

What's temporary and what's eternal in current spiritual trends

Rachael Kohn

May 24 2015: for the Progressive Christianity Network Victoria

and why the eternal isn't always good

and why the temporary isn't always without substance...

Despite all the moaning and groaning that religion is disappearing because the pews are more empty than full, there are fewer eligible men joining the priesthood, and church real estate is being sold off, we can rest assured that the spiritual yearning in the individual breast is not dying off.

What is temporarily making itself felt right now, however, is the grief that has resulted from a misappropriation of values on to things, which are seemingly spiritual but are in fact material. Having confused religion with edifices and clerical jobs, those who ought to care about the spiritual health of the people, can be seen regularly weeping at wakes for a body that is not there.

Funnily enough religion has resurrected somewhere else and the people in charge have not noticed.

Of course I'm being cleverly metaphorical, and some would say smugly confident about spirituality and faith arising from an eternally present impulse, a need or desire. I do think that is the case, even if I am not always optimistic about its results. Nonetheless, its expression is

sometimes harder to detect in our day because it is more eclectic, more dynamic, more diffuse, and far less beholden to centralized institutions and exclusive traditions than it once was.

It's a bit like the media – unleashed beyond the broadsheet and the free to air channels.

At this point you are thinking – *she would say that, after all as the person who makes The Spirit of Things each week, she's allowed the religiously diverse world, which she monitors, go to her head.* And you'd be right. **I am** in an unusually receptive position for the signs, like some big radar dish, scanning the skies for spiritual life. I pick up a lot of signals. That why my hair looks like this...

But why should we be surprised by a spiritually eclectic culture, when on the one hand in accordance with our religious ethics, we've opened the doors of immigration to all kinds of people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds and from every corner of the world? And on the other hand, our globally connected internet and entertainment media has unleashed an avalanche of cultural information that leapfrogs over national barriers and changes the way we think about everything.

How could we have expected our religious and cultural heritage to remain untouched by the new ideas and practices being introduced to our society? How could we expect to stay beholden to traditional forms that prevailed a hundred years ago?

The answer is, *We haven't*. Which is why, in contrast, sects and cults, in an attempt to preserve themselves in exactly the ways their leaders ordained, forbid any contact with all these conduits of cultural change. It is also why the Vatican, the highly centralized seat of Catholic power, still issues bans and proscribes books that violate central principles of its doctrine and ritual practices – one might say, to little avail.

The spiritual eclecticism, which is the result, I must admit, elicited a certain cool response from me, for a very long time, and I paid a lot of critical attention to its more extreme expressions in cults. And I recall that almost twenty years ago, David Tacey and I were sitting side by side in a new age conference and we were sniggering and carrying on, unimpressed with what we perceived as a shallow, utilitarian deployment of spiritual language for dubious material ends.

Although we were both invited to attend, as academics with more than a passing interest in contemporary spirituality, we had our BS detectors up and they were twitching.

Let us remember what was passing for contemporary spirituality at the time:

We had Deepak Chopra's *Seven Laws of Success*; James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* about the nine spiritual insights found in an ancient (fictional) manuscript in Peru; Jean Huston's *Jump Time* promising we could all transform into superheroes by harnessing entelechy (look that up, its from Aristotle); we groups like The Forum and Landmark

Education, which targeted young professionals telling them to ‘language their reality’ for successful careers.

Scientology was still reaping followers with its expensive so called ‘spiritual technology’, ie, the e-meter – a trumped up lie-detector, and the Mind Body Spirit Festival brought speakers who claimed to cure themselves from cancer and teach executives to literally walk over hot coals.

What characterizes all of these, and many many more teachers who feed the 6 billion US dollar per annum industry in self help and regularly appear on Oprah, is their promise of success, power, health and even magical abilities. Ten years later Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* epitomized this kind of wishful thinking, which promised the ability to actualize anything you truly **want**.

It boiled down to a spiritual materialism that struck me as oxymoronic and deluded. But *let’s face it*, it is an eternally present impulse in human culture to find a way out of our physical limitations, including our mortality. Indeed, the whole occult movement at the turn of the 20th century was thoroughly besotted with similar preoccupations, when a long list of famous people in the arts, joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Writers, like William Butler Yates, Arthur Conan Doyle and Arnold Bennett, Evelyn Underhill, Arthur Machen, E. Nesbit (aka Edith Bland).

What's ironic about it all, is that the contemporary new age was vibrating with talk about how we are all spiritually evolving to a higher plane of existence. This was also the belief of the occultists. And yet, what could be a more primitive or archaic form of spirituality than this vain voodoo of self-aggrandizement, material wealth, and power, sexual libertinism, as well as an almost alchemical search for physical immortality?

It is a spiritual materialism without heart - unless you define it in an immature way of 'getting whatever is your heart's desire' ... Today, it is also wedded to a pervasive consumerism that is nothing short of a new age prosperity gospel.

However, there is another kind of spiritual eclecticism that I have found in more recent times. It does not deploy spiritual insights or practices from other traditions for purposes of material gain or personal success in the vein of "we can all be superheroes." It is more reminiscent of the kind of lateral spiritual thinking evident for example, in Thomas Merton's spiritual journey and publications. I am discovering in some of the contemporary eclectic literature that the teachers are looking for spiritual wisdom's timeless truths, which have the ability to heal suffering souls, and find an inward source of fulfillment that no form of magic or materialism can provide.

Perhaps this form of spiritual eclecticism has emerged in the third millennium as a result of the catastrophic tragedies that the West has experienced in recent years, which have made it less trusting of - and less satisfied with - a shallow prosperity doctrine. It speaks, I think, of a

generation whose affluence and sense of invincibility has actually created the conditions of suffering. It speaks of a generation that wants to learn how to live with tragedy, with ruin, with lives irrevocably broken from drug addiction, and with an acceptance that, although life delivers adversity, it is possible to transcend the pain.

It is a spirituality, which teaches us that joy and fulfillment are possible despite the pain. And regardless of how many people or situations can cause you pain, you are not condemned to suffer, nor to inflict suffering on to others.

One expression of this, in our day, is the now annual conference on happiness. I must admit that when I was invited to be a keynote speaker at the conference in Sydney a few years ago, I spoke from the Hebrew Bible's wisdom tradition, and cautioned the audience about making life's goal the pursuit of happiness. My fellow speakers cheered me on, both on stage and off (I think they put all us 'Biblical types' into one session) but I was never asked to be a keynote speaker again.

OK, I have my limitations, and can't abide a view of the world that thinks it's 'all about me' and my pleasure and my freedom from pain. For one thing, I dislike being in the company of someone who keeps looking at me as if they are wearing weird underwear that always puts a smile on their face.

However, I am coming to appreciate an intelligent eclectic spirituality, and it came to me via a young American man who lives in Geelong,

Victoria. “New age” was how I classed him and he visibly flinched when I used the term, knowing full well that it carried the negative connotation of ‘flim flam faith’ for sale. But the truth is I didn’t have another word for it, even though I found his book, called *You Were Not Born to Suffer*, a really thoughtful, spiritually rich, and practically wise text. And despite being ostensibly ‘new age’ with some of the usual list of affirmations, there were old, eternal truths recognizable throughout it.

Meeting him reinforced that perception – for he was gracious, respectful, and humble, and believe me I’ve seen more than my fair share of cocky spiritual spruikers of snake oil.

Blake Bauer had been on a long journey of study and discovery and nothing about him or his book bespoke of flim flam for sale. On the contrary, I found a young man who had suffered mightily in his youth, with a family history of broken marriage, drug addiction, jail and suicide, and yet possessed a strikingly bright and clear mind and a generous spirit. He also had the determination to learn both the psychological and the spiritual ingredients of well-being, and integrate them into an outlook and practice that could prove salutary for the suffering soul – your own and others.

Blake teaches people that the search for love and regard and recognition and respect, which so many people from their teens onward never stop looking for, is a long and empty road if you do not have all those things in abundance for yourself. Yet his version of self-love is not the same as ego-mania, or narcissism, but an understanding that God’s love is yours

in abundance. Realizing that, which is a conscious acceptance that we ARE made in God's image, also means that our worth is not contingent on forever doing anything to gain approval.

Here I cannot help but cite a *midrash*, a rabbinic story, about Moses seeing God in the burning thorn bush. We have read this encounter with God as a great faith- confirming experience for Moses, but what was left out of the written narrative, which the rabbis intuited had another side to it, as it were, was that for God it also was a faith confirming event, for he too beheld with great delight the awestricken face of Moses. The midrash at one level is fanciful, metaphorical as they all are, but it points to something more than the plain meaning, for when you stop and imagine this mutual delight, you understand something fundamental about the I-Thou relationship. A relationship that was immortalized by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou*.

When you understand that you are the recipient of Divine Love then it is the first step on the road away from those situations where you put yourself in the way of mistreatment, abuse, and self-destruction. No room for nihilism here. The victim is no more. Self-hate is a thing of the past when you accept that within you lies what **God** intends you to be.

The poet EE CUMMINGS said: *The hardest challenge is to be yourself in a world where everyone is trying to make you be somebody else.*

The Vietnamese Buddhist monk, THICH NATH HAN, who founded Engaged Buddhism, and been a force of dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, said:

To be beautiful means to be yourself; You don't need to be accepted by others, you need to accept yourself.

I took those two quotes from Blake Bauer's book.

Martin Buber who published a collection of Hasidic Tales in 1927 includes this midrash, or story, about RABBI ZUSHYA of Napoli:

On coming to his followers with tears in his eyes, he said:

I have just learned that when I die and am facing my judgment, the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Moses, leading your people out of slavery?' nor will they ask me, 'Why weren't you a Joshua, leading your people into the promised land?'"

Zusya sighed; "They will say to me, 'Zusya, why weren't you Zusya?'"

Now mind you, I am generally suspicious of all the "I'm OK, You're OK" talk, this self-love philosophy, which back in the early 1970s as an undergraduate student of social work, I already suspected was too smug and too simple a solution to life's problems.

But Blake is convinced that people like me who shrink from it are *dead wrong*. And he may be right. One thing I grant him, and that is, the

spiritual writings of many traditions, be they Jewish Kabbalists, Christian mystics or Sufi masters, have all imagined the path of ultimate union to be an experience of the Divine *indwelling in the self*. That is, like conjugal love, the human-Divine union is frequently spoken of as a merging of the self with the Beloved.

A few quotes from the sermons of everyone's favourite 13th Century Dominican monk (everyone except the Franciscans who accused him of heresy) MEISTER ECKHART exemplifies the idea.

“The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.” (Sermons of Meister Eckhart)

“I am as sure as I live that nothing is so near to me as God. God is nearer to me than I am to myself; my existence depends on the nearness and the presence of God.” (Sermons of Meister Eckhart)

Well we can see that this unity of the self with the Divine is at the core of all mystical traditions and it seems to require no intermediary and no particular rituals, although some contemplative or meditative practices were certainly developed to enhance the likelihood of it occurring....

“Theologians may quarrel, said Meister Eckhart, “but the mystics of the world speak the same language.”

— Meister Eckhart

“Nobody at any time is cut off from God.”

— Meister Eckhart

This form of spirituality conforms very well with the conditions of late Western capitalist societies, which guarantee religious freedom, are democratic and imbued with an egalitarian ethos, where unlike at any time in recent history,

- 1) you have the time and opportunity to disconnect from the mainstream and get in touch with the God-Within;
- 2) you are able to partake in various forms of spiritual practice by paying for retreats, taking courses, going to conferences or even engaging in spiritual tourism.
- 3) you can discover and join one or more of the many groups on the internet.
- 4) and you can simply tune in, download or stream **The Spirit of Things** on ABC's RN, and get a weekly dose of the spiritual experience in our day. *I had to sneak that in!*

In sum, the spiritually eclectic offerings today satisfy a perennial desire on the part of individuals to heal their spiritual anxieties in a private and personal way, choosing the form that best suits them, and taking up other modalities and practices with freedom and impunity.

[Imagine, even if you are a mail handler at **Australia Post**, you can take three weeks off in your allotted vacation time and go on a retreat, and still come back to your job. That is the miracle of modern western capitalist society.]

That is quite a spiritual achievement today in our Australia, when parts of the world live in totalitarian theocratic societies that are either run like nation-wide prisons or are riven with communal conflicts and war precisely because none of these spiritual freedoms are possible or permissible. We ought to be grateful everyday for the freedoms we enjoy and uphold in this great country of ours.

Part II: The Survival of Community

And yet, doesn't the Torah say that God wants us to build him a sanctuary that 'I may dwell among you.' Why would he say that if he dwells in our hearts?

One of the most interesting Jewish thinkers today is the Dutchman, Rabbi Nathan Lopez Cardozo. [He has a Portuguese name because, as you may know, the Jews of Portugal were expelled in 1497 and Holland welcomed them, such that when you visit Amsterdam and behold the biggest Jewish sanctuary there, built in the 17th Century, it is called The Portuguese Synagogue].

Nathan Cardozo who visited Australia a couple of years ago, reflects on God's command to the Israelites to build a sanctuary, when prior to the

Golden calf incident, worship was decentralized. He argues in his book *Crisis, Covenant and Creativity (2005)* that the incident of the Golden Calf, was a perfect illustration of how the revelation at Sinai, the archetypal God encounter, is indeed a very difficult experience to hold on to.

The mystical union with God is not half as challenging to experience, as is committing it to memory through time, which erodes everything.

The sanctuary therefore is a means of holding on to time, making it stand still, against the ephemerality of experience and the fading of memory. That's is one explanation.

But appropriately enough the instruction to make a dwelling place for God, a *mishkan* in Hebrew, occurs after the Golden Calf incident. Why did the Israelites make a Golden Calf? Please don't read this incident through the lens of some modern anti-capitalist diatribe or, worse, some anti-Semitic trope about Jews worshipping gold.

Just think for a moment. When we human beings grapple with the concept of a higher world, of God's infinite beauty and excellence, we can only express it in metaphorical terms. Cardozo compares this with the way scientists make a concrete model which represents intangible elements in order to explain the structure of the atom or the curvature of space. Similarly the religious mind uses creative license to, in my words, it makes a model of the ineffable.

After all, the concrete expression of an idea is the most easily accessible to all. In a single glance, a thing of infinite beauty is beheld, which in those days, and still today, is represented by the most precious elements. And of these there was none more precious than gold. The rarest of metals, the warmest because it is a conductor of heat, it shines and glows like the sun, is pure, and was an immediate symbol of perfection. The calf, a young unblemished calf, was a symbol of sacrifice, which was made to God. The golden calf was the perfect metaphor or symbol of devotion.

But God was displeased, and ordered its destruction, and with it he threatened to destroy the people themselves. Why? Because it was *their* creation, *their* idea, and, using psychological language, *their* embodied ego. It was wrong because it misread humanity's task, which was to show humility before God, not to second-guess God or presumptively put themselves before God. Hence the warning that such an act constitutes idolatry, which is the worship of the self, the crime of narcissism.

An example comes to mind of an apprentice in a luthier's workshop, thinking he can make a wonderful violin when the master is away. But he is too young, and doesn't realize that it is not just the form of the violin, but innumerable things invisible to the eye, including the secret formula of the lacquer, which holds the key to its beautiful sound. Although one's intentions might be noble, sincere, and heartfelt, they are not necessarily right.

So why do we need a dwelling place, in which, incidentally, God orders two golden cherubim to be installed? The rabbis speculate that the *mishkan*, the dwelling place, comes as a divine concession to the people, perhaps, says Cardozo, with a sense of God's regret. Why regret? Because he realizes man is weak and has repeatedly shown that he forgets the whole earth is God's Temple. That is why we need a tangible symbol of it, and we need to enter into it, to re-live the inspiration of Sinai, and experience the presence of God.

So having implied at the beginning of this talk that it is in our hearts and not in the churches where we can find God, I also can say that it is a mistake to think that we are capable of living without our houses of worship.

Furthermore, how can we dismiss these dwelling places, and forget that it is through them that we reveal our aesthetic values, which are also a part of God's creation. As created beings, we ourselves are also creators – of architecture, music, of finely carved pews, stained glass windows, and silver ornaments, and also of plastic overhead screens and wall-to-wall carpet. We are makers and creators, and our spiritual lives are enriched by the manifold ways we physically remind ourselves that we are part of God's creation – along with the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.

While the weakening of our institutions – through corruption or through neglect – seems like a sign that they are temporary, if not doomed to extinction in the near future – such a prognosis is not born out by

history. Why? Because the religious life is nothing if it is not about the survival of the human community.

Without a spiritual set of values at our core, which we share and affirm on a regular basis, which we trumpet and honour in the places where we gather, we as a human community would disappear in a dystopia of chaotic values, self-destruction and unbridled aggression. Indeed, it is not that acting collectively is difficult to do – we see how hordes of young men are willingly acting together to wantonly kill and destroy people and sacred sites in Syria. What is much more difficult to do in a coherent and consistent way is to act collectively for the good of society, in a life affirming, generous, wise and peaceful way, with other human beings, which is the purpose of our western tradition.

The reason why the ‘great world religions’ are great – ie vast and vibrant – is because they are a testament to group survival, through the creative and committed pursuit of civilization, with religion at its roots and up in its branches. They become dispensable when they fail to do this.

If religion is vital to our survival, which I believe it is, it will not be merely as a tincture of mysticism, to be applied like some homeopathic cure for the suffering soul. I am too much of a social realist for that, and believe that surviving as a viable culture and civilization we need the institutions and structures to not only remind us - and others who do not yet know them - of our foundational values, but also to keep providing opportunities for us to refine our understanding of those values and express them in ways and in language that we can all understand.

I recently spoke to a young English woman vicar who was raised and matured in a couple of charismatic protestant churches in England. These are the kind of churches that 'progressives' regularly criticize as holding on to a 'primitive theology' of sorts. Well this person, whose name is Joanna Jepson, had had a facial deformity – of overgrown jaws and teeth, which started to appear in her teens. She also had a Downs Syndrome brother.

What she experienced at school was an awful lot of bullying and cruelty. Her brother endured similar fearsome attacks by ordinary folk. But luckily she and her parents were loved and supported by their church community, and Joanna was well aware that she simply would not have grown into the well adjusted person she is, neither would her parents have had a most loving and untroubled life with their son, had it not been for their warm and supportive charismatic church community. That kind of communal love and support, which always communicated God's unconditional love for them, remains an eternal value and a reality that would not have been possible in any other setting. Why? Because that church was utterly focused on the basic theology of God's love, offering countless opportunities for the I-Thou relationship. When she was old enough, after her bones stopped growing, Joanna had the face-saving surgery that restored her otherwise pretty looks to normality. But that isn't where her story ends. Its quite remarkable, as she takes on a very public issue, and shows how secular British society (just like ours) can be entirely at odds with itself, when it comes to upholding the value of human life on the one hand, and dashing it on

the rocks of medical conventions on the other hand. She brings to it a perspective that only someone who had experienced what she had, was theologically trained and committed, could confidently address. You can hear her on *The Spirit of Things*, 21/24 June 2015.

But there is something else from Joanna's story that brings me to the question of how communities can enliven themselves through understanding their holy texts in new ways, and free themselves from the chains of superficial interpretations. And while it might seem contemporary it is in fact an eternal trait of religion.

Joanna's theological training eventually took her to Holy Trinity College in Cambridge, where the famous Round Church, the second oldest building in Cambridge, is regarded these days as almost a shrine to CS Lewis, who attended it. I was there last year and saw it for myself. Evangelicals admire Lewis very much, although he was by far not a conventional Christian conservative when reading the scriptures. In fact, he wrote about loving yourself saying "I might detest something that I have done, Nevertheless I do not cease to love myself. In other words, that definite distinction that Christians make between hating sin and loving the sinner is one that you have been making in your own case since you were born."

While Joanna doesn't site him in her memoir, *A Lot Like Eve*, she reads the Genesis story of Adam and Eve in a questioning way that leads her to conclusions, which are not in accordance with 'the received' view in the conservative circles she knew in her younger life. She reads the story of

these two figures in Eden, not as proof of woman's inferiority and cursed nature, but discerns that it was only the serpent who was cursed. And it was the woman and man who judged themselves to be naked, to be ashamed, and it was they who hid away and covered their bodies because of it.

And she relates that understanding to the way we judge our bodies today, how women are judged, how the disabled are judged, and how misguided it is to see our bodies as cursed.

She now reads the scriptures in ways that opens them out – like Jesus' parables – to a wider contemporary society. It is an approach, which is fully comfortable with metaphor and pays little attention to the historicity of the texts, which is of little consequence for faith and even for values and ethics. She avoids the negative theological implications of the Adam and Eve story, which can arise from a literal reading.

In the audience today is David Tacey, who I'm honoured has come to hear me today. In his important work, *Beyond Literal Belief* (2015) David argues passionately that the literal reading of the texts has been a source of religion's decline, and even its descent into violence. He advocates a more poetic interpretation of scriptures as the only way that religion can survive into the future. **And you can hear that interview with him 31 May/3 June on The Spirit of Things, or download it or stream it by 28 May.**

I agree with David, but I come from a tradition that has been reading the scriptures that way since the beginning. Those early rabbis found ways to interpret and present the texts, which at the very time they codified them as the Holy Torah, were known to be 'on the surface' out of date. Hence the multi volume Talmud was compiled to extrapolate from the Torah a way to live in the present that did not replicate the archaic practices of the past. As Rabbi Cordoza notes, *"this explains why the Rabbis of the Talmud always discussed concrete legal cases or taught philosophical ideas by way of metaphor."*

Metaphors, remind us that reality cannot always be judged by appearances.

But you don't have to have been Jewish to employ metaphors of course. Here, the 4th Century Church Father, Augustine, could speak most eloquently in his Sermons about where to find God: He says in one of his sermons,

Others in order to find God will read a book.

Well as a matter of fact there is a certain great big book,

The Book of Created Nature. Look carefully at it. Top and bottom,

observe it, read it. God did not make letters of ink for you to recognize

Him in. He set before you all these things he has made.

Why look for a louder voice?

That sermon was read on the **Spirit of Things'** recent program on *Encountering God*, in which you can hear the Anglican priest from

Brisbane, Ceri Wynn, who was a geneticist, speak most eloquently on how the genius of genetics points her to God. It is a superb example of the concrete model standing as a metaphor of God.

But metaphor is in the hands of the interpreter, and its use in one place can let you down in another. Augustine, who was the Bishop of Hippo, did not see God in a very large part of His creation, fully half of the human race:

Woman does not possess the image of God in herself, but only when she is together with the male who is her head ... Woman is a misbegotten man and has a faulty and defective nature in comparison to his.

What a strange way of reading the account of creation in the Bible. Others have had no trouble reading it, either metaphorically or literally, as an account of God's image replicated in humanity, 'men and women he created them.'

And this brings me finally to my concerns about the harsh ways in which some people choose to read the scriptures – progressives and conservatives alike. While happy to read some parts of the Bible as metaphor and myth, in others they jump to literal readings that enforce a thick-headed, violent, depraved, and otherwise despicable view of the Jewish people. It matters not at all whether a writer like John, of the 4th Gospel, was 'Jewish' or not, his was a vile depiction of the Jews. Some of the very worst anti-Semites today are Jewish, just as some of the vilest anti-Christians today have Christian backgrounds.

Hatred and bigotry is an eternal characteristic of human beings and of religion. I could've spent this entire hour speaking about this most appalling trend, which is reappearing with great force in our world today. In particular, anti-Jewish diatribes are flooding the internet mostly from Muslim sources, but also infecting large areas of the Western establishment.

Will this new wave produce a darker version of religious eclecticism?

For example, Dr Sami Al Emam, a Professor of Judaism at Al Ahzar University in Egypt teaches his students that Jews killed Christian children and drank their blood (when the Russians and Germans found out they retaliated by killing Jews, which is why they no longer do this). (I've watched "re-enactments" of this on Palestinian TV teaching children that Jews kill children and make Passover matzo from their blood.) Dr Sami also teaches that Jews have a secret plan to take over Arabia, and that all the turmoil in Iraq, Syria and Yemen is due to the Jews, as foretold in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This 'expert' was interviewed in a Jordanian newspaper.* *

<http://elderofzion.blogspot.com.au/2015/05/egyptian-professor-of-judaism-describes.html#.VVpx-vmqpHw>

Similar views are widespread among Muslims, including Afghanis in Australia, who watch Iranian TV, which spouts similar vitriolic nonsense on its official government sponsored TV stations. Turkey produces equally egregious anti-Semitic materials, and many other Muslim

countries, including Malaysia promotes, despicable views of Jews in its publications.

This 'oldest hatred' has infected the Muslim population in this country, especially on university campuses, and elsewhere. It has given fuel to other Jew haters. Just yesterday I read about a Nazi rally to be staged in the Jewish neighbourhood of Golder's Green in London.

Such occurrences hardly arouse any concerned response other than from Jews. [Indeed, five years before the Iranian, Man Haron Monis terrorized hostages in the Lindt Café last December, which resulted in the death of two of people, I wrote the article, 'Radical Muslim Cleric Goes Unchecked', published on ABC's The Drum website, calling on the Muslim community to reign him in for his unchecked violent views and actions. It was republished the day after the Lindt Café deaths, and was picked up by the BBC and the LA Times.]

This is not a talk about anti-Semitism, so I will not elaborate any further about how widespread and how urgent this situation is. But it is of enormous concern to me that 'progressives' do not speak out about it, and have adopted the pan Muslim view that Israel and the Jewish commitment to Israel is the cause of the Middle East meltdown, and therefore it is deserving of being delegitimized, disabled and snuffed out. Jews have not felt this alone since the 1930s. Do they deserve this hate any more than the Christians, who are now the largest community persecuted today in Muslim countries?

I don't wish to end this talk on a sad note. Rather I wish to reinforce the great foundation we share in the Biblical tradition. Let us read it, as it was meant to be read, as an eternally relevant document that asks of us to walk in God's ways and to have faith and hope.

The prophet Micah asks, *And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. .. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might, they shall lay their hands on their mouths....He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot... 6:8*

It is a tradition that acknowledges the frailties of the human condition yet always offers the eternal promise of redemption.

This is our great, shared inheritance. Let us be proud of its enduring and **eternal message** to us, which I believe nothing can ever nullify nor should replace.

© Copyright Rachael Kohn 2015. All citations must be properly acknowledged.

