

THE STORY OF THE FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - A SEED IS SOWN

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, if you remember, I told my personal story. This year I was asked to tell the Story of the Foundation. Ironically enough when we are asked to tell our story we face the question – which story do I tell? People as well as institutions have many stories.

Last year I told a story of the Foundation to the Faculty and Centering Prayer Group Leaders. It was an informative story, a story of the people who had made possible the coming into being of the Foundation. It was a story of dates and events. It was largely an outer story – a story of what happened when and why and who made it possible. This is an essential story. It is like the skeleton of our body. It holds all else in place but there is more, much more. There is flesh and blood, and pulsating heart; there is soul and spirit.

Today I want to use the outer story as pegs on which to hang the inner story, the real significance of the Foundation for Human Development, its meaning and purpose.

So get into story telling mood, awaken your spirit of listening, open your mind and heart and allow the story to unfold.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Over twenty years ago when I chose the name Foundation for Human Development, some people were skeptical. They thought we needed a symbolic name like Living Water, Samaan Tree. I was encouraged when Fr. Henry Charles recognized the significance of the choice. It is the statement of your intention, he said. The name stayed.

But the name itself and its intent lead to some hard questions – What is it to be human? What does human development mean? And, how do we develop our humanity? We spend a life time struggling with these questions. At any rate, I have.

In the Genesis story, we are told that God created mankind in His own Image and Likeness. This is a startling statement. It can only mean that God created mankind like Himself, like God. So we ask ourselves, in what way, if any, am I like God? This is a scary question as we seek within ourselves the likeness of God and so often we fail to find it.

If the essence of who I am is the Image of God, why is it so difficult for me to see God in myself and in you? What covers this over and hides it from you and from me? And how can I remove this cover so I can experience and manifest my true self – the Image of God?

Then I face a series of other hard questions – in developing the human, do I develop essence only, the Image of God within me, or do I develop essence and cover? And what constitutes cover? Is it all that I have developed through my social conditioning, what Thomas Merton calls the Surface Self and what Thomas Keating calls the False Self? And is this conditioning fixed permanently or can it be made permeable to essence so that the Image of God shines through it? And if essence can indeed shine through the cover or False Self, how can we bring this transparency about? How can we help ourselves and one another to become transparent to the Divine Image in which we have been created?

And so the Foundation set itself a daunting task. It is essentially a task of transformation expressed at its greatest in those overwhelming words of St. Paul – “I live, now not I, it is Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20)) This is what we seek for ourselves and for you.

When did these questions begin for me? It is hard to say but they took conscious shape in an ongoing way when I was a Secondary School Principal. The question that tugged at me then was – What is it to be a person? Which is another way of saying, what is it to be human?

This is the background, the ongoing questioning and searching over years that led me to the name that expressed intent – Foundation for Human Development.

THE STORY BEGINS

And so, let me begin the story. In 1990 when the date of my retirement as principal of St. Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain, drew near, a group of teachers, parents, friends, got together to discern what they could do as a tribute to my work in education. These discussions gave birth to the Foundation. It was my farewell gift when I retired from the teaching service. It was intended to provide me with a forum from which I could continue my commitment to and my work with human development.

From the beginning I was clear that my focus was health, not sickness. I did not have then, nor do we have now, the training and qualifications to deal with serious psychological illness. Nor is this my area of interest. What I hoped we would always have are people with mind and heart to call each other to the fullness of life. I am interested in healthy human development – what blocks this and how these blocks can be removed - so that people can be fully alive. The model we use is developmental and educational rather than medical/clinical.

I would like you to listen even more carefully now as I attempt to outline some of the main principles from which we work.

1. I said that the model we use is developmental and educational. However the education we offer is education with a difference and is directed to adults. A lifetime in the education of children led me to the realization that little real change can be effected in children without the collaboration of parents and teachers and indeed of the adult community generally. If we want to transform children, we have to transform the adults who care for and influence them.
2. I was also convinced that information of itself does not change people. To get caught in the traditional mode of teaching would accomplish little. We

needed to work from the inside out, attempt to connect with the essential goodness in people and mirror that goodness to them. We had, of necessity, to work reflectively and, above all, we had to be true to who we are. Where we rest inside of ourselves is of paramount importance. Where we come from as we engage others makes the difference.

3. The programmes we offer are not the traditional academic studies; nor are we concerned with the teaching of numeracy and literacy, or with the transmission of vocational skills. We are concerned with the development of self-knowledge, self understanding and self-acceptance, not as an end in itself but that people might discover who they truly are and live out of this truth; that relationships might be deeper, truer, more life giving; that a new society might be born.
4. We address the transformation of society through the transformation of one person at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time. It is as each heart is touched; each spirit awakened that we can hope for a better world.
5. The Foundation responds to the cries of those bewildered by the rapidity of change in the contemporary world, who lack the skills to respond to changing family situations and to a work environment so different from that of the past; those whose relationships unravel or split asunder. It reaches out to those experiencing the emptiness of much of modern life despite all the information and qualifications that contemporary higher education provides; those hungry for a deep spiritual life beyond devotional practice; to those who hear the invitation to go into the desert or to “launch out into the deep.” It provides a “home” for the marginalized.
6. The Foundation attempts also to respond to the cries of those seeking to be freed from modern enslavement, addictions of all kinds: alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex; freed from the worship of the many contemporary idols –

power, wealth, the accumulation of material things; preoccupation with the superficial; obsession with immediate gratification. Slavery abounds.

7. Long ago the Foundation recognized what modern research has confirmed, that an understanding of one's personal narrative is pivotal if one is to make meaning of one's life. In numerous ways, the Foundation invites people to tell their story and in the telling to recognize that they are not helplessly caught in the past but can create for themselves a new future; that the movement from enslavement to freedom is possible for us all. It attempts to usher in a different way of being present and of engaging in creative action in the world.
8. We hold that the spiritual is an essential dimension of the human person so our work is primarily psychological/spiritual. I often speak of these as the two inextricably interwoven strands of the Foundation. Since our commitment is to transformation not merely behavioural change, we do deep inner work and invite people to set out on the spiritual journey.
9. So how do we attempt to translate all of these intentions into action? We offer a series of courses and workshops as well as one on one and couples counseling. We organize and guide retreats of all kinds - one day and residential retreats of varying lengths. We have a network of contemplative communities throughout the island where people from all walks of life, from every creed and race, can find rest and renewal of life.
10. The work of the Foundation is rooted in contemplation. It is from deep, silent prayer that the Foundation reaches out to service in the world, attempts "to do a little good." We introduce people to the contemplative tradition, to contemplatives of the modern era as well as those of centuries past. We emphasize in all that we do that it is not enough to live on the surface of life, not enough to develop psychological integration, that above all we need to nurture the life of the Spirit of God within us and to allow that Spirit to transform us.

[Pause for a moment and, in silence and stillness, allow yourself to receive all of this.]

STRUCTURE OF THE FOUNDATION

When in 1990 that group of teachers, parents and friends got together to provide me with a forum for my ongoing work in human development, they knew that a structure was necessary. They set up a Steering Committee to establish a suitable structure and chart the way forward. The Steering Committee took a leap of faith as they staked their reputation on something that was still only an idea in my head, had not been tried, and was a new frontier for me. My life experience had been in schools. I am grateful to them for their trust and confidence.

The names of the Steering Committee are: Gerard Furness Smith, Hubert Alleyne, Brian de la Rosa, Angela Hamel Smith, Annette Rahael, Angela Lee Loy, Astra da Costa, Greer Sebros, Melba Pounder, Jennifer Annandsingh, Elizabeth Crouch.

We have listed the structure of the Foundation in your Booklet and given the names of those who belong to the various groups. You might like to spend a few moments looking at this now.

The Foundation is a legally constituted Charitable Organization. We are indebted to Danny Fitzwilliam for seeing to this for us. Through the years Danny has done all of our legal work free of charge and is protective of our interests. He is our Guardian Angel.

Our Directors have changed over the years. Our original Chairperson, Melba Pounder, and Hubert Alleyne who succeeded her, are now both dead. We owe a great deal to both of them. I cherish their memories. Our present Chairperson Angela Hamel Smith brings the wealth of her talent and experience to this leadership role and we are grateful to her.

Elizabeth Crouch who had been the driving force of the Steering Committee, was the original Secretary of the Foundation. She resigned in 2002 and was replaced by Annette Rahael. Annette now lives in the USA and resigned in 2011. Jennifer

Annandsingh who was on the Steering Committee and has been a Director since the inception of the Foundation is now our secretary.

Our present Directors are: Chair- Angela Hamel Smith, Secretary - Jennifer Annandingh, Brian de La Rosa, Justice of Appeal Peter Jamadar, Justice Andre des Vignes, Kerwyn Garcia, Ian Benjamin, Rose Anna Trestrail. I am also a Director and President of the Foundation. Would the Directors please stand.

Since September 2012 we have had a Chief Operating Officer, Steve Williams. He is an invaluable addition to the team. (Stand)

Part of the legal structure includes Members of the Foundation. They play an important role at our Annual General Meeting, have been extremely supportive through the years and often ask the critical questions. The members are: Annette Rahael, Angela Lee Loy, Jeanette Williams, Carol Montserin, Derek de Freitas, Wendy de Freitas, Kathryn Walker, Deborah Walker. (Stand)

We recently established a Vision Circle with the Biblical number of seven. This group is entrusted with responsibility to keep the Vision alive. Justice of Appeal Peter Jamadar, Justice Andre des Vignes, Nicole Dumbell, Rose Anna Trestrail, Ian Benjamin, Steve Williams and myself. (Stand)

We also have an invaluable team who provide administrative support: Karlene Smith, Nicole Dumbell, Victoria Hobday, Ronnie Ghent, Boyd Reid, Sharon Amow Gay/Dominique Galt, Carol Pinto and, of course, Steve Joseph who is like my right hand. (Stand).

All life is made up of the interconnection of groups and individuals and the Foundation is no exception. I am indebted to the many of you who give of your time and expertise so generously to the work of the Foundation.

FINANCIAL POLICY

Through the years we have struggled with the issue of finance. We do not want to run the Foundation like a business simply on a profit basis and at the same time

we face the reality that bills have to be paid. There is inevitably tension between these two and holding a balance calls for careful financial management.

We have kept our fees low in an attempt to make our services available to as wide a section of the population as possible and we have not allowed the lack of money to debar a person from participating in a needed activity. Because of this policy, earned income is limited and there has always been a shortfall between earned income and operating expenditure. We are dependent on donations to meet this shortfall.

GRATITUDE

We are grateful to the many who have helped us through the years and the many who continue to help us. I think with special gratitude of the de Freitas and Walker families who in the early years played a pivotal role in supporting the Foundation and spreading the word of its work and who have continued through the years to support us financially and by means of their service.

I think of those who from the very beginning have given us donations each year; of those who recently gave us donations or made out Covenants in favour of the Foundation as we make provision for ongoing expansion.

The Foundation is indebted to many. I am grateful to each and every one of you. Be assured of my ongoing love and prayer as I entrust you all to the God of Love.

[Stand for a few moments and stretch. You might like to greet the person beside you and comment briefly on the structure of the Foundation and its underpinning principles.]

RETURNING TO THE STORY

And so back to the Story of the Foundation which is inevitably interwoven with my Story.

The Foundation began small. In the early years, I was virtually a solitary. A few friends helped me. We had little finance and few facilities. We had the use of just one room. Melba Pounder who was then Principal of St. Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain, allowed us the use of the staff room for our courses at night and over the weekends; the Sisters in San Fernando allowed us the use of a room in the Convent. We are indebted to Irma Thomas for organizing those early courses in the south. The Parish Priest at St. Finbar's Church allowed us the use of the sacristy. And so I moved around from place to place.

Moving around would not have been possible had not Sidney Knox, at that time C.E.O, of Neal & Massy, given us a car. This Nissan March was to serve us for the next seven years. In it I headed south to San Fernando and by the mid 1990's to the Sisters' holiday house on the Toco Main Road, just beyond the village of Rampanalgas, where I facilitated residential workshops.

Over time the Foundation took root and established a reputation for itself. What began as a solitary trek into the Unknown soon changed as companions joined me on the Way. They too were seeking healing, wholeness and the Face of the Living God.

It was not easy to disentangle myself from the world of education and throughout the 1990's I was on several National Education Committees, Church Committees and Committees of my own Religious Congregation. By the late 1990's it was clear that if the Foundation was to be firmly rooted I had to be free of all of this. I resigned from most of the committees.

Towards the end of the 1990's the issue of continuity faced us and I invited six of those who were closely associated with the Foundation to begin training so that they could join me in presenting workshops. They began. A few dropped out; a few dropped in. In the end four completed training in Psychosynthesis, a psychological theory and practice that includes the spiritual dimension of the person. They did an online training programme with Psychosynthesis International based in California and for four years we brought trainers to Trinidad to do face to face training.

As the Foundation grew, of necessity, we needed more space. We applied for and received grants from the J.B. Fernandes Memorial Trusts to expand our facilities. We received further grants to help cover the cost of bringing the trainers to Trinidad and for administrative assistance. The Trusts have been good to us over the years and we are grateful.

By the end of the 1990's too, I was introduced to Centering Prayer and I went to several retreats with Father Thomas Keating in the USA. In January 2000, I introduced Centering Prayer in Trinidad & Tobago. We started with three people, Karlene Smith, Diane Gaulteau and myself. Soon after, Diana Mahabir Wyatt joined us as did several others.

In December 2002 we brought Fr. Thomas Keating, Cistercian Monk and Founder of Contemplative Outreach to Trinidad; in 2003 Bonnie Shimizu, his assistant, to train a group of over twenty; in 2008 Fr. Carl Arico, Vice President of Contemplative Outreach, to do training with the Leadership Team and a one day retreat with a large group. In 2009 we asked Gail Fitzpatrick Hopler, President of Contemplative Outreach, to spend a week with us to train a group so that they could become certified Presenters of Centering Prayer. In 2011 we again invited Fr. Arico to Trinidad, this time to speak at our Annual Conference.

We now have ten Certified Presenters of Centering Prayer, eighteen Centering Prayer Group Leaders and fifteen Centering Prayer Groups. There are twenty two Faculty members who facilitate the various courses and workshops.

THE INFLUENCES

In the light of what I have said, it is not surprising that the primary, though not exclusive, influences of the Foundation are Psychosynthesis, to which I was introduced in January 1978 while doing post graduate studies in England; and Centering Prayer a method which leads to contemplation to which I was introduced twenty years later in 1998 while attending a workshop/retreat organized by the Christian Meditation Movement. Fr. Thomas Keating led the workshop and I immediately knew that I had found the Contemplative Path I had

been seeking even as at my first Psychosynthesis Workshop I knew that I had come “home” to the psychological theory and method that suited me.

The psychological work undertaken through Psychosynthesis is not an end in itself. It is intended to make the personality transparent to the Divine Inner Presence. Centering Prayer draws the distinction between the True Self and the False Self. The practice of the prayer leads to a “letting go” of the False Self and a movement to the True Self where we rest in God’s Presence. There is a resonance between the two and they tend to complement each other.

There are other influences, of course. There is the developmental theory of Erik H. Erikson and the very practical, down to earth, Transactional Analysis. Ira Progoff’s method of Journaling was a significant influence in the early years as were the writings of the contemporary contemplatives like Thomas Merton, Bede Griffith, William Johnston.

There was also the influence of the philosopher Martin Buber brought through powerfully by the Jewish woman Barbara Krasner with whom I trained in Family Therapy.

We have had many influences, drawn on many sources, but we have tried to ensure that the Foundation remains uniquely West Indian, attentive and responsive to the needs of our people, as this small society of ours grapples with the challenges and demands of a rapidly changing world.

We have been helped in this by you. The Foundation has been influenced and shaped by all of you who have come to us – giving even as you receive. Your stories have shaped and influenced us; your courage has animated us; your vision inspired us. An institution is not a lifeless thing. It throbs with the life of those associated with it. The Foundation is indebted to you for the life giving role you play.

THE BIBLE STORY IS OUR STORY

More than twenty years have passed since I heard the cry – Go into the land that I will show you; and I set out on this journey into the Unknown. All I had was an idea and with it serious misgivings, feelings of inadequacy with the insistent voice in my head which said, “You don’t know enough. You aren’t qualified enough.” But when God calls, He calls as He did Moses in Egypt despite his protestations of inadequacy; as He did person after person in the Bible Story. When called, we have only to obey in the assurance that God is there. He will show the Way.

God sends angels into our lives to point the Way to us. We have to be alert to recognize them. Often they come in human form, a man or woman just like us. When I told my personal story I referred to the Angel whom God had sent to turn my life around. This was a young Dominican priest, wise beyond his years. He had a profound influence on my life. He opened my eyes so I could see; my ears so I could hear. He raised me from the dead and brought me new life. All of this didn’t happen overnight. It was a long and tedious process and at times a very painful process but it was a vital process for me personally and for the Foundation. It was this process that enabled me, despite my fears and feelings of inadequacy, to dive in at the deep end and keep swimming.

The Bible Story is our story. We all know what it is like to be enslaved as the Israelites were in Egypt and we have also experienced what it is like to be led to freedom. Like the Israelites we have probably turned on those who set us free, grumbled about food and drink, turned for consolation to idols of one kind or another; turned our back on the Living God.

And we have also experienced the miracle of God’s grace, as His love and forgiveness have enfolded us; emptiness has been transformed into plenitude; a barren land into one flowing with milk and honey.

THE HEART OF THE FOUNDATION

A short while ago, I described at length the structure of the Foundation. Make no mistake this outer structure is important; it makes all else possible. The organizational structure provides a safe haven, as well as the systems and the manpower for the work of the Foundation.

The heart of this work is human transformation and through this the transformation of society. This transformation cannot be achieved simply at the psychological level with the facing of the shadow and the integration of the personality. It calls for more. It calls for the synthesis of personality and spirit. This synthesis, it seems to me, demands the making of a deep Inner Journey.

The Inner Journey is a challenging journey. It requires courage even as it requires faith and hope. It is a journey that requires us to get beyond the cover at the surface of ourselves (I referred to the cover at the beginning of this talk) so that we can discover who we truly are in the depth of our being.

The Inner Journey is inevitably a psycho/spiritual journey. The cover is the personality much of which blocks or clouds the way. We have to loosen these blocks, painful as this might be. Painstakingly, patiently we purify the personality, make space within it, 'let go of' the fears that bind us and we 'let go to' greater depth within ourselves and to the truth of who we are in God. The process of transformation continues. The inner radiance becomes manifest.

In one way or another we are all invited to make this journey. However not all of us hear or hearing respond to the call to remember who we truly are and in remembering to engage the process of transformation.

It is this transformation that is the real purpose of the Foundation. It is this that gives meaning to its existence.

This transformation is not an invitation to withdraw to some remote mountain top or barren desert. It is instead an invitation to more committed involvement in the world. It asks us, each one of us, to roll up our sleeves and make a difference

in society. We begin with ourselves and we extend outwards to family and friends, to church community and neighbourhood, to nation and the wider world.

The question each of us has to pose to ourselves is this: Am I another Christ on the face of the globe? Do I provide God with hands and feet, arms and legs, with mind and heart so that He can act through me in the world? Like St. Paul can I say, "I live, now not I, it is Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

All that The Foundation does – the psychological workshops that lead to self understanding, self acceptance and personality integration, the counseling, the Centering Prayer Groups, courses, silent retreats - all are intended to address the human condition, to soften the cover that blocks connection with the Image of God within us in whose likeness we have been created. Everything is intended to make the personality, surface self, false self, whichever word you prefer, transparent to the Divine Indwelling. Everything is intended to facilitate the transformation into Christ and to enable us to live in God's Presence and in accordance with His Will.

Were this transformation to take place in each and every one of us a new society would indeed be born, a new creation ushered in.

FAREWELL

This is where we are now. The seed gave birth to a tree, branches have grown; leaves continue to sprout. A few leaves have already died. I think of Hubert Alleyne and Melba Pounder with affection and gratitude. I remember Terry Thorne who was closely associated with the Foundation and modeled to us faith and courage. I think of Fr. Henry Charles and Diana Greaves who only this year left us for life beyond the boundaries of death. I think of the others who were at the centre and moved to the sidelines as they followed their own dreams; heard the beat of their own drum. And I am grateful.

Before I conclude, I would like to express gratitude to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny and in particular to the Community at Pembroke Street, as well as to the

Principals of the Secondary School of St. Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain, for allowing us to be located on the Convent compound and for opening up their facilities to us. Our story would have been a different one had we not enjoyed the hospitality of these two groups. They have enabled the fragile seed of the Foundation to take root and develop. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

A HOME OF OUR OWN

We have come to another significant turning point in the life of the Foundation. One chapter is closing, another opening. I know that you will rejoice with me that the Foundation has at last a home of its own. God's immense benevolence is again being made manifest in and through those whom He loves and who love Him. Like a miracle, perhaps it is a miracle, our chief benefactor and his wife, who have assisted us financially for the past ten years and more have outdone themselves this year. With extraordinary generosity, they have financed the purchase of a property as Home for the Foundation.

They have asked that their names be kept private. I need to respect this. I entrust them and their children to your ongoing prayer.

By Easter 2014, if not before, we hope to be established in our new Home No. 36 Cascade Road. I look forward to seeing you there.

And so let us rejoice in the Lord. Let us rejoice in the abundance with which He surrounds us through the generosity of His angels in the world. Let us rejoice in the inspiration He gives us and in the courage to translate inspiration into action. Let us rejoice in one another called by God to ever deepening relationship with Him and transformation into Him. May the Spirit of the Living God be ever with you and with me!

I thank you.

Sr. Paul D'Ornellas

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