

CTP Orientation, September 03, 2014    Address by Philip McKenna

Dear friends and colleagues

It is my privilege and joy to welcome especially you new colleagues to our 2014-15 school year.

I love the word 'orientation' with its ordinary clear sense, its deep psychological sense and its metaphysical sense rooted in our religious past.

I love too that "orient," "orientation" have both active and passive senses. You are not children made by law to go to school and do what you're told. You are all mature adults choosing a new profession and figuring out how you can best use this training and education: you are orienting yourselves. You are also being oriented by us—finding out about us through your application, meeting faculty, being told tonight about your group time and place, which seminar you'll be in, what you need to read and so on.

There are ordinarily only a small number of times in our life when we gather all we are and have become, and put ourselves into something palpably new and pivotal. You must suspect, and we know, that you will not go through CTP without radical changes to you person. You are not just preparing for a new job, not just learning some techniques, not just trying to master a system of thought. You are preparing yourselves to engage person to person with others who will entrust you with their deepest hopes. It's obvious that the training for this requires a collegial engagement of a like kind from you (and with you).

I'm not inferiorizing the study of theory and the learning of clinical skills. We started the CTP partly because these were insufficiently attended to in our training. What I'm doing is putting them in the larger context of your self transformative journey to prepare yourself as a therapist.

This is why we have a ritual called orientation, which in our case is essentially a meeting of the school and a celebration of our collective collegial spirit.

“Orientation” comes from the Latin “oriens”- “rising”—as in the Rising Sun. From it we get Light and Life. From it we set our direction, we orient ourselves.

Our first “Rising Sun” is our mother, her voice, her eyes and touch. Humans are given “where they are going.” Given “direction home,’ orientation. Winnicott (CTP’s Mozart to Freud’s Bach) included “lack of orientation” as one of his unthinkable anxieties leading us towards psychosis.

Beginning with Mother, we humans, temporal unfinished beings, forever after seek orientation outside ourselves. Given words for discernment by our community, we are always drawn to relationships with people and realities that seem to call us to completion. We seek, we choose—this is what makes our life a moral life.

As Charles Taylor says in his *Sources of the Self*, what makes us intrinsically moral beings is that we always have a question about the good, what it is that we properly orient ourselves towards.

It’s usually not difficult for people who have zealously pursued their own therapy for some years to grasp that therapy is a form of moral search, an orientation to the most meaningful life one can imagine. What must be harder in this hyper-individualistic age is to imagine the moral significance of your work as a psychotherapist as it relates to the community in which you are embedded and which is embedded also in you.

Whether the community’s media voice to itself knows it or not, your work as a therapist gives witness that in some part of its self-awareness, maybe in us, the community so values each person that it is worth spending many, many hours speaking heart to heart to those who need it and are willing.

So, beyond the personal human flourishing that our work as therapists gives us, we join those others in our society who labour for the human flourishing of our fellow citizens. We work one person or group at a time for the self-liberation of our clients to halt intergenerational madness and indirectly to help the next generation of children.

All this, understand, in a social context that is publicly secular, pluralist, and hopefully increasingly tolerant. At CTP you will learn to work with those whose world view or religious view is like yours and equally with those completely different. This is a competency to be consciously developed.

This evening let us above all rejoice that we have found each other. May we be colleagues for years to come.