

THE JOURNEY OF RICHARD G. MEECH

Richard Meech's sincere interest in and compassion for others came early in his life. It was well established even before his time at Upper Canada College, where it was nurtured and recognized with the receipt of the prestigious Herbert Mason Medal, awarded to two graduating students annually for 'integrity and strength of character'.

His passion for the history of ideas in the West was born in those high school days and fuelled within the classrooms of Queen's University, then Harvard, and finally the University of Paris and Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris. But the real fertilization of that passion came from his appetite for learning-through-living and his boundless curiosity about 'the other', made manifest in the opportunities for travel to distant lands afforded him by George and Martha Butterfield and the programs at Butterfield & Robinson. Fortunately, by 1980 George had recognized the depth of Richard's vision and orchestrated the unprecedented opportunity for a man of his age to address the Canadian Club of Toronto. Richard joined the ranks of prime ministers, Nobel laureates, and respected scientists, artists and innovators. He was twenty-six years old. It was the first public glimpse of the extraordinary intellectual journey Richard had embarked upon.

In his speech Richard explored three urgent challenges to the status quo in Western Liberal democracies. Those challenges had come to him during his travels, in his early encounters with foreign cultures. The first challenge: to achieve a personal integration that expresses the universal nature we share with all humankind, while striving to define ourselves as individuals. The second: to see our relationships with others in our community less in the competitive context and more in a complementary, mutually supportive way. The third: to reshape our relationship with the natural world by understanding humankind not as separate from it but as an integral part of the complex web of life. The last of these he saw as the crucial initial step from which the first two could evolve. These challenges would form the intellectual and spiritual foundations of Richard's work for the next thirty-eight years.

1990 marked the culmination of his next decade of building on those foundations with the completion of *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*. *Millennium* embodied Richard's belief that the growing awareness of the limitations of our culture of competition, consumption, and dominion over the natural world could be informed by the wisdom and knowledge woven into the lifeways and worldviews of traditional societies. This idea of learning from indigenous peoples, rather than observing them for entertainment or enrichment, or reaching charitably into the past to bring them along with us into our constructed 'reality' of the present, was aligned with some of the 20th century's great visionaries.

Following *Millennium*, several years of film and television production brought Richard to the next milestone in his intellectual journey. In 2010 he released *Ayahuasca; Vine of the Soul*, a documentary film that sought to awaken viewers to the possibility of a direct experience of the 'divine' through the ceremonial use of ayahuasca, a sacred plant medicine used in traditional Amazonian shamanism.

While this documentary might at first sound like a departure from those challenges outlined in the Canadian Club speech, *Vine of the Soul* reflected a significant step towards a deeper understanding of the human condition in the modern world. Richard had come to see that a successful response to the rapidly diminishing diversity of species and the life threat to the global environment required not just a determination to change our ways but a complete shift in consciousness. Richard knew intuitively such a monumental shift necessitated comprehending, on the deepest level, the natural world as the intersection of the divine and the human. It required a return to the same spiritual commitment to the sacred presence in all living things that he had witnessed in the traditional cultures he had studied and visited.

So now Richard was more focused than ever. He sensed that to continue on his journey of discovery, to help articulate and contribute to the ongoing transformation of our culture, it would be necessary to immerse himself in an environment populated with like-minded souls. He made several trips to California. In 2013 he met Sean Kelly, a Canadian professor in the Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness (PCC) department at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco.

Sean and Richard corresponded. They met again. They discovered the perfect alignment of Richard's intellectual and spiritual trajectory with the stated aims of the PCC department. They discussed the possibilities of Richard attending and teaching in the program. They imagined a cooperative effort to create a film or series that would focus on these ideas.

All of these plans and dreams came to an abrupt end with Richard's untimely death on the evening of September 29, 2018.

CIIS's Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness department, originally funded by Laurance S. Rockefeller, one of the 20th century's most visionary philanthropists, "attracts intellectually engaged individuals who are in varying degrees dismayed by what they see happening in modern societies and who are striving to find meaningful ways to develop their gifts to serve the future of the world". It undoubtedly attracted Richard. In fact, it was a destination he had moved towards for most of his adult life, but it became a very focused target for him over the last five years.

One of the PCC department's core goals is "re-imagining the human species as a mutually enhancing member of the Earth community". This mandate alone reads like an epitaph for Richard.

Knowing he spent two of his last few weekends immersed in a group dedicated to the ideas and aspirations that had inspired him for his entire adult life can bring us a hint of comfort in this time of devastating loss.

Richard had, in an intellectual and spiritual sense, come home. Where he might have set out for from there, we can only wonder.

**HONOURING RICHARD
THE RICHARD G. MEECH *ANIMA MUNDI* SCHOLARSHIP**

Richard Meech's friends, his wife Jill, his siblings Susan, Peter, Sally and Nan, their families and their friends established this scholarship at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco in his name to honour and remember Richard's extraordinary life and work. CIIS, founded fifty years ago, offers comparative and cross-cultural studies in philosophy, religion, psychology, counselling, cultural anthropology, organizational studies, health studies, and the arts.

The scholarship provides continuing financial assistance annually to one Canadian applicant in the MA or PhD program of the department of Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness (PCC). The PCC program is interdisciplinary, drawing on philosophy, psychology, cultural history, the history of ideas, consciousness studies, cosmology, ecology and the spiritual dimension of life. It aims to shape the leadership necessary for profound, progressive transformation of social institutions and individual consciousness.

The Richard G. Meech *Anima Mundi* Scholarship is awarded on the basis of financial need and on a demonstrated resonance with many of the core values that, over the years, had become central to Richard's way of seeing our world and our way forward in it. Those values include ecological or planetary spirituality, indigenous wisdom, integral ecology, plant medicine and the importance of the sacred in this critical moment for humankind and the planet, referred to by some as the second Axial Age.

To provide assistance to others in understanding and tackling the enormous challenges of global transformation that stand before us is to breathe life into the visionary legacy of Richard G. Meech.

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