



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

Newsletter No.43

Summer 2010/2011

This September we discovered dozens of Sturt Desert Peas in the Flinders Ranges

The Spiritual Dimension of Earth

Basically 'spirituality' is a word, a concept, to connote something or some state that lies behind the word. This is the same for all the metaphysical terms we use, including our most sacred terms to describe the Godhead. Meister Eckhart liked to distinguish between the words God and Godhead, deeming them to be quite different. As I understand him, the 'God' is the word we give to what cannot be described (Godhead).

There is a difficulty that accompanies any attempt to use language that tries to put meaning around the Godhead. The best we can do is to use language to connote God, and never to think we can use a name to denote God as we do when we use given names with each other. Having got this distinction made, and to return to spirituality, what are we to make of this term, which must also be a connotation. Questions might be asked like: to what extent is spirituality a cultural phenomenon, in the same way that religions in general are a cultural phenomenon, or a human invention?

Religions and spiritualities are not all alike, even though we use the same word to collectively describe them. Our monotheistic Abrahamic tradition believes that (our) God is the sole origin of the universe and source of our religion, even though Jewish, Muslim and Christian doctrines differ in detail. There has been a historic perception that other 'Gods' can be dismissed as 'idols' etc. Less intolerant views have been surfacing. There have been precedents in Vatican documents to suggest this softer view.*

Are there valid spiritualities other than a Christian or a Catholic spirituality? I think we have to agree that this is so. If spirituality is viewed as in some aspects independent of religion, then we can accept other peoples' spiritualities with respect. The cultural appearance of religion, and its accompanying spirituality, or the way we 'are in the world', might be seen as a common emergent quality in all cultures over the period when Homo sapiens (or even before) began to become the conscious expression of the emerging creation.

Can we speak of Catholic water, or Jewish water or Islamic water? This is not in the nature of water. Maybe it is also the nature of spirituality, that to denote it as pre-eminently Catholic or

Christian, without adequate understanding or use of language is a mismatch.

The spirituality that appeals to many is known as eco-spirituality. I believe this can sit side-by-side with other spiritualities. I believe that there is a transcendent kind of religion and its associated spiritualities that comes from a theistic tradition or cosmology. I believe that there is also a valid spirituality that derives from an earthed tradition, that we have often labelled (words again) as pagan or heathen. This tradition is being reclaimed again today, and many see it as a more earth-friendly and feminine-friendly way of 'being in the world.' Theophany in this tradition is not seen so much as a personalised transcendent deity but im-



manent, or inscendent to use a word coined by Thomas Berry. Both these spiritualities might be modified by our new knowledge of the cosmos. If you are looking for a label, it might be called a cosmic spirituality.

This might be a worry for our 'theistic' tradition, but I suggest that this need not be so. The rise of consciousness study pioneered in the last century by many including Teilhard de Chardin, to mention one we know well, suggests we are approaching a new way of seeing ourselves in the context of the emerging universe. After all we only discovered galaxies and the expanding universe in the 1920's, and this only a few decades after Darwin shattered our ideas of a stationary creation.

Teilhard called the coming era the 'noosphere', a term we tend not to use now, but his thinking has had something of a fulfilment in the

information revolution, and the instant access we now have to virtually all the wisdom of the ages. In Teilhard's thinking, spirituality, consciousness, and religion, might be seen as emergent qualities of earth. Emergent qualities appear as complexity increases. A recent Rubida article looked at the evolution of consciousness, and the discovery or analysis of the stages of consciousness that our species has passed through up to recent times. (see article in *Rubida No.41* on Jean Gebser)

The argument is that our religion comes from a period of predominantly Mythic Consciousness, and then as time has moved on there has been an increasing tendency for it (religion) to become subject to the scrutiny of the rational mind, with results that we see in our times a moving away from strong tribalism in religion to a thirst for religion and spirituality that answers a wider perception of the world.

This theory also states, and predicts, that in passing to a 'pluralist' phase, we might as a global culture expect an 'integral' stage that does not suffer from the worst of the tribal and rational mentalities that afflict much of modern religion. We have been warned to look out for evidence and expressions of this consciousness among our leaders and modern prophets.

Would it not be exciting to see such a consciousness emerging in our day. Might I even suggest that

in the context of a 13.7 billion year evolutionary universe, that Jesus, and others of two thousand years ago, a mere drop in time, were forerunners of this elevated consciousness, and we missed seeing it! The High Priest tore his clothes at the daring statements of Jesus when he declared himself one with the divine.

An integral spirituality might be expected to embrace all wisdoms, including eco-spirituality, in their temporal expression of the emergence of the 'logos' of 'God'. In an integral way of 'being in the world' there is room for many forms of religious expressions and spiritualities.

Trevor Parton

*See Lumen Gentium 16, Gaudium et Spes 92, Ad Gentes 18, Nostra Aetate 2.