

Creation Spirituality and Process Thought: CPS Seminar Notes (4/9/02)

Rick Kuykendall, D.Min.
Pastor, Bethel Congregational Church, Ontario, CA

INTRODUCTION

In reading Robert Mesle's book, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*, John Cobb in the closing chapter says that "*Process thinkers generally support approaches such as that of creation spirituality...*" and then later writes, "*I personally believe that process theists can affirm creation spirituality...*" p. 142

Here John Cobb himself has made the connection between Creation Spirituality and Process Thought.

David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, "Core Doctrines of Process Philosophy" # 1 = "The integration of moral, aesthetic, and religious intuitions with the most general doctrines of the sciences into a self-consistent worldview" p. 5
This too is what Creation Spirituality is about.

MATTHEW FOX

Matthew Fox was born in Madison, Wisconsin on the Winter Solstice, 1940.

1960 entered the Dominican Order.

Thomas Merton encouraged him to study at the Catholic Institute in Paris (Institut catholique de Paris) where he received his Ph.D. in 1970.

1977 – 1983 Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, Mundelein College, Chicago (Rosemary Radford Ruether + Brian Swimme taught a class here on Whitehead & Creativity, also *Manifesto for a Global Civilization* with Fox)

1983 – 1996 Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, Holy Names College, Oakland

1989 silenced—one month before at Minister's Convocation at Claremont

1993 expelled from the Dominican Order

1994 became an Episcopal priest

1996 University of Creation Spirituality, Oakland

CREATION SPIRITUALITY

Creation Spirituality is through the Bible, but also in the Medieval Mystics of the 12th – 14th Centuries.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)
Mechtild of Magdeburg (1210-1280) "Begunines"
Meister Eckhart (1260-1327)
Julian of Norwich (1342-1415)
Also: St. Francis & St. Thomas Aquinas

M. D. Chenu introduced Fox to these two contrasting traditions:
Fall / Redemptionist Theology vs Creation-Centered Spirituality
Original Sin vs Original Blessing (*Original Blessing*)
Creation Spirituality = the universe contains a "character of permanent
rightness" (RM 50) vs
Fall / Redemptionist = the universe contains a character of temporary
wrongness.

3 Paths of Plotinus & Proclus: Purgation, Illumination, Union
4 Paths of Creation Spirituality: (implicit in Eckhart with 14 themes in *Breakthrough*
later *Passion for Creation*, but by *Original Blessing* 26 themes)
* Eckhart "woke Fox from his dogmatic slumbers" (Hume—Kant)
Via Positiva—the new creation story, panentheism (Comic Christ)
Via Negativa
Via Creativa—Art-as-Meditation (extrovert meditation)
Via Transformativa—Compassion, prophetic mysticism
"The way to encourage authentic mysticism is to encourage its sister,
prophecy." (*Prayer: A Radical Response to Life*, p.95)

CREATION SPIRITUALITY & PROCESS THOUGHT COMPARED

1. Both Creation Spirituality and Process Thought reject traditional theism.
They reject the impassive God of Greek philosophy.
2. Both Creation Spirituality and Process Thought hold a panenthistic view of
God. *Original Blessing*, Theme #6
Eckhart, "Isness is God" + "God created all things in such a way that they are not
outside himself, as ignorant people falsely imagine. Rather, all creatures flow outward,
but nonetheless remain within God." + "all things added to God are no more than God
alone." Mechtild of Magdeburg, "the day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw
and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things."
3. Continual creation (Eckhart: "God created the world in such a way that God is still
continually creating it")
Continual creation = continual incarnation
"The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself" (RM 140)
This incarnation is not restricted to Jesus—God is incarnate in all things.
4. Distinction between Jesus and the "Cosmic Christ"
Christ = Logos = Sophia = Tao = Wakan Tanka, etc.

(John Hick, *God Has Many Names*)

Jesus was different in degree of "God-consciousness" (Schleiermacher)

We are different in degree of "God-consciousness" to other beings.

"What distinguishes us from a stone or tree or mule or horse is not that god is more distant from them... What distinguishes us is that they know nothing about this fact... we are conscious of God..." Fox, *Passion for Creation*, p. 146

5. Both hold the view of dipolar theism:

Hartshorne = abstract essence & concrete actuality

Whitehead = primordial nature & consequent natures

Creation Spirituality via Meister Eckhart: *"God acts but the Godhead does not act."* + Soul vs Soul's foundation—*"The soul knows in that place neither action nor knowledge. It is not aware in that place of any kind of image, either from itself or from any other creature."* *Passion for Creation*, p. 294

6. Both see all reality as interconnected: Whitehead spoke of his thought as a "philosophy of organism".

For Creation Spirituality this was expressed best through Hildegard of Bingen among others. (Hildegard: *"You are the mighty way in which every thing that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, is penetrated with relatedness"* also Eckhart: *"all things are connected"*)

7. Both views hold a process and evolutionary view of ultimate reality--at the University of Creation Spirituality all doctoral students are required to take a class entitled, "New Cosmology" which looks at reality via what Matthew Fox refers to as "the new creation story". Whitehead said, "The theme of Cosmology is the basis of all religions." (PR 529-530) + "whatever suggests a cosmology, suggests a religion". (RM 126—section: "The Three Traditions" = Buddhism, Christianity, and Science. *"Science suggested a cosmology and..."*)

Stairway going up to UCS

Brian Swimme & Rupert Sheldrake (*Natural Grace* with Fox)

8. Creation Spirituality also takes a process view towards the whole of our spiritual experience within the framework of what it refers to as "The Four Paths of Creation Spirituality".

9. Both are postmodern views of the world--with Creation Spirituality reaching back to the premodern Christian mystics.

Griffin in *Sacred Interconnections* sees Creation Spirituality as a "postmodern theology" (Fox, Suzi Gablik, & Joanna Macy all teach at UCS)

(Ken Wilber: *"Postmodernism is so yesterday."* A Theory of Everything, first page)

10. Deep Ecumenism--*Process Theology*, p. 37 + section entitled, "The Church and Buddhism": "... Christianity needs to open itself to still more radical transformation through the Asian religions." *Beyond Dialogue*. Creation Spirituality works from an experiential point of view: "The Art of Ancestral Drama" (Priestess of Oshun of the

Yoruba tradition), "Native American Rituals" (Seneca Indian), "Buddha & Christ", "Celtic Spirituality", "Creating Sacred Space" with a ritualist from Burkina Faso, body prayer with a Hindu who lived on Father Bede Griffiths' ashram in India

11. Both are ecologically responsible: Cobb & Griffin's *Process Theology* chapter 4 entitled, "A Theology of Nature", section: "How Is An Ecological Attitude Possible?" and chapter 9. Cobb, *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*. And **Creation** Spirituality

12. Both see God as promoting "enjoyment":

Cobb & Griffin's *Process Theology*: section entitled, "Divine Creative Love as Promoting Enjoyment" pp. 54-57

Whee! We, Wee All the Way Home: A Guide to Sensual, Prophetic Spirituality
Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh

Eckhart, "Asceticism is of no great importance" & "The soul loves the body" + "Now I shall say something I have never said before. God enjoys himself. In the same enjoyment in which God enjoys himself, he enjoys all creatures. With the same enjoyment with which God enjoys himself, he enjoys all creatures, not as creatures, but he enjoys the creatures as God. In the same enjoyment in which God enjoys himself, he enjoys all things." *Passion for Creation*, p. 76

13. Ritual. Whitehead: Ritual = "... the habitual performance of definite actions which have no direct relevance to the preservation of the physical organisms of the actors."

RM 10

"... mankind became artists in ritual." RM 10

Liturgy (Gr.) = "the work of the people"—"Ritual is the work of the people"

Fox, *The Reinvention of Work*, pp. 250,263

Howard Thurman Ritual Center

14. Feminism. Cobb & Griffin's *Process Theology*, pp. 61-62 & "The Church and Women's Liberation" pp. 133-135 + Mesle's *Process Theology*, Chapter 10, "Women's Experience and Process Thought" (written by his wife). In *Original Blessing* Fox speaks of the "Kingdom & Queendom of God" (Theme 7), God as Mother and we as mothers of God and birthers of God's son (Theme 19), and feminism (Theme 23). Eckhart: "From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth. The essence of God is birthing."

SPIRITUALITY—

John Cobb, "Whitehead's Model and Multiple Spiritualities" (Jan. 24,2002)

What do we mean by "Spirituality"?

1. Spirituality = the contemplative & ascetic traditions in Catholicism.
2. "Spirituality is a skill and an art; it is a practice and the key to it is simply: 'Does it work? Is it working? Are we experiencing God? All spirituality is about experience...'" *Confessions*, p. 102
3. Religion = Apollo vs Spirituality = Dionysus. *Confessions*, p. 274
4. Spirituality = walking the four paths.
5. Religion –institution, dogma, formal liturgy
Spirituality – personal, intuitive, experiential practices which are often eclectic

MODERN SOURCES

Thomas Berry / Brian Swimme

Clarrisa Pinkola Estes

Andrew Harvey

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Joanna Macy

Otto Rank

Rupert Sheldrake

Starhawk

Howard Thurman

John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, 1976

Matthew Fox, *Meditations With Meister Eckhart*, 1983

Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, 1983

Matthew Fox, *Passion For Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart*, 2000

David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*, 2001

David Ray Griffin, *Sacred Interconnections*, 1990

C. Robert Mesle, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*, 1993

Gabriele Uhlein, *Meditations With Hildegard of Bingen*, 1983

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1960 (Harper Torchbooks)

Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1927