

We must deal with the earth on the earth's terms

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MATT FOX AND THE HUMAN ENTERPRISE II

Last month we left incomplete our review of *THE COMING OF THE COSMIC CHRIST* by Matthew Fox, having run out of space before we could talk about Part V. We will not have enough room here either because Part V covers so much and I want to concentrate on one section, the section that treats with honoring the child, honoring youth, seeing to it that the young are a major factor in every phase of life.

The section begins with a condemnation of a society that destroys its children and its youth with widespread poverty, hopelessness, alienation, the prospect of nuclear war and preparations for it, stillborn dreams, suicide, alcoholism, drugs, racism; education for service to the corporation and corporate plundering of the planet; education for destroying beauty, for turning forests into trash and garbage; silence on the mysticism and glory of sexuality on the part of the churches with the accompanying rise of sexual abuse and pornography; religious and spiritual abuse of youth by the fundamentalists of all religions, who destroy ego and self-respect, destroy tolerance for diversity, love for creation, the sense of humor, the sense of sexual joy.

Fox uses the term "adulthood" to describe the condition where the children and young people have been shoved aside and their interests minimized by adults who have lost connection with childhood, adults preoccupied with materialism and success, adults without a sense of themselves or a sense of their species, of their humanness; adults defined by the TV ads.

Fox then sets up Senex, the archetype of the "Senator", the wise old man, the old ape, the old whale, and "Puer" the archetype of the child, the youth, the mystic within us all...

....IN A HEALTHY PSYCHE AND CULTURE SENEX AND PUER OPERATE TOGETHER. IN OUR CULTURE -- AND I SUSPECT IN MANY OF OUR PSYCHES -- SENEX AND PUER ARE AT ODDS, AND WHEN THIS HAPPENS WE DISPLAY, INSTEAD OF A HAPPY POLARITY OF YOUTH AND AGE, NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF EACH. A GENERATION GAP BECOMES A GENERATION CHASM THAT OPERATES WITHIN THE PSYCHE AND EXTENDS OUTWARD INTO OUR SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, RENDERING THEM AGEIST AND DUALISTIC. PSYCHOLOGIST JAMES HILLMAN WRITES THAT THE "NEGATIVE SENEX IS THE SENEX SPLIT FROM ITS OWN PUER ASPECT. HE HAS LOST HIS 'CHILD". IN OTHER WORDS, THE NEGATIVE SENEX IS THE PERSON OR CULTURE THAT HAS LOST THE MYSTIC WITHIN. HAVING REPRESSED THE CHILD WITHIN SUCH A SENEX IS A CHRONOS (THE GREEK GOD WHO ATE HIS CHILDREN OUT OF FEAR OF LOSING HIS THRONE TO ONE OF THEM) WHO WANTS TO CONSUME YOUTH AND CREATIVITY OUT OF ENVY AND REPRESSED YOUTHFULNESS. HILLMAN BELIEVES THAT CYNICISM AND TYRANNY RESULT FROM THE LOSS OF THE CHILD WITHIN THE SENEX.

"WITHOUT THE ENTHUSIASM AND EROS OF THE SON, AUTHORITY LOSES ITS IDEALISM. IT ASPIRES TO NOTHING BUT ITS OWN PERPETUATION, LEADING BUT TO TYRANNY AND CYNICISM; FOR MEANING CANNOT BE SUSTAINED BY STRUCTURE AND ORDER ALONE... THE OLD IS ALWAYS PREFERRED TO THE NEW. SEXUALITY WITHOUT YOUNG EROS BECOMES GOATY; WEAKNESS BECOMES COMPLAINTS; CREATIVE ISOLATION ONLY PARANOID LONLINESS.... CUT OFF FROM ITS OWN CHILD AND FOOL THE SENEX NO LONGER HAS ANYTHING TO TELL US. FOLLY AND IMMATURITY ARE PROJECTED ONTO OTHERS. WITHOUT FOLLY IT HAS NO WISDOM, ONLY KNOWLEDGE -- SERIOUS, DEPRESSING, HOARDED IN AN ACADEMIC VAULT OR USED AS POWER.

...THE RISE OF "PUER POWER" WILL PROVE TO BE AN ESSENTIAL PROPHETIC GIFT TO A SENEX CIVILIZATION PROVIDED, OF COURSE, THAT PUER POWER IS BALANCED ITSELF BY A HEALTHY SENEX. WHAT CONSTITUTES THE ESSENTIAL GIFT OF SENEX TO PUER? A HEALTHY SENEX IS IN TOUCH WITH LIVING TRADITIONS AND STORIES OF THE PAST THAT HAVE SIGNIFICANCE TO THE EMERGING STORY OF THE PRESENT.... JUST AS THE SENEX KNOWS THE ALLIES TO TODAY'S PUER NEEDS FOR A LIVING COSMOLOGY, THE SENEX ALSO KNOWS THE ENEMIES FROM THE PAST AND THE BATTLES THAT HAVE BEEN WAGED AND OFTEN LOST ON BEHALF OF THE COSMIC CHRIST. IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT KANT AND DESCARTES, NEWTON AND AUGUSTINE, HAD NO PLACE FOR A COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY IN THEIR PHILOSOPHY. PUERS HAVE TROUBLE MAKING DISTINCTIONS AND THEREFORE IN MAKING COMMITMENTS. THE PUER NEEDS TO FEEL THE STRUGGLE AND TO DEVELOP THE STRENGTH TO UNDERTAKE IT. A HEALTHY PUER NEEDS A DEVELOPING SENEX WITHIN IN ORDER TO MAKE COMMITMENTS BASED ON REALITIES OF HISTORY TO BALANCE A WELL DEVELOPED SENSE OF MYSTERY. THE PUER NEEDS TO KNOW THE LIMITS OF THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND HOW THIS ENLIGHTENMENT AGENDA HAS SO DOMINATED THE MOST RECENT RELIGIOUS EPOCH AND HAS SYSTEMATICALLY IGNORED THE CREATOR AND CREATION, A COSMIC CHRIST, THE SPIRIT, CREATIVITY AND MYSTICISM.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THESE AND MANY OTHER STORIES BE TOLD TO THE PUER FROM THE TRADITION THAT THE SENEX OUGHT TO HOLD DEAR, FOR WITH THEM THE PUER IS ARMED FOR THE ADULT STRUGGLE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT (OF FACING THE ENEMY WITHIN AND WITHOUT) THAT CONSTITUTES THE AUTHENTIC ADVENTURE TO WHICH THE PUER SO LONGS TO SURRENDER. THE PUER'S SENSE OF MYSTERY AND LIVING IN THE "NOW" SEEKS A BALANCE FROM THE SENEX' GIFT OF HISTORY AND STORYTELLING BASED ON THOSE ADVENTURES FROM PERSONS OF THE PAST WHO ALSO GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE "NOW" OF THEIR TIMES. THE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, OF THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY WHICH ATTEMPTS TO RECLAIM THE COSMIC CHRIST, OF SPIRITUALITY UNDERSTOOD AS THE EXPERIENCE OF BOTH MYSTICISM AND PROPHECY-- ALL THOSE GIFTS FROM SENEX TO PUER. AS PUER ASSIMILATES THEM, PUER MOVES FROM CHILD TO ADULT-WITH-CHILD. THE PUER FROWS UP BUT NEED NOT LOSE THE POWER OF BEING PUER. QUITE THE OPPOSITE, SUCH A PUER, STEEPED IN KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST, IS GROUNDED AND PREPARED FOR THE ADVENTURES OF THE FUTURE.

... A HEALTHY SENEX ALSO GIFTS THE PUER WITH WITH AN AWARENESS OF ESCHATOLOGY-- OF HOW HISTORY IS NOT ONLY THE GLORY OF THE PAST BUT ALSO THE URGENCY OF THE FUTURE. ALL THE POWER WE AMASS AS MYSTICS AND AS CITIZENS IN A LIVING COSMOLOGY IS MEANT TO BLESS FUTURE GENERATIONS, FUTURE PUERS WHO WILL IN TURN GROW UP TO BE HEALTHY ADULTS WITH BOTH PUER AND SENEX ALIVE IN THEM.

The function of the family elder is to help the young person to define himself or herself, to provide the "story" of the family and to make real the values that guide decision making. The problem at this time is that a major shift in values is under way and what Thomas call the "old story" is no longer adequate to the situation. The church is no longer adequate either because religion has ignored the problem of how the human fits into the natural world, at a time when the natural world is visibly being destroyed.

So Matt Fox'es senex is not equipped, at this time to fulfill the function of wise old man, or old ape, or old whale, the voice that brings youth on into the society and prepares youth to take over and become the seat of wisdom. For the number of wise old men is reduced to near zero. The powerful old men are in a negative senex mode shoving youth aside and repressing puer, clinging to privelege as if the world is about to end. So how do we accomplish the transition to new wisdom since there is no working old wisdom? There's a good question. Somehow the teachings of Tom Berry and Matt Fox have to be picked up and substituted for senex, absorbed through an inherent earthness that inhabits youth, and so equip youth for the role of wise old man before their time.

The 1989 Fall Conference of CFRSL, November 3, 4, 5, will feature Miriam Therese MacGillis, the nun who interprets Thomas Berry, as main speaker. I am discussing with her the task of talking about what it means to be human, how humans fit into creation; the need for humans to work actively and consciously at making the earth a more wonderful place even than it is. It would be good to lay out a positive plan.

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