

### The task of our times.....Part 3

Life is a web everything is connected Brian Swimme suggests, “We are related in terms of energy, we are related in terms of genetics; we are all a kind of kin. It is overwhelming” (Brian Swimme)

It makes an incredible difference to start to see ourselves and all of life as connected, rather than as separate. Then we start to do that it is not you and me, and an ant and a mountain and a river, but we are the one entity! Our solar system is huge, but it is ‘one’.

We tend to comment on a paddock of sheep. Although each sheep is separate, we see the flock. If we had a helicopter view we might refer to ten paddocks as one flock. One of the Apollo astronauts said *“it isn’t important in which sea or lake you observe a slick of pollution, or in which country a fire breaks out, or in which continent a hurricane arises. You are standing guard over the whole of our Earth.”*

Margaret Wheatley suggests that **“relationships is all there is”**. The more we explore the world of physics, biology and genetics, the more true this seems to be. We know that quantum physics has confirmed that observing a particle in one place immediately influences its partner, that is physically separated (as we understand physical separation) even by thousands of kilometres. It does this more quickly than the speed of light, the previously accepted maximum speed of ‘travel’. Suggestion behind this is that once two particles are connected, they remain connected, despite their seeming physical separation. Many of us have experienced this in our relationships with others, with a sacred place and with animals.

Scientists tell us that space is never empty or never ‘nothing’; rather what is present cannot be seen. The major part of anything, is space. On present reckoning, dark energy and dark matter make up 94% of the universe and no one knows what it is. More than ninety-nine percent of atoms are in fact ‘space’, and our bodies are ninety-five percent space. Our rational minds, find this difficult to accept.

Space, it seems is full of fields (including waves and rays) we cannot see, though we often feel their effects. Objects are drawn to earth (like the famous apple that hit Newton on the head) because space-time (gravity) curves in response to matter. Gravity is a field, rather than a force. We know there are magnetic, electrical and radio fields. We do not ‘see’ them until we note their effects, such as when we use a magnet, switch on a light or turn on a transmitter. Such fields create connections. There is an **‘everywhere presence’** and connections occur across this ‘whole’ even though we cannot always see them.

Most of us have spoken with someone who has had psychic experiences that are difficult to explain, such as uncanny coincidences, ‘sixth sense’, déjà vu, phantom pains, telepathy. clairvoyance, memories of past lives etc. We also know that twins physically separated, frequently respond in the same way at the same time, to particular experiences.

**Morphic resonance** is a phenomenon, whereby seemingly unconnected species or even thoughts, seem to emerge at the same time. Great scientific discoveries, including that of Darwin, have often occurred when other people have been experimenting with the same ideas in a totally different location. Biologist Rupert Sheldrake suggests this happens because there are morphic fields. He says that sometimes unseen influences affect our behaviour and our thinking, yet largely we are unaware of this.

During the 1920's in Britain, fresh milk began to be delivered to people's doorsteps. Blue Tits and other varieties of birds began to steal the cream by removing the caps and drinking from the tops of the bottles. Despite the fact that blue tits do not travel far from their nesting place, after the initial reporting in Southampton, there were reports from all over Britain. There were also reports from Sweden, Denmark and Holland. Milk deliveries stopped during the war, but when it began again in 1947, blue tits in Holland began their search for cream. Interestingly, what seems to have stopped this practice was the change to non-cream milk. The Tits were after the cream, not the milk!

The North America Monarch butterfly undertakes a massive migration in order to breed. It flies to Mexico, a journey of almost five thousand kilometres, and breeds in the same trees as previous generations! It was documented that during tsunamis, that the animals flee well in advance of the big waves. Somehow they know not only that something is about to happen, but that they need to flee. When a period of drought is coming, kangaroos know not to breed. Recently, experiments have shown that some breed of butterflies have learned to mimick the 'talk' of ants. While in their cocoon, they are able to 'tell' the ants outside, how and when to extract them. Such phenomena occurs all through the natural world.

**Symbiosis** is the enrichment of at least one of two interacting species. The sugar from fungi helps plants grow. Bees and flowers co-operate to produce honey. Often humans have not appreciated the effect of withdrawing (killing) a species within an ecosystem. However trees, insects, birds and animals have life-sustaining relationships. Plants and animals will adapt to get what they need and they co-operate with one another. Whenever one part of the system is destroyed, great adaptation is required. Some species cannot survive the removal of others. Leaf cutter ants are at risk of death from parasite wasps. Their protection is a small ant which they carry on the leaves they collect. These ants eat the parasites and in this way, both ants benefit.

There is an incredible '**intelligence**' in plants. In the process of photosynthesis, plants capture 'packets' of light from the sun, travelling at 300 kilometres per second, and converted them into food. Plants can mimic insects. They can change shape and colour and adorn themselves to attract birds and insects. A climbing vine can tie knots than any of us would be proud to be able to do.

Thomas Berry was a Passionist who died in 2009. He co-wrote 'The Universe Story' with Brian Swimme and was renowned for referring to the **reinvention of the human** as 'the Great Work'. He suggested that "the greatest challenge of our time is to discover *the meaning of being human*". Such a challenge is important for us in the PFGM because our Movement is based around relationships.

Hominoids have been living on earth for 7 million years and some of these branched off to form the primate family. Humans have lived here for at least 2 million years. Our species, Homo Sapiens emerged somewhere around 170,000 years ago. All of the other human species are extinct. Berry suggests that for homo sapiens (wise humans) there have been four 'defined' ways of 'being human'.

The first were **Hunter gatherers**. They lived in family groups! (15-40 people) which is interesting when we consider what we are seeking to achieve today through PFG's. They moved about for food, warmth and shelter. Those few who remain today are the Bushmen of Southern Africa, some of the Pygmies of central Africa, and the Spinifex people of western Australia. All of them are expected to disappear by 2020!

The second were **Agricultural people**, who began to live a largely settled life in villages. Many people still live like this today, but those who made the shift into this way of life lived around 10,000 BCE introduced what has been referred to as the Neolithic age (or new Stone Age). The people learned to domesticate crops and animals were domesticated and because they did not need to hunt as much, and they needed to sew and attend to their crops they began to live in tribes, often with people of other cultures. They often forcibly recruited slaves to assist with the labour.

With their superior sense of smell and loyalty, dogs became helpful for hunting and companionship. Sheep, goats, pigs and cattle were domesticated for food and skins and horses, camels and oxen were domesticated for work. Rice, wheat, barley, beans, corn, potato and other crops were grown and women learned to make baskets and water pots.

Because having more workers produced more food, larger families became not only desirable, but possible. Trading between villages led to an improved lifestyle as different villages began to specialise. Kinship, a close relationship with nature and equality among people were strong values. Because there was such an emphasis on fertility, deity's were usually feminine.

Small villages had harmonious lifestyles. Larger and more prosperous cultures needed to protect their stored goods from others and began to create boundaries. Many people would remember the movie 'The 'Gods Must be Crazy'. Until the Coke Cola bottled was introduced to the village everyone was satisfied. Suddenly everyone wanted this new product. One can easily imagine this happening in early village life.

The third era was that of **Classic Civilizations**, beginning around 5000BCE and often referred to as the Bronze Age. One of the early cities was **Sumer (in modern Southern Iraq)**. The city has **10,000 workers, including many slaves**. They were kept busy with the irrigation system which involved repairing canals, channels and reservoirs after the regular and massive floods from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Sumerian technology included the wheel and the potters wheel, writing, the calendar, astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, irrigation, boats featuring bitumen, waterproofing, axes, hammers, chisels, saws, knives, swords, daggers, pins, rings, glue, boots, sandals, waterskins, war chariots, arrows and quivers.

Together with Egypt, Sumer contributed our earliest cosmological thinking, mathematics, recorded writing and metallurgy! Administrative process, legal codes and schooling developed, and the city state idea was taken up and modified by the Greeks. When we note the rapid advancement in technology in our day, we can appreciate that Sumerian culture while not developing so quickly, was one of marked intellectual development. The city of Sumer was divided into 12 city states. Each had its own ziggurats or temple built to the gods. We can note the changed worldview all of this represents from primitive hunter-gather and agricultural life.

By around 3000BCE a number of significant kingdoms and cities arose including Babylon (85 kilometres south of modern day Baghdad) 2100-612BCE, Egypt (3150BCE-30BCE) and Mohenjodaro Sindh, Indus Valley (modern day Southern Afghanistan) 3300-1300BCE. It is estimated that around this time there were 5,000,000-10,000,000 humans on earth, but only 3% lived in large cities. This remained the case until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kings or Emperors became common, as did local governors and administrators. Warfare became a characteristic of this era as some civilizations sought to capture what others had and others were forced to defend themselves. Deities in this era became warriors and some kings and elders came to be worshipped as gods. We can note another changing worldview.

Western society has been greatly influenced by Greek and Roman civilization, especially through Greek philosophy and Roman forms of government. The worship of Gods and religion, entertainment, sports, military warfare, and the government of a far flung empire were all features of this age. Christianity came to be greatly influenced by Greco-Roman culture.

The fourth era is the Industrial/Scientific era from around the 1700's until now. This period saw the rise of mass production. Earth came more than before to be seen as a resource to be plundered – for humans. Machines made this more possible. People took what they wanted from the earth with no understanding of eco-systems. If they could not acquire what they wanted locally, it was taken by force from elsewhere. Indigenous peoples were slaughtered and exterminated; People were transported from their way of life and even from their own country for forced work as slaves. Forests were destroyed. Species like the dodo bird were made extinct by humans.

The rise of mechanistic science, removed the need for God. Beauty and the inter-relationship of species was replaced by 'usefulness', Even people, became like cogs in a machine often working in mass production lines. Child labour was common. Land animals and indigenous peoples were removed to create human settlements and 'progress'.

Humans saw their task as dominating and controlling nature. Super economies and consumerism paid no attention to the destruction they caused. Humans did not understand that wildness (chaos) is an integral to creativity. We are only now learning how life in the galaxies and on earth was created and that violent eruptions and earthquakes are creative. The 'dominance' of nature was justified at times by the command in Genesis for humans to 'subdue the earth'.

In 1955 American retail analyst Victor Le Bow proposed that "*Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and selling of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever accelerating rate.*" This thinking has led to mass production, over supply, reckless dumping and an acceleration of consumerism.

Thomas Berry reminded us that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. He said, "*We live in a world of concrete and steel, of wheels and wires, shopping centres and work. We no longer see the stars at night. Even in the day we do not experience the sun in any immediate or meaningful manner. Summer and winter are the same inside the mall. We read books but we no longer read the book of the universe.*" Berry suggested that the Church encouraged reading the book of Scriptures but not the book of life, yet the book of life is the primary revealer of God.

Berry suggested that this fourth era is coming to an end. Planet earth is being destroyed. Earth can live without humans, but we cannot live without Earth. "*Hand in hand with the physical (ecological) loss, is the degradation of the interior world of the human. To lose "the wonder and majesty, the poetry, music, and spiritual exaltation of the deep mysteries of existence is a tragedy.*" Any of us could ask, when did we last celebrate the rhythm of nature (e.g. watch a sunrise or mark the arrival of spring etc). Further, have we been captured by the awe of our world and the goodness of the creator? Has our prayer matured to be contemplative?

There have been these four eras of human life. Hunter-gatherer, Agricultural, Classic civilizations, Industrial-Scientific. In 1900, 14% of people lived in cities. In 2011 more than 50% of peoples in the world live in cities. 476 cities have more than 1 million people. 211 have more than 2 million. 63 have more than 5 million. 16 cities have more than 15 million. Lagos in Nigera had a population of 290,000 in 1999. It's population is now over 15,000,000! Not everyone is living in mega cities. 75% of the people in India today live in over 640,000 villages. What have we learned as 'wise humans'? In the last century we killed over 100,000,000 other humans and we have accelerated the 6<sup>th</sup> mass extinction in earth's history.

The coming era, will need to be the Environmental era. If we fail, homo sapiens are likely to become extinct, and we may destroy most of the earth's species in the process. Our first reaction to this theory (from our old worldview) is that God would not let humans die out. Remember the Mt Toba volcanic eruption 74,000 years ago!.It is estimated that all but one thousand pairs died in that eruption. This experience was not so different from the story of Noah! Such an experience would not be punishment by God. It would be the universe responding to God's ever prompting evolving 'direction'. 99% of species who have lived are now extinct, including all the human species except our own. Neanderthal humans became extinct 40,000 years ago. We are not the ultimate! That is clear from our destruction of one another and of other species. Will we learn?. Will we be able to change?. We have the intelligence, but do we have the will?

The earth is not a resource; it is our home. We can't throw rubbish 'out'. There is no out! We have to accept our responsibility because every species today lives in (our) human environment. We have dominated the planet. Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that every religious person of this 21<sup>st</sup> century will either be a mystic or nothing. This challenge calls us to live with a sense of awe. The more we know the universe story – our story, the more awe will be a part of our experience.

We can contemplate the vast and increasing diversity of life. We are related to all life. Everything is made from stardust. The future is dependent on our response. Everything we see around us (animal, tree, insect, fish, human) is related. Everything we see that has been manufactured, or that has life, came out of the earth. This includes the moon!

Our focus on relationships has to include all life forms. Our PFG aims and goals may need to be extended to include... 'to promote respect for the inter-relatedness of all life'. In this way, we could make a small but significant contribution to the call of life.

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