

Imago Dei

Pulse of Spirit
December 28, 2022



DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

Most years, I have a fight with Christmas.
And it gets worse year by year.

This year they were coming out with the
decorations and playing Christmas songs in
stores before Halloween! *Ouch!*

I have a Grinch in me when it comes to
Christmas.

*I'm not going to give any gifts!
No Christmas tree this year!*

But sooner or later, Christmas gets me.
Christmas service at Sunrise Ranch was like
that. The Spirit of Christmas was on full
show.

This morning, I heard a news reporter say: *I
hope you and your family enjoy a happy Christmas
together.* Seemingly, a lovely thing to say. But,
I thought, *What about all the people who are
alone? How is that making them feel?*

There is a rise in loneliness worldwide, which
is recognized as a global epidemic. And the
U.S. National Institute on Aging says that the
health risks of prolonged isolation are
equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

But loneliness is only one of the negative
trends in our public health. A synthetic opioid
drug, fentanyl, is now the leading cause of
death for young adults. And one study
showed that 9% of the American population
had a major episode of depression in 2020,
and the highest rates were for adolescents,
and young adults aged 18-25. Early data
suggests that the pandemic has exacerbated
the problem.

There are spiritual issues behind anyone's
health, and spiritual issues drive our public
health. Harold Koenig is a medical professor
at Duke University and co-founder of the
Duke Center for Spirituality, Theology and
Health. He reported that survival rates among

people who frequently attend religious services were particularly high, 37% higher than people who weren't actively spiritual or religious. He noted that the positive effect was similar statistically to the effect of cholesterol-lowering drugs or exercise-based rehabilitation after a heart attack.

Harvard Medical School published a study, "Spirituality and Serious Illness and Health." They reported: "Our findings indicate that attention to spirituality in serious illness and in health should be a vital part of future whole person-centered care." After reviewing hundreds of studies, they found that participation in a spiritual community is associated with longer lives, less depression and suicide, and less substance abuse.

The scientific research points to a massive spiritual issue in our country, which is mostly unidentified. We might read studies on the symptoms of it or hear about the consequences of it in the evening news. But most of us see evidence of it every day.

Religion may help. I say "may" because I think it depends on what the religion is and how it's being practiced. What are the messages, and what is the code shared through the religion? Is it the code of life? Or is the underlying code behind the message saying, *There is something wrong with you?*

This morning, Dr. Barry C. Black, the chaplain for the U.S. Senate, spoke of *imago dei*, literally translated from Latin, *image of God*. It is the theological doctrine found in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity that says we are made in the image and likeness of God. In Christianity, the doctrine of *imago dei* is often trumped by the belief in original sin—the

theological belief that there really is something wrong with you.

Dr. Black spoke of his recent experience visiting an exhibit on human anatomy. As he strolled through the displays of the systems of the body, he reflected on the verse from the Psalms that says we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The reproductive system was the last system shown. The chaplain fell to his knees, in awe of what he had witnessed.

The genetic code behind the human body is incredible—so complex, so wondrous. And yet, that is only the *physical* code behind the *physical* body. As the study of epigenetics shows, there is far more than human DNA that comprises the life code behind the human experience.

There is a spiritual code behind it all. Primal spirituality is authentic spirituality that taps into the life code. It is a spirituality that brings health, healing, and upliftment.

This passage is from my book, *Becoming a Sun: Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence for a Happy, Fulfilling Life*.

Primal spirituality is spirituality before religion. Before there ever was a religion, before there ever was a spiritual path or a spiritual journey, there was primal spirituality. It is the knowing of our Being, the knowing of who we are, the knowing of our place in the universe and our role as an embodiment of the Creator in Creation.

Primal spirituality is pristine spirituality. We often think of nature as being pristine. By definition, the Earth is a dirty place.

And yet it is, at the same time, pristine, even with all its rotting leaves and other decaying plant life. Even with all the manure from all the animals. Nature is pristine.

The truth of the human experience is also pristine.

At a physical level, the human body has processes that parallel the processes of decay and the handling of waste in the natural world. It is all beautiful in nature. Is it not in us? As long as our anatomical systems are functioning properly, everything is going where it needs to go, and health prevails.

But if the systems of the body that deal with human waste cease to function correctly, ill health creeps in. There is nothing wrong with the substances that comprise what is *human waste* relative to our physical bodies. It is part of our pristine nature. There is only something wrong if it isn't going where it needs to go—if it interferes with the other life processes in the body.

The same is true at every level of human experience—emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Through it all, there is *imago dei*—the life code.

Consider your feelings over the past 24 hours. And closely associated with feelings, consider your mood. Is there anything wrong with it? Or has it been pristine?

Nature has many moods. It might be the atmosphere of a warm spring morning. Or it might be a hurricane. Isn't it all pristine?

So it is in the human experience.

In our case, what is happening *in* us is connected to what is happening *around* us. Our mental and emotional awareness are clearly not things unto themselves. They are functions of not only what is in us but what is around us. Some of our awareness of the surrounding world is conscious—we know the origin of it because we can see, hear, feel, smell, or taste it. But there is far more that we are intuitively aware of.

We can come to believe something is wrong with us because of all that's going on. It's not true. It's pristine. It's beautiful. It's all supposed to be there. But where should we be in that picture?

Imago dei. We're here to be an expression and an embodiment of Divine Presence. When we are present as that, we can hold all that is happening in ourselves at every level—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And we know it is pristine. It is all held in the pattern of the life code.

Knowing *imago dei* erases the human conviction that something is wrong. It erases the conviction in original sin. Does that mean we have never done anything wrong? Of course not. Probably, we have all done things we regret. Could there be patterns of ill health? Yes. And still, it's all pristine. We are here to know the pristine nature of who we are, individually and together, despite all that's going on. We are here to know the life code and bring it to our human experience.

It doesn't take a brilliant person to see that there is something wrong in the world in which we live. It doesn't take a brilliant person to know that there is something troubling inside. What the brilliant person

knows is Divine Presence. Through that, we know *imago dei*. We are here to know and embody that in the midst of it all. We're here to hold it all in that Presence and let it all work out as creatively as possible, to allow Love to be real, to allow Love to bring forth life.

An authentic spirituality shares the code of that. It's a code that can be expressed in a way that the mind can entertain and, to some degree, understand. And yet it's also a code of the heart.

Listening to Christmas carols this morning and singing vigorously myself, I thought, "What was encoded into some of those carols is miraculous!" You could argue about the facts of the story. *Did it really happen like that? Was mother Mary really a virgin?* That's missing the point. In some carols, life and Love are encoded.

We have the remarkable ability as conscious human beings to proliferate the code of life through what we say and what we do. We can invest that code in what we express mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. We can spread the truth of *imago dei* throughout the world.

Knowing the code of life as an individual, with other people—this is primal spirituality. It is the ultimate remedy for every human ailment. That doesn't mean that there are not many other remedies that might be needed along the way. But in knowing our primal spirituality, we know *imago dei*. We know the code of life. And so we live.

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