

Closing Remarks

Peter Laurence

IN summarizing what I've heard today I'll restrict myself to two points. And I'll be followed by Ms. Benson's remarks, saving the best for the last. My first point has to do with the idea that when diverse people come together to discuss issues, the use of language is critical because each of us comes with a different perspective and a different sense of what the language is actually saying. And so, I think the person who deserves the most applause today is our interpreter. He is incredible. He digests fifteen minute discourses and then somehow feeds them back in another language.

I heard an interesting play on language in the conference today. It started with Dr. Jim Kodera saying that we need "contemplation" to transcend language, words, politics, and theology. There were some questions about his idea. Our small discussion group in particular thought that words are important and wondered why he said we need contemplation to overcome them. The sense I got of what he meant by contemplation was similar to what Bill Aiken said earlier using the term, "humanizing religion." There are other people who will call that whole process "spirituality". So we all seem to be using different terms in talking about whatever it is that transcends the things which divide us and instead connects us all. Whatever you want to call it, whatever language you use, there is something that connects us that does transcend those differences. And what I heard today was that we need to look harder for that. In spite of our differences, which certainly do exist, we need to find that connection and use it to be closer to each other.

My second point comes from a trend that I heard in the presentations today. The first presentation talked about an historic movement from violence toward coexistence. In religious history there is a lot of violence. There is still some around today, but there seems to be a movement toward coexistence that we welcome.

In the second presentation it was described as an historic marginalization of women that has been moving toward gender equality. And again, today there is obviously not universal gender equality but we've been

moving in that direction. Many of the panelists today made the point that, in relation to religion, all of this movement hinges on changes in the interpretation of scripture and tradition. The way we interpret our scriptures and our traditions allows us to bring them into the present and not just live in the past, because past history is not always that pleasant.

There is a book that I read recently that I want to recommend to everyone here because it describes social evolution in ways that I've never heard it described before. It presents a model I find extremely useful in looking at why we have some people who are still operating in very conservative traditional ways, other people wanting to function in progressive ways, and all those different levels going on simultaneously in our culture today and creating quite a bit of tension. So I'll recommend this book to you. It's by an author named Steve McIntosh and is called, "*Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution.*" If you read it I hope you will find it as helpful as I have in gaining some clarity about what is going on today and where we might be headed. So that's my contribution and I'll invite Virginia Benson to make hers.