

“Connecting Ecology and Spirituality”

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The recent visit of David Suzuki, a leading spokesperson for the global environment, was a most significant event for the Kuranda community. His holistic approach to the question, looking at the human impact on nature, and taking particular note of the indigenous spiritual perspective, viewed in the contemporary global context, is profound and compelling.

Historically, thoughtful people have always understood that there is a necessary connection between nature and spirituality. Religion and the natural environment have often been seen as aspects of one whole, aspects of the same integrated creation that has both a material and spiritual side to it. But many “modern” people, in their insistent search for purely scientific and material solutions, have tended to lose sight of this. It is this “divorce” that is the prime contributor to the present environmental crisis. It is only in comparatively recent times that the

need for the recognition of this connection has been rediscovered by a number of leaders of thought.

A milestone came in 1987 when the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) invited representatives of the major religions of the world to an interfaith event in Assisi, Italy to commemorate the 25th anniversary of WWF. It was appropriate to choose this venue having regard to its location as the home of the Catholic Saint Francis famed for his pacific interaction with animals and nature.

Since that time there has been an explosion of interest in this connection and its significance for human survival into the future. Clearly Dr Suzuki is an active participant in this line of enquiry. There are many others. There is a growing recognition that the problems facing our environment cannot be solved simply by applying scientific or materialistic methods (essential as those methods may be). There are deeper issues of “sacredness” and “trust” involved, requiring radically changed perspectives from that which most of us have inherited. We are beginning to appreciate the “interconnectedness” of all that exists, extending to the planet as a whole and beyond, embracing all life-forms and all dimensions.

The spiritual realm is an essential part of that total environment, not apart from it, and it is that realm which gives purpose, meaning and direction to existence. The practicing indigenous people have known this all along but most of the rest of us are still in an early learning mode in this regard.

The practical and principled way forward on this earth is now indicated by the concept of the “sacred global trust”. We need to regard everything connected with the planet as a divine bequest, dynamic and fragile in nature, and of which we collectively are the trustees and for which we have a sacred responsibility. Each of us is entitled to take the benefit of what the earth has to offer and to enjoy it, but only as one member of a single human family on a basis that is fair to the whole of that family, and in a sustainable way that is fair for both present and future generations. The divinity has created this world for our enjoyment, but not by way of plunder as some form of prize.

All aspects of our diverse human social order now require reconstruction and harmonization to facilitate the adoption of this concept. The divisions, hatreds and prejudices of the past are inimical to its implementation and must be discarded. How can we

possibly hope to effectively address the many and varied challenges to humanity’s meaningful future through the present fractured and contending world social order? It is an impossibility! A cooperative, holistic and systematic global effort of monumental proportions is clearly required. Such an approach requires the abandonment of all concepts and rules that fracture and cause contention, to be replaced by a new consciousness of the spiritual oneness of humanity and the mutuality of all creation. As one Baha’i writer has put it, “*only a world federal system animated by concern for all people of the world will enable mankind to arrange its economic, material and social life in a manner concomitant with justice for all people and the duty of reverence towards the earth.*” Such a unified approach is a prerequisite to the speedy putting in place of effective solutions to the many serious problems now facing the planet, including those of an environmental nature.