

Why Our Children Might Not Follow Us



WRITTEN BY Richard W. Scaine

Richard Scaine taught at Seton Hall University and Prep School (Theology, Astronomy, and Environmental Science) and New York Theological Seminary, from which he received a doctorate in 1977. He taught in the doctoral program at New York Theological for eighteen years, now retired. Dr. Scaine holds three master degrees: in Early Childhood Education, Psychology and Religion, and Theology. He received the Jungian Guild for Spiritual Guidance diploma in 1980 and is certified as an American Montessori Teacher. He was recently installed as a member of the pastoral team of the Inclusive Community in Nutley, N.J., a ministry he shares with his wife Mary.

Dick & Mary's email address is
mrscaine@comcast.net

It is evident from the assembled youth group at the Providence, Rhode Island **CORPUS** Conference that its members do not find spiritual energy and hope for the future in institutional forms of religion. Since the first step in prayer is not to beg for their return, but to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us through them, perhaps we had better begin to ask ourselves, "return to what?" After all, it is a **moral** question.

CHURCH REFORM

Each participant expressed an extraordinary appreciation for parental faith influence and would certainly turn to parental advice and support, but as yet, each has found the institutional Church somewhat disengaged from their areas of concern. Each acknowledged the social justice tradition taught in earlier religious training and especially embodied in parental encouragement.

abortion	election of bishops	right to Eucharist
boring liturgies	financial disclosure	rubrics on Sunday worship
celibacy	homosexuality	shortage of priests
contraception	loss of youth membership	voice of the laity
divorce and remarriage	patriarchy/clericalism	women's right to ordination

Michael Morwood, in his book, *From Sand to Solid Ground*, lists most of those issues about which the Church needs reform, namely,

The children of **CORPUS** members, all now young adults, recognized the Church's fixation on mostly sexual issues rather than broader social justice issues. Not one of the above issues was an area of intense focus. This does not mean they are unimportant. It **does** mean that we who seek their "return" are not hearing, as well as we should, what is needed for a new Christian vision of spirituality.

A NEW VISION

The basic elements of this new vision have already emerged. Our young people have picked up on most of them, even if not named. Insights from the following recently disparate areas are now beginning to coalesce and form a viable whole:

1. Twentieth century physics and astronomy, leading to a new cosmology,
2. Changes in traditional Christology,
3. Various aspects of feminist, ecological and liberation movements.

It is the contention of this paper that it is they, our children, who are inviting us into a new spiritual vision; it is no longer our responsibility to incline them toward an institution quite capable not only of sexual but also of spiritual abuse. Yes, certainly

Continued from page 6

Why Our Children Might Not Follow Us

there is within the sacred tradition of Christianity, and in our case, Catholicism, a **mystical** spirituality and a **prophetic** challenge. But, how well do we know it and how often do we hear it? When was the last time we articulated or heard from the pulpit or in religious education class the cry of a green earth from **Hildegard of Bingen** or a challenge to the imperialists in the dominant culture, bent on war, from the prophet Amos? Are these irrelevant? Youth don't think so. It's their future.

What about challenges to food distribution, child and elderly neglect, as well as population growth problems and clean energy and global warming, not to mention systemic racism and sexism. Aren't there moral issues involved here? Pope Benedict XVI, very recently in Loretto, Italy, insisted that "the planet risks irreversible decline from environmentally unsustainable development." But, if the institutional church is on the side of power and privilege from which its money comes for the most part, then we have a problem of credibility and our youth know it, and many of them are walking.

THE CHURCH WE WANT

The Church we want challenges the conventional wisdom of popularity and power and arises out of popular **experience** which is often the most profound expression of the desire for liberation because in it are concentrated the still imprecise but authentic formulations of human sufferings, hope, struggles, need for ritual and meaning of celebration. It is a reflection of faith from the **ground up** and its language is obviously very different from that of theological manuals and even the usual pastoral document. Youth speak a language far from treatises and manuals, but often close to the language of the

The Church is no longer the sole mediator to God, i.e., the one and only, as Pope Benedict has hinted it is. And, what is more, that creation is not static but evolving and the more it evolves the more we know both creation and God.

Gospel. It can be a colorful style, chock-full of lively comparisons borrowed from everyday observation. We ought to listen.

Much of our early religious training or formation focused on the opposite of what these young adults were saying to us. It advised us to abandon or **flee** the world in order to give ourselves more fully to God. Yet, our children, now adults, and others have reclaimed and enunciated a sense of God's abiding and creative presence in creation itself. The Church is no longer the **sole** mediator to God, i.e., the one and only, as Pope Benedict has hinted it is. And, what is more, that creation is not static but evolving and the more it evolves the more we know both creation and God.

EARTH AS SACRED

One area that young people are focusing on is the sacredness of the earth, and by extension, the entire cosmos. This brings us into the area of new discoveries of twentieth-century physics and astronomy, a "**New Story**" which is really an old story. A supernatural God "**out there**" apart from creation, has long plagued us. Such a God forces us to ask questionable questions and make unprovable assertions like:

Why does God permit evil, the killing of innocent children?

- Does God come down to help me and my team when we pray?
- What about the other team? They also prayed.

- God looks over me from above.
- My attendance at devotions heaps up merits for me in heaven.

IMMANENCE OF SPIRIT

Thomas Berry, Miriam Therese MacGillis, Brian Swimme, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Matthew Fox and others have indicated that a "capacity for Spirit and consciousness has been present from the very **beginning** of the physical emergence of the universe," about 14 billion years ago. Our human consciousness, still evolving, is the culmination of what has always been present.

This dovetails into Paul's description of God as the One "in whom we live move and have our being" (Acts 17:17-28). This is a God who is immanent in creation, the "ground of being" of Paul Tillich, the pantheism (God in all and all in God) of Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Marcus Borg, Sallie McFague, Matthew Fox and many others. This represents a shift away from an overhead, supernatural, transcendent overseer, separated from creation, to a creative, immanent evolutionary Spirit in creation, though not identical with creation. It is the Spirit of hope, active here and now (immanence) inviting us toward new possibilities in the future (transcendence).

Such Sacred Energy is **relational**, in that it connects everything together as it flows through the entire universe. It can be influenced by the activity of any

Continued from page 7

Why Our Children Might Not Follow Us

individual (co-creativity) yet transcends or is beyond; it is "more than" any one individual. This Spirit is "within" each of us or "among us" yet is nudging, luring us, the earth, the cosmos forward. When this lure, this invitation, this nudge of creativity is felt within the depths of our being, it is experienced as a **Divine presence**.

THE WORD "GOD"

Many scientists, many of our youth, and perhaps many of us have trouble with the word "God." Perhaps Jewish tradition had it right when it forbade a name for the ineffable. Although naming calls into existence, it also defines limits and allows **control**. But a name is not the reality; it is a sign. A reality has to be **experienced**, like beauty or love. Perhaps by using the name God, we are overlooking those many sacred experiences, which are profound and true and elicit that sense of awe which awakens the mystical but is not the God we know from our institutional upbringing.

If the God we name is embedded with patriarchy and punishment, with judgment and guilt, with rules and power, instead of **abundant** life, then perhaps we need to emphasize a different phrase, based on experience, like "sense of the sacred" or "experience of the divine." Then, eventually, the term "God" might once again take on the spiritual significance it deserves, without projection, as an invitation to new possibilities as a lure to the future instead of a reversion to the past and a dead-end for hope.

When Albert Einstein or Carl Sagan replied in the **negative** to the question, "Do you believe in God?", they were not denying their sense of the planetary or cosmic sacred. They were denying the

If the God we name is embedded with patriarchy and punishment, with judgment and guilt, with rules and power, instead of abundant life, then perhaps we need to emphasize a different phrase, based on experience, like "sense of the sacred" or "experience of the divine."

God of institutional projection, on whom all kinds of baggage and boundaries are placed. Perhaps Marcus Borg's question is in order here: "What kind of God is it that you don't believe in?" Often, the reply describes an overhead, judgmental God separate from creation. Sallie McFague in *Body of God; An Ecological Theology*, invites us to look on the earth and our own bodies with a new awe, a new appreciation of their sacred quality.

A NEW STORY

Because of the encrustations of time and culture, our questioning therefore involves the painful process of shedding baggage of centuries past. A "new story" has emerged, yet it is a very old one. It is the story of the universe itself, of which we are an **integral** part and in which, like our children are telling us, we must find an identity and join them in a "**this world**" pursuit instead of insisting on merits for an afterlife reward. The universe has been unfolding for millennia, even billions before we humans entered the scene. A recognition and respect for this evolutionary approach is called **Creation Spirituality**; it is indeed a "**New Universe Story**."

EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH

This evolutionary approach recognizes that the Spirit works through creation (Creator God), therefore in us, by enticement, tenderness and

persuasion, calling for a response. In this sense, we become co-creators with our Creative Source, who invites us **forward**. The **essence** of the Divine is to nudge creation forward.

A God "up there" who intervenes once in a while prompted Teilhard de Chardin to invite us to re-image God, not as determining events "from above" but as drawing creation toward the **Future**, from **within**. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner spoke of God as "the Absolute **Future**." Prominent Protestant theologians J. Moltmann and W. Pannenberg tell us that, in the biblical view with its emphasis on salvation history, the word of God means **Future**. The universe is celebrated, then, as an unfolding cosmic story. Evolution becomes the history of creativity. Our Creative Source is ever-creating as the evolutionary impulse in each of us, in the earth, in the entire cosmos. Therefore, when we "live, move, and have our being" in this Spirit, we become co-creators. It is in this sense that Martin Buber said, "We do not address God; we can only express God."

FROM EARTH MOTHER TO MALE WARRIOR SKY GOD

Yet, how did we ever get to worship a supreme **Male Warrior Sky God**, the God "up there"? What historical and cultural factors contributed to this patriarchal, projected figure who has caused such damage, especially to the **earth** and therefore, to the **feminine**?

Continued from page 8

Why Our Children Might Not Follow Us

THE GREAT MOTHER GODDESS

Indications are that humans across the world of Paleolithic times (40,000-10,000 B.C.E.) understood God to be a **Woman of Wondrous Fertility**. This Great Goddess was not thought to inhabit a supernatural world above. She embodied the earth, impregnating the whole creation with creative energy. She was worshiped as the **Great Mother**.

EARTH AS SACRED

The earth therefore, was a sacred place to be walked upon softly and was respected as the crucial link to the creative Source or Spirit that holds everything in being. The earth became the **primal** sacrament or revelation of all that divinity meant. Earth was conceived to be a unity, a whole which was alive because it brought forth life from its land and its water, i.e., from **within**.

EARTH AS A COMMODITY

For most of the human story, the entire creation, insofar as it was known, was perceived to be the body of the Great Mother Goddess. This expression, this openness and inclusiveness was seriously undermined by a change of consciousness during the **Agricultural Revolution** (10,000 or 8,000 B.C.E.). A profound shift took place in the how humans understood the meaning of the **land**, which up to this point was viewed as sacred. The land's ability to produce came to be seen as a bargaining tool, which led to a feeling not only of **power** but rights over the land. One could sell land and therefore accumulate wealth. Land became a **commodity** to be exploited and its spiritual significance was diminished. Various skills and techniques were developed to maximize

*The earth became the **primal** sacrament or revelation of all that divinity meant. Earth was conceived to be a unity, a whole which was alive because it brought forth life from its land and its water, i.e., from within.*

production. **Animals** were domesticated and may have been the initial factor in dividing the land into sections. Encroachers were punished and open warfare began.

FEMALE TO MALE DEITY

Whereas the old European belief system was grounded in the **agricultural** cycle of birth, death and rebirth embodied in the Mother Goddess, around **4500 B.C.E.** nomadic groups from Eastern Europe began searching for fertile lands for their **herds. They (Kurgans in particular)** highlighted the heroic Warrior Gods of the thunderous **sky. Weapons** were their dominant symbols.

With these developments came a gradual erosion of all that the Mother Goddess of wondrous fertility represented. Over time, even the religious focus centered on the supreme male deity. All that women symbolize became the greatest loser, with consequences that prevail to our own time.

EXPERIENCE OF GOD

How one relates to creation largely determines how one articulates the experience of God. A "divide and conquer" strategy toward nature encourages religious motivation which focuses on a supreme male sky (up there) divinity. A **hierarchical** structure is set up, with power invested in the king who represents the "supreme king" in the sky.

Note that England was interdicted by Pope Innocent II for advocating democracy according to the Magna Carta in 1215, rather than supporting "divine kingship." The Magna Carta with its democratic accent was declared by religious authorities to be against the **natural law**.

A supreme **Male Sky God** with its representative on earth creates an atmosphere of **subservience** among people; creative thinking becomes unacceptable and questioning becomes unpatriotic. Indifference set in, oversight is minimal, the environment is overlooked and, above all, **mysticism**, which sees all things in God and God in all things, is seen as wishful thinking. That face of God which is creative, nourishing and relational starts to fade. This God is violent and is used to defend war.

No **youth** wants to inherit this, no concerned **scientist** want to observe this, no mystic can see the Spirit in this, and certainly, no **prophet** can withstand its injustice.

Thank you Dan, Kirstin, Meaghan, Sarah and Sean. I hope we heard you well. It is we who have to continue to listen.

The **next paper** in our attempt to coordinate or synthesize a new spiritual vision that might provide hope for the future will focus on revisiting Jesus, examining some of the changes in recent Christology.