

# Tuesday AM – Justice and the Ecological Crisis – The Need for a Creation-Centered Spirituality

*Why are Christians so reluctant to let animals into our “stingy heaven”? John Muir*

## A. Some philosophical background

1. The shift from the “cosmological question” to the “epistemological” and “anthropological” question
  - Ancient Greek myths, religion, and Philosophy
    - Myths - always began with cosmology
    - Religion – often personified nature and was “careful” before it
    - Philosophy – began with the cosmological question: “What is the basic stuff? What is the universe made out of? How did the universe originate and how does it work?”
  - The emphasis within the Judeo-Christian doctrine on Creation (Genesis) where humans are given “dominion” over nature.
    - Lynn White’s famous critique
  - The radical shift in philosophy with Rene Descartes
    - The shift to the epistemological question: “How do we know?”
  - Existentialism, Personalism, Subjectivism - The shift to anthropological question: “Who am I and what do I mean?”

## B. The concept of Deep Incarnation

- The concept of the Incarnation of Christ
- The popular notion as this applying only to humans and not to the planet as such
- The incarnation of Christ as redeeming nature and the planet

## C. Highlighting the essential tenets within Creation-Centered Spirituality

- **What is creation-centered spirituality?**

Briefly stated creation-centered spirituality is a spirituality which in its theology and praxis emphasizes **three** things which are perhaps not sufficiently within classical spiritualities:

- 1) The fact that all of creation, the cosmic world, and not just anthropology, is part of God’s plan for earthly and heavenly life.
- 2) The fact that the human being is, in essence, physical as well as spiritual. Anthropology is not angelology.

- 3) The “Cosmic” dimension of Christ – The Christ is more than an anthropological phenomenon, but is too a cosmic phenomenon, namely:
  - Christ was already a vital force in the original creation (e.g., Colossians 1).
  - Christ is the consummation of history, both anthropological and cosmic (e.g., Romans 8, 19-22; Ephesians 1, 3-10)
  - Christ came to save the “world” not just the people in the world.

- **From these basic premises flow a series of other emphasis**

- 1) Nature has intrinsic rights.
- 2) Nature, just as humanity, will be redeemed.
- 3) The quest for community and consumption within God’s Kingdom is a quest that calls us to a proper relationship with God, with each other, and with physical creation.
- 4) The quest for God and full life under God may never be a disembodied quest.
- 5) The goodness of all creation, including the physical, is our path towards full life in God. We move through nature and grace, goodness, to God and full life.
- 6) From this, Creation-centered spiritualities go on to emphasize a number of things:
  - Nature must be treated as a whole, as one eco-system. Hence we must have fewer and less sharp dichotomies between:
    - ✚ humans and physical creation
    - ✚ spirit and body within humanity.
    - ✚ rational and emotional within humanity.
    - ✚ man and women
    - ✚ left brain and right brain.
    - ✚ social and individual.
  - The path to wholeness and redemption (full life with God, each other, and the cosmic world) is a path that we must tread not just through our rationality (left-brain) but also through our non-rational faculties (right-brain)

- **A critical evaluation**

- A major question: What “image” might we give ourselves, given the mandate we, humanity, receives in Genesis to “be masters of the earth”? Stewards?

## **A Perspectives from Mark Wallace – The area of Christianity’s relationship to “animism” and “paganism”**

Christian theology and spirituality need to re-examine their relationship to animism and paganism. Animism and paganism are Christianity's lost treasure. God wrote two books, the book of revelation (the Bible) and the book of nature (the world). The early animists and pagans had only the one book, the book of nature. Hence they tended to worship nature. Judaism and Christianity have both books which should allow us to honor nature more properly without worshipping it; that is, our monotheism and our scriptures can now become a prism through which we can read God's other book, nature, without being threatened by its natural sacraments.

## Key Figures ...

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical on the Environment, 2015.
  - Thomas Berry
  - Richard Rohr
  - Brian Thomas Swimme
  - Ilia Delio
  - Mark I. Wallace
  - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
  - Annie Dillard
  - Matthew Fox
  - Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
  - Lynn White Jr., *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, 1966
  - Elizabeth Johnson
  - Niels Henrik Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*, 2015.
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