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I tell parents that we ought to teach children that a life lived according to the guidelines, explicit and implicit, coming out of church, school, the popular culture and the commercial media will be a life of considerable emptiness, and lack of fulfillment. A life devoted to the pursuit of happiness through materialism, the satisfaction of appetites and the pursuit of wealth and comfort is largely wasted. In a major way, parents are already aware of this and worried about it. They know of the aimless floundering kids are going through pursuing pleasures that do not satisfy, often degrade and, most importantly, destroy zest and erase fascination.

So the parent asks me, "How would you go about it? What would you teach my kid Chris?" My answer is that the first thing to do is to help Chris find an identity and the second thing is to find a purpose. And both involve finding the "story", the story of how we came to be, how everything came to be, and then making a deep search for why. These two questions have forever been the questions that religion is to answer. In the old Baltimore Catechism the first two questions went to this subject and the answers were fully responsive. "Q. Who made me? A. God made me. Q. Why did God make me? A. God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to be happy with Him." And if I were teaching Chris that's what I would teach.

But I would take into account the story of the cosmos and of the earth as it has unfolded and been made available through the work of Darwin, Clausius, Maxwell, Boltzman, Einstein, Hubble, Planck, Bohr, Hawking, Jantsch, and Prigogine, and in the parallel world of the spirit, the work of Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Morris Berman, Fritjof Capra, Robert Bellah, Matthew Fox.

For it is of the utmost importance that the human come to understand that the human is a component of a life system, a participant in a life system and by no means its master even though the human has learned enough of the earth to exercise an ugly exploitation of it. It was very, very hard for religion to grasp that Galileo had something to say. How could it be admitted that the earth was not the focus of the universe? It just could not be true. So the church pronounced Galileo to be a heretic. And how can it be admitted that the human is not the primary and principal form of life? The human is Godlike says religion and all other life forms are subordinate, not Godlike. That is where the trouble is. Everything is Godlike. Everything portrays divinity. (Summa Theologica. Question 47.) Everything has a place and has rights and everything performs a function. And everything came to be through a twenty billion year process that started with a fireball, and everything plays a part in the still unfolding story. The human has a part but not the only or even the most important part. The story is a story of a journey, as all good stories are, and it is the planetary journey, the cosmic journey that the human journey is part of. The human is subordinate to the whole.

I would tell Chris, the central reality you can know is the earth. The earth is the intermediary creator, cosmic agent, God's agent, and for the human is primary lawgiver, primary teacher, primary healer, and primary source of life, beauty, spirituality, joy, and love. The earth is also primary revelation. The earth has existed for four billion years and has evolved life in a sequence which science has penetrated even more deeply, especially over the past half century. The human has existed for a million or more years with a recorded history that goes back a few thousand. Your own identity is to be found in

knowing how you yourself are connected to the system and the process and in locating yourself in space and time. All creatures perform a function, fill a niche. What has evolved has come to be in consequence of conditions that favored its existence. Everything that happens had the potential to happen. And each element of a life system helps to maintain that system. Thus, the wolf and the deer both sustain the life system of the forest.

What is the function, the purpose, of the human? We have said that it is to love God and to be happy. But how is this function taken care of in the earth's scheme? The human brings to the earth the ability to reflect, to love, to admire, to enjoy, to appreciate, to learn, to understand, to be fascinated to be zestful. Without the human none of these functions would be satisfied. The earth has brought the human into existence to know the beauty of the earth. The human is the earth in a real way, the earth with a capacity for self love. The human was invented by the earth to be an earthlover.

If it were not for the human there would not be actual beauty and joy since these exist only in potential and are realized only in their conscious recognition. The function of the human is to learn and to love and to enjoy consciously. That is what I would try to teach Chris; to give a sense of purpose.

But that is not enough. It is essential that each element, each participant, in a life system do its part in maintaining that system. If the system disappears the system has failed. The earth's life system is in danger of disappearing by reason of the human presence in it. The human which the earth brought forth to know and to love and to admire and appreciate the earth, as well as to sustain it, is instead destroying it. The human not only fails to know the human purpose but fails to respect a life system the human cannot live without. Folly of an order beyond comprehension. Chris would learn in my classroom the history of this folly.

Noboby gets out of bed in the morning and pursues an activity without a motivation. So what parents want is a motivation that seizes the youngster with allurements, with strong desire. What you dream of being is what moves you. So my aim would be to foster in Chris a fascination with life and a dream of conscious knowing and enjoying the glory found in the immense variety of living things and a zeal for healing the hurt that has been done.

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All of this means, it seems to me, that religious doctrines must be elaborated extensively in order to comprehend this view of the human and the earth. This is no reproach and no indictment. Teilhard's major work was not published until 1955, and it is still being digested and fought over. But when 20th century science found that the classical view of time and space and matter did not fully deal with reality, classical science was extensively rewritten. So it is also true that religious doctrine does not deal with the full reality of the human story and the cosmic story and must be accordingly revised. The scandal of Galileo should not be repeated.

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Acknowledgement: This piece has borrowed heavily from the writings of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry.

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October 25 Professor Richard Sylla will discuss Jane Jacob's new book Cities
7:30 p.m. and the Wealth of Nation. At the Center.