

Re-connecting with Sacred Earth

We come into being through the Earth. Simply put, we are Earthlings. The Earth is our origin, our nourishment, our educator, our healer, our fulfilment.

There is a great need for us a human species to re-connect with the sacredness of the Earth. In a very real way, the whole Universe is a sacrament of the Divine, and the world is our meeting place with God. How we came to lose the sense of the Earth as sacred, and a place charged with the glory of God is a long story.

The Earth is Sacred

With the emergence of self-awareness, our ancient ancestors gradually came to realise that the Earth was a place charged with Divine presence. In their rituals and traditions, they gave colourful expression to this realisation. They worshiped the Divine Feminine, deeply aware that without the blessing of Earth's fertility, life would not be sustainable.

Emergence of belief in a male deity

With the emergence of patriarchal societies some ten thousand years ago, there emerged at the same time a parallel religious belief in a male Deity. Through this alignment, the power structure of the Earth reflected the power structure of the heavenly court. The male God was seen to be in charge of everything, both in heaven and on earth, including the mighty powers of Nature in all of its manifestations. Humans came to believe that natural disasters were visited upon them by an angry God punishing them for their infidelities. Storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and deadly plagues were all experienced as evidence of Divine retribution.

Alienation from the Earth

Simultaneously, humans grew more fearful of the Divine and more mistrustful of Earth and its natural forces. Thomas Berry claimed that, when in 1347 the Black Death came to Europe from China, and in the space of five years wiped out twenty five million people, one third of the population of Europe, a crisis point in human-earth relations was reached. A profound alienation from the Earth began to manifest itself.

Christian theology fails to address our alienation from the Earth

This alienation was not helped by a Christian theology which preached that the Earth was a vale of tears and that humans were living in a temporary state of exile from their real home in heaven. Implicit in this doctrine was the belief that what happened to the Earth was of secondary importance compared to the all-important goal of heavenly salvation. The real deal was not how the heavens go but how one goes to heaven.

The role of the sciences

When the scientific advances of the seventeenth century placed at the disposal of humans powerful tools for controlling Nature, a sense of hubris gripped the minds and hearts of the elite of Europe. This hubris gave rise to a cultural and

philosophical movement called the Enlightenment. Humans began to believe that their destiny was now in their own hands, and that Nature could be punished for her past “offences”. Descartes, the soldier, philosopher scientist who facilitated the emergence of this new era, led the attack asserting that Nature would have to be “tortured” to force her to part with all of her secrets. The outcome of all of this was the Industrial Revolution with its promise of heaven here on Earth.

Failure of the Enlightenment project

The Enlightenment philosophy paved the way for three centuries of pillaging of Earth’s natural resources. Despite the significant advances made across many fields of scientific endeavour, there was little sign of the arrival of the Utopia that had been so optimistically promised by the prophets of the Enlightenment. The Utopian exuberance gradually evaporated. It was replaced by an existential angst arising out of the experiences of the twentieth century with its cascade of terrible wars, waged with fearsome weapons of war. Through it all, the industrial appetite for more and more resources grew and grew in the face of ever increasing demand.

We need to take stock

The notion that the Earth was sacred, and a manifestation of the Divine, was lost in the industrial stampede to produce more and more stuff. This is the point on evolutionary journey at which humanity has arrived. We find ourselves on a road that offers little promise of providing a pathway to any kind of sustainable future. We need to take stock, and see how we can plan to travel by a different road. A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

- We need to recover the sense of the Earth as a sacred place, as an awesome revelation of Divine creativity and beauty.
- We need to develop a spiritual practice that opens our hearts to the God of all Creation, to our precious Earth home and to each other. For God is in all and all is in God.
- We need to spend time with Nature, as Jesus did, in order to discover again its beauty, wonder and awe. In this way we will renew our love relationship with Mother Earth. As Thomas Berry has warned “We will never save what we do not love.”
- We need to familiarise ourselves with the dynamics of Earth itself as a living system, its natural control mechanisms, its self-healing processes, its limitations, its capacity to supply our reasonable needs. Ignorance of Mother Earth and how she functions will be no justification if and when a major crisis is visited upon us.
- As a species, we need to recognise the rights and needs of all of the other species that share the planet with us. Each species contributes in its own way to the overall wellbeing of the planet. The other species are essential to the health of the planet as a living system.
- We need to find a life style that is sustainable for the Earth as a community of life not just for humans

- At a personal level, all of us need find ways to walk more gently upon the Earth so that our combined footprint is such that Mother Earth is not in danger of being trampled to death.
- We need to find companions to walk with us on this journey towards a different way of being upon the Earth. This conversion to a new way of living must come from the ground up. It needs an upsurge from below rather than decrees from above.

Somewhere in all of this, the Jesus Story and the Universe story must rhyme. We need to explore this mysterious rhyme, and allows its cadences to possess our souls

We need to do all of this to honour the Divine Presence who has provided us with this wonderful Earth, and whose love-energy sustains despite our persistent short-sightedness and inability to see the bigger picture.