



Eucalyptus rubida

Newsletter of The Centre for Ecology & Spirituality,
183 Burns Rd. Glenburn, Victoria, Australia. 3717
Ph: 03 5797 8532 Email: centreecology@bigpond.com
www.edmundrice.org/glenburn

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The flower of the Leatherwood (honey) tree, South West Tasmania

We Have been Touched by the Universe

Over the past ten years here at Glenburn we have built up a remarkable community of teaching and learning folk - people who come regularly or who have come for our longer programs like the ten-week Sacred Earth course.

Situated on the margins of our urban life, and to some extent on the margins of conventional religion, remarkable people and groups have come to our little patch of forest on the banks of Katy's Creek to think deeply about our place in the scheme of things.

I think this is a microcosm of what is going on all over the world. The whole Earth is closing in on us as we are thrust ever more deeply into its cosmic ferment. This emotion has been signalled by various people over the past century - for me originally most significantly by the priest/paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and by the process philosopher/theologian Alfred North Whitehead.

Their thinking shook up the conventional religious community. Teilhard de Chardin for example highlighted an ancient concept that everything has a spiritual dimension - even the rocks he loved so much in his childhood.

with everything there is a within and a without

Alfred North Whitehead was prominent in a period of process theology that challenged the conventional orthodoxy of a primordial and unchanging personal godhead. He articulated for me the bigger, larger sacred presence beyond the level of the purely personal relationship.

The universe conspires to form each new creation.

This short quote is like a poetic description of quantum mechanics. David Bohm, one of the fathers of the quantum theory has a certain take on it

In some sense man is a microcosm of the universe; therefore what man is, is a clue to the universe. We are enfolded in the universe.

Bohm acknowledged his debt to the 15th Century German mystic St Nicholas of Cusa. Bohm's notions of complementarity, implicate and explicate order are pretty well lifted from the metaphysics of Nicholas' notions of God as the

enfolded order, and the world as the unfolding order:

"The infinite oneness is the enfolding of all things (complicatio). The world is unfolding (explicatio). God is enfolding in so far all things are in Him; He is unfolding in so far as He is in all things"

Strange if we should be surprised or even scandalised. Many cultural traditions have dealt with these dimensions of thought over millenia. So why are they re-appearing in century of a 'high' reli-



gious and technological culture? These are among the issues our teaching and learning community here at Glenburn have been faced with over the past ten years, and which I think have challenged the world community.

In our 21st Century I think people are reconstructing their way out of a period of quite destructive post modernism, where lots of our clay gods have hit the dust - sometimes throwing out the baby with the bath water. Time to rescue the baby! What is of the essence of life and living? What is to nourish us now in the way our earlier spirituality did? A lot of people are coming to another appreciation of what it means to be human i.e. a new identity.

Every experience of life has taken place in a sacred context - nothing ever profane. Always and at all times the world is unfolding out of the "infinite oneness" of Nicholas of Cusa: every new creation is a beautiful conspiracy of the universe according to Whitehead, and Teilhard de Chardin has handed us back a world charged with spirit.

The difficult intellectual environment of Plato, Cusa, Bohm and Whitehead offers us just a glimpse of what lies beyond language - a mystical holism that is beautiful and mysterious - able to be experienced, but never quite explained.

The quote from Ernesto Cardenal on page 2 of this newsletter gives some insight into what is meant by an ecological or cosmic identity.

We Have been Touched by the Universe is the title of this editorial. I don't know if the word *touched* gives quite the meaning I have been trying to convey. A short quote from an earlier poem might say more:

So what is justice now- just a word?

Or maybe it is a heart

*with hands to hold, lips to kiss with,
and eyes with which to weep.*

For when we hold (touch) we are also held;

when we kiss, our lips are also kissed,

and when we weep

it is the Universe watering

its secret beautiful garden.

The expanding evolving universe is crying out for its human element (us) for that response of a love which is beyond that expressed by the language of *stewardship* or even *caring*. Mary Oliver has the line:

There is only one question

How to love the earth?

Trevor Parton

Reading:

Alfred North Whitehead: *Science and Religion*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: *The Human Phenomenon*

David Bohm: *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*