

## God's Call to us All

I love the story from Samuel – Samuel hearing the voice of God and not recognising it. There is a naiveté and mystery about it; it is all happening in the dark of night; voices heard but not recognised – Samuel, Samuel...

It has shades of the sorcerer and his apprentice – the sorcerer is trying to impart knowledge and wisdom, and the apprentice learns through testing and experience.

If that sort of imagery frightens you, it is certainly the master and his student – but I think that is too tame when we start talking of the mysteries of the soul and God's calling from the depths...

I can trace the first call of God on my life back to my baptism. I was five at the time. I had one of those parental friends that you call 'aunty'. She was highly eccentric and worked overseas in Venezuela – for Shell oil if I remember.

On one of her furloughs she decided that I needed to be 'done' and duly arranged a baptism with the vicar on a Saturday afternoon.

I stood at the font with mum and my brother sat in a pew pulling faces at me all the way through – I tried hard not to giggle.

Then I stood on a chair and had water poured over my head; and then I was signed with the sign of the cross. The water was running into my eyes and I wanted to wipe it away. My mother wouldn't let me – more out of superstition than anything else I think.

My crazy aunt gave me a picture book with some readings and prayers. It became a treasure and I read it religiously until it fell to pieces some years later.

Something happened that day – a new consciousness awoke within me – from then on, quite naturally, I 'chatted' with God as though God were a friend. I had no formal Christian education other than my book and my 'chats' with God. I am very thankful for that as I did not need to unlearn too much crap and nonsense that often gets imparted from Sunday Schools and the like!

I use the phrase 'a new consciousness awoke within me'. That is just what it was at the time – nothing external, no demands or expectations, just me and my friend.

In much later years I experienced what was called 'the baptism in the Holy Spirit'. This time I was not allowed to just experience it and let it be. The experience was 'theologised'. I was introduced to sin and redemption, to an external judgemental God and a whole lot of other crappy concepts that do nothing to enhance the soul or develop a wholesome relationship with myself and with my God.

I went through many difficult years of repression and confusion.

As I have journeyed on I now understand God's call as coming from within not from without; Not as call from outside to be something I am not, but a calling from within to be something I already am. It is a calling forth of the divinity that is fully part of my humanity.

And this is how I now understand the Christmas story. Jesus may have been a character in history, but in his story he is a representative of every person, of you and of me.

When I was born, the angels too announced my birth – 'Alleluia – Keith is born', they sang. 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all'. (Mind you I do not think there were too many shepherds around Wimbledon at the time who were listening – but the hosts of heaven heard!).

This is what the Christmas story is all about – it is telling us that divinity and humanity are one – they are not separated. As this truth is brought to consciousness things change.

I have worked with a number of married men who have struggled with their sexuality. Many of them have to overcome evangelical and conservative or traditional theologies before they can really begin to accept their sexuality. More latterly I have begun to share the notion that their desire to begin to express their sexuality is a call from God. At first they are often bemused by this concept – after all they hold the idea that sex is a sin – especially gay sex!

But I am convinced that the 'coming out' journey is in response to a call from God. It is a call to become integrated and to be at one with our selves and at one with our God. And whoever hears this call and responds to it finds healing and wholeness.

I think when the angels announced my birth they sang, 'Alleluia – Keith is born – and he's gay; Peace on earth and goodwill to all'. I just had to hear them damn angels too!

I am abhorred that churches generally do not embrace and teach these truths but rather would encourage people to stay repressed and in the dark.

I am sure some of you will be aware of the Pope's end of year message to the Vatican staff.

I was directed to a BBC website by a friend, which had the title 'Pope attacks blurring of gender'. Apparently Pope Benedict had suggested that the need to save humankind from what he called 'a blurring of gender roles' was as important as saving the rainforests from global warming.

His remarks were clearly directed towards the gay and transsexuals communities, and the BBC article at Christmas time clearly made these connections too.

However I returned to the article on the BBC website yesterday and it has been demonstrably changed and there is a rider saying, 'This article has been amended to make it clear the Pope made no direct reference to homosexuals or transsexuals'.

It is bad enough that the Pope uses the power he gains by holding a theology of sin and redemption to make such derogatory comments aimed directly at people like you and me, it is entirely another when the Vatican uses its influence and control to force a respected news source such as the BBC to amend its reporting.

It is clear that the Pope was roundly condemning the gay community suggesting that we are blurring gender boundaries and that gay men are not men and that lesbian women are not women. I am not sure what he thinks we are – but believe you me – I am all man!

This is blatant misinformation and is the Vatican's way of influencing the wider public in a way that can only encourage antipathy and violence towards gay people.

Another article in the New Zealand Herald this week headed 'Seminaries effective in stopping 'homosexual behaviour'.

The article began by saying 'A Vatican office that evaluated United States Roman Catholic seminaries in response to the clergy sex abuse scandal

concluded that administrators have been effective in stopping 'homosexual behaviour' in schools, although the agency said the problem still exists'.

Again this is blatant misinformation. The sexual abuse of minors by a repressed priesthood has nothing to do with being homosexual. Again the church is using its power and influence in an attempt to further alienate gay people from the wider community by suggesting that abusing children is a homosexual act!

I thank God every day that my God has called me – it was not quite the angels – but it has been a quiet voice in the stillness of the night quietly calling me forth – Keith, Keith....

January 15<sup>th</sup> in the USA has been set aside as a National Day in memory of Martin Luther King. He knew that he and the divine were one – he knew all about incarnation and the cost of integrating that knowledge. I am sure that if he lived today he would be standing up for the rights of the marginalised gay community.

Listen to what he said in a speech in 1965. I have not edited these words and of course they are in the parlance of the time:

"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down, men other-centered can build up. I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land ... I still believe that we shall overcome." --Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Noble Prize Acceptance Speech, Dec. 10, 1965

If those words are not from the mouth of God I do not know what is.

He also said:

I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to live for and with those who find themselves seeing life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit signs. This is the way I'm going. If it means suffering a little bit, I'm going that way. If it means sacrificing, I'm going that way. If it means dying for them, I'm going that way. Because I heard the voice saying: do something for others.

What are you hearing the voice say...?