

The Earth Charter/ Spirituality

Right Relationships

At our time in the Universe story, we are challenged by 'The Earth Charter' to renew right relationships with each other and all species of the Earth. The more we become connected to the earth which sustains and nourishes us physically, emotionally and spiritually, the more we become connected to the Divine and each other. Thomas Berry reminds us that we cannot have healthy people on a sick planet. We are challenged to change our focus from economic wealth to health and wholeness.

"By not accepting responsibility for the fate of the earth, there is a failure of religious responsibility to the divine

as well as the human. As we damage our outer world we degrade ourselves." Berry (1991:9)

Environmental Devastation

The Earth Charter reminds us that we stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when we must choose our future. Under the heading 'The Global Situation' it states, "The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and the massive extinction of species."

- 87% of our major water systems are ecologically dead
- deformities in all species have doubled in the last 20 years and are expected to double again in the next 20 years (Fox 1988:16)
- 25,000 people die each day from water related illnesses.(Serrill 1997)
- rainforests are being destroyed at the rate of an acre per minute
- 800,000 hectares of land in Australia, 20,000 farms are affected by salinity . (Bureau of Statistics)
- each year approximately 10,000 species disappear forever. (Berry 1988:36)
- 15 billion tonnes of Carbon Dioxide added to the atmosphere each year
- Thinning of the ozone layer



once there were Elephants ○○○○○○

Living in communion with:

The Earth Charter calls us to renew our relationship with the Earth, to live in communion with all of creation as the people did in early times. We need to listen and learn from our Indigenous brothers and sisters whose family included the rivers, mountains, earth, animals and all species. They had a sense of the divine as persuasive and revealed in the natural world. We need to listen again to the wisdom of the mountains, the voices of the wind, trees, rivers and animals and reclaim a sense of awe and wonder. Every moment of our lives something is being born in trees, in the earth, in hospitals, in the bush. There is so much diversity in creation, in the species, stars and galaxies, as well as fire and power in the oceans, earthquakes, volcanoes. We are called to experience new life, to wonder at the dance in the animals and to fall in love every moment of our lives.

- *“Every part of this earth is sacred to my people.....The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle are our brothers.”* Chief Seattle 1854
- *“Earth...is a sparkling blue and white pearl...laced with slowly swirling veils of white....like a pearl in a thick sea of black mystery.* Edgar Mitchell, astronaut.
- *“If one doesn’t love one part of this earth and every tree and blade of grass on it, how are you going to love the whole planet?”* Margaret Mead
- *“The Word is living being, Spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity. This work manifests itself in every creature.”* Hildegard of Bingen
- *“The earth she sick from mad mankind. Read the land. Listen to it – only then will you be free.”* Bill Niedije, Kakadu Man
- *“Christians in particular must realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards the Creator is an essential part of their life.”* John Paul II
- *“The world is the arena of divine disclosure.”* O’Murchu



The Earth Charter Principles:

- **RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE**
- **ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY**
- **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**
- **DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE**

Finding the Balance:

Principle 12 of the Earth Charter states: “ Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.” While young men are being sent to war to fight old men’s ideological battles, women as Chittister (1995:153) points out, comprise most of the world’s poor, most of the world’s starving, most of the world’s refugees, most of the world’s enslaved. Children and Indigenous groups would also be amongst the poorest. This Principle as well as many others calls us to recognise and develop the feminine in a healthy way within ourselves and our institutions. It calls us to use the language of ‘mother earth’ and nurturing, caring, living in communion with.

Where the masculine tends to be competitive, elitist and hierarchical, the feminine is participatory, circular, close to the earth and self healing. As Murphy (1997:133) states, “Social Analysts tell us that patriarchy is in its death throes, that we are entering a new era of evolution in which feminist (and Christ like) principles of co-operation, mutual empowerment, sharing and justice are coming to the fore.”

The mystic within us needs to be reawakened through art, music, dance and listening to the earth in the music of the rain, rivers, the breeze and the call of the insects, birds and all species. We need to balance our left brain, learning information and analyzing activities with right brain creativity, wonder and awe. Scientists are recognising that they have profound experiences of awe and reverence for the universe. The union of concerned Scientists in 1992, stated: “We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our Planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.”

Hope and Action for the Future:

One of the key needs of our time is in Education to bring awareness of our impact on the planet and the need to develop sustainable lifestyle. The Catholic Bishops’ Social Justice statement in 2002, ‘A New earth – The Environmental Challenge’, stated, “Catholic Parents, as the primary teachers of their children, can help them discover the wonders of nature. Catholic parishes, schools, dioceses and organisations have an essential role to play. They are challenged to be examples of best practice in ecological stewardship. “

Wayne Dyer suggests we get back to nature. “Wilderness is therapy. Give yourself time in the woods, trekking in the mountains, walking in fields or along the beach. Just being in nature is a way of letting go of wanting more. Dyer (1995 p54)



From little things, big things...

There are significant changes being made, including recycling, saving water, Clean up Australia and the World days, Landcare projects, Green Policies and Green Politics. As the Earth Charter states, “Our environment, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.” In the ‘Way Forward’ the Earth Charter calls on all of us, “Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.” Likewise the National Council of Churches in its Theological Statement, February 14th. 2005 issued the following invitation, “In Christ’s name and for Christ’s glory, we call out with broken yet hopeful hearts: join us in restoring God’s Earth – the greatest healing and moral assignment of our time.” The choice is ours. We can work together playfully and creatively to ensure a healthy planet for the future.

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