

SACREDNESS OF CREATION

"To be human is to be passionately committed to something that grasps and transforms us." ¹ Charles Birch

by Anne Bonnefin

I remember a time when I was fourteen walking down the steps of our church at Drummoyne with my grandpa. As I knew him, Eric Haworth was a very softly spoken, gentle man. He worked in the printing industry and was one of those people who would rather show that he was a disciple of Christ than tell you. Yet what he shared in the time it took to walk down those short set of steps has been a guide in my life ever since.

As he spoke that day he painted a picture for me with his words and his arms. It was as if he was drawing a rainbow with his hands. "There is the physical and emotion...the mind, the intellect, the body and then overarching them all is the spiritual." He went on... "The spiritual realm infuses everything" .. "All things are spiritual." he said - reciting the words from our Doctrine and Covenants.

Now the reason why I mention this in relation to the Sacredness of Creation is that when I read again the Enduring Principle of Sacredness of Creation one phrase jumped out at me that I had barely noticed before: "Spirit and material - seen and unseen are related." This is intriguing. How are the seen and unseen connected?

I wondered what Albert Einstein had to say on the subject; after all he talked about matter and energy. I found in his autobiography his belief that we are separate from the everyday world. He felt we live as passive observers that have very

little influence upon the world around us. "Out yonder there was this huge world," he said "which exists independently of us human beings and which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking."² He felt we were separate from creation - an observer rather than a participator. I pondered on this "Would his statement about creation be different if he lived in this day and age?"

Professor John Wheeler who was a colleague of Einstein offered a radically different perspective of the seen and unseen. Wheeler said "We had this old idea, that there is a universe out there, and here is man, the observer, safely protected from the universe by a six-foot slab of plate glass"....Now we learn from the quantum world that even to observe so minuscule an object as an electron we have to shatter the plate glass; we have to reach in there"³..... I discovered that experiments in quantum physics show how by just focusing our awareness upon what that electron is doing for even an instant in time changes its properties during the time we are looking at it. The experiments suggest that the very act of observation is an act of creation. We are not as separate from the world as once believed - at the subatomic level we become the participator not merely an observer.

Dr Mark Diesendorf also reminded several of us at Drummoyn Congregation's Global Challenges Series recently of how we are more than just observers at the global level too as he shared with us some of the latest findings on the impacts of Human-induced Climate Change. He spoke about the impacts of climate change, air and water pollution, land degradation, energy insecurity and how humans are changing the climate and the planet. He talked about the frequency of droughts, floods, catastrophic bush fires and heat waves and the main causes of climate change coming from the burning of fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas, deforestation and agriculture. He reflected on the IPCC report of 2021 of Climate Science where they reported that, "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere (frozen surfaces) and biosphere have occurred." Mark asked us to look at the ethical and moral issues, "Is it right that we, the present generation, have bequeathed to our children and grandchildren a climate that will be much harsher, unhealthy and dangerous?"

He also encouraged us - We have existing technologies right now! - Clean technology is available and economics is on its side. "It is time to dream what is possible." he said. Renewable energy, electric vehicles, electricity, for heating, efficient appliances and energy efficient housing are some of the changes we can start to adopt right now that can make a substantial impact on the future.

Mark challenged us to look beyond Green Growth to De-growth and painted a picture of a Steady State Economy and what that would look like; an economy where our use of energy is compatible with ecological sustainability and social justice. He shared extensively from his scientific knowledge and spoke of how time is of the essence. Yet rather than leave us despondent he encouraged us to take a proactive and positive position.

I thought about our nature, the nature of God and our material world. "All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination."⁴ One last time I turned to a scientist, Charles Birch, for thoughtful comment and I quote.

*"The power of the Christian gospel is the experience of divine love that transforms life. We experience God first and then spend the rest of our lives trying to understand that experience and its relevance to the whole world. The God of the universe touches us as we experience life in its fullness. But God is vaster than our experience of him. When I go down to the ocean and swim on its shores I get to know one part of the ocean; its near end. But there is a vast extent of ocean way beyond my ken that is nevertheless continuous with that bit of the ocean I know. So it is with God. We touch God at the near end, yet that same God extends into the farthest reaches of the universe and there too is pervasive love. This is the full meaning of incarnation. The universe exists by its incarnation of God in itself."*¹

In his book *On Purpose*, Charles Birch says that our Christian walk can be summed up in three words: passion, philosophy and programme. Passion he says is the only appropriate response to the love of God - think of the words of Jesus ... "with all your heart". This is about our emotional response. Philosophy is about seeking meaning in our understanding. This is about our cognitive response. Programme is about the practical side of life.. it is in Jesus' words ... "with all your strength."

Birch sums up his thoughts - "To live is to feel, to think and to act. The call to the full life is to love with all our heart and mind and strength, these three. There is no more emphatic utterance in all scriptures than that. I know of no greater commitment that life can make."¹

The rainbow lorikeets have been visiting again this morning. Their neon feathers stand out against the red berries they are hungrily eating. I delight in their presence. The lorikeets remind me that some things can only be really known with the heart. I take time to observe, to be present, to focus, to watch, to open up to their mystery - that changes me, connects me to the sacred. I ponder where they finish, and I begin. I contemplate how much I love the Enduring Principle, Sacredness of Creation. I examine how much I love creation. I think of my response as a steward of care. I observe how my outer material world is intricately linked to my love of God. I wonder what it means to respond with all my heart, mind and strength. I remember my grandpa's words from our scriptures- "all things are spiritual". And finally, I look outward to my community to join me because the task to care for creation is too big a task to contemplate alone.

1. Charles Birch *On Purpose*

2. Albert Einstein *Autobiographical notes* (ed. Open Court Publishing Company, 1949)

3. Wheeler, J.A., and H. Zurek. eds. 1983. *Quantum Theory and Measurement*.

4. Community of Christ - statement of belief - www.cofchrist.com.au