

CARP Talk 26th November 2015 Report

## Michael Schroder - 'Spirituality ~ Where can I find God?'

'To find' - 1. to discover or perceive by chance, unexpectedly or after a deliberate search.  
2. Succeed in obtaining (something).  
3. Discover or experience to be the case. (from the Oxford English dictionary)

According to a poll conducted by YouGov in 2013, about 44% of young people in the UK claim to believe in a God or higher spiritual power. But out of those 44%, how many can say that they have 'found' God? Well before asking that maybe we should ask, well how does one go about finding God? It's not a really straightforward question is it? Nature, relationships, hobbies, were some of the answers offered by the audience on Thursday evening at an unremarkable but cheerful café room in Lancaster Gate. Of course everyone will have their own way of seeking and experiencing spirituality, but the answers that Michael gave that night were somewhat unconventional and rather remarkable, and certainly left the audience with a steady feeling of zeal and willingness to face the question of how to find God in their own lives.

The evening started as any other, people chatting, hugging, complaining about uni or organising shopping dates, some regulars diving straight into the social scene with an open hand at the ready at the end of an outstretched arm to welcome newbies, while others preferred to avoid the small talk. New guests were of course welcomed openly and warmly, they felt so invited that they naively began to believe that they could feel totally relaxed the whole evening. But of course we never promote comfort zones for too long in CARP, so they were thrown straight into a public speaking challenge before the talk had even begun. Bet they never saw that one coming.

The challenge consisted of a timed, spontaneous speech in front of a small audience, on a random question given on the spot. Oh, and all filler words were counted and announced at the end. So after the nervous laughter, introductions and assigning of an 'ums' and 'ers' counter, the challenge began. In the beginning people were generally nervous, but because of the acceptance, encouragement and general friendliness of the people in each group, everyone felt well received and it ended with some mixed feelings of relief but mostly of openness, warmth and maybe a tinge of pride knowing that some comfort zones had been abandoned. Overall the activity was very successful in preparing the group for Michael's talk.

His talk consisted of many short testimonies of personal experiences and realizations. Firstly Michael posed some questions to the audience; who here believes in God? A few nods, a few confident hands raised, some meek fingers rose towards the ceiling for a split second before shooting back down into a lap again. Next question; so has anyone found God here? Again some nods, some confident hands may have lost a little gusto. So how can we experience God? As stated before, some answers given were through people, your relationships, through nature, your hobbies. So one by one Michael started to break these topics down into paths to find God through relating them to his own experiences.

Michael talked about BMX, how his love for it allows him to feel peace, fulfilled, to feel God in moments of completely losing himself in something he loves. He talked about his wife, how your partner can be your window to God. But the point he placed most emphasis on was not about how we can experience God in our relationships or passions, but through our struggles.

Michael gave a short testimony on his experience at a workshop, on a relentless challenge day, with an exhausted team and a beat up but strong spirited team leader. He told of how his team leader took on the burden of the entire team. That day he made the determination not to let his team leader take on the weight of his own responsibility. He realized that in the same way God also takes on the burden of our responsibilities and mistakes. God is carrying our burden on His shoulders so that it is lighter for us. So as with his team leader, Michael decided that he no longer wants to let God carry his burden, but to take responsibility of his own life, to relieve God and allow Him to trust in him. Through this realization he could feel the love of God through his team and team leader, and also he could understand God's heart of wanting to take on the suffering of others. Through the most challenging situation, he found God, because that is where God resides.

Undoubtedly Michael's testimony left the group with many thoughts, feelings, realizations, inspiration but maybe mostly hope. Hope that God is indeed there waiting for each of us to find Him. But there was much more to it than that in Michael's message. Perhaps the main underlying message was that when you do find God, will you have the courage to take the weight off His shoulders?

After a thought-provoking and inspiring talk, everyone was able to socialize, discuss and eat dinner together and end the day in cheerful spirits.

