

## CREATION SPIRITUALITY

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Creation Spirituality- What's in it for the Caribbean?

When we look at the people in our pews, we see that they represent mainly the senior citizens and children. There is a missing age. My 20+ nieces and nephews are not going to Church. The Confirmation teenagers endure the classes and then as soon as they go to University, many of them say that faith is not relevant. Some are even saying there is no God. They experience a contradiction between what they have been taught in Church and science. They do not need God to explain the mysterious. Our young people have made me realize that we cannot take it for granted that Caribbean people will continue praying and believing in God. During my Sabbatical in Ireland, I have discovered that there need not be a conflict between faith and science. In fact my faith was deepened by science.

Those of you from Trinidad know of my love for Nature and my attempt in the Catholic News to use photos to deepen faith. What you may not know is that Terry Julien who is here with us today is responsible for that. Once in a Catechetical Seminar in Cumana, he was expounding on indigenization as it was then called. He said that when Caribbean people hear about the vine and branches, they probably think of the parasitic vines that kill trees rather than vines loaded with grapes in Jesus' backyard. That set me on an ongoing search to find images from our environment to share the wisdom of Jesus. Thank you Terry for challenging me to link faith and nature. Only recently I discovered that Nature is the primary revelation of God.

When I went on my sabbatical in Ireland and England, one of my hopes was that the experience of the 4 seasons would help me to make sense of my experience of letting go my job, the loss of loved ones as an autumn/winter experience and come back here in a new spring of hope for the years of retirement. What I did not expect was that I would be fired by the scientific story of the Universe and feel challenged to share this experience with others.

What was it that wowed me? First and foremost, I was amazed at the Time Frame. I could not get my head around 13.7 or 8 billion years since the first flaring forth of the fireball that we call the Big Bang. For Caribbean people 300 years is a long time. 13.7 billion years is beyond our imagining.

Then I heard of the vastness of outer space with its billions of galaxies and stars which in for me a slow slow time gradually evolved from the early gases. I feel so small and insignificant in the face of such immensity.

The wonderful power of gravity which glues it all together points to the total interconnectedness of every single thing. Every atom is linked to every other. What a beautiful image of communion.

Every new fact made me more enthralled by the story. The evolution of earth was dependent on the death of a star. So Stars die? The Supernova explosion gave rise to our solar system. The sun is a star too, emitting tons of energy daily to give us life. Death is part of the journey. We are the dust of stars.

Though I had heard of unicellular and multicellular organisms before, it came as a surprise for me that all life emerged from the ocean . What a special moment it was when photosynthesis was discovered, allowing the sun's light to be made into food!

I celebrated Sex which was crucial for the differentiation of species. 250,000 species of insects, 25,000 of orchids, 10,000 species of bacteria in a spoon of garden soil- numbers like those blew my mind. When I had my experience of snow, I found myself meditating on the knowledge that each snowflake is unique though I could not see it with my naked eye. There is diversity in unity.

Dark holes are truly fascinating. The fact that 95% of the Universe is dark energy invisible to the eye is a great reminder of the darkness which often envelops our lives as we search for meaning in the innocent sufferings of so many on earth.

My earlier introduction to space led me to believe that all was order and harmony. Far from the truth! Any order that there is comes out of chaos and cataclysm. I learnt that there were five major extinctions. One of these was responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs when a meteor hit earth near Mexico. However, the demise of the dinosaurs led to the survival and development of smaller mammals and ultimately our evolution as our brains developed in size.

Creativity came out of crisis.

We humans are the late arrivals on the scene. We are the consciousness of Earth. We are the ones who can reflect upon this long journey of the Universe and be awed by this emerging knowledge. The sad fact is that we are now the first ones with the power to accelerate an extinction of all the beautiful complex life on planet earth

What's in it for the Caribbean?

What has this story got to offer Caribbean people? My thesis is that this scientific story has the potential to energise faith. The divorce between faith and science which has lasted 500 years can be healed if we are willing to embrace the new story and let it fill us with awe and inspire faith based action to save our beloved Home.

But are we prepared to give up our old cosmology? Everyone needs a story to give meaning to life, to answer the deep questions- who am I , what is life about-where is God, what happens after death. For 1500 hundred years , the Bible based cosmology , which itself was based on the Babylonian cosmology sufficed for Western spirituality. We learnt of a God as the Creator of heaven and earth in 6 days All of Creation was good. We were very good, made male and female in the image of God . We were to name all creatures and conquer the earth. However, our first parents Adam and Eve sinned and we were banished from paradise. We inherited the original sin of our first parents.

The New Cosmology states that the Universe is an ongoing creation beginning 13.7 billion years ago. We are original blessing and all creatures are part of that blessing. We all evolved from a single cell which over eons of time evolved into the complex beings that now exist. Humans evolved from several streams, some of which died out . Creation is ongoing.

This new Cosmology demands that we look again at our notion of God. Who is the God of evolution? He/she cannot be an abracadabra God. He/she cannot be the Eye in the sky seeing all we do and punishing us for our transgressions. He/she cannot be a puppet master manipulating events on earth or the grand inquisitor checking on our new notions of theology! We in the Caribbean cannot continue saying “God is a Trini /Vincentian” when we are spared from a hurricane!

Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit scientist and priest of God that He/she is not a God who makes things but a God who makes things make themselves. We get an intimation of an immanent God who sets things in motion. Our early peoples also had a sense of an immanent god. Lennox Honychurch of Dominica has shown that “the Amerindian in the islands was an integral part of the natural cycle, and the spirits which held it in place had to be understood and placated.” We have much to learn of awe and reverence from the Early peoples. Their experiences and care for the earth have much to teach us.

In Creation spirituality, God is both immanent and transcendent. The theologians are finding new images to express the God of evolution-the ground of our being, the mysterious One, Emptiness, Mother, no-thing. Others describe the God of energy, connecting everything together. When we tap into this energy we experience the Divine in a deeply personal way. Tentatively we pray with Karl Rahner “Shall I say Creator, Sustainer, Pardoner, Near One, Distant One, Incomprehensible One, God both of flowers and stars ,God of the gentle wind and of terrible battles, Wisdom, Power, Loyalty and Truthfulness ,Eternity and Infinity . You are the all merciful, You are the Just One. You love itself.

As we are challenged to a larger God, we are also required to look again at Jesus. He is the One who is the product of 13.7 billion years of evolution. He contains in Himself all the marvelous powers of the Universe- the radiance, the interconnectedness, the allurements, the seamlessness. He is the new Supernova who dies so that new life can emerge. He is the Sun who gives of Himself in self-sacrificing love. He is the Cosmic Christ who decided that His ongoing Presence would be in elements of the earth and work of human hands. His Resurrection is a cosmic event transforming all creation in an ongoing way.

Are we in the Caribbean Church willing to disturb the “simple” faith of our people by looking again at the doctrine of original sin? Can we lose the distrust of the body and of the earth? Are we afraid of speaking

of original blessing? Are we prepared to look again at the doctrine of original sin and the notion of atonement? The fact that the human race evolved from predecessor species over tens of millions of years poses problems for the doctrine of original sin as an event at a one-off moment in time, and hence for all aspects of Catholic teaching that are derived from it such as atonement.

We need to revisit the traditional doctrine of substitutory atonement by the sinless Jesus whose innocent sacrifice is then accepted by a righteous God for the debt of sinful humanity. This doctrine posits a picture of a vengeful sadistic God who required the death of his offspring to meet the exacting standards of His justice.

Are we prepared to look at the way we explain and celebrate Baptism? Are we prepared to deepen our understanding of Eucharist? Are we prepared to become mystics as required in our search for the Divine every where? Are we willing to create new rituals and hymns?

When I was a teenager, I knew that when I visited the sick as my Legion duty, it was an act inspired by my knowledge of the compassion of Jesus. Now when I join with the many eco groups in our country to collect plastics or pick up garbage from our beaches, do I have a sense of acting out of my faith in a God who wants to save our planet?

The secular prophets are challenging us. The religious prophets- Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, Teilhard de Chardin –have offered us the awe-inspiring story of the Universe. Our Caribbean prophet, Bishop Anthony Dickson has written all we need to know in pastoral letters, talks and creative story telling. I thank them all and hope that we will join with this movement of the Spirit within all the religions of the world to link our faith with the new scientific story of the Universe.