

## TRANSCRIPT

### **In Search of A New Culture: Perspectives on Human Flourishing** *Talk given Oct. 29, 2022 at the World Goodwill Seminar in New York*

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Hello and welcome to the final phase of the World Goodwill Seminar coming to you from New York. This phase of the Seminar builds on the two meetings broadcast from Geneva and London earlier today. We have had Geneva's presentations on "A New Culture, A New Civilisation" and another on the Light of love, approached from an African and Sufi perspective. Then from London, Jan Karlin, spoke on the challenge of true creativity and culture in an age of entertainment; and Max Haiven spoke about his work on the Radical Imagination, based on the premise that our society and therefore culture, is the product of our collective imagination, and therefore it is through the imagination that we must change it. And so we look forward now to further rich and varied presentations with guest speakers, Jude Currivan, a cosmologist, planetary healer, futurist and author, Janice Garrett, a choreographer and dance educator, and John Fullerton, who has described himself as an unconventional economist and the architect of Regenerative Economics.

So how do all these seemingly disparate fields come together under the banner of a new global culture and what do we even mean by culture? In a recent mailing we discussed how the word 'Culture' has its metaphorical roots in the plant kingdom – from the Latin cultura: the tilling of land to prepare the earth for crops, and how the ancient Roman orator, Cicero, was the first to use the term as an agricultural metaphor to describe the cultivation of the soul or "cultura animi". Cicero's works rank among the most influential in global culture – the central idea being the cultivation of a 'philosophical soul' as the highest possible ideal for human development. And this is surely the primary goal for a new culture – a shifting away from materialism towards inclusive spiritual thought and expression. This motivates all World Goodwill activities – to make steady progress towards a culture of goodwill – goodwill being a dynamic, transformative energy.

It is this energy of goodwill that promotes "human flourishing" as referred to in our seminar title. The concept of 'flourishing' is more accurately related to joy than happiness and wellbeing, for joy is a quality of the soul rather than the personality. Joy is experienced through a life of virtue and reason that allows the energy of the soul free passage through all aspects of the personality life, conveying a sense of psychological levitation – a raising upwards. It is a truly religious experience and the reason why joy and the related word, 'Rejoice,' have such strong Christian associations; in the words of St. Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."<sup>2</sup> Joy should be the outstanding quality of the religious life but, as the initiative Theology of Joy and the Good Life observes:

"Notwithstanding the importance of joy to human well-being and the deep, ancient religious foundations for understanding and cultivating joy, the very idea of joy has all but disappeared from modern theological reflection, is all but ignored by the social sciences, and is increasingly absent from lived experience. The consequence is a 'flattening out,' a 'graying,' of human life and communities – abundance of entertainment notwithstanding – and a sharp bloom of individual and communal dysfunction."

It is heartening therefore, to see joy and flourishing emerging as features of the new and rapidly growing field of the “positive humanities” – an area of research that brings together positive psychology and the arts and humanities. Furthermore, a research project associated with UNESCO’s Futures of Education initiative has proposed that “flourishing is the central purpose of education.” Summarizing research from around the world, the recently published project report includes a section on Education and Human Flourishing.

Through all these initiatives and more, we can surely detect the dynamic beginnings of a new science of social evolution to which the Alice Bailey writings refer – one that is based on the flowering of the spirit within each individual, and which, from the esoteric perspective, is vividly portrayed in the following ancient formula:

"Out of the lotus in the head springs the flower of bliss.  
Its earliest form is joy.  
Out of the lotus in the heart springs the flower of love.  
Its earliest indication, wisdom is.  
Out of the lotus in the throat emerges the flower of living forms.  
The earliest sign is understanding of the Plan." <sup>DINA I</sup>

It is difficult to think of a new culture without this reawakening of a new religious impulse, one which unites people everywhere and is open to the existence of a conscious and ordered Plan or pattern behind outer events. This is the sense that evolution is being driven forward by a majestic purpose, and that the unfolding qualities of every unit of life, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, are needed to fulfil it. Surely one of the most pressing needs of our time is this sense of working in a purposeful universe driven by goodwill. It is characteristic of a truly religious impulse, born from a sense of wonder about the world and the nature of existence. It injects life with meaning that can revolutionize attitudes and strengthen the bridge to the subtle worlds of consciousness.

This sense of wonder as expressed by the very young, is also a vital ingredient in education and it should extend into their formative years as well as in teenage life, driving minds and imaginations on a lifelong quest for meaning. In contrast to the tendency to overemphasize intellectuality, a recent initiative entitled – The Wonderful Education project – highlighted the importance of fostering the intimate connection between wonder, education and various aspects of human flourishing, proposing that “Wonder-full education...could promote human flourishing in three main ways: by stimulating learning, morality, and spirituality.”

Anders Schinkel, in a paper entitled Wonder, Mystery and Meaning, notes that inquisitive wonder is an active, searching attitude, a wondering *about* something that is resolved when the answer is found. Deep, contemplative, or existential wonder is not merely passive. He says, “The experience of wonder, especially of contemplative wonder, is often one suggestive of a deeper or higher meaning; the pull one feels is that of a deeper meaning, not that of the comfort of everyday meaning. Wonder unsettles—exposes the limitations of—existing frameworks of understanding, ...we do not return to them and cling to them, but we seek to go beyond them, to more encompassing ones.”

It is this same sense of contemplative wonder that leads us to search for meaning – a progressively deeper understanding of the purpose of life, and identification with it. And as Professor Schinkel recognizes, it can be an unsettling experience as it replaces established patterns of thought in which a certain sense of security and identity has been invested. But, if we work creatively to cultivate a positive tension, we can break through the veils that enshroud the everyday world to reveal a realm of meaning. Interestingly, the word ‘wonder’ is related to the German Wunde (wundt) or wound and suggests a breach in the membrane of awareness, a sudden opening in a man’s system of established and expected meanings, a blow as if one were struck or stunned. “To be wonderstruck is to be wounded by the sword of the strange event, to be stabbed awake by the striking.” [Howard L. Parsons]

It’s probably fair to say then that the astronomical community, as well as many of the general public, have been stabbed awake by some of the beautiful and surprising images that have been recently transmitted to earth by the James Webb Space Telescope. The universe is revealing even more structure and order than was commonly thought to exist and the wonderful mystery of creation grows deeper than ever, the beautiful, jewel like galaxies hinting that there is intelligent direction behind cosmic evolution.

So now I’m looking forward to listening to our first speaker so let me hand you over to Michael to introduce Jude Currivan.