

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KURUVILA ZACHARIAH

I am Kuruvila Zachariah, 72 years old, the father of three sons and a daughter. I trained as a biologist and for 45 years taught and did research at universities in Alberta, London, Ontario and Waterloo.

My Beliefs

During the past three decades my interior life was profoundly shaped by the Jesuits at Guelph and the transformation continues to this day. Most influential was John English who was rector of Ignatius College, Guelph. He said in 1984: "...the spiritual dimension of living is at the heart of all reality. Awareness of this comes only by reaching a higher- or if you like, deeper level of living." I believe this.

He made me aware of a deep truth: it is that what moves us humans most powerfully are images from the imagination. They affect the heart which leads us humans to act, much more than thinking or facts. Think about the Danish newspaper cartoons. We live in a culture inundated with images, in media, news, movies everywhere. Many are false images. John English taught that exercising the spirit is vital for right living. Spiritual exercises reveal to us authentic images of God, of the World, and of the Self.

Consider what a single authentic image has the power to do. Astronaut Edgar Mitchell, commander of Apollo 14, saw the World in a new way.

Suddenly from behind the rim of the Moon . . . there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth . . . home." - Edgar Mitchell, astronaut, USA, 1971

So profoundly was he affected that he abandoned the outer space program to explore inner space. He described that experience and the transformation it made in his life in his book *THE WAY OF THE EXPLORER: An Apollo Astronaut's Journey Through the Material and Mystical Worlds:*

It wasn't until after we had made rendezvous... and were hurtling earthward... that I had time to relax in weightlessness and contemplate that blue jewel-like home planet suspended in the velvety blackness... [I felt] an overwhelming sense of universal connectedness... an ecstasy of unity....It occurred to me that the molecules of my body and the molecules of the spacecraft itself were manufactured long ago in the furnace of one of the ancient stars...

So, building on Edgar Mitchell's magnificent vision, I believe the entire cosmos, from tiny molecules, to every creature and every planet, is the manifestation of The Divine and thus, an integral, interconnected whole.

So too, I believe in the Incarnation which is that The Word, God's self expression has given its light to every mind/soul in the world. Christians call this the "Christ in us". Other faiths have different expressions for this same inner reality. I believe that it

follows that all authentic images of God, World and Self impart to us an ethical core built on “loving-kindness” to all other creatures, without exception.

My Principles and Practices

John English gave me and Lois, my wife, the gift of two priceless principles:

First, direct experience of the importance of the Spiritual Exercises.

Secondly, direct experience of the importance of small groups of persons who meet regularly to share their faith.

Over the decades the interplay of these principles guided us into working with others at the Ignatius property as listed below

Since 1976, we were:

Members of the Jesuit Farm Project,

Members of the Jesuit Ecology Project,

Participants the Community Sponsored Agriculture effort,

Members of the Ignatius Hill Group (ICA),

Members of the Retreat Team as presenters and spiritual directors for two 8-day ecology retreats,

Members of the Retreat Team as presenters and spiritual directors for 3 annual farmers' retreats.

As members of the Jesuit Farm Project we worked with REAP Canada to plant 10 acres of the farm property with blocks of willow cultivars for fast-rotation forestry tests and with perennial switchgrass species for tests of their potential as fuel and fodder.

Also we attended in excess of 12 retreats, ranging in duration from two days to 40 days.

Since 1976, members of Christian Life Communities (CLC) of English Canada and national co-presidents from 1985-1987. The Guelph Jesuit Centre is the original home of CLC and we have attended numerous regional and national assemblies and Executive Council meetings at the Centre.

We attended and were presenters at numerous workshops on group development, the Enneagram, ecological spirituality, marketplace ministries, and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

We organized and presented, with others, training programs for the spiritual directors of small groups. These training programs, as well as the workshops, meetings and assemblies we participated in, incorporated time for reflection and prayer with the land.

We worked closely with John English, former rector at the Centre and director of Loyola Retreat House, on CLC organization and development, and ecological initiatives at the Centre.

With him, we wrote “Twenty Four Exercises for the New Story of Universal Communion”, an ecological and cosmological version of the Spiritual Exercises.

At present the two of us meet with three small groups, each about once per month.

We direct another group of 7 high school chaplains through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

We give workshops and retreats to a variety of groups. The next one is in Liverpool, U.K. in June.

We are organizers and editors for a team that is writing a new expression of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

We are developing a web site with other CLC members. Its focus is the development of small story groups within an evolutionary framework.

The Impact of Large-scale Commercial Development adjacent to the Ignatius Property

Physical Interference

Our place of regular communal worship at present is in Ignatius Hall at the property. It is a sacred indoor site for us with memories going back many years. We meet with a small group each Sunday for Mass. The Hall has large windows which overlook a broad stretch of the new commercial development site. The Hall is on the hilltop with a wide visual sweep so that the bright lights and noise from the existing commercial development are inimical to the serenity which I value during worship. As new development proceeds, this deterioration will intensify and will greatly diminish my experience of the Mystery.

Non-physical Interference (a) HISTORY

UNESCO, 1972, affirmed that a heritage has both cultural and natural value; the two features of the site, history and nature, interact so that the emergent experience enriches the community spiritually. UNESCO continues to assert that “deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world.” Commercial development in the immediate vicinity destroys something of value in the synergy.

I believe the Guelph Jesuit Centre possesses the characteristic of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Some 16th and 17th century Jesuit missions in Brazil and Argentina were named UNESCO World Heritage sites. Another, in Bolivia, consists of several

missions founded between 1696 and 1760. These settlements of native peoples were designed by the Jesuits in a style that married Catholic architecture with local traditions. The six that remain – San Francisco Javier, Concepción, Santa Ana, San Miguel, San Rafael and San José – make up a living heritage on the former territory of the Chiquitos.

Non-physical Interference (b) SYMBOL

My experience of mystery in worship has an immense power to transform lives. Individuals, myself and communities are transformed. I believe that this power is perceived as symbols and transferred through ritual both of which reach deep into my unconscious world. We treasure and venerate these. Commercial development is not evil; the livelihood of all people depends on it. But we are in a rare moment in history today as the Roman Empire declines and new empires arise. Worldwide, commercial activity is in a feverish state and is evoking disturbing symbols which have seductive as well as destructive power. In a significant measure, my ability to worship in peace is jeopardized when such symbolism exists side by side with the sacred site, the Ignatius Property.