

“Why Would a Focusing Workbook be Directed Specifically to the World’s Christian Communities?”

by Edwin M. McMahon, Ph.D. & Peter A. Campbell, Ph.D.
On Their New Book:

Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality

What benefit can the Focusing community derive from a book specifically directed to Christians? The beginnings of an answer lie within *the application* of underlying principles drawn from the Focusing process itself as well as from Gendlin’s extensive research. The mark of any truly game-changing scientific theory, such as Gene’s, has always included a capacity for being applied in other fields, often far beyond the initial context within which the original spearheading theory was conceived and first put into practice. Furthermore, such an unexpected application can then often make a significant contribution back to the original source where the pioneering theory was first derived and applied.

While *Recovering the Lost Body-Connection* is filled with useful information and exercises, especially for Christians but equally applicable on any spiritual path, at the same time a perceptive reader will sense the potential of deeper, more profound and far-reaching Focusing currents flowing beneath the surface of these pages. The two of us have spent our long lives researching from a psychological perspective what in religion and spirituality promotes human wholeness and what moves us into pathology.

From this perspective, rarely discussed issues within healthy spiritual development are explored throughout the new workbook. For example, What is the body’s physical role in spiritual development? Can the human organism itself teach us anything about what it means to be more fully human at those unexplored depths of organic knowing within our bodies into which we seldom journey within the wired-up, frenetic environments of our modern societies? What role does metaphorical symbol play within the understanding and practice of a healthy spirituality? Not metaphor as a literary device, but as the powerful, interacting symbol which can reach deep within the body-knowing of those hungering

for new depths of awareness in their felt-sensing of a cellular relationship within some larger Body or Greater Living Process—for Christians, the Body of the Whole Christ, or their continuing embodiment *in Christ*, as St. Paul so often wrote. What can Paul's own experience teach all of us about our knee-jerk tendency to push aside difficult feelings, often treating them as enemies, somehow to be conquered or *process-skipped* around and avoided? How does more talk about Focusing, more theory, more workshops actually help us to replace and grow beyond our entrenched process-skipping habits?

By the late 1990's we could not see how Focusing would ever make the potential contribution which it is capable of supporting in more peace-filled, less violent and healthier societies unless *a more effective pedagogy* could be created for addressing the widespread *process-skipping habits* so pandemic and embedded within the many different cultures in which we were then working. Such embodied habits keep ordinary people so incongruent, out of touch with and distracted from their own deeper needs and aspirations that they scarcely know what is going on inside themselves. The last chapters in our book address these important issues of process-skipping and the addictive spiritualities largely held in place by unrecognized habits which keep people chronically disconnected inside themselves and from one another.

So, we stopped giving workshops and began our quest by searching for what seemed to be essential habits needing to be developed *in our bodies*—beyond merely adjusting our mental thinking or analyzing—in order, gradually, to grow beyond and eventually to replace older process-skipping habits that no longer worked for us—if indeed they ever did! If our societies too often break down, the way back to human wholeness lies first in reestablishing a healthy community life *within our own bodies*. For the two of us, our best teachers, as always, have been those who session after session worked regularly with us over this twelve year period.

If meaning is not only thought in our minds but also *felt* in our bodies, as Gene so often has emphasized, then what role does developing *a body-habit of attending to felt-sensing* play within the vast, as yet unexplored world of our relationships within some Larger Living Process which for millennia humans have recognized as playing an integral role in our maturing human consciousness? We have found that an experience of this kind of faith (*re-*

ardless of spiritual tradition or background) provides a fertile context from within which we can learn more about what it means to be human by probing further into these more primal depths of human awareness in ourselves. Participants in our programs have come from a broad spectrum of Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian and former Christian backgrounds, along with confused and empty Americans chronically stressed by our compulsive, unbalanced work/entertainment culture.

Yet, as time, patience and commitment pay off for many in our programs—if they continue growing into a new habit of noticing and nurturing their important feelings as a way of daily living—they find themselves not only journeying into an experience of greater personal wholeness but maturing as well in developing a body-sense for being *living membranes* within a Larger Loving Presence as a single, unifying, organic experience within their own body. Their faith-perspective can then expand to include not only what they learn in a cognitive, informational way from study and reading the scriptures, they also learn how to include what their own body and felt-sensing can raise in awareness and blend within their faith-experience and tradition as well. A much more holistic, inclusive, and *embodied* experience through their faith-recognition of discovering themselves participating within a life even greater than their own.

Two thousand years ago, within the early Christian communities, in his Acts of the Apostles St. Luke attempted to write about the same thing we have discovered people need companioning into today. He left a written heritage from his experience of these early Christian groups in order that those who followed might also experience this Larger Body in which, “... we live and move and have our very existence.” (Acts 17:28) St. Paul, too, celebrating his own growing experience of such awareness wrote: “... it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. (Gal 2:20) It is important for the Focusing community to realize that we have finally figured out how *the missing pedagogical link for experiencing ourselves within some Larger Living Process involves a changing relationship to our own bodies* through the habit of noticing and nurturing our important feelings (including the felt meaning or *felt-sensing* embedded within such experience).

We emphasize **the body-habit** of nurturing important feelings as integral to Focus-

ing—something far more than simply Focusing when we feel we need it. Such nurturing or caring for important feelings, relating to them in a different way stands out as one of 6 identifiable *body-learnings* presented in our new book. We highlight here *the development of these habits in our bodies* because we have come to realize that they express profound psychological and pedagogical breakthroughs which can then support the maturation of emotional health *together with* a healthy spirituality and maturing sense for the common good—no matter what the religious tradition (or lack thereof) within which such awareness may begin to emerge. The process of congruent human wholeness itself can then become our closest friend and teacher, revealing who we really are as living cells within this Larger, Gifting Process—which can be and has been interpreted in many different ways.

Emphasis has been made throughout our new book to simplify Focusing language, reducing six steps to two—*Noticing* and *Nurturing* important feelings. Top priority is placed upon developing these two steps *as a living habit within our bodies*. In addition, identifying process-skipping habits and learning how to grow beyond them then opens an entire landscape of new body-learnings. We develop many chapters with exercises and stories as well as guiding our readers into discovering their own body’s “*Affection Teachers*” in order to change the quality of their presence and relationship to their own difficult feelings. We have found that each person, whether three or ninety three, needs to learn how this *new mentor*, (both for children and adults), may be found right within their own body itself—discovering the unique, personal *Affection Teachers* who help them to fashion a new, loving and caring relationship with feelings they habitually run from or avoid.

We have created this workbook after 12 years of experimenting with sufficiently long enough programs within which participants can begin the lifelong process of opening windows upon the depth and significance of Gendlin’s remarkable felt-sense when he wrote:

Your physically felt body is in fact part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people—in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from inside. (*Focusing, Bantam Revised Edition, May 1981, p.77*)

When introducing the Christian community to this excerpt from Gene’s book, *Focusing*, we don’t hesitate to put themes from Gendlin and St. Paul together when paraphrasing Ge-

ne's last sentence to read, "... this sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the Body of the Whole Christ as it can be felt from inside us."

If healthy spirituality reflects anything authentic in human experience, it unveils a maturing awareness for finding ourselves as integral cells within some Larger, Living Body unfolding, within us and capable of being felt-sensed. Such inner body-awareness nurtures our innately human sense of caring for our environment which gifts us with life and a concern for the common good of all who receive life—without which we find ourselves powerless to survive as a species. Gene has been reputed to have dropped the following metaphorical hint at some recent gathering: "... *Something is living us ...*" The rippling outward through just such felt-sensing body-awareness cracks open a further door upon a vast and inviting, inner landscape—an opening passageway through which each new generation of BioSpiritual Focusing explorers can be drawn to discover where this powerful internal process might ultimately lead them. As Christopher Fry so movingly wrote for those who choose to live a BioSpiritual Focusing way of life:

Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.

Christopher Fry: *A Sleep of Prisoners*

Thank you, Gene—from Ed as a fellow octogenarian, and Pete following close behind at 75—for your pioneering contributions in philosophy and psychology which have *implications* ranging far beyond the professional fields within which you have made your lifetime contributions. Thank you, too, for living long enough that the *implicit world* which you so passionately continue to explore has enabled the two of us to extend your findings into the realm of religion and spirituality in a way that holds the potential to open new fields of inquiry for theological and scriptural studies, as well as promising new directions in pastoral care. You and your work mean a great deal to us, Gene. A sincere **Thank You** for all that you have done—and for Mary's amazing capacity of spreading this around the world.

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