

Bulletin

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"It is only with the heart that we can see rightly".

(The Little Prince)

If We Have Eyes That See...

James Profit



Lakeshore Experience

Ah,... I had arrived! It felt like home! I had just spent two hours on the road dealing with traffic. The streets were grey from the mixture of that once white snow, and salt, applied supposedly, to make my travel easier. Coming near to my destination, I suddenly got a glimpse of the lake. Not able to resist the urge to have a closer look, I took a sudden right and went down to the edge of the lake. I leapt out of the car, and stood facing the lake, with the city to my back. Here, I savoured what was before me... a horizon without land, the cool breeze on my face, the quiet sound of the small waves hitting the shore, the smell of the damp air. The burden of my city driving lifted; a calmness and peace came over me. I experienced intimacy with God. I had come home!

After several moments on the shore, I slowly returned to the car, and eventually reached my destination. I was late for my appointment, but there are more important things than being on time! Though I can no longer remember the purpose of the appointment, I do remember well the experience on the lakeshore.

Returning Home...

A Native elder once told me that the land of our birth, if it truly was our home, will always draw us back because it has formed us; it has created us. I

return home not only to visit family; I go to be nourished by the land, the air and the sea. It is not only the land of our birth but similar landscapes as well, that draw us, calling us to experience our connectedness again.

Lack of "at-homeness" with the Earth

Our industrial and urban lifestyles do not easily facilitate an experience of being at home with the earth. Even persons living in rural areas have grown more distant

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from the earth. I have heard it said, perhaps somewhat facetiously, that one can measure a farmer's attachment to the land in reverse proportion to the size of the tractor.

Some of us have a dualistic relationship with the land. We live our "normal" lives and then escape to "be in nature" to become rejuvenated. With such a relationship we receive an incomplete and therefore romantic experience of nature. It lacks true intimacy which involves suffering, death and rebirth.

Could this lack of intimacy or feeling at home with the earth explain why we are destroying our home, the earth, with our rampant consumerism and greed? Each year, more than 20,000 species of life forms become extinct – species which are unique expressions of the creator as we humans are. Each day, 115 square miles of rainforest are destroyed, and 71 tons of topsoil lost to erosion.

Meanwhile, 841 million people continue to suffer from malnutrition and hunger. Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on climate change, a group of over 500 scientists from all over the world, warned us that we can no longer deny the scientific evidence that the earth is warming (global warming) and that we humans are responsible for this ecological crisis.

War with the Earth

Our indifference to the suffering of the earth and other life species can only be explained by our detachment from, and indifference to, the earth.



In our industrialized culture, we are at war with the earth.

This declaration of war became clear to me recently when I was reading a farm newspaper. I came upon an ad for a herbicide called Ultimax, produced by Dupont. It had a beautiful blue sky in

the background, and red barns far off in the distance. A field with 5 inch high corn was in the foreground. It was a beautiful pastoral view, except for one thing. In the center of the photo there was an *army tank* pulling a pesticide sprayer. The caption underneath the photo stated, "Just how badly do you want your weeds gone?"

In our assault on nature, we continue to find "solutions" to the problems of our industrial age by the same form of linear thinking which has brought us to where we are today. This thinking is so unlike the cyclic model that nature gives us.

As an example of this linear thinking, we have come to understand the beautiful white snow on our streets and roads as a "problem". We solve this problem by applying different chemicals and then we fail to see the environmental consequences of our solution as a problem. Biotech-

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nology, more pesticides, in vitro fertilization, nuclear power, drilling for more oil in the seas and national parks, wider highways are all promoted as solutions to other problems. Yet, if we have eyes that see, we have to see that we have come to a dead end.

Healing the Earth

The earth is in crisis, and many of our old ways of being and acting are simply not working. Our very survival as an earth community and human family depends on a drastic change of lifestyle which includes a different way of thinking, a different way of being with the earth. All of this needs to happen immediately.

The need for quick action is great but there is no need for despair. While there are many signs of the death resulting from our war on the earth, there are also many signs of the life-producing healing springing from the earth. The life force within Mother Earth cannot be suppressed easily and she continues to find ways to heal herself. Sometimes, we humans, a part of the earth, are also a part of the healing that is happening. The younger generation would seem much more aware of, and concerned about, this ecological crisis.

A number of people are becoming more concerned about climate change and are beginning to make changes in their lives. Recently, I was one of 1500 participants attending a weekend organic agricultural conference, in contrast with about 75 participants in the mid-1980s. Community gardens are springing up in abandoned lots. We are beginning to see more discussion of alternative energy forms such as wind and solar power. Obviously, the agri-chemical companies behind the

biotech industry are on the defensive with prospects of a decrease in their profits.

Ecological Movement in Religious Congregations

Many members of religious congregations are exercising leadership in the ecological movement as a whole, and leading it in the church. This is an expression of the earth's healing, a healing that every religious needs to join.

There is much about our life that can help us be nurturers and healers of the earth, rather than lieutenants of war upon it. In our commitment to a spiritual journey, we need to rediscover the earth as our home, especially that part of the earth on which we live. In our resting in the quiet presence of the creator, we can allow the physical/spiritual earth to form our spirit.

We are invited to discover the truth by allowing "the animals,... the birds of the air... the plants of the earth,... the fish of the sea" to teach us as Job 12 reminds us. We need to experience the natural and spiritual cycle of life, death and resurrection. Our spiritual journey is a coming home to the oneness of creation, the Holy One.

Hope and Humility

As religious, we are comfortable with the reality of mystery. We allow ourselves to be inspired by its call beyond ourselves. This can encourage us to have eyes that see the presence of the creator and the reality of the resurrection in the earth. We see this in the earth we walk on. We can see this in the food we eat. We can see ourselves, as part of the earth, as the presence of the Divine. Our seeing gives us hope.

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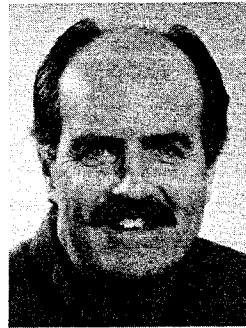
We are also called to humility. Humility is derived from the same Latin root, *humus*, meaning "earth" and "soil". The humility to which we are called is a felt experience that we are not separate from the earth, nor controllers, nor even stewards of it. Our humility can give us a greater sensitivity to the ecological sin in which we participate, seeking forgiveness, knowing that true forgiveness requires a conversion, a transformation of our behaviour.

Crossroads...

At this moment, our human community is at a crossroads. We are faced with real choices. We are being called to discover the earth as our home, our place of comfort, peace, nourishment and renewal, our source of truth and wisdom.

We are being called to discover the intimate relationship we have with each other and with

the entire universe. To the extent that our relationships are fractured and broken, we are being called to heal these. We are being called to dedicate ourselves as individuals and congregations to protect the earth from further destruction, particularly our specific role in this destruction through our lifestyles. Only by heeding this call and making a choice for the earth can we truly experience the sacred community that we are.



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Reflection

Reflection Questions

Suggested Scripture Passages: Job 12; Isaiah 51:1-3; Ps 19:1-6; Exodus 3:5; Isaiah 26:9; Psalm 104

1. How is my/our experience of the earth an experience of God?
 - ✓ How am I/are we being called to come home to the earth?
2. How am I/are we (personally and congregationally) contributing to the ecological crisis?
 - ✓ What changes do we need to make in order to live in harmony with the earth: in our lifestyle, in our communal life and community life, in our living out our consecrated life, in our spirituality?
3. How can religious communities be prophetic agents of change towards the healing of the earth?

Questions