

# **EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION IN THE EARTH COMMUNITY**

Bob Bossie, SCJ for the Education Conference in Salamanca, Spain, 2008

Adveniat Regnum Tuum: to educate with an open heart

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many years ago, I had an experience of God at which time I realized that I was of God and that I was holy and lovable. And I also realized that everyone and everything else was of God, was lovable, holy and worthy of reference. Since then, I've slowly been growing in what this means and want to share it with you.

In order to make this more helpful, I want to introduce you to three elements of social justice which I have come to believe are essential in the work of education. The first element is God's call for us to be more conscious of our connection with the earth and all of creation. Second is our need to grow in compassion for those who are poor and the earth herself. The third element is that hunger, war and the destruction of our ecology are structural problems. However, before I go into those three elements, let me provide some background.

## **THE EARTH COMMUNITY**

This is our home, the earth. (Show the photo of the earth from space) A tiny planet in the spiral arm of the galaxy called the Milky Way, one of billions of such galaxies.

6-1/2 billion people are part of this earth; in less than 25 years there will be over 8 billion, according to estimates. Millions of other species are also part of this earth.

When we look at this picture, there are no evident boundaries. The earth and all of the earth's inhabitants are one, including all creatures large and small. The earth is one living organism of which we are part.

One person compared the earth to "a single cell in the universe, and we are not over or outside the cell, but in it. We will live or die as this single cell lives or dies, and we are united in the possibility of community and fulfillment within this life of this cell."<sup>1</sup>

The earth is part of the universe, God's extravagant, ongoing act of creation.

## **HUMAN IMPACT**

What has been the human impact on the earth community?

You know some of the facts. On this living organism we call home, 2 billion persons live on less than \$2 a day, 1 billion live, if that's an appropriate word, in abject misery without even the capacity to read a book or sign their name. Over 22 armed conflicts rage and the human community spent over \$1 Trillion on war last year, 50% of which was spent by the USA alone. Social commentators tell us that more and more wars are likely to be waged over food, water, fuel and other resources.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution in the 18th Century – of which Fr. Dehon had first hand experience -- humans have been altering the delicate balance within earth's ecosystem and driving more and more of our sisters and brothers into desperate poverty. In recent years, based upon neo-liberal economic policies, and using advances in communications and transportation, corporate-driven globalization has altered this delicate balance exponentially and further impoverished billions of persons.

The cumulative effect of this unbridled human industry has produced extreme changes: coastal flooding and depletion of the ice shelf, ozone depletion, climate change and loss of bio-diversity, soil depletion and polluted water air and food

This world-view is born out by 2500 scientists from around the world who comprise the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. After six years of study, they predict – if we continue on our present course -- an inevitable future of violent storms, devastating drought, increasing temperatures and rising sea levels. Yes, humans have always had an impact on the earth but not to this degree.<sup>2</sup>

Let me give you a very practical example. A few months ago, at the social justice Center where I minister in Chicago, I broke this cable (show the cable) which connects the DVD player to the TV. When I went to a large department store, Target, to replace it, I found cables ranging in price from \$6 to \$25. I bought the one for \$6 but on the way home I looked closely at this cable and was shocked.

First of all it was manufactured thousands of miles away from Chicago, in China. Second, it contained several separate pieces which all required special materials such as metals, plastics and dyes. These materials probably came from countries outside China, and each piece of the cable required separate manufacturing processes, including all the machinery and power that, that requires. Once this cable was assembled it was packaged and shipped, by container ship I assume, to the USA and transported by rail, to a truck to the store I visited in Chicago.

Perhaps I'm slow in coming to such conclusions, but at that instant I knew my purchase of this very *unique* item at such a *low* price was possible because both the earth's resources and the work of thousands of persons is taken for granted, undervalued, to satisfy my need. In just a few minutes, I realized that I am living off the backs of the poor and the poor earth.

## **THE BROKEN RELATIONSHIP**

What is the root cause of this broken relationship between the human community and the earth?

Well-known “ecologist” Wendell Berry instructs us that there is a broken connection, which bears catastrophic consequence, between our food, clothing and shelter -- as well as all the other goods we consume – and our appreciation for them. We are involved in a profound failure of imagination, Berry says. Neither money nor technology brings forth food. Food, as with everything else we need and want, comes from nature and from the work of people.<sup>3</sup>

A few months ago, I saw a documentary on the relationship between the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnum peoples. (Cro-Magnons are our immediate ancestors.) These two civilizations overlapped by several thousand years. The Neanderthals disappeared, it was suggested, by war between the two peoples, *never to be seen again*.

This reality reminded me of two things: one, the future of the human race is not guaranteed and two, and most importantly, God invites us to be part of his/her creation. It's our calling, and our choice, to create with God a beloved community living in harmony with all of creation. .

Today, there is a new urgency to find a better way. We must accept that our quest, for this harmonious earth community is not an option. We're on a short time line as the climate changes, populations grow, and resources such as food and water and fuel become more scarce.

Through the Internet, their lived experience and other sources, young people know these truths and the dangers of our continuing in the way we are going. They are hoping against hope to find another way.

## **TOWARD THE KIN-DOM OF GOD**

How can we, the young and more experienced, heal this broken relationship between ourselves and the earth, of which we are part?

I will try to answer this question by focusing upon the three elements I mentioned earlier which we desperately need to integrate into our educational programs if we are to provide some sense of hope. These elements are reflected in Father Dehon's life. He embarked on a renewed or deeper spirituality, felt an ever deeper compassion for those who are poor and focused upon changing the structures which produce so much harm.

**The First Element** is God's call for us to be more conscious of our connection with the earth and all of creation, what I call a “deep spirituality.”

As spirituality and psychology teach us, we go through various developmental stages of self-identification and relationship to the Divine. The initial state is ego development where we come to recognize our self as unique. The second stage is where we come to know ourselves as part of a community. And the third stage of self-identification is metaphysical, spiritual or mystical, wherein we come to know ourselves as more than what can be sensed or observed. We come to know ourselves, ... in community, ... as part of the Divine.<sup>4</sup>

Today, I believe, God is calling us to another stage of development: an ecological self-identification, where we recognize ourselves as part of the earth, our living home. This is a deep spirituality – not just an intellectual awareness -- in which we internalize the fact that we are part of God’s creation, and that we are united with all people and all creation, from the smallest subatomic particle and micro-organism to the largest Quasar in space.

Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara says it well: “Everything is sacred, each being, each energy of the universe. Sacred means the life of the universe and its evolution...there is nothing that is not sacred – this is not a word-play,” she say. “Sacred must become a concept larger than it was hitherto. Sacred is now not limited to space and time,” Gebara concludes.<sup>5</sup>

The wisdom of the American Indian tradition seems to summarize this stage of spiritual growth and self-identity. The Great Law of the Iroquois people compiled 1000 years ago says this: "In every deliberation we must consider the impact on the seventh generation...."<sup>6</sup>

More recent wisdom comes from Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper and Chief of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation. In his commencement address to the graduating class at Berkeley University in the US, he reminded his audience: “what you call resources, we call our relatives.”<sup>7</sup>

And on the wall of the meeting room at the 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice where I have ministered since 1980, we have this wisdom: “What will be the impact of our decisions here today on those who are poor and most vulnerable and the earth herself.”<sup>8</sup> We, in this conference, might ask ourselves the same question.

You might find it helpful to use this wisdom as the grounding philosophy of your educational institution and your classrooms. Or, as we did at 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center, you might want your students to create their own expression of this wisdom. In either case, you could put this wisdom on the wall of you classrooms, meeting rooms and prayer rooms.

**The Second Social Justice Element**, by which we can heal the broken relationship between ourselves and the earth, is our need to grow in compassion *for* those who are poor and the earth herself. As you might suspect, our growth in compassion will also deepen our spirituality?<sup>9</sup>

I’m sure you know that Compassion causes us to be moved by what we have seen of the suffering of the poor and marginalized -- children-of-the-earth. Ancient peoples spoke of the earth as their mother because it was from the earth that they were nourished. This is true for us today. Full compassion, full identification with those who are poor includes, by necessity, compassion for and identification with the earth. What causes harm to the earth has enormous impact on her poor children through flooding, destruction of habitats and so forth.

This compassion, this identification with suffering earth-children, is accomplished by exposure through first-hand experience and information. The more we are exposed to

their suffering, to the destruction of their home, our home, the earth, the deeper, more lasting and integrated does our compassion become.

Some academic institutions and agencies organize exposure trips to other countries but these trips can be conducted in our own cities and towns as well. For example, I visited a small school in Brazil years ago where the teacher, educated in Montessori and Paulo Freire methodology, took her class of young children around the neighborhood, looking at the conditions in which they live which included piles of refuse and garbage. After this trip, she brought them back to the classroom and had them draw images of what they had seen and to talk about it.

To deepen our compassion, it's also important to make friends among the poor and, yes, to make friends with the earth.

I'm reminded of my time living in a poor neighborhood in Chicago. I had received permission from my provincial to live alone in this neighborhood with the purpose of making my home among the poor. I was following the example of two bishops in Bolivia who decided to live among the poor to allow themselves to be converted by these same people.

In my new home, I started inviting this homeless man to stay with me from time to time. One night in talking with him, I had this sense that I had gone to heaven and God welcomed me and said thanks for all you did and tried to do. You are a good person, God said to me, but you won't be happy here because my home is filled with all those people who were poor and you don't have any friends among them.

Clearly, we Christians understand compassion as a virtue and an attribute of God,

As our compassion deepens, we become more involved both by providing direct assistance to those in need and by living a more simple lifestyle. In the early stages of self-development we heard the call of God to live a simple lifestyle so that the poor could have a more equitable access to what they needed. But in deep spirituality, our compassion encompasses the living relationship between the between the earth and her poorest children. Thus, simplicity of life leads us to reduce our consumption, repair and reuse what we already have and recycle resources for other uses.

As this point, I'm reminded of the wisdom of Father Ellacuria, one of the six Jesuits murdered, along with their housekeeper Elba and her daughter Celina, by the US-backed death squads in El Salvador in 1989. Father Ellacuria was the president of the university there. He said that we should no longer speak of the poor, middle class and the rich. Rather, we should speak of those who are miserable, poor and rich. He said that there should be no rich or miserable people. Everyone should be poor, using only what they need. When they killed him and the other Jesuits, they shot them in the head as a sign that it was their ideas, what they taught, that threatened the established order.

So, the question for educators is how can compassion become a more integral part of the educational experience, be that in the liberal arts or science?

**The Third Social Justice Element**, by which we can heal the relationship between ourselves and our home, the earth, is the awareness that poverty and the destruction of our ecosystem is a **structural problem**. This awareness is another step in growing into this deep, ecological state of being, what I call “deep spirituality?”

Poverty and the destruction of our home, the earth, is the direct result of political and economic policies. These, in turn, are reinforced by religious beliefs and, so called, security interests. Poverty and Eco-destruction are not accidents. They have been created. And we all involved in this – whether we like it or not -- as agents of the structure, as victims and as pawns.

This is social sin and it should lead us to feelings of indignation and anger. While anger might not seem to be a Christian emotion, it can be a response of love for the earth and those who are the primary agents of this oppression, if we use our anger to call the oppressor to conversion. The more we realize that it is a structural problem, the more we can direct our anger at the system, which exploits the earth and her children, and work to change the system.

Relief work, which normally flows from our compassion, is like curative medicine while social change is like preventive medicine. Nobel Peace Prize nominee Helder Camera, former Archbishop of Recife-Olinda, Brazil said that we should put 20% of our effort into relief work and 80% in changing the system.

There are several ways that we, and our educational institutions, can engage in changing the systems. You will notice that I am now referring to the systems indicated on you one of your charts.

First, is in the area of governance or our political life. We must work to promote a form of decision-making from the bottom up rather than from the privileged few at the top. And we need to do this in all our institutions but especially at the level of government. You might be interested in knowing that the form of management we use at the justice center where I minister is consensual. Since its foundation 34 years ago, the Center had not had a director. We make all of our decision together. Everyone is responsible for the life and ministry of the Center. Recently an indigenous Methodist Bishop from Bolivia, who was visiting the Center where I minister, emphasized the need to support emerging popular democracies, wherever they may be found.

The beautiful rendering of the Adam and Eve story we heard yesterday explains the underlying spirituality of this form of governance. You recall that Adam woke from sleep to find another person there in the garden. And this Eve was holy not because she was made from his rib but because she was the image of God.

The economy is another area of our common life in which we need to work for change. We need to promote fair trade, not free trade, so that resources and benefits will be distributed equitably, as my story about the DVD cable reminds us. Francis van der Hoff, a Dehonian priest working in Mexico, is a leader in the fair trade coffee movement. Do we use fair trade coffee in our institutions? If not, why not?

In regards to the economy, I would ask you to consider the suggestion made by Evo Morales, president of Bolivia to the VII indigenous forum of the United Nation: To save ourselves and the planet, he said, we must eradicate the capitalist model, and the North must pay its ecological debt to the world.

Third, this element of social justice calls us to join with others in promoting and developing local economies of scale, alternative transportation systems and fuels. Yesterday, on the train ride from Madrid to Salamanca, I was impressed by the number of energy-generating windmills we saw. In this moment of growing food shortages, the answer for alternative energy is clearly not in bio-fuels, which further exploit the earth and cause further hunger and starvation. Recently someone said, as long as food is treated as a commodity, we will have hungry people. Gandhi said with so many hungry people in the world, God could only come as bread. This says something about our celebration of the Eucharist.

Fourth, we must continually ask, what does security mean? Is true security not the well being of everyone and the earth our home, not just the well being of the privileged few? How is fear being used to foster larger armies, more wars and the domination of the many and the destruction of the earth? And what can our institutions and our educational programs do to change this around. And especially, what can we do to promote nonviolent alternatives of which we have a long history under the most brutal of regimes?

I'm reminded of the time I spent in Israel and Palestine as part of a peace team calling for a two state solution. As we walked through the old city of Jerusalem we saw armed Israeli soldiers on every corner. I realized that this was Jesus' experience with the Roman occupation, a time of incredible violence. Yet, he spoke of love of the enemy, not a passive love I might add. Nonviolence is his unique teaching.

Fifth, we educators and followers of Christ, must ask ourselves, how does our faith support or challenge these systems and what can we do to ensure that this is part of our lived faith. Loyola University in Chicago provides one example. Loyola has a three-year-old Masters of Arts program in Social Justice. Several members of the staff of 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center where I minister are graduates or current students of this program. They are learning in both a theoretical and practical manner how to put their faith into action to change structures.

## **TOOLS FOR EDUCATION**

I have provided for you three sheets as tools for education. The first sheet includes the statements of wisdom, which I mentioned earlier. You may want to use this sheet to help your institutions or classrooms create their own statement of wisdom.

Second, I have provided you with two charts, which I hope will help you develop this deep spirituality. The first is called the "The Two Feet of Social Action" and the second chart is a Systems Chart. The Two Feet of Social Action chart shows that it takes two feet to walk in the way of justice, peace and integrity of creation. One foot is charity or relief work, our initial response to our growing compassion for the poor and the earth. The

other foot, justice or social change, indicates our responses to the realization that compassion is not enough.

The second chart I provided is the chart of the social systems, which form the basis for our interaction with one another and with the earth. It's a tool to help us understand the structures, those habitual patterns of relationship which influence all of our lives and the earth herself. Four main questions summarize the text in this chart: In each of these systems, who decides? Who benefits? Who suffers? And, what values are being exhibited?

With regards to the first question, who benefits. This refers to who is at the table when decisions are made and who is left out. This is an appropriate question in our families, schools, churches, and government structures. It also reminds me of the words of now deceased peace activist Phil Berrigan who said that laws are made by the privileged, for the privileged to protect their privilege. And these same laws are violated by the privileged when it suits their privilege.

## **CLOSING**

In closing, let me remind you that I suggested three social justice elements which I believe are essential to the work of education. The first element is God's call for us to be more conscious of our connection with the earth and all of creation. Second is our need to grow in compassion for those who are poor and the earth herself. The third element is that hunger, war and destruction of our ecology are structural problems.

My question to you is this: how will you integrate these ideas into your institutions, your programs or your classrooms, be they liberal arts or science based. Certainly there are gifted persons here and in our institutions and among the broader educational community to help us find the way in this endeavor. There really is no option for us and for the young who come to our institutions.

As educators, we are called to play an enormous role in this transformation to a beloved community living in harmony with all creation, what has come to be called the Earth Community. The young come to us in our institutions torn between the realities of a bleak future and their high ideals that a better world is possible. They look to us, and our institutions, to help them find and create a better future.

If it is true, as I said in the beginning of my reflections here today, that God fills every element of creation -- *and I believe it is true* -- then we know that these are not just our efforts but they are the very life of God.

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Educating for Peace And Planetary Community at the Level of Our Deep Humanity <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/peaceed/docs/mische-deep-humanity.pdf>
2. World's scientists say climate change is much worse than they thought, Monday, January 29, 2007, Steve Connor <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/article2194298.ece> , IPCC Fourth Assessment Report

- <http://www.accc.gv.at/ipcc4AR.htm> , “The four stages of global warming denial”  
[http://www.treehugger.com/files/2006/06/4\\_stages\\_denial.php](http://www.treehugger.com/files/2006/06/4_stages_denial.php)
3. Wendell Berry, “In Distrust of Movements”  
<http://thegreenhorns.wordpress.com/essays/essay-in-distrust-of-movements-by-wendell-berry/>
  4. Patricia M. Mische, “Educating for Peace and Planetary Community at the Level of Our Deep Humanity”<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/PeaceEd/docs/mische-deep-humanity.pdf>
  5. Centerings, Spring 2008, <http://www.8thdaycenter.org/resources/centerings.html>
  6. This wisdom is attributed to the Great Law of the Iroquois which was developed over 1000 years ago.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven\\_generation\\_sustainability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_generation_sustainability)
  7. Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper and Chief of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. “Fall 2005 Commencement Address” at Berkeley University in the US  
[http://nature.berkeley.edu/site/news\\_item\\_detail.php?id=136](http://nature.berkeley.edu/site/news_item_detail.php?id=136)
  8. 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice learned this wisdom from, now deceased, Bishop Ken Utener who expected his diocese to begin every meeting with a similar question. He didn’t allow the conversations to drift to intellectual exercises about spiritual poverty but rather focused on real material poverty. It was his position that if we focused our efforts on the poor all else would fall in place. He said we were God’s stewards -- God’s money managers. If the earth and all its fullness was a gift from God -- it was also the gift we returned. It was a gift for which we are held accountable. Abundance was not ours -- regardless if we acquired it by hard work or circumstance-- but God’s
  9. Albert Nolan, “Four Stages of the Option for the Poor”  
<http://www.8thdaycenter.org/resources/publications/singlepage.pdf>
  10. Loyola University in Chicago has a three-year-old Masters of Arts program in Social Justice. [http://www.luc.edu/ips/academics\\_certs.shtml#3](http://www.luc.edu/ips/academics_certs.shtml#3)

## **OTHER SOURCES**

1. “Gandhi, Gandhism and the Gandhians,” essays by Thomas Weber. New Delhi, Roli Books, 2006, xxii, p. 362 p. <http://www.vedicbooks.net/gandhi-gandhism-and-the-gandhians-p-1707.html>
2. Millennium Development Goals <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
3. Toward a Spirituality of Justice  
<http://www.8thdaycenter.org/resources/publications.html>