious dialogue and relationships

These themes came forward from the insights, reflections and discussions among Grail women over the past 6 years and the expressed desire to begin ‘to explore more deeply’ a number of areas that impact on our Grail life and identity in the 21st century. They include- our foundational roots in Christianity; our understanding of ourselves as an international ecumenical movement; the influence of culture and cultural change and the spiritual challenges that stem from this in our various country contexts and as a multicultural Grail movement; our experience that some Grail women have travelled other than Christian spiritual paths, and as a result, our need to grow in understanding of what this means for our international movement. The themes also reflect our awareness of the ‘signs of the times’ – the hunger for spirituality, the profound search of younger generations for meaning and different expressions of the Mystery in their lives; the desire for inter-religious dialogue and building relationships; the growing awareness of the unity and interdependence and the presence of the Mystery in all that is. Our call is to be women of contemplation, opening ourselves to mystical experiences and at the same time women called to live in justice and solidarity with the poor and a world that cries out for healing.

This was a big task to set ourselves for a one week program, especially when the words we use so often these days are ‘go more deeply into...’!

SO, HOW FAR DID WE GET?

We made a good start! The Forum was another step forward in our dialogue around spirituality and the challenges we face in all our diversity. Now we must all take another step and go more deeply into one or more of the themes of the Forum.

In the body of this report there are short excerpts from the input on the theme for each day of the Spirituality Forum. The papers presented on each day of the Forum are available in full on the website <http://www.grailspiritualityforum.org> and we urge **National Teams** to find ways to help members in their country access these riches! It is hoped that careful reading of these papers will help countries define what they would like to focus on in the coming year.

Under each of the themes you will also find **questions discussed or proposed by the presenters at the Forum. National groupings can use these questions when taking up a particular theme for further study, reflection and discussion.** In

addition, there is a summary of the **Insights and Challenges** Forum participants put forward on the last day. These insights and challenges appear under the theme to which they refer or in stand-alone boxes. We thank the workgroup who stayed on after the Forum to do this work. They were the Vision Statement Group members (*Mary Gene Devlin, Maria Carlos Ramos, Imelda Gaurwa, Ada MacDonald, Cristina dos Anjos, Anna-Maria Ahlen and Alison Healey*), Spirituality and Theology Network Coordinators (*Cay Charles, Teopista Nakibuule and Ticha Vasconcleos*), and the ILT (*Mary Gindhart, Ruth Crowe and Cristina dos Anjos*).

THE WAY FORWARD

*** The ILT sees that the task ahead for the international Grail is:**

‘to honor and deepen our foundational Christian roots and at the same time to nurture the new openness to the diversity of spiritual paths and different discernments of the Mystery present within the International Grail’.

A three step process to continue this important dialogue around Spirituality and the Grail in the 21st Century has been proposed.

1. National Teams are requested to make sure that Grail meetings happen during which groups can chose what theme(s) they will work on between August 2007 and August 2008. NLTs are asked to make sure that all Grail members in their countries have access to the materials from the Spirituality Forum that are on the website, www.grailspiritualityforum.org.

2. Each country or Grail grouping is requested to decide on

- A. Which of the Forum themes/challenges your group or country will work on in the coming year, and to begin to work on this as soon as possible.
- B. What would your group like to see go forward internationally?
- C. What common knowledge do members of the International Grail need now?
- D. What resources does your country need to go forward?

3. IC members to feed back to the International Secretariat by September 1, 2008 what your country has done and what you wish to bring forward internationally. The reports and any issues and concerns that countries wish to raise will be discussed at the International Council/Network Coordinators meeting in November 2008.

If the ILT can be of any help in relation to any of these matters please let us know.

*** The Vision Statement Work Group** will have new material to work when this process is completed. They will share material that comes from countries with each other, and analyze the themes that have been worked on by the various countries, noting similarities and differences in response to the themes. They will present this analysis back to countries early in 2009. After this, there will be ongoing consultation with the membership, so that, step by step, we will work towards identifying what actually is the vision of the International Grail today. From this, they

will prepare a new Vision Statement to be proposed and discussed in the lead up to the next IGA in 2011 when a vote will be taken.

*** Spirituality and Theology Network**

It has been proposed that the future of the Spirituality/Theology Network - after the forum in August 2007 - is to be divided into two parts. The main part on Spirituality will be formed after the coming year of discussion in each country on the themes presented at the Forum and the challenges that emerged. The ILT has requested country reports be sent to them by 1 September 2008 about what has been discussed and what suggestions, if any, people have for the future. At the International Council meeting (in November 2008) how to proceed with bringing depth to our spirituality focus will be decided. Since Spirituality is for all members of the Grail it needs to take another form than a network.

The second part regarding theology will be formed during this coming year at first with a small group and then after its parameters are more clear open to others. We ask for your prayers for these two new ways of working.

*** The International Formation Team will meet in early December** to plan the next International Formation program to be held in Brazil in 2008. They will consider the insights and challenges that came out of the Forum that have implications for Grail formation during their preparation of the formation program.

*** The spirit in which this dialogue among us needs to continue.**

Forum participants realized the importance of bringing significant issues into open discussion and we understood the need for:

- * Deep listening and sensitive responses
- * Mutual trust
- * Truth in our conversation with one another
- * Allowing time for all to come to understanding
- * Prayerful discernment
- * Accepting continuing differences with grace.

*** The Forum - an expression of our solidarity**

Forum participants affirmed that we have experienced the entire Forum as an action of solidarity, which we understand as mutual giving and receiving. This was evident, not only in the financial and material solidarity which made the Forum possible. We enriched one another spiritually; we shared our knowledge and wisdom born of our different experiences and studies; we supported one another in times of painful difference. We want this spirit of solidarity to continue and penetrate all that we do.

DAY 1 *Cultural change and spiritual challenges

**Presenters: Alison Healey (Australia), Lucy Kimaro (Tanzania)
Isabel Allegro (Portugal)**

Blessed are you who are thirsty...

Maria Carlos Ramos, spoke about the many translations for the word, ‘Beatitudes’. It is a noun from a very active verb which means ‘march’. ‘Go marching’ was translated, ‘being happy’; it would be better to say: ‘being mostly happy’. The Beatitudes are an exhortation, a greeting very common in the Bible, especially in Isaiah. Some theologians say that they are a true political program of Jesus. Blessed are you who are thirsty... ‘to be thirsty for’ is the metaphor most used by the mystics:

‘At night we will go to find the fountain
Only thirst illuminates us’. (St. John of the Cross)

**Alison Healey* offered some tools for cultural analysis, reflection and application to our lives and relationships in the Grail. She presented a series of slides which explored a TYPOLOGY OF CULTURES showing some of the dominant features of three typologies: non-modern, modern and postmodern. (The slides and full explanations are reproduced on the website.) Alison explained that a ‘typology is a way of analysing a wide range of observations, in this case what is known about many, many varying cultures, past and present. Typologies are necessarily generalizations, and thus have the limitations of generalizations. However, they can also be a useful aid, so long as we remain aware of the many varied realities, each with some unique characteristics, that have provided the data for the analyses’.

Alison also pointed out that ‘We need always to remember that our view of reality is not reality itself. In a multicultural movement, such as we are in the Grail, seeking unity with one another, **I wonder if you would agree with the following as a requirement of membership in the Grail: that every Grail member accepts as an obligation that she open herself to others who are living a different cultural reality from her own.** When I say ‘open herself’, I mean consciously seek more cultural understanding, opening mind and heart and imagination to discover not only how others act and communicate but also the underlying meanings and values that they live by. This is something less than a second enculturation which involves long-term living in another culture and which is not available to everyone. But it is something I suggest is available to everyone: many of us have as neighbours people of different cultures; some of us live in countries with substantial numbers of indigenous people from whom we can learn much; and then, there are books and radio and television programs and films. To do this would be to open ourselves also to the spiritualities of others and, thus, clarify and enrich our own’.

Some definitions of terms that we all need to have for a common understanding.

‘**Culture is an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions** expressed in symbolic forms, by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and attitudes towards, life’.

Clifford Geertz

‘Culture is a system or set of meanings, values, models and patterns, incorporated in or underlying the actions and communications of the life of one specific human group or society. This system or set is consciously or unconsciously lived and assumed by the group as the expression of its own human identity and reality. This system or set is learned (it is not a biological inheritance) and passes from generation to generation, whether received directly as it is or changed by the group itself’. Marcello Azevedo, SJ

Enculturation occurs when a person enters into a culture and learns how to be a member of it and become competent in it. Our sense of personal identity comes from our culture. Our culture also provides us with our ‘world view’: all that we perceive to be real and possible. We begin to be enculturated from the moment of our birth – even before birth. Since we absorb much of our culture unconsciously, we can never know it thoroughly in a conscious way. If we move out of our own culture to live in another we need to open ourselves to a second enculturation process. Depending on many factors, people will achieve more or less competence in their new cultural situation.

Acculturation is a process of cultural change resulting from contact between different cultures. One may borrow and incorporate a certain cultural feature from another culture. However, where one culture is markedly more powerful than the other, the contact may be a very unsettling, threatening, even overwhelming experience for the less dominant one, eg, the impact of colonial cultures on indigenous people in several parts of the world. In our own time, because of globalization, the culture of modernity has increasingly forced itself on other cultures, giving them little, or no, opportunity to be discerning or selective about what intrudes into their culture.

Alison posed the question, the challenge for us to think about:

‘Do you think it would be useful for Grail groupings around the world to think about this question: How discerning are we in the Grail in our responses to the cultural influences impacting upon us?’

Inculturation

Lucy Kimaro had chosen to speak about ‘inculturation’ in the following session. However, Alison thought a short explanation of this word seemed appropriate here while dealing with definitions. Unlike ‘enculturation’ and ‘acculturation’, which are terms used in anthropology, ‘inculturation’ belongs to the language of Christian theology. Although Pope Paul VI did not use this word, he articulated its meaning in his encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 520, where he spoke of ‘going to the very centre and roots of life’ to impregnate the culture with the Gospel.

‘Inculturation’ implies that, as the Gospel is embodied in a human community, the culture enlightens the Gospel as the Gospel transforms the culture. Contemporary missiologists, who speak of mission in terms of inculturation, assume that before there is any explicit Christian presence in a culture, there may be values and meanings that are compatible with the Gospel.

Questions for discussion

We divided into groups to discuss **3 questions** which addressed cultural characteristics as they affect our spiritualities, as individuals, as members of a Church or religious community and as Grail groupings.

- 1 (For each person) What are the strongest cultural influences in my spirituality?
2. Applying some cultural analysis to the church or religious community to which you belong, or feel most connected with, what cultural features do you recognise there?
3. As you think about Grail groupings around the world, including your own, what are the strongest cultural characteristics you identify with them?

Some feedback was taken from the groups. One person reminded us it was important not to doubt the authenticity of another's spiritual path. Another noted that the official Catholic Church sometimes acts in an authoritarian manner such as in the non-modern model. A Brazilian participant spoke about finding the open spaces in the tradition. An East African brought out the importance of respecting the position of elders, both in Church and other settings (including the Grail). One woman said that deep listening is a radical act, and that certainty is not the goal of spirituality; she told of a time that a Grail group, when it came time to pass the Lords peace, decided instead to pass the Lord's disquiet, as a symbol of commitment to being open to questions which challenge us in our spirituality.

**Lucy Kimaro's* paper was entitled, 'Inculturation of Christian Spirituality: a twenty-first century challenge' and in her presentation Lucy offered insights and analysis from her research into the meaning of 'inculturation' in the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church today and the challenge it can present in a world desperately in need of a values base. Lucy emphasized that the process of inculturation must take place in concrete places and specific times in order for the Gospel to realize its fulfilment as a universal message. Inculturation, she explained, must go much deeper than simply taking on music or liturgical expressions – it must reach the very heart of a culture, so as to transform it from within, thus affecting all dimensions of society. Christians must understand their own cultures' errors, omissions, etc., in order to be able to discern how the Gospel interacts with different aspects of society. At times, when inculturation has not fully happened, a dichotomy remains between Christianity and culture.

Lucy made the point that the Gospel must come through a specific culture just as Jesus was born into his own cultural and temporal setting and then transformed his culture. This is enacted through the same Holy Spirit which brought about Jesus' birth and propelled him in his ministry. Christians have an obligation to make the Gospel and the Church relevant to their own cultures in their own times, while acknowledging that the seeds of the Gospel are already present in all cultures. The Gospel can act as a corrective to transform elements of a culture that need reform. An example Lucy gave was of diviners who use their gifts to harm others.

Two questions given for discussion in groups were:

1. Which values in your own culture today need to be strengthened or challenged by the Gospel message?
2. How do Grail members make Christianity a living faith in their cultural contexts?

Participants were assigned to groups which mixed different geographical regions. Again the feedback was brief but very fruitful. One group noted cultural traits that needed to be changed, such as polygamy. Another group spoke about making a conscious choice for a culture of service as opposed to the culture of power. One talked about the need for a humble Christianity. Yet another warned of the danger of Christianity's trying to purify a culture without acknowledging and accepting the values consistent with the Gospel that are already there. A member from Mozambique described how in her country some people experience the dichotomy between their Church and Culture.

* *Isabel Allegro* began with a short film which planted the fundamental question, *Who am I? What am I doing here? What for?* Isabel described religions as a way of answering questions related to the spiritual search. Yet, these answers with their proposals (spiritual and ethic), are tentative answers, just forms of approaching from afar the Great Divine Mystery. All religions are bound in their cultural frames. All religious expressions, even the Bible, are culturally determined. Not even Revelation bridges this gap, and Jesus himself came as a culturally determined human being. Religions are means, not ends, to bring us to the threshold of the holy, to something that cannot fully be explained. Because God is transcendent, and beyond us, all religious language is analogous, and uses metaphors which in different religions find different names.

All religions change with the times Isabel pointed out. Within the Catholic Church itself, different streams take up different insights. The mystical tradition, for example, is often marginalized in the official Church.

Isabel spoke about a notable position taken in the post-modern culture which acts she suggested 'like a cocktail', assembling different practices taken from various traditions. In her view each of us must respond to the question '**Have I gone deeply enough into my own tradition?**'

She pointed out that '**today we in the Grail face a much wider diversity** in our international community, culturally and spiritually, which is a wonderful challenge to each and all of us: to the Grail as a spiritual movement in the 21st century. The Grail has always understood itself to be a spiritual movement in the world'. The Faith Message, IGA 1988 confirmed an openness to God as the central Mystery of our lives and within this centre, a wide variety of spiritual paths has developed in the Grail.

'Our present situation' Isabel observed, 'could thus be envisaged as owning two equally relevant faces of our common spiritual ground: On the one side, our "foundational Christian root". This is our matrix, and there is no way of denying it: it is our historical being. On the other side, a new openness to multiple paths (individual or group) in spiritual life has become part of our international reality, since decades ago. This is a result of different discernments of the signs of the time in the cultures we belong to'.

Isabel quoted Rachel Donders, ‘The source of the Grail dynamism is “a consciously reverent openness to the Mystery in and around us, the Source of Life [...] a wellspring of hope and trust in life, leading therefore to action and celebration, towards a newly-to-be-found God-centeredness”. She concluded, ‘So, the source of belonging together beyond all possible differences is this common spiritual ground. Here we converge, in our attention and intention of an intense presence before the Divine, that sustains us, the whole Universe and each person and group’.

After Isabel’s presentation we divided into groups, with each group receiving a sheet of texts taken from different traditions. We shared our impressions of the texts and what they might mean for us, and wrote onto small slips of paper. Then the whole group came into a circle for a closing ritual during which we sat together in contemplative silence and placed our small papers into a Grail cup placed at the center.

The full text of Isabel’s presentation, as well as Alison’s and Lucy’s, is on the website.

(Deidre Cornell and Ruth Crowe)

***Possible additional questions for discussion in national groups**

1. In what way(s) is the Grail in your country ‘counter-culture’? In what ways ‘culture-conforming’?
2. When is your religious tradition a source of joy and happiness to you? When is your culture a source of joy and happiness to you? When is the Grail a source of joy and happiness to you?
3. When has your culture aided you in living faithfully in accordance with your religious tradition or spiritual path? When has it made it difficult?
4. When has being in the Grail aided you to live faithfully in accordance with your religious tradition or spiritual path? When has it made it difficult?

***Insights and Challenges**

Forum participants affirmed that as an ‘international, spiritual and cultural movement’ (Int. Struct. 1.1), we want to:

- * Deepen our religious and spiritual roots
- * Reflect critically on our cultures
- * Engage in a continuing dialogue between our culture and the Christian Gospel
- * Grow in understanding of the underlying meanings of cultural and religious symbols which are part of Grail life in our different communities around the world.

We acknowledge the presence and power of the divine in all of creation and we call for deep respect and reverence for the sacred symbols of all religions and spiritual traditions

DAY 2 * Youth Voice in the Grail and their search

**Presenters: Kerstin Jacobsson (Sweden), Sara Jona Laisse (Mozambique),
Bonnie Hendricks (USA), Ginoca Carvalho Neto (Portugal),
Emilia Maria Mota (Brazil), Asteria Massawe (Tanzania)**

Blessed are you who search...

The second day started with a celebration around this Beatitude. And this was the theme of the whole day, in which a group of young people from different countries were asked to tell about their spiritual pathways. The celebration was in Taize-style, prepared by some young Portuguese women. Simple Taize chants were sung and repeated, prayers were said and silence was shared.

A panel of younger Grail members, Asteria Massawe (Tanzania), Emilia Maria Mota (Brasil), Ginoca Carvalho Neto (Portugal), Bonnie Hendricks (USA), Sara Jona Laisse (Mozambique) and Kerstin Jacobsson (Sweden) had been asked to reflect on their spiritual pathways and to tell about obstacles and challenges, and in which ways the Grail could respond to the needs of younger women. The stories were very different, but also had things in common.

Sara Jona compared the Biblical Ten Commandments with values in traditional African life, which was part of her upbringing. She concluded that Biblical values and traditional African values were not far from each other. For example, in both, love, peace and harmony among each other are central. She made a plea to work on this dialogue between traditional and Christian values.

Emilia told about the culture shock she experienced when she moved from a small village to the town, and how spiritual contacts helped her to find her way. At the moment she works with women and children against violent behavior. She said we all live in a moment that is confused – to have the courage to leave our houses to go to the community is the challenge.

Bonnie explained that, after years of searching and deeply exploring and participating in formal Christian faith, her spirituality now finds expression through walking the land daily, and living lightly and simply on the planet - striving to live more sustainably. Her challenge is in not having a communal expression and celebration of what grounds, inspires and challenges her being.

Ginoca walked to Santiago de Compostella, although she was not sure about which way to go. She brought up this theme as an important issue of younger people in Portugal today – it is not so clear anymore where to find inspiration, which choices to make and which role models to follow. Many younger Portuguese have had a traditional catholic upbringing, but are themselves estranged from the church. It was when she came across the Grail women that she started looking at the colours of faith, at the shapes of God, with a new look, in a process of inner transformation that marks her life.

Asteria spoke of the tradition of Christianity in Tanzania being only 100 years old, and that traditional belief (for example in diviners, witchcrafts and devil worshipping) is much older and is deeply instilled in the people. She told about responsibilities young people should dare to take, but how many young people in her country get lost in being dependent upon others, or even upon

things worse, like alcohol and drugs. She showed that in the Church, they know what their spirituality is.

Kerstin told us about her love for the beauty and simplicity of nature, how metaphors of nature provide powerful symbols such as the longing of the soul for God as ‘a dry land longing for water’, and how nature calls her to live in the present moment as in Buddhist thinking and the tradition of the desert fathers. A challenge she lives with is how people in her country are not used anymore to talk about religion and faith. Many people are involved in, or longing for, a spiritual quest, but they do not speak about it – so nobody knows and everybody is lonely.

During the discussion that followed **all kind of questions were raised**. One was: Do you have a picture of where you want to be (in the future)? Not everyone answered that question, but one member said ‘no’ – that she is open to the journey. This opened the conversation to the Young Women of the Americas meeting in Honduras and there it was a feeling of wanting something new was expressed.

Some of the older members spoke of the need for reaching out for the continuation of the Grail – that rituals need context. There was talk of the Iona community in Scotland and of the Taize songs.

Two questions were asked of the panel by one of the audience:

1. Is there enough space in the Grail today to walk your path?
2. Are there things you would like to see changed to walk the path?

Answers to these questions included some of these thoughts:

- These are difficult questions. Today is a big step for us because you are listening. We need to speak more freely – we feel a bit afraid to say what we feel
- I think there is enough
- We want to go farther
- The forum is an opportunity – there has to be opening – there is a search for spirituality

Opening the questions to others, young and old produced these answers:

- Some of my friends read the passage of the tax collector climbing a tree – important to see roots – old branches – and new branches – important to create your own spirituality – today I feel thrilled – these roots extend to the entire world
- When I see the younger people doing the work I usually do, I feel strong
- Thrilling to listen to Emilia – advice about going to the city. Each person has her own way– what guided me was spirituality
- How can I find this social attitude? – I can’t find it in the church
- In our training meeting, someone read a text about filling stadiums in the past – we are not in this time – why do you go there?

In the afternoon the discussion went on in small groups addressing these questions

1. What struck you – or challenged you in the morning panel?
2. Is there enough space – or what are the challenges to walking your path in the Grail?
3. How can we as Grail affirm and support your personal spiritual growth in a more collective way?

In the report back, some of the points mentioned were:

- Words: ancestors, communion, leadership, search, beauty, working for justice, the land, the presence
- Influence from Grail women makes an impact
- How do we go back to ourselves?
- We are waiting for our souls to catch up with us
- Read a book and come to talk about the book
- The challenge for space for people is sensitive
- We understand that we are not all the same – Grail women should be open to that diversity - evident that so many realities are together – women on different searches – how to open to this diversity?
- The moments when we can reveal to each other our spiritual paths, it opens us
- Practice of listening to one another is crucial
- In the Grail, I know the good side of Christianity
- A network of young people from the whole world is needed – all of us can do this
- We can share if we feel that the Grail is not open
- Availability for service is needed – not just to feel better
- We look for spirituality – key for our work
- Modern/post modern societies need a space for interior experience
- Working for five years with young women...at a certain point what I needed was to deepen in my own path
- Prayer group is a bridge to Work Group (Bridge for God)
- A certain point comes when the group needs to go deeper – how to do this?
- We need to create some context for going deep, otherwise we are a group of very good friends.
- The Grail gives one a chance to read Bible and to share many things you can't share in the family
- The Grail had a genius for bringing out in tradition things that are neglected – today **what is the genius of the Grail?**
- The Grail is the door to something – something universal – connected – a tribe in the people of God
- Real challenge is to make the space for young people.

In the evening - an Agape celebration by Cay Charles

One of the most memorable events of the Spirituality Forum was the evening of the Agape feast. An Agape is often referred to as a communal love feast. And feast it was -- a feast for the eyes with a colorfully decorated long table around which all 70 participants gathered -- down the center of the table, the dark green of the beautiful grape leaves centering around a bowl where each of us placed a lit candle. A feast of special foods and a special ceremony of sharing bread with special songs and readings. But most of all, a feast of community, of unity made most palpable by our being taken care of by the young Portuguese women who, with Loreto, gave us this gift.

The celebration finished with a quotation from a text written by Father van Ginneken in 1932:

'Be of your time, up to date, adapt yourself completely to the requirements of the times ... Let us dare to be modern ... Let us go with the time and also speak the language of the youngest generation. Put away worn-out sayings, create your own words. (Retreat 1932, Conf. 18).'

Our world has changed enormously since these words were written, and Father van Ginneken himself would be surprised about the actuality of his sentences.

(Christa Anbeek and Mary Gene Devlin)

Some suggestions for countries

- * Have your own 'youth panel' around the theme of their spiritual search.
- * Engage in inter-generational dialogue as part of this session.

Possible questions for further discussion

1. What struck you or challenged you in the report of this day and in the copies of the original presentations of the panel found on the Forum web site?
2. Is there enough space or what are the challenges for younger women to make their path in the Grail?
3. How can we as Grail affirm and support the spiritual paths of younger women in a more collective way?
4. How to create spaces for our diversity and how to be open to these diversities?

***Insights and Challenges**

Forum participants acknowledged that the future life of the Grail depends on young women, who, with a diversity of spiritual journeys, are drawn to the movement.

Therefore it is important for the Grail

- to listen to their experiences and include their perspectives.
- to incorporate them into the movement in a way that allows them to be authentically themselves, being influenced by the Grail and influencing the Grail.

DAY 3 * Exploring Mysticism and Prophecy

Presenters: Anita Saisi and Marina Sangali (Italy)

Blessed are you who are simple in your heart...

Who are the 'simple'? In Matthew, the 'simple' will see God.
In Jewish tradition 'listening' is very important: 'Shema' Israel.
In Christian tradition it is 'seeing'.

Our disgrace is that we have a much too complex heart which doesn't allow to see!

Anita Saisi said at the beginning of her presentation that in recent years more interest in mysticism has arisen connected with the search for spirituality, the aim of which is to find new ways of understanding the divine. She continued, 'my interest in mysticism started early, in my twenties and I read Teresa of Avila's writings and those of other mystics; they inspired me a lot and made me understand the importance of the search for God in a personal, direct way and this for me has always been a priority to other more institutionalised ways. Mystics gave me permission to follow my way in the search of God, assuming responsibility for my choices and then I found in the Grail the same openness and interior freedom'. Anita's journey continued through her theological studies. She has found that the developments in theology in the twentieth century gave more people the opportunity to study the mystery of God and God's relation to human life as it is expressed in different cultures and contexts. 'Feminist theology and liberation theology, for example, gave women and those fighting for justice permission to say their word and to share their experience in this important renewal in the search for God'.

Then in 2000 her interest in mysticism was renewed when the search for spirituality came also from non-believers and she was asked by some colleagues, psychotherapists and counsellors by profession, to introduce them to this phenomenon. They formed a group in Milan for sharing and growing in this adventure that they call: 'To nourish the soul'.

Anita was really struck by the universality of the phenomenon of mysticism and she became more convinced that the Spirit, the *Ruah*, blows where she wants; 'no established religions, no dogmas or rules can put a limit to her creative action on this earth and in the hearts of men and women'. She said that 'a need comes from our inner self, like a cry from our heart that pushes us towards the mystery, an undeniable need strictly connected with the survival of humankind at a time like the one in which we live when we are all so caught up with money and other material ways of life'. She became most interested in how mystics influence their time and how they help us to enter deeper in the problems and conflicts of the society we live in. She said, 'At the same time they are so involved in these problems but able to go beyond them. Their witness is subjective and universal, deeply interior but overflowing at the exterior'.

Anita has discerned that 'what is common to all mystics is their availability to accept a presence that is given as a pure gift. This will demand the soul to go through what in Greek is called 'metánoia', an awakening of your eyes and your mind, a purifying of your heart from all that is

not God. As someone once said: “Don’t go to a fountain with a glass full of water!” Nothing will be as it was before’.

Anita’s paper needs to be studied in its entirety. It is full of insight about such things as the three traditional stages of mysticism: *the via positiva, the via negativa, and the via transformativa*. She gives us examples from Buddhism and Hinduism, from Indian sages, from the Sufis, Rabiya and Rumi, from Christians, Francis and Clare, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

One of today’s mystics Anita spoke about is Ramon Panikkar. ‘His vision’, she said, ‘is integrative and he conceived a cosmotheandric view of reality, a concept that unites cosmic, divine and human dimensions. The real world, he says, is a world of variety and complexity. It is crucial to him that we acquire a global awareness in the cosmotheandric dimension of our destiny. It is dialogue that makes pluralism, co-existence, democracy, justice and peace possible’. Another mystic she spoke of is Dorothee Soelle. In her book ‘The Silent Cry’, Dorothee Soelle ‘explores the importance of mysticism as a way for today’s world to fight materialism, individualism and fundamentalism. Her effort is to democratise mysticism, that is to say to believe that we are all mystics if we listen to our inner desire for God – the mystery, and if we become able to hear the silent cry that comes from the depths of human life. Mysticism can help us to reach the wholeness and the oneness of life’. ‘Mysticism is the experience of the wholeness of life’, Dorothee Soelle affirms. And Raimon Panikkar says, ‘We are all mystics’.

Finally, Anita spoke of Dag Hammarskjöld, for whom mystical experience was ‘a freedom in the midst of action’. She describes him as a man who suffered from growing isolation, but who could accept it and transform it into a deep union with God, reached through a search where radical self-criticism and radical doubt were joined. He finally discovered that to say ‘yes’ to God means to say ‘yes’ to oneself.

Marina Sangali began her talk with an explanation of the path of her life which led her through a religious childhood to moving away from the church and engaging in social and political actions, feeling a Christian woman and a feminist at the same time. Through some Grail experiences, engagement in Anita’s group and the study of Panikkar and Etty Hillesum, Marina’s spiritual world opened to understanding about **mysticism**. She found it very important that all the mystics from different traditions tell the same things, about letting go, being clear to yourself, sharing love and compassion, listening to your inner self. That means to her that the spiritual and religious need has a universal origin and gives humankind a chance to share something in common. She continued, ‘I often ask myself and my journey companions: How can we get closer to the Mystery? How can we experience what the mystics tell us, *something after which nothing will be as it used to be?* Here my impatience and my old need **to do something** comes in again. I know it is very important to dedicate space to silence and reflection. Then it will come and if not, I will be a richer person anyway’.

Etty Hillesum’s writing has had a deep effect on Marina. Etty was a twenty-seven year old Jewish resident of Amsterdam in the early years of World War II and her path led to Auschwitz. What Marina felt reading her diary, and still feels anytime she goes back to her writings, is like meeting an old friend, someone exceptional but at the same time quite similar to her as far as emotions, experiences, fears and doubts are concerned. Etty had her own religious rhythm, not inspired by church or synagogue, or by dogmas or tradition. ‘*When I pray, I hold a silly, naïve or deadly serious dialogue with what is deepest inside me, which for the sake of convenience I call God*’. ‘*I repose in myself. And that part of myself, that deepest and richest part in which I repose,*

is what I call "God". Her mysticism led her not into solitary contemplation but back into the world of action. Her God, in a sense, resided in her own capacity to see the truth, to bear it and find consolation in it. In the concentration camp her soul found its deepest expression: she placed herself unreservedly at the service of her people. As she put it in one of the last entries in her diary, she wanted to be the *'thinking heart of the barracks'*.

We encourage all Grail members to read the reflections of Anita and Marina. They are on the website in full.

Anita also gave us **a booklet of reflections** from a variety of mystics over the centuries. Please ask the Forum participants from your country to share this with you if you are interested.

In the afternoon, we **took a bus trip to Serra da Arrabida, the Mother Mountain**, where the Sufis once had a monastery, but which changed to being a Christian convent in the mystical tradition in later centuries. Then after a brief stop at the ocean so that the group could have a look and a quick wade in the sea with lots of laughter and splashing, we visited Palmela Castle, also Moorish at first, then under the jurisdiction of Christian soldier knights. Bonnie spoke of the pilgrimage this way...

A PILGRIMAGE

Feet in the ocean
Water so blue
Water splashing
Women gathered in the sea

On top of the world
The white of the Convent
The blue of the sea
far below
Bathed in the rays of the sun
Holy Place of Sufis
The "Mother Mountain"

Walking the icy stones
Castle so ancient
Eerily quiet
Hauntingly cold
Accompanied by the ghosts of warrior monks
in the heat of the day

In the evening, *the Swedish Grail women* led us in a beautiful evening prayer in the courtyard about Brigit of Sweden. 'Dear Lord, show me the way and make me want to walk it'.

(Mary Gene Devlin and Ruth Crowe)

*Insights and Challenges

Forum participants affirmed that in all experience there is a mystical dimension. Therefore as Grail women we are called

- to study and deepen our understanding of mystical experience and
- to seek to make time and space in our own lives for contemplation, the soul of radical action.



DAY 4 * Elaboration of Suffering/Human Wholeness/Justice/Solidarity

Presenters: Teopista Nakibuule (Uganda), Nadia Villefort (Brazil) and Bibi Helgesson (Sweden)

Blessed are you who suffer and seek justice...

This is probably the most disturbing message of the New Testament. By suffering it is possible to go further and to see God. Probably it is during the night, in making sense of it, that we move. Justice is also connected with each one of us.

To wish
To desperately wish
Until pain
Until suffering
That all be
The other way

(Maurice Bellet)

Teopista Nakibuule began the session with words and slides of images of suffering people in Africa. We then met in groups from the various regions of the world, to work on **the question, 'What kind of suffering is happening in your communities?'** Returning, each region shared. Here are just a couple of points from each. We found Africa naming guns as a very big factor at the base of many of their problems, first before independence, and now perpetuated by multinational companies. The loss of indigenous seeds also led the list.

Europe reported psychological suffering and emptiness, and lack of respect for the environment. North America mentioned racism, militarism and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and immigration.

Latin America spoke of health issues, crime, and much poverty in spite of fine supermarkets and airports. The Pacific reported refugees, human trafficking in PNG and corruption. Muslim people are victimized. Most countries mentioned natural disasters and also globalization.

Nádia Villefort gave a presentation about Brazil and the suffering of women especially. She spoke of the question about suffering, ‘Why me?’ And spoke of what happens with popcorn – that it can suffer the fire and burst and become a soft white flower, or it can refuse to pop, and be just a dead kernel! Which am I, we could ask ourselves? Nádia shared some examples of people and situations in Brazil where there is deep suffering. The group then stopped to pray for women suffering in the world, to light candles and to pray for the world.

Two questions discussed in small groups:

1. How is the Grail facing or responding to the suffering we see in our community.
2. How is this response or struggle for justice central to our spirituality?

To form groups, we made a spiral with the women who had been in the Grail the longest time at the center of the line, spiraling out to the latest members, and then combining three older members with three newer ones. This brought interesting perspectives to the discussions.

Bibi Helgesson was the third presenter and she walked us through the book of Job, starting out with a contemporary example of a young woman who cuts herself in the midst of her great misery. ‘What is there to say to such pain?’ asked Bibi. After Bibi’s powerful presentation, we went back to the morning groups and worked on **the question put for discussion:**

‘How is the Grail and can the Grail, be a loving, healing community in the face of suffering in the world?’

There were many deep conversations and points brought back to the whole group, including the need to create spaces of trust, being a community to support those who are suffering, **being with** the one suffering in silence (not giving the advice in the manner of the friends of Job), and being involved in many ways of social action.

The pain of suffering experienced by the group needed to be lifted, and *Ticha Vasconcelos* and *Teopista Nakibuule* offered an opportunity for this in a healing ritual in the courtyard just before supper. The hot sky filled with clouds and a few soft drops of rain fell, as we sang Taize songs, listened to readings, and blessed each other with fragrant oils, praying for all our personal and collective sorrows, and that we be drawn into work for justice as we care and love each other in our joys and in our sufferings. We had moved through the “Via Negativa” into the Transformative Way, the way of healing and we went smiling into supper. In the darkness after supper, with candles lit, some of us gathered to listen to *Cay Charles* and *Ticha Vasconcelos* read from ‘The Big Inquisitor from *The Brothers Karamasov* by Dostoievsky. And so to rest...

(Mary Gene Devlin)

***Insights and Challenges**

As a world wide movement of women, 'committed to the transformation of the world into a global community of justice and peace,' (International Structures 1.1) Forum participants affirmed that we need to continue to:

- * Deepen our understanding of this commitment
- * Work for political, economic and social justice
- * Challenge the structures of power and domination in society and in the church
- * Take action to oppose technologies which feed violence and war, devalue human life and destroy the integrity of the planet
- * Affirm the personal authority of women and their capacities for creative initiative and leadership.



DAY 5 * Reflections on the Eucharistic and the Early Christian Communities

Presenters:

**Early Christian Communities - Maria Carlos Ramos (Portugal),
Eucharist - Nicoletta Crosti (Italy),
The understanding of Eucharist in the Lutheran Church -
Bibi Helgesson (Sweden)**

Blessed are you who break the bread with the others...

To break the bread is the simplest gesture of humanity. We have lost this gesture. Bread is today presented already sliced in supermarkets in most countries...!!

Many people were excited about what this day would bring, since there were different expectations. Would we have an ecumenical con-celebration, or would we just keep to the program, where on Sunday a Catholic Eucharist was scheduled and on Monday a Lutheran Eucharist. Father Carlos from the Golega parish, (where the Golega Grail Centre is situated in Portugal), joined us for the whole day. He and Bibi Helgesson had corresponded over a period of time before the Forum, working through some of the ways they might celebrate a Eucharist together. **We thank Father Carlos and Bibi for all the time they gave to these reflections and for their insights. We thank Father Carlos for his presence with us at the Forum at a time when he was extremely busy.** His view was, of course, that the final decision about what form our Eucharistic celebrations took was the Grail's decision.

The day began with an introduction by *Maria Carlos Ramos*. She explained some things about the oral traditions that started after Jesus' death and resurrection, and showed that only after fifty years the first narratives of the Gospels started to be written down. This process went on for many decades. So, the words in the Gospels are not the words of Jesus himself, but interpretations of his words, influenced by the time and the contextual concerns of the writers. So already in the Gospels we find a plurality of ideas and insights.

Nicoletta Crosti divided her talk into two parts. In the first she explained the meaning of the Eucharist according to the new trend of the second Vatican Council, while in the second part she spoke of the Roman Catholic liturgical rite, therefore making a clear distinction between the Eucharistic mystery in itself and the liturgical rite which should express it.

She began her presentation with the observation that since the second Vatican Council, good theology has been based on the Word of God (Dei Verbum n.24), so Nicoletta offered some Biblical reflections on the Eucharist, in which she put an emphasis on the image of God as an 'eagle' who carries her young ones away from evil. She carries her young ones **on** her wings, not under, because she flies so high that the danger can only come from below. The image of the eagle expresses the connectedness of God and God's people – through the blood of the covenant they belong to the same family. Besides Biblical reflections (which were of course much more elaborated than can be summarized here but are in full **on the website**), Nicoletta gave some insights into the liturgical developments of the Eucharistic rite.



In the beginning the community aspect was central and also the prayer of praise and of thanks for all the wonderful things the Lord had done and does. But after the conversion of Emperor Constantine a lot changed. The pagan religious attitude, in which there was a big gap between the sacred and the profane began to dominate the rite, and also a kind of trade mentality (I do something for God, so that he will do something for me). Also, the priests started to be the central subjects, and no longer the community. The next development was that the Eucharist became a sacrament, which made it independent of being eaten or not. So now, it was not even important anymore if people from the community were present or not, the priest could just do his rite. Some changes were made again at the second Vatican Council, but what we have now is a mosaic of different liturgical trends.

Bibi Helgesson ended the morning session by telling us something about Martin Luther and the Eucharist in the Swedish Lutheran Church. Bibi put an emphasis on the fact that Lutherans also have the belief that in the Eucharist Christ is present in the bread and wine. How this works is a mystery, but He is really present according to Lutheran believers, so there is no difference with the Roman Catholic belief on this point.

Discussion around the celebration of the Eucharist

In the afternoon there was time for questions. It still seemed unclear to many of us what kind of celebration we were going to have a few hours later. It was clear that some of us really would have liked to have a con-celebration, with a Roman Catholic minister and Bibi, while others were hesitating. During the discussion a lot of very interesting things were exchanged. For example, Nicoletta observed that the new Pope does not understand important parts of the second Vatican Council which declared that the church had to open up to other churches more, and even to other religious traditions. But now there is another trend, the Catholic Church is closing its doors and windows and declaring itself to be the only true church, which is not correct according to the Gospel.

There was some exchange around the meaning of Eucharist and the policies of different Roman Catholic Church authorities to receiving Holy Communion at Ecumenical services. Other important things were said, and different feelings and insights were expressed. Ruth Crowe explained why the ILT and the planning team had made the decision not to have a con-celebration. When the ILT heard about the plans of working towards having an ecumenical Eucharist, they insisted upon consensus around this. The planning team decided to do this consultation during the forum and they had to conclude that there was no consensus among participants about having an ecumenical Eucharist. So that is why the decision was made to have a Catholic Eucharist on this fifth day of the forum, during which Bibi was also at the altar, and to have a Lutheran Eucharist on the sixth day. It was made very clear that both celebrations were celebrations of our Grail community and everybody present was invited to participate fully in both of them.

All agreed that discussions of such importance need a lot more time than we were able to give at the Forum.

Although the outcome was painful for some of us, we had a joyful Eucharist on that day.

(Christa Anbeek and Ruth Crowe)

A further comment

When summing up the week, *Cay Charles* spoke about this experience as follows. ‘Our fifth day on the Eucharist was intended by the planning team to be an experience of Ecumenism. It is here that we were naive and we moved beyond where we actually were. The day caused suffering and isolation for some. But the revelation of both the way Father Carlos and Bibi celebrated, and the experience of the Lutheran Holy Communion the following day brought us, we believe, one step further. The purpose of having Maria Carlos Ramos give background and Nicoletta’s reflections was to clear away some of the rigidity of interpretation and to look with fresh eyes at our experience of Eucharist’.

Lorna Bowman (Canada) has written a reflection around these discussions – please see the forthcoming *Crossroads*, December 2007.

*** Insights and Challenges**

Forum participants agree that -

We need to seek to understand the meaning of Eucharist at a deeper level.

We need to think more about -

- * is the celebration of the Eucharist at the core of Christian faith in all its diversity?

We know the Eucharist has a different place in different Christian traditions?

- * what does this mean for the Grail as an ecumenical movement?

DAY 6 - * Eco-Spirituality

Presenters: Marilyn Aitken (South Africa) and Caresse Cranwell (Australia)

Blessed are you who inherited the Earth...

Luke adds what we can call 'non-blessed': 'Woe to the rich!'

Woe to us if we aren't capable of taking care of what is ours and those who come after us will not find earth a pleasant place to live.

The theme of the day 'Eco-spirituality' was introduced by **Marilyn Aitken** (South Africa) and **Caresse Cranwell** (Australia).

This was a very challenging but enjoyable day. There were many spaces of interaction throughout the day.

Caresse presented and defined 'Ecological' as 'a dynamic communion of inter-connected parts'. Eco-spirituality emerges for her out of the fundamental question of 'who are we?' Impressive pictures of galaxies in a vast universe made us aware of our small selves. And yet there is one energy, one Spirit, 'the very ground from which everything arises.' Eco-spirituality was described as a way of understanding the patterns of life, because they can give us access 'into the mind of God, or insight into the nature of the Spirit.' Basically these patterns of life are all inter-connected. (**Caresse's slides and comments are on the website** and we encourage you to go there and reflect on her presentation).

Marilyn put up a picture of polar bears standing in the middle of the ocean on a small melting glacier-shell quite far from land. We reflected on what this state of affairs has to do with humans, with our way of life: global warming, climate change, Christ on the Cross! Marilyn's talk needed to be shortened on the day itself, but it is filled with insights that are important to the raising of our consciousness on the issue of the future of the planet. **We encourage you to refer to it on the web site**, noting thoughts on indigenous spirituality and on the spiritual links among people committed to causes related to the environment. She gave us a quote from Thomas Berry the monk, physicist and theologian which summarizes the 20th Century in three sentences:

'The glory of the Human has become the Desolation of the Earth. The Desolation of the Earth is becoming the Destiny of the Human. All human institutions, professions, programs and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they prohibit, ignore or foster the 'great work of our time to reinvent the human being' so that we may become conscious of ourselves as part of the great web of interconnections in the universe thus enhancing human earth relationships'.

Later Caresse led us in a number exercises that made us aware of how our true Self is one of inter-connectedness 'that stabilizes in the form of an identity over the course of its life'. We discovered, what this means concretely by looking at our self as having a 'protector and a controller', of 'being vulnerable and of being connected'. A true Self then is integrated and free-functioning, acting and reacting in relationships. How we are inter-connected in our outer world, in the systems, we learned in several games played during the afternoon session, moving around outside without words, but being related, building up systems or bringing them to collapse.

Following short reports about nature-related spirituality connected with life in Grailville and in the Tiltenberg, (read by Bonnie Hendricks and Carla van Thiel) **we discussed in country groups how and by whom our spirituality in relation to ecological questions has been influenced.** It was surprising to see that this theme had been part of the lives of Grail groups in many places for quite a long time. With the help of the tool 'living Eco-spirituality' presented by Caresse, we discussed the following two questions first in small groups and than in the plenary.

Questions for discussion

1. What do these different aspects of Eco-spirituality invite you to in your own spiritual practice?
2. What can we do as the Grail?

On the website there are **3 short reflections** from theologians on the spiritual necessity to be in nature. This one is by **Irish theologian, Fr Donal Dorr**: 'We need to be in touch with unpolluted earth and sea to nourish our spirit. We cannot survive long unless we are in touch with the beauty of nature, and experience at times the freedom and space of a wilderness place'.

'Modern science indicates that it was not just a romantic flight of fancy that led Saint Francis of Assisi to speak of 'Sister Dove' and 'Brother Ass', 'Brother Sun' and 'Sister Moon'. We humans are of the same origin and are made of the same elements as these 'sisters and brothers' - and we dare not forget it. We are all woven together into a single fabric composed of waves and atoms and sub-atomic particles - all parts of one cosmos'.

***Insights and Challenges** expressed by Forum participants.

We have so much more to learn about all we heard during this day, about new ways of looking at and connecting with the Universe.

- We affirm the call that eco-spirituality makes to us to be conscious of our interconnectedness- inner and outer.
- Cosmology can give us an insight into the Mind of God.
- We are called to live an ecologically sustainable life, aware of our impact on the outer and inner worlds: the natural world and our spiritual life.

The day ended with the celebration of the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

We celebrated together the Swedish Lutheran service of Holy Communion led by Bibi Helgesson.

Gathering at a simple wooden cross in front of the house, Bibi reminded us that Jesus, shortly before the transfiguration, told his disciples that soon he would be dying on the cross, and after he came down from the mountain repeated this again. In a long procession we followed the cross to a well in the garden. The well - source of living water – was prepared as the altar. We shared in the word of God and in Holy Communion, deeply connected with each other, and with the whole of creation: suffering and given hope; and we received strength that our struggle for transformation in faith will become transfigured by the Spirit.



(Marita Estor, Christa Werner and Ruth Crowe)



DAY 7 * Reflections on the Week

Blessed are you who are thankful

Blessed are those who are thankful. God saw that all was good and rested on the seventh day. In the Greek translation of the creation narrative, the word ‘kalos’ means ‘beautiful’ and ‘good’, therefore the capacity to give thanks: it is very good.

Day 7 was a workday when we tried to pull together the week’s reflections and activities, recommending what we saw as important for Grail women around the world to do more study around and/or reflection and discussion.

Cay Charles gave a brief summary/review of the whole week, which had helped the Forum participants deepen their reflections further on crucial issues such - understanding our Christian roots more deeply, ecumenism, exploration of new paths of spirituality and more. For the six days of the Forum, Cay reminded us, there had been rich contributions about culture, voices from young people's experiences of spirituality, mysticism, justice, and suffering in the world, Eucharistic Celebration and eco-spirituality.

Forum participants were invited to discuss their experiences and learnings from the Forum in national groups. Some of the crucial issues that emerged as needing more attention were

* deepening our Christian roots *Bible studies *understanding Eucharist *mysticism * ecumenism *inter-religious dialogue *eco-spirituality *identification of Grail values.

***Ecumenism - Insights and Challenges**

Forum participants acknowledged the call to deepen our Christian roots.

Deepening our Christian roots means to go forward with:

- studying of the Bible from a woman's perspective
- studying the history of Christianity with its different movements and understanding of Jesus Christ and different ways of relating with the Divine (with particular focus on women, Christian mystical movements and the Eucharist).
- researching the relationship between Christianity and other cultures and traditions, so as to be able to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

Deidre Cornell (USA) and *Christa Anbeek* (The Netherlands) had been invited to the Forum as participants and as 'listeners'. Both were given the opportunity to share some of their insights from the Forum.

*Some comments from *Deidre*.

'...our goal is not to simply co-exist, even while recognising our differences. In **dialogue**, our goal is transformation. As we open ourselves to this process, in honesty and respect, we are transformed. I think we had a taste of this during this forum'.

'We don't want to become an **ecumenical movement** without really deepening in what that means. Our goal is to engage with each other so that our communion, which is an underlying existential reality which already exists, can be realised'.

'We must ask ourselves if we have an adequate understanding of **plurality**, and for Christians this must be rooted in the Holy Spirit... [in the early Church] differences were not abolished but made intelligible. So we must conclude that plurality is divinely ordained and forms part of the Creator's plan, enacted through the Holy Spirit. If we consider the divine as the source of plurality, our differences are no longer an unfortunate accident but an invitation to dialogue and transformation'.

'...**Grail women** of our individual countries must trust - and challenge - each other to carry out their own discernment process, in which we define what is most precious and most valuable in our Grail 'cells, and it is our collective international Grail task to 'help God help us' to safeguard them.

Some important questions posed by Deidre for further reflection.

1. Are we really aware of the extent to which our cultures affect our national Grail spiritualities?
2. Do we really have confidence that the Holy Spirit is leading each Grail country to a common horizon?
3. Do we really affirm that each country is carrying out the Grail vision in its own way?

***Christa Anbeek** (The Netherlands) outlined an approach to engaging in inter-religious dialogue.

Inter religious dialogue: three positions

1. Exclusivism

Only one true religion
Fundamentalism, Pentecostals

2. Inclusivism

Other religions have parts of the truth
Vatican II – Nostra Aetate

3. Pluralism

Many true pathways
Panikkar (many windows, we need each other to get an idea of the whole picture)

Four ways to do inter religious dialogue:

1. Intellectual/doctrinal level

Sharing beliefs – religious specialists

2. Ethical level

Doing works for peace and justice together
Judaism: sharing our common messianic call

3. Exchange of spiritual practices

Thomas Merton, Father Lassalle
Monastic inter religious dialogue

4. Biographical/narrative level – openness

Who are you?
What are the most important experiences in your life?
How did your faith carry you through?



Nadia Villefort (Brazil) & Imelda Gaurwa (Tanzania)

Both Deidre and Christa have written fuller texts that are available on the website.

Lorna Bowman (Canada) reminded us of the elements of being a prophetic movement.
‘A prophet is one who feels with the heart of God’ (Abraham Herschel).

A prophet imagines new possibilities. A prophet has a new way of seeing the world.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS PUT FORWARD AT THE END OF THE FORUM

A) From Maria Carlos Ramos and supported by the team that worked together on materials in the days after the Forum.

*** Towards a Theology of Inclusion**

We propose that the Grail develop a ‘theology of inclusion’. This suggestion emerges out of several perceptions and experiences during the Forum.

- We believe that the Holy Spirit is in everyone and everything
- We are aware that science tells us that our universe, while being immensely diverse, is a community of being sharing common material elements
- We know that our world is rich in diverse cultures and religions and spiritualities, which, in our globalising world, are increasingly in interaction with one another

Developing a theology of inclusion would lead us

- to go more deeply into our Christian roots;
- to engage in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and relationships;
- to explore and grow in understanding of cultural, religious and spiritual diversity among us;
- to care for the universe;
- to respect each person’s life story; and
- to seek justice, solidarity and peace for all.

B) From some country groups present at the Forum

Canada

1. We recommend that the Spirituality Network continue and give particular attention to
 1. study of Bible as a source of spiritual nurture
 2. offer opportunity to deepen study of mystics & their praxis
 3. impact of culture on faith and Christian/Grail life
2. That the website continue with opportunity to expand on subject of spirituality

Kenya

1. Promotion South-South dialogue/activities within the Grail
2. Use of modern technology to help us know each other, e.g. including a photo when communicating through the internet
3. Follow-up of deeper spiritual forum in regions
4. Updating history of Grail

Mexico

Como vamos a trabajar en Mexico, la Espiritualidad Forum?

1. reconciliación
2. un informe juntas-reuniones para pasar la información
3. en las reuniones que vamos hacer:
 - a. conocer se a uno misma – espiritualid x que estamos reaccionando de esa manera
 - b. compartir exp. Individual acerca suprimiento
 - c. sanación – a través de lec. Biblia, rituals y pensamientos, otras reg. = Ecomenismo.
4. incorporar (women sign)s juvenes=intergeneraci.. inter fe dialogue, conferencias, reuniones informes i doc.

Translation

How are we going to work in Mexico after the Sprituality Forum?

1. Reconciliation
2. An information bulletin, meetings so that we can pass on the information
3. In the meetings, what are we going to do:
 - a. getting to know one's self, one's spirituality x that we are reacting in this way
 - b. to share one's experience about feeling 'left out' or excluded.
 - c. healing by way of Bible readings, rituals and thoughts, other
 - d. religions and Ecumenism
4. Incorporate women, youth, intergenerational, interfaith dialogue, conferences, meetings reports and documents.
5. Exchange experiences on a national, regional level and later international level by way of website.

The Netherlands

1. Give support for a conference by and for young women in the Grail
2. Make the Mexican artworks of these days into postcards. Put the international Grail website on it (on the back) and send the cards as often as possible
3. Where is the international website? It is and important way to make the Grail visible
4. Make an international Grail celebration work book. Examples (of some celebrations), prayers, songs, texts, symbols, rituals to use for inspiration e.g. healing service this week. A system that can be updated.

Portugal

1. to maintain and feed website regularly
2. national meeting on most relevant questions in the forum
3. 'GRUPOS DE PERTENÇA' deepening questions
4. ILT and 'vision group' to further process started in Forum (articulated with National Teams)

Sweden & Italy

1. Bible with inclusive language + Grail psalter available at all international meetings
2. To reach the same level of knowledge on issues – but how? Tools?
3. Engage actively with the Bible
4. Continuing developing 'Grail' language for eco-spirituality and mysticism.

USA

1. Spread word about website, continue to use the website for dialogue
2. Persons from each country take what happened back to their country
3. Each country have person(s) to communicate what happens back to International



BLESSING OF THE 7TH DAY

Blessed be Culture –
the knitting of us together in song, in dance, in the footsteps of our ancestors.
Blessed be the bridges
that allow us to enter, to embrace another's culture and call it good.

Blessed be the young and the wisdom they give us,
the courage to be on the search, to find the paths, to walk in the ways of the old
and to create brand new ones.

Blessed be the mystics and what they teach us—
the reaching of the heart and soul to the Mystery without and the Mystery within.
Blessed be prayer
that heals us when we are hurt
and gives voice to our joy and gratitude.
Blessed be the call to healing,
the healing of those who suffer injustice and hurt
as a result of greed, ignorance or happenstance,
the healing of those who suffer in body or mind.

Blessed be the Breaking of the Bread,
the coming together of the People of the Feast
borne on the wings of the Great Eagle God,
the People gathered and begotten at the same time.

Blessed be our sister, Earth,
little one, pebble in the universe on whom we stand.
Blessed all her creatures great and small, organic and inorganic.
Blessed be the interdependent Web of Life.

Blessed be the Infinite Everything, our Mother Father God, the Great Mystery
who urges on in hope,
connects us to all that ever was and will be,
who binds us together in love
no matter how far apart we are.
Amen

Carol Siemering (USA)

You will find more prayers and rituals on the website.

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Photo left: left to right Clotilda Bukirwa (Uganda), Angela Bugatar (PNG), Cay Charles (USA), Carol Webb (South Africa).
Photo right: left to right Marina Sangalli (Italy), Christa Anbeek (The Netherlands), Carol Siemering, Mary Gene Devlin (USA).



Loreto Couceiro and the young Portuguese led the Agape Celebration



Sara Jona Laisse (Mozambique) & Bibi Helgesson (Sweden)



Imelda Gaurwa (Tanzania) and Angelina Kyonda (Kenya)



group shots

