

Creation

Nancy Adams, TSSF Study Week (JPIC)

Having agreed to write a discussion paper on 'Creation' I found myself reflecting on a selection of prayers, songs, poems, and philosophical thoughts of others. throughout the ages, about the integrity of creation.

They begin, of course, in the Thirteenth Century, with Francis' "Canticle of the Creatures". In September's issue of the Franciscan, which looks at the mutual harmony between science and religion, Hilary Pearson, TSSF, very eloquently discusses how this canticle is a basis for a spirituality of matter for today: "The Canticle expresses St Francis' approach to matter: He saw that all created things are interconnected and reflect God's love and goodness".

Then, in 1854, in these excerpts from a speech to the President of the United States which is attributed to Chief Seattle, we hear the same plea for respect of the earth, for the sanctity of life, and for the interconnectedness of the people and mother earth; the 'web of life':

"...Every part of this earth is sacred to our people...
I know the sap that courses through the trees as I know the blood that flows in my veins...
We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters...
The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst... The air is precious.
It shares its spirit with all the life it supports.
The wind that gave me my first breath also received my last sigh.
You must keep the land and air apart and sacred,
as a place where one can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow flowers. ...
This we know: The earth does not belong to us. We belong to the earth...
The earth is our mother. What befalls the earth befalls all the sons and daughters of the earth...
This we know: All things are connected like the blood that unites us.
We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
We love this earth as a new-born loves its mother's heartbeat. ...
Preserve the land and the air and the rivers for your children's children and love it as we have loved it."

With this speech, 150 years ago, the element of 'time' enters into the acknowledgement of our interconnectedness: "preserve the land and the air and the rivers for your children's children and love it as we have loved it". Is this one of the first pleas for something which has, in the 21st Century, become known as "sustainable development"?

The words of the Buddhist Prayer below echo the sentiments of both Francis and Chief Seattle:

"Let us pray that all living beings realise that they are all
brothers and sisters, all nourished from the same source of life.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

Let us plead with ourselves to live in a way which will not deprive other
living beings of air, water, food, shelter, or the chance to live.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life,
and of the sufferings that are going on around us,
let us pray for the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth."

Sustainable Development: the United Nations Conference on the Environment which met in 1990 in Rio de Janeiro raised the profile of this concept and offered it to the global community as a vision for the 21st century. Although there are many definitions for this concept the one I prefer is very simple, and it is put in

the context of working towards achieving a 'quality of life' for all, but acknowledging that it depends on:

The "Carrying capacity of the earth" and the "Caring capacity of humankind"

As Franciscans, we are bound by our Rule, to think, pray about, and act on these crucial issues of the integrity of creation, which is bound up inextricably with peace with justice for humanity. And it is imperative that we support it in the global context by acting locally. Michael Hare-Duke, in his paper on "Global Responsibility in the theology of Hans Kung," approaches this issue of responsibility from an inter-faith point of view of supporting a 'global ethic' which has been proposed by the Parliament of the World's Religions.

I support this, and all of the initiatives that he mentions in his paper, and would like to add another: the role education can play -- teaching children what it means to be a *Global Citizen*. A *Global Citizen*, in the context of Education for Citizenship has the following qualities:

- feels empathy with others;
- has a sense of identity and self-esteem;
- has an understanding of social justice;
- has an understanding of and respect for diversity;
- has an understanding of and commitment to sustainable development;
- has an understanding of peace and conflict, and wants to behave co-operatively and help resolve conflict;
- has the ability to think for themselves, ask questions, and give an opinion;
- has an understanding of globalisation and interdependence, and is actively committed to learning more about such issues;
- has a belief that people-- individuals -- CAN make a difference.

If we commit ourselves to teaching our children, and our children's children these qualities then we will be enabling the possibility of a future where the integrity of a creation secured for future generations might become a reality. This pledge is echoed in a passage written around the turn of the 20th Century by Kahlil Gibran:

Shall there come a day when man's teacher is nature,
And humanity is his book
And life his school?
Will that day be?

We know not,
But we feel the urgency that moves us
Ever upwards towards a spiritual progress,
And that progress is an understanding
Of the beauty of all creation
Through the kindness of ourselves and the
Dissemination of happiness through our love of that beauty.

and is echoed again in a hymn written just after the Second World War by Fred Kaan:

1) For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
Help us rise and pledge our word.

3) All that kills abundant living,
Let it from the earth be banned;
Pride of status, race or schooling,
Dogmas keeping man from man.
In our common quest for justice
May we hallow life's brief span.

2) Lead us, Father, into freedom,

4) You, creator-God, have written

From despair your world release;
That, redeemed from war and hatred,
Men may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
Fear will die and hope increase.

Your great name on all mankind
For our growing in your likeness
Bring the life of Christ to mind;
That by our response and service
Earth its destiny may find.