



# Eucalyptus rubida

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Some little insect has made this gum leaf the site for eggs to hatch somewhere down the line.

## “There is an integrity to Creation”

This quotation comes from Pope John Paul's Peace Day Message of Jan 1, 1990. It is an easy thing to say, but it is a little more difficult to interpret when you ask yourself just what is implied by 'Creation' and just what might constitute the meaning of the term 'integrity.'

The easy theological answer is that the integrity is due to the fact that God made everything. The more difficult interpretation is to look at the levels of significance that different life events and lifeforms exhibit from the level of the atom, to the level of mind. This study is called 'ontology', and this is a much talked about philosophical idea. It is important to distinguish between this and theology, and to respect the different modes of thought. They are both attempts to make sense of the world. Neither of them constitute reality itself. The study of evolutionary cosmology lends itself to a consideration of ontology, or how things relate to each other in significant ways; very similar I think in some ways to ecology. For example how radically different, if at all, is the manner in which a tree functions within its environment as compared to the way we function within our environment?

Firstly the tree: well both the tree and ourselves are much more than the complex machine that the Cartesian thinking would have us believe them to be. Typically a machine conjures up an idea of a complex but unchanging device that functions only because some kind of energy is fed into it, like winding up a spring or by adding some fuel. A tree could not be more different. We know that a tree grows from very small cells within the seed or perhaps by cuttings that reproduce vegetatively. The cells within a tree vary widely from tiny root hairs (that cumulatively might attain a length of hundreds of kilometers) to cells of the trunk and green cells in the leaves that do the photosynthetic thing, and 'skin' type cells that line the leaves and allow the entry and exit of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Some trees have clever defence mecha-

nisms such as the redwoods of America where trees on the edge of a forest can communicate by their root systems to trees deeper in the forest and warn them of an approaching fire. This allows them to prepare their foliage so as to better withstand the fire. There has long been a scientific tradition of 'vitalism' or 'organicism' which attributes a higher degree of sentience to life forms than a reductionist science would allow. This accords well with the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin who proposed a basic life force within all matter. It also underlies the metaphor of Gaia as it is attributed to Earth. This is the



notion that our planet has been formed over a long period of time, and that life and Earth have both evolved in a cooperative way. This supports the idea that this process is integral to all life forms including the human. At this time in our history we see the effects of human activity entering this evolutionary process in such a way as to alter its direction very significantly. Dare I mention climate change, nuclear and gene technology and space exploration.

Now the human is not above nature as we were taught to believe but we are instead a part of nature. The fact that we walk on and above the earth should not tempt us to believe that we are ontologically different in a radical way. Radically we are of Earth and our root system instead of being buried in the ground is instead the air we breathe and the foods we eat - in other words radically the same as for other forms of life - interdependent. We have

a bioregional context, whose immediacy cannot be denied. Our spirit life is mediated to us courtesy of the billions or more cells that have over eons of time worked in symbiotic alliances to further the complex mystery of life. We now reflect on and call this 'cosmogensis' or the evolution of life.

This integrity we are talking about is the foundation for a new ethics. The old ethic sees value in creation only in its benefits to the human species. This cannot be supported if we admit a deeper and more radical integrity to creation. So we must begin to talk about the rights of rivers and the rights of forests and so on. And this conversation has to be held from a new standpoint. This standpoint has to respect an ontological equality within the spectrum of life.

Dare I say we must not allow the theological concept of the human soul to keep us on a fictitious level of self-importance, well apart from a deep and mystical oneness at the cellular and atomic level with all that has and will live in the universe.

Earth, Creation, whatever, (words are unimportant) is worth living for and dying for. It is worth devoting our lives in mutual enhancement. It is worth our art and our poetry and most of all our love. This is not as some would say, idolatory. If, as theology says in *Gaudium et Spes*,\* "God dwells in the innermost depths of the human heart and awaits our discovery of him there," then we should not be surprised that this will be the way that some people will make divine sense of their lives. The human heart then, where 'God dwells' is the privileged metaphor for the authentic and mysterious source of love and attachment to that which moves and nurtures us. It is an inviolable and wild space at the centre of our deepest joy (c.f. Theios eros agathos = divine love - Dionysius). As we ponder our attachment to Creation we may feel the need to reclaim it in order to be true to ourselves.

Trevor Parton

\*Vatican II Document: The Church in the Modern world.