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The sacred act of keeping house

Donna Schaper | Jul. 30, 2013 Eco Catholic

A lot of people don?t like to keep house. We dislike dusting and sweeping. We disdain the cleaning of the toilet areas. We don?t like taking out the garbage or filling up the bird feeders.

Errands can drive us crazy, as can the maintenance of our ?home page,? or the memorization of our passwords. I used to tell my three kids (two boys and a girl) that only boys could vacuum, and for several good years, they actually believed me. It was my best ?sex education? venture of all.

I often wonder if this ?above-it-all? attitude about keeping house is at the base of our environmental crisis.

Aren?t houses supposed to take care of themselves? Aren?t planets supposed to renew, automatically, without a password protection system in place? Could it be that our garbage and our feces, our ?throwaways,? are actually important to place and space and grace?

Turns out that they are, and we didn?t need to put on an apron to find out. We just had to go home and realize we forgot to buy toilet paper again. We can either be irritated about what we forgot or put remembering at the front of our vision. We can make maintenance a part of creativity or live above it all.

The Benedictines understood this first. They made washing the dishes a sacred and complete act in itself. The dishes weren?t ?cleared? in order to make way for something more important. The dishes were cleared.

Hazen Henderson, a Canadian economist, wrote about ?whole cost accounting [1].? She argued that it is not just product and purchaser that make a transaction but all that the product took in energy and labor, for the long haul, and also the purchaser?s final disposal of that product and what it cost. Batteries and landfills come to mind. So does Monsanto, acting with such disregard for accountability wholly costed, in saying seeds should not be saved but reinvented for each hybridized crop.

British literary critic Terry Eagleton joins Henderson and the Benedictines when he says [2] of the U.S., ?The good news about the citizens of this kindly, violent, bigoted, generous-spirited nation is that if ever the planet is plunged into nuclear war, they will be the first to crawl over the edge of the crater, dust themselves down, and proceed to build a new world. The bad news is that they will have started the war.?

If you wanted to do one small thing for the planet, which would be parabolic and David-like to the Goliath of growth, you could consider learning to love keeping house. Or just love the word ?keeping,? which is a real beauty.

It is as good as the overweight words of ?imagining? or ?visioning ?or ?transforming.? It is as slender a verb as there is. It has a past, a present, a future.

It has a moment and allows for a certain elegance to the morning?s waste disposal activities. It might even save the planet?s occupants from themselves.

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[1] http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/tools/fca/questions.htm
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