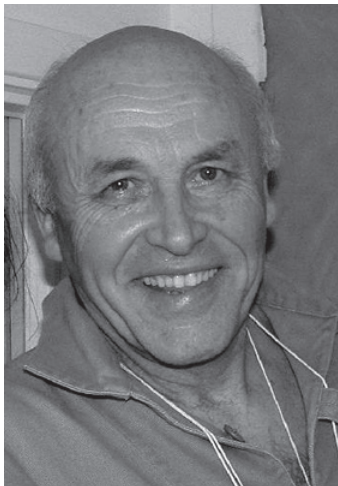


The Meaning of Our Historical Situation

Daniel Laguitton

Scientist by training, humanist at heart, Daniel Laguitton explores, reflects and writes along the road less travelled. In August 2009, Montreal's Radio Ville-Marie (www.radiovm.com) will air his 500th weekly "Miroir des Mots", a presentation and commentary of seminal works by the great spiritual leaders of all ages, from Lao-Tseu to Thomas Berry, Master Eckhart, Krishnamurti, Erich Fromm, Martin Buber and others. As a translator he has undertaken to translate Thomas Berry's main works into French and hopes to have them published in the coming years.



Dear Thomas, Your introduction to *The Dream of the Earth* provided an answer to the question I asked a spiritual teacher a few years ago and to which I did not feel I received a fully satisfactory answer at the time.

My question was this: "We are in a cultural situation somewhat similar to that of the Roman empire of the 5th century—our Western 'empire' is showing signs of physical decay and spiritual disarray. Is there in the spiritual tradition of the 5th century some source of guidance and inspiration we could draw from to prepare us for the 'Dark-Age-like' transitional period we seem to be entering?"

The answer sounded like this (I paraphrase): "Well, this was the time of Augustine and as I have explained, much of the redemption spirituality and its dire consequences are rooted in the writings of Augustine, therefore I do not think we have much to emulate there...It is also the time of the Desert Fathers and of Gregory the Great from which we have much more to learn."

In *The Dream of the Earth*, you state your essays are "to be read in the larger tradition of Western historical interpretation," a tradition that starts with *The City of God*, a founding vision that "provided much of the guidance and the energy for bringing forth the medieval civilisation and, in that manner, for creating the Western world as we know it, both in its grandeur and its disturbing qualities."

Although compatible with my spiritual teacher's answer, your broader perspective provides an explicit rationale to the deep conviction I hold that Earth community is the key to a sustainable future on our fragile and ailing planet. We need to achieve a post-modern redefinition of the city of man by apprehending the Cosmos as a living Temple where humans are invited to live in a state of communion. Your books are blueprints for such a spiritual revolution in which Earth sciences and theologies merge into an art of living that is foremost an art of universal loving. Such a renewed city of man will, de facto, be a gateway to the city of God, as in T.S. Eliot's words: "Only through time time is conquered." Notwithstanding the enduring grief held by many disciples of creation spirituality (I among them) about the Earth-demeaning collateral damage of Augustine's redemption theology, your perspective on the key role played by *The City of God* provides "redeeming" insight about Augustine's contribution and makes him, in that sense, a valid 5th century source of guidance for our time. Emulating Augustine's attempt to meet the spiritual needs of his time does not imply endorsing his particular ideological and psychological approach. Distancing oneself from Augustine (or anyone else), however, should never amount to throwing out the baby with the bath water.

I have not forgotten that your birthday is November 9, ten days ahead of my long-departed father's (born on November 19, 1914). I therefore wish you a very happy and healthy birthday, timeless inner peace.