

MEMO

To: Stan Klein

From: Ty Cashman

Re: my presentation

Date: July 14, 2005

A Big Tent and a Broad Yoke

Although there are theological differences between the various mainstream religious traditions (even within the individual traditions), the spiritual progressive streams and the scientific communities -- differences that keep us separate from each other -- it is probably not useful to try to join us together by focusing on those differences. As it turns out, most of the differing theological opinions are not sticking points relevant to the larger issues that face us, in fact overwhelm us, at this time. **Some of the differences are, of course.** How to deal with those will need discussion. But any yoking will best be done by inspiring us all to join in the solution to the problems we all already see and agree on. This is the genius of democracy, the forging of majorities on specific issues out of what are otherwise different and separate cultures and traditions. Strangely enough, the more rigid and uncompromising religious groups in America have been better at this technique recently than have the more flexible ones. And they have been rewarded with unusual success as a result.

Aside from theological and doctrine differences, there are cultural differences between the traditions and lineages. Often the cultural differences hold us apart more than the doctrinal ones. It is hard, for example, for a Catholic to respond positively to the impassioned call from a pulpit: "Do you take Jesus for your personal Savior?" Of course, he or she does take Jesus for his or her personal Savior – but this is not the way, culturally, that Catholics frame their commitment.

There is one issue I would propose for us to consider. This is an issue that all traditions and lineages can potentially agree on, with the exception of those who are committed to the belief that the world as we know it is going to end in this generation. These folks are not only a segment of the Southern Baptist Convention together with some of the millions of readers of the Left Behind series of novels who expect "the rapture," but some New Age people, too, e.g., those who are followers of Lyara on www.operationterra.com, who await an "ascension," and perhaps others awaiting the year 2012, the date of the end of the great cycle of the Mayan calendar.

Those of us who believe that we cannot expect the escape of those of us "whose hearts are true" and a subsequent possible refurbishing of the earth for a thousand years by supernatural powers, beginning in the next few decades – those of us who instead accept that our progeny will have to live in the mess we leave behind – we may be able to unite around a shared sense of realism and responsibility for the future.

If we are right, and the others are laboring under a great, complex escapist fantasy, here are some facts about the human situation in the world:

In 120 years, everyone living today will be dead. A new human population will inhabit the earth. They will be an entirely fresh set of individuals, unknown to any of us -- billions of individuals, innocent of all the crimes against nature that have been and have yet to be committed in the 21st century. But they will have to live in the world we leave behind, a world scarred and impoverished by our voracious and short-sighted economic decisions. They will have to make their livings with the meager resources we leave unexploited. They will live in the midst of all the toxicity we leave behind, flooded and scorched by the unbalanced climate that our greenhouse gases have created. They will farm on our exhausted soils, fish our exhausted seas, drink our contaminated water, get lumber from the scrub forests of regrown clearcuts in a world of impoverished biodiversity.

This is a religious issue. We, the living, are perpetrating crimes, theft, mayhem on all foreseeable future generations. It is an issue of intergenerational justice. These unborn individuals, families and nations are innocent. All religions stand against injustice toward those who are helpless to defend themselves.

The story of Adam and Eve, common to the three monotheistic religions, is a tale of great loss. There are many ways it can be and has been interpreted, but one thing is sure, as a result of their felt need to exploit every resource in the Garden, even though they had been warned to leave some of it untouched, they lost the Garden entirely. Since the Garden was to be the birthright of their progeny, the deep tragedy of the result of their greed was that they lost the Garden for their children and great grandchildren through all the ages.

Our generation has not listened to this lesson. We, who should know better, are repeating the sin of Adam and Eve on our children's children's children -- despoiling this Garden Earth that we inherited relatively intact from those who went before us.

We are the ancestors of all future generations. What we do to the earth, they will inherit. But we do not think of ourselves as ancestors. This identity, though obvious, is not lodged in our minds in a way that we must visit it on a frequent basis. But it could be.

The religious liberals, the progressive spiritualists, the scientific community and mainstream religious traditions could join together in forming a Society of Ancestors. A multi-denominational Society with each member committed to living personally as an Ancestor and to influencing his or her political system as a representative of future generations. Representative government works when each segment of society has a representative in the halls of deliberation and legislation. But those who will inherit what we leave behind have no Senators or congressmen to represent their rights or their stake in the world's resources.

Every religious denomination could have its Society of Ancestors. Each would pursue the vision with a different style. Together we would be a large and coherent political

force and constitute a balance to that large segment of believers whose faith commitments leave no room for concern for the future.