



**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
Resources for Spiritual Questers

# *The Ecological Samaritan*

*-Colin Amato*



*April 2017*

Recently I attended the Ecology and Religion summit at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. I was in the presence of important scientists, mystics, theologians, and members of native tribes. The main theme of the summit was what can spiritual people do to help raise awareness of and help solve the ecological crisis that faces our planet today. However, I did not share with you what happened to me prior to reaching CIIS and the summit. I attended the summit with some of my classmates and professor of my Ecology and Liturgy class. We got off of BART at Civic Center Station and began to make our way to the escalator that would bring us to the surface of Downtown San Francisco. As I turned the corner to head towards the stairs, I noticed a young man, probably a few years my junior, holding a syringe and heading back to take his seat among his companions, all young men sitting on the dirty ground of the station. Another young man was just rolling up his sock on his left foot; obviously he had just administered the drug to his foot.

I was shocked. I had different emotional reactions. I felt like I needed to do something for these young men. But I also felt fear. Why fear? Well, I have a fear of needles. But it was their appearance; their nomadic appearance intimidated me. I felt also very sad for them. But I did nothing. My school group and I walked right past them and headed for the stairs. As we walked to CIIS we didn't say a word about their situation, even though I was sure we all noticed them and their situation. As we walked through downtown San Francisco we saw many homeless folks begging for money and again, we did nothing, nor discussed the situation.

CIIS is a multiple story building in the heart of Downtown SF. When you enter, it is like night and day. You go from the dirty and homeless filled streets to a beautifully furnished plaza and the classrooms and lecture halls are amazing. You feel like you are in a well-established, very well financed location. Our lunch during the break at the summit was well provided vegetarian Greek food, way more than what was needed for the crowd of people attending the summit. Would the leftovers be given to the people outside on the street? I don't know. But you have to understand after my earlier experience in the BART station it was hard for me to not feel like I was Alice, and this was Wonderland.

This feeling of Wonderland did not leave me the weeks that followed my attendance of the summit. The information provided by the speakers, the lectures in my ecology class, the documentaries

I was watching, all made me feel like I had been living in total darkness with regards to the ecological crisis, and that I was in Wonderland, where the majority of the citizens were totally unaware of reality, or worse, totally insane.

Plato has his allegory of the cave, which tries to highlight the problem of limiting our vision and what happens when our awareness is expanded. You really can't go back to the old limited way of doing things; you have to continue on, seeking more light, more understanding. I felt like the person in Plato's cave, my awareness was being expanded, and I had to deal with the newfound level of awareness. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Before having this feeling of awareness expansion and having to get use to it, I went back to the image of the young men-pounding heroine. I recalled the parable of Jesus and The Good Samaritan. We heard it read earlier. In my experience hearing this parable preached on, the focus is typically on the Samaritan. He is the hero of the story. He is the only one that helps the man who was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. We are usually encouraged to be like the Samaritan; in fact that is what Jesus encourages to focus on. But if I may, I would like to turn your attention to the other elements of the story. As Swedenborgians we pay attention to all elements of a narrative in sacred text. We look for the different symbols to clue us in to the deeper meaning behind the literal sense of the text. I began to meditate on the story in its entirety and began to think about the different characters and how they show up for myself in my life.

There are times when I have tried to be the Good Samaritan and help others. I feel like I do this in my role as psychotherapist. There have been times when I felt like the man beaten on the side of the road, unable to help myself, ignored by others, and very much in need of aid. However, I think I have spent more time in my life being the Levite and the Priest, the ones that see the situation and do nothing. I felt that way that day at the BART station. And as I continued to have my awareness expanded by the topic of ecology, I felt I had been living as the Levite and priest for most of my life.

This brought me to the realization that I needed to accept the reality that I have this habit of intellectualizing things, not that research or reading is bad, but that there is more than just trying to understand something. Swedenborg teaches us that Use is such an important part of our spiritual growth. Yet, as Jim has pointed out, Use fell out of style in our denomination. Hardly anyone was talking about. There has been this focus on Regeneration and Correspondences, and yet Uses, practical

application, fell to the wayside. Why is that? In my opinion, because actually doing is very hard. I know it is hard for me personally. You might be able to understand something intellectually, but what about your emotional reaction to the situation, what about your behavior that allows you to apply what you believe in the real world. That is something I personally struggle with and perhaps some of you do as well.

That is why I am so happy to hear that we are going to have a Bible Garden at Hillside. If there is one major theme from my ecology class it is this: The global crisis is overwhelming, and yet hope can be found with individuals and communities who take steps to change their habits and help improve the ecological situation around them. One of those steps is planting a garden. But should we stop there? I certainly hope not. I am not sure what the future holds for us, and I am not going to stand up here and tell you what to do. I need to figure out what I am going to do to not only better my ecological surroundings, but own being in relationship to nature. Once I feel like I have a handle on my own role as an ecologically conscious spiritual being, I'll feel like I can start to have SOME form of a discussion with the rest of you, not as expert, but fellow concerned traveller.

If we are to become Ecological Samaritans, we need to understand that we contain within us the different characters of the story. The ones that saw the situation and did nothing, and also the Samaritan who wanted to help the man who was left for dead. I think it would also be helpful to look at the man who was left for dead as The Earth. We have a choice, will we be helpful to the earth, or will we ignore it?

We talk a lot about correspondences. I think our tradition is very important and our theology can be helpful for those who wish to have an ecologically friendly spiritual life. We need to keep in mind that the process of Regeneration begins with contemplation and ends in physical action. It begins with an expansion of awareness and consciousness; changes the way we see things. When our awareness expands it comes with a price, the curse of knowing the situation and having to decide what to do about it. We talk about correspondences, the birds and trees and animals.

What would correspondences be if all of those things were dead and gone? What then? I pray that with our increase of awareness we can continue as a community to figure out how we all might contribute to helping our mother earth and be the Ecological Samaritans we are called to be.

Amen.