

Jesuit Forum **OPEN SPACE**

...Engaging the signs of the times...

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Finally, it's a wisdom problem

There are moments in human history when deep change seems not only necessary but also inevitable.

Sometimes people experience such moments as a kind of springtime: an unfolding, an opening, a rush of growth, unprecedented opportunity. Sometimes these fateful moments face us as a collapse—or a threatened collapse—of the pillars of the known world: a grinding together of an impatient planet's hidden tectonic plates, a rending of the surface as terrible as the recent Haitian earthquake.

In our lifetime, it seems that the whole human race is being driven, lured, invited or pressed into one voracious global economic system, which steamrolls away many modes of diversity.



Exciting though that prospect can be from the point of view of a growing human unity, the machine that currently drives globalization has truly fearsome aspects. Many prophetic voices are warning that our economic machine is at war with nature, and that we, urgently, need to learn to live in peace within nature, its biodiversity, and its limits.

And a more ancient warning is also heard in this globalizing moment: our economic machine is widening the chasm between rich and poor. Unless we bridge that gap, there will be no healing for us on any level.

“The awareness of being connected to all of nature is particularly strong in ecology. Connectedness, relationship, and interdependence are fundamental concepts of ecology, and connectedness, relationship and belonging are also the essence of spiritual experience.

Thus, ecology seems to be the ideal bridge between science and spirituality. Indeed, Hathaway and Boff advocate an “ecological spirituality” concerned primarily with the future of the planet Earth and of humanity as a whole.”

*Fritjof Capra
from the Foreword to
The Tao of Liberation*

Capra is a physicist, systems theorist and author and founding director of the Centre for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California.



There are different (and differently useful) ways of responding to the sense that we live in a *kairos*, a time of reckoning.

Recently I participated in two excellent conferences in Ottawa. The first was organized by the Halifax Initiative, a coalition of social justice NGOs. They were asking: **“What’s missing in the response to the global financial crisis?”** The second conference was sponsored by the Canadian International Council (CIC) on **“The World in 2015: Implications for Canada.”**

Bold analytical theories, institutional projections and reflections abounded, as well as calls for fundamental changes in our economic and political structures in order to engage China and Asia effectively in the future. The need for “new eyes” and new paradigms was recognized.

But I noticed little awareness of the crippling lack of trust, community and social consciousness in our individualistic Western culture. And without community and communal consciousness, there is little nourishment for achieving the profound transformation of minds, hearts and structures which this hour in history demands.

In recent years, serious thinkers have increasingly been emphasizing the need to enhance social consciousness in the world—indeed, to achieve a global transformation of consciousness. Let me tell you about two recent books which approach this issue, each in its own way. I’ll try to give the gist of their authors’ thought, mostly in their own words.



First there is Jeremy Rifkin in his **Empathetic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World of Crisis**. He sees the global drama as a struggle between empathy and entropy, between the surges of empathy that have accompanied great transformations in consciousness, and the steady increase in the consumption of energy as civilizations developed.

He does not look to either faith or rational philosophy for a solution in this struggle; he finds them too preoccupied with mind and spirit, to



The Earth Charter: it requires a change of heart and mind

As never before in history common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally and globally.

Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision.

We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

The Earth Charter was created by an independent commission convened as a follow-up to the 1992 Earth Summit. For more information:
www.earthcharter.org

the detriment of interest in the concrete experience of the human body. He will take whatever help faith or reason may offer, but he puts his hope in empathy.

A predisposition for empathy, embedded in our biology, is presently exploding into our social consciousness through rapid developments in global communications systems. Rifkin considers this upsurge of empathy as a kind of fuel for a potential increase in solidarity and community among people, making possible what he calls an empathetic civilization.



David Korten, in **The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community**, takes a more cultural approach to the challenge of global solidarity. His thought is very much in line with that of the Earth Charter (see side-bar).

Korten's work contrasts, as he puts it, "the stories and deep assumptions underlying the values and relationships of Empire [our present capitalist system] that legitimate a hierarchy of domination and wealth concentration on the one hand, and on the other hand, Earth Community: networks of partnership, sharing, and mutual learning. [He] draws on the deeper insights of both science and religion to make the case that learning and partnership are integral not only to life, but as well to the whole of Creation."

For Korten, world religions in general and Christian churches in particular have a natural role in facilitating inter-racial exchange and dialogue, an essential aspect of awakening and deepening social and cultural consciousness. The story of God is integral to our changing human story, nourishing in us the great dreams that provide an ever-widening horizon in our waking lives.

walking Wisdom

A third new book on which I will dwell longer is **The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation**. It has two authors: Mark Hathaway, an adept in transformative education and research, and Leonardo Boff, a liberation theologian from Brazil. Their book is a wide-ranging search for liberating wisdom that can lead us toward an Earth Community, toward healing of our world so torn by the rich-poor chasm and by ecological crisis.

Hathaway and Boff (both Catholic Christians) use thematically the ancient Chinese word "Tao". For them Tao evokes "walking wisdom" – expressing not only deep integrated human understanding, but also the wisdom that is already at work in the natural evolution of our universe, to which we must listen more carefully.

The early chapters deal with the obstacles and openings for transformation found in recent developments in cosmology, evolution, ecology, economics and psychology. Their findings are largely consonant with those of Rifkin and Korten but they include insights from Asian religions and cultures that temper an overly western bias.

Here, in limited space, I will reflect only on their final two chapters, highlighting (in their own words) a few of their more important insights into Christian spirituality as it helps us integrate our various types of intelligence - rational, emotional and spiritual—into an integrated wisdom.

The authors call for a reinvention of ourselves as human—nothing less than a spiritual awakening and revolution. If we look to our origins, evolution, destiny and purpose we can contemplatively encounter God as the Source of all. The human psyche is desire that knows no limits. We are fully satisfied only with all and the All.

Spirituality has often been presented as a looking inward to cultivate the Spirit or to experience God within one's own soul. But what if spirituality is explored holistically as our way of being a person in the context of all creation? We are created, embodied persons. Spirit (or soul) and body are not so distinct and separated as we have sometimes imagined.

Here we are not talking about a received definition of God but rather the God of our personal journey - the ultimate source of value and of the sacred dimension within us. As Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." This awareness is a lived experience rather than a concept or doctrine.



The experience is that we are linked and relinked [the meaning of the word religion] to each other, and all of us to the originating Source.

"A thread of energy, life and meaning passes through all beings, making them a cosmos instead of chaos, a symphony instead of a cacophony."

Experience of God is not always linked to religion. However, over 80% of humankind is associated with religion in one form or another. It is the task of religion to provide the conditions necessary to allow each person and each community to dive into the divine reality and attain a

"Now is the time to recognize that we are living - and indeed, that many peoples have lived for centuries - without respecting the basic laws of life, including the laws of balance and of self-limitation.

We have forgotten the ancient wisdom that taught us that we do not command nature, but rather are totally dependent on nature's bounty and goodwill."

Mark Hathaway &
Leonardo Boff
The Tao of Liberation

personal experience of God. God is not distant. God is immanent to all being. In faith we know what St Paul told the Athenians, echoing the intuition of their own ancient poets: "In God we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17: 28)

From the perspective of cosmology we might well name God "Energy" – at once supreme, conscious, organizing, sustaining, living – the most mysterious of all realities.



**Science is organized knowledge.
Wisdom is organized life.**

Immanuel Kant



We are made wise, not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.

George Bernard Shaw



The beginning of wisdom is found in doubting; by doubting we come to the question, and by seeking we may come upon the truth.

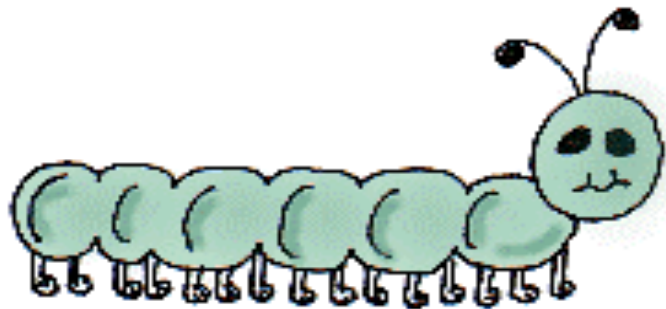
Pierre Abelard

Through revelation we know God as love - as Trinity - Father, Son and Spirit - whose whole reality is relationship. As we are now discovering through science and personal experience, all creation is a web of dynamic relationships. And we can embrace and experience God in all creatures.

These are some of the important elements the authors highlight in Christian spirituality. They also point to comparable elements in the "wisdom schools" of other religions.

The integration of spiritual intelligence with other forms of intelligence [cognitive, emotional, etc] opens us to living communion with all things in an atmosphere of respect and reverence for other beings. St. Francis of Assisi embodied this integration.

Meister Eckhart, a Dominican theologian and mystic born in the 13th century, wrote:



"Every creature is full of God, and is a book about God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature."

And yet we are not pantheists - we know we are not God!

It is these spiritual insights that give us the freedom to transcend our present worldview – to escape our "monoculture" (to use Vandana Shiva's expression) and discover a way of transformation. Absurd conventions – such as the idea that unbridled greed, competition and pursuit of self-interest result in the well-being of all – lose their grip on us.

Recent recession deepened poverty in Canada

A report released May 2010 shows that Canada suffered steep job losses throughout the 2008-2009 recession.

Those who were economically vulnerable before it began suffered disproportionately from its effects.

Those in very low-waged jobs, those with the lowest levels of education, recent immigrants and off-reserve Aboriginals were all more likely to lose their jobs.

Over 150,000 families were looking for new work, on Employment Insurance or forced to turn to social assistance.

Without a poverty elimination strategy, it is clear that more people will be impoverished. See “**Bearing the Brunt: How the 2008-2009 Recession Created Poverty for Canadian Families**” at www.cpj.ca.

Add your name to the growing petition urging the federal government to adopt a national strategy for the elimination of poverty in Canada.

Sign on to the Dignity For All Campaign: www.dignityforall.ca.

The breakthrough solutions to present crises are to be found not primarily in technology but in “wisdom politics”—in the free creative thinking and action of people enlightened and motivated by something deeper than greed, fear or narrow reason alone.



In his foreword to **The Tao of Liberation**, Fritjof Capra, physicist, systems theorist and author, suggests that ecology seems to be the ideal bridge between science and spirituality because both emphasize connectedness, relationship and interdependence as fundamental concepts. We are interwoven with each other and with the whole web of life by the One whose loom holds all of creation.

That is why the option for poor and the option for earth are inseparable in a new, compelling conception of sustainability as liberation.

In this “Tao” or wisdom perspective, knowledge is not seen as power to control but as power to love. On the way to wisdom, perception takes precedence over conceptualization and attentive contemplation is more important than analysis. This kind of holistic, intuitive apprehension has been downplayed, or even lost, in a scientific rationality based on reductionism.

Stripped-down, Cartesian reductionism, in its generations of dominance, gave us powerful technologies and brilliant formulas into which we tried to squeeze the awesome reality that surrounds us. But it made us—at best—one-eyed and one-dimensional. Now a new *kairos* is upon us, with much wider imperatives.

This time of crisis threatens us, but it also invites us. Let us ponder and pray that a transformation of consciousness will indeed come in our time—and that it will prove to be a true receptivity to the boundless God Who holds everything in the embrace of love.

Bill Ryan sj



Information – even accurate information does not guarantee follow-up action when institutions garble it and people really do not want to hear or know it.

Wisdom drives out fear, freeing people by widening their horizon, giving them new eyes to see a bigger and more friendly world.

Specialized knowledge does not nourish social imagination, desire or community.

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Bolivia and led by indigenous people, is an inspiring sign of hope.

We're part of a living, evolving cosmos. We need dialogue on ancient wisdoms and very modern wisdom.

The Copenhagen climate summit failed because poor countries did not trust the rich countries and were wary of their proposed financial fixes.

The social media revolution has made possible some positive signs of the times: the global Jubilee movement and several global actions, such as the unprecedented world-wide protest against the Iraq invasion.

People become skeptical about democracy when they lose trust in their neighbours and political representatives who speak only the politically correct thing in public.

Blessed unrest or patient impatience are children of wisdom, which sees the larger picture and where the energy really lies.

The ecology movement is helping science and religion find significant common ground.

These are some of the ideas that bubbled forth during an afternoon session at the Jesuit Forum in May.

The gathering included Mark Hathaway and the sharing was inspired by his book (co-authored with Leonardo Boff), *The Tao of Liberation*.

With thanks to all the participants.



Robin Hood Tax

A tiny tax on financial trades could raise \$650 billion a year to fight climate change and poverty both at home and abroad.

The tax would enable governments to honour their promises to finance climate change adaptation in developing countries and to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

The fact that Canadian banks emerged relatively unscathed from the financial crisis does not absolve us from our global responsibilities.

This tax would also help curb speculation, one of the causes of turbulence on the global financial markets.

For more information and to take action, please see:
www.kairoscanada.org/en/ecojustice/climate-change/robinhoodtax/

Addicted to oil at our peril!

The gigantic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is horrific in its scope. And the oil is still flowing into the mysterious sea world and now onto the beautiful beaches all around. Our faith in technology to fix such problems has withered. Still the oil flows.

“Inky darkness, icy temperatures and, most of all, crushing pressures conspire to make deep exploration daunting if not impossible. That is why scientists estimate that humans have glimpsed perhaps only a millionth of what is down there to see.

“That also helps to explain why a runaway oil well on the seabed in the Gulf of Mexico is a massive calamity, with crews struggling to stop the crushing crude. It is the brutal nature of the abyss.” William J. Broad, New York Times, May 30 (see links below).

As we witness the daily unfolding of this tragedy in the media, our thoughts turn to our own oil quest in the Alberta tar sands. Apart from the daunting use of water and natural gas and the loss of enormous tracts of boreal forest, Canada is now one of the biggest and growing producers of carbon dioxide in the world. Our emissions cause tragic consequences for people in the Global South. Never mind Rio, never mind Kyoto, never mind Copenhagen, never mind Cochabamba...



Canada's dirty oil: Breaking Our Addiction

A new DVD from the Dirty Oil Sands network, an international collaboration of citizen and indigenous groups, makes the case that Canada's oil sands are too dangerous, too dirty, and too expensive.

Highlighting the local and global impacts of oil sands extraction, **Breaking Our Addiction** also makes the case that dirty oil sands crude vs Middle Eastern oil is a false choice. In our 21st century economy, a clean transportation future awaits if we choose to make it happen (see link below).

www.nytimes.com/2010/05/30/weekinreview/30rosenthal.html
www.nytimes.com/2010/05/30/weekinreview/30broad.html?ref=weekinreview
www.oilsandswatch.org www.dirtyoilsands.org

Further reading: **Crude World: The Twilight of Oil** by Peter Maass, a contributing writer to the New York Times Magazine.



Nature: an intertwined set of relationships

*An excerpt from The Tao of Liberation
by Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff*

Ecology...has become the context in which we must consider all human problems. In the ecological vision, nature is no longer seen as something given, like some kind of primordial piece of data that encompasses all the immense variety of phenomena. Rather, nature is seen as an open system, an intertwined set of relationships, or as an intricate fabric of energies in constant movement which passes from chaos to ever-more complex depths of order.

More precisely, matter exists only tendentially: that which exists, according to the theory of relativity and quantum physics, is a universe of energy. A certain kind of crystallization of energies in equilibrium appears as matter. Another, extremely complex form arises as consciousness and spirit. But all of these are immersed in a dynamic, diverse and unified whole.

In this understanding of nature, the fundamental law is that of relationship. Nothing exists outside its relationship to other entities. Everything relates to everything else at all points and at every moment. From this perspective, then, we do not worry about threatened species in isolation, but rather in the context of their relationship with the regional ecosystem, with the biosphere, with the planet, and ultimately, with the entire cosmos of which we are a part.

Because of this, we should not compartmentalize knowledge into isolated disciplines. It is important to develop an understanding of the transversality (interconnected or cross-disciplinary nature) of knowledge, perceiving how one contribution relates to another – complementing it, correcting it, and forming all into a great synthesis. In this process, we must take care that we do not only pay attention to contributions that come from our own cosmology, worldview, religion or culture. All the contributions of other cultural and spiritual traditions must come into play: those from ancestral knowledge, those from popular culture, and those from the beliefs and dreams of each people. Each of these represents a window giving us access to diverse and complementary dimensions of nature.

We must listen and learn...listen and learn...

Therefore, it is imperative that we listen. We must listen to our inner selves, listen to our genetic code, listen to the deepest pulses of our desire. We must listen to the messages that come to us through each and every thing, besides being things, they are also bearers of significance and doors to new insights. We must listen to the voice of each people and each person, as well as the voice of each and every spiritual tradition. And we must learn from these voices. From this process of listening and learning, a universal symphony will be born. Indeed, the very existence of dissonance and chaos calls us to create a symphony that must be nourished and safeguarded.

**After reading this, you might want to read the book!
Published by Orbis Books, you can find more information at
www.taofliberation.com.**

Still in Denial



Patricia Storms

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