

Margaret Allen's Review appears in *Pipeline* August 2008, Col Jennings Reply in *Pipeline* December 2008

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Creating for Life: an artist's spiritual reflections***

Col Jennings 2007 (Special limited edition published in connection with the Exhibition 'North, South and Centre' in February 2008)

This short book is a very personal account of one man's journey through a period of mental ill-health, and the part that was played by art and by various thinkers and writers in helping him to come out the other side. It is generally accepted that many of the most creative people have similarly suffered, like Van Gogh, for example. Many face having to make the decision whether to take medication to flatten out their mood swings, with the risk of harming their creativity. The spirit of creativity works in mysterious ways. Col finds in his inspired art a way to God. He finds inspiration in, among others, the well known mystic, Meister Eckhart and in the blind/deaf Helen Keller, whose overwhelming handicaps did not prevent her being a channel of grace. He discusses the importance of art and culture through the ages and admits that he started with an idea which grew. That the result is a bit untidy at times does not detract from value of the story of one man's pilgrimage.

The book could have been longer – he covers such a wide range that I kept feeling 'tell me more about that idea'. His journey has been a wide-ranging and profound one and he has been helped on the way by many artists and writers. His journeying takes him to the Swedenborgians and the *Book of Urantia*. I googled these – the former was described as "a dangerous mystical non-Christian religion. Its denial of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit, the vicarious atonement, and rejection of Acts and the Pauline epistles clearly set it outside of Christian orthodoxy." The Urantia book touches on science-fiction and is "a momentous work consisting of 2,097 pages of material received from numerous celestial beings supposedly brought to the earth by superhuman, divine beings in 1934.... Its claim is that it is the 'finest major divine revelation since the coming of Christ to our planet'." In other words, they may be classified as outside Christian orthodoxy, but that does not diminish their potential to help people, and thus there is value in them.

Tighter editing would have made it a better book, but those who know the author will appreciate the way in which he has laid bare his soul, and in so doing can be a help to others along the way.

And, of course, we cannot forget the vivid pictures – an important part of the book, and a celebration of nature in Australia in all its beauty. The reflections in the water are a significant part of them. He finishes with some words of our Scottish Wellspring friend Peter Millar:

*I believe I am created in the image of God, I believe God delights in me. ... I believe God empowers me to share with others the journey to wholeness ... I believe God stands with me now. I believe God has brought me to this place.*

Margaret Allen

### **IN REPLY...**

#### ***The Art of Discernment***

My thanks to Margaret Allen for reviewing my short book *Creating for Life* in the last edition of *Pipeline*. I am concerned though, that my Wellspring friends might be somewhat puzzled and bewildered at this point by the book's content. I thank Margaret for drawing attention to the book's need for tighter editing. It was written initially in eight full days and typed and published last year in a couple of weeks when Pat and I were also creating forty-four paintings and photographs for our February Art Exhibition. Understandably it is a little untidy.

In response to Margaret's frustration to "tell me more about that idea" or ideas, I am pleased to foreshadow to all Wellspringers that my work in progress (a prolonged work in the extreme), "Peacing it Together – a colourful life", will reveal all my thoughts. Don't hold your breath though!

While generous in the main, Margaret's comments on my short references to Emanuel Swedenborg and the Urantia Book were certainly uninformed or puzzling to say the least. When you "googled" Margaret, did you hit the "Hillsong" webpage or was it the Religious Right information dissemination page? I too am a "googler", but my life experience of reading vast works of comparative religions, Christian theology, science and philosophy (many far outside the realms of Christian orthodoxy) has taught me some discernment.

One consistent guide I've used throughout my lifetime of study and reflection has been the text from 1 Thessalonians: 5: 19: "Quench not the Spirit, do not despise inspired messages. Put all things to the test and keep what is good."

Margaret's descriptions of those people who may have been influenced by the extensive works of Emanuel Swedenborg as belonging to a "dangerous mystical non-Christian religion" is a great disservice to Helen Keller, the poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the famous writer Henry James and many others who found Swedenborg most inspiring.

For someone who has not read the Urantia Book, to make the statement it "touches on science fiction" is hilarious! Like any book of life, philosophy or religion it is open to question and appraisal, but to relegate this mammoth book of hundreds of Papers relating to every aspect of known human philosophies, religions, the history of the Earth, its peoples and science, (including over seven hundred pages on the Life and Teachings of Jesus) to the "science fiction" bin is ridiculous.

Anyone who spends as many hours searching the "web" as I do knows the pitfalls of the deceptions and misinformation that are found there. The "religious right", particularly in the United States, has a particular vested interest in promoting a dinosaur's small mind-view of religion to ensure the whole conservative, military, industrial, profit enriching, consumerist society stays in power. The "religious right" is responsible for ensuring a consistent forty-seven percent of Americans still hold on to a belief in "creationism"; they have successfully eradicated Trade Unionism from the US society; they endorse wholeheartedly every US military mis-adventure and give full support to the US "gun lobby".

Most of the religious right consistently support the US Republican contenders for office regardless of the fact that most Americans are privately in massive debt, lack any decent health insurance and the "public debt" under every Republican Administration has increased by between 10 and 40% during their terms of office in the past thirty years. These people vigorously promote skepticism of any impact of Climate Change in an environment continually poisoned by fumes and carbon emissions.

These so-called Christians from the US promote the strange idea that Jesus was on earth to uphold "power", not love, humility or of "service" to all humankind regardless of race, gender or any other discriminatory factor. Sadly, here in Australia we still have churches actively promoting this right wing "American way of life". How dangerous or ridiculous is this?

My book, "Creating for Life", attempted to promote and open up a discussion on art and spirituality. It does not reflect orthodox Christian thinking. I was past that in the 1960's. Today I find it extremely amusing that today's orthodox churches, and the Wellspring Community for that matter, still want to play "denominations" with a pretence of espousing "ecumenical games" as an adjunct. Holding endless ecumenical discussions and forums seems madness when we are all fully aware that Jesus, our good friend, was so decidedly "inclusive". Yes, we all need community, but Jesus' whole world was "his community". He was the lover of all humankind and

creation, certainly not the exclusive father of any one particular “box” of belief or believers.

Recently while minding the Braemar Art Gallery at Springwood I chatted to a photography friend of mine who had a multi-layered religious upbringing. He told me he abandoned the local Uniting Church over issues relating to questions of religious art. He also smiled and told me he could no longer adhere to any church community which promoted a Jesus “that was a big time businessman, in a pin-striped suit with a Ferrari waiting in the car park”. I had to agree with him.

The real orthodox Christianity, and the peace-loving revolutionary Christ of my youth, has been high-jacked by a “religious right”. Hopefully that will not persist for too much longer now. So many lovers of this amazing person and inspirational leader are getting anxious for renewal.

In this “crunch time” in human history we are experiencing the very consequences of human greed, the desecration of our environment, consumerism run wild and the very extremes of capitalism. It may be time for us to all to start again wearing our collective creative hats, to explore the art of discernment and to plan for a new form of Christian life. From one small section of the “work of science fiction” (sic) I’ll finally finish with this quote:

*“If Christianity could only grasp more of Jesus’ teachings, it could do so much more in helping modern humankind to solve these new and increasingly complex problems.*

*Christianity suffers under a great handicap because it has become identified in the minds of all the world as a part of the social system, the industrial life, and the moral standards of Western civilization; and thus has Christianity unwittingly seemed to sponsor a society which staggers under the guilt of tolerating science without idealism, politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without restraint, knowledge without character, power without conscience, and industry without morality.*

*The hope of modern Christianity is that it should cease to sponsor the social systems and industrial policies of Western civilization while it humbly bows itself before the cross it so valiantly extols, there to learn anew from Jesus of Nazareth the greatest truths mortal humankind can ever hear – the living gospel of the parenthood of God and the brotherhood / sisterhood of humankind.”*

(Urantia Book, Paper 81: 6, 42)

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28<sup>th</sup> October 2008