



“Being Christ for Creation”

I was listening to an interview of David Suzuki by Rick Cluff on CBC radio. This was last Wednesday, Earth Day, and Rick was asking Dr. Suzuki what it meant to him. He responded by simply saying, “Every day is earth day for me”. He doesn’t have anything against designating one day every year to focus on what it means to be ecological citizens. But it’s kind of like thinking about God twice a year, at Easter and Christmas. It’s better than nothing. But if God is ultimate reality, the loving presence in which we live and move and have our being, then it seems just a tad token to stop twice a year to give God a thought – doesn’t it? Every day is Spirit Day.

That we actually need to be reminded of God at Christmas and Easter, and of our planetary citizenship one day a year, is a result of the modernist worldview. This worldview also has implications for the state of our planet. I have been reading through Charles Taylor’s Templeton Prize winning book *A Secular Age* – a daunting enterprise given its length of nearly 900 pages. Essentially, he’s looking at why, only a few hundred years ago, if somebody were to walk in on you while you were praying on your knees, it would have seemed perfectly normal. But today, if a friend caught you on your knees in prayer you’d likely feel embarrassed. What’s up?

In attempting to free humanity from superstitious beliefs and ecclesiastical authority, the modern worldview emerged and ended up throwing out the baby of Spirit with the bathwater – water that actually needed to be thrown out. It was toxic. It was holding us back from realizing our full potential as a species. We had to take the next step of our development. By deposing pre-modern beliefs and power systems – (the church) – humanity did take off. We discovered the scientific method. We discovered medicine based in empirical testing. Our life span increased. Infant mortality decreased dramatically. We discovered technologies that have made our lives much better – at least in the West. The problem is that in the process Spirit – the interior, sacred dimension of both human beings and the cosmos (or creation) – was systematically removed.

Spiritual evolution of our species essentially came to a stand still – except in a very small minority. We were forced to choose between returning to a pre-scientific, pre-rational form of faith – a reactionary fundamentalism that Bill Maher takes cheap shots at in his documentary *Religulous* – and rationalism – that denied Spirit. That’s not a great set of options. The people Bill Maher

interviewed for his documentary are made to look ridiculous because their beliefs are pre-modern – they believe what they believe because it says so in the Scripture – and it’s especially sad that Mr. Maher feels a need to denigrate them. In a sense his subjects are victims of modernism. They are reacting against this modernist impulse to jettison Spirit from the universe. But the way forward is not to denigrate or ridicule them. You end up by creating reactionary religion - the Taliban or Al Qaeda – or a Pat Robertson and a Jerry Falwell influencing vast numbers of people to turn their back on a scientific worldview.

As a result of modernism and the reactionary religion it spawned, our collective spiritual intelligence is stuck at a very rudimentary evolutionary stage – what Spiral Dynamics calls *Truth Force* in which there is only One True Way, and you believe it or die. Seventy percent of the world’s population is centered at this level of spiritual intelligence. Or you get stuck at the God of rationalism. What goes unexplored in his documentary is how Mr. Maher’s own spiritual intelligence is frozen – he is a victim of a modernist worldview himself, and his own spirituality got stuck at a modernist, rationalist level of development – a spirituality characterized by focusing on surface levels of reality – a universe without any sacred interiors. Notice he interviews precisely one Jew and one Roman Catholic, who both have a higher spiritual intelligence than he does, but both of them are made to look eccentric and silly.

Which brings me to my point. While I was preparing this sermon I received three emails from different ecological groups. One headline was “Stop the Slaughter of Bears”; another concerned the vast dead zones in our oceans, caused by acid rain and pollution; the last one pointed out that B.C. is one of only two provinces without legislation to protect endangered species. Now, each of these issues is complicated and compromised by particular interests and particular perspectives – no question about it. But generally speaking, humans beings are in the midst of a three hundred year process of colonizing the earth, reducing livable habitat of other species, extinguishing many species, polluting the atmosphere with greenhouse gases that are heating up our planet with potentially catastrophic results, destroying what’s left of our forests and rainforests. Sadly, I could go on, but the decimation of our planet is a manifestation – in my opinion – of this modernist form of spirituality that denies an interior sacred dimension to life. The Great Wall of Modernism surrounds the soul of our species and separates us from our own sacred interiors and the sacred interior of the planet and her creatures.

This is the primary point that I make in my book *Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos*. After voiding creation of Spirit – of a sacred interior dimension – we are able with impunity to exploit it. Animals, forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, are reduced to being “its” and not “thous” with rights

and privileges. They become “resources” and commodities, not intrinsically valuable, but only insofar as they serve our ends. Which might not be so bad, until we examine how myopic those ends have been for three hundred years of this modern period. These ends have focused primarily on the creation of wealth – myopically defined as money. You see, when the human being is voided of an interior, sacred dimension – when Spirit is tossed – the hole in the middle of our being needs to be filled with something, *anything, everything*. When asked: “How much is enough?”, the modernist soul answers, “just a little more”. We become *takers*, to use the language of Daniel Quinn’s protagonist, a Silver Back Gorilla. The true wealth that every religion points to is the wealth of living connected to the sacred dimension – in the created and uncreated realm. It’s the wealth of sacred wisdom.

The reading from 1 John this morning talks about sin as “*lawlessness*” (3:4). I want to suggest that the laws we’re guilty of transgressing may include the ones written in the Bible. But I suspect they are even more primal than these ones. The laws we are breaking are natural laws. When we cause a species to go extinct, or pollute a river, we are going against what is part of our inherent nature. Disconnected from Spirit and the interior dimension of life, we become the lawless species. We have gone beyond *distinguishing* ourselves as a species – a good and necessary evolutionary development – to *disconnecting* ourselves from our

membership in the life community of the planet. We have transgressed the law of knowing directly our inherent biological connection with the bio-systems and creatures of the planet. We have lost the sensibility that all of creation, ourselves included, are in the words of the author of this letter “children of God” – physical manifestations of the invisible Spirit of God. The ecological crisis is ultimately an identity crisis – we don’t know who we are.

Well, the writer of 1 John suggests an identity for us and for all creation. “You are children of God”. But we don’t remain children, according to the author. “You are children of God, *now*; but what we will be has not yet been revealed.” I love this evolutionary or developmental sensibility. God’s not finished with us! Modernism and rationalism aren’t the end game. They are the developmental equivalent of adolescence. We’ve been acting like teenagers! We thought it was all about us. We wanted our own way. We were testing our strength and our agency. We’ve been all about trying to distinguish ourselves from the family. And now, after five hundred years, let’s hope we’re secure enough in our distinct identity, that we can come back home to the planet, be ourselves, but realize it’s not all about us! We can experiment with being adults – with actually being active members of a larger community of life, and practice taking responsibility for the welfare of others!

We’ve been like the prodigal species, who left home, squandered the

inheritance of a 14 billion-year universe. Now we're ready to repent and come home. And guess what? We're going to discover that we're still God's children! Just like the parable says, and just like the writer of 1 John says: "you are children of God". But the author of this letter doesn't stop there. He makes an outrageous stab at who are going to be when we finally grow up. We'll be like Christ (3:2). We are in the process of being transformed into Christ – *that's* who we are!

And if we're destined to be like Christ, why not start *acting* out of our Christ-natures today? Why not fall back in love with creation, as God has fallen in love with creation – so much so, our faith contends, that God took on flesh and became a member of creation – in Jesus? Why hold ourselves back from loving like this, when it is in our very nature as children of God to fully commit to creation – as God committed to creation in Christ? This is what the Christ energy was doing in Jesus of Nazareth after all wasn't it? Committing to the healing and repair

of creation. Giving it all so that we would rediscover our deep identity as children of God – replete with a sacred, interior life. Why not expand and extend this sacred mission and include all creation? Why not, on this Earth Day, fall *back* in love with creation – with each other and with the planet? Be Christ for creation! I'll end with a poem by Dostoyevsky's poem:

Love all Creation,
The whole of it and every grain of
sand ...
Love every leaf
Every ray of God's light
Love the animals
Love the plants
Love everything
You will perceive the divine mystery in
things
And once you have perceived it
You will begin to comprehend it
ceaselessly
More and more every day
And you will at last come to love the
whole world
With an abiding and universal love.

There's a worthwhile Earth Day
goal!