

# HELL AND HIGH WATER

Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition

*Alastair McIntosh*



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First published in 2008 by  
Birlinn Limited  
West Newington House  
10 Newington Road  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1QS

*www.birlinn.co.uk*

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(*www.AlastairMcIntosh.com*)

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ISBN13: 978 1 84158 622 0  
ISBN10: 1 84158 622 6

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset by Carolyn Griffiths, Cambridge  
Printed and bound by

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like?’ What steps might we and our societies consider to heal the dissociation of sensibility that has left so many struggling to be satiated?

### *A 12-Step Programme*

The following preliminary steps are all elements of what I would call a ‘cultural psychotherapy’. Just as psychotherapy with individuals usually tries to help people to understand their own history – what has made them how they are and how they are not – so cultural psychotherapy does the same at collective levels. It is what any psychologically aware teaching of social history ought to express, though it rarely happens because the implications can be explosive.

In *Soil and Soul* I attempted to illustrate cultural psychotherapy with land reform and community empowerment. It is not a case of having ‘a therapist’ set loose on an entire community or nation. Neither is it something easily written into the programmes of governments and institutions. It is something much more subtle and participative than that – more a process of osmosis that comes from many people and directions at once. It happens when any one of us contributes to a climate in which truth is spoken and a context for depth is held. I think there are three main elements. There is the *re-membering* of that which has been dismembered. A *re-visioning* of alternative ways in which things could be. And a *re-claiming* what is necessary to bring that vision to fruition.

Such an ethos can propagate in many different ways – through community meetings, in all manner of media, in art and music, in education, health and religion, and in grassroots organising. Rarely can it be led by the political mainstream. Most often it is a movement of the avant-garde – digging out the channels into which subsequent political process might flow. We saw this very clearly with Scottish land reform. What started off as a few visionary trickles from local communities in the early 1990s built into a river that eventually delivered the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Today, more than a third of a million acres representing 2% of the land area of Scotland are under the ownership of community land trusts,

and a raft of revolutions in community regeneration has followed in the wake. People in government often say to me, 'What should we do about climate change? We can't disagree with the logic of the scenario you paint, and yet it makes our efforts seem futile.' I find that all I can answer is, 'Keep pushing the limits of what you can do within your electoral mandate, but above all, wake people up.' It is a tough answer but a true one.

Our difficulty in tackling global warming is that it is a symptom of malaise in the collective soul. Unless the psychospiritual roots of this are grasped, our best efforts will amount to no more than 'displacement activity' – like the wild animal that, powerless to defend itself from a predator, starts grooming itself. By collectively refusing to wake up and radically transform our ways of life, conflict and ecocide is likely to knock ever louder on the back door. Like King Duncan's horses breaking loose in *Macbeth* 'as they would make war on mankind', nature's horses of the apocalypse will not let us off the psychological hook. We are faced today with a collective neurosis. For as Jung wrote, 'People who know nothing about nature are of course neurotic, for they are not adapted to reality.'<sup>6</sup>

The steps that follow, then, are all about reconnecting with reality. They are an attempt to describe patterns and examples by which we might re-establish sensibility. I have written them up in 'we must' form. That way adds a bit of rhetorical oomph. But, of course, they are only suggestions, faltering and contestable at that.

### 1. *We must re-kindle the inner life*

This is where it all must start. The inner life is our most fundamental resource. It is the realm of thought, creativity, imagination, emotion, visions and dreams. It falls both within and beyond our conscious ken, starting in the individual mind but anchored to the eternal Spirit. We will not be able to live sustainably on Earth nor deepen human dignity unless we learn how to be resourced from such roots. I have suggested that vio-

lence historically destroyed much of our capacity for the inner life and has subsequently limited it from re-emerging. The antithesis of violence is empathy – felt connection in loving relationship. Rekindling the inner life is therefore about opening to empathy. That includes its expression through family, friends, community, work, the arts, nature and psychospiritual development.

Awakening others to the inner life is perhaps the most important contribution that the artist can make to present times. Rekindling it is a process that takes many years in most people. It happens in fits and starts, sometimes seeming to run more backwards than forwards. But gradually, steadfastness develops. A person with a well-developed inner life finds grounded strength within. This is what the violent can neither stand nor understand, but this is what sustains the world and living things.

Whether we are aware of it or not, spirituality is the powerhouse of the inner life. It is the inner reality or 'interiority' of all things, akin to the role of energy vis-à-vis matter in the outer world. Like any form of power, spirituality can be corrupted. Religious history is full of it – tormenting inquisitors, mad mullahs and paedophilic priests. But always the name of the game, as Walter Wink's writing so powerfully shows, is to call 'fallen' power back to its higher, God-given vocation.<sup>7</sup> The aim is not to destroy but to redeem. This is where spirituality is revealed as that which gives life and, specifically, life as love made manifest.

I believe that none of us can force love to happen. It doesn't come from an act of will mandated from the ego. Love is an opening, a gift of Grace. It comes from the Spirit that animates the soul, and is within conscious intent but beyond conscious control. We can ask to love and be loved, but usually we must wait. In the waiting we have to sit with our emptiness. That's where courage is called for. The courage to face the truth without resorting to the masks of lies and addiction. It is the deepest meaning of prayer.

God does not force love upon us. It's not a rape, in spite of the sorry impression that spiritual abuse by cults and some organised religion has all too often given. The reality is that God simply invites us to say 'yes'. All else follows on from that deep letting

go into Being. It is how the inner life rekindles from its primal source, one that may often trickle, but which never runs dry.

## 2. *We must value children's primal integrity*

Our children are shaped partly by their intrinsic potential – both genetic and spiritual – and partly by the social and natural environments that surround them. When either of these are degraded or marred by violence, the child is at risk of becoming a product of a damaged world.

Each child is a seed waiting to flower into its own destiny. That seed is the child's primal integrity, its innermost soul. Caring for this means neither neglecting nor indulging the child. It means helping to birth its *areté* – its all round potential – across a range of competences that integrate head, heart and hand. It means, above all, communicating empathy by expressing respect and, equally, graciously accepting its reciprocation.

Psychologically speaking, the 'first half of life' is about developing an ego identity. Here we learn to wash our face, express what we're about, and make a living in the world. What distinguishes a child where the primal building blocks are well positioned is the ease with which transition can later be made into the 'second half of life'. This is the deepening into the soul – the realisation, as we saw earlier, that one is not just the cork but also integral to the river that carries it. Such inner-resourced adults make bad addictive consumers. Their sense of well-being comes mainly, though as corporeal beings never entirely, from things that cannot be bought or sold.

All children need safety and stability, social networks where they can make well-formed attachments in relationships, and contexts where they can express without fear what is happening in their lives.<sup>8</sup> The provision of these should be the cornerstone of public policy and family practice. Neither should attention to primary needs in one another cease as the first half of life matures. Children can remind us that such principles remain important even in the 'second childhood' of old age. That means honouring primal integrity all the way

from the cradle to the terminal letting go that, one day, will signal the 'passing' of a life fulfilled.

### 3. *We must cultivate psychospiritual literacy*

Implicit to what has been said so far is a framework of understanding of what it means to be a human being. In the past, religion defined this with its creeds and dogmas. At their best, these express profound truths. But spiritual abuse within politicised religious structures has too often soured them. It has left many potential followers allergic, fuelling the rise of secular humanism since at least the Enlightenment.

The bridge between rationality and spirituality started to be rebuilt during the twentieth century by depth and, laterally, transpersonal psychology. Depth psychology was pioneered by Jung, and transpersonal psychology is its late twentieth-century flowering into a spiritual psychology that is built upon the psychic interconnection of all things.<sup>9</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, words like 'psyche' and 'spirituality' have become increasingly acceptable in mainstream public discourse. This has been helped along by many people now drawing a distinction between religion and spirituality.

At its best, religion is the socially organised structure of communally expressed spirituality. The religions of the world should be the culturally appropriate trellis up which the living vine of spirituality can grow. But where religion has become dysfunctional and the trellis no longer leads towards life, the vine is perfectly capable of growing wild. That is what we commonly see happening today. It is a healthy development – provided that sight is not lost of the fact that spirituality does concern the dynamics of interconnection. Community is therefore a key part of it, whether we name it 'Sangha' (Buddhist), 'Ummah' (Islamic) or 'Church' (Christian). Spirituality does require withdrawal and private retreat, but this must interplay with a social context. There can be no such thing as a wholly private or privatised spirituality.

In my own work speaking to many different types of group



– environmental, church, corporate, military, governmental – I often find it useful to communicate a basic structure and terminology of the psyche. It is only a model and a simple one at that, but I find it invaluable for creating a shared starting-off point. This is what I mean by psychospiritual literacy. What I do is to hold up the back of my hand and say:

The structure of a human being can be modelled like this. Here's a finger nail. That's my ego self – my small self which is the outer self that is Alastair McIntosh. It's centred in my field of consciousness. It's the me who's giving you this lecture, who has done this and that in life and, oh yes, hopes to flog you one of his books afterwards! That's ego for you! We've all got one and actually, we all need one. It's our face in the outer world and building it is the psychological task of the first half of life. It's like something that my friend Djinni of Scoraig did. Once she stood outside a potentially fraught community meeting holding a box marked *Ego*. As people arrived she enquired jauntily: 'Do you need some, or would you like to leave some of yours here?'

Right at the base of my finger is the hand. Where the finger joins the hand is my deep Self, the great Self or the soul. The capitalisation there is deliberate to distinguish from small self. Here is the part of me that connects to the undercurrent of the Spirit, the animating fire that is 'God' within. The deep Self is the ultimate grounding of who I am; the deepest me and the crucible of inner life. It sits, at the boundary of time and the eternal, at the juncture of the personal and the collective unconscious. We are not normally aware of these realms, but notice that there's several spread fingers on this hand. They're one another. The deeper we go the closer they come. At the level of the collective unconscious – down at the bottom – they're all joined, like islands beneath the sea. That's the nature of mystical interconnection. It is the ultimate basis of community.

But don't get your harps out yet! In the middle, right between the small and the great selves, is my finger's knuckle. That's my shadow self. It sits at the level of the personal unconscious – the realm that's specific to my life but of which I'm not very aware. The shadow is the flip side of the ego's light; it's the murderous

Mr Hyde that gives the lie to the charming Dr Jekyll. The shadow complex is charged up with all the hurts going back to infancy, all the things I've done or have had done to me that I've repressed, but also, all that I could be but have never yet become. Really, I'd mostly rather pretend the shadow's not there. Unfortunately, if you ask my close colleagues or my wife, they'll tell you otherwise!

The integration of these three layers of being is called 'self-realisation' or 'individuation'. The name of the game if we want to become not 'perfect', but whole, is for the ego self to settle down to being held in the deep Self. Psychologically this is the work of the second half of life. Some people start working on it as early as their teens and others might reach their seventies but still be no more than uncentred teenagers. What makes it tough is that this journey requires coming to terms with the shadow self. Psychospiritual development always requires facing the darkness. Anybody telling you that spiritual development is all positive vibes and sweetness and light hasn't yet faced their own shadow, and a shadow unacknowledged is a shadow that gets projected out onto the world: a shadow that hits out in what I call 'shadowstrike'. That's why psychologically naïve groups are always infighting. A shadow that is faced, on the other hand, becomes the lode from which gold is gleaned. It becomes the coal face of both inner and outer growth. Humbled in our own humanity and tenderised towards others, the fullness of who we are can be gradually realised.

I am aware that some Buddhists would take issue with the schema presented here. They would say that there is no self or Self, therefore rather than creating psychospiritual literacy I am compounding the delusion. I suspect that there are depths of mystery here that surpass understanding, and that even their concept of no-self would collapse when pushed far enough – perhaps into 'Buddha nature'! Let me just emphasise that the simplified Jungian model I have presented is just that – a model. I find it useful, but that doesn't make it one size to fit all shapes.

#### 4. *We must expand our concept of consciousness*

As we have seen in our exploration of advertising, the spirituality of consciousness matters because its hijacking is nothing less than a dangerous theft of life. Theologically speaking, to have consciousness captured is to fall into the hands of 'false gods' – those of money, power, fashion and insatiable want. When marketing substitutes real needs with artificial wants, it becomes idolatry – it requires the sacrifice of our lives' efforts for ends that can never fully please.

Western psychology and philosophy presumes that consciousness, as Professor Hans Eysenck personally put it to me in 1975, 'is just an epiphenomenon of brain activity'. So far neurological research has failed to establish how such an 'epiphenomenon' comes about. Eastern philosophy would argue that it never will be established. That is because the East considers the brain to be an epiphenomenon of consciousness, or 'mind', rather than the other way round! It is as if the brain is the radio receiver, but consciousness is everything that goes on in the recording studio that makes the programmes we listen to. The brain, of course, regulates consciousness. It has been described as a 'reducing valve of cosmic consciousness', just as a radio set can regulate the volume or tone of what programme it plays. But to look for the source of consciousness within the brain is like trying to find a studio full of performers running around the printed circuits of a microchip.

The idea that consciousness has no intrinsic existence is the root of nihilism – the idea that everything is meaningless. One of the problems with nihilism is that it removes all ethical constraints on behaviour. It permits open house in the manipulation of consciousness and thereby feeds both the degradation of human dignity and mindless consumerism. It is to counter such dehumanisation that re-humanisation, in the form of spiritual practice that acts upon consciousness, lies at the heart of all great religions.

In outward form spiritual practice involves such activities as prayer, meditation, yoga, dance, poetry, study, work, engagement with nature, singing and sacrament.<sup>10</sup> What all these

share in common is a requirement for 'presence' – the process of becoming mindful to that which is real as distinct from that which is 'virtual' or a facade. This stimulates values that are more than mere ethical choices. It opens realms of motivation driven from inner essence. In some religious outlooks such as Quakerism or Ignatian spirituality this is thought of as being 'moved' or 'led' by the Spirit.

There is no rocket science in all this. Sages have taught it for millennia. Yet the faculty of consciousness is the first casualty of hubris. Conversely, hubris cannot bear to be exposed by mindfulness. It cannot prosper in awakened *Homo sapiens*, the 'knowing human'. That is why violence, the adjutant of hubris, is described by such adjectives as 'senseless' and 'mindless'. Violence can only arise in mindless ignorance of reality, thus Hinduism, for example, attributes evil to *maya*, which is 'ignorance'.

The development of consciousness is the antithesis of violence. It connects us with the fullness of reality, as we have seen, through empathy, which is love. Such is the shift from the liminoid to the liminal – crossing the threshold that distinguishes deathly nihilism from life-giving Being.

##### 5. *We must shift from violent to nonviolent security*

Psychological advances since the end of the Second World War have opened new insights that offer hope for how violence can be reduced. But these insights are emotionally challenging to those who persist with a punitive approach, and so they have yet to be adequately integrated into public policy. 'Violence,' says James Gilligan, former director of psychiatric services in the Massachusetts prison system, 'is the ultimate means of communicating the absence of love by the person inflicting the violence . . . The self cannot survive without love. The self starved of love dies. That is how violence can cause the death of the self even when it does not kill the body.'<sup>11</sup>

Because those who have been desensitised by violence will be predisposed to its perpetration, Gilligan describes violence

as a 'social epidemic'. The late Brazilian Roman Catholic bishop Dom Hélder Câmara first popularised this idea in his classic 1971 text of liberation theology, *Spiral of Violence*.<sup>12</sup> He said that social violence starts with the level 1 violence – the primary violence of social injustice. This leads to secondary violence – rebellion by the oppressed. That in turn invokes tertiary violence – repression by the powerful. And that further impoverishes the state and so completes the spiral by feeding back into more primary violence.

The only antidote to the spiral of violence is the spiral of love. This is the power of nonviolence, not as a passive 'pacifism' but as vibrant 'truth force' or *satyagraha* as Gandhi called it. Nonviolence has played a major part in bringing liberation to India, Portugal, the Philippines, South Africa, countries of the former Soviet Union, minority groups such as black Americans and dozens, if not hundreds, of other examples.<sup>13</sup> Is it not time to study peace and not just war? That, at least, is what I've said over the past decade in addressing some 4,000 senior officers from nearly 100 countries who have been through the Advanced Command and Staff Course at Britain's foremost school of war – the Joint Services Command and Staff College. A couple of hours each year are now devoted to exploring such a point of view in the curriculum. We live in strange times that can offer strange openings.

In my experience the military generally believe that while war may be inevitable, and that is what they train for, it is neither a good nor a lasting answer. Many today from the British armed forces have experienced active service in Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan. When I describe Camara's 'Spiral of Violence' or Walter Wink's naming, unmasking and engaging the Powers, heads begin to nod. These men and women – people for whom I have developed a paradoxical admiration because they understand the meanings of service and community far better than most of their political masters – also see peace as their business. We don't disagree over dying for one's beliefs. Our point of contention is whether also to kill for them. The bottom line question is: 'wherein lies true security?' I simply suggest that we need to shift along the

spectrum from violent to nonviolent forms of security. Climate change demonstrates this imperative better than anything. We're not going to head off global warming by continuing to bomb our way into other people's oilfields. The only hope is moving towards social and environmental justice across the world. Such has to be the cornerstone of an enlightened defence policy. It includes learning to recognise and process conflict at all levels of society.

6. *We must serve fundamental human needs*

As we have seen, the cutting edge of consumerism is the insatiable generation of wants. 'To be' becomes equated with 'to have' – what J.K. Galbraith called the 'dependence effect' of a cancerously corpulent economy. In contrast, a sustainable society, a sane society, is one that seeks to meet fundamental human needs in life-enhancing ways.

Such needs are called 'fundamental' because happiness only requires a certain level of materiality before the balance of fulfilment shifts from outer acquisition to the inner capacity for appreciation. A sane society would be one that satisfies fundamental needs for shelter, food, water, education, health-care and so on, but which also stimulates people onwards into realms of life that money cannot buy.

The Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef has undertaken simple but life-giving work on this. He suggests that fundamental needs are the same the world over and throughout history.<sup>14</sup> They include the needs for subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, creation, identity, recreation and freedom. In a matrix he analyses each of these for what they entail in terms of being, having, doing and 'interacting' (which is to say, the nature of the relationships incurred).

For example, the need for identity means being in a sense of belonging, esteem and confidence. It might mean having a place of home, language, religion, sexuality, occupation, values, a set of memories and social reference groups. In terms of

doing, it entails growing up, learning, working, worshipping, playing and, one day, dying. And all this requires interaction in the private and social settings of everyday life, with family, friends, colleagues, any chosen gods and goddesses and, who knows, perhaps a few enemies!

Joining this to a similar concept that was pioneered in the South Pacific during the 1980s by my former colleague, Fr John Roughan, now Secretary to the Prime Minister in the Solomon Islands, I sometimes carry out an exercise with groups where I present Max-Neef's fundamental needs as an array of spokes on a wheel. Participants are invited to shade in, perhaps using a score out of ten, to show where they see themselves, their communities, or their nations on each parameter. In the South Pacific version this was called the 'Development Wheel'. It used indicators of village wellbeing like those of Max-Neef, but including practicalities such as water supply and food availability. It proved a crucial tool to rapidly appraise village relief priorities after the devastation of Cyclone Namu in 1986.

Whichever version of the method is used, once the segments of the wheel have been shaded in participants can be asked the pivotal question with which to reflect on the status of their needs: 'If this was a bicycle wheel, what sort of a ride would you have?' Some people have a frustratingly constrained ride because all the spokes or segments on their wheel scored low. Most have a bumpy one, indicating punctures in some areas or lack of growth. These then become the priority for attention. Rarely is anybody coasting full speed downhill!

Having evaluated their needs, participants can then be asked how they go about trying to satisfy each type of need. Max-Neef's view is that fundamental needs are shared by everybody. It is the way we try to satisfy them that differs culturally and from person to person.

He analyses 'satisfiers' of needs as follows. Some supposed satisfiers are 'violators' of others. For example, the arms race supposedly satisfies the need for protection, but it violates needs for subsistence, affection, participation and freedom. Others are 'pseudo-satisfiers'. For example, prostitution is only

a surrogate for affection. Others are 'inhibiting satisfiers': television targets our need for recreation but can inhibit creativity. Some are 'singular satisfiers': they satisfy only one need rather than many, for example, food hand-outs that satisfy subsistence needs alone. And lastly, the ideal is to try and achieve 'synergic satisfiers'. These satisfy a wide range of needs in ways that stimulate the creation of whole networks of wellbeing. An example is how babies are fed. Bottle-feeding can be singular. It can satisfy little more than the need for subsistence. But breast feeding additionally usually satisfies needs for protection, affection and identity.

In such ways Max-Neef's model challenges the conventional idea that a society should maximise economic growth. Instead it shows how qualitative outer and inner aspects of consumption – being, having, doing and interacting – are interwoven. The sane society, he says, is one that would assess socio-economic policies to optimise the satisfaction of fundamental human needs synergistically.

#### 7. *We must value mutuality over competition*

Without the competitive ethic, modern life would be a very sluggish affair – perhaps not unlike the former Soviet Union. Competition both motivates and challenges towards perfection. However, competition becomes a destructive force if not held within a wider framework that is cooperative. Today, obsessive competitiveness is pushed in government policy, industry and even at children in the classroom from the most tender age. In theory it does not have to be aggressive in this way. The original meaning of 'competition' derives from the Latin, *competere*, from *com* meaning 'together' and *petere* meaning 'to strive or seek'. *To compete* therefore originally meant, 'to strive in common'. But it is a sign of the times that this sense has largely been lost. Instead an expression of behaviour has evolved that has become injurious to the soul and destructive to the environment. People are encouraged to compete and consume not out of need, but to keep up – ever fearful



that if they don't run faster and faster on the racetrack of success they'll be trampled by those coming up from behind.

The counterpoint to such competition is cooperation. At a commercial level this finds expression in cooperative and mutual business entities. But how can such cooperation be kept on its toes? Do we not need a bit of both qualities? Like Plato's image of the soul as a chariot drawn by two horses, one passionate and the other reasonable, could there be a higher synthesis by which such opposites can pull together?

I recall discussing this question with my friend Thierry Groussin, head of training in the French cooperative bank, Groupe Crédit Mutuel. We were driving around on the single-track roads of South Harris. Being the kind of place it is, as cars met in opposite directions, they'd typically pull in and flash one another to move ahead. Sometimes they'd cause mini traffic jams playing 'You go. No, you go!'

'There you are, Thierry,' I said. 'This is the community where people compete to cooperate!' And that's how the horses of competition and cooperation can be harnessed. Naked competition is based on naked individualism. We are, of course, individuals, but as we saw with the metaphor of the back of the hand, we are also interconnected with each other and therefore interdependent upon one another. As such, business structures based on mutuality reflect depth psychological reality better than do those based on aggressive competition. Perhaps there was method in the word's original meaning.

Fascinatingly and perhaps disturbingly, it is not just the green movement that is exploring this. Mainstream marketing is also flirting at the edges. Charles Saatchi is no longer involved with Saatchi and Saatchi. The company's new French owners have introduced an ethical policy that prevents the acceptance of accounts for products like tobacco and armaments. But as Europe's biggest ad agency, Saatchi and Saatchi remain at the cutting edge of marketing ideas. In a controversial book called *Lovemarks*, their worldwide CEO, Kevin Roberts, claims that 'love' is now the cornerstone of Saatchi's strategy! He says:

Today the stakes have reached a new high. The social fabric is spread more thinly than ever. People are looking for new emotional connections. They are looking for what they can love . . . When I first suggested that Love was the way to transform business, grown CEOs blushed and slid down behind their annual accounts. But I kept at them. I knew it was Love that was missing. I knew that Love was the only way to ante up the emotional temperature and create the new kinds of relationships brands needed. I knew that Love was the only way business could respond to the rapid shift in control to consumers . . . The idealism of Love is the new realism of business. By building Respect and inspiring Love, business can move the world.<sup>15</sup>

We need be under no illusions that Kevin Roberts' primary loyalty is, as he implies, to his clients' brands. Neither need we imagine that upping the emotional ante in this way is going to cut consumption. But as his close colleagues have told me, 'It will change consumption.' And how very, very interesting it is to see that even the business world is starting to feel challenged by the need for a new relationality.

In early 2008, when I tested some of the ideas in this book with a futures think tank run by WWF-UK in London,<sup>16</sup> it was a senior executive from Saatchi's who seemed to be one of the most switched on to them. The greater part of me is, of course, suspicious. At the end of the day, it is hard to see how capitalism can survive without being cut-throat and without marketing forever inventing new tricks. But another part of me suspends judgement. There's a case for stopping and watching what happens at the passing place on that single-track road. Could it be that a 'new realism' based on love and respect is starting to become visible as a product of contradictions in the nature of advanced capitalism; an emergent property not previously imagined? Could that be what in future might shift our economic system unexpectedly towards mutuality? Could it thereby 'move the world' in the manner Kevin Roberts hints at? I will watch with interested scepticism and a potential helping hand, but we certainly live in peculiar times.

### 8. *We must make more with less*

One way that social and environmental justice movements have learned from the marketing world in recent years is in their understanding of product augmentation. This shows in the growing market for products with social or environmental 'kite marks' – Fair Trade for better prices to the poor, Soil Association for organic foods, RSPCA Freedom Foods for animal welfare, and so on. The added value accrues because values are built in. For example, as much as we can in our home, we buy certified organic meat from the local farmers' market. It costs double what we'd pay for the generic product in a supermarket so we eat smaller portions and a little less often than might otherwise have been the case. But it pleases us more, because we know it treats the soil, farm workers and the animals better. You're not left feeling tainted afterwards like you might with a leg of cheap imported battery chicken. As such, less becomes more. You don't just buy food. You buy something consistent with your understanding of right relationship.

One of the trade indicators that most gives me hope for the future is that, worldwide, the market for Fair Trade certified products grew 42% in 2006. It directly benefited more than 7 million producers.<sup>17</sup> To my mind, paying for things like that is better than giving to charity. It embodies justice and so upholds dignity. None of the genuine ethical products require coercion or manipulation to make them leap off the shelves. Demand simply comes from people's growth in consciousness; from a growing activation of the inner life.

To activate the inner life means to deepen the capacity for presence. Presence applied to what we consume means a savouring of things, a drawing out of the full satisfaction that something can give us because our attitude receives its totality. For example, when I hold in my hand a glass of good malt whisky I don't just gulp it down. At least, not on the first glass! I cradle it around and warm it with my hand. I'll spend several minutes before tasting a drop, just enjoying the aroma. It is the distillate of the land that I imbibe – the essence of barley, peat,

the sea and our people who worked it. Those are my words, but the producers know it too. As one manufacturer says in the instructions that come with the bottle: 'Touch it. Feel it. Form a bond with this place and the people that live here. Become one of the many people bound to this place by their love of Laphroaig whisky and all that it embodies'!

My reader may think I've been taken in too much by the advertiser's motivational manipulation. I would dourly reply that such a reader cannot be a Scot! What we see here is the truth of the culture driving advertising rather than the other way round. But if we're going to have to argue about it, let's do so over a glass of . . . well, actually, Lagavulin if you could possibly stretch to it? I mean, we all have our foibles! But whatever the outcome of that debate (and I'm happy to stand corrected if we're still standing), my point remains that it is the combination of product and presence that builds augmented satisfaction. Whisky demonstrates the principle perfectly: the older the bottle, the smaller the dram. Applying the same principle to consumption as a whole, we are all called upon to become *connoisseurs*. That's how to make more out of less and be the richer for it. Far from being a recipe to kill joy, it's the only sustainable way to en-joy.

## 9. We must regenerate community of place

Ecology is the study of plant and animal communities in relation to their environments. Human ecology does the same with people. It studies human community in relation to its social and natural environments. Research in ecopsychology – ecological psychology – has repeatedly shown that we need to be able to attach to places as well as to other people.<sup>18</sup> We tend to be most at ease within ourselves when we have a sense of 'home' that is both emotional and geographical. As such, communities of place – our country, town, village or a bioregion such as an island or a watershed – tend to be very strong markers of identity. Bioregional identity is very often present in ways that we hardly notice. For example, when we speak of

the 'Thames Valley Police' we are describing a bioregionally defined organisation. How strange that crime can follow ecology even if other walks of life can't!

Usually communities of place are stronger than socially constructed communities of interest. There is an asymmetry here. Communities of interest are nested within communities of place, not the other way round. That is because place is physical: it is our grounding in nature. Some postmodernists will challenge this. They say that nature, too, is a mere social construction. Well, at the cost of deconstructing any hope of a Lagavulin in the pub afterwards, I have an answer to that. This particular premodernist has a penchant for inviting extreme postmodernists to stop eating, hold their breath, and then we'll see how long their social construction of nature lasts!

'Place' is a very warm word. It is the product of both environment and culture; of nature and society. There is a sequence of reconnection with place that I have observed from my work with community regeneration in both Scotland and Papua New Guinea. I call it *the Cycle of Belonging*. It functions like this:

1. A sense of place (grounding)
2. gives rise to a sense of identity (ego/head)
3. which carries with it a sense of values (soul/heart)
4. generating a sense of responsibility (action/hand)

That final sense of responsibility then feeds back into renewing sense of place. All this builds social and environmental cohesion. If the cycle is broken at any point, both human community and natural ecology are damaged – it becomes a vicious cycle. Conversely, if it is strengthened, people and place regenerate.

This has been the main dynamic by which community land ownership has achieved so much in Scotland. As Maggie Fyffe of the Isle of Eigg once told the BBC during a debate with the former landowner, 'In the past we never had the opportunity to prove that we could be responsible.' Some ten years after 'freedom' the island has a diversity of employment, a growing

number of children in the school, and, since February 2008, its own community-run power grid – Eigg Electric – generating its very own ‘Eiggtricity’! This is designed to provide over 95% of the island’s requirements from renewables comprising three hydros, four wind turbines and an array of solar voltaic panels. Battery storage smoothes out supply and demand and diesel backup fills in when there’s a shortfall. Previously most electricity needed by the island’s forty-five homes, twenty businesses and six community buildings came from costly little diesel generators chugging away at the back of every home. Perhaps most interesting of all is that the new system works because load management is governed by a trip switch in every house. This ensures responsible awareness of what nature can provide: if anybody gets too greedy, they get cut off!

Strengthening people’s connection to place can not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It also offers psychological benefits. I asked the husband of Eigg’s doctor what changes he thought community land ownership had brought. He said his wife sees it the most. She prescribes far fewer antidepressants than was once the case! Another lesson from Eigg is that because the community buy-out was partly driven by conservation partnerships, and because tourism is so important, there is strong local support for the regeneration of woodlands and other special habitats. And lastly, when one goes into even some of the lowest income homes on Eigg, it is often Fair Trade tea or coffee that will be in the cup. Such can be the beneficial effects when community of place is re-membered, re-visioned and successfully re-claimed.

#### *10. We must build strong but inclusive identities*

The IPCC considers that by the middle of this century, 200 million people could be forced from their homes. These may lose all sense that they ever had of belonging to a place. In a cool, hilly country like Scotland where the impacts of climate change are likely to be less pronounced, pressure will grow to accept climate change refugees. What will happen? Will the

privileged pull up the drawbridge to try and keep at bay the human consequences of their consumer profligacy? Or might we be able to think more humanely about who belongs to where? Specifically, can we bring to the cultural foreground constructs of identity that are inclusive rather than exclusive? Can we emphasise civic rather than ethnic identity: not 'blood and soil' but 'soil and soul'?

To answer this we might start by looking at what a nation is. I believe that a nation is more than just a state. A state is a mechanism of government, but a nation, over and above that, is a cultural entity. In a celebrated address at the Sorbonne in 1882, the great Breton theologian and Celtic scholar Ernest Renan pushed this even deeper. He said: 'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle,' and he continued:

A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of moral conscience which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist.<sup>19</sup>

I find that very powerful. It affirms that identity, including national identity, is important. But it is only legitimate where it encodes a moral consciousness that can yield to admirable principles of community. Where people may lose their homes because of global warming, it begs the consideration that we who might be more fortunate have a special responsibility to take them in. Indeed, the legitimacy of our own claim to identity would depend upon it. It is for each nation to work out its own rationale, but in Scotland that might be built on existing cultural principles that define identity inclusively. For example, hospitality has traditionally been considered a 'sacred duty' for the short term and fostership, or adoption, for permanence. The fosterling must be protected, just as Joseph fostered and protected Jesus. As a Gaelic proverb says, 'The bonds of milk (i.e. nurture) are stronger than the bonds of blood (i.e. nature).' And another: 'Blood counts for twentyfold; fostership

a hundredfold.' My own way of expressing this is that 'a person belongs inasmuch as they are willing to cherish, and be cherished, by this place and its peoples.'<sup>20</sup> The Scottish Government expresses it in the slogan: 'One Scotland; many cultures.'

None of these lofty principles mean that we are necessarily good at living them out. But it does help to have such cultural reference points in trying to do so. We, which is to say, a great many of us in modern Scotland during the national soul-searching that preceded Devolution, went out and looked for them.<sup>21</sup> They were waiting in our poets, our song writers, our customs and our history. Any nation could do the same if it so chooses. As Renan could see, it all depends what kind of a nation you want yours to be. What gives me joy in Scotland is that while there is still racism on the streets, there is also a passionate concern for the underdog, and this has very ancient anchor points. A practical example of it in action is the GalGael Trust in Govan where I live. The name dates back to the ninth century: the 'Gal' was the stranger, as expressed in place names like Galloway or Galway. The 'Gael' were the heartland peoples. Originally the Gall-Gael (*Gal Gaidheal* in Gaelic) referred to the 'strange' or 'foreign' Gaels – people who had interbred with migrants, mainly the Norse. Today's GalGael find this to be a powerful metaphor for present times. It helps to rekindle a strong sense of identity in people from hard-pressed communities even though many of us have very mixed backgrounds and fragmented identities.

Today there is a bit of the indigenous and a bit of the alien in most of us. A construct of identity that allows the honouring and melding of these can really work, and powerfully so, where community is at its heart.<sup>22</sup> The GalGael's workshops are constantly visited by politicians, clergy, academics and media interested in such an approach to community regeneration. It demonstrates that the Cycle of Belonging can apply to urban deprived areas as much as to rural ones.

A large part of GalGael's success is that participants are taught artisan skills using natural materials like wood, wool and stone. The boats that some of them help to build take



them out on outings down the Clyde. The voyage doubles as a metaphor for the Hero's Journey of departure, initiation and return in life. People say things like, 'GalGael gave us back our river.' But more than that, the simple act of anchoring community in a context of mentoring and eldership gives people back themselves. It calls back the soul. Skills like these could be applied in many different contexts. They could, for example, help to ease the pain of cultural dislocation that people in the future are likely to experience from climate change.

As I struggle to put all this into words I am aware how difficult it is to communicate the sheer wonder of what is potentially open to us. There is something about the fullness of our potential humanity that can transfigure even situations that otherwise seem degraded, hopeless or pointless. In his essay, 'Real People in a Real Place' from a collection called *Towards the Human*, the late Isle of Lewis poet Iain Crichton Smith manages to touch on it. Here he reflects on a person who has moved to the city and been stripped of most of her anchor points. And yet, he manages to see beyond this into nothing less than the sacred:

Sometimes when I walk the streets of Glasgow I see an old woman passing by, bowed down with shopping bags, and I ask myself: 'What force made this woman what she is? What is her history?' It is the holiness of the person we have lost, the holiness of life itself, the inexplicable mystery and wonder of it, its strangeness, its tenderness.<sup>27</sup>

Such is the depth from which we too must learn to understand identity if human potential is to be realised and a dwelling place furnished for all.

#### 11. *We must educate for elementality*

In *A Sand County Almanac*, the classic work of ecology published in 1949, Aldo Leopold described conservation as 'a state of harmony' between people and the land. He proposed a 'land

ethic' based on the principle that, 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.'

The 'biotic community' is the whole web of life. People need to understand and be motivated to preserve it if they are to accept stringent action to combat climate change. In Britain since the 1990s considerable progress has been made in advancing environmental education. But education at the level of the 'head' alone is not enough. The head is very good at making decisions. But it is the passion of the heart that pumps blood both to the head and to the hand that puts action into effect. That is why Leopold's emphasis on beauty stands out.

At the end of the day, when the glitter of the shops has worn off, the packaging transmogrified to garbage, and the credit card bill slips through the door, the world of consumerism is sad and tawdry. Except where economic growth serves the fundamental needs of the poor, it measures little more than the rate at which natural beauty and human effort is trashed. Consumerism only goes skin deep, which is why it is always so obsessed with cosmetics, fashion and keeping up appearances. In contrast, true beauty is experienced when inner values harmonise with outer action. This is why right relationship with nature makes us whole. It salves our neurosis; it is a form of 'salvation'.

I am convinced, especially from my own experience growing up on the Isle of Lewis, that children both young and old need an 'elemental education' fully to be able to appreciate reality. They need contact with nature where they can learn about matter and energy, cosmology, the atmosphere and its weather, the soils and the rocks, and the rivers, lakes and seas and their flora and fauna. They need to experience nature's beauty and the sheer *fun* of it, for nature absorbs children in so many different ways.

We adults must be careful in our shouldering of the burden of awareness not to instil in our children the kind of eco-hypochondria that so often afflicts jaded greens – moaning about all that's wrong with the world, but forgetting to notice the magic of the crocuses pushing up and into blossom for yet

another year. Children need to have a positive hands-on engagement with the ancient four 'roots' or 'elements' of reality – fire, air, earth and water. They need to know them in all their dangers – in their wild vicissitude that demands respect and courage on the Hero's Journey. And they also need to know them in all their sensitivity and vulnerability – in the filigree of frost on a winter's morning leaf – the hallowed loveliness that brings a tear to the eye.

In my view, none of this means treating the world in a hypersensitive 'precious' way. Even the most 'spiritual' of indigenous tribes kill animals, fell trees and hew stone. But it does mean doing these things with respect, with gratitude. We are bound up, all of us, with the strife of Heraclitus that constantly crucifies the elements of the world. And we, too, will feed the worms in our time. But these same elements are also bound into the love that, as Empedocles saw, unifies the world once more. We can see this cosmology symbolised in the Celtic cross. It is also the Medicine Wheel of Native American traditions from the other side of the great Atlantic. In these we have the four elements or the four directions. They're quartered by strife, but encircled in love. So there it all is – the elements of life incarnate dancing to the song celestial – life, death and resurrection.

### *12. We must open to Grace and Truth*

At times I have been hard on organised religion in this book. And yet, whether because of or in spite of religion, I am conscious of having experienced a profound spirituality amongst the predominantly Presbyterian people with whom I grew up and move still to this day. I want to acknowledge my gratitude to them, for without their influence and especially their sense of community I could not have learned in the ways that I have. My father used to say that kindness is what matters above all else. Even when there is little else that can be done – when the actual or metaphorical floodwaters are rising all around and hope gets put to the test – even then, we can still try and be

kind. Gratitude is what sustains and completes the cycle of grace. It is the essence of ‘worship’ – an Old English word meaning the celebration of ‘worth’. If in our pride we neglect gratitude, or confuse it with sycophancy, there can be no hope of building true community because the doors of life’s deepest gifts will stay closed.

The American environmental educator David Orr goes so far as to believe that gratitude is the single most important quality needed to address climate change. He says that only in such a spirit can we be freed from the loveless illusion of independence, and discover the sustaining truth of interdependence. This applies both for our relationships with one another and with the natural world. It is the flow of grace that opens the doors of ‘providence’, which is to say, *provide-ence*, in all walks of life. Such is what it means to find blessing. Orr quotes the great twentieth century rabbi Abraham Heschel, who said: ‘As civilisation advances the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines . . . humankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of *appreciation*.’ And Orr concludes, ‘In our universities we teach a thousand ways to criticise, analyse, dissect and deconstruct, but we offer very little guidance on the cultivation of gratitude – simply saying “Thank you.”’<sup>24</sup>

Grace – both given to us and shared by us – walks hand in hand with another quality, Truth. The first verse of the Hindu gospel, the *Bhagavad Gita*, reads in Juan Mascaró’s beautiful Penguin translation: ‘On the field of Truth, on the battlefield of life, what came to pass, Sanjaya . . . ?’ The battlefield of everyday life is here revealed playing out on a much greater stage – what is called Dharma in the Sanskrit or Truth in most English renditions, but meaning the unfolding through eternity of the divine cosmic way that fashions human affairs. Sanjaya was the eagle-eyed charioteer to the blind king, Dhritarashtra. The text’s message is that power on its own is profoundly blind precisely because it finds Truth, and telling truths, so challenging.

Whether in the politics of a king or in the everyday lives of us all, power is always tempted to fabricate reality by putting a

spin on things. As the great Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev put it, 'The lie of the contemporary world' has come about because we have been subjected to or have permitted 'the disappearance of the very criterion of truth'. This distorts our perception of reality because it is 'the expression of a profound degeneration of the structure of consciousness.'<sup>25</sup> To restore consciousness to clarity and thereby, to redeem power in accordance with the Dharma, we need an external reference point that can lift us beyond our own restrictive narcissism. That is why we need the eagle eye of Sanjaya's spirituality to see where we're going. Church and state do not have to be allied, but if the actors of state lose touch with the truly spiritual they will slide inexorably into the lie.

We all get caught up so easily and deeply in webs of untruth and delusion. It makes truth and integrity one of the most challenging of spiritual practices. We perhaps fret, rightly, at our complicity in 'little white lies' but miss the structural whoppers. Unchecked, that makes it harder and harder to see Truth, or God for that matter. It is no coincidence that the secular age is the age of the lie, for consciousness itself has dimmed. Our sense of aliveness fades, and there's only the ache left behind – the lacuna in the soul – the promise of what could otherwise be that it's so tempting to try and attain through everyday addictions. As one of our community at the GalGael Trust told me, 'Heroin took away my pain, Alastair, but it also took away my soul.'

Soul retrieval is the ultimate ministry of the planetary hospice worker. That is the quickening – the polishing of the tarnished – that brings back life even in the midst of death. The more that I reflect on the culture of the lie in relation to what drives world problems like war and climate change, the more I'm convinced that the deep answer starts with trying to live truthfully. Along with gratitude, kindness, mindfulness and the love of beauty, Truth is the grace that kick-starts our lacklustre spirits back into touch. And so, we must re-set the little battlefield of our lives on the great field of Dharma. We can but consider simply saying 'yes'.

Towards the end of *Anna Karenina* there is a section where

Tolstoy's hero, Levin, is living 'in the very holy of holies of the people, the depths of the country'.

As he goes about the farm scything, reaping and threshing, only one other thing occupies his mind: the questions 'What am I? And where am I? And why am I here?'

He talks a lot with the muzhiks, the peasants, and Tolstoy tells us that 'all the good people close to him were believers.' During a conversation one of these contrasts two types of men.<sup>26</sup>

The first 'just stuffs his belly' and 'lives for his own needs'. The other 'lives for the soul' because, the muzhik says, he 'remembers God'.

'How's that?' asks Levin, who's desperately searching for the meaning of life.

'Everybody knows how,' replies the muzhik. 'By the truth, by God's way.'

And as Levin takes his leave, this man's words slowly come alive and set him ablaze. They have, Tolstoy narrates, 'the effect of an electric spark in his soul, suddenly transforming and uniting into one the whole swarm of disjointed, impotent, separate thoughts which had never ceased to occupy him.'

His hubris, his doubts and his existential angst are all dissipated. And so Levin lies down upon the good Earth. He gazes up at the cloudless sky and into the infinity beyond. He listens to mysterious, joyful voices from within and finds a depth of Truth, an unexpected gift of Grace, which transcends all the art and argument of the cynical world.

Here – beyond bounds of creed and dogma – is what the Church was always struggling to reach and teach.

Here, beyond mere belief, is faith – living Truth that quickens reality, renewing all that has been degraded by the familiarity that breeds contempt.

And Levin sees that 'reason could not discover love for the other, because it's unreasonable.'

He cannot believe his spreading sense of consummate happiness.

'My God,' he whispers, 'thank you!'