

SEASON OF CREATION-1ST SEPTEMBER TO 4TH OCTOBER 2020

Fact Sheet 5 Week 5

Eco-Spirituality-The New Normal

I. Introduction: Earth, spinning tirelessly for 13.7 billion years in space, has a long history. The Earth was born of an explosion (Big Bang Theory) in the mother star 450 crore years ago. The Earth is a living entity and she has consciousness. She is not simply mud and rock but according to the Indian perspective she is a Mother-*Dharti Maa*. Earth as a mother has been embracing us, nourishing us, nurturing us and giving us greater capacity to change the atmosphere and to add to it. In the story of Earth and of Life, we have already experienced three eras of life i.e. **Paleozoic Era** (ancient life), **Mesozoic Era** (middle life) and **Cenozoic Era** (recent life). The universe is groping its way toward a New Geologic Era. According to Teilhard de Chardin the universe progresses by breakthroughs, and leaps forward in Evolution and Consciousness. In the late 1980's, Thomas Berry named this new kind of consciousness, that leads to a new geologic era, as the **Ecozoic Era**. *Ecozoic* is a term that suggests a vision of how the human-earth community could be, not necessarily how it has been in the past. We live in a time of profoundly dysfunctional and maladaptive geological force. The challenge before us humans is to consciously prescribe a future life-enhancing, regenerative new cosmology and a vibrant Earth community and we are genetically endowed for cultural or transgenic solutions, as to how to live. At present, Eco-Spirituality seems to be the best solution and the New Normal.

II. What is Eco-Spirituality? Eco-Spirituality is a way of life that keeps body, mind and soul in sync. It has to do with relationships i.e. a triptych of Relationships with God (faith), with other human beings and with creation (justice) and see to the well being of all. It is similar to the Francis of Assisi Spirituality of Relationships. It is finding God in all things and all things in God (Ignatius of Loyola Spirituality), as God's love permeates all created things and all other persons. Eco-Spirituality is a way of life, a way of living our life in relation to our home the Earth. The Isa Upanishad also speaks of everything in God and God in everything (*Isa vasyam idam sarvam*- God dwells here everywhere). Tribal tradition considers the Earth as spirit-filled. God is Emmanuel i.e. God with us. According to Hildegard of Bingen the *World is God's Playground*. *The world is charged with the grandeur of God*, says Hopkins. The Bible too says the same, Love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself; and all God's creatures are our neighbours,-Vasudhaiva kutumbakam i.e. the World is one family.

God and human beings are involved in rebuilding the human community as a new creation. The Earth nourishes those who care for the whole, but on the other hand, Mother Earth removes anything that is not working for the wellbeing of the whole e.g. Far back in history, the earth was dominated by dinosaurs who made life on the earth brutish and short. As such, 65 million years

ago, Mother Earth with the help of an asteroid obliterated, the giant dinosaurs, in order that many varieties of smaller animals could thrive. When the wicked grow in leaps and bounds, God intervenes. We humans are part of the web of life and are fully interconnected with the biosphere. When we connect with ourselves and with others i.e. all God's creatures, we automatically connect with the Divine (God) because the Divine is in us and in all His/ Her creatures. "Contemplation is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things"-Thomas Merton. In a nutshell, Eco-spirituality is a more personal and engaged spirituality. It is a combination of Science, Art, Mysticism and Religion, an immersion in God and nature. Eco-Spirituality makes it possible for us to love God without having to turn away from the world, and to love creation without having to fear that we are in any way forsaking the call to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of God. Eco-Spirituality calls us to focus simply on performing each act with integrity and purpose.

III. Stalwarts of Eco-Spirituality: We stand on the shoulders of giants because our ancestors have discovered Earth's great geological story within which we think and act today. Some living thinkers today are Brian Swimme, Rosemary Reuther, Miriam MacGillis, Matthew Fox, Sallie McFague, Evelyn Mary Tucker, John Grim, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Ilia Delio and others. But we shall concentrate here on just two giants i.e. Teilhard De Chardin and Thomas Berry.

1. **Teilhard de Chardin:** a French Jesuit, a Paleontologist, a theologian, a mystic, a prophet and a geologist was far ahead of his times, which is why his congregation exiled him from France to New York. Thank God today three Popes namely Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have now accepted Teilhard's work. Teilhard was of the opinion that the universe is alive. He focused on bridging the gap between science and religion, in order to make it a vital force of daily living. He looked forward to the convergence of the Cosmic Christ and Omega (*He is the Alpha and the Omega*). For Teilhard evolution was a sacred story, one that encompassed galaxies, planets, myriad life forms and humans. For him all matter was sacred and permeated with divine presence. There is a psychic /spiritual dimension in each and every creature. When we experience creation through our senses, we experience the divine. For Teilhard, creation itself becomes a primary scripture, a primary revelation and a source of awe and wonder. Through appreciation of science, we are able to see with new eyes, and to understand that at the heart of the universe lies an emergent energy. This is the heart of God, or as Teilhard called it, the *Divine Milieu*. In other words, this is the dynamic integration of contemplation in action. His cosmic vision expanded our sense of the divine's numinous presence, and laid the foundation for an evolutionary faith. Teilhard thus called for a new exegesis of creation and a new literacy that integrated faith and science and called forth the emergence of a sacramental imagination. Teilhard's understanding of the noosphere, which is a layer of mind, action and love encircling the globe i.e. the sphere representing

the interrelationship of human consciousness; has today, through scientific insights and means, extended and expanded worldwide.

Teilhard saw that the universe is a sequence of irreversible events best understood as a narrative. This narrative is held together by gravitational attraction into a state of relentless transformations and expansions that contain the story of the universe in a never ending sequence of transformations. The divine radiates from the very matter; and matter suffused with divine energy, reveals the dimension of God.

2. **Thomas Berry:** a man of towering intellect, profound conviction, a compassionate heart and a global prophet, calls us to reinvent what it means to be human. He was the first to articulate the New Story in an essay in 1978, and then later in his signature work, *The Dream of the Earth*. With co-author and evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme, he wrote *The Universe Story*, describing and celebrating the unfolding cosmos, from the primordial flaring forth to the Ecozoic Era (a term he coined).

Like Teilhard, Thomas Berry trusts the evolutionary process, while seeing our human participation in a much more proactive mode. We humans have a direct responsibility for the evolutionary process and we need to be vigilant and informed in the awareness we bring to what is essentially a co-evolutionary enterprise, a collaborative endeavor, with God, creation and humans all working together to bring about the new heaven and the new earth. For Berry this universe is not a collection of objects but a communion of subjects, which is why we need to show deep respect and reverence for the whole of creation.

Berry and Swimme also talk about the paradox of creation and destruction. It is said that Thomas Berry was imbued with the spirit of Teilhard de Chardin, the intellect of Aquinas, the Eros of Hildegard, the humility of Francis, the science of Einstein and the courage and imagination of Jesus.

IV. The Scope of Eco-Spirituality in Daily Life: Deep experiences change us every day. All we need to do is know, notice, pause and open wide our five senses to see-see, hear, smell, taste and touch the divine in creation all around. The scope of Eco-Spirituality is very wide. It invites us to connect with /heighten our awareness with the unceasing flow of God consciousness. *The best way to love God is to love many things*, says Van Gogh. We are invited to express a gesture of aliveness in whatever modality we wish e.g. words/ movement/sound and song/poem/prayer, solitude, drawing/painting. Creativity is the nexus from which our vision for a new civilization / the new normal is born. We are called today to create a fresh and vibrant beauty that was not here before. Eco-spirituality challenges us to plunge courageously into deep wells of wisdom—from Science, Religion, indigenous peoples, women, mysticism and art; to realize the creative energy of the divine bubbling up and

pulsating through every molecule and people on this sacred Earth. Eco-Spirituality unleashes vitality, creativity and playfulness. It is egalitarian and pluralistic, rejoicing in the manyness of beings that interconnect in a rich cosmic community. It is a spirituality needed for an ecological peacemaking and a just world community.

V. Conclusion: Eco-Spirituality challenges us to focus on Integral Ecology. Guided by the wisdom of Thomas Berry and Teilhard de Chardin we are invited to celebrate the capacity of a listening heart (using Generative Listening and Generative Speaking of Otto Scharmer's Theory U). We are called to develop our relationships in and through mutually enhancing relationships i.e. women's wisdom drawing us together into circles of inclusion, indigenous wisdom-who celebrate the presence of the divine in its many manifestations, the wisdom of our traditions-Christian, Muslim, Judaism and all other religions, the wisdom of Science Evolutionary Faith and Quantum Physics. Ecology, climate change, modes of understanding, pottery, clay, drum-making, gardening, baking, cooking, and food everything comes under the purview of Eco-Spirituality, as long as we are conscious of the Triptych Relationships with God, with other human beings and with creation. **“Our spiritual journey is not only one of hospice workers for a dying culture, but also one of midwives who sit at the bedside of emerging structures and birth them so that they can become the scaffolding for a new vision of the world.”- Jim Conlon**

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS/ACTIONS/ACTIVITIES:

1. “Eco-Spirituality is a way of life”. What do we understand by this? Explain.
2. How can we consciously prescribe a future life-enhancing, regenerative new cosmology and a vibrant Earth community?
3. Eco-Spirituality seems to be the best New Normal for our times. Do you agree with this statement? If so, why? If not, do you have a better alternative? Explain.

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22nd September 2020