

**SPIRITUALITY:**

**TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK**

Norman Whitney

In my opinion, the general line of thinking regarding Spirit is of ‘something out there’ that is highly imbued with power, creativity, and leadership beyond the greatest of imagination. Many treatises have been compiled on what this is all about, among them a book called the Holy Bible, the basis of the Christian faith system. Christianity expounds a triune God comprising Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I, personally, am a Christian, indoctrinated by family, Sunday School and Church activities, three years in a Theological College obtaining the degree Master of Divinity, followed by Ordination and Ministerial responsibilities in Pastoral Charges for fifty-six years. As well, for sixteen years during that time I held an appointment as Professor of Religious Studies in Saint Thomas University in Fredericton, N.B. During my Theological studies and subsequent Ministry, I have always thought that the doctrine of God the Father and God the Son had been well documented and were reasonably understandable. However, I could not say the same for God the Holy Spirit (third person of the Trinity). In this respect, over the years I have approached Faculties of Religious Studies, as well as individual Scholars, encouraging them to engage in Scholarly studies in an effort to provide a fundamental and clear picture of the third person of the Trinity (Holy Spirit) in Christianity. For me, this approach is all premised on the Biblical story of Christ’s assertion to the Disciples following his resurrection that he would ascend into heaven to be with the Father but that he would come back in a more powerful way, namely, a Spiritual way that would engage life as a guide and comforter. In light of the Pentecostal revelation, which depicts this as having actually happened, it has always seemed to me that the true significance of this in terms of life of all sorts living and thriving together in the world has not been put in terms of a doctrine knitting all life together in peace and happiness as embedded in Christ’s dictum for love of God and one another as prescribed in ‘creative goodwill’ (‘agape’ type of love). Thus, in life of what I perceived as very little, in anything, having been done in response to my suggestions, it seemed to me that no one was listening and being activated to do something.

Then something very significant happened in my life, comprising a ‘tap on the shoulder’, as it were, with a very clear message to do it myself. This occurred following the closure of my last Pastoral Charge, namely, The Valley Mission Field in the United Church of Canada, which I had served as Minister for sixteen years. This occurred officially on September 30, 2005. Two weeks later, one morning on my way to work at an appointment I held at the University of New Brunswick as a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Biology and Faculty of Forestry and Environmental Management, I received a very clear and concise message which said: Norman, get on

with a study of the Nature of Spirituality, do it at the University of New Brunswick, and do it now. Upon my arrival at the University, immediately I went to the Dean of my Faculty and told him what had happened. His response was, go for it Norm! He was very supportive. Then I visited the President of the University who, likewise, was very supportive, saying get on with it. Thence, I phoned the Moderator of the United Church of Canada in Toronto whose enthusiastic response was also very supportive and encouraging. Thus, by noon that day, I had a mandate to design a new course which I would begin teaching in the winter term of 2006. The course was/is entitled "Bioethics, Emotional Intelligence, and the Nature of Spirituality." I have been teaching this course yearly since and, along with students in the classes doing research on the Nature of Spirituality.

With respect to the Spiritual part of the course, my thesis is that Spirituality is prior to everything, the essence of everything, and connects everything. This, in my opinion, supplies level playing field for all life, human and otherwise, thus providing a foundation for positive, peaceful, interactions among all. Engaging this from a human point of view especially, it is facilitative to have a clear understanding of one's morality, thus the Ethics part, indeed Bioethics since Interactions among living beings precipitate emotional responses of various types. An understanding of this along with skills in dealing with them positively are very helpful in amicable life together.

This educational work continues at the University of New Brunswick, and it inspires interest and positive action among students, faculty, staff and others whenever the topic surfaces. There is no doubt in my mind that here we have the means of entrenching a new and exciting paradigm for peaceful existence among all life, especially human beings.

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