

We need meaningful mysticism

Diarmuid O'Murchu | Dec. 15, 2010 Eco Catholic

We are severely damaged by the absence of meaningful mysticism. I believe that only such deep spirituality can



give us the wisdom, courage, heart and

great souls needed to confront and turn

around the government, religions and business institutions that work together now to destroy our world. How else do we engender hope and vitality in the face of these destructive forces?

The human spirit was never meant to live with so much fear and helplessness. So mysticism ? the idea that we can directly access the divine in our human experience, in our everyday living ? haunts our imagination. I would define meaningful mysticism or spirituality as a capacity for mystery, together with a longing for the infinite.

This mysticism is not elitist or esoteric. It happens in real ways, grounded in real life. Whenever the values of the Gospel are lived out in real ways, that?s mysticism. Denuded of our capacity for mystery and the infinite, we atrophy, shrivel and end up turning to all sorts of compensations to feed our deep desires, creating a culture awash in consumerism and addictions. Mysticism is an enduring resource that delivers liberating hope and creative possibility.

This meaningful mysticism is directly connected to the story science is telling us about how the universe evolved and how we humans emerged from it.

There?s a cosmic dimension to our lives, elegantly illustrated in the fact that stardust is essential to our existence and all sources of our nourishment ultimately belong to light from a nearby star.

Our own existence derives from an amazingly creative story of some 6 million years, yet our human origins and history for hundreds of thousands of years are often dismissed by academics as primitive and barbaric.

Without this wider point of view, there is a tendency in religion to alienate people from the planetary and cosmic web of life. The dualism of sacred versus secular truncates nature?s invitation to live in a convivial, cooperative relationship with the Earth and its living systems. The experience of being human in an integrated planetary and cosmic way is largely unknown to people of our time.

Healthy efforts are underway to re-imagine these Earth-human relationships in, for example, the bioregional movement.

Meaningful mysticism seeks the sacred in the ordinary, not in the extraordinary, salvation in the goodness of the

now, not in the ultimate triumph of a hereafter. It takes incarnation seriously, thereby inviting further commitment to and engagement with the transformation God desires for all embodied life from cosmos to individuals. The deeper we reach into creation itself the more we encounter that which we yearn for transcendently.

We come to realize God is not so much a ruler from on high as a catalyst who reveals meaning from within the creation. The great Mystery is illuminated particularly through the paradoxes in life that often baffle and confuse us.

I recently heard Green activist Paul Hawken describe the present convergence of the environment and social justice movements as the largest social movement in history, comprising over one million organizations in every country in the world. He documents the efforts of these groups. In the church I notice that 60 percent of all theologians are now lay people. This lay generation is solidly grounded in environmental and human rights.

There is a worldwide ferment that generates hope, and it's found among elders mostly. The young can't afford to pay attention in a very competitive society. Elders need to carry the responsibility.

Today we are inundated with information while knowledge has become the province of academia, but that knowledge tends to be dry, heady and often not very useful. We need wisdom, not just information and knowledge.

How do we learn to live wisely? A key formulation of wise living can be found in the Green adage to think globally, then act locally. That keeps us grounded in the real while our ideal side as creatures of the cosmos, as planetary dwellers, is satisfied as well. There are places around the world where people are coming together to find ways to live wisely. I teach every year at the Sophia Center in Oakland, Calif., which is one such place, but there are many others.

I like this quote from Margaret Wheatley: "It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships and how well we know and trust one another."

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