

AN EMERGING CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON ECOLOGY, AS SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE, COSMOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE.

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PART 1. A GENERAL OVERVIEW

Readers can be grateful to Dr. Augustine Thottakara for inviting a wide range of writers from very diverse religious backgrounds to share their thoughts on the eco-dynamics of their respective religions with special focus on the future. The global community today is asking scientists, economists, politicians, and other experts to address the challenge of our deteriorating environment. Solutions to this complex and multifaceted crisis do not come easy. But the Christian Churches above all should have a prophetic word to offer. For no religion would dare to say that the ecological concerns for our planet and our belief in the God of all life should not go hand in hand.

1.1. In Christ All is Created

In the very first century, the Apostle St. Paul sent a letter to the people of Rome in which he writes: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, 8:19-23).

Again, during his imprisonment in Rome he told the Church in Colosse, a city in Asia Minor: "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; in him *all things* in heaven and on earth were created"(Colossins 1: 15 ff).

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These scriptural passages (and others, too) highlight some fundamental truths concerning the environment from a Christian point of view. Firstly, that there is a dynamic movement within all of creation. Secondly, that human beings and nature are profoundly connected. Thirdly, the significance of the Christ for persons and for the creation.

1.2. An Urgent Task

To develop a new understanding of our relationship with God through our relationships with the material world around us, we must move in an ever-expanding consciousness of the unity that binds all of God's creation together. For this reason, at the beginning of the 21st century, one of the most urgently needed areas of reflection and growth in human awareness is that of developing an earth spirituality. We desperately need a spirituality today that will restore a sense of the sacred immanence of the divine in all of God's creation, including ourselves in our vital relationships with our world. As Jesus Christ is the meeting of divinity and humanity, with neither of them inseparable and yet each of them a distinct nature, so also we and the whole of creation in all of our materiality and finiteness are not to be separated from God living with us and all of nature. No longer can we read God's injunction in the Book of Genesis (1:28) as an invitation to conquer nature by exploiting His gifts to us through selfish motives. Rather we are obliged to protect and nurture the hidden potentialities within nature, since all is sacred. As Pope John Paul II states, we need to acquire

...a growing awareness that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate - animals, plants, the natural elements - simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its natural connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the 'cosmos' (*Res Socialis*, art 34).

1.3. The Christian Churches

Yet it must be said Christian Churches have been tardy in their response to the on-going destruction of the planet. Many seemed to have closed their eyes and tacitly allowed creation be degraded and somehow

separated from humanity, in spite of many prophetic figures to the contrary, including St. Francis of Assisi. Why has this happened? Why, for example, was little or no attention paid to the "nature" at the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church 1962-1965, even though it was the most significant Church Council in modern times. Why has the new "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (1990) spoken only obliquely about environmental concerns. Was the Church "steering" people away (at least until recently) from taking a contemplative stance towards the natural world because of a fear of Pantheism? (making God and creation coterminous, i.e. the universe is God and God is the universe); or had the theology of creation become tainted with the Newtonian mechanistic interpretation of the world?, or was there still elements of fundamentalist thinking among some concerning the creation as described in Sacred Scripture, especially the Book of Genesis?

1.3.1. A Major Challenge for the Reformed Churches

Whatever about the Catholic Church, a theology and spirituality of nature presents a bigger challenge for the modern inheritors of the Protestant Reformation which characteristically has emphasized divine revelation over human reason in our knowledge of God, the Gospel over nature, the deeds of God in history over any natural revelation, the order of redemption over the order of creation, Christ over the Father and the Holy Spirit (Cf. *At Home on Earth*, Charles M. Murphy, 1989). However, the Protestant theologian, Jurgen Moltmann has succeeded in bringing a more unified perspective that has brought together the biblical account of creation with the findings of the natural sciences and the theory of evolution.

1.3.2. Cosmology of the Bible

Whatever about Christian theologians, the scientific view of the world that emerged from scientists and mathematicians such as Newton and Descartes certainly played a major part in undermining the positive relationship that humans had towards the created world. Some blame, however, needs to be attributed to the cosmology of the Bible as handed down in story form, uncritically, from one generation to the next. Michael Dowd in his gentle modest handbook called *Earthspirit*, 1991, points out

how from a straightforward reading of Genesis was developed a series of unqualified popular beliefs. For example, that humans were placed on a fixed, ready-made earth of which they were to have dominion. That they were made in the image of a God who was transcendent to creation. That a spiritual relationship with God was the only thing that really mattered. Other living beings in nature were material and did not have souls. God might eventually restore creation to its original perfection, but that will not take place until the end of time. So humans could probe and explore and exploit nature because it was separate from them. Putting it at its very best, nature might be broadly perceived as sacramental, but of itself it possessed no intrinsic value. Seemingly forgotten were the words of Job: 'Ask the beasts to teach you, the birds of the air to tell you, the plants of the earth to instruct you, the fish of the sea to inform you...who among them do not understand that behind all life is God's hand?' (Job 12:7-9).

1.3.3. Christians Born to be Priests

Christians are born, by baptism and the Spirit, to be priests, not kings? Christians are born to name, to interpret, celebrate, question and mourn, not to dominate or destroy? Christians are born to experience nature as a mode of divine presence, and not stand idly by when such a primary mode of presence is being annihilated before our eyes? For the true Christian stance towards nature is not to see it as a backdrop for human activity but as a source of revelation of the ultimate mystery itself. Thankfully, an increasing number of Christians sense the continuity of God and nature, of nature with humans, and humans in community. With this vision, all life assumes significance not only because humans think and wonder, not only because humans are bonded into a communion by the genetic information connecting all the generations of the ancestral tree of life but because all things in heaven and earth, are destined be brought into a unity in Christ (Cf Eph 1:9). Yet today many Christians still do not see the book of nature as revelatory, like they see the book of the Bible. So the destruction of nature continues.

1.4. Awareness of Ecological Degradation

It was back in 1962 the first loud voice of alarm concerning the deterioration in the environment was heard. In that year Rachel Carson

published her much-acclaimed book, *THE SILENT SPRING*. In the 1970s Wendell Berry and others brought this awareness further. However, the first real awakening among the Christian Churches probably dates back to 1967 following Lynn White's well known charge that Christianity should bear an immense burden of the guilt for the ecological crisis ("The Historical Roots Of Our Ecological Crisis"). White was convinced that western technology, science and commitment to progress was largely conditioned by the Christian belief that God created the world to be ruled and used as thought fit by human beings. These accusations provoked many critical responses from religious thinkers at the time. But today, many are grateful to Lynn White Jr. because his book goaded many Christians, of all denominations, into making deeper reflections about creation and their Christian faith.

1.5. An Important UN Report

Then in 1987 came an important report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development ("Our Common Future"). This report brought the problems facing our planet on to a more global level. It began by saying how in the middle of the 20th century, human beings had come to see the planet earth from space for the first time. This vision had an impact on thought at least as big as the Copernican revolution in the 16th century, when Copernicus upset the human self-image by revealing that the earth was not the centre of the universe. Now the global community got a comprehensive glimpse of the earth for the first time, and many came to recognize it as an organism whose health depended very much on the health of each part. The authors of that United Nations report did not forecast the future. They were simply serving a notice - an urgent notice based on the latest and best scientific evidence - that the time had come to take decisions to secure the resources that would be needed to sustain this and coming generations.

1.6. "The Earth Summit"

A follow-up to this report, "the Earth Summit" held in Brazil in June 1992 further highlighted the need to protect and preserve the natural environment. But while these world-impacting events did increase awareness of the environmental problems of our planet, governments' and

international policy continue, by and large, to be aspirational. The gains in knowledge were not enfolded in concrete action or in changed lifestyles. Certainly not on a scale broad enough to reverse the pattern of ecological devastation that is accompanying modern technological developments. Yet it needs to be said that something is happening in the human community's self-awareness that is calling for more spiritual connectedness with the earth and each other, greater loving, and a new way of thinking.

PART 2: HOPEFUL SIGNS IN THE CHURCHES

2.1. Challenge to Anthropocentric Bias

Only recently has mainstream Christianity begun to question seriously the current environmental problems. But some of the questions that Christians are asking are important, e.g. how can people participate with God in the universe story? How profoundly is nature interwoven with our own story? How is our own story interwoven into other non-human stories? Certainly, there is a widespread realization dawning on all peoples that the trees, the grasses, the animals, the viruses and bugs of our planet are not there just for us. And the hitherto anthropocentric bias in Christianity is being challenged seriously. The great environmentalist John Muir was very conscious of this bias. He used to ridicule the very idea of humans "conquering" a mountain by reaching its peak. "When a mountain is climbed it is said to be conquered - as well say a man is conquered when a fly lights on his head". The mountain invites our contemplation, not our domination.

2.2. Recent Church Documents

It was heartening to see the first papal document devoted exclusively to environment and development published on Jan 1st 1990 called "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation". Pope John Paul II addressed the environment question again in his Encyclical Letter "Centesimus Annus", (May 1991) but not in great depth. Since then, the Pope has made many other references for the need to preserve the environment. The World Council of Churches published a significant statement in 1991 and followed this on with a document called "Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change" (May 1994). The Presbyterians published a very thorough document in 1990; the

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America did the same in 1995; and many Bishops' conferences throughout the world, including the Philippines' Bishop Conference in 1988, and the USA Bishops in 1991. The Second European Ecumenical Assembly meeting in Austria in 1997 did put a fly in the ointment when they bewailed the fact that the European Churches, Protestant and Catholic, while positively raising awareness about the environment were showing little real zeal for behavioural change. This large gathering of Protestants and Catholics in Austria courageously called for a change in the entire system of values that govern decisions in politics, economics, industry, agriculture, and transport, as well as human lifestyles.

2.3. Seeking a New Language

The Christian Churches are also seeking to find a new language to explain how nature is interwoven with the human story. There is a growing openness or "compatibility" of the scientific picture with religion. Our destiny and the destiny of the whole universe is seen to lie together. As the recently retired President of Queen's College, Cambridge, and Anglican priest, John Polkinhorne states (*Searching for Truth*, 1996): "It is a great mistake to be too spiritually minded. Christianity at its best and truest has always taken the whole of the created world seriously. Matter matters". The eminent Christian cosmologist Ernan McMullin, S.J. names this growing science-religion convergence as "consonance".

2.4. Theologians and Scientist Together

In 1991, Pope John Paul II initiated a forum for international secular scientists and theologians, which has been meeting annually for almost ten years now. Unfortunately, the fruits of this dialogue still remain largely between book covers. But in general it is fair to say that natural theology is on better terms with contemporary science than it has been for a long time. Albert Einstein would be happy with this. He once said that science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind. At the popular level there are also welcome changes happening. The individualistic pious devotions of the 18th and 19th are very much on the wane. Today, it is no longer regarded as avant-garde for ordinary church people to declare that they are part of an evolving world. That the whole earth is alive. That creation as a whole functions as a living, maturing

system. That human beings are earth's reflexive consciousness. And that true Christian love exists when one celebrates this communion of the whole.

2.5. Humans are Co-creators with God

But seeking a new language compatible with the insights of the natural sciences is not the only search on today. Christians are also finding new ways to connect up the meaning of creation and redemption. More church people accept personal responsibility as co-creators with God in giving future direction to the world. In fact, the responsibility itself seems to be constantly increasing as new insights emerge from the natural sciences: Personal salvation and global salvation are, therefore, seen as two dimensions of the same divine process. The same Jesus who died in order to save human beings is the same Jesus who came to redeem the entire cosmos. In the words of St. Paul: "in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

2.6. Salvation is also Participatory

If there is to be sustainable progress for the world it must be found in the continuing enhancement of life for the entire planetary community. So, salvation today, be it personal or planetary, is accepted by most contemporary church people not only to be a gracious gift of God but also participatory. One of the faces of created reality that seeks greater unity and integration is the absolute and essential role of the feminine. Masculine attitudes about being have held too much pre-eminence. Collaborative common effort between men and women that is warm, caring and non-competitive, is crucial to the work of creative redemption and redemptive creation. That is why many of the great Christian concerns today revolve around broader human issues. The Church's call for greater commitment to peace, justice has already become an integral part of Christian belief, prayer and living. Likewise references to the cosmic Christ is offering a powerful image to move Christians to share the Lord's ongoing mission to save the earth from exploitation and destruction. Indeed, practical faith for many today begins with an attitude

of a basic compassion for the whole world and matures as it grows towards universal and inclusive loving. Faith and hope in God **and** the world is becoming faith and hope in God **through** the world.

2.7. The Same Gospel

These new directions do not reject or replace biblical Christianity in any way. The traditional concepts of the Christian faith remain valid. Nothing essential is being discarded. Everything is simply being looked at in a fresh way. The new cosmology is a further revelation of the gospel, not a different gospel. Yet Christians need to be reminded that they may be seriously out of step with the Holy Spirit today, if they choose to continue reading the Bible through the lenses of the old cosmology. This has to become a major part of the new evangelization called for by the Church. To "evangelize the world" or "preach the gospel" in the new millennium needs to include the education of people in the new cosmology. Otherwise there is a danger that human beings will become an uncontrollable cancer in the body of the Christ.

2.8. Good People Can Be Dangerous

Sufficient evidence exists to indicate that people, who choose to remain with the old cosmology, will continue to think and act as if they were separate from and superior to the rest of nature. They will see the earth as merely a material resource, and God as a transcendent Being who is outside the process except on those "extraordinary" occasions when He "intervenes" because people pray and ask Him to do so. Fr. Thomas Berry put it succinctly: Good people are dangerous when they are operating out of assumptions about reality which do not in fact correspond to reality. Or, as the late Gregory Bateson, a philosopher, biologist and psychologist with strong Christian convictions once wrote:

If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation, and you have the idea that you are created in God's image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you unrightfully claim all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless, and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit.

2.9. The Centrality of the Incarnation for Christian Ecology

Before concluding this section (Part II), it would be remiss if we did not stress that the Christian belief in the incarnation is central to any Christian understanding of ecology. The incarnation - God becoming a man in Jesus Christ - provides a vision and mission to all Christians who are concerned with the future of the earth. There is the story told of a little girl who was afraid of the dark and had a hard time when she was put to bed. Time after time she came back to the family room, and mother had to take her back to bed. She begged her mother to stay with her all night. "I can't do that", her mother replied, "but you shouldn't be afraid because you are not alone. God is always with you". "But I don't want God," the little girl cried. "I want somebody with skin on".

2.10. Nothing is Profane

Fortunately, as Christians we believe that we have a God "with skin on". The incarnation refers not only to the enfleshment of the Son of God but that in Jesus, humanity and divinity has been inextricably linked. God has entered into creation so thoroughly by virtue of the incarnation that nothing is truly profane for those who know how to see. Everything is capable of revealing the presence of the sacred. Martin Luther expressed it well: "Now if I believe in God's Son and bear in mind that he became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples and pears, and reflect that he is Lord over all and the centre of all things". Yes, the birth of Christ has lifted the physical and material to a new dignity and sacredness.

2.11. Incarnation and Structures in Society

In the Christian perspective the material is capable of bearing the spiritual, which is, of course, the basis also for the Christian sacramental system. Unfortunately, the imposition of the technosphere on the biosphere and the psychosphere is progressively devitalizing and dehumanizing life. Monika Hellwig comments that the battlefield where salvation meets destruction today is not only within the consciousness and private lives of the individual but also in those very structures of human society that shape our futures. She concludes by saying that the salvation

of God will have to be made relevant to these social, political and environmental structures if it is to be believable. And there is not the slightest doubt that this will happen. Even against its own institutional resistance, the Churches are continually finding deeper and more disturbing implications to the Jesus-event.

2.12. Incarnation and Evolutionary History

Many theologians now place the incarnation in continuity with creation. The early Christians confronted Gnosticism, which saw no reason to save the body or material things. But Irenaeus in the second century spoke of God gathering all of creation and restoring it through Christ. And while the incarnation took place within a specific historical moment, its gains further cosmic significance when seen in the context of the ongoing creative evolutionary process. For the incarnation situates Christ not just at the centre of sacred history, but at the centre and meaning of all *human and cosmic evolutive history*. In other words, according to this interpretation, the incarnation is not simply an "afterthought" of God to repair the damage done through the "fall". Rather from the beginning, God's divine goal for creation was to culminate in the birth of Jesus, and then move on to the re-creation of the world through the Spirit.

One of the seminal thinkers of this century has been Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (d. 1955). His abiding significance lies in his fervent desire to reconcile "the two halves of our lives". In his own words he wished to overcome the dichotomies and dualisms of God and the world, humanity and Christianity, religious detachment and worldly activity, creation and redemption, the natural and the supernatural, the soul and the earth, spirit and matter, himself as priest and scientist. He wished to unite them all into one love, one universe, one divine milieu - into God who is at once the centre and the environment for everything that exists.

2.13. The Views of Some Christian Theologians

A sprinkle of the many theologians and scientists both old and new, who would embrace the importance of the incarnation in the context of evolution would include:

Theologian Duns Scotus, a franciscan, born in Scotland in 1265 and beatified by Pope John Paul II on March 20, 1993. He was one of the first to offer this broader alternative theological understanding of the primary purpose for the Incarnation. He did so not in order to diminish or deny the significance of the Redemption, but rather to provide a more adequate understanding of God's loving action in the world planned before the beginning of time.

Teilhard de Chardin, S.J speaks of Jesus hidden in the forces that give increase to the earth and observed that as evolution moves on, the incarnation triumphs even more in the world. He wrote: "You (Jesus) are the Centre at which all things meet and which stretches out over all things so as to draw them back into itself. I love you for the extension of your body and soul to the farthest corners of creation through grace, through life, and through matter".

Karl Rahner, SJ writes that creation and incarnation are in continuity, and Christ is acknowledged to be the apex of the creative process (Cf. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 1978). Jesus is the culmination of the gradual movement of materiality towards conscious spirit. In fact, all matter, he says, is oriented to spirit and develops towards spirit by virtue of its own inner being and potential. Jesus Christ, Rahner says, becomes a permanent ontological determination of the whole of cosmic reality. The risen Christ influences and shapes the very being of the material universe.

Dennis Edwards, a priest and theologians in Australia, states that the incarnation is not something arbitrarily decreed by God, an "extra" in evolutionary history. Jesus of Nazareth is God's absolute self-communication to the cosmos. Creation and redemption are to be understood as two moments in the one process of God's self-communication with the world. In Jesus of Nazareth, God accepts the cosmos, and the cosmos accepts God, and these two acceptances constitute a unity (Cf. *Jesus and the Cosmos*, 1991).

Brennan R. Hill, theology professor at Xavier University, Cincinnati, states if incarnational theology can be extended beyond the human to all of creation; if creation, incarnation, and redemption are all of a piece, then creation has been transformed by the coming of Christ, and the benefits of

redemption are shared by all creation. This kind of vision of the world is clearly needed for ecology (Cf. *Christian Faith and the Environment - Making Vital Connections*, 1998).

If the plan of God then is to be one with creation, through Jesus Christ, in order to save the world, and to bring it to fruition, then abuse of creation is reprehensible. Jesus is the cosmic Christ, a presence and power of divine grace in the world. Does one need more convincing that a true understanding of the incarnation has a vital role to play for all Christians in restoring the earth for future generations?

PART 3: THREE MAJOR AREAS OF GROWTH IN THE CHURCH OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

3.1. The World as a Single Cosmic Community

It is my belief that the Christian Churches, after a shaky start, are increasingly responding theologically and spiritually to the crisis of the environment. They have already issued a loud wake-up call not only to Christians but also to society at large about the magnitude of the present problems. I expect the Churches will throw the full weight of their moral authority behind the findings of the scientific world that human beings and the natural world are at present on a collision course. They will offer new insights and new interpretations from biblical texts. The Churches will point out that there is a strong sense of interdependence between all creatures, human and sub-human, and they will place emphasis on the image of the world being a single cosmic community rather than a collection of autonomous entities.

3.2. Concept of Stewardship

The well-known Irish environmentalist, Fr. Sean McDonagh, writing in a book edited by Dermot Lane, *New Century - New Society* (1999) says that a Theology of Stewardship will be developed. He points out that human well-being, both for individuals and communities is utterly dependent on other creatures and a fertile environment. The Book of Genesis in Chapters 2 and 3 challenges humans to be stewards of God's creation and to live in companionship with the rest of creation. This is seen in the way they viewed the land. They saw the land as a gift from

God, not the exclusive property of the king or ruling classes (1 Kgs.21). Land was the heritage of all the people and meant to sustain the whole community. Ultimately, Yahweh is the true land owner. The cultivators are only God's tenants. They are stewards.

McDonagh says the Churches will rectify the misunderstanding among many Christians that the resurrection somehow catapulted Jesus out of the order of creation and placed him in some atemporal zone. They will make it abundantly clear that the Risen Christ is even more deeply centered in creation. That he is at the centre of human and cosmic history. That "Christ is all, and is in all" (Col.3-11). And that all Christians will rejoice in the fact that the resurrection 'renews all creation'.

3.3. The Immanent Presence of God

The sacramental liturgy can also be expected to highlight how the Christian community can experience the presence of God in the world of nature. Beginning with baptism, where the symbolism revolves around life-giving water and the power of the Spirit, will prove a strong incentive for the Christian community to ensure that their water and the water in their locality is not polluted with toxic, human, industrial and agricultural waste. In this way the sacrament of baptism will not be seen merely as an initiation into the community of believers, but as an initiation into the wider earth and cosmic community.

Let us now look at three areas that the Christian Churches in the new millennium can be expected to grow and make practical applications by virtue of greater ecological awareness. The three areas we select are: 1) the Liturgy, 2) Environmental Theology, 3) Eco-Spirituality.

3.4. In Liturgy

The links between worship and ecology are much deeper than the general interconnectedness of creation and human life. Through the incarnation, worship and ecology are bound together at their core. Worship can nurture a deep environmental awareness in people, and a heightened awareness of the environment can contribute to the worship life of the Church community. It is bidirectional. The Church will more faithfully follow Christ's example in using created things more

consciously as a means of encountering the divine. For example, the experience of immersion in water or the pouring of water in baptism; the feel and aroma of the scented oil called chrism used at baptism, confirmation and ordination; the touch of the human hand in penance and anointing of the sick and ordination; the taste of bread and wine in Eucharist; and the shared vows of love in marriage. All these express divine realities as well as powerful human experiences. Add other created things that find their place in Christian worship: incense that speaks of our prayer and of God's forgiveness; the wax of candles reminding us of Christ, the light of the world; the wood of the cross as a sign of victory even more than a sign of suffering; statues and stained glass that call us to live in the communion of saints; the human voices that proclaim the word of God; the sounds of musical instruments and voices; and the processions and dances of members of the assembly. All these elements of worship, if regarded properly, give witness to the fundamental belief in the incarnation and its intrinsic connection to matter (Cf. *Liturgy and Ecology in Dialogue*, Lawrence E. Mick, 1997).

3.4.1. Attention to Symbols

In the coming millennium the Churches will likely make better use of symbols as a means of promoting heightened ecological awareness. The liturgy will foster a more contemplative approach to life and creation. The things we use and the actions we do in worship will be handled in such a way that their reality will be abundantly apparent. Certainly more attention will be paid to the basic symbols we use. In this way the sense of awe and wonder - a basic emotion which forms the heart of Christian worship - will again become part of the eco-dynamics of the Christian religion. Unfortunately, the miracle of life around us goes too often unnoticed and uncelebrated - in life and in liturgy. As the poet Marcia Hans comments:

Fuelled by a million man-made wings of fire, the rocket tore a tunnel through the sky and everybody cheered. Fuelled only by a thought from God, the seedling urged its way through the thickness of black, and as it pierced the heavy ceiling of the soil and launched itself up into other space, no one even clapped.

It is so easy to overlook the manifold small wonders that mark every day. Yet this is what the liturgy will need to celebrate. But we also hope that Church liturgy will again become solemn and glorious, profound and ecstatic, serene and exuberant, weighty and festive. And, pertinent to the theme of our essay, it will widen its scope to include the cosmos and the expanding emotions a contemporary liturgy should signify (For further "expectations" of modern liturgy, see *Liturgy for the Third Millennium* by M. Francis Mannion; Priests and People, Dec. 1999).

3.5. In an Environmental Theology:

The entire theological endeavour will likely involve a complete rereading and revisioning of the Christian tradition in the light of modern ecology and the natural sciences. It will remove itself from any literalist or fundamental reading of Scripture. For this has nurtured a second-class piety that is private and otherworldly, a piety that connects with less and less people today. Openness to fresh meaning and new applications of scripture to modern issues will be required. Nor will it be enough to look only on scholarship for biblical interpretation. There will also be need to interpret scripture from "below", i.e. through the life experience of people. This method is helping to liberate many oppressed peoples in their struggle for justice in South and Central America. The same method of reading scripture from below can awaken people to see why the earth is being destroyed and the need for action against those most responsible.

3.5.1. The Insights of Scripture

In the Scripture, God is not revealed as a distant force or an abstract word but as a personal power present in all things. The dignity of the earth and all living things is clearly visible there. God is revealed as the origin, sustainer and destiny of all creation - the creation we have inherited from the past, a creation that is a dynamic present, and the new creation that can be hoped for in the future. Environmental theology may still be under construction, but as it develops, it will continue to draw from the scriptures as its primary source. It will use the best of contemporary biblical criticism for context, but it will be honest in its critique of where biblical views either fall short or even can be detrimental to sustaining the earth

(Cf Brennan R. Hill, especially his work *Christian Faith and the Environment - Making Vital Connections*, (1998).

3.5.2. The Place of Humans

Christian theology in the past has been too human-centered. The hierarchical mentality so prevalent in the Christian tradition has viewed humans at the apex of creation, the ones who have dominion over all things. Even the most recent Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that "God created everything for man". Nature has been denied an integrity of its own. An environmental theology in the new millennium will try to see the human person as uniquely singular yet as someone who is integral to creation. People are described as coming from the breath of God and commissioned to reproduce this life in their children. But human beings are commissioned also to care for each other and for all creation. The two are inseparable. For this reason there needs to be a shift in theology towards a more earth-centered perspective. A perspective where the earth and its resources will be seen to have a worth and dignity of their own. The human person will be seen as a part of and not greater than the environment. A component member of the earth and its life systems, not outside it. Thomas Berry put it rather bluntly when he said: 'The earth can exist without us, but we cannot exist without the earth'.

3.5.3. A Christian Anthropology

So for an effective environmental theology, a Christian anthropology is needed. An anthropology, which values the singular dignity and uniqueness of the human person, yet does not thereby give humans the right to dominate the rest of creation. Our destiny is irrevocably linked with that of the world. Our uniqueness does not make us superior to other creatures, but a responsibility to care for all creation and to share in the creative and sustaining power of the Creator. Humans are neither the centre of the world, nor its master. Rather all are called to be servants to the world and co-creators with God for the world, and always deeply appreciating the beauty and integrity of created things. In so doing an environmental theology will listen to people and nature and join with them in a call for clean air, water; for land to grow food and for a place to live that is fresh, clean and healthy.

3.5.4. An Environmental Ethic

An environmental theology will have to take on board also an environmental ethic. According to J. Baird Callicott, 'environmental ethics is environmental because it concerns non-human entities...and ethical because it attempts to provide theoretical grounds for the moral standing of non-human entities'. Bernard Haering prophetically placed environmental ethics in the centre of his 1981 volume on social ethics, "Free and Faithful in Christ". The value of ethics for most human beings is that it revolves around the everyday matters of living, how to relate to other people, problem-solving in the present and planning for the future. But the "eco-ethicists" carries additional responsibilities: it identifies issues relating to the complex relationships of human beings and nature, it develops frameworks for analysis, and it contributes to good decision-making within the ecological, ethical and economic communities.

3.5.5. Approaches to Environmental Ethics

Alan S. Miller describes three different approaches to environmental ethics that can be used to describe three historical tendencies in the human-nature relationship: 1) The self-interest or *egocentric* approach - the dominant western worldview - where human beings seek to maintain their separateness and dominance over the rest of creation; 2) The *homocentric* approach which stresses an essentially human-centered, but still socially responsible way of living; 3) The *eco-centric* approach emphasizing that, while human beings do have special characteristics distinguishing them and to some degree setting them apart from other animals, they are nevertheless interdependently involved with the global ecosystem (Cf *Gaia Connections*, Alan S. Miller 1991).

3.5.6. The Ecocentric Approach

This third tendency, the ecocentric approach to environmental ethics, lays stress on the holistic paradigm. Everything is connected to everything else. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The world is seen as active and alive, by virtue of internal causation. The primacy of change and ongoing process is always affirmed. It acknowledges the non-dualistic unity of mind/body, matter/spirit, people/nature. And specific to the Christian environmental theology, the eco-centric approach will be firmly

rooted in the gospels and will possess a profound love of life and compassion for all things.

3.5.7. Creation and Evolution

Finally, an environmental theology in the new millennium will reflect more deeply on some other aspects of creation in the context of evolution. For example, that there is a unity in all reality. That creation is a process where matter is always evolving towards life and then towards spirit. As Chardin says (and the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins also), there is an "innerness" or "withinness" inside all of matter. Environmental theology will maintain that matter can no longer be seen as static, inert and dead. Even the rocks and other inanimate objects are alive. The natural sciences, especially quantum physics will support this view. Indeed, a number of living theologians and cosmologists in one way or another already share this view. Just to name a few: Ian Barbour, John Polkinhorne, Nancy Murphy, Robert Russell, William Stoeger, George Coyne, Brennan R. Hill, Dennis Edwards, Christopher Mooney, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Charles Birch, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Jay B. McDaniel, Paul Davies, Arthur Peacocke, Kitty Ferguson, Wolfhard Pannenberg, J.E.Lovelock, Carolyn Merchant, John Cobb, Stephen Jay Gould, Keith Ward, Leonardo Boff and many others.

3.5.8. A Summary

To sum up: A new Theology of the Environment will not only promote the human capacity to be open to the transcendent, but will emphasize the immanence of God in all things. It will emphasize that God is inscrutably within as well as infinitely beyond. God is totally within and totally beyond all beings simultaneously. It will take into account both the transcendence and the immanence of God, while being particularly drawn to the presence of God within each living creature, and within all material reality. Furthermore, it will explain how we live in a "becoming" universe and that we humans are also a part of that "becoming" in that same evolutive process. Environmental theology will acknowledge the interconnection between human life, other living things and the earth itself and that God can be truly experienced in all things. It will also be an inclusive theology and be capable of listening to the natural sciences and

universe for direction, as well as to the scriptures. Finally, it will highlight the Christological dimension as being of paramount importance for Christians. Following the evolutionary model, it will show that the entrance of the Christ into humanity in the individual person of Jesus of Nazareth marked a critical threshold, a change in the sphere greater than the any movements from non-living matter to life, and from life to reflective life. As Emily Binns writes:

Jesus, God's man, the person of unconditional love, full of compassion, always forgiving and unafraid, is the very Christ who is at the heart of creation, who gathers up all of creation. Since Christ is the term of evolution, since the world can no more have two centres than a circumference can have two centres, evolution itself is holy, and what might have been seen as irreconcilable - faith in the world and the human, and faith in a God - can no longer be seen in this light (Emily Binns, *The World as Creation*, 1990).

3.6. Eco-spirituality

3.6.1. A New Spiritual Awareness

We are witnessing today worldwide the emergence of a cosmic mysticism, which is partly based on the insight that human beings and the material cosmos are interrelated and inter-dependent. We are becoming conscious in the most profoundest of ways that we are "not our own". That we belong, from the cells of our bodies to the finest creation of our minds, to an intricate and constantly changing cosmos. However, God is not only compatible with the findings of modern science but that the hypothesis of God is the best available explanation for a dynamic and evolutionary worldview. A new spiritual awareness is arising among people that I believe has the power to transform and reinvigorate traditional religious values. It should not be surprising then that the traditional Christian ways of putting things may need some re-interpretation. Likewise, the forms of spirituality that will accompany these changes.

3.6.2. Newton and Descartes

It has been said that the biggest paradigm shift of the 20th century concerns our understanding of the universe. The old story of the universe as expounded by the great scientists Sir Isaac Newton was based on a static view of reality. Newton had already assimilated Descartes' view of matter, which was that outside the mind there existed only a multitude of separated, independent competitive objects, not an intricate network of inter-dependent organic parts. The end result of this view of the universe was that God was seen as the static observer of a mechanical world. He was a transcendent God to whom people could give extrinsic glory, but could not "affect" Him any way. It is this Cartesian-Newtonian story of the universe which has been influencing the religious piety of the majority of the people in the West for the past 200 years or so. It has led to extrinsic forms of worship and ritual, which in turn became the touchstone for a person's spiritual progress.

3.6.3. A Dynamic and Relational World

The "new story" of the universe is telling us that all reality is alive, dynamic and relational. Even the human person cannot be a detached observer, but is himself/herself a participator. We understand that the material world around us is being created and is evolving through complex events of energy inter-relationships. Energy keeps rearranging itself in new forms by creating new relationships with the surrounding environment. Fritjof Capra describes it thus:

Quantum theory forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole. This, however, is the way in which eastern mystics have experienced the world, and some of them have expressed their experiences in words which are almost identical with those used by atom physicists" (*The Tao of Physics*, 1975).

But if there seems to be "chaos" in the complicated web or relationships in nature, there is also providence. We believe the resurrectional presence of Christ who fills all things gives consistency to the whole of creation. And the dynamic created world, in the context of

eco-spirituality, becomes a point of encounter for a universal communion between human beings and God.

3.6.4. Eco-spirituality and Spirit of Reverence

One of the tasks of eco-spirituality is to explore the relationships that human beings have with the world and with God. It will ask how does God reveal Himself in the ever-changing events of each day? How can the environment as we now know it channel divinity to us? How does the Triune God go out of Himself and connect to our dynamic inter-relational world? (the new story of the universe). Eco-spirituality will also oblige people to move against the current of irreverence in contemporary society. Just as reverence is born in moments of quiet wonder allowing us to ponder the beautiful and to experience the presence of God there, so irreverence is a consequence of hasty skimming the surface of life and failing to find any richness or depth in it. Irreverence sometimes looks for justification by labeling it as "pragmatism" or "being practical". Nevertheless, it is only by walking the path of universal reverence that people will be led to a sense of kinship with all created being.

3.6.5. Fr. George Maloney, S.J.

I am as ever deeply indebted to Fr. George A. Maloney, S.J. who first introduced me into a spirituality based on the uncreated energies. What I will say about the divine energies below are found and elaborated further in several of Maloney's books including: *Inscape - God at the Heart of Matter* (1978); *Uncreated Energy - A Journey Into The Authentic Sources of Christian Faith* (1987); *God's Exploding Love*" (1987); *Mysticism and the New Age* (1991).

(i) The Uncreated and Created Energies

The **Uncreated** Energies, the foundation for a spiritual practice so beloved by the Greek Fathers and the eastern Churches, can offer us a dynamic way of experiencing today how God works in a world that is itself fundamentally constituted by **created** energies: Gravity, Electromagnetic force, Nuclear Weak and Nuclear Strong. I believe the contemplative, who may experience with some facility the personalized uncreated energies, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in creation, will

find it easy to "tune into" the awesome power of the enormous created forces in the world. At the same time the created forces in nature can aid the faith movement of the contemplative as he or she is called into a deeper union with God through the uncreated energies. The term "Energy" somehow synchronizes more easily than "grace" when connecting into the reality of our dynamic universe.

(ii) An Explanation

What exactly are the divine uncreated energies? From the outset, the term "Uncreated Energies" of God is to be distinguished from God's eternal essence. The divine energies are God as He goes out of Himself to share His very own life with us. They are the "going-forth" of God. We know that none of us can ever see God fully. "No one has ever seen God" (1 Jn 4:12). Yet, through the divine energies, we can truly know God and experience Him. Although in his Godhead He is totally incomprehensible, He can be experienced in His energies. The uncreated energies are not God's action, but God himself in his action who makes himself known and gives us the ability to "see" him. As St. Gregory Palamas of the 14th century says: "to say that the divine nature is communicable not in itself, but through its energy, is to remain within the bounds of right devotion" (Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 1968).

(iii) An Important Distinction

The Greek Fathers always insisted on the distinction between God's essence and His uncreated energies. This preserves the awesome transcendence of God yet it permits the God "who is love" (1 Jn4:8) to share His life with us. Union with God always means union with the divine energies, not with his divine essence. Archbishop Raya writes: "These Uncreated energies are not actions of God. They are not "gifts" of God. They are God himself in his action. They are the very God who is Himself uncreated" (Archbishop Joseph Raya, *The Face of God*, 1976). That is how grace was primarily understood by the Greek Fathers.

(iv) St. Gregory of Nyssa

The favourite image of the sun emitting its rays to the earth is used by St. Gregory of Nyssa. Although the sun is distinct from the rays of the

sun, yet the sun is wholly present in each ray. So God in His energies is wholly present in each ray of His divinity, yet God in His essence remains unapproachable. It is this distinction between the essence and energies that makes it possible to preserve the real meaning of the words that we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet.1:4). In a word, the doctrine of the Uncreated energies signifies that the whole Trinity is energetically and personally present in loving relationships towards us and all created being. It is for humans, the contemplatives, to have eyes to see and sensitivities to experience these energies in each other and in creation. There is no eco-spirituality that I know of that has greater potential to connect us to God on a daily basis, than that which is based on the uncreated, personal, loving energies of God.

(v) Need to re-educate our Senses

To set the basis for such an eco-spirituality may mean re-educating our senses in order that they bring to consciousness, sharp, vital, full sense experience. It may mean journeying inwards in prayer to touch the sacredness of the Trinitarian God as the ground of our being and then outwards to a union of love with our neighbours and towards all of creation.

(vi) The Divine Energies Hidden Inside Molecules

This union of love towards all of creation will increase our appreciation of the gigantic power of the created forces in nature, and by way of analogy, will help us more to understand the uncreated energies that underpin and sustain them. We will come to deeply appreciate the intrinsic worth of matter. We may even choose to "mentally" convert every bit of matter we see into energy (energy and matter are convertible $E=MC^2$) and then give glory to God for His hidden divine energies in each piece of matter. Every created thing will evoke in us a deep sense of awe. For example, we may pause and look at the billions of hidden molecules in the sparkling foam of crashing ocean waves against the rocks. This experience will not only give us a thrilling insight into the power of nature, but can point to the uncreated energies inside each molecule, which is none other than the Trinitarian God beckoning us to let Him share Himself with us. Yes, we can truly encounter God, as through a dark glass. But in

a broader perspective, it can also connect us into the heart of our dynamic world and help us "understand" how God, through His uncreated energies, is accompanying the universe on its evolutionary journey towards the *parousia*.

(vii) The Need for Praxis

Eco-spirituality is a form of contemplation that uncovers God's presence in every person, in every event and in every thing. God asks each of us to walk through this world and commune with Him. His infinite love is being poured out into all creation from His Trinitarian "We-community". God permeates all persons, all things, all events, by His personalized, loving, uncreated energies. A contemplative can "see" God progressively more and more in all created being. Yet it is only through a purification that the Greek Fathers call praxis that one can see the energies of God bathe the whole universe and charge it with his infinite love. I believe eco-spirituality will be an important element in the eco-dynamics of all Religions in the new millennium.