

stillpoint

CREATION SPIRITUALITY COURSE SESSION I : OVERVIEW OF CREATION SPIRITUALITY

Introduction

- Welcome to this 5 week course on Creation Spirituality
- This is an experiential course i.e. you are not coming to a series of 5 lectures by me but rather this is hopefully going to be an immersive experience where we explore some ideas but we don't just do that with our minds but also with our bodies, our senses.
- I should point out that I do not claim to be an expert in this. I haven't taught this before. It's an area that interests me and I wanted to put together this course so I could learn about it with you.
- It might be helpful to hear a little about who I am
 - I am a priest in the church of england. I help to lead and guide a small, experimental faith community called 'Home' and I am one of the associate clergy in this parish.
 - I am also one of the Directors of something called 'Stillpoint' - an organisation committed to the nurturing of spiritual practice - rooted in the Christian mystical tradition but engaging across various spiritual traditions and also engaging with the arts.
 - It's with this Stillpoint hat on that I am offering these sessions during lent this year.
- So let's begin by defining some key terms that we will be using over these 5 sessions.

What is Creation?

- Creation = all things including us. "It is us in relationship with all things".
- In CS human beings are co-creators with God.
- this co-creating with God is always in the NOW
- that doesn't mean we don't learn the lessons of the past. It is important to deconstruct the past to lessen its impact on the choices we make in the NOW. We also have a view of the future but we remember that it is at least partially contingent on decisions made in the now.
- Creation is about BEING IN RELATION (1,9). "Relation is the essence of everything that exists".
- CS is about original blessing - a provocative phrase which shocks us a little when we hear it for the first time because we're so used to hearing the phrase 'original sin'.
- the concept of original sin isn't even in scripture - it's not jewish and it's not Christian. We get no sense of it in the teaching of Jesus - Jesus never mentions it. The fall is not the same as original sin.
- Augustine introduced the concept in the 4th century and it has infected the western christian tradition. It starts the story at Genesis 3 rather than Genesis 1
- Gen. 1 of course carries the repeated refrain "it was good".

What is spirituality?

- ask people "what does the word mean to you?"
- the word spirituality comes from the word spirit - *ruah* - *breath* - *wind* - *energy*
- it's about living life at the depth level rather than the surface level
- it's a path - a way of living - not goal oriented "it is the way itself"

- it's what happens when *spirit* draws us and beckons us (rather than what happens when we are driven by the private ego)
- this always results in solidarity with others, community, compassion - because these are the hallmarks of ultimate reality itself
- we discern a loving presence suffused throughout the whole of creation. spirituality is the word we use to describe the various ways we can respond to this presence, flow with it, work with it.
- spirituality is a journey that takes us
 - away from the superficial into the depths
 - from focussing on the outer person to the inner person
 - from the false self/flesh/sinful nature being in control to living from the true self/spirit/christ nature
 - from the privatized individual to solidarity in community (with all things i.e. compassion)

What is Creation Spirituality?

- CS is a path, a tradition and a movement
- A spiritual *path* that starts with cosmology rather than anthropology i.e. Gen. 1 not Gen 2/3
- this path leads us deeper into engagement with reality, leads us towards wholeness and integration
- it has certain features that provide a framework for us - these are like signposts on the way i.e. it names or delineates the spiritual journey
- CS is also a *tradition*
 - that's been lost (in a mechanistic, non-mystical world devoid of wonder)
 - that connects with the perennial wisdom and spiritual heritage of native people e.g. Celts
 - that's rooted in the scriptural witness:
 - Yahwist/J Author
 - wisdom literature
 - prologue to John's gospel
 - the parables of Jesus
 - Jesus' idea of the kingdom of God
 - scriptural hymnody in the NT
 - birth narratives
 - in the Church Fathers (I, 15)
 - in the 12th century medieval 'mystic-prophets' e.g. Hildegard, Francis, Aquinas, Mechtild, Eckhart, Julian etc.
 - these people were trying to integrate religion with cosmology/science but a split happened between the two
- CS is also a *movement*
 - of people who are shaped by this tradition and who are energised to work for renewal in the world
 - it's quite possible to be shaped by this tradition and not to have read Matthew Fox's books! A number of you are probably already engaging with this kind of spirituality

Why is Creation Spirituality important?

- CS is a liberation theology for 1st world peoples
- in the under-developed world there is a poverty of the body
- in the over-developed world there is a poverty of the soul

- So CS is about setting people free. free from what?
 - a disenchanted view of the universe
 - a loss of wonder
 - a suppression of the feminine
 - a suspicion of the physical, particularly the body
 - a utilitarian view of creation
 - an intellectualisation of human life i.e. challenging the primacy of thought as a way of being
 - an unchallenged, relentless dominance of consumerism which defines us as consumers
 - the myth of redemptive violence/militarism
 - addiction ('addictive enslavement')
 - ego
- CS is NOT just about getting back to nature/eco-stuff.
- It's as much an urban spirituality as a non-urban one.

What are the 4 pathways that make up Creation Spirituality?

- The next four weeks will be spent looking more deeply at each of these 4 paths in turn
- But I thought it might be helpful to begin with an overview of CS as a whole
- Matthew Fox delineates Creation Spirituality as 4 paths:
 - The Via Positiva
 - The Via Negativa
 - The Via Creativa
 - The Via Transformativa
- These 4 paths are a way of *naming* the spiritual journey
- this is important as it gives us a common language to connect our journeys with the journeys of others

The 4 Paths tell us what matters

- the Via Positiva tells us that awe and delight matter
- the Via Negativa tells us that darkness, suffering and letting go matter
- the Via Creativa tells us that creativity and imagination matter
- the Via Transformativa tells us that justice and celebration matter

If we are going to gain balance in our spiritual journeying we need to pay attention to these 4 paths.

The 4 paths tell us where to find God

- we find God in awe, wonder, the mystery of nature and all beings (the Via Positiva)
- we find God in darkness, nothingness, suffering, silence, emptying (the Via Negativa)
- we find God in creativity, imagination, generativity, and re-creation (the Via Creativa)
- we find God in the relief of suffering, working for justice, homeostasis (balance) in creation, and in the celebration that happens when people come together to give thanks for the gift of being together (the Via Transformativa)

So that's an overview of the Creation Spirituality teaching.

Over the next 4 sessions we are going to look in more detail at each of these 4 paths.



SENSORY WORK WITH ELEMENTAL MATERIALS

So - as I want these sessions to be experiential rather than just a series of talks we're now going to take some time to let these things settle as we engage with the elemental materials which I've laid out at the back of the church.

There you'll find earth, air, fire and water - these are the 4 classical elemental materials.

Remember, CS is rooted in cosmology rather than anthropology. In other words we understand ourselves - our wholeness, healing, our spiritual journey, everything about us - within the context of creation.

So we're going to use these 4 elements to meditate on where we are in our spiritual journey.

I'd like you to go and explore the area at the back of the church and then sit with one of the elements, engage with it, and consider some questions....

- why do you think you've been drawn to this element?
- what does this element say to you about your life and your spiritual journey
- what feelings does it evoke in you?
- which of the 4 paths seems to be most prominent for you at present?
- which seems to be most under-developed

LINKS

www.thestillpoint.org.uk

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Creation-Spirituality-Liberating-Gifts-Peoples/dp/0060629177/ref=sr_1_12?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1267092631&sr=8-12